A History of Theatrical Activity in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1819-1900

Alban Fordesh Varnado

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A HISTORY OF THEATRICAL ACTIVITY
IN BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA, 1819-1900

A Thesis

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

The Department of Speech

by

Alban Fordeh Varnado
B.A., Louisiana State University, 1941
June, 1947
MANUSCRIPT THESES

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The writer wishes to express his appreciation to Dr. Claude L. Shaver for suggesting, advising and directing the work of this thesis. He would also like to thank the personnel of the following libraries for assistance in finding newspaper material pertaining to his subject: Louisiana State University Library, Newspaper stacks; Louisiana State Museum Library, New Orleans; and Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi.
The purpose of this study was to discover (1) the amount of theatrical activity in Baton Rouge, Louisiana during the nineteenth century; (2) the nature of the activity; (3) the names of productions and of persons connected with the production; and (4) the development of the theatre in Baton Rouge as compared with that of other Southern towns.

The main source of information was the newspapers of the period. The earliest available papers were for 1819 so that date was taken as the starting point of the study. The study was terminated at 1900 partly because it marked the turn of the century but chiefly because a new theatre was built at that time which marked a new era in the theatrical history of Baton Rouge.

The study may be summarized as follows: (1) in 1821 the first stock company appeared; (2) for some years after that time theatrical activity consisted largely of readings, recitations, and concerts; (3) in 1833 the first showboat visited the town; (4) in 1841, the first amateur organization was formed; (5) in 1847 the first minstrel company appeared; (6) during the Civil War the theatre flourished under the sponsorship first of the Confederate troops,
then under the Union forces after the occupation of the
town in 1862; (7) in 1865 Pike's Hall, the theatre which
was to be the center of theatrical activity until 1900,
was constructed; (8) during its thirty-five years of exist-
ence Pike's Hall played host to many theatrical companies
which grew from small repertory companies to large compan-
ies playing spectacular productions of one performance
each.
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INTRODUCTION

The city of Baton Rouge, Louisiana is situated on the east bank of the Mississippi River about ninety miles north of New Orleans. From the time of its discovery in the early part of the eighteenth century by the French explorers Bienville and Iberville as a small Indian village, the city has grown to a metropolis of 110,000 people. During the majority of its history the city has been an important center in the development and growth of the state, and has been the capitol city of the state for most of its history.

The main problem of this study has been to unearth the records of theatrical activity in Baton Rouge; to discover how frequently theatrical entertainments were given, who gave them, where they were given, and how they fitted into the whole scheme of the town's growth.

The study has been developed along chronological lines because it was desired to discover the sequence, frequency and nature of performances, and this form seemed best suited for the handling of the problem. Newspaper accounts comprise the chief source of information for the study. In some instances the newspaper source has been supplemented with a further explanation from other sources; this was done when it was felt that more clarification or
expansion of a particular point was needed. Use of additional sources was, however, held to a minimum because the purpose of this study was to provide an outline or skeleton frame upon which future studies might be based.

Newspaper records of Baton Rouge were available as far back as 1819, and the study necessarily begins at that date. For the most part the newspaper collections were reasonably complete although in several instances there were gaps of as many as ten years. The newspapers were found in libraries at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, in the State Museum at New Orleans, and in the Department of History and Archives in Jackson, Mississippi.

The history of the theatre in Baton Rouge is continuous from the beginnings to the present. There are no natural divisions of the material. However, in order to make the treatment of the material more malleable, the study was arbitrarily divided into four sections of approximately twenty years each. These sections together with a concluding section, form the five chapters of the study.

