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WESTERN STATE COLLEGE OF COLORADO

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History of the Wheeler Opera House

Aspen, Colorado, 1889 - 1894

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

of

Master of Arts

by

Bertha Louise Shaw

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PREFACE

Seventy-six years ago the Wheeler Opera House was a symbol of the prestige and culture of the silver mining town of Aspen, Colorado. Somehow theatrical historians have overlooked the little theater -- twice ravaged by fire that spared enough attic space for pigeons to nest. Since restoration in its Victorian style, artists of world renown and some of tomorrow's great musicians appear there.

From 1950 through 1954, the writer lived in Aspen when famous musicians were performing at summer festivals, and professional skiers were helping develop a winter ski resort. Proud pioneers, dwelling in the glorious past and probably a little intolerant of the 1950 advances, told stories of Aspen's late nineteenth century wealth from the silver mines, progressiveness and culture. After hearing these tales, an idea developed that a history of the Wheeler Opera House should reflect that sterling silver life, and, if it did, the findings should be organized in a tangible form that they might be preserved.

The original purpose of the study was to seek out facts about the origin of the opera house, its managers, entertainments by companies of performers, and its audiences from 1889 through early 1894, because that period included the beginning of the house and the time when there was greatest theatrical entertainment in it. Analysis revealed that significant material concerning the management of the house suggested a careful examination of the procedures employed in its operation. These

procedures could not be studied without considering all the related elements of the theater. Therefore, this thesis emphasizes management of the Wheeler as a theater and includes historical background of Aspen, the physical theater, audiences, performances, performers, and companies. Since the approach to the study is through the theater, a communication media, this thesis belongs in the field of theater.

Value of this research lies in the contribution it should make to theater history of Colorado. It offers a compilation and preservation of significant materials concerning management and theatrical activity of one opera house in an isolated Rocky Mountain town where fabulous riches poured from its silver mines until they were shut down because of the decline of silver prices and the Panic of 1893. Perhaps this work will be an aid to other theatrical studies of this period and region.

Before considering this history, use of the word "theater" should be discussed. In the 1880's an opera house was built, but not especially for opera; it was used for many kinds of theatrical productions. Hence, it was a theater. The second interpretation of "theater" refers to any and all entertainments presented in a theater but not limited to literature of the theater. In the case of the Wheeler, it includes every kind of entertainment presented, from serious drama and comic opera on "down" to boxing exhibitions and appearances of spiritualists. In fact, it referred to any attraction that appeared on the stage at the Wheeler -- even midget shows.

The manner in which the Wheeler was operated depended upon the events and circumstances as they happened, so chronological order is employed in this history to show how they affected its operation. Some deviation from this order occurs when other order or placement of

material helps to focus attention on the management. The introductory chapter provides Aspen history to show what position the opera house held in the town's development. Chapter II follows with construction of the building to its completion and the grand opening. The managers, in order of their appointments to the house managership, are treated in Chapter III. Chapter IV presents a change of chronological order. The audiences are considered first because it is for them that the theater and performances were created. The kinds of performances they saw are described next. Following this, leading performers are presented in chronological order of their appearance. Because the companies are least related to management of the house, they are considered in the last chapter.

If this history of the Wheeler Opera House is to be significant to the student of theater, the forces that produced the house must be considered. The discovery of silver and its production in Aspen were closely related to the being of the opera house, so the first chapter, "Handsome Mining Town in the Rocky Mountains," presents a brief history of the town from its beginning through early 1894. In it, early theaters and the influence of Jerome B. Wheeler on the economic and social development of Aspen are stressed. In one way, the little town was like other new ones founded by America's growing population moving West; it had a new opera house. However, in a mining town it was unusual for a theater or opera house to be a part of the biggest, most-substantial and best-furnished building, so the record of the construction of the opera house building and descriptions of its furnishings are presented in Chapter II, "Little Gem of a Theater." Distinctive features of the decor and equipment of the auditorium and stage are followed by an account of the grand opening celebration.

Detailed knowledge of how resident theater managers directed opera house activities in Colorado mining towns seems to be lacking, so Chapter III, "Managers Had to Rustle," is devoted to the procedures employed by the first five Wheeler Opera House managers in as many years. Their many responsibilities included booking and advertising a balanced program of attractions for the community, complying with city laws and ordinances, applying sound business methods for financial success, cooperating with civic and community groups, creating and maintaining the aesthetic value of the theater, and being accepted as responsible citizens. The chapter shows how these managers operated the Wheeler in view of a number of problems. The first one, common to all, was the outside control of booking by Peter McCourt of the Silver Theatrical Circuit. To point out how unpredictable audiences hampered management, audience reactions to managerial policies are included. Other problems creating changes in procedure resulted from an employer's interference and lack of interest in the theater, as well as a deteriorating economy, and the added responsibilities of duties unrelated to the theater.

Chapter IV, "Applause Heard a Block Away," is concerned with audiences, performances and performers. The first section deals with the kinds of audiences, who were in them, and how they reacted to the performances and performers. Next, the kinds of performances seen at the Wheeler are described: those done by touring companies are emphasized. The Aspen Daily Times served as a source for classification as to types of entertainments, and to show variations in some of these types, details of American theatrical history are added. Here audience reaction to these types appears. The last section about what kinds of touring performers

played also includes how the audiences responded to them. Material concerning American theater history is limited to that found in the Aspen Daily Times.

In Chapter 7, "Troupes on the Silver Circuit," a detailed account of how the Silver Theatrical Circuit was operated in relation to the Wheeler Managers and touring companies comes first. To better explain the development of this circuit some American theater history is included. This is followed with a discussion of the kinds of touring companies that came to the opera house. Again, some audience reaction to the companies is recorded.

A chronological list of productions completes the work. This includes the names of the companies, attractions, artists, dates and length of engagements at the Wheeler. The principal source for this was the Aspen Daily Times.

Since no records, programs, or prompt books of the opera house are available, the principal source for research has been the complete files of the Aspen Daily Times.¹ Advertisements, advance stories, reviews, editorials, comments and social columns were used. Press representatives who wrote accounts of Wheeler attractions changed from time to time and very likely did not have the training background necessary for true criticism. Names of these writers were not revealed. For some performances there were no reviews, possibly because no one from the press attended.

Other sources of material were books, pamphlets and scrapbooks owned by Aspen citizens and the Aspen Historical Society. Official

¹Hereafter, the abbreviation ADT is used to refer to this newspaper.

documents on file in the Pitkin County Court House and in the office of the Aspen City Clerk were used. Interviews with pioneers brought forth interesting sidelights.

From Frank Hall's History of the State of Colorado, LeRoy Fafen's Colorado and Its People, and Len Shornaker's Roaring Fork Valley came basic data on Aspen's early history and silver mining. The clipping files in the Western History Division at the Denver Public Library were valuable concerning J. B. Wheeler. The M. A. thesis, History of the Tabor Grand Opera House, Denver, Colorado, 1881 - 1891, done by Elmer Crowley at Denver University in 1940, and the History of the Tabor Opera House in Leadville, Colorado, from 1879 to 1905 by Dorothy Degitz at Western State College in 1935 aided in establishing stock company movements.

Illustrations are in this work to make the history of the opera house come alive, and sources for them are acknowledged here. The engraving for PLATE I appeared in the Aspen Daily Times, January 1, 1890, and was photographed by Tony Gauba. The engraving for PLATE II, from the 1890 Aspen Illustrated booklet, and the photograph used for PLATE VI, a gift of Mrs. Mabel Beckerman, are property of the Aspen Historical Society. Franz Berko photographed both of these and the picture in PLATE III. Pictures from collections of John Heron and Mrs. Minnie Staples were used for PLATES IV and V, respectively. The photograph of the opening program, PLATE VII, is in possession of the University of Colorado -- Western Historical Collection. The picture used in PLATE VIII appeared in the Aspen Daily Times on November 13, 1892, and was photographed by Joan Lane. PLATE IX is a reproduction of Silver Circuit stationery provided by Mrs. Alys Freeze.

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CHAPTER I

HANDSOMEST MINING TOWN IN THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

The Wheeler Opera House building, taller than the surrounding colorful contemporary architecture and restored Victorian structures, faces Aspen Mountain from which much of the silver came to make it possible. An unpainted wooden fire escape crisscrosses its front, the week's foot specials are advertised in the east windows of the first-floor grocery, Pitkin County Library hours are posted inside the corner door, and a coffee house sign points to the basement. Thousands of tourists who go to Aspen, Colorado, annually to enjoy its world-famous mountain resort facilities and cultural opportunities are probably unaware that the three-story brick building in the heart of the business district was a symbol of progress and culture in the 1890's. Curious tourists frequently question townspeople about it and then usually ask why one of Colorado's finest opera houses was built in an isolated mining town where usual opera fare seemed out of place.

To answer this question and provide necessary background for a history of the Wheeler, this introductory chapter traces the economic and social development of Aspen from its beginning in 1879, when prospectors found silver, through the Panic of 1893. During these years the miners and men of wealth who followed the prospectors transformed the raw camp into a model little city, only to see it decline with the silver crash. Almost from the beginning there were theatricals in Aspen, so

Descriptions and policies of early theaters are included to give a better understanding of the importance of the Wheeler to the community. Jerome B. Wheeler was one of the wealthy men who helped improve silver production, brought railroads, and put up structures which resulted in a modern and flourishing town with cultural advantages little known in the stereotyped and short-lived mining camps of the times.

Just ten years before Mlle. Rhea and her Shakespearean performers traveled by rail from Denver to Aspen to perform at the Wheeler Opera House, three prospectors searching for gold in 1879 trudged and rode horseback sixty miles from Leadville over what is now Independence Pass into the Roaring Fork Valley of the Colorado Rocky Mountains. After making camp near a big spring, they found outcroppings of silver -- and still more silver -- everywhere in the wash of the Roaring Fork River.¹ They staked claims immediately and started mining. Until late that fall, other prospectors straggled over the rugged trails to find silver. News of the Ute Indian uprising nearby drove many out, but by 1880 the miners returned and many others came to work and stake claims at what was known as Ute Spring Camp.

Ute Spring, later to become Aspen and Pitkin County seat, lay eight thousand feet above sea level, isolated from smelters, silver markets, and the world in general. Even so, quite a little community developed in 1880, and by 1881 a temporary boom² resulted in the packing of silver ore out to Leadville at four cents a pound by mule and burro. The same animals packed

¹Frank Hall, History of the State of Colorado (Chicago: The Blakely Printing Co., 1895), p. 272.

²ASP, February 15, 1881, p. 4.

food and supplies back to camp. Soon newly-developed toll roads permitted faster and less-costly ore transport by wagon.³

Of the women who came to camp with their husbands in 1880, fourteen remained through the winter and helped provide entertainment, all home talent. They started a Sabbath School and later a singing school which became so popular a large tent was set up for it. Nearly everyone in camp came.⁴ Also, seven musicians who called themselves the Hamtown Glee Club invited many residents to Beard's Hall for a banquet after which a musical program and dancing took place.⁵

News of rich ore strikes traveled fast and attracted many kinds of people. Summer brought preachers, businessmen, and even a pioneer theater man. John Tudor built and opened Aspen's first theater, the Tudor Theatre Comique, on July 30, 1881. The Tudor family staged burlesque featuring glamorous Mamie.⁶ Tit Marsh, a Rocky Mountain News correspondent, visited the place and described entertainment the Tudors offered the miners in this way:

The "theatre" opens its doors two nights in the week -- Saturday and Sunday -- and is patronized (as well as the bar) principally by the miners. Pretty good houses are attracted, for purchasing a drink gains you admission to the show. The TUDORS hold forth and give the "boys" broadsides of dead and gone jokes that were middle-aged fifteen years ago. There is quite a contrast between it and the Tabor Grand [Denver]. The bar is the principal feature, all covered by a large wall tent. The seats are narrow rough boards, and the stage is with-

³Len Shoemaker, Roaring Fork Valley (Denver: Sage Books, 1958), pp. 35-36.

⁴Ibid., p. 43.

⁵Frank L. Wentworth, Aspen on the Roaring Fork (Lakewood, Colorado: Frank B. Rizzari, 1950), p. 128.

⁶Ibid., p. 62.

out a drop curtain. A piano, violin and cornet discourse disconcerted sounds to soothe the restlessness of the audience between long waits -- for drinks.⁷

Although Aspen's population had grown to about one thousand by 1883 and much ore had been taken from the newly-opened mines, growth of the city was retarded by lack of transportation to railheads. Hauling ore by wagon over the range to Granite or Buena Vista was expensive and slow.⁸

At this time Jerome B. Wheeler, a New Yorker who had brought his wife to Manitou, Colorado, for her health,⁹ paid a short visit to Aspen and immediately recognized the economic potential of the mining camp. In a matter of hours he had bought mine property and an unfinished smelter and ordered it completed.¹⁰ To provide coke and coal for the smelter, he bought a coal mine¹¹ and then had a toll road built to it.¹² His influence on Aspen's early history was made clear in an editorial which stated in 1884: "The camp was dead, but after his purchases, it was revived." ¹³

The immensely wealthy and energetic Wheeler, a Civil War veteran¹⁴ and former flour merchant, had learned and practiced astute business methods

⁷Rocky Mountain News, September 20, 1881, p. 3.

⁸Shoemaker, op. cit., p. 81.

⁹Bettie Marie Daniels and Virginia McConnell, The Springs of Manitou, Denver: Sage Books, 1964, p. 65.

¹⁰RMN, February 25, 1885, p. 3.

¹¹Shoemaker, op. cit., p. 69.

¹²Ibid., p. 84.

¹³RMN, August 12, 1884, p. 2.

¹⁴The Denver Post, Dec. 14, 1881, p. 12.

as controlling partner of F. W. Macy Company, the large New York City dry goods store. Wheeler's fortune and social stature had not diminished when he married the widow of former company executive, Robert Macy Valentine.¹⁵

Wheeler did not settle in Aspen, but he continued to influence its economy as an executive and investor. He organized the J. E. Wheeler Banking Company¹⁶ and the Aspen Mining and Smelting Company with himself as president¹⁷ but left operation of these and other enterprises to his subordinates. "He bought property after property on Aspen Mountain paying liberal prices," one editor wrote of him, "and followed up these purchases with fearless expenditure for development."¹⁸

By late spring of 1891 a stampede to the silver city had swelled its population to 5500. Eight doctors, thirty-one lawyers, fifteen civil engineers, and two dentists were among the professional men who came to share the wealth.¹⁹ The place was like a bee-hive. "Fire-engines, horse-back riders, and vehicles of all kinds were coming and going on most of the streets. Long pack-trains were packing ore. Hundreds of miners were working around the clock."²⁰

Enterprising businessmen and the usual camp followers offered a variety of entertainments for Aspen residents with twenty-six saloons,

¹⁵Interview with Jesse Harrison, and the Price is Right (Cleveland, Ohio: World Publishing Co., 1956), p. 32.

¹⁶AST, March 21, 1884, p. 4.

¹⁷John G. Sanfield, Mines and Mining Men of Colorado (Denver: By the author, 1893), p. 41.

¹⁸AST, August 13, 1891, p. 2.

¹⁹AST, May 9, 1885, p. 1.

²⁰Sanfield, p. 32.

five billiard halls, one dance hall, fifteen sporting houses, one opera house, and one variety theater. The Rink Opera House built by Edward C. Rice²¹ brought "first-class troupes over the range in stages" and was used for roller skating and a place for public performances of all kinds.²² In the same year, Charlie Boyd, an experienced variety trouper who had played with Haverly's Minstrels in Denver and later managed the Globe Theatre in Leadville, arrived to manage the Aspen Theater newly built by C. J. Colas and John Eitel. In 1886 Boyd changed its name to the Theatre Comique, and the Aspen Times rated the operation of his profitable variety theater in this way:

Outside of the box-work²³ which in western variety shows is a necessity, there is not a feature of Charlie Boyd's Comique which would offend the most fastidious pleasure seekers.²⁴

"Railroads follow the miners" was a topical saying which became a truth in Aspen. The Denver and Rio Grande Railway actually raced to lay tracks to town²⁵ ahead of the Wheeler-promoted and partially-owned Colorado Midland Railroad from Leadville to Aspen in 1887.²⁶ Cost of hauling a wagon of ore over the range for \$35.00 was cut when these railroads hauled a ton of it to Denver for \$8.00 and to Leadville for \$4.00.

²¹ADT, May 9, 1885, p. 4.

²²ADT, November 10, 1880, p. 2.

²³When not performing, women variety entertainers "worked" the boxes to get men to order "expensive drinks." The Denver Post, August 15, 1920, p. 5. quoted in Melvin Schoberlin, From Candles to Footlights (Denver: The Old West Publishing Co., 1941), p. 196.

²⁴ADT, January 1, 1887, p. 4.

²⁵Encyclopedia, Encyclopedia, p. 116.

²⁶Wesley Sprague, Export in the Rockies (Denver: Sage Books, 1961), p. 11.

Soon ore was shipped out at the rate of fifteen hundred to two thousand tons per week.²⁷

Just as the railroads carried fabulous amounts of silver ore out of Aspen, they brought in more people and supplies to boost all business and improve property values. For example, E. C. Rice's Rink Opera House, then the "family" theater, was renovated. The five hundred seats were numbered, the entire building was ceiled with "Chicago lumber" to improve acoustics, extra stoves and an exit door near the stage were added²⁸ and tiered seats were placed in the gallery.²⁹ The railroads also transported stock companies with their own scenery to Aspen to vary the usual Rink program of roller skating, church services and benefits, masquerades, and home talent shows.

Other entertainers also came by rail to help Charlie Boyd make good his advertisement of "a change in programme every night at popular prices."³⁰ His Theatre Comique, in a building much smaller than the Rink, featured variety such as singers, dancers, jugglers, boxing matches (sometimes in the afternoon), gymnasts, and other small combinations. Boyd, active in many Aspen activities, was popular with patrons and performers alike.³¹

Shortly after the Rink Opera House improvements were publicized, J. B. Wheeler, in town on business, announced that work on a new bank

²⁷ADT, February 25, 1888, p. 3.

²⁸ADT, February 12, 1888, p. 4.

²⁹ADT, February 16, 1888, p. 4.

³⁰ADT, January 19, 1888, p. 4.

³¹ADT, January 3, 1888, p. 1.

building would start May 1 and that it would be furnished with a "public hall, complete with stage fixtures." Aspenites, delighted about this and the fact he had sold his interest in the Macy Company, thought he would become a resident.³² As usual, he did not stay long, for when he was not at his beautiful summer home, Windermere, in Manitou Springs, Colorado, he was in New York, Chicago, or any place else business beckoned.³³

During early construction of the opera house building, this editorial concerning it and Wheeler's faith in American business appeared in the Times:

This building is one that would be a credit to any city. When someone asked him how he expected it to pay, he replied, "Oh! This is a great country, and every dollar put into such improvements will clearly come back with a splendid profit."³⁴

The two thousand additional residents who arrived in Aspen during 1888 saw vast street improvements and construction of the most important building put up that year, the three-story opera house block.³⁵ As the entire building neared completion, Ralph A. Weill, first opera house manager, arrived in town and gave such a glowing account of the plans for furnishing the opera house that a reporter wrote this:

It became evident from the description of the furniture, fixtures, stage and scenery that are being ordered for the opera house that Aspen is to have the second best opera house in the state.³⁶

The corner rooms on the ground floor were finished first and on March 20, 1889, all Wheeler Bank employees and officers, except Mr. Wheeler

³²AT, February 23, 1888, p. 4.

³³Sprague, op. cit., p. 139.

³⁴AT, August 12, 1888, p. 2.

³⁵AT, January 3, 1889, p. 2.

³⁶AT, February 15, 1889, p. 6.

who was not in town, greeted friends and patrons invited to celebrate the opening of the new J. B. Wheeler Bank. The magnificent quarters with entrance floor of marble tile, richly carpeted offices, cherry furniture from Chicago, much plate glass, polished brass and pink marble and, of course, the latest and best vault and safety deposit boxes served as a sample of Wheeler's practice of providing the best and most-handsome business and city improvement money could buy.³⁷

As tenants occupied other quarters of the building, elegance continued to be in order and seemed to serve as a prelude to the opening of a handsome opera house. Into the "L-shaped" area around the bank on the first floor, clothier Louis Weinberg set up his "palace of fashions" with its many new brass fixtures³⁸ and elegant reception rooms, "one for the ladies at the Mill Street entrance and one for the men at the Hyman ave. [sic] entrance."³⁹ Even the Opera House Tonsorial Parlors in the basement had the latest in Koch's patent reclining barber chairs, full-length plate glass mirrors, hand-painted cut-glass bottles for bay rum, and a bathroom with even temperature that no bather might catch cold.⁴⁰ Wheeler's Aspen Mining and Smelting Company had corner rooms over the bank on the second floor. His attorney, W. W. Cooley had the two "elegant" west rooms, and Dr. Paul of the Aspen Mine had the two carpeted east rooms. Among other professional men on the floor was Dr. Bryant, a dentist.⁴¹

³⁷ADT, March 21, 1889, p. 4.

³⁸ADT, March 29, 1889, p. 4.

³⁹ADT, February 18, 1889, p. 4.

⁴⁰ADT, April 12, 1889, p. 4.

⁴¹ADT, March 19, 1889, p. 4.

Just a few days after the bank opening, the announcement that the opera house would be named for Jerome B. Wheeler was made in New York by Manager Weill. He said that Wheeler had foreseen the possibilities of Colorado and reportedly had investments there of "no less than seven million dollars." Then he explained that the investor had filled Aspen's need for a good theater by providing a handsome and well-equipped opera house second only, in Colorado, to Denver's Tabor Grand.

For a number of years Aspen has been sadly in need of a handsome place of amusement. The city has fully 9,000 inhabitants, and the nearest place where a good attraction could be seen was Denver which was 200 miles away. Mr. Wheeler has supplied the want, and the opera house which he has erected is one of which even the great city of New York need not be ashamed. In fact, we have not gone outside of this city for principal decorations and furnishings, and I think that when it is completed he can claim the neatest and best-appointed opera house in the state outside of the Tabor Grand.⁴²

The ten-month construction of the opera house block gave Aspen's economy a boost. It had provided work for professional builders, contractors, and skilled workmen from Denver as well as for local firms and laborers (see Chapter II, p. 19). New rental space permitted merchants and professional men to plan enlarged business in more spacious and attractive rooms. Additional personnel to maintain the big building meant more money would circulate.

Opening of the Wheeler Opera House also gave the economy, social life, and prestige of Aspen a boost. Much publicity heralded the opening on April 23 and 24 as townspeople made ready for the occasion by purchasing finery they had not needed before. One clothier advertised that he had prepared early for male opera patrons by stocking full dress suits and introducing a line of "fine fancy spring suits suitable for any dress

⁴²March 26, 1915 . 2.

occasional "out-of-towners" with work on made-to-order opera hats had to reject 15 to 20 minute delays (see Chapter II, p. 36). Out-of-towners filled hotels (see Chapter II, p. 38) and a reporter from the Denver Republican wrote a story that surely gave Aspen prestige.

The theater is a little gem. It was built by J. B. Wheeler, the millionaire miner, who had done so much for this section, and its appointments are all perfect. The opening was a full-dress affair and the audience was by far the most brilliant assemblage that has ever gathered in the "New Empire."⁴⁴

Perhaps Aspen's society needed the "little gem" of a theater. According to George W. Loyd, a mining engineer who knew mining towns, Aspen was the "opposite" of the many mining camps characterized by what was known as the "rough element." This, he explained, implied "a lack of refinement and cultivation in the citizens, an enterprise to gain wealth rapidly but not to build up homes and substantial business blocks." However, in Aspen, he added, with the building of fine homes the "pleasures of a refined society" had come, and the "erection of the Wheeler" was a connecting link which led the social world to the business world.⁴⁵

Opening of the handsome Wheeler may have encouraged other theater improvement. Tom Moore refurbished his variety theater and held a "grand reopening" of the Palace Theatre with "an entire company of Eastern stars." Admission was the same as before: "Patronize the Bar and Walk In." Moore was the only theater man who advertised for talent in local papers. The following appeared at the bottom of his theater advertisement: "Artists

⁴³ Id., April 21, 1889, p. 4.

⁴⁴ The Denver Republican, April 24, 1889, p. 2.

⁴⁵ [George W. Loyd, ed.] Colorado Mines: A Souvenir of the New Mining Progress Building (Denver: Privately printed, n.d. [probably early 1890]), p. 45.

of acknowledged ability can always procure two weeks or more at this Theatre, with a surety of getting their salary."⁴⁶

Business was good for everyone as four thousand tons of ore were shipped out weekly.⁴⁷ Wheeler invested and developed more mine properties and then financed building of the Jerome Hotel, another "elegant" improvement for Aspen.⁴⁸ The fine one hundred-room brick hotel which cost \$125,000.00 to build and \$40,000.00 to furnish opened in November of 1889.⁴⁹

Silver was Aspen's economy and, although prices had declined throughout the eighties, the huge bodies of ore in the area made mining profitable. Early 1890 held great promise for the silver mining future; passage of the Sherman Act that year guaranteed large government silver purchases which brought its prices up temporarily.⁵⁰

Prosperity reigned in Aspen, and her residents used part of their silver riches for civic and cultural improvements such as new churches, a hospital, the county court house, two light and power plants, and new schools.⁵¹ As historian Frank Hall wrote of the city, "it was . . . the handsomest, most substantial and attractive mining town in the Rocky Mountains. . . . there was no lack of capital for the extension of any legitimate enterprise."⁵²

⁴⁶ADT, June 12, 1889, p. 3.

⁴⁷ADT, June 9, 1889, p. 2.

⁴⁸ADT, November 28, 1889, p. 4.

⁴⁹Canfield, op. cit., p. 33.

⁵⁰LeRoy R. Hafen, Colorado and Its People, (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., Inc., 1948), I, p. 457.

⁵¹Shoemaker, op. cit., p. 33.

⁵²Hall, op. cit., p. 276.

In the wave of prosperity, E. C. Rice again refitted his Rick Opera House, changed its name to the Tivoli Theatre, and employed W. R. Weston as manager. Advertisements offered first-class entertainment every night and Saturday afternoon at popular prices. Family rates were seventy-five cents, fifty cents, and twenty-five cents.⁵³

Silver prices declined and the wave of prosperity ended as the railroads merged ^{what?} and cut off some of their ore cars to Aspen,⁵⁴ thus reducing the amount of silver that could be shipped out. Business failures followed and closing-out sales were advertised in the area.⁵⁵ A nation-wide stringency in money prevailed in early 1891⁵⁶ and was evident in Aspen in June when the Palace Theatre closed because of poor business.⁵⁷ Silver prices continued to edge downward; Charlie Boyd quit the Comique, and by early 1892 the two men who had attempted to operate it also gave up.⁵⁸

Bar silver prices plunged that spring, but many mine owners and managers continued to operate mines at a loss, hoping the price would change for the better. Finally they had to decide whether to close down the mines or cut the price of production.⁵⁹ Miners of low-grade ore were laid off⁶⁰ and mine owners began to look for ways to recoup losses.

⁵³ADT, November 30, 1890, p. 2.

⁵⁴ADT, November 25, 1890, p. 3.

⁵⁵ADT, December 19, 1890, p. 4.

⁵⁶ADT, January 3, 1891, p. 5.

⁵⁷ADT, June 24, 1891, p. 4.

⁵⁸ADT, February 9, 1892, p. 4.

⁵⁹ADT, May 15, 1892, p. 4.

⁶⁰ADT, May 19, 1892, p. 5.

Mine litigation had already cost J. B. Wheeler much money, so he began disposing of investments. After disposing of his coal and coke interests for about a million dollars,⁶¹ he and his wife sold the Jerome Hotel to Arch Fisk of Denver for \$125,000.00. Perhaps a reporter figured the Wheeler Opera House Block was the next in line for sale when he asked Wheeler Bank Cashier Tissington if Wheeler were quitting Aspen. The answer was negative.

On the contrary, he is as thoroughly identified with Aspen as at any time in his career. He knew he wasn't a hotel man -- but it improved Aspen.⁶²

Nothing could stop the dropping silver market, and in July of 1893, the Panic was on; in fact, people almost stampeded to get out of Aspen to find work. Some walked with packs on their backs; others rode horses, wagons, or the "rods." Those with enough money traveled by train.⁶³

The town was not deserted, but there was not enough work producing other metals for all the miners. Despite help from civic groups organized to relieve the suffering,⁶⁴ hunger and destitution prevailed. Wheeler came in August to assure payment to depositors of his closed bank.⁶⁵ Promises did not feed the hungry, so the Chamber of Commerce sent a man with a four-horse team "down the valley for potatoes and other produce" to feed the "183 families -- totaling 950 people who had received aid" by late September.⁶⁶

⁶¹ADT, July 12, 1892, p. 5.

⁶²ADT, August 26, 1892, p. 8.

⁶³ADT, July 20, 1893, p. 4.

⁶⁴ADT, July 8, 1893, p. 3.

⁶⁵ADT, August 7, 1893, p. 4.

⁶⁶ADT, September 25, 1893, p. 4.

Like early prospectors, Aspenites lived "off the land" picking berries, fishing the streams, and hunting deer and elk⁶⁷ in the hills, as J. B. Wheeler looked for another venture in Cripple Creek, Colorado -- "the greatest gold mining district in America."⁶⁸ As winter came on, suffering increased when diphtheria and scarlet fever plagued Aspen.⁶⁹ To aid the needy, Wheeler sent eighteen head of cattle.⁷⁰

The silver crash may have served as a grim reminder that only ten years before Aspen was an ordinary mining camp. Energetic and wealthy promoters who brought modern mining and business methods to develop it helped bring the railroads to carry out the unlimited supply of silver. Though slowly declining, a silver market existed, but with a never-ending supply of ore only a rosy future could exist. There was no end to prosperity; any business could succeed. Some people came to stay and they built substantial homes and places of business.

Wealthy J. B. Wheeler, who had come early, invested, developed his holdings, and helped the whole area by promoting a second railroad. After the railroads had arrived and the business outlook seemed solid, he built his bank block. The big building and its beautiful opera house helped the economy of the town, gave it prestige, and lifted social life; townspeople had an elegant place for entertainment.

The sterling silver economy could not last as the market slipped. When ore could no longer be produced at a profit, the rich and the poor

⁶⁷ADT, October 10, 1893, p. 3.

⁶⁸ADT, October 24, 1893, p. 4.

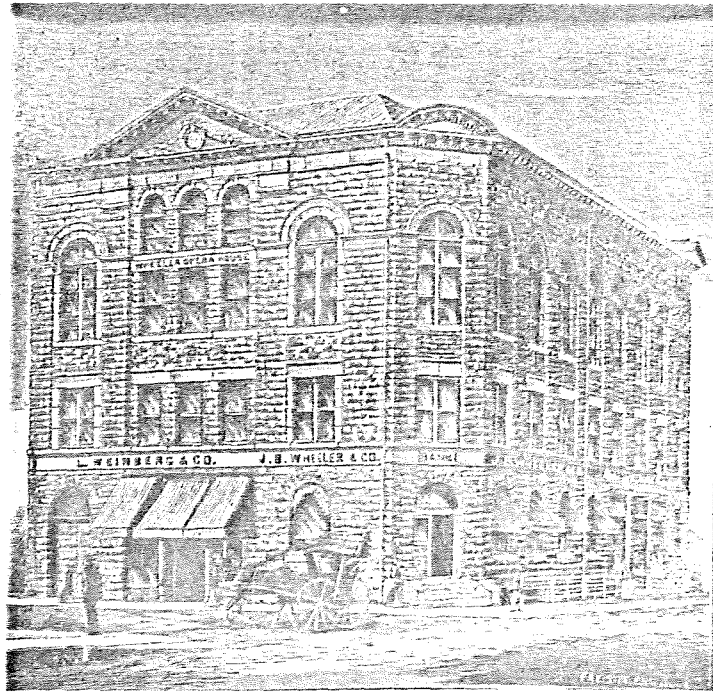
⁶⁹ADT, November 18, 1893, p. 4.

⁷⁰ADT, November 21, 1893, p. 4.

suffered as Aspen's silver economy died. Developers of the town left; a few who stayed mined other metals for which there was some demand, but others had to struggle for a living or leave.

Sixty years later in front of the Red Onion Saloon, a wrinkled old miner, sharing a wooden bench with some of his cronies and curious tourists, reminisced about the old silver days. He paused, looked up at Aspen Mountain, and then finished his story with, "Hell, we're the only things left, and we're mineralized. We got silver in our hair and lead in our rumps."

PLATE I



WHEELER OPERA HOUSE 1890

CHAPTER II

LITTLE GEM OF A THEATER

Construction of a three-story brick and stone building was new and unusual in Aspen where hastily and often flimsily-built structures had been normal for the mining camp. Having a handsome opera house in the best building in town was still more desirable and the populace was eager to see it and be a part of its opening.

In four parts, this chapter first records the Wheeler Block construction and incidental problems from letting of the contract until the opera house was completed. The second and third parts offer minute descriptions of the auditorium and stage with their fine furnishings and modern equipment. Following this, the preparations, excitement, and glamour of the two-day grand opening show how the community accepted the handsome opera house.

The Construction

The contract for the building called for its completion by April 1, 1889,¹ however, the builders may not have anticipated the kinds of mistakes and accidents that occurred with the Wheeler Block. Excavation began early in June, 1888, at the corner of Hyman Avenue and Mill Street

¹ADT, November 15, 1888, p. 6.

in the center of Aspen's business district.² Wheeler had bought two lots there four years earlier from J. E. Freeman for \$2,000.00.³

Plans and specifications for the city's largest brick and stone building had not arrived from Denver when news was out that the opera house room would be sixty by one hundred feet, one-fourth larger than the Rink.⁴ Within the month local contractors learned they could submit construction bids for the big \$75,000.00 edifice;⁵ later, the Aspen Plumbing Company secured the plumbing contract.⁶

Peter Wilson had started work on the basement before Denver architect Edbrook arrived in July.⁷ Late in August, Ross, Frazier and Company, the Denver contractors for the mason work, were busy, with Mr. Ross as supervisor.⁸ Progress on the second story was so rapid in September⁹ that woodwork was added to the third story in October.¹⁰

Mr. Kepler, the superintending architect whose experiences included construction of some of the largest buildings in Chicago and other eastern cities, stated that the building was one of the most solid and convenient he had ever built. He pointed to the door step of the

²ADT, February 23, 1888, p. 4.

³Lots R and S, Block 81, Clerk and Recorder's Book of Pitkin County, Colorado, Book 14, p. 349.

⁴ADT, June 5, 1888, p. 4.

⁵ADT, June 1, 1888, p. 4.

⁶ADT, June 24, 1888, p.4.

⁷ADT, July 11, 1888, p. 4.

⁸ADT, September 1, 1888, p. 4.

⁹ADT, September 28, 1888, p. 4.

¹⁰ADT, October 27, 1888, p. 6.

bank as evidence. It had been bedded solid by mistake and the settling of a fraction of an inch would have broken it, but it remained intact. He said that the bank room would be ready for occupancy by January first and he expected to see the rest of the building completed before April first.¹¹

Sidewalks around the building were completed in November,¹² and work was rushed to get the roof on so the mechanics could "defy the weather"¹³ and work inside. As stone cutters worked at "dressing up the corners" of the building, townspeople noticed the east wall looked strange. A reporter attempted to explain it this way, "The apparent concavity in the east wall is an optical illusion which the dressing down of the corners will probably correct."¹⁴ The architect arrived shortly, checked the wall, and reportedly insisted that the wall be torn down although the contracting superintendent felt such action was unnecessary.

Architect Edbrook of the new Wheeler block has just been in the city and a report has just been started that he notified the contractors that they would have to take down the east wall of the building. Ever since the building went up, the wall has had the appearance of being "dished." It is now shown that such is the case.

When Mr. Davis, superintendent for Halleck and Howard, was asked about the report regarding Mr. Edbrook's action, he said that he did not think the wall would be taken down. It was perfectly safe and he would be willing to submit it to the highest authority obtainable. The building was of unusual strength, he said; it might be crowded with all the people who could get into it and all might be dancing at once without causing a tremor in the massive structure. Mr. Davis explained that the "dishing" was caused by the wall being built of both stone and brick. The inside has a little opportunity to settle, while the outside is solid. The result is that there is a tend-

¹¹ADT, November 15, 1888, p. 6.

¹²ADT, November 23, 1888, p. 6.

¹³ADT, November 28, 1888, p. 6.

¹⁴ADT, December 1, 1888, p. 6.

ency to draw the wall in, thus causing the hollowness that appears about the second story.

An effort was made to see Mr. Kepler, who has superintended the work, but he could not be found. If the architects should refuse to receive the building a nice point would arise because of the fact that they have directly superintended the work, and it would probably be claimed by the contractors that defects should have been pointed out before the work had been entirely finished.

.....
The carpenters were at work yesterday putting in the windows and the building will soon be closed against the weather.¹⁵

Obviously the decision was made; two days later the Times reported, "Mechanics were at work yesterday preparing derricks to be used in taking down and rebuilding the wall of the opera house if it shall be decided to do so."¹⁶ Details of the reconstruction plans were told:

The work of taking down the east wall of the opera house block will commence as soon as the floors and roof can be shored up. The wall will be taken down to the sills of the hall windows except at the ends where the wall is straight. Two derricks will be used and the work will be done quickly.¹⁷

It should be noted here that W. J. Edbrook was the architect for the Tabor Grand Opera House in Denver. Coincidentally, one wall of that opera house fell into an alley during winter construction and had to be rebuilt.¹⁸

The work of rebuilding the east wall of the opera house block went fast, but two days after Christmas the newspapers forebodingly announced, "The rebuilding of the opera house wall will be completed this week if no mishap is met with."¹⁹ It happened. At twelve forty-five on Jan-

¹⁵ADT, December 7, 1888, p. 6.

¹⁶ADT, December 9, 1888, p. 6.

¹⁷ADT, December 11, 1888, p. 6

¹⁸Elmer S. Crowley, The History of the Tabor Grand Opera House, Denver, Colorado, 1881 - 1891, (Denver University, M. A. Thesis, 1940), pp. 8-11.

¹⁹ADT, December 27, 1888, p. 6.

uary 3, as a swinging scaffold twenty-five feet above the sidewalk gave way, four workmen fell. James Richardson, a member of the stone-cutting firm of Ross and Richardson, fell in a window area and received bruises and a head cut. James All, an elderly man who landed on some lumber, suffered a spine injury and was "out of his head." Previously he had been hurt on the job when struck by a falling brick. Philander Moore and William Watson struck stone pavement. Moore's skull was fractured and his right elbow shattered; Watson's back was severely injured and one ankle was wrenched.²⁰ As a result of this accident, an editorial in the Aspen Daily Times started a campaign to build Aspen's first hospital which was completed in September of 1891.²¹

In spite of the accident, construction moved along rapidly as a steam heating apparatus was installed and plasterers began work on the first floor.²² Completion of the exterior included the word BANK carved in the stone above the door and massive steps which led to the J. B. Wheeler Bank quarters.²³ No other building in Aspen was so solidly and well constructed nor finished with such detail.

The same high-quality construction and finish work were evident in the opera house where "Wheeler spared no expense in making it perfect in all its details."²⁴ An Aspenite familiar with the town's theater growth could hardly believe the progress the new opera house represented. He rated it the best in the city as he wrote this about its opening:

²⁰ADT, January 4, 1889, p. 5.

²¹ADT, September 9, 1891, p. 5.

²²ADT, January 12, 1889, p. 5.

²³ADT, March 21, 1889, p. 4.

²⁴ADT, March 26, 1889, p. 2.

To an old-timer it was a sight long to be remembered that was witnessed. It seems but a few [sic] months since the only place for meetings of any kind was some improvised hall in a balloon building. Later on came the Rink opera house, more commodious, more comfortable and presenting many of the features of a well appointed theatre. These are now superceded [sic], but those who have been familiar with the various stages of development could scarcely realize the change that has taken place until they stepped within the doors of the opera last evening.²⁵

The Auditorium and Furnishings

To reach the auditorium of the Wheeler, patrons used the main entrance on Hyman Avenue. The ticket office was located on the ground floor under the wide stairway²⁶ which was finished with a highly-polished wood balustrade. On the third floor at the top of the stairs was a "ladies' retiring room and cloak room adjoining the auditorium."²⁷

Modern and dazzling lighting equipment enhanced the house. The chandelier, a work of art, was suspended from the handsomely frescoed ceiling by a wire rope.²⁸

Those who have been fortunate enough to secure seats will be delighted and surprised when they assemble in this perfect "bijou" of a theatre, and the electricity sparkles, crackles and radiates from the thirty-six branch chandelier in the centre of the ceiling and from around the house. This chandelier is the crowning glory of this beautiful house, being made of hammered brass, handmade, trimmed with silver and set with three dozen incandescent lights, each with an opalescent shade, flaring out at the end in the form of a flower.²⁹

²⁵ADT, April 24, 1889, p. 4.

²⁶ADT, April 26, 1889, p. 4.

²⁷ADT, April 23, 1889, p. 4.

²⁸ADT, April 8, 1889, p. 4.

²⁹ADT, April 23, 1889, p. 4.

New and unusual theater lighting was introduced at the Wheeler. There must have been dimmers³⁰ installed on stage to control house and stage lights, for a reporter in describing the house lights wrote this:

These lights are so regulated that their strength can be increased or decreased as the scene may require, by ingenious apparatus on the stage. This will enable Mr. Robert Cutler, the property man, to give necessary effects in every case.³¹

Wide aisles and the seating arrangement of the house allowed for plenty of room and good visibility of the stage. On the floor sloping toward the stage was the parquet, 599 seats, divided in the center by a commodious aisle carpeted in crimson. The side aisles were similarly carpeted. No attempt had been made to crowd in seats. Two stairways at the back led "to the balcony seats regarded by old theater-goers as the best in the house" because they furnished "the best and most exalted view of both the audience and stage."³²

Opera chairs "of the most improved make" had brown morocco leather-covered cushioned arms and spring-cushioned seats "with wire frames under them to hold gentlemen's hats." They were capable also of being turned up "to facilitate the ingress and egress of persons going in and out between rows of chairs."³³ These chairs, now stored in James Parsons' Isis movie theater in Aspen, look narrow and uninviting,³⁴ not

³⁰Resistance dimmers were used about this time. Samuel Selden and Hunton D. Sellman, Stage Scenery and Lighting (2d. rev.; New York: F. S. Crofts and Co., 1938), pp. 312-316.

³¹ADT, April 23, 1889, p. 4, col. 2.

³²ADT, April 23, 1889, p. 4, col. 3.

³³ADT, April 8, 1889, p. 4.

³⁴Interview and personal observation in Aspen, Colorado, June 19, 1964.

at all like they looked to an 1889 theater patron who compared them with those at the old Rink Opera House:

The metamorphosis from the high-set, stiff-backed, straw cushioned racks in the Old Rink Opera House, to the spring-cushioned, morocco covered opera chairs will immediately translate the fortunate auditor from Tophet to Olympus. The spectator is no longer compelled to draw heavily upon his imagination as his condition is comfortable and his eye is feasted.³⁵

The five chairs in each of the two proscenium boxes appeared more comfortable and elegant.³⁶ Upholstered in gold plush, they blended with the lavish gold and red decor of the boxes.

The proscenium boxes are semi-circular in shape, and their domes are bedecked with silver stars in an azure sky. These are constructed of cherry wood inlaid with gilt lincrusta-walton. The brass rails resting on the soft scarlet velvet of the box arches stand out in bold contrast with the gilt paper that adorns the walls within. The chairs are of mahogany, richly upholstered with old gold plush. Heavy damask portieres, gracefully looped, furnish a refuge for the retiring occupant of these boxes from the gaze of the audience. The boxes are so constructed, that the fortunate possessors can get the best view of the stage and auditorium, and can be seen or not at pleasure.³⁷

An early engraving of the auditorium (see Plate II, p.26) shows orchestra space provided immediately in front of the stage. An iron pipe railing served as a divider between the first row of seats and the orchestra area.

Although the brick building was practically fireproof, the fire escape ladders on the west side of the building³⁸ may not have been considered adequate for emptying the house quickly in case of emergency. Possibly the fact that the opera house was on the third floor and could

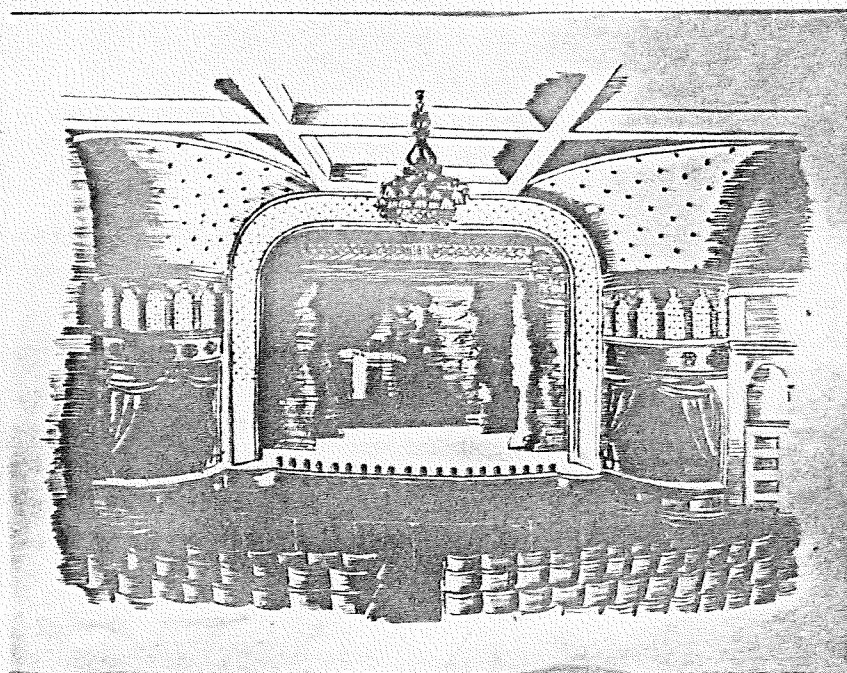
³⁵ADT, April 23, 1889, p. 4.

³⁶ADT, April 22, 1889, p. 4.

³⁷ADT, April 23, 1889, p. 4.

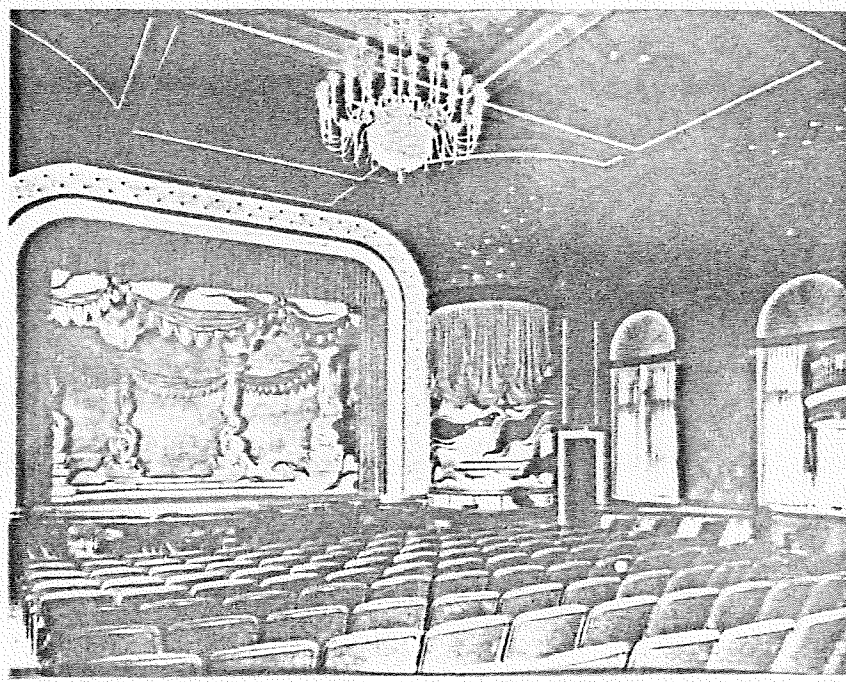
³⁸ADT, April 24, 1889, p. 2.

PLATE II



WHEELER OPERA HOUSE 1890

PLATE III



WHEELER OPERA HOUSE 1964

hold more people than any other theater in Aspen prompted a grand jury investigation of the entire Wheeler Block for safety. Their report, which indicated that the building was almost fireproof,³⁹ described fire precautions for the stage and satisfaction with Wheeler's plans to provide an additional fire exit by building an iron stairway on the outside of the west wall. The report of the grand jury as it appeared in the Aspen Daily Times follows:

THE JURY'S REPORT

STATE OF COLORADO)
) SS
 COUNTY OF PITKIN)

IN THE DISTRICT COURT IN AND FOR SAID
 COUNTY, AS YET OF THE MAY TERM, 1889.

In the matter of the examination of the
 Wheeler Opera House by the Grand Jury:

We, the grand jury empanelled and sworn in and for said county, respectfully report as follows: That we visited the Wheeler Opera House and made a careful and thorough examination thereof with regard to its safety from fire and the means provided for the escape of people in case of any sudden alarm, and we find that there is hardly any chance for a fire to start; there is not a fire in the building, except in the basement, and there is not a gaslight or lamp, being everywhere lighted by electricity and heated by steam. The stage is guarded by a fireman and other assistants, and within easy reach, there is a stand of pipe with hose attachments, and in case of any possible firing of the stage it would be immediately put out, so complete are the arrangements which have been made by Mr. Wheeler.

But we did not find the means of escape ample as required by law, and we called on Mr. Wheeler to provide additional means for emptying the house in case of sudden emergencies. To this demand, Mr. Wheeler readily acceded and has submitted to the jury plans and specifications hereto attached, which we have deemed to be ample and

³⁹In 1912 two fires eight days apart and both supposedly set by a "fire bug" occurred on and around the Wheeler stage. The first fire was minor, but the second caused damage estimated at \$30,000.00 and destroyed all scenery, stage equipment and properties. Aspen-Democrat Times, November 21, 1912, p. 1.

sufficient to comply with the law. These plans provide for a doorway to be made with the width of six feet on the west side of the house, leading from the auditorium and a stairway six feet wide, leading down along the west side to the rear of the building with suitable rests or plates to break the long flight of stairs to make the descent easy. This will allow people to pass from the auditorium out of the side door, and those from the gallery to pass down the way leading to the front, thus dividing two lines against each other as now is the case. Thus, in our judgment, obviating all danger whatever in case of panic or alarm. Mr. Wheeler has agreed to have the work executed as speedily as possible.

Very respectfully submitted,

Samuel Cramer, Foreman⁴⁰

The new iron stairway, made in Denver,⁴¹ was put up in September.⁴² Aesthetically, the black stairway may have been preferable to the old ladders, but practically it was of little value in winter and early spring. It served as a convenient attachment for ice and huge icicles as snow melted and dripped from the roof.⁴³

The Stage and Equipment

The opera house itself was designed and built to fit the Wheeler bank building, not vice versa. This limited the stage size to fifty-one feet wide, twenty-six feet deep, and twenty-five feet high, but left little space backstage when scenery was in place. Ralph A. Weill, first manager of the Wheeler, had announced that there were twenty-six complete sets of scenery which he had selected from designs furnished by the best scenic painters in New York,⁴⁴ but a later description stated that the

⁴⁰ADT, July 17, 1889, p. 4.

⁴¹ADT, July 24, 1889, p. 4.

⁴²ADT, September 8, 1889, p. 4.

⁴³Personal observation, 1950-1954.

⁴⁴ADT, April 23, 1889, p. 4.

"large and commodious" stage was "fitted out with fifteen full sets of the finest scenery and stage settings."⁴⁵

If all of these fifteen (or twenty-six) sets of scenery were stored on or above the stage, they probably included back drops with wing pieces or curtains for masking since there was not space for other types of scenery. Photographs of the stage and some of its original scenery (see Plates IV and V, p.30) indicate that the Wheeler had the usual "stock" scenery of the times which frequently included ballroom and outdoor settings. Scenery pieces were probably standard and could be used interchangeably for several sets. This might account for the "revolving scenes" mentioned in the following description of scenery used for the first home talent performance:

. . . some six of the new revolving scenes that are on the opera house stage will be set for the Peak Sisters and Penelope. One of these will present a beautiful parlor, an imitation of that of Mrs. Jaimie [sic] Potter's residence in New York and there will be a grate with a real fire in it.⁴⁶

Photographs of the stage (see Plates IV and V, p.30) do not reveal any draw curtains, but a roll curtain is obvious. It probably was this curtain Manager Weill described as a drop curtain when he told a New York Daily Mirror reporter about the new Wheeler.

By the way, what do you think is the subject of the drop curtain? It is a representation of the Brooklyn Bridge, painted by Burke [of the Chicago Opera House] from sketches obtained in this city, and is one of the best pieces of work of the kind I have ever seen.⁴⁷

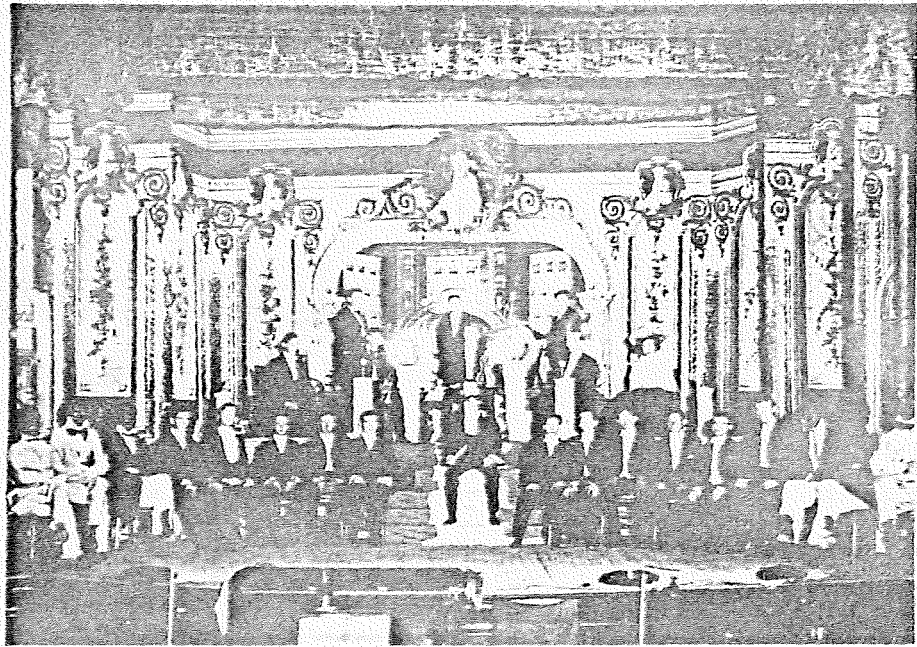
Perhaps the drop curtain symbolized the coming of city life and the world to Aspen. Designed by two New Yorkers, world famous for their

⁴⁵ADT, January 1, 1889, p. 2.

⁴⁶ADT, April 28, 1889, p. 4.

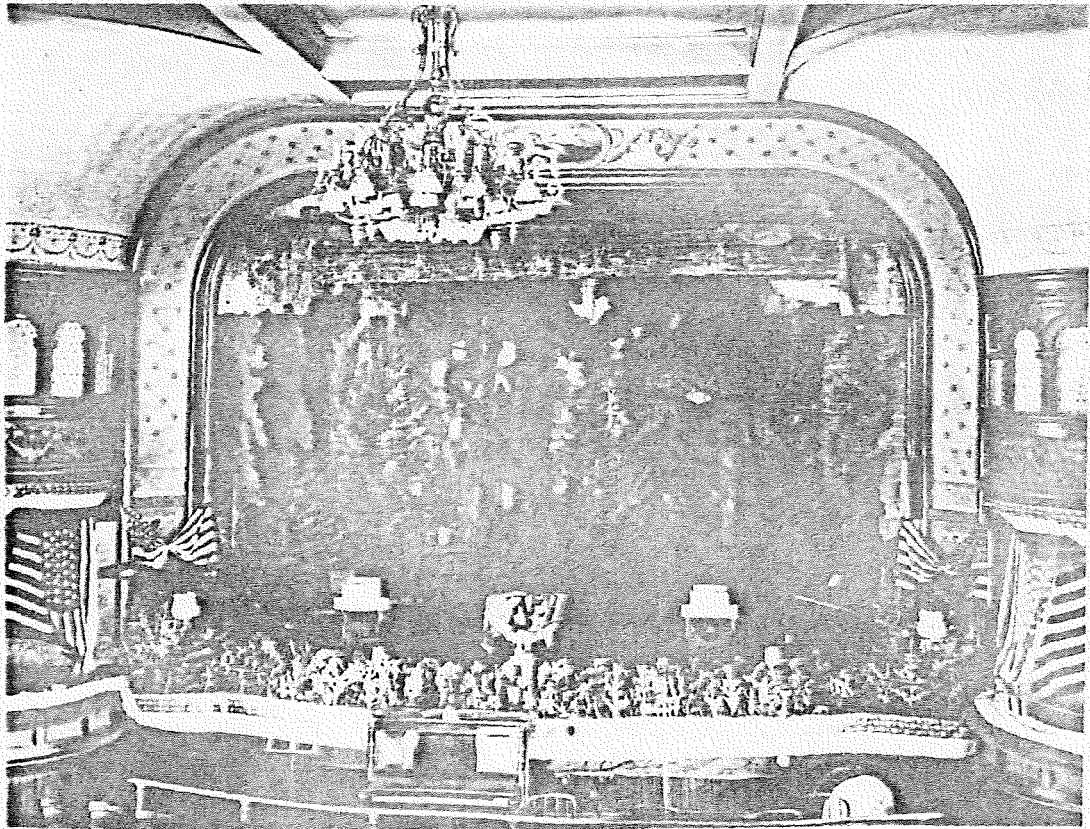
⁴⁷ADT, March 26, 1889, p. 2.

PLATE IV



WHEELER OPERA HOUSE. SOMETIME BEFORE 1912.

PLATE V



WHEELER OPERA HOUSE. SOMETIME BEFORE 1912.

scenic art, and painted by no less than Chicago's opera house scene painter Burke, it pictured not only the bridge and the East River, but ships from all over the world.

The drop curtain in itself is an artistic study being the combined effort of Messrs. Charles Graham and Homer Emons, two of the best scenic artists in the world. It is a painting of the East River Bridge, that great artery of trade and travel connecting the great metropolis of the United States with its millions of suburban population on Long Island. It presents a moonlight view of the greatest suspension bridge in the world under which a large Boston steamer is passing with ease and grace, whilst the immense forests of masts of ocean grey-hounds, loading and unloading their costly burdens for and from every part of the world are sketched with the minutest detail.⁴⁸

Provision had been made to bring scenery and properties from the alley below onto the small stage through a large door in the center of the back stage wall. Along the rear right of the back wall a small stairway led to a floor just below the stage where dressing rooms were located. Of them Manager Weill said, "We have seven dressing rooms, besides that of the star, and they will be under the stage and nicely fitted up. In fact, they will be rooms in fact as well as by name -- not cells."⁴⁹

The stage "had all the modern appliances," but only the lighting equipment was described. A photograph (see Plate II, p. 26) shows foot-lights, and one may assume that lighting equipment included dimmers (see p. 24) because the strength of the house lights could be increased or decreased from the stage.⁵⁰ Very likely the stage was equipped with a treadmill. A review of The County Fair testified to the fact that an actual horse race took place on the stage. It stated that trained horses "came in for their share of applause" as their "efforts to win the race

⁴⁸ADT, April 23, 1889, p. 4.