There have been numerous studies of the theatres of all periods in New Orleans, Louisiana and in Natchez and Vicksburg, Mississippi; Baton Rouge might be considered as the geographical center of these two, and a center of theatre about which no study has heretofore been made. This study was made with the purpose of initiating research and investigation into an unexplored territory, and it is hoped that further studies will be made to complete the entire picture of theatrical history for this area.
CHAPTER I
1819-1845

The first available information about theatrical activity in Baton Rouge was found in the Baton Rouge Gazette of April 17, 1819, and concerned a performance at the Court House by an East Indian juggler named Sena Sama. He had appeared in December, 1817, at St. John's Hall in New York and at the Social Garden in Brooklyn;¹ between March 29 and April 6, 1819, he had appeared in Natchez, Mississippi.² In addition to feats of juggling and other tricks, he swallowed a sword, 22 inches in length, and pledged himself to thrust it down his throat the entire length.³

On August 24, 1819,⁴ Baton Rouge was visited by the Olympic Circus, which was under the management of Messrs. Joseph Beriyeaux & Company. The performance consisted of a representation of horsemanship, of feats of agility, and of the trampoline. This circus exhibited on the lot

³Baton Rouge Gazette, April 17, 1819.
⁴Ibid, August 24, 1819.
owed by Mr. Aubert, on Church Street.

By May of 1821, Baton Rouge had acquired a theatre and a company to play in it. The theatre building must have been fairly large because it boasted a pit, boxes, and a gallery. The company came from the theatre at Natchez and was managed by W. Jones. Very little is known about the actors in the company other than their names, and a newspaper account of their performances in Baton Rouge. A review of their first appearance appeared in the Baton Rouge Gazette of June 2, 1821.

We were gratified on Saturday (May 26) by a visit to the Theatre to observe the neatness and convenience with which the manager, Mr. Jones, had in so short a time decorated his house. This rational, and to us novel amusement, was opened by the appropriate Comedy of the "Soldier's Daughter", and we must be permitted to say that the performance far exceeded our expectations; Mr. Jones supported the character of Gov. Heartell to entire satisfaction. Frank Heartell was well personated by Mr. Price. - In the part of Timothy Quaint, Mr. Carr certainly excelled. - Mr. Boyle supported his part well. Widow Cheerly the Soldier's Daughter was in one opinion, never better personated on any stage, than it was by Mrs. Price on this occasion... The after piece of Turn Out, or the Enraged Politician, afforded much amusement; the character of Restive was well supported by Mr. Boyle. - The part of Doct. Fruckle lost none of its interest in being personated by Mr. Jones. - Gregory was admirably played by Mr. Carr. - Mr. Price did not meet our expectations in Forage. - Mrs. Price's manner of playing Marian Ramsay, excited and certainly deserved the highest applause—indeed it would be impossible to say too much in praise of this interesting actress.

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5Baton Rouge Gazette, June 2, 1821.
On Monday evening (May 28) the Honey Moor was played to a crowded and fashionable audience. The parts in general were well sustained, and the repeated applause of the audience, evinced their satisfaction.

On Thursday (May 31) the Comedy of the "Stranger" was represented, in which the efforts of the company to deserve the patronage of the citizens of Baton Rouge seem not to have been relaxed, and although there was no boisterous demonstrations of pleasure evinced on the part of the audience, I am induced to believe that it originated more from a distaste for the piece, itself, than from any defect in the performance. Mr. Price certainly deserves much credit for the masterly manner in which he supported the part of the stranger; it is but candid to say that Mr. Jones in the character of Baron Steinfort has barely reached mediocrity; Mrs. Price in Mrs. Haller fully justified the expectations which her first appearance created, the character was admirably sustained.... The performance this evening was concluded by the laughable and much admired farce of the "Romp", it passed off with much eclat and the characters were generally well sustained, and although we do not intend to remark particularly on the performance, we must in justice to Mrs. Price say, that the character of Pricilla Tomboy was personated in a manner, which reflects the highest credit on the years and experience of this inestimable actress.

The fact that The Stranger was not well received is substantiated by another account in the same paper which was submitted by someone who signed the initials J.H.J. & Co.

We happened in at the Theatre on Thursday evening in time to witness the last scene of the Stranger, by Kotzhus, we recollect enough of the piece, to wish that it might forever be banished the American stage; when dressed cut with most of the virtues that are susceptible of, as personified in Mrs. Haller, our very sympathies are enlisted in favor of guilt. Mrs. Price gave full effect to her part, and looked charmingly in her distress.