⁴⁹ADT, March 26, 1889, p. 4.

⁵⁰ADT, April 23, 1889, p. 4.

caused much excitement."⁵¹ Another production, the Civil War play Shenandoah, required a horse on stage. In one scene, Aspen citizen Dan John rode a horse hired from the local livery stable of Trowbridge and Grey.⁵² An advertisement for another play offered "a genuine old mountain coach drawn by genuine broncos."⁵³

According to Wayne Callahan, Aspen pioneer who as a youngster attended the Wheeler frequently, horses actually did appear on the stage. There was a difference of opinion about how the horses reached the stage. Callahan said he saw the well-trained horse used in Shenandoah led up the forty-eight steps and five landings of the main stairway, and he added, "It took approximately forty-five minutes to do it. That horse was probably blindfolded to bring him down or maybe he was backed down."⁵⁴

Another pioneer, Robert C. Weise, recalled that his father told about a horse named Cold Molasses which was lifted in a sling from the alley behind the opera house up through the scenery door at the back of the stage.⁵⁵ Callahan said he had seen The County Fair production and there were three or four real horses on the stage.⁵⁶

A photograph of the stage (see Plate VI, p. 33)⁵⁷ following the 1912 fires shows absolutely no scenery left; all timbers were charred and

⁵¹ADT, June 15, 1892, p. 6.

⁵²ADT, June 17, 1890, p. 2.

⁵³ADT, April 18, 1891, p. 2.

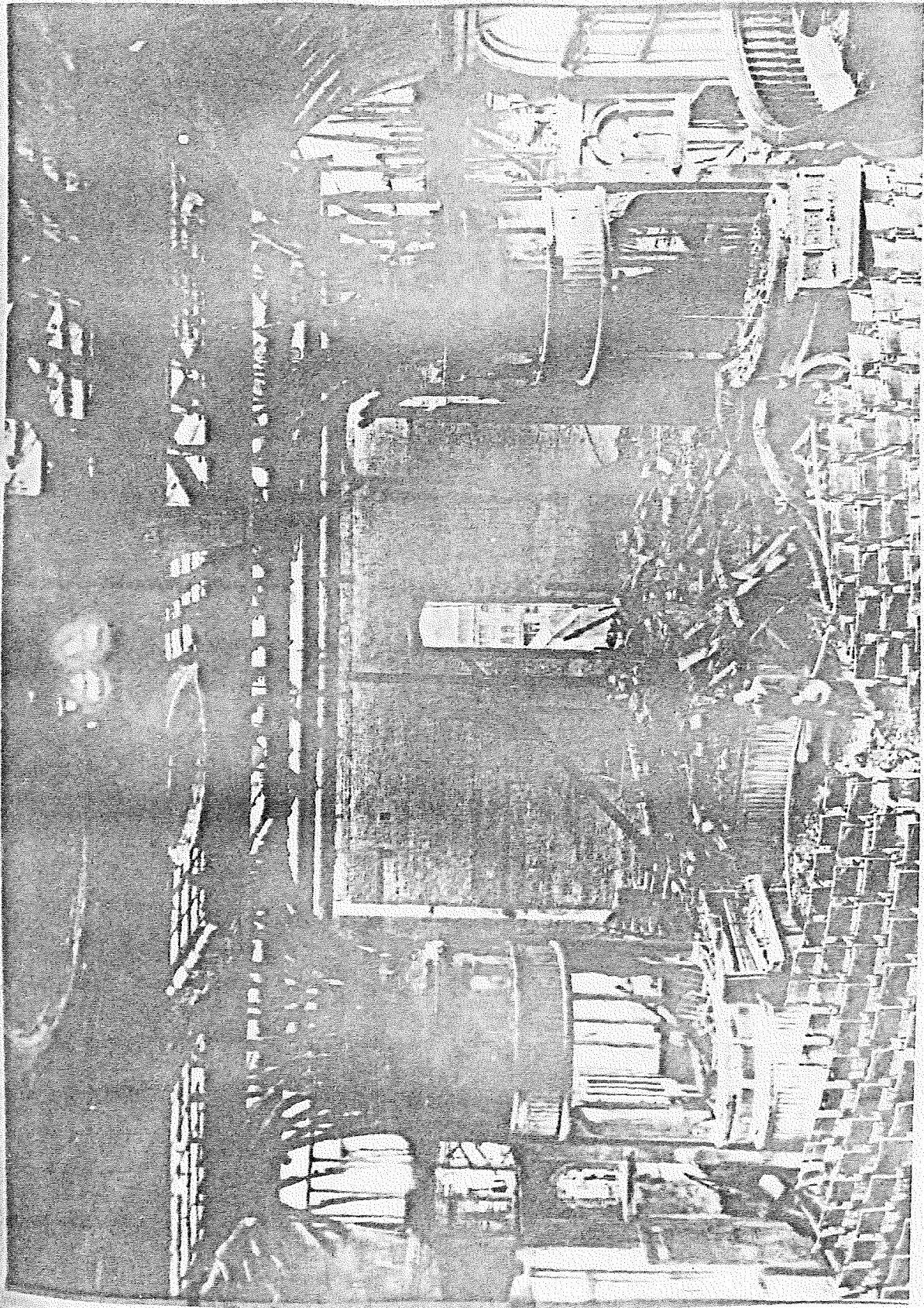
⁵⁴Personal interview, June 22, 1963, Aspen, Colorado.

⁵⁵Personal interview, June 24, 1963, Aspen, Colorado.

⁵⁶Personal interview, June 22, 1963, Aspen, Colorado.

⁵⁷Property of Aspen Historical Society, Aspen, Colorado.

PLATE VI



WHEELER OPERA HOUSE AFTER 1912 FIRES

a pile of black rubble lay on the stage floor. During renovations new flooring was placed on stage removing all evidence of trap doors which might have been there originally. The big charred grids above the stage are still in place and in use.⁵⁸

No evidence is available concerning location of the property room. Its stock, however, had "everything necessary for the production of every known play and opera" including "tropical flowers and rare plants from the delicate orchid to the famous edelweiss of Switzerland," all conscientiously reproduced.⁵⁹

Although the Wheeler stage seemed to be well equipped, scenery and unusual mechanical devices necessary for the popular realistic scenes and extravaganzas were carried by many traveling stock companies. However, for the touring company producing The Ivy Leaf, Robert Cutler, the Wheeler's first stage manager, created the "Ivy Tower" which was "one of the numerous pieces of mechanism that had been conceived by the brain and produced by the hands" of Cutler.⁶⁰ Four years later William Van Hoorebeke, one of Aspen's talented young amateurs, produced what was considered "the finest piece of stage scenery seen at the Wheeler for some time. . . . It was a cataract of living water."⁶¹

The Grand Opening

The grand opening of the Wheeler Opera House was publicized in many ways. John Coleman of the Leadville Tabor Opera House had come to

⁵⁸Personal observation, June 15, 1962.

⁵⁹ADT, April 23, 1889, p. 4.

⁶⁰ADT, May 3, 1889, p. 2.

⁶¹ADT, March 29, 1893, p. 1.

Aspen to paste billboards,⁶² the corner Drug Store across from the Wheeler sold tickets, and the newspapers carried the following theater advertisement:

Tuesday and Wednesday, April 23 and 24

CONRIED'S

English Comic Opera Company
Under the personal direction of Mr. Heinrich
Conried, in a Grand Spectacular Presentation
of Mr. Adolph Muller's Beautiful Romantic Opera

"KING'S FOOL"

80 - ARTISTES - 80

Including Professor Hartl's Original Viennese Lady Fencers
Bewilderingly Beautiful Marches
Dazzlingly Electrical Effects
Enchanting Music

Grand Fencing Contest for a purse of \$150 offered
by Aspen citizens.⁶³

Other advertisements indicated that Aspen merchants were offering fine clothing and accessories specifically for Wheeler opening patrons.

Gentlemen who propose attending the grand, full dress opening of the Wheeler Opera House, on Tuesday night, will be pleased to know that the Weinberg Clothing Co. has just received a large assortment of the finest quality of full dress black cloth coats and low cut vests, and black doe-skin vests. They also have a large assortment of black folding opera hats, and silk hats for gentlemen, also "crush" hats for ladies.⁶⁴

Before Easter, ladies knew Milliner Rhine had a good assortment of the popular opera hats,⁶⁵ but according to the Staats, Hunt and Company advertisement, the demand for made-to-order millinery had exceeded the supply by opening day.

⁶²ADT, April 20, 1889, p. 4.

⁶³ADT, April 21, 1889, p. 4, cols. 7 and 8.

⁶⁴ADT, April 21, 1889, p. 4, col. 3.

⁶⁵ADT, April 18, 1889, p. 4.

"Rush and crush" hardly expresses the situation as to trade in fine millinery for the opera. We can take no more orders today, as it will tax our whole force to the utmost to complete engagements at 6 o'clock.

Staats also had a dozen or two "beautiful pattern hats and opera bonnets as well as a few China fans, fine handkerchiefs, neckwear and kid gloves left for the occasion."⁶⁶ E. L. Hurkin had "tulle or illusion" hats, fans, kid gloves, ruching and a few choice beaded wraps and opera shawls for sale,⁶⁷ in addition to three dozen pearl opera glasses to rent.⁶⁸

On the afternoon before the Wheeler opening, the Conried Opera Company was not the only talent Aspenites planned to welcome. A large crowd gathered on Mill Street from the Clarendon Hotel (corner of Mill and Durant) to the Denver and Rio Grande station to await the arrival of the opera company and Professor Norris' dog show which was booked at the Rink Opera House that night. About three o'clock, as Charlie Boyd's band from the Comique marched down Mill Street to the depot to receive the opera company, spirited horses pulled three landaus with red, white and blue ribbons and rosettes on the wheels to receive the dogs. At least three thousand people watched the animated scene. Some seventy-five opera company members came up town first; a few stopped at the Wheeler, but most of them continued two blocks to the Clarendon. As "one thousand or more small boys" cheered, the landaus carried some thirty or more dogs of all kinds to the Rink.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ADT, April 23, 1889, p. 2.

⁶⁷ADT, April 24, 1889, p. 2.

⁶⁸ADT, April 24, 1889, p. 1.

⁶⁹ADT, April 24, 1889, p. 2.

A few desirable seats at \$2.50 were available when the Wheeler box office opened at six-thirty,⁷⁰ but afternoon newspaper announcements listed other entertainment at lower prices for that night. Obviously, the Rink manager considered the Wheeler competition for in his advertisement the following appeared: "The opera company [Conried] tonight is nothing compared to Prof. Norris' thirty performing dogs. Prices \$1.00 and \$0.75 for adults. Children \$0.25." Veteran theater man Charlie Boyd had shown his public spirit and cooperation in the afternoon by taking his band to meet the opera company. Boyd's usual daily "ad" simply listed D'Ennery's A Celebrated Case plus a variety of minstrel and music. A week-old "ad" for the Palace Theatre, a variety spot, announced: "Each performance closes with a sparkling afterpiece. Admission -- Patronize the Bar and walk in."⁷¹

That Tuesday night the scene on Hyman Street must have been colorful as opera patrons in their finery came from every direction, some on foot and others in horse-drawn carriages. Billy Tagert, veteran livery man, recalled that \$5.00 was the carriage fee to transport four people to the house and call for them after the performance.⁷²

The opening of the Wheeler was hailed as "one of the most notable events in the history of Aspen's most eventful year." It was a night to remember. Every seat in the house was sold as eight hundred first-nighters in full dress took their places. The scene was more like that in a city theater than one in a mining town. The ladies, charming in their expensive new costumes, fairly glowed in the brilliantly lighted theater.

⁷⁰ADT, April 23, 1889, p. 4.

⁷¹ADT, April 23, 1889, p. 2.

⁷²Personal interview, June 23, 1962, Aspen, Colorado.

Each lady was handed a perfumed satin program (see Plate VII, p. 39) and a fine bottle of perfume as souvenirs of the event.⁷³ Leading gentlemen of the town appeared in swallow-tails to honor the occasion. As greetings were exchanged, everyone seemed⁷⁴ delighted to be on hand for the inauguration of the beautiful new theater.

Shortly after eight o'clock the curtain was raised and the big, glamorous, and elegantly costumed Conried Company presented a comic opera, The King's Fool. The audience anticipated a musical treat, but they were fascinated with the fencing exhibition and listened with interest to the announcement that the same lady fencers would fence for a prize offered by Aspen citizens the next night.⁷⁵

When the performance ended, celebration of the theater opening continued through the night. George B. Brown, an Aspenite who missed none of the excitement, said that champagne flowed and "nobody went to bed that night."⁷⁶

Where the after-theater festivities were held is not known, for Aspen hostelries were crowded and could not house all of the out-of-town visitors who came for the opening. Some people had to "spend the night sitting in chairs in billiard rooms." Every hotel, lodging and boarding house was filled and had to turn customers away. "Before supper time"

⁷³ADT, April 24, 1889, p. 4.

⁷⁴"Editorial Notes," Colorado Magazine, XX, No. 6 (November, 1943), pp. 239-240. Interview when Mr. Brown presented Colorado State Historical Society with the program and one of the original chairs from the opera house.

⁷⁵ADT, April 24, 1889, p. 2.

⁷⁶"Editorial Notes," loc. cit.

PLATE VII

WHEELER OPERA HOUSE,

ASPEN, COLO.

JEROME S. WHEELER, OWNER.

RALPH A. WEILL, MANAGER.

Opening Nights, Tuesday and Wednesday, April 22-23, 1889.

Conried's English Comic Opera Co.

UNDER THE PERSONAL DIRECTION OF

HEINRICH CONRIED.

Presenting Adolph Muscat's Grand Spectacular Romantic Opera

IN THREE ACTS.

:: The King's Fool ::

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

Phillip, King of Navarre,	John G. Bell	Claire de Grammont,	Emily Bell
Prince Julius, his nephew,	Heien Bertram	Jeanne de Chavigny,	Mollie Hillard
Caracanda, C'ntess of Pompignan,	Jennie Raffarth	Bertha de Autrevail,	Grace Golden
Felisa d'Amores,	Ada Glasca	Charisse de Rochefort,	Gladya Ansel
Yvonne, Felisa's foster-sister,	Della Fox	Antonie de Ferramos,	Lois Cheney
The Prophesatory,	Harold Leslie	Olympia de Clairville,	Helen Alva
Carillon, Court Jester,	W. H. Fitzgerald	Elvire d'Artigny,	Ada Walker
The Chancellor,	G. W. Horne	Alphonse d'Abnet,	Martha Berkhart
The Legatee,	Walter West	Cloilde de Marlborough,	Laura Palmer
Comte Rivarol, Colonel,	Harry de Lorene	First Lansquenec,	W. Underwood
Archibald de Zornoza,		Second Lansquenec,	A. Thomas
Lieutenant of the Lansquenets,	F. Hartman	Third Lansquenec,	C. G. Weber
A Watchmaster,	Bernard Katz	Antonio, Gardener,	A. Ashlin
Jeanne de Pompignan, (Nieces)	Marion Langton	Aigidius Doockener,	W. Gray
Bianche de Pompignan, (C'ntess)	Annie Jackson	Lansquenets, Country Folks, Vivandieres, Fencing Girls, Courtiers, Pages, Peasie, Etc.	
Marguerite de Beaulieu,	Grace Lippincott		
Marie d'Etchervary,	Helen Avery		
Agnes d'Elissagarry,	Jenny Flower		
Celine de Beaumont,	Belle Stapleton		
Madeleine d'Ustariz,	Louise Hillard		

PROF. MARTL'S VIENNESE LADY FENCERS.

Misses Jageman, Anna Brantsch, Pold Brantsch,
Ida von Somogy, Pauline Hoesknecht, Lina Reine,
Emilie Woytech, Marie Scherer

SYNOPSIS.

PLACE: ACT I.—The Castle of Salvaterra, Spain.

ACT II.—The Camp at Pampeluna.

ACT III.—Royal Garden of the Castle at Pau in the Pyrenees.

TIME: The beginning of the XVI Century.

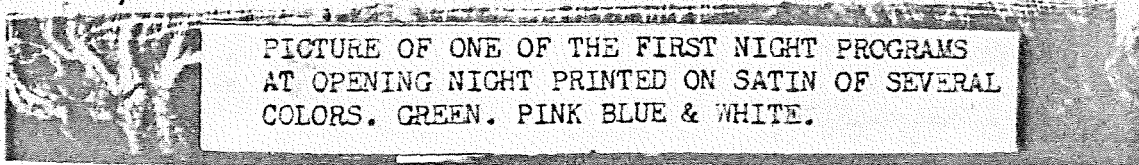
Scenery painted at the Tabor Grand, Denver.

Costumes after original designs by Franz Gaudi, historical painter at the Imperial Opera House, Vienna, by
Henry Datten, of New York.All figures in the march are copyrighted by H. Conried, in the office of the Librarian of Congress, in Washington,
December, 1888.

Stage mechanical effects by C. D. M. Gishan.

SIG. TOMASI, - - - - - MUSICAL DIRECTOR.

BELL & HOWELL, DENVER.

PICTURE OF ONE OF THE FIRST NIGHT PROGRAMS
AT OPENING NIGHT PRINTED ON SATIN OF SEVERAL
COLORS. GREEN. PINK BLUE & WHITE.

the Clarendon and Windsor Hotels had no rooms left so cots were set up in hallways for guests.

Interest in the opening was more than local. Editor C. C. Davis of the Herald Democrat and Manager James H. Cragg of the Tabor Opera House came from Leadville and a correspondent came from The Denver Republican.⁷⁷

Although there was no standing room at the Wheeler or the Rink, some normally curious ten-to-twelve-year-old boys were determined to see the grand opening. Their resourcefulness resulted in inexpensive and air-conditioned box seats.

A score or more of these public spirited youths took in "The King's Fool" last night from private boxes with the additional comfort of being able to masticate popcorn and smoke cigarettes all the while. Their means of ascent were the fire escape ladders, on the west side of the Opera House, and the little iron railed balconies outside of the windows were the boxes. They first raised, by subscription early in the evening, silver change to the amount of a dollar, with which an admission ticket was purchased by one of their member. This young gentleman upon obtaining admission to the body of the theatre deftly run up the inside blinds high enough to admit of a full view from the outside boxes. It is needless to say that the boys were happy.⁷⁸

On Wednesday, second day of the opening, several Aspen men arranged for an extra bit of celebration at three o'clock in the opera house. They put up a cash prize for the lady fencer from the Conried Company who could make the best score against Theodore Rosenberg, architect and fencer from Glenwood Springs, Colorado (see Chapter III, p. 48).⁷⁹

That night some young boys saw The King's Fool without paying and made a little money "on the side." They hung around the ticket office early and when Mr. Frost left it for a few minutes, he left the little

⁷⁷ADT, April 25, 1889, p. 4.

⁷⁸ADT, April 25, 1889, p. 4.

⁷⁹ADT, April 25, 1889, p. 4.

half-door at the back of the office and behind the stairs open. The boys took about ten or fifteen general admission tickets, used what they needed, and sold the rest for twenty-five cents each "right in front of the door of the theater."⁸⁰

Aspen's best-constructed building housed its best-furnished theater. Solidly built of brick and sandstone, and partially rebuilt for safety, it was practically fireproof. Fire-fighting equipment on the stage and an adequate iron fire escape added to safety features in case of fire or panic. Audience enjoyment was a prime factor considered in the furnishings and equipment of the auditorium. The sloped floor with comfortable seats permitted visual and physical comfort. The splendid surroundings of fine woodwork, elegant draperies and frescoed walls, all superbly lighted by the handsome chandelier created an aesthetic atmosphere to remove patrons from the work-a-day world of the mining town. The stage was equipped to provide the best possible conditions for artists to perform. In its limited space, the Wheeler stage offered what a modern city theater of that time might have had: eight dressing rooms, the finest obtainable scenery produced by professionals, the very latest lighting equipment and appliances and, finally, a technician to handle the equipment and build any new stage mechanism needed.

The glamorous opening of the house, packed by citizens and strangers in full evening dress, marked acceptance of the Wheeler as Aspen's finest theater. It was "the" place to see and be seen.

⁸⁰ADT, April 26, 1889, p. 4.

CHAPTER III

MANAGERS HAD TO RUSTLE

In New York, over half a continent away from Aspen, Ralph Weill was approached about equipping, staffing, and opening a fine opera house in a mountain mining town. His employer-to-be was a millionaire who had sold his New York business to go West; others were going there to seek fortunes. Weill accepted the professional employment and by mid-February of 1889, he too was in the West.

This chapter about the Wheeler managers begins with Weill's arrival in Aspen when construction of the third floor opera house was beginning. He was the first of five men who managed the Wheeler Opera House from 1889 to 1894. How all of these men were selected is not known, but the usual practice of securing an experienced man for a new J. B. Wheeler venture prevailed with Weill's appointment. The first three managers were professional theater men; the other two were some-time Wheeler Bank employees who not only accepted the management of the house, but performed in any other capacity required of them. Primarily, this chapter tells how these managers operated and handled its problems. In some cases, however, it is necessary to include instances of the type, size, or reaction of an audience because these were direct results of advertising promotion or the attempt to obtain top-quality programs by the managers.

Ralph A. Weill

The first manager of the Wheeler Opera House, Ralph A. Weill, arrived in Aspen from New York in February, 1889, and with professional aplomb, immediately began advertising the house. First, he described the grand furnishings and fine scenery ordered. Next, to point up the high quality of his technical assistant, he announced that Robert J. Cutler, who knew every star on the American stage and was then working with Mrs. James Potter Brown in New York, would be the property man. Finally, to give an idea of the type of entertainment that would come to the Wheeler, he said he had intended to have the popular singer, Miss Emma Abbott, open the Wheeler; but because of her husband's death, she had retired from the stage.¹ This was Weill's first booking problem.

When he was in New York a month later, to further publicize the opera house and give it prestige, Weill told the New York Daily Mirror that the \$125,000.00 opera house in Aspen had been christened "The Wheeler" in honor of Jerome B. Wheeler, a well-known New York businessman and Colorado investor. Actually, Weill was in New York to purchase "all the necessary adjuncts for a first-class theater" and he emphasized how all the furnishings would add to the decor and elegance of the house (see Chapter I, p. 10).

Other technical staff appointments and booking plans were also revealed by Weill. In addition to Cutler, well known to theatrical people in the East, Mr. Burke of the Chicago Opera House had been engaged to paint the scenery, and J. Alexander of the Denver Tabor Grand was to be in charge of stage construction. Possibly Weill had visited the Tabor

¹ADT, February 15, 1889, p. 6.

to secure Alexander's services and arrange for Silver Circuit bookings. Peter McCourt may have produced a list of some first-class touring entertainments booked for the Tabor which Weill assumed would be on the Wheeler program. However, it seems likely that Weill actually did not know what bookings he would have, or else thought such name attractions offered good publicity, because over half of those listed in the following announcement did not appear at the Wheeler.

The house will be in Pete McCourt's circuit and time is consequently already booked. Among the attractions that will appear are E. H. Southern [sic], Thatcher, Primrose and West's Minstrels, Mile. Rhea, 'A Legal Wreck,' The Lyceum Theater Company, R. B. Mantell, Mme. Modjeska, Rosina Vokes, Booth and Barrett and others. The Colorado Midland Railroad will make traveling of the combinations easy.

Actually Weill planned to stay in Aspen just long enough to arrange for the Wheeler opening and its efficient financial operation, for he made this statement:

It is our intention to open the Wheeler about April 29th and I shall leave the East for Aspen about the 10th of that month to remain there until the theater is well on its way to prosperity. For the opening performances, the prices will be \$2.00 and \$2.50, though the regular prices will be on the \$1.50 standard.²

To promote the opening of the opera house, Weill telegraphed the Aspen Times requesting that an announcement be made that he had engaged the Conried English Opera Company, producing The King's Fool, to open the Wheeler on Tuesday and Wednesday, April 23 and 24. He added that it was then playing at the Tabor in Denver and was considered "a grand operatic treat."³ Booked on the Silver Circuit, it was also to play at

²ADT, March 26, 1889, p. 2.

³ADT, April 18, 1889, p. 4.

the Tabor Grand Opera House in Leadville on the night before the Wheeler opening.⁴

The next day Weill arrived from Denver with final plans for the opening and Wheeler arrived from New York with plans other than attending the gala opening of the opera house which bore his name. Weill was no doubt stunned, and Aspenites, a little hurt by Wheeler's obvious lack of interest. They had been delighted to learn that Mr. Wheeler would be present for the grand opening and had started preparations "to tender him a grand banquet as a token of his public spirit and liberal treatment of Aspen." Disappointed, they cancelled their plans when they learned he planned to leave the following day for New York to be present at the centennial celebration of the inauguration of George Washington. Then he offered another explanation as he said, "I came out on business for the Grand River Coke and Coal Company and did not know the opera house would be opened until I arrived in Chicago."

Weill's efforts to publicize and make the opening of the Wheeler a financial success began the very day he returned to Aspen. He placed tickets on sale at the Corner Drug Store, advertised sale of the two boxes to the highest bidders, and stated that he had to guarantee \$2,500.00 to get the opera company to come. A reporter checked on ticket sales and wrote that \$2.50 was very reasonable for the opera house opening and that seats were being taken so rapidly they would probably be gone by that night.⁵

⁴Dorothy M. Degitz, "History of the Tabor Opera House, Leadville, Colorado, from 1879 to 1905" (unpublished Master's thesis, Western State College of Colorado, 1935), p. 9.

⁵ADT, April 20, 1889, p. 4.

One of Weill's promotional plans was thwarted. The idea of having sealed bids for the boxes left at the Wheeler Bank did not please Mr. Wheeler, and the following notice appeared in the Times on April 22, the day before the opening:

THE PROSCENIUM BOXES

Owing to the fact that Mr. J. B. Wheeler objected to the auctioning off of the proscenium boxes of the Wheeler Opera House for the opening night, the manager has decided to set the price at \$25 each. They will be sold this morning at the Corner Drug store.⁶

Other methods to draw a full house for the opening were employed. Weill had a synopsis of The King's Fool placed in the newspaper to acquaint the public with the story of the comic opera. He planned another promotion "gimmick" which probably appealed to those not particularly interested in comic opera. A big advertisement announced, "Grand Fencing Contest for a purse of \$150.00 offered by Aspen Citizens." The Vienna lady fencers of the Conried Company were "to contest with foils and broadswords for three prizes amounting to \$150.00 offered by Messrs. Wheeler, Gillespie, and Weill."⁷ H. B. Gillespie, a leading citizen, was part owner of the famed Mollie Gibson Mine.⁸

Hardly a detail for the opening was overlooked by Weill. There was a huge welcome at the railroad station for the Conried Company and most certainly he arranged with the Times reporter to write the detailed description of the interior and furnishings of the theater for the afternoon paper on opening day (see Chapter II, p.25). The fine scenery he

⁶ADT, April 22, 1889, p. 4.

⁷ADT, April 21, 1889, p. 4.

⁸Len Shoemaker, Bearing Fork Valley (Denver: Sage Books, 1956), p. 141.

had selected for the stage "was rigged" under his direction. To please the ladies in attendance, Weill with the help of a druggist had provided perfumed satin programs as well as gift bottles of choice perfume.

The air was filled with delicate odors that added an oriental touch to the scene. This was accounted for when it was learned that C. S. Clute, the enterprising Cooper Avenue druggist, had come to the assistance of Manager Ralph Weill. The latter had furnished satin programs for the ladies and these had been perfumed by Mr. Clute with Atkinson's White Rose. The effect was pleasant in the extreme. In addition, Mr. Clute had prepared five hundred bottles of choice perfumes which were presented to the ladies in the audience, each one receiving a bottle.⁹

Despite Jerome Wheeler's interference with promotion plans and his absence for the opening, Weill's plans to make it "the" important social event of the year succeeded. The beautiful theater was packed, and to pay proper respect for the affair, ladies came in full evening dress..

Last evening was a memorable one in the history of Aspen. The occasion was the opening of the magnificent opera house which has been secured to the city through the public spirit of Mr. J. B. Wheeler. It was evident that the people of Aspen appreciated the importance of the event, for they turned out in such numbers that the house was crowded, and the scene was made resplendent with the costumes of the ladies in full evening dress, who thus paid special honor to the opening of the temple of amusement.¹⁰

The Viennese lady fencers made a "hit" with the first nighters when their "fencing exhibition fairly took the house by storm." In fact, it stirred several mine operators and businessmen to arrange with the opera company manager for an extra exhibition at three o'clock the next day on the Wheeler stage. They offered \$150.00 in gold as prize money

⁹ADT, April 24, 1889, p. 4., col. 3.

¹⁰ADT, April 24, 1889, p. 4., col. 2.

to any lady fencer who could make the best score against Theodore Rosenberg from Glenwood Springs, Colorado.

Weill must have cooperated with the group even though a duel between a man and woman could have overshadowed his original second night plan of offering \$150.00 in prize money to lady fencers. He might have thought this was a way of creating good will among future opera house patrons. The complete story of the duel as it appeared in the Aspen Times follows:

A FENCER CARVED

Mr. Rosenberg Cuts Miss Jageman Three Times But Gives Her \$150

Messrs. Fred G. Bulkley, W. E. Newberry, J. H. Devereaux, John C. Eames, Perry C. Carryell, J. D. Bransford, Heinrich Conried and several other gentlemen put up ten dollars apiece, yesterday, to be awarded to any one of the lady fencers with the Conried Opera Company who would make the best score against Theodore Rosenberg, the well-known Glenwood Springs architect. The contest took place in the Wheeler Opera House at 3. P.M. [sic]. Mr. John C. Eames having been appointed time keeper, Mr. Devereaux, scorer for Mr. Rosenberg, and Mr. Conried kept score for Miss Jageman. Both parties donned wire helmets, plastrons and long gauntlets, and it was seen from the first that both contestants meant business. The lady had been informed that Mr. Rosenberg had fought seventeen duels as a student and five while in the army and was a fencing master. There was very little exaggeration about this and Mr. Rosenberg has upon his face the marks of three terrible sword encounters fought in Jena, Austria.

Everyone who visited the opera house Tuesday and Wednesday noted the dark-haired Miss Jageman, who towered in height above all the rest of the fencers and took all the prizes, where she was interested, but they should have seen her yesterday fighting Mr. Rosenberg for the \$150 in gold that lay on the table on the stage. She claimed that she was badly handicapped on account of the altitude and was badly blown from the beginning of the fight. Mr. Rosenberg was a little better off in this respect because he had come from Glenwood Springs, only about 2,000 feet nearer sea level.

Mr. Rosenberg had a little the advantage of the girl because his plastron, or jacket, besides being of heavy duck, was stuffed with deer hair, but the gentleman's gauntlet was too large for him which put him at some disadvantage.

In the first of the twenty-one rounds that were fought, it was quickly seen that the contestants were pretty [sic] equally matched. Miss Jageman was no longer a woman, she was a soldier in the battle

field, and a veteran at that. Mr. R--- (sic) was cool as the proverbial cucumber. In fact, he was in his element. Miss Jageman's face was a study as seen through the wire helmet. Her nostrils were distended wide. She glared out of her eyes at her opponent, and they crossed swords in earnest.

They fought with what are called broad swords, of the finest steel. Mr. Rosenberg says they are dull, but his was sharp enough to cut Miss Jageman twice on the right arm and once in the hip. He said he was fishing for a minnow and caught a whale. There is no question but that, while he won the prize in a score of 17 to 15, he had his hands full to do it.

There were two innings, the first lasting 20 and the last 15 minutes, with an intermission of seven minutes between. There were twenty-one rounds, in the first of which Miss Jageman was cut twice in the sword arm and once on the right hip. Mr. Rosenberg received a scratch on the left hip. These were all the casualties.

After the first inning the lady contestant had the two wounds in her arm bound up by her friends, who seemed to thoroughly understand this branch of surgery and did the work deftly. She lost very little blood during the contest, but the bandages being too tight, they had to be loosened last night, when considerable of the red fluid escaped. Notwithstanding this and though she fainted once, while in the wings, she had seven set-tos on the stage and won a prize as the best lady fencer.

After winning the purse of \$150 Mr. Rosenberg gallantly handed it over to his banished opponent who received it with thanks.

The report that \$1000 was bet on this contest proved upon investigation to be a canard. Mr. Rosenberg had a certified check of \$500 which he asked Mr. Conried to cover but the latter did not have sufficient confidence in Miss Jageman to risk it.¹¹

Whether the Jageman-Rosenberg duel or poor advance ticket sales prompted it, Weill decided to cut prices in order to have a full house the second night. Balcony chairs were reduced to \$1.50 and general admission was only a dollar. Parquet seats were held at the original price of \$2.50.¹²

¹¹ADT, April 25, 1889, p. 4.

¹²ADT, April 24, 1889, p. 4.

After their second performance, the Conried Company left on a night train. News stories the next day did not comment on size of the house but did describe the fencing exhibition as the chief attraction of the two-day opening. The following editorial, however, asked why Booth and Barrett, well-known and popular actors on tour, could not be booked to open the house over again since the opera company's performance did not satisfy.

Booth and Barrett are to be in Denver next week. Can't they be induced to come over here so that we can have the Wheeler Opera House opened over again? There are many people here who have never seen the great Booth, and there is no one who has seen him who would miss the opportunity to see him again. They would draw packed houses in a two nights' engagement, and the people of Aspen would feel that their opera house had been properly dedicated. There is no use in attempting to disguise the disappointment that followed the performance of the third rate troupe that has just been here, so let us have something standard. Get Booth and Barrett to come and the house will fill itself.¹³

The second booking for the opera house consisted of local entertainment -- a benefit sponsored by ladies of the Christian Church. An advance story for it repeated dissatisfaction of the Conried Company's performance and indicated to Weill that Aspen had musical talent quite capable of opening the opera house.

The double bill to be rendered at the Wheeler Opera House on Monday night "Penelope and the Peak Sisters," ought to draw better than the "King's Fool," the fight between Miss Jageman and Mr. Rosenberg, with its gorey [sic] sequel thrown in. This will really be the opening of the opera house of the people, for the people and by the people of Aspen, which is the correct way to do it. The aggregation of amateur Aspen histrionic talent that is going to open is of much higher order in every respect, but theatrical training, than Conried's hippodrome, the female fencers thrown into the bargain. . . . Then go see some fine acting, and hear some singing that none of Conried's Company could ever imitate much less equal.¹⁴

¹³ADT, April 25, 1889, p. 2.

¹⁴ADT, April 23, 1889, p. 4.

Reportedly, to those in the half-filled house, Mrs. J. W. Deane's singing was "sublime, as usual" and Professor G. A. Godat's string orchestra played the "finest concert of its kind ever given in the city."¹⁵ A quick decision to give a repeat performance the next night drew a "select and appreciative" audience plus a suggestion from the Times that the same group give Behemian Girl at a later date.¹⁶

If Aspen audiences wanted "something standard" and with good singing, Weill filled their request. An Irish play, The Ivy Leaf, performed by W. H. Power's Company, played one night to a "large well-pleased and even delighted audience" of 700. They were probably also pleased with the standard prices of \$1.50 and \$1.00. The press approved the selection by stating, "If Mr. Weill furnishes us with such attractions his audiences will not complain."¹⁷

Weill was pleased with the good house for The Ivy Leaf, but the booking problem troubled him. The good companies he wanted demanded too much money to come over the mountains. Also, he could not predict what Wheeler patrons would support since he had to cut prices to fill the house the second night of the opening, and even the highly-publicized home talent performance did not draw well. When the hard-working manager's booking problem was recognized, the Times not only explained it, but urged support of Weill.

Manager Ralph A. Weill is to be congratulated for his enterprise in bringing Mr. Power and his people to Aspen. Nor does his efforts in this behalf stop here, for to use the popular expression, he is keeping the wires warm between Aspen and Denver in his efforts to get Little Lord Fauntleroy for us, and is apparently on the high road

¹⁵ADT, April 30, 1889, p. 4.

¹⁶ADT, May 1, 1889, p. 4.

¹⁷ADT, May 3, 1889, p. 4.

to success. No one but the manager of a theatre in the Rocky Mountains knows how hard it is to get good troupes to come to this side of the range. They invariably ask to be guaranteed a certain sum of money, which is frequently about as much as they would make by playing a second night in Denver. Then the manager who wants them has got to "rustle." It is a good deal like rowing in the fog, too. You know what you want to do, but you haven't the slightest idea where you are going to land. . . . If the people of Aspen knew how happy Manager Weill felt at the way they turned out for the "Ivy Leaf," they would be inclined to do it again and again especially if they knew the difficulties he was laboring under, and the Herculean efforts he is making to please them.¹⁸

That the opera house was to be used as a public hall became evident when another church group booked it for a benefit. Members of the Presbyterian Ladies Aid Society sold tickets at \$1.00 apiece for a concert there by the Fisk Jubilee Singers.¹⁹

The day after the Fisk concert, Weill went to Denver for the announced purpose of trying to get theatrical companies to come to Aspen.²⁰ What transpired between Weill and McCourt is unknown, but Weill did not return to Aspen. Just seven weeks previously, he had said he would remain at the Wheeler until it was prospering.²¹ Whether he had actually contracted for short-term employment or had quit simply because he could not cope with program and booking problems, no explanation was made public.

During the next month only one professional troupe played the house and Robert Cutler assumed managerial duties. For Decoration Day services the Times noted that "Comrade Cutler decorated the Wheeler Opera House with bunting stars and stripes and festoons for Winfield Scott Post

¹⁸ADT, May 9, 1889, p. 4.

¹⁹ADT, May 14, 1889, p. 4.

²⁰ADT, May 15, 1889, p. 4.

²¹ADT, March 26, 1889, p. 2.

No. 49."²² Later, listed as acting manager, Cutler announced some Wheeler attractions that had "already been booked,"²³ possibly by Weill.

H. R. Woodward

On June 23 a brief newspaper announcement stated that Ralph Weill had resigned as manager of the Wheeler and H. R. Woodward of New Albany, Indiana, had accepted the position. "Mr. Woodward was once manager and owner of the Bijou Theater of New Albany. He seems to be a young man of ability."²⁴ No other information about the new manager was made public.

Robert J. Cutler

"Mr. Robert J. Cutler has been appointed manager of the Wheeler Opera House, vice H. R. Woodward, resigned."²⁵ This curt notice ended Woodward's four-week managership about which the press had not commented. J. B. Wheeler had arrived in Aspen just two days before²⁶ the appointment and was probably responsible for the change in managers. The press approved of Cutler who apparently was capable.

Mr. Cutler has been the efficient stage manager of the house since its opening and on no shoulders worthier could fall the full managerial mantle. The house under his direction is sure to be conducted so as to leave not the slightest cause for grumbling. The retiring manager, Mr. Woodward, will remain in Aspen and engage in some new enterprise.²⁷

²²ADT, June 1, 1889, p. 2.

²³ADT, June 17, 1889, p. 4.

²⁴ADT, June 23, 1889, p. 4.

²⁵ADT, July 24, 1889, p. 4.

²⁶ADT, July 23, 1889, p. 4.

²⁷ADT, July 24, 1889, p. 4.

Within three weeks of Cutler's appointment, his wife, mother, and two daughters had arrived in Aspen to make their home.²⁸ Kate, another daughter, had arrived earlier. Since Cutler was originally appointed property man of the house but obviously became stage manager, Kate might have been employed, also. Her capability in handling properties was noted in an advance story about the Wheeler opening. "Miss Kate Cutler is the artist under whose magical touch the stage can be transformed into a seeming Paradise."²⁹

Possibly the arrival of his family indicated to Aspenites that Cutler planned to stay and become active in community affairs. At any rate, a group of townspeople approached him about forming an amateur dramatic association to produce plays once a month in the winter. He took an active interest in it and assured the group that use of the opera house could be had at the least possible expense. As these plans were announced, the Aspen Times carried a piece from the New York Dramatic News attesting to his long professional experience and acquaintances.

Rob't [sic] Cutler well known as a stage machinist in New York for the last 25 years has become manager of the handsome new opera house in the thriving town of Aspen, Colorado. He will have many callers among the profession, and renew many an old friendship during the season.³⁰

When Cutler became manager in July, he stated there was nothing booked for the Wheeler before August 27 when the Goodyear Minstrel Company would give two performances and that he was of the opinion that good attractions would appear in rapid succession.³¹ Cutler's booking problems

²⁸ADT, August 13, 1889, p. 4.

²⁹ADT, April 23, 1889, p. 4.

³⁰ADT, August 15, 1889, p. 4.

³¹ADT, July 24, 1889, p. 4.

began when this was changed. Instead, the Old Jed Prouty company, having just played the Tabor in Denver, appeared at the Wheeler on August 22, one night only.³² Peter McCourt, Silver Circuit manager, also arrived the same day.³³ Whatever McCourt and Cutler may have decided, there were no more Wheeler bookings of any kind until the middle of September.

The largest audience that had ever gathered in the Wheeler saw Edward Harrigan in Old Lavender as the opener of the 1889-1890 fall and winter season.³⁴ For the rest of 1889 the house was generally well filled to crowded and there was no criticism of Cutler or the Wheeler's varied program. Yom Kippur services, the Democratic County Convention, Episcopalian Sunday night services, an elocutionary contest, and local benefit concerts were booked between professional theatricals which ranged from melodrama, farce comedy, Humpty Dumpty and Little Lord Fauntleroy to a Christmas matinee of stereopticon views and a visit from gift-laden Santa Claus "to amuse the ladies and children."³⁵

In January and February the quality and number of professional bookings at the Wheeler increased as Shakespearean tragedy, light opera, extravaganza, and the perennial Uncle Tom's Cabin played to good houses. Episcopalians and other local groups continued to use the house. Cutler, then ill, very likely became quite disturbed when a company arrived to appear on a night when the Wheeler was already booked. The Aspen Times blamed Peter McCourt for the error.

³²ADT, August 23, 1889, p. 4.

³³ADT, August 22, 1889, p. 4.

³⁴ADT, September 17, 1889, p. 4.

³⁵ADT, December 27, 1889, p. 4.

Roland Reed and his splendid company arrived on the Denver and Rio Grande in a special car yesterday and will play "The Woman Hater" at the Wheeler Opera House Tonight. The company was booked to play here Monday and Tuesday by Pete McCourt, who manages this circuit. But Pete was making so much money on the Mining Exchange that he got "rattled" and did not take into account the fact that the opera house was engaged for last night.³⁶

The opera house had been engaged for that Monday evening by St. Mary's Guild of the Episcopal Church for a musical entertainment that Kate Cutler had assisted in producing.³⁷ Whether Kate was just assisting the group or actually substituting for her sick father was not made clear, but within a week she was appointed treasurer of the Wheeler box office.³⁸ This was the first time such an appointment had been made, and it may have been Cutler's official means of directing management while he was indisposed. The nature and seriousness of his illness was not revealed, but early in March a reporter wrote that he was out again after a long illness.³⁹

Cutler's health and busy schedule may have limited his social activities but he was a member of the Order of Elks, as were nearly all actors. After his illness, he assisted the few other Elks (unorganized at the time) in Aspen give a complimentary banquet at the Clarendon Hotel to the Evangeline troupe when its Wheeler engagement ended. Most of the men in the company belonged to the Order.⁴⁰

³⁶ADT, February 18, 1890, p. 4.

³⁷ADT, February 20, 1890, p. 4.

³⁸ADT, February 22, 1890, p. 4.

³⁹ADT, March 2, 1890, p. 4.

⁴⁰ADT, March 16, 1890, p. 4.

Since the Wheeler had been in operation for about a year, its \$200.00 theater license was due to be renewed.⁴¹ Cutler followed the routine procedure of submitting a written petition to the city council one month before expiration date of the license. Obviously, some disgruntled people wanted to tax the Wheeler more heavily, for at the March 17 city council meeting a theater license ordinance was introduced, setting the amount for a first-class theater at \$400.00 and for a second-class theater at \$200.00 per annum. Distinction between the two classes was not mentioned, but it might have been based on seating capacity or possibly on whether or not a bar was part of the theater. The Wheeler was the largest theater in Aspen and had no bar facilities as did the smaller theaters, such as the Comique and Palace.

At the council meeting Alderman Donnelly, who considered the Wheeler a cultural benefit to Aspen and the variety theaters as places where laborers were overcharged, was against the ordinance and said so as he paced the floor and emphasized his remarks with his fist on the Mayor's desk.

Gentlemen, I see the motive of this ordinance to raise the license of the Wheeler Opera House. It is an unfair discrimination and I oppose it. Mr. Wheeler has expended \$75,000.00 in building a beautiful edifice that is a great credit to our town. It is well known that it is not a big paying investment and Mr. Wheeler should not be required to pay a heavier license than Charlie Boyd of the Comique or Tom Moore of the Palace. Mr. Wheeler gives us a legitimate play; the other two have variety shows. At the Wheeler opera house we can take our wives and children; the other places suck the blood from our miners, our blacksmiths and our laboring men; we can get along just as well without the latter class.

⁴¹Ordinances of the City of Aspen, Colorado. Down to February 10, 1890. Times Publishing Co., 1890. Aspen Licenses, Section 277.

Alderman Latta supported the ordinance. Misinformed about the financial status and seating capacity of the Wheeler, he considered it a business supporting outsiders only. Although willing to drive out all theaters, he did condone operation of the Comique and Palace because of their local employment benefit.

We know that Mr. Wheeler built his opera house to make money and that it is bringing in big returns. He gives entertainments three or four times a week and the house is filled with 1000 at \$1.00 and \$1.50 each. All this money goes out of town and is a drain on the people. If I were the council I would make the license \$4,000 a year instead of \$400 and drive them out altogether. The opera house is of no benefit to us. On the other hand Charley Boyd and Tom Moore employ the people here and the money is spent here in town. Such places have to be run by someone and it might as well be by Charley Boyd and Tom Moore as anyone else.

Alderman Glassbrook suggested that all three theaters be charged \$400.00 while Alderman Leonard sided with Mr. Latta. Mayor Carson, who had actual facts about the Wheeler operation, ended the discussion by stating that he thought if the council undertook to bleed Mr. Wheeler, he would shut the opera house up since it had run behind \$400.00 from the time it had opened to the first of January. The ordinance was tabled.⁴²

No doubt, Cutler learned of the spirited city council discussion and publicizing of the 1889 Wheeler deficit. He left for Denver the next day. Reminiscent of Weill's last trip to Denver, Cutler's announced purpose for his going was "to try to get" the popular "Boston Ideals" (The Bostonians) for the Wheeler; however, he took his ailing daughter, Carrie, with him. She was seeking a lower altitude and planned to remain in the capital for some time.⁴³ On his return, several days later, he stated

⁴²DT, March 18, 1890, p. 6.

⁴³DT, March 18, 1890, p. 4.

that owing to other engagements, the Bostonians could not come to Aspen but that he had secured them for the next season. Cutler's problem was like Weill's the year before; good companies demanded high fees to come to Aspen. He said that in order to get the Bostonians he had to guarantee them \$1,000.00 for each performance for two nights.⁴⁴

His return to Aspen coincided with the arrival of the Postage Stamp Company which played A Social Session for two nights at the Wheeler. Upon learning that eleven of the company belonged to the Order of Elks, the accommodating Cutler and a few other Elks repeated the practice of offering hospitality to their visiting brethren by arranging an entertainment for them right on the Wheeler stage. After the curtain had fallen on the last act of A Social Session, actors changed, stage scenery was moved, long tables were set across the stage, and refreshments were served. This was followed by a program of songs, toasts, and instrumental music. The affair ended when the group decided "to organize a lodge of Elks in the city and have it date from the advent of the Postage Stamp Company in Aspen."⁴⁵

The "on stage" party with brother Elks of Aspen and the theater may have been Cutler's swan song, for the next day Aspenites learned that he would leave. That some of his backers recognized and appreciated his managerial efforts was obvious from the Times comment.

Manager Cutler of the Wheeler Opera House will soon leave us, he having determined to return to New York. The patrons of the house will miss him greatly as much of the success of the entertainments has been due to his care.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ADT, March 25, 1890, p. 4.

⁴⁵ADT, March 27, 1890, p. 4.

⁴⁶ADT, March 26, 1890, p. 4.

Although Cutler planned to return to New York in two weeks, he said the change had been under consideration for some time. His daughter, Carrie, could not live in the high altitude. It also affected his heart.⁴⁷

Very quickly, loyal opera house employees probably decided upon the theatrical tradition of giving a benefit performance for Cutler as a fitting public and financial tribute to their popular manager. The Times carried this initial announcement of it: "As a mark of regard in which Mr. Cutler is held by the management he will have an appropriate 'benefit' tendered him before his departure."⁴⁸ No professional talent was booked for the Wheeler because Aspen's home talent who appreciated Cutler's able and understanding assistance prepared the "appropriate" attraction which was well advertised in this manner: "A Grand Complimentary Benefit to Manager R. J. Cutler Tendered to Him by His Many Friends of Aspen. A Splendid Entertainment Guaranteed. Musical Olio and Laughable Sketch. Tickets \$1.00. A Rare Treat, Don't Miss It." The Elks also planned to honor him with a reception after the show.⁴⁹

The benefit included "home talent from whistling and vocal solos through clog numbers and children." His own daughter, Josie, sang the topical song "I Like It -- I Do." Grateful for the generous courtesy shown him by the admirers, Cutler thanked everyone.⁵⁰

At the Wheeler two nights later, the talented Josie Cutler was roundly applauded when she again sang "I Like It -- I Do" for the hospital

⁴⁷ADT, March 27, 1890, p. 4.

⁴⁸ADT, March 27, 1890, p. 2.

⁴⁹ADT, March 30, 1890, p. 6.

⁵⁰ADT, April 4, 1890, p. 4.

benefit given by King's Daughters.⁵¹ Lack of theatrical career opportunities in Aspen for Cutler's daughters, musical Josie and Kate of technical and business experience, might have influenced his decision to quit and return to New York with his family. Kate left ahead of the family⁵² and a local newspaper stated that Josie had a job waiting for her there.

Miss Josie Cutler who has charmed Aspen with her singing, will join a spectacular opera company on her return to New York. The young lady has had several years' experience on the stage and is assured of success.⁵³

Josie, her mother, and grandmother left Aspen a week after the benefit.⁵⁴ Cutler's year at the Wheeler ended when he left to join his family a few days later.⁵⁵

W. B. Cochran

End of professional theater management of the Wheeler came when W. B. Cochran, a Wheeler Bank employee, became responsible for opera house activities. Before the Cutler benefit, Cochran went to Denver, probably to arrange Wheeler bookings; however, with no known experience in theater management, he was not appointed as manager, but rather was named to "succeed Cutler as business agent of the Wheeler Opera House."⁵⁶ There must have been other changes in house personnel, but Cochran waited until Cutler had gone before advertising for help. "Several ushers wanted at

⁵¹DE, April 6, 1890, p. 2.

⁵²DE, April 10, 1890, p. 4.

⁵³DE, April 8, 1890, p. 4.

⁵⁴DE, April 10, 1890, p. 4.

⁵⁵DE, April 16, 1890, p. 4.

⁵⁶DE, March 30, 1890, p. 4.

Wheeler Opera House. For terms apply to W. B. Cochran, Room 6
Wheeler Block.⁵⁷

During Cochran's first two months of Wheeler direction, the varied program, part of which had been booked by Cutler, played to steadily decreasing audiences. After observing the two railroads' popular weekend "Laundry Train" excursions to Glenwood Springs, where Aspenites could bathe in the hot springs pool, Cochran conceived the idea of bringing outsiders to the Wheeler to increase business. He arranged with the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad for a special theater train to bring people from Glenwood Springs and Carbondale to Aspen to enjoy Bronson Howard's Shenandoah on June 16. Purchase of theater tickets included transportation to Aspen; return tickets were sold at single fare.⁵⁸ In addition to this promotion for patrons outside Aspen, Cochran used another plan to entice local people. He persuaded Captain Smith and thirty National Guardsmen to provide a drill team and soldiers for the war drama.⁵⁹ Eighty-five theater train patrons were in the audience that filled every seat in the house, including those in the boxes.⁶⁰

After boxer Jack Dempsey, THE NONPAREIL (not the Manassa Mauler), drew a well-filled house for a clever performance which included several fights,⁶¹ something new for Wheeler patrons, Cochran lowered prices to draw summer crowds. He announced that prices for all attractions in

⁵⁷ADT, April 19, 1890, p. 4.

⁵⁸ADT, June 12, 1890, p. 4.

⁵⁹ADT, June 14, 1890, p. 4.

⁶⁰ADT, June 15, 1890, p. 6.

⁶¹ADT, June 28, 1890, p. 4.

July and August would be reduced to \$1.00 for the parquet, \$1.00 reserved balcony, \$0.75 balcony, \$0.50 dress circle, and \$0.25 for children.⁶² The house was filled for the two professional companies which played in July.

Cochran went to Denver again, apparently to secure bookings. After his return, the Wheeler advertisements listed him as manager instead of business agent. He announced that nearly all troupes booked for the Tabor Grand in Denver would also appear in Aspen the next season because a through railroad down the Grand (Colorado) River and on to Salt Lake City would be completed shortly.⁶³ To explain the immediate lack of bookings he said that all first-class companies were taking summer vacations, and he added that the opera house had been dark for a week so it could be thoroughly cleaned and recarpeted.⁶⁴

Although Cochran had booked just one professional and one home talent entertainment for the Wheeler in August, he also worked at the Jerome Hotel. J. B. Wheeler had lent the former Clarendon Hotel operators, B. E. Phillips and T. M. Byxbee, \$60,000.00 to build the Jerome Hotel but they could not make it pay,⁶⁵ so Wheeler took over ownership. A news item was proof that Wheeler employees, even Attorney Cooley, worked wherever they were needed. "The Wheeler Bank boys are having fun learning to run a hotel. McDonough, Hobbs, Cochran, Adams and Cooley all take a hand."⁶⁶

⁶² DT, June 29, 1890, p. 2.

⁶³ DT, June 23, 1890, p. 4.

⁶⁴ DT, July 27, 1890, p. 5.

⁶⁵ DT, August 23, 1890, p. 4.

⁶⁶ DT, August 26, 1890, p. 4.

On September 10 the one-night opener of the 1890-1891 season at the Wheeler was well attended;⁶⁷ Cochran had learned from the previous spring that he could not expect a good second-night house. To insure full houses for the two-night Wheeler booking of the great actor Robert Mantell, Cochran arranged another theater train from Glenwood Springs for Othello, Mantell's second night performance.⁶⁸ Apparently, the house was filled; the Times noted that it was the second best night at the Wheeler in a long time and an exception to the rule because it was a financial success.⁶⁹

Possibly another exception to the rule occurred when a Times social column reporter wrote that Wheeler had attended the opera. "Many people also noted that when W. J. Scanlan played at the opera house which bears the great banker's name, Mr. Wheeler sat in the parquet with friends while others occupied the boxes." The "others" were named and included potential smelting business competitors of Wheeler who were in town to look over the Holden Smelting and Mining site and some building plans.⁷⁰ The news item was consistent with what seemed to be the Times practice of regarding Wheeler as Aspen's millionaire benefactor who preferred to remain out of the limelight when publicity for others aided business for Aspen or possibly the opera house.

Cochran's July prediction that "some of the best traveling combinations" had been booked for the Wheeler⁷¹ was right. Although an

⁶⁷ADT, September 10, 1890, p. 4.

⁶⁸ADT, September 25, 1890, p. 4.

⁶⁹ADT, October 1, 1890, p. 4.

⁷⁰ADT, October 7, 1890, p. 4.

⁷¹ADT, July 27, 1890, p. 5.

unknown drama critic for the Times criticized the poorly-attended play Beacon Lights as full of "too much blood and thunder style for this Western country," he did praise the October program. "Another reason for the play not taking with our theater goers, is the fact that for the last month we have had nothing but the top of the profession on our boards."⁷²

The good programs laced with home talent benefits continued, and during December while Cochran vacationed at his old home in the East, Jimmy Ryan, a Wheeler Bank employee, served as opera manager.⁷³ Cochran returned to learn that the financial crisis pending throughout the nation had spread to Aspen where some businesses had failed and others were selling out,⁷⁴ so he petitioned the city council to reduce the Wheeler theater license in an attempt to lower opera house operation costs.⁷⁵ Cochran requested that the Wheeler license be reduced from \$200.00 to \$100.00 and strengthened his case by citing the \$100.00 fee for the Tabor Grand in Denver and the \$25.00 fee at Salida. The council reduced it in February⁷⁶ and a week later passed an ordinance fixing the license fee for a first-class theater at \$100.00, but later amended it by striking out "first-class" so all theaters, including the Comique, Palace, and Tivoli, paid the same fee.⁷⁷

⁷²ADT, November 2, 1890, p. 5.

⁷³ADT, December 7, 1890, p. 4.

⁷⁴ADT, December 19, 1890, p. 4.

⁷⁵ADT, January 27, 1891, p. 2.

⁷⁶ADT, February 3, 1891, p. 4.

⁷⁷ADT, February 10, 1891, p. 4.

Declining silver prices, the nationwide "tight" money situation, and the added responsibility of managing the Jerome Hotel required business efficiency on Cochran's part. After his success in getting the theater license lowered, he seemed to avoid the possibility of poor second-night houses by booking good attractions for one night only, and holding the top price seats at \$1.50, the same as it had been at the beginning of the season. His plan worked and the Wheeler was filled for all attractions. Next, to bring more business to the Jerome Hotel, which was near the Denver and Rio Grande depot, the resourceful Cochran advertised convenient late dining room hours for possible patrons returning from Glenwood Springs on the Sunday "Laundry Train."⁷⁸

As Cochran worked to make Wheeler's opera house and hotel pay, Wheeler himself attempted to ease the financial pinch. Long and expensive litigation over mine properties had drained his resources, so he and some of his associates offered their stock in the famed Mollie Gibson Mine for sale at \$1.50 a share,⁷⁹ a low price for such stock.

Cochran seemed to sense what audiences wanted and tried to offer the best at the Wheeler, even if he had to book far in advance. After Lillian Lewis held her audience spellbound with her "superb" and "emotional" acting in Credit Lorraine, probably reminiscent of Modjeska's similar effect on Aspen audiences in 1889, Cochran announced that he was negotiating to bring Modjeska back to Aspen in 1892.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ADT, May 10, 1891, p. 4.

⁷⁹ADT, March 25, 1891, p. 4.

⁸⁰ADT, May 24, 1891, p. 2.