We were compensated in staying for the afterpiece; Mrs. Price's Pricilla Tomboy was played to life, and if we admired her under the influence of Melpomene in the play, we in the afterpiece confessed her Thalia's favorite. Carr was pleasing in Watty Cockny, and Boyle in Barnacle amused. The company tonte ensemble we are firmly of opinion did their best, and that no one had a right to complain, and we assure the good
people of this good town that where all is given, nothing more can be had, and therefore they should be satisfied. We confess ourselves so much pleased that we shall see them again.

On June 4, the attraction was "Home's celebrated Tragedy, in 5 acts, called Douglas, or the Noble Shepherd," and the "laughable farce in 2 acts, called The Sleeping Draught."

In the fall of 1821 the troupe returned for a series of performances; the first presentation, on Monday evening, Nov. 12, consisted of The Soldier's Daughter, and The Spilled Child. On Nov. 26, 1821, on the bill for the eighth and last performance were The Stranger and The Budget of Blunders.

In 1821, Mr. Caldwell of the American Theatre in New Orleans visited Baton Rouge, and procured a lot on which he proposed to build a theatre. However, as late as November, 1822, Mr. Caldwell had not built the theatre and there is no evidence to show that he did build it.

At this point it might be well to include a description of Baton Rouge as a town in 1822 as reported in the columns of the Baton Rouge Republic for April 9, 1922.

The town of Baton Rouge is pleasantly situated on a high and handsome bluff on the east bank of the Miss-

6Ibid, June 2, 1821.
7Ibid, Nov. 10, 1821
8Ibid, Nov. 24, 1821.
9Baton Rouge Republic, June 18, 1821.
issippi about one hundred and twenty miles above New Orleans, and in the parish of East Baton Rouge, of which it is the seat of justice....The boulevard on which is located the market-house and a branch of the Louisiana State Bank is one hundred and twenty feet wide. The streets, which are fifty and sixty feet in width, are regularly laid out, crossing each other at right angles, and generally planted with rows of Chinatrees, which not only adds much to the beauty of the village, but affords an agreeable and pleasant shade. A considerable proportion of the inhabitants are Americans... the houses are principally frame buildings, many of which are neatly painted, and have handsomely enclosed and well cultivated gardens attached to them..... A number of brick and wooden buildings have been lately erected, and many more are now building; there is nevertheless room for enterprise and improvement in almost every branch of business.....

A partial inventory in 1822 would show that there were in the town 257 white families, 14 black families, 178 private houses, 10 new buildings, 1 theatre, 1 bank, 1 Catholic Church, 1 courthouse-post office. The population of the Parish of East Baton Rouge was divided as follows: 355 1/4 free white males, 2386 free white females, 2166 male slaves, 200 1/4 female slaves, 98 free colored male persons, 126 free colored female persons and 513 foreigners, soldiers, etc. 10

In December of 1822, the theatre used by W. Jones and his company in 1821 was taken over by William F. Kummer and fitted up for the purpose of giving Public Balls. A moveable floor was laid over the Pit, and the Hall, which was handsomely decorated, was capable of containing two hundred persons. 11

10 Baton Rouge Republic, April 9, 1822.
For the next few years accounts of legitimate theatrical activity in Baton Rouge were practically non-existent. Information about entertainments which may have taken place is sketchy because of the incomplete files of the newspapers of that time. The following survey of the period will, therefore, be sketchy also.

In February, 1823, Mrs. M'Bride and her daughters gave a program of Concert and Recitations. In May and June, 1823, Mr. Dwyer, a comedian, appeared at Madame Légendre's Hotel. Dwyer also played in Natchez about this time, and Joseph Miller Free, in his dissertation on Natchez, had this to report about him:

Dwyer, a comedian of Irish birth, who had arrived in New York in 1810, was a polished gentleman, and had formerly been successful—"in light dashing comedy -- almost faultless". But by 1823 he had grown obese and his present tour was unsuccessful because of the Southerners who had already seen such capable actors as Caldwell in the same comedy roles.

The next mention of an entertainment in the town appeared in the Baton Rouge Gazette of March 10, 1827, and concerned an exhibition by a Mrs. J.W. Green, but the nature of the exhibition was never disclosed.