A month later the busy Cochran made a four-day trip to Clarence (near Marble), the town Wheeler had founded on Rock Creek (now the Crystal River) the year before. Possibly, Cochran had tired of his dual manager jobs and had done some prospecting for himself, for the Times stated that he was making the trip "to look after some mining property in that district" in which he was interested.⁸¹ Two weeks later Cochran was relieved of the duties he had handled for nearly a year at the Jerome Hotel. Wheeler leased the Jerome for six months to Calvin Morse of Denver.⁸²

There was little activity at the Wheeler until the 1891-1892 season opened in September when Goodyear, Elitch, and Schilling's Minstrels played to a full house. Good attendance was the general rule for the balanced program Cochran had booked, but a new program problem developed as companies playing one-night stands in Aspen cut their performances in order to leave on the night train and fulfill their next bookings. Probably Cochran could do little about it, but a Times reporter felt the patrons were being cheated when he wrote, ". . . as long as shows come to this city on a one-night stand and are in a hurry to catch the 11 o'clock train out, pieces will be cut almost in half and the amusement public will never get the worth of their money."⁸³

On December 4, Kate Claxton appeared at the Wheeler in The Two Orphans on the fifteenth anniversary of the great fire in New York's Brooklyn Theater where Miss Claxton had played the same part. Her name

⁸¹ADT, June 26, 1891, p. 4.

⁸²ADT, July 10, 1891, p. 4.

⁸³ADT, October 26, 1891, p. 4.

had been associated with fires ever since then, so Cochran cleverly publicized her appearance by arranging for both policemen and firemen to be present. Whether or not the Times reporter considered it publicity or precaution, he wrote:

Manager Cochran, with commendable foresight, had assembled the police force to preserve quiet and order in case of emergency, and fire laddies were on guard with a fair representation of their number before the footlights to catch the first warning.⁸⁴

Cochran seemed determined that Wheeler patrons should see what they had paid for, so when the W. T. Carleton Opera Company was ready to perform Indigo, he refused to raise the curtain until Mr. Carleton, who was billed to play Janio, consented to go on. Cochran said that it was specified in the contract that Carleton would appear in the cast in Aspen, just as the same contract had been made the year before when Carleton refused to comply with the terms concerning his performance. The temperamental actor was berated by the Times, but Cochran was given credit for refusing a substitute and requiring contract fulfillment with this compliment, "Manager Cochran is deserving of highest praise for insisting that the performances at the Wheeler shall be up to the highest standard and that the letter of all contracts shall be carried out."⁸⁵

Although Cochran had been listed as manager on all Wheeler Opera House advertisements since June, 1890, actually he was not officially made manager until February, 1892. At this time the manager's job was combined with a "number of other responsibilities that had formerly devolved upon Mr. Woodward, general agent and fiduciary for J. B. Wheeler."

⁸⁴ADT, December 6, 1891, p. 5.

⁸⁵ADT, February 9, 1892, p. 4.

The same Mr. Woodward had served as the second Wheeler manager for a month. No publicity was given Cochran's appointment which might have meant he sometimes served as Woodward's assistant.⁸⁶

During the first two years of managing the Wheeler, Cochran adapted to the community needs and assisted whenever he could. To aid in financing Aspen's first hospital, he helped arrange for benefits at the Wheeler. Later he served as a judge for the Cake Walk, a hospital benefit given at the Tivoli by the colored people of the town.⁸⁷ When the Western Slope Council, dedicated to promoting silver for the Western Slope, met for three days at the Wheeler, Cochran announced a donation of \$100.00 from the opera house for the group.⁸⁸ Likewise, when bar silver prices dropped drastically in April, he lowered Wheeler prices⁸⁹ to keep the opera house open at reasonable prices.

The drop in silver threatened all of Wheeler's Aspen enterprises and he made a quick trip from New York to expand other Colorado investments. Before leaving for Colorado City to introduce manufacture of window glass in his year-old glass works there, he probably left orders with Cochran and bank employees to push development of the town of Clarence near the marble beds.⁹⁰ Immediately, Cochran went to Clarence. He returned to make a glowing report of the booming town. Lots were selling for \$100.00 to \$200.00 apiece; the railroad grading to the hot

⁸⁶ADT, August 15, 1892, p. 8.

⁸⁷ADT, April 15, 1892, p. 4.

⁸⁸ADT, December 13, 1891, p. 5.

⁸⁹ADT, April 9, 1892, p. 5.

⁹⁰ADT, April 9, 1892, p. 4.

spring was finished and plans were in the offing for a cog railway to be built up to the marble beds.⁹¹

Managing the Wheeler was now almost a sideline for Cochran. After serving as a delegate to the three-day Silver League Meeting in Denver where means to check silver price were discussed⁹² and assisting with instituting an Order of Elks in Leadville,⁹³ he returned to Aspen and more work. He placed a huge advertisement in the Aspen Times promoting real estate sales in Clarence. Although the names of Wheeler Bank officers, J. B. Wheeler, H. R. Woodward, and H. T. Tissington, were listed at the top, Cochran, the man who was doing most of the work, had his name and his opera house room listed at the bottom of the "ad."⁹⁴

Possibly Wheeler felt his other business ventures could carry the Aspen mine losses until silver prices rose. As president of the Manitou Mineral Water Company, he closed a contract to advertise the waters of Manitou throughout the East at a cost of \$100,000.00.⁹⁵ His bottling works in Colorado City manufactured bottles for the mineral water. In addition to that, his employee Cochran, who had made very few May bookings at the Wheeler, had been promoting real estate sales in Clarence where, reportedly, lots were in fair demand.⁹⁶

⁹¹ADT, April 16, 1892, p. 4.

⁹²ADT, April 22, 1892, p. 4.

⁹³ADT, April 30, 1892, p. 4.

⁹⁴ADT, May 8, 1892, p. 4.

⁹⁵ADT, May 23, 1892, p. 4.

⁹⁶ADT, May 27, 1892, p. 4.

Early in June the price of silver edged up a little and so did the professional bookings at the Wheeler, which ranged from farce comedy to minstrel to the Eckert Heck Troubadours supporting Emma Berg, a brilliant Swedish songstress, in a repertoire of special comedies. The Troubadours drew large and appreciative audiences for two nights and a matinee at the low prices of \$0.25, \$0.35, and \$0.50.⁹⁷

By now Wheeler Opera House management had become a tool for Cochran as he utilized publicity for its attractions to help advertise machinery and real estate he had for sale. In a Sunday Times he had placed a half-page advertisement containing four columns about Wheeler shows, three offering machinery and equipment from the Hewitt Sampler for sale, and another three columns about lots for sale in Aspen and Clarence.⁹⁸

After the big "ad" appeared, Cochran left for Clarence to handle sales there; he probably missed transportation home for he did not return to the Wheeler in time for the Haverly Minstrels' performance. The Times told of his return trip:

Manager W. B. Cochran, the vigilant and indefatigable representative of the Clarence Town Company, returned from that miniature metropolis at midnight, having been compelled to cover twelve miles of the distance on foot.⁹⁹

In spite of his ordeal, Cochran described the Fourth of July plans, money situation, and gambling in Clarence and Marble optimistically and concluded, "Oh, the towns are booming."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ADT, June 19, 1892, p. 7.

⁹⁸ADT, June 19, 1892, p. 5.

⁹⁹ADT, June 23, 1892, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ADT, June 24, 1892, p. 7.

Because H. R. Woodward was out of the city, Cochran had to assume some of Woodward's Wheeler Bank responsibilities. The health of Woodward's wife "was in such delicate condition that it was necessary for her to seek its restoration in the East." He had taken her there. Woodward's absence gave Cochran an opportunity to develop an idea he had conceived of a season of summer opera. He immediately began organizing a company with Miss Emma Berg and Mr. Eckert as a nucleus.¹⁰¹ These two people were the stars of the Troubadours whose performances at low prices had been well received only two weeks before at the Wheeler.

As manager of the newly-formed Eckert Opera Company, Cochran began publicizing its program and modest prices. Beginning July 11 there was to be comic opera at the Wheeler every night for three weeks at the low price of \$0.50. To bring in more patrons from the financially embarrassed community, he placed the following promotion device in a newspaper:

By going to the Elite Cigar Store on July 3rd or 4th and purchasing one dollars [sic] worth of cigars, you will then get a free reserved seat entitling you to see "Olivette" at the Wheeler Opera House Monday July 11.¹⁰²

Money to promote, build, and outfit the opera company seemed to be no problem for Cochran who planned to tour with the group at the end of its Aspen engagement. He contracted with the Times Printing Company (Aspen Times) for fine show printing. The size of the opera company was increased to twenty-five people.¹⁰³ As rehearsals proceeded, costumes

¹⁰¹ADT, August 15, 1892, p. 8.

¹⁰²ADT, July 4, 1892, p. 4.

¹⁰³ADT, July 8, 1892, p. 8.

and stage settings were prepared at great cost.¹⁰⁴ After a quick business trip to Denver, Cochran announced that he would take his company over the Silver Circuit. This prompted a Sunday Times editorial which praised him: "He is deserving of success for he has done much to improve the class of theater attractions for this city."¹⁰⁵

Olivette opened on Monday night and the Tuesday Aspen Times, instead of presenting a review of the performance, paid tribute to the adept Cochran for his courage in attempting a season of opera for the small town and its opera patrons.

A season of opera in a city of this magnitude is a feat that few managers have dared. It has never been ventured beyond the confines of Denver, and no one but the adroit Cochran, with his vigilant eye, would have attempted it. No sooner, however, had he sounded the public pulse and it was a "go." He joined with him Mr. Eckert, the exquisite tenor, whose company had determined on a summer holiday and with what results is best betokened by the large and cultured audience that peopled the soothing realms of Melpomene last night. It was an evidence of appreciation that Manager Cochran, in his most reckless hopes, hardly dared expect.¹⁰⁶

The Tuesday night performance was attended by "another fashionable audience," but Cochran tried another "gimmick" to fill the house on Wednesday night. On the front page of the Times a ticket was printed: "Admit one lady accompanied by a gentleman holding a First Class Ticket to the Eckert Opera Co. tonight. Secure tickets at Carbury's Book Store." The ticket was signed by B. Clark Wheeler (Times editor) and W. B. Cochran.¹⁰⁷ This brought a large attendance, and Olivette's run ended on Thursday.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ADT, July 10, 1892, p. 1.

¹⁰⁵ADT, July 10, 1892, p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ADT, July 12, 1892, p. 8.

¹⁰⁷ADT, July 13, 1892, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ADT, July 14, 1892, p. 7.

Having lost twenty pounds since the start of his opera season, the hard-working Cochran announced that Chimes of Normandy would play from Monday through Wednesday and then H. M. S. Pinafore would take the boards.¹⁰⁹ Good houses greeted Chimes of Normandy and it played Thursday, an extra night.¹¹⁰

Cochran tried the old trick of including home town talent to entice patrons to H. M. S. Pinafore. He said that the popular Mrs. J. W. Deane, former opera singer and wife of a prominent Aspen judge, had consented to appear as Buttercup in the play.¹¹¹ Mrs. Deane did not appear in the operetta which played Friday and Saturday and there were no press reviews or comments concerning the performances.

The day H. M. S. Pinafore opened, Cochran announced travel plans for the company before he went to Leadville to make arrangements to open there July 25. By special coach he expected to take his company to Leadville for a two-night stand, and after the second performance, the Elks of that town would "tender the performers a reception at the Tabor Grand." Then, after completing bookings in Glenwood Springs and Grand Junction, the combination would continue west on the Silver Circuit through Utah.¹¹²

As manager of the Eckert Opera Company, Cochran was in and out of Aspen, but less than a month after his company opened in Aspen, he resigned as Wheeler manager. James Ryan accepted management of the house.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ADT, July 17, 1892, p. 8.

¹¹⁰ADT, July 21, 1892, p. 8.

¹¹¹ADT, July 17, 1892, p. 8.

¹¹²ADT, July 21, 1892, p. 8.

¹¹³ADT, August 10, 1892, p. 5.

Three days after Cochran's resignation, a Times reporter wrote sympathetically about the breaking up of the Eckert Opera Company and Cochran's bad luck in Salt Lake City:

It is understood that the Eckert Opera Company will go to pieces in Salt Lake this approaching week, their contract with Mr. Cochran having expired. In many senses the pluck of Mr. Cochran is to be admired. He simply took hold of something in which the germ of success did not exist.¹¹⁴

Cochran was in trouble and his friends were staggered when they read these headlines (and sub-head):

A WARRANT FOR HIM
BILLY COCHRAN DEFENDENT IN A STRANGE CASE

A demand that he return and deliver the books of the opera house to the new management - the wreckage of the Eckert Opera Company in Salt Lake City

H. R. Woodward told the press he had sent telegrams to Cochran "advising him to despair and return to Aspen that the books might be gone over and returned to him [Woodward]." When Woodward failed to get any reply, he resorted to issuing a warrant for Cochran's arrest to bring him back to Aspen for an accounting, regardless of how unpleasant it might be.

Then Woodward revealed that Cochran's organizing of the company had "involved heavy expenses and from its inception was a steady draw on the opera house." In fact, it involved revenues of the opera house and "fastened its almost sateless tooth" upon Cochran's own finances. Undaunted, however, Cochran "pressed his undertaking hoping at each turn to recover and find himself" with a paying attraction. Miss Berg's voice did not draw patrons and disaster was inevitable. In Salt Lake City, the

¹¹⁴ADT, August 13, 1892, p. 8.

even tenor of his way."¹¹⁹ Woodward returned to Aspen but offered no comment about Billy or any settlement.¹²⁰

Cochran, well aware of Wheeler's collapsing Aspen enterprises, was probably looking for a way out. In fact, although the sale was not publicized until December, Cochran may have known that Wheeler had sold the opera house to Charlotte M. Valentine (his wife) for \$1.00 in June.¹²¹ Wheeler, too, must have been aware of Cochran's plan to leave with his opera company, for it was during Cochran's opera season that Wheeler was in Aspen and sold his interest in the Grand River Coke and Coal Company.¹²² Just a few weeks later the title of the Jerome Hotel had been transferred from Jerome B. Wheeler and Charlotte M. Valentine to Arch Fisk of Denver for \$125,000.00.¹²³ Low silver prices had forced both Cochran and Wheeler to make changes.

James Ryan

The fifth Wheeler Opera House manager, James Ryan, had served for several years as general manager of the Aspen Street Railway Company. Later he became a Wheeler employee and was made secretary of the opera house company.¹²⁴ Wheeler bookings by Cochran were exhausted when Ryan became manager, so he was compelled to go to Denver to arrange for fall attractions with Peter McCourt.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ADT, August 26, 1892, p. 5.

¹²⁰ADT, August 30, 1892, p. 5.

¹²¹ADT, December 6, 1892, p. 8.

¹²²ADT, July 12, 1892, p. 5.

¹²³ADT, August 26, 1892, p. 3.

¹²⁴ADT, January 1, 1893, p. 2.

¹²⁵ADT, August 20, 1892, p. 5.

As silver prices continued to slip in September and October, no shows were advertised in any theater but the Wheeler, where box office receipts and quality of performances were not up to par. However, the Times praised Ryan for his efforts: "Manager Ryan deserves much commendation upon the manner in which he is conducting the Wheeler. The revenues from the box office have not shown a steady increase, but the class of attractions are the best that can be booked."¹²⁶ With no improvement in the silver market, Wheeler professional bookings decreased during November and the Times noted that the Wheeler was "taking things easy."¹²⁷ In December, a columnist considered Ryan's bookings old and stale as he wrote, "Manager Ryan of the Wheeler has a choice collection of 'chestnuts' to give away."¹²⁸

On New Year's Day, 1893, Ryan celebrated his twenty-sixth birthday¹²⁹ and probably appreciated the Times write-up about his popularity and attempt to book attractions to suit the public:

. . . Mr. Ryan has become very popular with the theater going public as well as with the managers of traveling attractions. He has displayed rare judgment and ability in his bookings; he has given the people many first class entertainments during the season and has a number of others for the near future.¹³⁰

The demand for Wheeler attractions was on the decline early in 1893. Scarlet fever and diphtheria were rampant; businesses were closing, and Ryan had stopped the daily box "ad" for the Wheeler and advertised sparingly for the three or four professional performances each month.

¹²⁶ADT, October 22, 1892, p. 8.

¹²⁷ADT, November 23, 1892, p. 8.

¹²⁸ADT, December 18, 1892, p. 8

¹²⁹ADT, January 1, 1893, p. 1.

¹³⁰ADT, January 1, 1893, p. 2.

Home talent and benefit performances increased. By springtime, Wheeler audiences were listed as "delighted audience -- not so large as it should have been,"¹³¹ or "small but appreciative."¹³²

Bar silver prices -- constantly dropping -- were listed in the daily newspapers as Aspen's economy slipped. Little could stop it, so big business and the working man had to adjust. The railroads reduced rates and the opera house manager's office was vacated so a paying tenant could have the space.¹³³

About a month later, Charlotte Valentine (Wheeler's wife) mortgaged the opera house to James M. Downing for \$158,000.00.¹³⁴ Miners were laid off and more businesses failed. Finally, when opera house employees produced the burlesque Cinderella to a small audience, the Times gave the reason for the small house, "When no one has money the attendance at any entertainment must be necessarily small."¹³⁵

The Wheeler was dark throughout July as silver prices plummeted downward, and Aspen with the whole nation experienced the great silver panic of 1893. Along with the others, Wheeler's Aspen Mining and Smelting Company laid off all men,¹³⁶ and his bank closed July 20.¹³⁷

¹³¹ADT, April 13, 1893, p. 5.

¹³²ADT, April 19, 1893, p. 5.

¹³³ADT, May 30, 1893, p. 5.

¹³⁴Clerk and Recorder's Book of Pitkin County, Colorado, Book 114, p. 144.

¹³⁵ADT, July 1, 1893, p. 5.

¹³⁶ADT, July 2, 1893, p. 8.

¹³⁷ADT, July 20, 1893, p. 4.

Business was at a standstill, and people who could find a way to leave moved out quickly.

Manager Ryan remained in Aspen and did his part in the hopeless task of finding new economy for the proud town. He donated the opera house for a Chamber of Commerce charity for which tickets were \$0.25 apiece.¹³⁸ He continued to donate use of the house for benefits, business and mass meetings, where ways for Aspen to help itself were discussed since silver was no longer valuable. For those Wheeler patrons who wanted and could still afford entertainment at prices of \$0.50, \$0.75, and \$1.00, Ryan booked three professional performances in the last six months of 1893.

The Wheeler did not close, but theatrical people felt the effect of the dull times as their visits to Aspen became few and far between. In the last few months of the Wheeler's first five years, professional companies played one-night stands only two or three times a month. Advertising was scant and reviews practically non-existent. The heyday of the Wheeler Opera House ended when the magic of silver disappeared.

The Wheeler Opera House was doomed from the beginning. Aspen's economy which was on the downgrade when the house was conceived and born never recovered. Silver mining was the lifeline of Aspen's existence, and as silver went, so went the town, the Wheeler, and its managers. The community support naturally faltered. Booking problems and J. B. Wheeler's indifference to his manager's abilities and desires also were factors in its failure.

¹³⁸ADT, August 8, 1893, p. 4.

Most of Aspen's residents were miners or people not interested in the top-quality entertainments for which the opera house was built. There were not enough of the fashionable or cultured people to support the program. When managers attempted to have theater licenses lowered, the city fathers offered battles, not help. Complaints from patrons about quality of performances, and their lack of attendance for good programs, did not help success of the house. Cochran turned to the outside with his theater train promotion to bring in patrons.

Peter McCourt's control of booking and prices practically tied the hands of managers. They had to take what they could get. There was too much risk involved to bring expensive shows for which McCourt demanded guaranteed fees.

J. B. Wheeler interfered with house operation and had little, if any, interest in the theater. Early, he stopped Weill's box auction and, later, when the house was not a paying venture, he gave Cochran duties completely unrelated to the theater. His lack of support did not help morale of the managers.

Each manager's attempts to "make the house pay" differed from the others. Weill wanted to use big-city methods, became impatient with Wheeler's interference, the little community life, and McCourt's control, and quit. Woodward was a bank employee who might have been a theater manager at one time. His appointment was in name only; Cutler ran the theater. Cutler, easygoing, older and likeable, catered to home town talent, and was "at home" with citizens -- just naturally. He saw no future at the Wheeler, whether he was ill or not. He quit.

Cochran, the "man about town" who learned fast, made many friends, and with much hard work made the Wheeler a "going operation" as long as

possible, was there the loneliest. Tired of his many duties, he also quit and "took to the road."

Ryan was literally and figuratively "kicked upstairs" when he became manager of the remnants of a theater. There was little need for theater when few people had money for such a luxury. He was the only Wheeler employee left to keep the house in order.

J. B. Wheeler was no theater man, but was a wise-enough businessman to employ professional men to set up and operate his opera house. When the professionals could not make the house pay, he lowered expenses by hiring non-professionals -- his bank employees who operated the house when they could find the time. The Wheeler management was a headache for all.

CHAPTER IV

APPLAUSE HEARD A BLOCK AWAY

Wheeler managers booked attractions for their audiences, but the people of Aspen had places to go other than the theater. Lodge, church, civic, and social announcements usually appeared on the same pages of the newspaper as advertisements, reviews, and comments about theaters. After most of the Wheeler performances, some comment, though brief, appeared concerning the size of the audience or company movements. Occasionally, there was a reference to the weather or an evaluation of the community regarding its attendance at the theater. Times stories about the whole Wheeler program seemed to reflect a proud and protective attitude; everything at the Wheeler was good -- or wholesome, at least. The very few programs of questionable character that appeared were promptly written about with disdain. Reviewers were more interested in performances and performers than with who made up the audiences.

This chapter is also more concerned with performances and performers; but because knowledge of the kinds of audiences who attended the Wheeler will provide a better understanding of their reactions to entertainments, it discusses the audiences first. Seldom did social columns of newspapers list names of patrons attending or occupying box seats at the opera house. Rather scant coverage mentioned the unusual audiences, their dress, behavior, or their reaction to managerial policy, attractions, and artists. Social and cultural status of audiences was

reflected in part by the type of performances they attended and the commentaries of star performers.

Next, the kinds of performances audiences saw at the Wheeler are considered in order of their frequency of performance, with emphasis on those by touring companies because they were played more frequently than those by home talent groups. Types of home talent productions are included to show what fare Aspen amateurs might have liked to do and see. The size and nature of audiences and their reactions to kinds and specific features of performances are supplied to indicate what patrons wanted, even if they had little choice. Reactions of the reviewers to the entertainments are also included. Scenery, costumes, costs, advertising, and problems of producing attractions at the Wheeler are described when relevant. Some material of historic nature about how kinds of attractions were modified is added to clarify changes in the nature of attractions.

Descriptions of touring stars and leading performers the Wheeler audiences saw complete the chapter. Facts concerning the number of performances, return engagements, distinctive types of acting, favorite roles, plays, costumes, and publicity for the performers are listed. The size and kind of audiences, plus their types of reactions to the performers, is supplemented by the reactions, in some cases, of the performers to the audiences and surroundings and the reactions of so-called critics and reporters to performers and their abilities. Behavior, friends, and social activities of some entertainers in Aspen add interest. Although some actors had established reputations, for others a clarification of their star status seemed necessary, so some historical facts have been included. All performers are considered in order of their appearance at the Wheeler.

The Audiences.

Patrons who attended the Wheeler were the restless people who had pushed America's frontier to the west, the mountains and, specifically, Aspen for silver and its material benefits. They were part of a population in flux. When the Wheeler was built, about six thousand people,¹ mostly mine laborers, were the residents of Aspen; five years later Judge J. W. Deane estimated the count had risen to twelve thousand with a transient population of probably five thousand.² Although veteran frontier theater men had provided theaters and entertainment for the miners, the Rink Opera House, considered the family theater, might have been patronized by the miners as well as other people in the town.

Perhaps many of the ladies and gentlemen in full evening dress who attended the opera house opening were the same people who had supported the Rink. In finer clothes, they were willing to pay top prices to see attractions in a beautiful first-class theater, not a part-time skating rink. A reviewer wrote that they looked like a metropolitan audience that night.

There was a picture such as would be looked for in New York, but scarcely in Aspen. Eight hundred people had gathered to witness the opening performance. A flood light from the incandescents fell upon animated faces and the rich toilets of the ladies and men made a picture that impressed itself deeply upon the minds of all old residents as they entered. Every seat was occupied and on every side were manifested the signs of the satisfaction with which people greeted the occasion.

If Wheeler audiences had standards, who made up the typical Wheeler audiences? The eight hundred who attended the gala first-night opening³

¹Len Shoemaker, Roaring Fork Valley (Denver: Sage Books, 1958), p. 139.

²Ibid., p. 180.

³ASP. April 24, 1889, p. 4.

were not typical nor were the "400 people consisting of the creme de la creme of Aspen society" who attended the first night of home talent operettas.⁴ Possibly the "large, well-pleased and even delighted" audience that attended the next professional booking, The Ivy Leaf, an Irish play with music, was a sample of audiences to come. A review of the piece stated that if the manager would provide more such attractions, his patrons would not complain.⁵

Very likely some of the complaints of the two first Wheeler bookings came from the theater-goers known as the "gallery gods" who occupied the less expensive seats in the balcony or gallery. A reporter described the influence their judgment had on potential theater patrons.

If the play-going people of Aspen should happen to make up their minds that way, and they generally do it beforehand, they can't get to the corner drug store quick enough to get their tickets. They are generally there two days before they are put on sale, asking for them. But if the gods say, "It don't amount to much," then it won't and that's all there is to it.⁶

How many gallery gods attended the Wheeler is not known, but they must have been quite well behaved because only once was there any publicity about their interfering with a production -- and that seemed to be deserved. When an apathetic audience of only seventy-five turned out to see the old barnstorming piece Our Bachelor played poorly, "the gallery gods guyed the play a little."⁷ They preferred comedy and roaring farce to plays such as Pez Woffington which a reporter wrote was "too devoid of the 'rough

⁴ADT, April 30, 1889, p. 2.

⁵ADT, May 3, 1889, p. 2.

⁶ADT, May 9, 1889, p. 4.

⁷ADT, November 18, 1889, p. 2.

and 'turbid horse-play' to suit the fastidious tastes of the 'gallery gods.'⁸

Poor houses were sometimes attributed to slushy weather or other attractions in town, but after a poor house for Georgie Cooper in Little Lord Fauntleroy, a reporter chided the public for its absence after having packed the house for a farce earlier in the week. "It does not speak well of a community when it will pack a place of amusement to see a roaring farce, and permit an ennobling performance like this to be given to empty seats."⁹

Socially prominent people attended Shakespearean pieces and home talent performances. A social item in the newspaper stated that before Miss Rhea performed in Each Akin About Nothing, Mr. and Mrs. H. B. Gillespie (see Chapter III, p.46) invited the two-year old Dickens Club to their home. "After the usual reading, Mrs. Gillespie entertained the ladies and husbands at dinner after which they adjourned to the opera house as guests" of the Gillespies. The paper named all of the guests.¹⁰ Following publicity that the "creme de la creme" of Aspen society had attended the first night of Peck Sisters and Penelope, operettas done by home talent, the second night audience was "select and appreciative."¹¹

Sometimes stars made comments about Wheeler audiences and culture in Aspen. Madame Helen Modjeska was particularly pleased with the large cultured audience which saw her in As You Like It and stated that she

⁸ADT, October 11, 1890, p. 4.

⁹ADT, February 10, 1891, p. 4.

¹⁰ADT, June 16, 1889, p. 4.

¹¹ADT, May 1, 1889, p. 4.

had never played the part of Rosalind "before a house that more quickly recognized the fine points of the play."¹² Rose Coghlan, who was "surprised to find that Aspen was such a substantial city," also commented on the people: "Of course, I did not expect to see only the pistol be-decked miner of sensational newspapers, but I hardly expected to see so many evidences of culture and refinement."¹³

When there was standing room only at the Wheeler and the boxes were occupied, names of socialites or visitors were sometimes mentioned in the press. The socially prominent C. H. Jacobs and W. J. King families sat in the boxes when Georgie Cooper played in Little Lord Fauntleroy.¹⁴ They were also occupied when Captain Smith entertained guests including Adjutant General E. F. Klee of the Colorado National Guard,¹⁵ D. R. C. Brown of the First National Bank and E. R. Holden of the Holden Smelting and Mining Company entertained businessmen and had seats in the boxes for a W. J. Scanlan performance.¹⁶

No names were mentioned, but some Aspenites who saw Credit Lorraine probably had been "playing" the stock market for they reacted sympathetically when the heroine used her wealth to save her lover:

The plot and character of the drama is one well calculated to hold an Aspen audience in close and breathless attention. The scene on the Paris Bourse was so realistic to the average speculator in the Aspen stock market that a spontaneous and audible sigh of intense sympathy and relief was heard all over the house when Lenora threw her entire fortune to bull the market and save the honor and credit of her lover.¹⁷

¹² ADT, July 16, 1889, p. 4.

¹³ ADT, September 25, 1889, p. 4.

¹⁴ ADT, December 3, 1889, p. 4.

¹⁵ ADT, April 12, 1890, p. 4.

¹⁶ ADT, October 3, 1890, p. 4.

¹⁷ ADT, May 23, 1891, p. 4.