In the Baton Rouge Gazette of May 3, 1828, an advertisement announced that Brown's circus would play on

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12 Ibid., Feb. 1, 1823
13 Ibid, June 2, 1923
14 Free, op. cit., p. 162
May 8, 9, and 10, and would present vaulting, tumbling, dancing, singing, farces, etc. by the company. The names of the company were Lewis, Myers, Sergeant, Burns, Johnstone, Birdsall, S. Lipman, M. Lipman. Also featured was "that wonderful horse", Rob Roy. In the Gazette for Nov. 29, 1828, appeared an advertisement for Monsieur and Madame Robert who were to give an exhibition of skill and magic on Nov. 29 and 31 at Madame Legendre's Hotel. The Roberts were jugglers who had appeared in the interval between the opera and the new "equestrian drama" presented at the Park Theatre, New York, on April 21, 1825.15

On Sept. 10, 1831, Mrs. Aristippe commenced a series of recitations at Madame Legendre's Hotel.16 Mr. Aristippe was a pupil of the Talma School of Tragedy, and his programs were composed of the readings of tragedies and comic recitations.

On March 26, 1832, the Yeaman Circus played in Baton Rouge, and presented a variety of pleasing Gymnastics, Equestrian and Theatrical performances.17

In the Baton Rouge Gazette of March 6, 1833, appeared an advertisement of a Floating Theatre to play on the 6th of April for the benefit of Mr. H.A. Williams. This was probably the first showboat to play at Baton Rouge. The

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15Odell, Annals of the New York Stage, III, 194.
16Baton Rouge Gazette, Sept. 10, 1831.
17Ibid, March 31, 1832.
piece performed was entitled "a new and interesting Melo
Drama", called The Floating Beacon or the Norwegian
Wreckers; the afterpiece was entitled No Song, No Supper,
or the Lawyer in the Sack, with Mr. Williams as Endless,
the lawyer. The boat must have been fairly large because
it boasted a gallery. Williams had appeared in 1828 in
the Natchez Theatre (replacing Russel in low comedy parts).
Free said of Williams: "H.A. Williams, originally from the
Boston Theatre, had been an Albany state manager in 1817
and later the same year appeared in light comedy roles in
New York ..... his best role of the season [1828] was his
Shylock, which was described as excellent."

From 1834 to mid-1840, three circuses and a mechanical
theatre played in Baton Rouge. There is no available record
of other performances because of a five-year gap in newspaper
records.

In the Gazette for Sept. 26, 1840, appeared an announce-
ment that a troupe would open a series of performances. It
is hard to determine whether these performances were ever
given; the following announcement is the only mention that
ever appeared in the papers of the day:

T.B. Franklin has the honor of informing the ladies
and gentlemen of Baton Rouge and its vicinity that he
intends visiting them with his Corps Dramatique (select-
ed from the St. Charles and Camp Street Theatres), and
proposes giving a series of Dramatic entertainments
nightly, consisting of Tragedy, Comedy, and Farce; the
scenery and wardrobe is entirely new, the company
efficient, and he trusts by a production of novelties

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to ensure a liberal share of their patronage. The Theatre will open on Saturday evening, 26th.

In the Gazette of Feb. 6, 1841, appeared the first mention of a Thespian Corps, which the present writer believes was composed of amateurs. He bases this belief on another article which appeared several weeks later, March 13, 1841, and in which the following is reported concerning this Corps:

Last week our Thespian Society moved into the building on the corner of Lafayette and Church Streets, which is fitted up in a tasteful manner, with sufficient to accommodate a numerous auditory; and on Saturday evening last, a series of entertainments were given, with a force and effect that would have done no discredit to more experienced professors of the histrionic art. Such amusements deserve encouragement, as they tend to dispel ennui and chase away the mograms. By the way, the scenic decorations reflect much credit on the artist-like skill of the amateur by whom they were designed and executed. 19

In April, 1841, Mr. Chapman offered a series of performances in Baton Rouge. The Gazette of the time had this to say:

Perhaps some of our readers are not aware that Mr. Chapman's theatrical corps are now in town, and offer nightly a variety of scenic entertainments. Tonight, we understand they perform Bulwar's popular piece The Lady of Lyons, to conclude with The Swiss Cottage. 20

The last performance for the 1841 season was William Tell, or The Hero of Switzerland, "to conclude with a laughable farce." 21

19 The Church Street mentioned in the quotation above probably is the one now called Main Street.

20 Baton Rouge Gazette, April 15, 1841.
21 Ibid, May 29, 1841.
Mr. Chapman returned in 1842 for another season.

Here are two reactions to the event:

We have neglected too long the notice due to an event of such importance as the arrival of a theatre among us. Mr. G. Chapman has rented the room over the Market-house, where, with his company, he gives nightly exhibitions. The piece for this evening is Theresa, or the Orphan of Geneva. It is highly interesting, and we hear the cast will be good. Mr. Chapman's company is well spoken of by many who have witnessed their performances, a pleasure in which we have not yet indulged, and hence our reason for using hearsay authority.\(^{22}\)

We occasionally visit the theatre, we are surprised to see so much merit so ill-requited, unless Thursday night might be considered an exception, then indeed the house was better, but then only in the range of odious comparisons..... We declare that Miss C. Chapman is an actress of very fine, finer dramatic talent, highly spirited, closely appropriate, a happy instance of vivacity and temperance, ever impassioned but "never o'er-stepping the modesty of nature". She sings, too; we do not pretend to be connoisseurs, but we know when we are pleased.... Miss T. Chapman is not so fully pronounced rather because she won't than because she can't. Her style is unpretending; natural and so amiable that we could not find it in our hearts to criticise her even if she deserved it. Mrs. Hamilton has improved parts naturally fine by discipline and experience. The gentlemen are all good, each in his line.\(^{23}\)

Mr. Chapman returned for the 1843 season, and one of his stars was Dan Marble who played in Black-eyed Susan.\(^{24}\) Dan Marble was well known in New York, where he had appeared at the Park Theatre. On June 5, 1842, he played in The Forest Rose and Black-eyed Susan; and on June 6, in

\(^{22}\)Ibid, May 28, 1842

\(^{23}\)Ibid, August 20, 1842

\(^{24}\)Ibid, April 1, 1843.
The Vermont Wool Dealer, and on June 7 in Yankee Land as Lot Sap Sago. Marble made famous the role of Sam Patch.  

In 1844, an amateur theatrical society was organized in the town by the officers at the United States Garrison and Arsenal on the north side of town. All that is known about this organization, called only Thespian Society, appeared in the pages of the Gazette on June 1, 1844:

Thespian Society. Wishing to encourage anything that has a tendency to elevate the morals and character of our fellow beings, we attended a performance of this society at the Garrison on Tuesday night (May 28); and were much gratified both with the neatness of the building and the correctness of the performance for a first trial. The audience was respectable and orderly. Several ladies graced the boxes, and by their presence encouraged the undertaking. The officers afford them every inducement they can. We hope to see them encouraged, and soon our garrison will be, what it out to, sober, moral and respectable. Ambrose Guinett and the farce of Fish out of Water will be the next performance.

The Thespian Society was very active during the fall and winter of 1845, and the newspapers of the day frequently mentioned its activities; but unfortunately, the titles of the pieces performed and the actors appearing in them were all too often omitted. However, some of the newspaper accounts, sketchy though they were, are worth quoting:

Thespian Society. A society, composed of the elite of our young men has been organized under the above name. They have fitted up the room over the marketplace for their performances...they have already several beautiful scenes, and we will soon have a theatre in this town much superior to any travelling

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companies that has visited us for years past. Their first performance (on Saturday the 16th inst.) sur-
passed the most sanguine expectations of the audience. We are glad to see so many of our young men, devoting
their leisure time in the evenings, not only to the improvement of their mind and morals, but also in
preparing amusement and recreation for our citizens. They have our best wishes for their success. 26