Children attended some Wheeler performances such as Little Lord Fauntleroy¹⁸ and the Christmas matinee. At the latter, a child from the audience assisted Santa Claus distribute Christmas presents from his tree for children holding lucky numbers they had drawn.¹⁹ Home talent presentations, such as the Mother Goose tableaux done by children for an Episcopalian benefit²⁰ drew youngsters out. A reviewer for The Twelve Temptations described it as family entertainment to which "children were invited -- nothing to shock the modesty."²¹ Wayne Callahan, Aspen pioneer, said he was taken to the Wheeler as were others whose parents could afford the prices and wanted their children to see good theater.²² Special prices for children were frequently advertised; Cleveland's Minstrels offered a child any seat in the house for their matinee at twenty-five cents.²³

Groups attending performances in a body included the Elks, Aspen Lodge Number 224, who supported Patti Rosa, the only female member of the Elks in America, when she played Dolly Kardon. They gave her a reception and banquet later.²⁴ For The Ensign, a great naval play of the Civil War, all members of the Patriotic Sons of America and National Guard were requested to come in uniform.²⁵ When Patti Rosa played a benefit performance

¹⁸ADT, December 3, 1889, p. 4.

¹⁹ADT, December 27, 1889, p. 4.

²⁰ADT, March 18, 1890, p. 4.

²¹ADT, May 30, 1889, p. 4.

²²Personal Interview, June 22, 1963, Aspen, Colorado.

²³ADT, October 1, 1891, p. 4.

²⁴ADT, March 4, 1892, p. 4.

²⁵ADT, September 27, 1892, p. 4.

for the Elks, lodge members and patrons "filled the house to a jam."²⁶ Again they appeared in "full dress to welcome their only sister" when she returned to play Miss Dixie.²⁷ Other groups, such as G. A. R. and Civil War veterans, appeared in bodies for the annual Memorial Day services held in the opera house.

Although very seldom billed at the Wheeler, high-kicking dancers insured front row ticket sales. Millie Price, the famous high kicker whose sensational marriage to Denver banker Dow's son had occurred shortly before her Wheeler appearance, was no exception. The same bald-headed men who had met her at the depot in the afternoon came to see her that night: "All of them had front seats at the opera house to see Millie kick."²⁸ Turner's English Circle Company of high kickers also drew customers for the front seats when "all the bald heads in Aspen answered to roll call just previous to the raising of the curtain at the Wheeler Opera House last night. They were pretty well bunched in the front rows."²⁹

Reviewers frequently used the term "fashionable" to describe audiences; often it was coupled with "large" or "select," and seemed to denote social status and fine dress. People who had come from Glenwood Springs on the theater train were part of a "large and fashionable audience" which was handsomely dressed.

Quite a number of ladies and gentlemen appeared in evening dress, and the scene from the stage was suggestive of a huge bouquet: the variegated tints of the ladies' costumes, the flashes of bright color here and there, the sparkling jewels, all together formed an animated bouquet of rare brilliance.³⁰

²⁶ ADT, November 18, 1892, p. 4.

²⁷ ADT, January 12, 1891, p. 4.

²⁸ ADT, January 10, 1891, p. 3.

²⁹ ADT, February 6, 1891, p. 3.

³⁰ ADT, June 22, 1890, p. 5.

Opera lovers had requested an engagement of the famed Bostonians, but were disappointed when the company cut scenery and talent. A reviewer probably expressed the audience reaction when he wrote that the musicians were good and welcome to return if they would remember that Aspen was "not a village" and that her people wanted the best the Bostonians had to offer.³¹

Enthusiastic and appreciative audiences were given to frequent bursts of prolonged applause. After Phoebe Davies' thrilling second act finale, she was "compelled to come before the curtain and received renewed plaudits of the audience."³² William Daily "capped the climax with his singing of 'Down Went McGinty'" and was encored.³³ For numbers in the farce A Barrel of Money "applause was frequently loud enough to be heard at the Hines office, more than a block away."³⁴ Applause for Alexander Salvini's foot was perhaps the most unusual at the Wheeler.

A look or a gesture by a comedian will often be applauded, but we do not often see the progress of a play checked in a serious passage by such manifestations on the part of the audience. This was witnessed last evening, and the applause was called forth principally by an expression of disdain conveyed in part through a motion of Mr. Salvini's foot.³⁵

Appreciation was shown in other ways. The Elks attending one of Patti Rosa's performances presented her with a basket of flowers.³⁶ Hilda

³¹ADT, March 13, 1891, p. 2.

³²ADT, January 16, 1890, p. 3.

³³ADT, February 1, 1890, p. 4.

³⁴ADT, March 13, 1891, p. 4.

³⁵ADT, October 22, 1890, p. 4.

³⁶ADT, January 12, 1894, p. 4.

Thomas' sweet singing of character songs "earned her a beautiful bouquet of cut flowers from some admirer in the audience. These flowers she gracefully wore at her breast for the remainder of the evening."³⁷

When the Times stated, "There is a minstrel show at the Wheeler Opera House tonight and the average man will be happy,"³⁸ the level of audiences for minstrel, vaudeville, and all comedy was properly described. Average or elite, the Wheeler patrons were courteous, well dressed, and appreciative. As actress Clara Morris testified, "An Aspen audience catches a point or shows its appreciation of a fine piece of acting quicker than any people I ever saw. I am in love with the people in the mountains."³⁹

Wheeler patrons included a cross section of Aspen's permanent and transient population who could afford its prices. The fashionable and elite audiences attended performances by nationally-known companies and stars of standard drama and comic opera. Children were sometimes in attendance for the Wheeler's generally clean and wholesome programs. Lodge and veteran groups appeared in bodies on special occasions. The well-dressed Wheeler patrons behaved well, were appreciative of entertainment, and showed it frequently. If, on opening night, the house were filled with townspeople, over one-eighth of the estimated population would have been there. Another eighth on the second night would have meant that one-fourth of the population had come. Perhaps nearly everyone in Aspen attended the Wheeler at some time.

³⁷ADT, February 11, 1890, p. 4.

³⁸ADT, November 13, 1890, p. 4.

³⁹ADT, January 1, 1890, p. 2.

The Performances

Offerings at the Wheeler from 1839 through early 1894 were of many kinds. Traveling companies brought Shakespeare, minstrels, vaudeville, comic opera, extravaganza, burlesque, melodrama, concerts, lecturers, and even boxers. Home talent performers presented concerts, musical programs, and some plays and operettas.

Newspaper advertisements and reviews recorded showed that entertainment by touring companies and combinations accounted for approximately two-thirds of the time booked at the house. Comedy, farce comedy, and extravaganzas shared top honors in number of performances. Next in line were melodramas and comic operas, followed by minstrel shows. Standard drama and Shakespeare, though performed by leading artists, did not appear often. Concerts and lectures were more numerous than appearances of boxers or spiritualists.

Of home talent entertainment, nearly all for the benefit of some church, lodge or charity, musical programs and concerts were most numerous. Fewer than twenty-five plays and operettas were produced; comedy, farce comedy, and melodrama, in order, predominated productions of amateurs from various sponsoring organizations.

Much of the Wheeler entertainment was light and musical. Comedy and farce comedy led in number of productions; however, many pieces listed as comedies had much music and bordered on farce comedy. Likewise, some farce comedies were so close to burlesque or extravaganza, a correct count of any one type was difficult.

Comedies with little plot and written with much music by Charles Hoyt were played more times than the works of any other author. A Brass Monkey played three times, A Hole in the Ground and A Bunch of Keys twice

each, while A Texas Steer, A Midnight Bell, and A Parlor Match each played once. A Brass Monkey, billed as farce comedy "direct from New York after a THREE MONTHS RUN," played for two nights to crowded houses and was probably typical of Hoyt's plays marked by broad humor, lack of plot, and use of whims of the day.

Of the elaborated skit, musical absurdity, farce comedy or whatever you are a mind to call it, it would almost be impossible to give a connected narrative. . . . This much can be said, that, like all of Hoyt's, it takes hold of the fads of the day and shows them up in such absurd lights as would make a dog laugh.⁴⁰

Just one of his plays, A Texas Steer, was listed as satirical comedy, and like his others filled the house and kept the audience laughing but was better than Hoyt's other comedies because of some keen burlesque. A reporter wrote that "Hoyt's new play . . . draws like an ox. It drew a full house at the Wheeler Opera House and kept them roaring with laughter during the entire performance. There is some keen burlesque in it that raises it above the level of most of his pieces."⁴¹

Another type of broad American farce popular at the Wheeler was the comedy featuring the Irish immigrant, but including the German, Italian, and Negro written by Edward Harrigan and Tony Hart.⁴² Probably their best piece, Cordelia's Aspirations, which included Negro performers,⁴³ played once as did Old Lavender. This type of comedy containing vaudeville and musical specialties but more rural American

⁴⁰ADT, November 5, 1889, p. 4.

⁴¹ADT, March 19, 1891, p. 4.

⁴²Glenn Hughes, History of the American Theatre 1700 - 1950 (New York: Samuel French, 1951), p. 286.

⁴³Cecil Smith, Musical Comedy in America (New York: Theater Arts Books, Robert MacGregor, 1959), p. 64.

employed immigrant characters of other origins. An advertisement for Peck's Bad Boy listed a "Dutch comedian" and "Our Governor's Quartette" as specialties.⁴⁴ After observing Ole Olson posters around town, one reporter wrote that "The idea of substituting a Swedish dialect comedian for the German or Irish of which the public has long been surfeited is not a new one."⁴⁵ Three days before the show, part of a newspaper advertisement for Ole Olson was written in Swedish dialect, "He haf been en dees kontry wan yare femt mont and sax wake and he haf yust yumped his yob with Yonny Yonson."⁴⁶

Comedy-dramas still more rural and sentimental were seen frequently and were well attended. An example was From Sire to Son which was considered consistent, realistic, and "above all" exactly suited to public taste. The leading man won the sympathy of the auditors, and when the leading lady "sang 'Home Sweet Home' it was plain to see how much the audience was affected."⁴⁷ New England Folks and The Old Homestead with the Yankee farmer character pleased the patrons. One review for The Old Homestead, which played twice, illustrated this type of country entertainment.

This play is of the nature which always appeals so strongly to popular favor. The simple joys of rustic life, and the quaint humor and honest, kind hearted spirit of the New England farmer are truthfully portrayed in a manner that touches a responsive chord in the nature of every auditor.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ADT, March 3, 1893, p. 2.

⁴⁵ADT, February 1, 1891, p. 2.

⁴⁶ADT, February 4, 1891, p. 2.

⁴⁷ADT, October 10, 1889, p. 4.

⁴⁸ADT, December 8, 1891, p. 2.

The Wheeler was opened with comic opera, the craze of the New York stage during the 1880's.⁴⁹ The King's Fool, composed by Adolph Muller, a Viennese,⁵⁰ and directed by Hans Conried, another Viennese,⁵¹ was typical of that popular type of entertainment having a somewhat farcial plot, characters and tuneful music. A reviewer wrote that it was styled as a comic opera but was "entitled to take higher rank."⁵² Fifteen different comic operas brought good audiences to the Wheeler, but the number of productions decreased after 1890.

Olivette, Chimes of Normandy, And H. M. S. Pinafore led comic opera in number of productions probably because Manager Cochran had organized the Eckert Company in Aspen and used the Wheeler bookings as practice performances before taking the company on tour. Said Pasha was given twice, once each by two different companies. Except for The King's Fool, which was booked for two nights, all other comic operas played one night only. Just one matinee was attempted.

The spectaculars, or American extravaganzas, originally created by Edward E. Rice actually were burlesques or travesties on familiar stories with music and rhyming nonsense to hold them together. Devoid of much plot, but well laced with music and dance, they were intended as diversion for the whole family, "not merely for the roués, sophisticates or black sheep."⁵³

Big extravaganza companies like the one which produced The Twelve Temptations brought elaborate handsome costumes, and a wealth of scenery

⁴⁹Smith, op. cit., p. 75.

⁵⁰Theodore Baker, Biographical Dictionary of Musicians, ed. Nicholas Slonimsky (5th ed. rev.; New York: B. Schirmer, 1958), pp. 1132-1133.

⁵¹Was manager of New York Metropolitan Opera in 1903. Ibid., p. 313.

⁵²DT, April 24, 1889, p. 4.

⁵³Smith, op. cit., p. 39-41.

at great expense. The three grand ballets and Mile. Marie Bonfanti, premiere danseuse of The Twelve Temptations production, received rave notices. Costumes for the Ballet of Nations were gorgeous, but typical of spectacular staging was "the cockatoo ballet, in which the dancers carried live birds upon perches in their hands -- a novel, beautiful and taking performance." Carfare alone to bring this company and its twenty-six tons of scenery from Denver was \$1,100.00.⁵⁴

The Wheeler stage was not big enough for all extravaganza productions. Fifty-five members of the Adonis company found the stage a little small but omitted no scenes;⁵⁵ however, Rice's World's Fair was cut some.⁵⁶

In its seventeenth season, Evangeline, Rice's first and best-known extravaganza, was advertised "to draw nails from your coffin."⁵⁷ This, no doubt, referred to the dancing cow in Evangeline, a trademark of the piece -- two men costumed as a heifer. The other trademark was the Amazon march by girls whose armor dresses were described as "the most beautiful and dazzling ever seen on the American stage."⁵⁸

Cecil Smith states that during the 1880's, a military plot or hint of one offered an excuse for the ever-popular march or drill by chorus girls in masculine uniforms which left the female legs in sight.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ADT, May 30, 1889, p. 4.

⁵⁵ADT, October 23, 1890, p. 4.

⁵⁶ADT, December 9, 1890, p. 4.

⁵⁷ADT, March 15, 1890, p. 4.

⁵⁸ADT, March 9, 1890, p. 4.

⁵⁹Smith, op. cit., p. 83.

Hans Conried had incorporated this popular practice in his production of The King's Fool, a comic opera, with the Amazonian drill, but he added a new "leg show" variation by including lady fencers.⁶⁰

Burlesque — not the E. E. Rice "family entertainment" type — played a few times at the Wheeler. Cecil Smith stated that the play of burlesque "consisted of a musical and rhyming travesty on some well-known romance, play, opera or legend, often with a punning title" such as Carmen Up-To-Data or Cinderella Up-To-Date. In these burlesques the hero was played by a girl who wore tights just as the chorus did.⁶¹ The two performances of Cinderella by Wheeler employees and other home talent were acceptable, but the two professional performances were exceptions to the Wheeler's clean program which Alderman Donnelly referred to when he said the opera house was a "place we can take our wives and children."⁶²

A reviewer stated that Carmen Up-To-Data might better have been termed "Chestnuts Up-To-Date" and he continued to denounce the performance:

The songs and sayings of the specialty contingent had whiskers on them that would lay those of the Kansas hayseed statesman in the shade, and in several instances bordered on the vulgar. Especially was the latter the case with Charles Fostelle, who did a female "turn."

. . . The song fakir made things about as unpleasant for the audience before the curtain went up and between acts as did the worn-out acts of the company afterwards. The fakir would never be missed from the company.⁶³

"SIMPLY ROTTEN" was part of the headline for the criticism of Cleopatra. Although some pretty but scantily-clad girls did some high

⁶⁰ADT, April 24, 1889, p. 4.

⁶¹Smith, op. cit., p. 115.

⁶²ADT, March 18, 1890, p. 6.

⁶³ADT, March 13, 1892, p. 3.

kicking in the first part of the show, a Dutch and a Negro comedian annoyed the audience. The second part, a burlesque of Cleopatra entitled "Our Merry Female Club," was as tiresome as the first part. A reviewer stated that the performers belonged to the "beer halls of Cincinnati and the dance halls of State Street, Leadville. The men who left their families at home were well pleased."⁶⁴

Melodrama was played by touring companies more often than comic opera. Uncle Tom's Cabin was performed five times while The Two Orphans, The Count of Monte Cristo, Hazel Kirke, and The Waifs of New York each appeared twice. Streets of New York by Boucicault, Alone in London, Shenandoah, and The Stowaway, among others, played one-night stands. Home talent groups gave East Lynne twice and The Drunkard's Doom once.

Productions of The Waifs of New York were perhaps typical of the excitement offered by the emotion-packed scenes and realistic stage devices of melodrama. One performance of the play was described as "replete with sensational features and thrilling incidents, suggestive of yellow-backed literature and the villain - still - pursued - her blood curdling episodes of life."⁶⁵ For the other performance the scenery was considered a great feature. The Harlem railroad bridge with the two passing trains, Castle Garden, Trinity Church, and the fire scene were "truly realistic and the mechanical effect was wonderful."⁶⁶

Stage properties, mechanical devices, scenery, and fire scenes were other features audiences saw in melodrama. Live burglars, drills,

⁶⁴ADT. February 5, 1893, p. 5.

⁶⁵ADT. May 1, 1891, p. 4.

⁶⁶ADT. June 10, 1890, p. 4.

masks, powder, and dark lanterns, and a yacht with tapering masts and flowing sails added to vividly realistic scenes to keep the audience on "tiptoe of expectation" for The Stowaway.⁶⁷ The woman drowning in the lock of the river was a "wonderful contrivance" in Alone in London.⁶⁸ As usual the fire scene in the last act of Streets of New York was "realistic and loudly applauded."⁶⁹

At least one minstrel company playing the Wheeler had Negro performers, and nearly all had bands which led street parades to advertise their shows. The Georgia Minstrels showed public spirit -- and incidentally advertised their two-thirty and eight o'clock performances -- as their "colored band made quite an addition to the parade" on the Fourth of July, 1890. They marched between contingents from the Anti Tobacco Battalion and the Aspen Fire Department in a parade to celebrate Independence Day and the laying of the cornerstone of the new hospital.⁷⁰

Minstrel shows generally played to good houses at the Wheeler two or three times a year, but one performance which played to a small house indicated that the routine of the minstrel show did not change much.

There is a sameness about minstrelsy that grows irksome to the average theater-goer and the efforts to amuse the audience last night by repetitions [sic] of old "business" was a failure. Some specialty acts were good.⁷¹

⁶⁷ADT, October 15, 1889, p. 4.

⁶⁸ADT, April 11, 1890, p. 4.

⁶⁹ADT, October 14, 1891, p. 1.

⁷⁰ADT, July 6, 1890, p. 5.

⁷¹ADT, October 4, 1891, p. 4.

A few plays by American playwrights were in evidence at the Wheeler. Patrons saw Mr. Wilkinson's Widows and Private Secretary by William Gillette. Steele MacKaye's Hazel Kirke played twice and his Paul Kauvar, once. Shenandoah, done by professionals, and The Henrietta, done by amateurs, were written by Bronson Howard.

Many plays were adaptations of English and French stories and plays. Three adaptations of Alexander Dumas, The Count of Monte Cristo, The Clemenceau Case, and Deception, appeared. This was true for The Two Orphans by D'Ennery and Carmon. Dion Boucicault's spectacularly staged Streets of New York was an adaptation. After Dark and London Assurance also came from his pen. His sense of what had audience appeal sometimes became a little crude.⁷² A reviewer mentioned it after London Assurance played.

The comedy abounds in humor and sparkling witticisms which keep one laughing till [sic] his sides ache. But there are some coarse and vulgar allusions in the play as presented which should be eliminated before the piece is presented to a respectable people.⁷³

Within three months of the opera house opening, two of William Shakespeare's comedies had played to large audiences; but in the next three years, his plays were seen but four more times. Of the total of six performances which included two comedies and two tragedies, As You Like It and Othello, were booked twice. Much Ado About Nothing and Richard III each played once. After Miss Gale and Creston Clarke in As You Like It "gave good satisfaction" to a fairly good audience in March of 1892, no more Shakespeare was booked.⁷⁴

⁷²Phyllis Hartnoll (ed.), The Oxford Companion to the Theatre (2nd ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 89.

⁷³DT, October 12, 1890, p. 2.

⁷⁴DT, March 29, 1892, p. 4.

Other Wheeler attractions included concerts -- usually by groups of singers -- lectures about travel, health, temperance, and mental telepathy, plus stereoptican slides and a midget show. Pantomimes and entertainments built around boxing exhibitions were seen three times.

Actor Duncan B. Harrison wrote and played in Honest Hearts and Willing Hands, a comedy drama featuring the world's heavyweight boxing champion, John L. Sullivan, who fought a three-round contest with Jack Ashton.⁷⁵ There was standing room only at the Wheeler although there was little to the play of "the blood and thunder variety," which seemed to please those present.⁷⁶

The kinds of performances Wheeler patrons saw ran the gamut of shows on the road at the time. Many Broadway hits and a few stars came to the Wheeler. The bulk of the program was light and musical. Comedy and farce comedy, which could be done by small casts, were played most often probably because they were less expensive to bring for the one-night stands which became almost a rule at the Wheeler. Big companies, such as those offering extravaganza, comic opera, and minstrels, were popular. Many melodramas came and the most popular performances of this type included much realistic scenery and stage devices.

Some trends developed. Shakespeare and serious drama were dropped early as the program moved toward comedy and music. Two-night stands were also dropped early and a decrease in the number of big companies on the road occurred. Basically, Wheeler patrons liked entertainment that would make them cry a little, laugh a lot, and after the last curtain, leave the opera house humming the hit tune of the evening.

⁷⁵ADT, January 24, 1892, p. 3.

⁷⁶ADT, January 28, 1892, p. 2.

The Performers

The railroads brought many kinds of performers to the Wheeler, some with regional, others with national, and a few with international reputations. They could arrive in Aspen during the afternoon, play one performance, leave that night and play a performance the next night in another Colorado town. Theater performers, old and young, favorite and neophyte, were touring, and some came to the Wheeler.

Mlle. Rhea

As Beatrice in Much Ado About Nothing, Mlle. Rhea was considered a "star" and "simply perfect," and even though the large Wheeler audience had trouble getting used to her speech at first, her charm and fine acting wooed them.

It required a little time for the audience to become familiar with Rhea's accent, but her bewitching manner and splendid acting won them from the start while they soon, also, fell in love with her speech.

Definite audience reaction of some kind must have followed Mlle. Rhea's delivery of one line. A reviewer wrote that an "incident of the evening was the breaking out of the baseball enthusiasm in the town when Beatrice assured her uncle that she had 'a good eye.'"

On the day of her only performance at the Wheeler, she and some of the ladies of the company toured the Mollie Gibson Mine. Mr. H. B. Gillespie, part owner of the mine escorted them.⁷⁷

Helena Modjeska

This famous Polish actress, and a fine supporting cast from the Booth and Barrett Companies, came once to the Wheeler and played As You

⁷⁷AT, June 13, 1880, p. 4.

Like It and Adrienne Lecouvreur to large audiences who were enthralled with her performance and that of the cast. Her support was "very nearly perfect," but her handling of the "exceedingly difficult" role of Rosalind in As You Like It was so perfectly done that "many old theatergoers . . . felt themselves carried away."⁷⁸

After the performance, a reporter interviewed the Countess (Modjeska) and her husband, the Count Bozenta, while they waited for supper at the Delmonico. She was "exceedingly attractive" and seemed to be "thoroughly earnest" when she said she had been "particularly pleased" with the audience.

In Adrienne Lecouvreur, on the second night, the star's emotional acting resulted in several curtain calls. Her depiction of the "paroxysms of jealousy were wonderful and, as scene succeeded scene, Modjeska was before the curtain again and again" to acknowledge their applause. Her death scene, however, was described by the reviewer as one that would not be soon forgotten. "It was painfully realistic, but as an exhibition of histrionic art it, perhaps could not be excelled."⁷⁹

Edward Harrigan

Harrigan, who always played the Irish immigrant in the plays he wrote depicting New York City life, opened the 1889-1890 season to the largest audience that had ever gathered at the Wheeler. He played his favorite part, that of Old Lavender, in the play of the same name.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ADT, July 16, 1889, p. 4.

⁷⁹ADT, July 17, 1889, p. 4.

⁸⁰ADT, September 17, 1889, p. 4.

The next night the comedian as Dan Mulligan, his most famous character, performed in Cordelia's Aspirations which kept a crowded house in "a constant state of uproar over many laughable situations from the rise to the final fall of the curtain."⁸¹ This was his only appearance at the Wheeler.

Rose Coghlan

"Fair" audiences saw Rose Coghlan's two performances at the Wheeler in 1889. She chose Jocelyn, a play by her actor-brother for the first performance in which a duel scene between her and Mr. Saviani "though splendidly acted and liberally applauded" was considered quite "inconsistent." The reviewer defended his opinion by adding, "No man could fight in such a cold-blooded manner with the woman he adored."

The costumes she wore in Forget Me Not on the second night, made by Felix and Worth and especially designed for the character of Stephanie, were considered "some of the most superb ever seen on the Wheeler stage." In the role of Stephanie, which she had originally created, Miss Coghlan was supported by "the strongest kind of a company" and brought the wonderful scenes of the play out in a "brilliant manner" which "startled the audience to many and prolonged outbursts of enthusiasm."⁸²

With fervor she described her scenic trip from Denver to beautiful Aspen with its lovely opera house and told an interviewer that she was more than pleased that her managers had decided to take the Silver Circuit tour. She concluded her interview by saying that roily waters had spoiled

⁸¹WT, September 19, 1889, p. 4.

⁸²WT, September 21, 1889, p. 4.

her plans for fishing but that she would return. Then she added, "Oh! I am going to buy a mine when I come here next year as I hope to on my vacation."⁸³

She returned a year later for two performances and there was no publicity about any mine purchase, but newsmen differed in their opinions as to Miss Coghlan's status as a star. Of her first performance as Peg in Peg Woffington, a Times reporter wrote that she had "won rounds of applause" and taken several curtain calls. He also wrote that the star had lost none of her force and beauty since a year ago and she was still a favorite on the stage.⁸⁴ The other writer noted that she had played to a "fair-sized and not altogether unappreciative audience" and appeared "well in the role." Very likely the second newsman was the writer of "Dramatic Notes," a newspaper column which appeared for the first time after she played one of her most successful roles, that of Lady Gay Spanker, in London Assurance, for he not only questioned her star status but criticized her performance.

Rose Coghlan was again a disappointment as a star to the poorly filled house. She dresses georgeously, but where she gets her reputation as a great artist is hard to see. Her words are biting and she cuts them short with a regularity that is painful.⁸⁵

Patti Rosa, The Female Elk

Of local fame was Patti Rosa who, during the first five years of Wheeler operation, played five different engagements and was the only

⁸³ADT, September 25, 1889, p. 4.

⁸⁴ADT, October 11, 1890, p. 4.

⁸⁵ADT, October 12, 1890, p. 2.

performer to have her picture in the Aspen Daily Times.⁸⁶ She was billed as a young, charming, and brilliant comedienne popular in England⁸⁷ and a favorite of members of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks in Aspen. Packed houses always greeted the "only sister" of the Elks who sometimes attended her performance in a body. Many theatrical men belonged to the order, but an advance story about her performance in Dolly Varden explained that she was the only actress who could claim membership.

Miss Rosa has the honor of being the only female Elk in America, notwithstanding that others, solely as an advertising scheme, represent themselves as being members. She has won the love, esteem and gratitude of that powerful and benevolent order.

After attending her standing-room-only performance in a body, they gave her a reception and banquet in their lodge room. The evening was "made merry" as the Elks gave a literary and musical program for the actress, serving refreshments of various kinds. She joined in the toast to the departed brothers, and her husband thanked the lodge for the honor paid to Miss Rosa.⁸⁸

George Boniface, Jr. and Augustus Bruno, Miss Rosa's husband, performed with her in plays adapted by Clay M. Green for her talents of singing, dancing, and banjo playing.⁸⁹ After she played in Imo, which might have been a sample of this type of adaptation, a reviewer wrote the

⁸⁶ADT, November 13, 1892, p. 2.

⁸⁷ADT, February 14, 1891, p. 4.

⁸⁸ADT, March 3, 1892, p. 4.

⁸⁹ADT, November 28, 1889, p. 4.

PLATE VIII



PATTI ROSA

play is one of those that has no good point beyond the opportunity for comedy. The fun had the merit of being pure, though often rough and uncouth."⁹⁰

The Elks arranged with Fatti Rosa to play Miss Dixie for their benefit in late 1892. Even after the silver crash, she repeated Miss Dixie to a crowded house, and the Elks in "full dress" presented her with flowers.⁹¹

Georgie Cooper

Georgie Cooper, who made the character of the child in Little Lord Fauntleroy famous the world over, played the part twice at the Wheeler. Boxes were occupied and the gallery crowded for her first appearance in 1889. Her ability to perform so well without prompting brought this review:

The part of the child, "Little Lord Fauntleroy," was taken by Georgie Cooper and she performed in a manner that was wonderful, reciting her lines, which cover sixty pages of manuscript, without a suggestion of prompting, without a hitch at any point, and often with marked dramatic effect.⁹²

Although her picture, "that of a beautiful little girl," was on display to publicize her second performance sixteen months later,⁹³ the house was small. The little miss, however, again "won the hearts of the audience by her beautiful acting."⁹⁴

⁹⁰ADT, February 19, 1891, p. 4.

⁹¹ADT, January 5, 1894, p. 4.

⁹²ADT, December 3, 1889, p. 4.

⁹³ADT, February 5, 1891, p. 4.

⁹⁴ADT, February 10, 1891, p. 4.

Louis James

Twice Louis James came to the Wheeler with his "carefully selected" company. For his first appearance in Virginus, a reporter wrote that "a large sized audience" received James "most appreciatingly" [sic]. The story stated that, "Mr. James in the title role received the lion's share of applause" and continued that it was "useless to tell of his magnificent acting."⁹⁵ Possibly the writer thought it was also useless to attend James' performance in Othello the next night, since there was no review for it the following day.⁹⁶ Before his return appearance eleven months later, a news item suggested that the people who had gone to the opera house on Monday to see the minstrels should go again on Saturday night when Louis James would be there "and find out what a good show is."⁹⁷ A large and distinguished audience went to see him in Ingomar. Maybe the same [sic] reporter attended it, for very briefly he wrote that "Ingomar the Barbarian was a treat by Louis James, actor remembered from his appearance during the last season in Virginus and Othello."⁹⁸

James O'Neill

A crowded house greeted James O'Neill in his first presentation of The Count of Monte Cristo in 1890,⁹⁹ and by the time he had returned -- about four years later -- the "eminent romantic actor had played the piece

⁹⁵ADT, January 21, 1890, p. 1.