Thespians. The performance on Monday night was such as would have done credit to older hands. The room
was crowded with as large and respectable audience as we have ever seen gathered on such an occasion in this
town. We are glad to see the efforts of our young men meeting such approbation from our citizens. With
a little practice this company will be able to play not only comic, but good dramatic pieces. There is no
lack of histrionic talent in their ranks. 27

Thespians. A representation will be given by this company on Wednesday evening for the benefit of Mr.
E.K. Brown, the artist who painted the drop curtain and most of the scenery of the company. An English and a
French piece will be performed. Mr. Brown is an able artist and a gentleman, and we hope a discerning public
will give him a full benefit on the occasion. 28

Thespians. This company played to a crowded and highly respectable audience on Tuesday evening last.
The performance of "The Idiot Witness" would have reflected credit on much more experienced actors. We
would advise our young friends to take a little less time in making their toilet, this defect rendered the
farce rather tiresome. If they wish to secure the attendance of ladies in the future, it is highly
necessary to have an active police in the attendance. 29

The dates of presentations by the Thespian Society were as follows: for the 1845 season: August 16, September 8,
September 21, November 21, December 15 and 16; the Dec. 16 presentation being that of The Idiot Witness.

26 Baton Rouge Gazette, August 30, 1845.
27 Ibid, Sept. 13, 1845.
28 Ibid, Sept. 20, 1845.
29 Ibid, Dec. 20, 1845.
CHAPTER II
1846—1865

The season of 1846 was practically devoid of theatrical entertainment—the only attractions being the Swiss bell-ringers, who appeared on April 20, and the S.P. Stickney New Orleans Circus, which exhibited on December 4 and 5, 1846.

The Thespian Corps opened the season of 1847 with a performance on Jan. 2 at the Market-Hall. The Corps appeared again on Feb. 11 and caused this editorial comment in the Gazette of Feb. 13:

Thespian—The meeting of this corps which took place on the 11th inst. was one which did credit to all the performers; and it is a remark, well worthy of notice, that had the young gentlemen of Baton Rouge a little more encouragement, with the proviso, that they had a proper building, from which to shoot "the paper bullets of the brain", which are not intended to injure, but to amuse, they would become a corps of the first respectability, and one which would do much credit to its founders and the inhabitants of East Baton Rouge.

A remark should in justice be made in reference to the performers of the 11th inst, and that is the extreme inclemency of the night; for, had a disinterested person been behind the scenes, he would have perceived that every performer was nearly frozen, and in consequence, was unable to perform his part as well as might have been expected, under more auspicious circumstances.

1Baton Rouge Gazette, Dec. 19, 1846.
On April 17, 1847, Henri Herz, "composer and pianist to the King of the French" and Camillo Sivori, the only pupil of Paganini appeared in concert at the Garrison Ball Room. Herz and Sivori were well known in musical circles during this period. In 1846 they had appeared at the Tabernacle in New York City. Between April and December, 1847, Baton Rouge was visited by two circuses, Tom Thumb, Gustave Krollman, and Josh Gore. On December 18, 1847, Baton Rouge saw its first minstrel show when the Peedee Ethiopian Opera Troupe played in town. The troupe was composed of Messrs. Backus, Stanford, Price, Wilson, and Saydam. On December 25 and 27, a troupe calling themselves the Sable Harmonists appeared at the former residence of Judge Morgan.

In 1848, Madame Ablamowicz, the Theatrical Corps from the French Theatre in New Orleans and three circuses, appeared in Baton Rouge. The French Corps is the only one of any importance for this study, and this is the account which appeared in the Gazette at the time:

The Theatrical Corps from the French Theatre, New Orleans, are now in town for the purpose of giving a series of representations. Their first performance took place on Tuesday last (Aug. 29), and was respect-

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3*Odell, Annals of the New York Stage*, V, 312-313.

4*Baton Rouge Gazette*, Dec. 18, 1847.

ably attended, it gave general satisfaction. The second performance will take place this evening at the Garrison Ball Room when will be presented the play of "The Misfortunes of Champignel" and the "Phial of Cagliostro". We hope our citizens will give them that patronage which their endeavors to cater to the public amusement so richly deserves. The third performance will take place on Tuesday. (Sept. 5).

On March 2, 1850, there was an operatic Soiree (in full costume) at the Harney House by Miss Eliza Brienti and Mr. Manvers. On July 18, 1848 these artists had appeared in New York at the Astor Place in the opera The Black Domino; Miss Brienti as Camilla and Mr. Manvers as Julio.

In the Gazette of April 6, 1850 appeared an editorial concerning a proposed auditorium, which was described as follows:

It will consist of a Social Hall—comprising Concert, Ball, and Dressing Rooms. A Hall for Exhibitions and the drama; Reading Room, Armory for the Washington Guards, etc. The probable cost will be $10,000 to be subscribed in shares of $50 or $100 each....

In the December 7, 1850 Gazette appeared an elaborate advertisement for a performance by the Spaulding and Rogers North-American Circus, which was scheduled to appear on December 16 and 17. Part of the advertisement reads:

An entire theatrical corps! Actors, actresses, comedians, supernumeraries and under the stage management of Mr. H.F. Nichols, late proprietor of the Adelphi Theatre, Washington, D.C. and Mrs. F. Ormond, the favorite of the Broadway Theatre, New York,

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6Ibid, Sept. 2, 1848.

7The Harney House was situated at the corner of Lafayette and Main Streets, and the original building is still standing under the name of the Louisian Hotel.

8Odell, op. cit., V. 324.
assisted by Dickenson, the Yankee Comedian; Adams, Paul, Hunt, Anderson, Hartley, Mesdames Mossop, Perry, Dickenson, Miss Hartley, etc.—producing every night under the supervision of Mr. Rogers, under whose auspices the same pieces ran for over One Hundred Nights in each of the cities, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore—the Nation Dramatic Spectacles of Old Put and Mad Anthony Wayne and concluding with the thrilling tableaux of Gen. Washington, mounted on a live war-horse.

On Jan. 14, 15, 16, and 17, 1852, the Campbell Minstrels performed in Baton Rouge at the Harney House. According to Odell, the Campbell minstrels in 1851-1852 included Luke West, A.H. Pell, H.J. Burdett, S.C. Campbell, C.D. Abbott, H. Rumsey, S.E. Clark, T.B. Pendergast and J.T. Temple. On April 1 and 2, 1852, Dan Rice visited here with his Hippodrome and Circus. On the first of May, 1852, Madam Anna Bishop was presented in concert at the Harney House, and was soundly criticised in the Gazette. The criticism is interesting because of its complete frankness and honesty, and for that reason part of it is included here:

Madam Anna Bishop. We had the honor of hearing this noted vocalist on Saturday last, but we cannot with our contemporaries, join in besmattering her with praise—in truth we were much disappointed. She did not please our taste, and we candidly believe that she belongs to that class of bugs whose name commences with hum. We certainly do not profess to be the most competent judges of her abilities. Our prejudices may lead us too far in such matters, but we really believe that there are thousands of young ladies in our State, in every respect her superior; and we think it not at all improbable that we could name half a dozen or more within an hour's walk of our office.

9Baton Rouge Gazette, Jan. 10, 1852.
On October 11 and 12, 1852, Baton Rouge had its first glimpse of The Floating Palace, a Mississippi River show-boat which was to appear at Baton Rouge landings for several decades. On this occasion the boat carried the Spaulding & Rogers Circus, Great European and American Amphitheatre. The editor of the Gazette visited the Floating Palace, and we are indebted to him for the following description of the boat:

Through the kindness of the agent we have had a walk through the Floating Palace. The establishment all in all goes beyond our expectation. We had no idea that so complete an amphitheatre in all the details of grace, ease, and elegance could be made to float. The ring is as perfect as could be made upon terra firma, and the boxes, and gallery as comfortable as any of our best Theatre.

The chime of bells is a novelty and the organ a perfect piece of workmanship. The whole affair is lighted by gas, generated on board and sent by means of conductors to every part of the structure. In connection with the Circus is a Museum well worth a visit. Tonight is the last night and "everybody" should avail himself of the opportunity of seeing this wonderful water craft.