⁹⁶ADT, January 22, 1890, p. 4.

⁹⁷ADT, December 24, 1890, p. 4.

⁹⁸ADT, December 28, 1890, p. 4.

⁹⁹ADT, March 13, 1890, p. 6.

over 3,000 times."¹⁰⁰ Even though this appearance came after the silver crash, the opera house was packed.¹⁰¹

Maggie Mitchell

Billed as America's favorite actress, Maggie Mitchell played the Wheeler twice. First, she played in her "famous creation of Fanchon, the Cricket."¹⁰² A large audience was "captured" from the shadow dance in the first act "to the cricket's return at the close of the play."¹⁰³ She returned to play to an excellent house in Little Maverick in 1892 when she was sixty years of age. The press noted that "Father Time" had dealt gently with her, but she "seemed not to have lost the charm that attracted theater goers" a generation before.¹⁰⁴

Effie Ellsler

The only actress to play the Wheeler five years in a row was Effie Ellsler who had played the title role in Hazel Kirke when it opened in New York's Madison Square Theatre in 1880.¹⁰⁵ Having played at the Pink Opera House in 1888,¹⁰⁶ she was popular and well known in Aspen. Preceding a complimentary review for the comedienne in The Governess, a reporter wrote: "Effie Ellsler is no stranger to Aspen theatre-goers

¹⁰⁰ADT, January 31, 1894, p. 4.

¹⁰¹ADT, February 4, 1894, p. 4.

¹⁰²ADT, April 29, 1890, p. 4.

¹⁰³ADT, April 30, 1890, p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ADT, February 10, 1892, p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ADT, April 22, 1892, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ADT, February 12, 1888, p. 4.

and there was a large audience to greet her."¹⁰⁷ Before her next Wheeler appearance, a good advance sale of tickets indicated she was a favorite. "Judging from the number of tickets sold Effie Ellsler will be greeted with a full house. She has many friends here."¹⁰⁸

She did not play Hazel Kirke at the Wheeler until 1892 and then the reason for her playing other pieces was made known. "Effie was forced to give up Hazel Kirke two years ago because of nervous prostration. She took it up again this season and people think she has improved."¹⁰⁹ The next season she repeated it on her farewell tour,¹¹⁰ but the following year she was back again, this time in Doris.¹¹¹

Robert Mantell

Robert Mantell was well known to western theaters and appeared at the Wheeler for a two-night stand. He "gave a good performance" in Monbars to a "large and appreciative" audience for the first night,¹¹² and played Othello, the second night. For the latter performance, a well-filled special train, from Glenwood Springs and Carbondale, Colorado, brought patrons to see the actor.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ADT, May 28, 1890, p. 4.

¹⁰⁸ADT, April 5, 1891, p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ADT, April 24, 1892, p. 4.

¹¹⁰ADT, April 14, 1893, p. 6.

¹¹¹ADT, March 14, 1894, p. 4.

¹¹²ADT, September 30, 1890, p. 4.

¹¹³ADT, October 1, 1890, p. 4.

Henry E. Dixey

Known for his singing, dancing, fine figure, and shapely legs, Henry Dixey was billed as "America's most famous burlesque comedian."¹¹⁴ The matinee idol who had played hundreds of performances of Adonis in New York, Boston, and London¹¹⁵ was "superb" and a member of his fifty-five member cast was received well. "Many people recalled the handsome form of Miss Yolande Wallace, and her appearance was warmly welcomed."¹¹⁶ The Times noted that the assistant manager of the Dixey Company was the city editor of the Chicago Times, who was "taking a trip of recreation and sight-seeing through the country with Dixey."¹¹⁷

Thomas W. Keene

With the exception of Edwin Booth, the fifty-year-old Keene was considered the best-known and most popular tragedian in America¹¹⁸ -- so the advance story for the Shakespearean actor read. There was not a vacant seat in the opera house for his only performance of Richard III. The review stated that his interpretation of Richard was above criticism; in fact, he was "the only Richard" of the day.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ADT, October 19, 1890, p. 4.

¹¹⁵ADT, October 21, 1890, p. 2.

¹¹⁶ADT, October 23, 1890, p. 4.

¹¹⁷ADT, October 24, 1890, p. 4.

¹¹⁸ADT, September 25, 1891, p. 3.

¹¹⁹ADT, September 26, 1891, p. 4.

Lillian Lewis

This star was booked to play a two-night stand and, before she opened in Credit Lorraine, an advance story stated that she would be "tragic and emotional."¹²⁰ She was "superb" in a "splendid exhibition of human passion that held the audience spellbound."¹²¹ The next night to a "fair" but delighted audience she appeared in As In A Looking Glass, known as "the Jersey Lily's play" and the press wrote that "Miss Lewis suffers nothing by comparison with Langtry in the same title role." Her dresses were admired by the ladies of Aspen.

Miss Lewis and her company were "more than pleased" with Aspen. She "invested in 10,000 shares of Aspen mining stock" before she left.¹²²

Kate Claxton

When Kate Claxton and Charles A. Stevenson, her husband, brought the magnificent revival" of the Two Orphans¹²³ to the Wheeler, she had played the part of Louise, the blind girl, for over fifteen years. Although Miss Claxton was suffering from a cold, she was convincing in the part of Louise which was described as "distinctively Kate Claxton's part and one for which no actress had ever attempted to compete." Her husband's performance of dual characters was considered "good."¹²⁴

¹²⁰ADT, May 20, 1891, p. 4.

¹²¹ADT, May 23, 1891, p. 4.

¹²²ADT, May 24, 1891, p. 4.

¹²³ADT, December 1, 1891, p. 2.

¹²⁴ADT, December 6, 1891, p. 5.

Minstrel Performers

Performers generally came to Aspen on the day of an attraction and often left on the night train, so there was little time for observation of their offstage conduct. Song and dance man J. V. Bryce from W. C. Cleveland's Minstrel troupe came to town drunk. The Times reported his ungentlemanly conduct, beating and evasion of the police:

Mr. Bryce brought a good sized jag along with him when he came to the city yesterday. Added more stuff -- became a "low foul-mouthed noisy and quarrelsome rowdy." He insulted a lady on the street and became involved in two "scraps" with more respectable members of the company. Larry Maroney "mopped up the office corridor" of the Jerome with him.

"Why," said Mr. Cleveland to a reporter of this paper, "when I learned the cause of the affair, I sent two of my own boys out to find the rascal and lick him again. They found him skulking in an alley and pounded him again."

Warrants were issued for being drunk and disorderly, but he managed to elude officers in some way and probably got out of town on one of the early trains.¹²⁵

The majority of the stars who came to the Wheeler were middle-aged actors who had played one-night stands of their best or favorite plays. Some were actually old and found the road offered a chance to stay in the limelight. Child stars and a few stars in their thirties appeared. Most of the performers had good supporting casts, which sometimes included their spouses. Some stars chose the road as a place to "fade away."

There were all kinds of audiences, performances, and performers at the Wheeler; variety was a quality shared by all. Generally, audiences preferred light and musical pieces, but realistic melodrama or attractions by big casts having fine costumes and much scenery were

¹²⁵DT, March 27, 1891, p. 4.

popular. Shakespeare and heavy drama, played seldom, were attended by the more refined audiences. Usually, stars with established reputations and shows of long runs or road experience came; in fact, some had been on the road for years. As a rule, audiences and performers alike behaved well, and the attractions were nearly always clean and wholesome. The ever-changing Wheeler audiences saw some home talent entertainment, a few great stars, and many attractions that were on the road playing one-night stands. Aspenites did not have to go to Denver to see them; they came to the Wheeler.

CHAPTER V

TROUPE ON THE SILVER CIRCUIT

Managers of the Wheeler Opera House depended upon touring theatrical companies for most of their programs. This was to be expected for there was no resident company of actors at the Wheeler, but there was a boom in touring companies carrying every kind of show over the new railroads that had stretched across the nation and into towns with new theaters. Circuits developed with the boom, commercial managers and booking agents appeared, and Broadway, or sometimes San Francisco, became the proving ground for stars and companies to win reputations before going on tour for a season or more.² Since the Wheeler program consisted largely of attractions by touring companies usually booked through the Silver Circuit, this chapter first presents an explanation of how this circuit and its booking agent, both side developments of the touring company boom, were related to the companies that came to the Wheeler. To further clarify these developments, some incidental history about changes in theater on the American scene is included. Secondly, it describes what companies came, from whence and how often, their size, stars and in some cases quality, their length of

¹Grant Tinker, History of the American Theatre 1700 - 1950 (New York: Samuel Knickerbocker, 1911), p. 223.

²William Van Meter, The Living Stage (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1955), p. 361.

stay and conduct, their means of travel and methods of publicity, as well as prices and remuneration. Possibly some companies did not book through the Silver Circuit; old established touring groups and a few barnstoring troupes booked appearances independently.

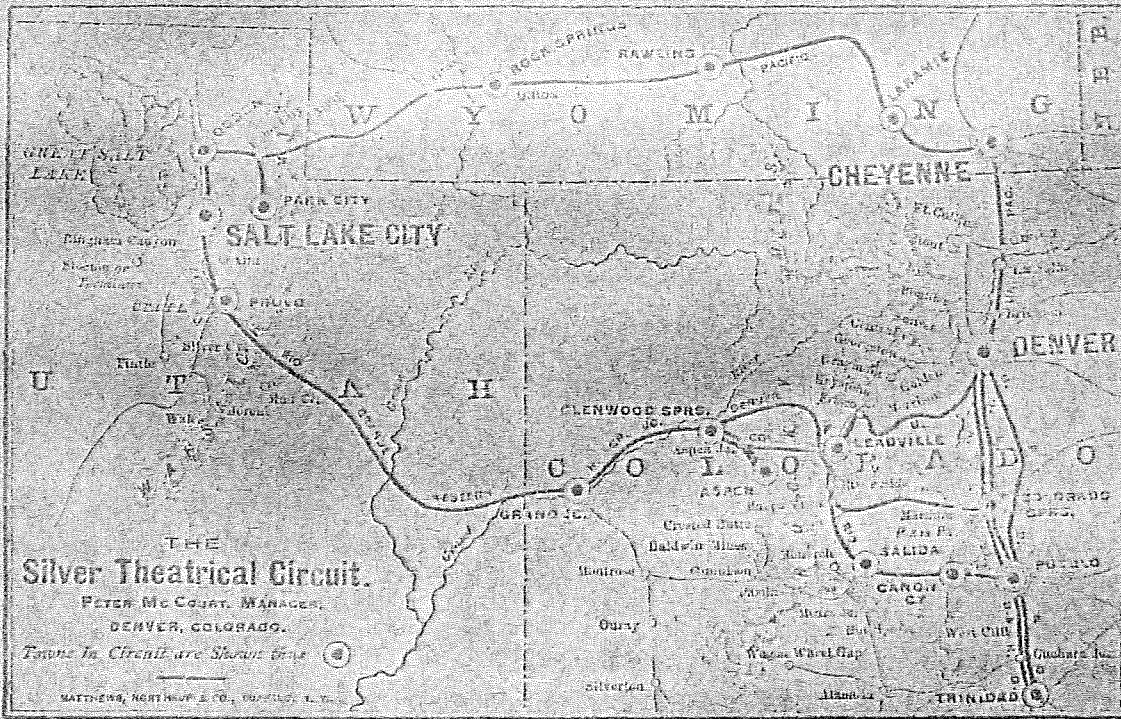
Before the Wheeler opened, plans were made to have it in Peter McCourt's Silver Circuit, a three-year-old theatrical circuit which included Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming towns having theaters and railroads (see Plate IX, p. 119). The young and shrewd McCourt, former dry goods clerk in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, and salesman in New York City, was a brother-in-law of H. A. W. Tabor, silver scion and builder of Denver's Tabor Grand Opera House. After a year as secretary to Tabor, McCourt became manager of the opera house in 1884 and, in order to learn every detail of the business, began in charge of the ticket office.³ McCourt made trips to New York each spring, as did many other theater managers, to bargain for attractions for the next season's program. During these trips, he perhaps learned of the new and small theatrical circuits developing in the East.⁴ As Denver became the hub for western railroads, the enterprising McCourt conceived the idea of a theatrical circuit originating in Denver which could supply smaller theaters in railroad towns. By 1886 the Silver Circuit was a reality; McCourt was its manager and booking agent with headquarters in the Tabor Grand.

Aside from McCourt's financial gain, the plan gave companies going to and from the Pacific Coast opportunities to perform several nights on

³Henry Dudley Teetor, "The Silver Theatrical Circuit: or All the World's a Stage," Magazine of Western History, XIII (November, 1890 - April, 1891), pp. 740-741.

⁴Barnard Hewitt, Theatre U. S. A. 1668 to 1957 (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1957), p. 256.

SILVER CIRCUIT



DENVER	.....	WYO.	TABOR GRAND OPERA HOUSE	.....	SEATING CAPACITY	.....	1,500
"	.....	"	15TH STREET THEATRE	.....	"	.....	1,000
COLORADO SPRINGS	.....	"	OPERA HOUSE	.....	"	.....	1,100
PUEBLO	.....	"	GRAND OPERA HOUSE	.....	"	.....	1,300
TRENTON	.....	"	JAFFA OPERA HOUSE	.....	"	.....	800
SALIDA	.....	"	OPERA HOUSE	.....	"	.....	800
LEADVILLE	.....	"	TABOR OPERA HOUSE	.....	"	.....	1,000
ASPEN	.....	"	WHEELER OPERA HOUSE	.....	"	.....	1,100
PROVO CITY	.....	UTAH	OPERA HOUSE	.....	"	.....	800
SALT LAKE	.....	"	SALT LAKE THEATRE	.....	"	.....	1,800
OGDEN	.....	"	GRAND OPERA HOUSE	.....	"	.....	1,700
PARK CITY	.....	"	OPERA HOUSE	.....	"	.....	800
ROCK SPRINGS	.....	WYO.	OPERA HOUSE	.....	"	.....	700
CHEYENNE	.....	"	OPERA HOUSE	.....	"	.....	1,200

the way, thus reducing loss of time originally spent in travel alone.

Actually, a company could "play" its way from Denver to San Francisco.

. . . for instance, Emma Abbott leaving Denver Monday could be at the Colorado Springs opera house that night; at the Opera House, Pueblo, Tuesday; Tabor Opera House, Leadville, Wednesday; Wheeler Opera House, Aspen, Thursday; Salt Lake Theater, Friday; Ogden Opera House, Saturday; and leaving Ogden Sunday morning, arrive at San Francisco the following Monday noon.⁵

The Wheeler opened when McCourt's three year's of experience in booking companies on the Silver Circuit must have given him a fairly good idea of what types of troupes and entertainment would draw paying houses in the smaller towns. Very likely he also had learned that some companies would not consider a tour of one or two night stands without a guaranteed fee, and that others did not relish traveling in the mountains. Touring companies interested in playing the circuit were either dependent upon McCourt's booking methods or they could contact managers independently, which was risky financially, in the new theaters of what had been considered the "hinterlands."

Frequently, companies played several days or a week in Denver, traveled to Aspen on Sunday, played the Wheeler on Monday night, and left that night or the next morning to make Leadville for a performance on Tuesday night. Advance stories usually mentioned from where a company was coming, such as one for Cleveland's Minstrel Show which stated that they would "begin at the Tabor Grand where a week's engagement was filled, proceed to the week on the road at intermediate points."⁶

Whether a review followed a performance or not, a news item generally stated when the troupe left and where it was going, as was this

⁵Teator, op. cit., p. 741.

⁶WT, September 27, 1891, p. 4.

case with Louis James and his performers: "The James Co. will leave this morning for Leadville where they will open with Julius Caesar."⁷ Sometimes companies came from Leadville on their way back to Denver.

When in Aspen, most companies stayed at the Jerome or Clarendon Hotels; however, some engaged special railroad cars for travel, sleeping accommodations, and scenery. The Bostonians had their "own special pullman,"⁸ McFadden's Uncle Tom's Cabin combination traveled in "their own special car,"⁹ and the Georgia Minstrels toured in "their own special palace cars."¹⁰ Special baggage cars carried scenery, properties, and costumes. Wheeler patrons were disappointed when the cast for The Clemenceau Case arrived and could not perform without their costumes and scenery. The baggage car containing their equipment was cut off in Red Cloud, Nebraska; the train, behind time, was cut to make up lost time. Efforts by the manager to have the car "brought up in time for the Wheeler performance were fruitless."¹¹

Very few companies attempted more than a two-night stand. The Wilbur Company featuring James R. McCann and Lizzie Kendall in melodramas was the only one to play three nights and a matinee to full houses. Also, this was the only one to move to another Aspen theater, the Tivoli, for the rest of the week.¹² Manager Cochran's reorganized Eckert troupe once tried three nights of the same piece but gave up the idea. The two nights

⁷ADT, January 21, 1890, p. 1.

⁸ADT, March 13, 1891, p. 4.

⁹ADT, June 9, 1891, p. 4.

¹⁰ADT, July 3, 1890, p. 4.

¹¹ADT, January 20, 1891, p. 4.

¹²ADT, May 14, 1890, p. 4.

and a matinee plan was successful for the original Eckert Troubadours, Stetson's Uncle Tom's Cabin Company, and Richards and Pringle's minstrel group, but not for the California Opera Company doing three different and popular comic operas. Combinations doing two-night stands of the same piece usually had poor second night audiences. The manager for the Augustin Daly Company, booked to play the Wheeler one night, cancelled his engagement at Salida because he said that "Aspen had a better reputation for a house the second night than Salida had for the first." The company showed another play at the Wheeler, but on the second night, there was a "miserable falling off of the audience."¹³ After 1890, one-night stands were in order at the opera house.

Advance agents for large and nationally-known touring groups usually came to Aspen about a week ahead of their companies. These men handled publicity by giving advance stories to newspapers, posting billboards, and providing any other media for advertising their companies. Also, they often checked travel schedules and arranged for living accommodations. Sam Thall, advance agent for the Grismer-Davis Company, was in town making such preparations¹⁴ while his company was concluding a four-week engagement at the Bush Theatre in San Francisco.¹⁵ Smaller groups, those originating closer to the Rocky Mountain region or barnstorming units, did not have such personnel but may have mailed advance publicity to theater managers.

¹³ADT, May 16, 1890, p. 2.

¹⁴ADT, November 23, 1890, p. 4.

¹⁵ADT, November 30, 1890, p. 4.

Nationally-known and booked a year in advance with a guarantee of one thousand dollars for one night, the famous Bostonians, particularly noted for their well-cast and superbly staged presentations,¹⁶ were probably the finest comic opera performers in the country.¹⁷ For their one performance, prices were raised, every seat in the house was reserved, and six hundred dollars' worth of tickets had been sold three days before the musicians arrived.¹⁸ With their orchestra and grand chorus, the group reached Aspen in their own special pullman. Although there were some cast substitutions, their performance was "a real treat to scores who had so often been bored by barnstorming companies."¹⁹

Not so well-known nor managed as the Bostonians, the California Opera Company came from the West Coast twice in five months. A month after its first appearance at the Wheeler, the company was stranded in Salt Lake City as a result of bad management, a drunken advance agent, and too large whiskey bills.²⁰ Three months later, with Mr. Ben Tuthill as manager and some other changes in the company, they returned.²¹

Special arrangements by the hospital committee to present the Abbie Carrington Grand Opera Company in a benefit performance were not very fruitful. Perhaps the company did not arrive in time; in place of a review, a news item stated that the "D & R G train was late two hours,

¹⁶Cecil Smith, Musical Comedy in America (New York: Theater Arts Books, Robert MacGregor, 1959), p. 175.

¹⁷ADT, November 5, 1891, p. 2.

¹⁸ADT, March 10, 1891, p. 4.

¹⁹ADT, March 14, 1891, p. 4.

²⁰ADT, May 17, 1890, p. 2.

²¹ADT, August 12, 1890, p. 4.

so a train was held in Grand Junction for the accommodation of the Abbie Carrington combination."²² Only \$15.30²³ was realized from the "certain per cent of the proceeds to go to the hospital fund."²⁴

W. T. Carleton, dubbed the "guiding genius" of his fifty member opera company, had a replacement take his singing role for the first booking, but when he tried it a second time (see Chapter III, p. 68), Manager Cochran refused to permit such a change.²⁵ The next year members of this group and other comic opera companies combined with orchestra director Carl Martens and returned as the Calhoun Opera Company — minus Mr. Carleton.²⁶

Charles Frohman's Comedians came to the Wheeler for three one-night stands. Frohman's name had become synonymous with productions of standard drama and his companies of fine actors toured the continent²⁷ with hit productions from New York, the result of his careful play selections for popularity on the road, good talent and direction. In the cast which played Mr. Wilkinson's Widows were star players, Joseph Holland and Mrs. Georgie Drew Barrymore.²⁸ The review for the show pointed up the quality of the company's talent. "Like Charles Frohman's companies,

²²ADT, June 21, 1891, p. 4.

²³ADT, June 28, 1891, p. 4.

²⁴ADT, June 25, 1891, p. 4.

²⁵ADT, February 9, 1892, p. 4.

²⁶ADT, April 17, 1893, p. 8.

²⁷Oral Sumner Coad and Edwin Mims, Jr., The American Stage, Vol. XIV: The Pageant of America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929), p. 264.

²⁸ADT, May 8, 1892, p. 4.

this one was first-class in every particular -- composed of real actresses and actors. . . . They were all stars, not a stick in the company."²⁹

Another favorite group from New York, the Effie Ellsler Company, made annual tours to Aspen and played five engagements at the Wheeler. Famous for her original character of Hazel in Hazel Kirke, Miss Ellsler was supported in all her engagements by her husband Frank Weston and sometimes by C. W. Couldock, also of the original Hazel Kirke cast.

One of the oldest companies in the country, The Milton Nobles Company, starring Milton Nobles and his wife Dollie had come to Aspen by stage in 1884 for an appearance, but traveled by rail when they came to the Wheeler for a one-night and two two-night stands. James O'Neill, the actor-manager, brought his strong Monte Cristo company twice for one-night stands. The Louis James Company came twice in 1890 when Mr. James was featured in Shakespeare and tragedy.

Several minstrel companies appeared at the Wheeler with their distinctive type of entertainment. In 1890 and 1891, W. S. Cleveland and his troupe of thirty-five³⁰ to over fifty³¹ performers played the Wheeler four times at prices ranging from a quarter for children at a matinee³² to one dollar and fifty cents for the parquet and reserved balcony.³³ Each booking brought different headliners such as the "King of

²⁹ ADT, March 15, 1890, p. 4.

³⁰ ADT, September 27, 1891, p. 4.

³¹ ADT, December 16, 1890, p. 2.

³² ADT, October 1, 1891, p. 4.

³³ ADT, December 16, 1890, p. 2.

Minstrels, the Inimitable and only Willie P. SWEATNAM" and the "fat and funny Billy Rice"³⁴ or "Big Mouth Comedian Tom McIntosh."³⁵

Charles E. Schilling, veteran minstrel man,³⁶ appeared three times with troupes. Twice he managed and played with the Goodyear, Elitch and Schilling Company, organized in Denver and owned by John Elitch, Jr.³⁷ The third time the troupe was billed as the "Chas. E. Schilling's Minstrels."³⁸

The Richards and Pringle's Georgia Minstrels played twice. The show featured Billy Kersands, a silver cornet band, and was supported by a "coterie of Colored Star Artists."³⁹ Primrose and West's troupe from the Pacific Coast⁴⁰ appeared once as did Gorton's Famous New Orleans Minstrels and Haverly's Mastodon Minstrels. The latter two companies introduced a new feature to minstrelsy; they substituted a free open-air band concert on the street to replace the usual parade.⁴¹

In a class by themselves were the companies playing the perennial Uncle Tom's Cabin; "Tom Shows" was a show business term applied to them.⁴² With well over fifty "Tom Shows" on the road, just three of them came to

³⁴ADT, January 23, 1890, p. 4.

³⁵ADT, December 16, 1890, p. 2.

³⁶ADT, November 14, 1890, p. 4.

³⁷ADT, November 11, 1890, p. 4.

³⁸ADT, November 2, 1892, p. 8.

³⁹ADT, April 8, 1892, p. 3.

⁴⁰ADT, May 9, 1893, p. 5.

⁴¹ADT, June 22, 1893, p. 6.

⁴²Hughes, op. cit., p. 300.

the Wheeler. The Stetson Company featuring tiny Mable Arlington as Eva played two evening performances and a matinee.⁴³ The other shows were of the "double" variety. This advertising scheme to draw crowds was used by McFadden's Mammoth Double Company as they listed two of nearly every feature of the production, plus the parade.

2 Marks, 2 Topseys, 2 donkeys, 2 Shetland ponies, 4 bloodhounds, 10 musicians, 6 jubilee singers, 1 pullman car, 20 performers. Grand free street parade, 12 o'clock, rain or shine.⁴⁴

Sutton's Monster Double Company was advertised as "The Barnum of them all" and carried thirty-two performers with doubles for all parts.⁴⁵ Confusion resulting from the fantastic double casting prompted a reviewer to write this opinion: "The old story has served a noble purpose and deserves tender treatment in his [sic] old age."⁴⁶

The big companies featuring extravaganzas and spectaculars were popular. M. B. Leavitt, leading producer of this type of show, brought his company of fifty to the Wheeler on three occasions. Charles H. Yale managed companies three times for William J. Gilmore's bookings of The Twelve Temptations and the Devil's Auction. E. E. Rice's companies appeared twice. The famed Bolossy Kiralfy Company featured The Water Queen and Henry E. Dixey brought his Adonis company once. Nick Roberts' Pantomime Company doing Humpty Dumpty had one booking.

The Kimball Opera Comique and Burlesque Company under the "sole management of Mrs. Jennie Kimball" and starring Corrine, the ex-Spanish

⁴³ADT, February 16, 1890, p. 2.

⁴⁴ADT, June 6, 1891, p. 4.

⁴⁵ADT, January 22, 1892, p. 3.

⁴⁶ADT, January 24, 1892, p. 4.

dancer, came to the Wheeler twice. Both times the company advertised sixty artists;⁴⁷ however, after the second booking, a reviewer wrote that "some forty very ordinary people," so far as talent was concerned appeared to "a much better house than they deserved." His caustic comments about the company also noted false advertising about the scenery as he wrote, "The two carloads of scenery was left in the Rio Grande yards, if they had it, as advertised."⁴⁸

Vaudeville companies were booked three different times but none came more than once. Colonel John D. Hopkins, king of the vaudeville producers, with his Boston Howard Athenaeum aggregation played a two-night stand as did Professor Herman's Trans-Atlantique Vaudevilles. Moore and Gillet's London Star Specialty Company advertised twenty-five vaudeville acts at prices of one dollar and fifty cents and one dollar for one performance. Charlie Boyd brought members of the Arnold Gardner Company, then appearing at his variety theater, the Comique, to the Wheeler for a hospital benefit.⁴⁹

Nearly all of the companies that came to the Wheeler were on tour across America and had originated in New York; a few came from the West Coast or the immediate region. Railroads to Aspen and Peter McCourt's Silver Circuit booking plan made engagements possible if companies elected to follow the general practice of playing one-night stands. Minstrel companies with annual change of specialties, and other groups of-

⁴⁷ADT, March 9, 1892, p. 3.

⁴⁸ADT, March 13, 1892, p. 4.

⁴⁹ADT, September 13, 1890, p. 4.

fering a different piece on the second night, played two-night stands, but three-night stands were seldom attempted.

Those coming most often -- usually not more than once a year -- were older companies, such as the Ellsler and Nobles troupes, well known in Aspen before the Wheeler was built. However, groups having national reputations, such as the Frohman Comedians, Leavitt's and Gilmore's extravaganza performers, played three times in five years, a good record for the Wheeler.

Fear of crossing the rugged Rockies kept some "city" companies away and probably served as an excuse to demand a price too high for an evening's "take" at the Wheeler. Possibly some companies which normally played in metropolitan areas liked the idea of having a trip to the mining towns for there was a pattern in troupe movements. A company, after playing in Denver for several days, traveled on Sunday, played the Wheeler a night or two, often took a night train to Leadville and, after a day or two there, returned to Denver ready to resume a continental tour. Sometimes the pattern was reversed, and Aspen was the last Silver Circuit stop before Denver. Perhaps some quality companies that normally did not play in small towns took the little scenic tour just to see if stories about theater life in the fabulous mining towns were true.

Although big and well-organized companies frequently sent advance agents ahead to arrange for publicity and living accommodations, performers often traveled in their own special cars, thereby solving their housing problems. This was especially true for the colored troupes.

Prices were raised for a few nationally-known and large companies such as the Bostonians. This was the exception, though, rather than the rule. The number of companies coming to the Wheeler was reduced as silver

prices fell. Theatrical touring companies were made up of people making a living "on the road" rather than in one theater or area. If a stand at the Wheeler could offer enough silver to jingle in their pockets, they came.

In 1894, April 23 and 24 fell on Tuesday and Wednesday, just as they had five years before when the glamorous opening of the Wheeler Opera House was the talk of the town. An enterprising manager might have promoted a grand celebration for the Wheeler's fifth anniversary, but the house was dark. Earlier in the month, two touring companies had punctuated the program of home town activities -- a Populist Party rally, a temperance lecture, amateur benefits for the King's Daughters and the G. A. R., plus the high school commencement exercises for two girl graduates. The Wheeler was not closed, but its use was a reminder of J. B. Wheeler's first, and perhaps prophetic, announcement in 1888 that his bank block would be furnished for a public hall -- with stage fixtures.

APPENDIX

Chronological List of Productions

The following table gives the events at the Wheeler Opera House from its opening on April 23, 1889, to April 26, 1894. The column on the left contains the initial letter for the day of the week; an asterisk denotes a matinee. The second column lists the dates of the events and in the third column are names of the company, the entertainment, the author (when possible), and the important actor or actors. Advertisements, reviews and items from social columns of the Aspen Daily Times, Volumes V through X, served as sources.

1889

T and W	April 23-24	Conried's English Comic Opera Company, <u>The King's Fool</u> by Adolph Müller.
M and T	April 29-30	Home talent, <u>Peak Sisters</u> and <u>Penelope</u> ; auspices ladies of Christian Church.
T	May 7	W. H. Power's Company, <u>The Ivy Leaf</u> by Con T. Murphy.
F	May 10	Fisk Jubilee Singers, Concert.
W and Th	May 29-30	W. J. Gilmore Company, <u>The Twelve Temptations</u> by Joseph C. Foster; W. J. Gilmore.
Th	May 30	Memorial Day services by local citizens.
Sun	June 9	Convention Reception, International Typographical Union.
M	June 17	Rhea Company, <u>Much Ado About Nothing</u> by Shakespeare; Mlle. Rhea.

1889

S	June 22	London Star Specialty Company, vaudeville; Moore and Gillet.
T and W	June 25-26	Reception and meeting, American Institute of Mining Engineers.
M	July 15	Modjeska Company, <u>As You Like It</u> by Shakespeare; Mme. Modjeska.
T	July 16	Modjeska Company, <u>Adrienne Lecouvreur</u> by Scribe and Legouve; Mme Modjeska.
Th	August 22	Rich and Harris Company, <u>Old Jed Prouty</u> by Gill and Golden; Richard Golden.
M	September 16	Edward Harrigan Company, <u>Old Lavender</u> ; Edward Harrigan.
T	September 19	Edward Harrigan Company, <u>Cordelia's Aspirations</u> ; Edward Harrigan.
M	September 23	Coghlan Company, <u>Jocelyn</u> by Charles Coghlan; Rose Coghlan.
T	September 24	Coghlan Company, <u>Forget Me Not</u> ; Rose Coghlan.
F and S	October 5-6	Yom Kippur, Jewish holiday services; local citizens.
T	October 8	Home talent concert; Baptist Church benefit.
W	October 9	Nobles Company, <u>From Sire to Son</u> by Milton Nobles; Milton and Dolly Nobles.
Th	October 10	Nobles Company, <u>Love and Law</u> by Milton Nobles; Milton and Dolly Nobles.
M and T	October 14-15	<u>The Stowaway</u> ; Marion Elmore.
W	October 23	Democratic county convention.
F	November 1	Vincent Company, <u>Our Boys</u> ; Felix and Eva Vincent.
S	November 2	Vincent Company, <u>Chip and Fogg's Ferry</u> by Callahan; Felix and Eva Vincent.
M and T	November 4-5	Hoyt Company, <u>A Brass Monkey</u> by Charles H. Hoyt; Charles Drew and Flora Walsh.

1889

- M and T November 25-26 Nick Roberts' Spectacular Pantomime Company, Humpty Dumpty by George L. Fox.
- W November 27 Patti Rosa Company, Margery Daw by Craven and Green; Patti Rosa.
- M December 2 Little Lord Fauntleroy by Frances H. Burnett; Georgie Cooper.
- S December 19 Silver Medal Elocutionary Contest.
- Sun December 15 Musical Service, Christ Episcopal Church; Reverend Alexander Allen.
- M and T December 23-24 A Bunch of Keys by Charles H. Hoyt; Louise Raymond.
- W * December 25 Moore's Art Exhibition, Victorellis and Santa Claus.
- Sun December 29 Musical Service, Christ Episcopal Church; Reverend Alexander Allen.

1890

- S January 4 Public installation, Women's Relief Corps and Winfield Scott Post, G. A. R.
- Sun January 5 People's Service, Christ Episcopal Church.
- Sun January 12 Song Service, Christ Episcopal Church.
- M January 13 Grau Comic Opera Company, The Brigands by Offenbach; Marie Greenwood.
- T January 14 Grau Comic Opera Company, Amorita; Marie Greenwood.
- W January 15 Grismer-Davis Company, The Tigress by Ramsy Morris; Joseph Grismer and Phoebe Davies.
- Th January 16 Grismer-Davis Company, The World Against Her by Frank Harvey; Joseph Grismer and Phoebe Davies.
- M January 20 James Company, Virginius by Sheridan Knowles; Louis James.

1890

T	January 21	James Company, <u>Othello</u> by Shakespeare; Louis James.
Th	January 23	W. S. Cleveland Company, Haverly Minstrels.
F and S	January 31- February 1	Knight Company, <u>Over the Garden Wall</u> ; Mrs. George Knight.
Sun	February 2	People's Service, Christ Episcopal Church.
T and W	February 4-5	Hoyt Company, <u>A Hole in the Ground</u> by Charles H. Hoyt.
M and T	February 10-11	Leavitt Burlesque Company, <u>The Spider and the Fly</u> by Frazer and Gill.
F, S*,S	February 14-15	Stetson Company, <u>Uncle Tom's Cabin</u> by Stowe, Aiken version.
T	February 18	Home talent musical, Christ Episcopal Church.
W	February 19	Reed Company, <u>The Woman Hater</u> by D. D. Lloyd; Roland Reed.
Sun	February 23	People's Service, Christ Episcopal Church.
M and T	February 24-25	J. M. Hill Union Square Theatre Company, <u>A Possible Case</u> by Sydney Rosenfeld.
Sun	March 2	People's Service, Christ Episcopal Church.
F	March 7	Chamber of Commerce, public meeting to raise funds to advertise Aspen.
W	March 12	James O'Neill Company, <u>The Count of Monte Cristo</u> by Alexander Dumas; James O'Neill.
F and S	March 14-15	Rice Company, <u>Evangeline</u> by E. E. Rice.
F	March 21	<u>Out of Bondage</u> by Reverend Joseph Bradford; the Hyer sisters.
M and T	March 24-25	The Postage Stamp Company, <u>A Social Session</u> .

M March 30
Th April 3
S April 5
Sun April 6
T April 8
W April 9
F April 11
M April 12
T * April 13
T April 14
Th April 15
F * April 17
T April 18
T May 13
W May 14
Th May 15
F May 16
S May 24

1890

Sun	May 25	Memorial Services, auspices of Winfield Scott Post, G. A. R.
T	May 27	Ellsler Company, <u>The Governess</u> by E. J. Swartz; Effie Ellsler.
W	May 28	Ellsler Company, <u>Egypt</u> by Edward Sheldon; Effie Ellsler.
Th	May 29	Home talent, W. R. C.
Th	June 5	<u>A Long Lane: or Pine Meadow</u> by Sedley Brown.
F	June 6	Illustrated lecture, "The Homes of England" by The Great Cromwell.
S	June 7	Illustrated lecture, "Paris, the Beautiful City" by The Great Cromwell.
Sun	June 8	Illustrated lecture, "The World's Fair and Paris Exposition" by The Great Cromwell.
M	June 9	Katie Emmett Company, <u>The Waifs of New York</u> ; Katie Emmett.
M	June 16	<u>Shenandoah</u> by Bronson Howard; original New York cast and Frank Carlyle.
T and W	June 17-18	Joseph Haworth Company, <u>Paul Kauvar</u> by Steele MacKay; Joseph Haworth.
T and W	June 24-25	Professor Herrmann's Trans-Atlantic Vaudevilles.
F	June 27	Boxing matches, Jack Dempsey, the NonPareil.
Th, F*, F	July 3-4	Richards and Pringle Company, Georgia Minstrels.
M	July 7	Public installation of I. O. O. F. Lodge by Aspen Lodge No. 59 and Silver City Lodge No. 92.
T	July 8	<u>Held by the Enemy</u> by Gillette. Did not appear - scenery burned in Walker Opera House fire in Salt Lake City.
Sun	July 13	Illustrated lecture of Johnstown flood, hospital benefit.

1890

M	July 14	William A. Brady Company, <u>After Dark</u> by Dion Boucicault; Bobby Gaylor.
F	July 18	Home talent concert, Mrs. J. A. Small.
M	August 11	The California Opera Company, <u>Olivette</u> by Audran.
T	August 12	The California Opera Company, <u>La Mascott.</u>
F	August 29	Home talent, King's Daughters.
T	September 9	<u>Lady Peggy</u> ; Nellie McHenry.
F	September 12	Arnold-Gardner Vaudeville Company, hospital benefit arranged by Charlie Boyd of the Comique Theatre.
M	September 29	Robert Mantell Company, <u>Monbars</u> by Adolph D'Ennery; Robert Mantell.
T	September 30	Robert Mantell Company, <u>Othello</u> by Shakespeare; Robert Mantell.
M	October 6	W. J. Scanlan Company, <u>Myles Aroon</u> by Augustus Pitou; W. J. Scanlan.
F	October 10	Rose Coghlan Company, <u>Peg Woffington</u> by Charles Reade; Rose Coghlan.
S	October 11	Rose Coghlan Company, <u>London Assurance</u> by Dion Boucicault; Rose Coghlan.
T	October 14	Democratic meeting.
W	October 15	Hoyt Company, <u>A Midnight Bell</u> by Charles H. Hoyt.
F	October 17	Hoyt Company, <u>A Brass Monkey</u> by Charles H. Hoyt.
M	October 20	<u>A Child of Naples</u> by Adolph D'Ennery; Alexander Salvini.
T	October 21	<u>Don Caesar de Bazan</u> by Adolph D'Ennery; Alexander Salvini.
W	October 22	Henry E. Dixey Company, <u>Adonis</u> by E. E. Rice; Henry E. Dixey.

1890

- F October 24 Home talent, Temple of Fame; Ladies of Baptist Church.
- M October 27 Republican meeting; Governor Routt, speaker.
- F and S October 31-
November 1 Beacon Lights.
- W November 5 Aamold Concert Company, child pianist Louie Elbel, benefit for Father Downey and new Catholic Church.
- Th November 13 Goodyear, Elitch and Schilling, Minstrel.
- T November 18 The Carleton Opera Company, Nanon by Geneé.
- M November 24 Home talent, benefit for Presbyterian Church.
- M December 1 Hanlon Volter Company, pantomime and novelty.
- Th December 4 Grismer-Davis Company, Lights and Shadows by Charles Gaylor; Phoebe and Joseph Grismer.
- M December 8 Edward E. Rice Company, Rice's World's Fair.
- F December 13 Home talent concert by Ladies of Episcopal Church.
- M December 22 W. S. Cleveland Company, Minstrel.
- S December 27 Louis James Company, Ingomar by Marie Anne Lovall; Louis James.

1891

- T January 6 Abbott English Opera Company, Bohemian Girl by Balfe; Emma Abbott. Cancelled due to Emma Abbott's death in Salt Lake City.
- F January 9 Donnelly and Girard Company, Natural Gas; Nellie Price Dow.
- M January 12 W. W. Fowler and Wm. Warrington, The Corsair by Rice and Braham.

1891

T	January 20	William A. Brady Company, <u>The Clemenceau Case</u> by Alexander Dumas. Cancelled due to scenery and costumes in baggage car left in Red Cloud, Nebraska.
S	January 31	Kimball Opera Comique and Burlesque Company, burlesque of <u>Carmen</u> by Alexander Bizet; Corinne.
M	February 2	Charles Frohman Company, <u>The Private Secretary</u> by William Gillette.
S	February 7	<u>Ole Olson</u> ; Robert L. Scott.
M	February 9	<u>Little Lord Fauntleroy</u> by Frances H. Burnett; Georgie Cooper.
W	February 18	Patti Rosa Company, <u>Imp</u> by Fred Marsden and Clay M. Greene; Patti Rosa.
S	February 21	Bolossy Kiralfy Company, <u>Water Queen</u> .
T	March 3	Denman Thompson and George W. Ryer, <u>The Two Sisters</u> by Charlotte Lennox.
W	March 11	<u>The World</u> by J. C. Little; J. C. Little.
F	March 14	The Bostonians, <u>Fatinitza</u> by Von Suppé.
M	March 16	E. D. Stairs' Company, <u>A Barrel of Money</u> ; Gracie Emmett.
W	March 18	Hoyt Company, <u>A Texas Steer</u> by Charles H. Hoyt.
S	March 21	Sprague's Comedians, <u>A Social Session</u> .
Th	March 26	W. S. Cleveland Company, Cleveland's Consolidated Minstrels.
T and W	March 31- April 1	"Phenomena," exhibition of mind reading and feats of strength; Martha and Charles Steen.
Th	April 2	Home talent benefit concert, <u>Titania</u> ; Band of Hope.
S	April 4	J. C. Lewis Company, <u>Si Plunkard</u> .
M	April 6	Republican ratification meeting.

1891

- S April 11 Ellsler Company, Miss Manning by James Runyan; Effie Ellsler and Frank Weston.
- Sun April 12 Lecture, "Progress and Christianity," benefit for Catholic Church; Right Reverend N. C. Matz.
- Sun * April 19 Mass meeting for miners to explain hospital contribution benefits.
- T April 21 Milton Nobles Company, From Sire to Son by Milton Nobles; Milton and Dollie Nobles.
- F April 24 Wanted - the Earth; John Dillion.
- Th April 30 Katie Emmett Company, Waifs of New York; Katie Emmett.
- S May 16 Home talent, East Lynne.
- F May 22 Lillian Lewis Company, Credit Lorraine by Lawrence Marston; Lillian Lewis.
- S May 23 Lillian Lewis Company, As In A Looking Glass by Lawrence Marston; Lillian Lewis.
- Sun May 24 Union Memorial Services, auspices G. A. R. and W. R. C.
- F May 27 George C. Staley Company, A Royal Pass.
- Th June 4 Aspen High School Commencement exercises.
- M June 8 McFadden's Mammoth Double Uncle Tom's Cabin Company, Uncle Tom's Cabin by Stowe, Aiken version.
- T June 9 Illustrated lecture, "Paris, the Magnificent" by H. H. Ragan.
- W June 10 Illustrated lecture, "A Trip to Alaska" by H. H. Ragan.
- Th June 11 Illustrated lecture, "Ramblings in Rome" by H. H. Ragan.
- F June 12 Charles H. Yale Company, Twelve Temptations by Charles H. Yale; W. J. Gilmore.
- S June 13 Illustrated lecture, "Yosemite and Yellowstone" by H. H. Ragan.

1891

M	June 15	Reed Company, <u>Lend Me Your Wife</u> by Dion Boucicault; Roland Reed.
S	June 20	Abbie Carrington Grand Opera Company, <u>The Rose of Castile</u> by Balfe; hospital benefit.
T	June 23	Public meeting about silver prices.
M	June 29	Frank W. Sanger Company, <u>Mr. Barnes of New York</u> by A. C. Gunter.
Th	July 16	New York Bijou Theater Company, <u>City Directory</u> ; Russell's comedians.
M and T	July 20-21	<u>Starlight</u> ; Vernona Jarbeaux.
Th	August 6	Lecture, "Big Blunders" by Reverend T. DeWitt Talmage.
M	August 31	<u>The Messenger</u> , benefit for Episcopal Church.
Th	September 3	Goodyear, Elitch and Schilling Company, minstrel.
T, W, Th	September 8-9-10	Grand Lodge Convention, Knights of Pythias.
F	September 11	<u>Incog</u> by Mrs. R. Pacheco; Charles Dickson.
F	September 25	<u>Richard III</u> by Shakespeare; Thomas W. Keene.
M	September 28	Evans and Hoey Company, <u>A Parlor Match</u> by Charles H. Hoyt.
S *, S	October 3	W. S. Cleveland Company, minstrel.
T	October 12	Wilbur Company, <u>The Planter's Wife</u> ; James McCann and Lizzie Kendall.
W	October 13	Wilbur Company, <u>Streets of New York</u> by Dion Boucicault; James McCann and Lizzie Kendall.
Th *	October 14	Wilbur Company, <u>The Two Orphans</u> by Adolph D'Ennery.
Th	October 14	Wilbur Company, <u>Escaped From the Law</u> ; Lizzie Kendall.

1891

F	October 16	Home talent, <u>Frou Frou</u> by Meilhac and Halévy; benefit.
M	October 18	<u>The Nominee</u> ; Nat C. Goodwin.
F	October 23	Cosgrove and Grant Company, <u>The Dazzler</u> ; Kate Castleton.
T	October 27	<u>The Hustler</u> by Lew Rosen.
M * and M	November 2	Concert, P. S. Gilmore Band.
Th	November 12	Lillian Lewis Company, <u>Credit Lorraine</u> by Lawrence Marston; Lillian Lewis.
F	November 13	Home talent benefit operetta, <u>Elma</u> ; Band of Hope.
M	November 16	The Goldens, <u>Fate</u> by Bartley Campbell; Bella Golden.
T	November 17	The Goldens, <u>Our Bachelors</u> by Harry Robinson.
Th and F	November 26-27	<u>Lost in London</u> ; Newton Beers.
Th	December 3	<u>Yon Yonson</u> by Jacob Litt; Gus Heege.
F	December 5	<u>The Two Orphans</u> by Adolph D'Ennery; Kate Claxton.
M	December 7	<u>The Old Homestead</u> by Denman Thompson and George W. Ryer.
Th	December 10	<u>Dr. Bill</u> ; adapted by Hamilton Aide.
F	December 11	Charles H. Yale Company, <u>Devil's Auction</u> by William J. Gilmore.
T, W, Th	December 15-16-17	Western Colorado Congress, Western Slope silver advocates.
T	December 22	Home talent, <u>East Lynne</u> , Tayleure adaption; King's Daughters benefit.
Th	December 24	Fowler and Warmington Company, <u>Skipped by the Light of the Moon</u> .
M	December 28	<u>Sport McAllister</u> ; Bobby Gaylor.

1892

M	January 4	William A Brady Company, <u>The Clenenceau Case</u> by Alexander Dumas; Sybil Johnstone.
F	January 8	Grismer-Davis Company, <u>The Burglar</u> by Augustus Thomas; Joseph Grismer and Phoebe Davies.
S	January 9	Frank Savage Stock Company, <u>Mr. Potter of Texas</u> by A. C. Gunter.
S	January 23	Sutton's Monster Double Uncle Tom's Cabin Company, <u>Uncle Tom's Cabin</u> by Stowe.
W	January 27	<u>Honest Hearts and Willing Hands</u> by Duncan B. Harrison; John L. Sullivan vs. Jack Ashton in three-round glove contest, Duncan B. Harrison.
M	February 8	W. T. Carleton Opera Company, <u>Indigo</u> by Strauss.
T	February 9	Maggie Mitchell Company, <u>Little Maverick</u> by C. T. Dazey; Maggie Mitchell.
S	February 13	<u>The Lion's Mouth</u> by H. G. Carleton; Frederick Warde.
Th	March 3	Patti Rosa Company, <u>Dolly Varden</u> by Charles T. Vincent; Patti Rosa.
S	March 12	Kimball Comic and Burlesque Company, <u>Carmen Up To Data</u> ; Corrine.
M	March 14	Charles Frohman's Company, <u>Mr. Wilkinson's Widows</u> by William Gillette; Joseph Holland, Mrs. Georgie Drew Barrymore and Thomas Burns.
F	March 18	Home talent benefit, Aspen Juvenile Opera Company, <u>A Dress Rehearsal</u> ; auspices of Methodist Church.
M	March 28	<u>As You Like It</u> by Shakespeare; Miss Gale and Creston Clarke.
W	April 13	Reno and Ford's Comedians, <u>Joshua Simpkins</u> .
F	April 15	Richards and Pringle Company, <u>Georgia Minstrels</u> ; Billy Kersands.

1892

S	April 23	Ellsler Company, <u>Hazel Kirke</u> by Steele MacKaye; Effie Ellsler.
T	April 24	Home talent, I. O. O. F. celebration.
S	May 7	Charles Frohman Company, <u>Jane</u> ; original New York cast.
T	May 17	Concert, Colorado State University Glee and Banjo Club.
T	May 24	Fisk Jubilee Singers, concert, auspices of ladies of First Presbyterian Church.
S	May 28	Miller Brothers Company, <u>Kajunka</u> ; pantomime.
Sun	May 29	Memorial Sunday Services, local citizens.
M	May 30	Memorial Day Services, Upton Post, G. A. R.
S	June 11	Donnelly and Girard Company, <u>Natural Gas</u> ; Amy Ames.
M	June 13	<u>The County Fair</u> by Charles Barnard and Neil Burgess; Neil Burgess.
F, S *, S	June 17-18	Eckert Heck Troubadours, repertoire of special comedies; Emma Berg.
W	June 22	Haverly's Mastodon Minstrels.
Th	June 23	<u>Hoss and Hoss</u> ; Charlie Reed and William Collier.
M, T, W, Th	July 11-12-13-14	Eckert Opera Company, <u>Olivette</u> by Audran; Emma Berg.
M, T, W, Th	July 18-19-20-21	Eckert Opera Company, <u>Chimes of Normandy</u> by Planquette; Emma Berg.
F and S	July 22-23	Eckert Opera Company, <u>H. M. S. Pinafore</u> by Gilbert and Sullivan; Emma Berg.
W	July 27	Gorton's Famous New Orleans Minstrels.
T	August 9	Daniels Company, <u>Little Puck</u> ; Frank Daniels.

1892

W	August 10	<u>A Night at the Circus</u> by H. G. Donnelly; Nellie McHenry.
T	August 16	Marshall's Military Band Concert cancelled.
Th	August 18	Home talent, <u>The Confederate Spy</u> ; Company C, National Guard.
W	August 24	Concert, Mendelssohn Male Quartet from Denver assisted by local talent.
Th	September 29	<u>McFee of Dublin</u> by Charles T. Vincent and John T. Kelly; John T. Kelly and Florrie West.
F	October 7	Jacob Litt and Thomas H. Davis, directors, <u>The Ensign</u> by William Haworth.
T	October 11	Duff Opera Company, <u>The Gondoliers</u> by Gilbert and Sullivan; Helen Bertram.
F	October 21	Home talent, Columbus Day celebration, school children, W. R. C. and G. A. R.
S	October 22	Fowler and Warmington Company, <u>Skipped by the Light of the Moon</u> ; Charles J. Hogan and George Booker.
M	October 24	Campaign Speech, Senator Teller.
Th	October 27	Political rally, H. H. Eddy, speaker.
F	October 28	Nobles Company, <u>For Revenue Only</u> by Milton Nobles; Milton and Dollie Nobles.
S	October 29	Nobles Company, <u>A Son of Thespis</u> by Milton Nobles; Milton and Dollie Nobles.
S	November 5	Republican rally, Belford, speaker.
M	November 7	Charles E. Schilling Company, minstrels.
Th	November 10	<u>Renee De Moray</u> by D'Ennery; Clara Morris.
Sun	November 13	Medium, Dr. Cooke.
Th	November 17	Patti Rosa Company, <u>Miss Dixie</u> ; Patti Rosa, benefit for Elks.

1892

- T November 29 Home talent, The Drunkard's Doom.
- W November 30 Harry W. Williams Comedy Company, Bill's Boot; Joseph Sullivan and Larry Smith.
- F December 16 Jolly Surprise by Arthur Wallack; preceded by Offenbach's The Little Broom Sellers; Fanny Rice.
- W December 21 U and I by James L. Lederer; George P. Murphy.
- T December 27 Home talent, By Force of Impulse.
- S December 31 Home talent, concert, Christian Church benefit.

1893

- M January 2 O. W. Haywood Company, New England Folks by Sol. Smith Russell; Alba Haywood.
- F January 6 Katie Putnam Company, An Unclaimed Express Package.
- Th January 12 The Spider and the Fly by M. B. Leavitt; Louise Royce.
- F and S January 13-14 Home talent, The Merry Milkmaids; Methodist Church benefit.
- M January 30 American Dramatic Company, Incog by Mrs. Pacheco; Charles Dickson.
- S February 4 Turner's English Girls Company, Cleopatra, burlesque.
- T February 7 Home talent, Silver City Dramatic Club, Woodcock's Little Game and Word of Honor.
- T February 14 Bill Nye, humorist, and A. P. Burbank, monologist.
- W February 15 Baroness Blanc Company, Deception, adaption of Le Demi Monde by Alexander Dumas; Baroness Blanc.
- T February 28 Home talent, The Irish Doctor by Walter Owen; benefit for widow of snow slide victim.

1893

Th	March 2	Trans Atlantic Company, <u>Fun on the Bristol</u> ; John F. Sheridan.
F	March 3	Atkinson Comedy Company, <u>Peck's Bad Boy</u> ; Fred Wenzel and Jennie Schuman.
T	March 7	E. A. McFarland Company, <u>The Old Home- stead</u> by Denman Thompson.
M	March 20	Home talent, <u>The Henrietta</u> by Bronson Howard; benefit for widow of mine accident victim.
S	March 25	<u>A Turkish Bath</u> ; Marie Heath.
W	March 29	Home talent, <u>Cinderella</u> , burlesque.
W	April 5	Henshaw and Ten Broeck Company, <u>The Nabobs</u> .
Th	April 6	Greenwall Company, <u>Larry, the Lord</u> ; R. E. Graham and Marie Lawrence.
T	April 11	Miss Annie Eva Fay in a scientific seance on spiritualism and theosophy.
W	April 12	Florence Company, <u>The Mighty Dollar</u> by Benjamin Woolf; Mrs. W. J. Florence and Howard Coveney.
S	April 15	Ellsler Company, <u>Hazel Kirke</u> by Steele MacKaye; Effie Ellsler (farewell tour).
M	April 17	Calhoun Opera Company, <u>Said Pasha</u> by Daniel Auber; Laura Millard.
T	April 18	Calhoun Opera Company, <u>Bocaccio</u> .
M	April 22	Home talent, <u>The Henrietta</u> by Bronson Howard.
S	April 27	<u>Gentleman Jack</u> ; James J. Corbett, boxer who knocked out John L. Sullivan.
T	May 2	Lecture, Louis F. Post.
W	May 3	Stark's Austro Hungarian Orchestra, concert.
T	May 9	Primrose and West Company, minstrel.

1893

Th	May 11	The Lilliputions, <u>The Little Countess</u> by Charles Gaylor; <u>Countess Magri</u> , original Mrs. General Tom Thumb (farewell tour).
S	May 20	<u>The King of the Turf</u> ; cancelled when company disbanded in Denver May 14.
W	May 24	<u>The Prodigal Father</u> ; Carmencita.
S	May 27	<u>The Idea</u> by Hallen and Hart; Al Wilson.
Sun	May 28	Memorial Sunday services.
T	May 30	Memorial Day services.
M and T	June 12-13	Boston Howard Athenaeum Specialty Company, vaudeville.
Sun	June 18	Miss May Howard, English medium.
Th	June 22	<u>O'Dowd's Neighbors</u> by Mark Murphy.
F	June 30	Home talent, <u>Cinderella</u> , burlesque.
F	August 11	Home talent, musicians' charity concert, Chamber of Commerce benefit.
M	September 3	Home talent, Labor Day program, Daggett's opera house orchestra.
S	September 30	Miners' mass meeting.
M	October 2	Businessmen's meeting.
W	October 4	Mass meeting, miners and mine laborers.
F	October 6	Litt and Davis Company, <u>A Nutmeg Match</u> by William Haworth (no review - may not have played).
F	October 13	Home talent musicians' charity concert, for Chamber of Commerce.
T	October 24	Grand Populist Rally, Governor Waite, speaker.
Th	November 2	Aspen Antipartisan Equal Suffrage League.
M	November 6	Populist Party Rally.

1893

- F November 24 Barlow Brothers Mammoth Minstrel Company.
- M November 27 Friends by Edwin Milton Royle.
- T December 5 Fowler and Warmington's Comedians,
Skipped by the Light of the Moon;
cancelled due to storms in mountains -
troupe could not make railroad connections.
- T December 12 Home talent concert, Apollo Club, Cham-
ber of Commerce benefit to alleviate
destitution.

1894

- M January 8 American Dramatic Company, Admitted to
the Bar by Charles Klein; Charles Dickson.
- Th January 11 Patti Rosa Company, Miss Dixie; Patti
Rosa.
- F January 19 Home talent, G. A. R. benefit entertain-
ment.
- S February 3 James O'Neill Company, The Count of Monte
Cristo by Alexander Dumas; James O'Neill.
- W February 7 McFee of Dublin by Charles T. Vincent and
John T. Kelly; John T. Kelly.
- W February 14 Home talent, Aspen Specialty Company,
including Daggett's Band and Aspen Man-
dolin Club, King's Daughters benefit.
- Th February 22 Daniels Company, Little Puck; Frank
Daniels and Bessie Sanson.
- T March 6 Ole Olson.
- S March 10 Home talent, Rebecca's Triumph; King's
Daughters benefit.
- T March 20 Ellsler Company, Doris by Robert Drouet;
Effie Ellsler.
- T April 3 Populist Rally.
- W April 4 Home talent, Rio Grande; King's
Daughters benefit.

1894

F	April 6	Freeman's Fun Makers, <u>A Railroad Ticket</u> by Charles E. Blaney.
S	April 7	Temperance lecture.
S	April 14	Home talent, <u>The Southern Spy</u> ; benefit G. A. R. encampment fund.
M	April 16	High School Commencement exercises.
S	April 20	M. B. Leavitt Company, <u>The Spider and the Fly</u> by M. B. Leavitt.
Th	April 26	I. O. O. F. 75th Anniversary exercises.

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