On November 1, 1852, Dan Rice's Circus returned for a performance, and during Christmas week Pratt's panorama of Eden was exhibited. The year was closed by a performance of Old Joe Sweeny and his original Virginia Minstrels at the Harney House on December 28, 1852. It is possible that this Joe Sweeny was the banjoist who accompanied the

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11Baton Rouge Gazette, Oct. 12, 1852.
Confederate General, J.E.B. Stuart, during the Civil War; however, the present investigator has not been able to verify this.

The season of 1855 consisted of a performance by Kunkel's Nightingale Opera Troupe, three panoramas, two separate appearances of Dan Rice and Circus, and one performance by Welche's Parisian Hippodrome.

In 1854, there was a performance by the Chinese Dramatic Corps, which seems to have been a magic show; a concert by Ole Bull, the violinist; Adelina Patti, the singer; and Maurice Strakosh, pianist and conductor; a magic show by Herr Alexander; and a performance by Van Amburgh's Menagerie, aboard the Floating Palace. There was also mention of an attempted reorganization by the Thespians.

In 1855, Van Amburgh's Menagerie played a return engagement and was accompanied by Reed's Minstrels, on board the steamer James Raymond. On March 5, 1855, E.F. and J. Mabie's Grand Combined Menagerie played in town. On July 12, 1855, the Christy Minstrels, managed by A.L. Christy, gave a performance which was severely criticised by the papers:

Christy's Minstrels. This company gave an entertainment at the Harney House, on Thursday night, to a very good house. They opened well, and the audience seemed well satisfied; until the same stale and stupid jokes and abortive witticisms used ten years ago, were introduced without the slightest variation; and then the audience very properly, as we think; gave evidence of disaffection. The singing was "M.O." -- ordinary mess. The only player, was the first fiddle, who might take a few lessons more without injury, and then instruct the second, how to stumble through the simple office of vampng. The banjo, did not know its part, and "bones" came in, and went out of the chorus, invariably before
or behind the time. When we examine the matter calmly, it is a very stupid business, for sensible people, to set by the hour and listen to coarse jokes, from imperfect delineators, of negro character; and when there is not a single grain of originality to spice the entertainment, it is perfectly disgusting.¹²

On August 1, 1855, the editor of the Daily Comet made the first of a number of appeals for the erection of a theatre—a theatre which was not built until some ten years later.

It is a remarkable fact, that here at the Capital of the State—the city of Baton Rouge, with a population of very little less than six thousand souls.... that there is not a public hall; a theatre; a reading room, or any other building whereat the people may meet in social reunions for public amusements. There is no reason for the fact; and therefore there is none to offer.... What has become of the company of Histrionics? Where is the Lyceum, and the reading room? Where is the Masonic Hall, that was to have been erected; and where is the building the Odd Fellows have so long had completed on paper? Is there not enterprise enough, to get up one public building? Are the Masons, and the Odd Fellows willing to be roasted in narrow contracted attics, and ill appointed third stories; and this too, when a large and commodious building would yield them a handsome revenue? No. We honestly conclude that all wanted, is that some two or three influential members of one or the other or both of these orders; put their heads together and a building will rise out of the ground; such as may do honor to the place. There are a hundred men in town who could put up such a building, without feeling any pecuniary embarrassment, from the investment.

The last week of 1855 was taken up by the Crescent City Circus of Rosston and Manahan, and by a museum and concert aboard the Floating Palace and the James Raymond.

¹²The Daily Comet, July 14, 1855.
On January 29, 1856, a concert was given in the Hall of Representatives by Mlle Teresa Parodi, Madame Amalia Patti Strakosch, Signor Lanardi, and Maurice Strakosch. The rest of the 1856 season was filled with the following attractions: The Floating Palace and the James Raymond on Feb. 22 and 23; H.M. Smith's Great American Circus on April 25 and 26; Washburn's American Circus and Indian Amphitheatre on May 23; Ned Davis' Olio Minstrels on board the floating theatre, Banjo, on May 16 and 17; and H.M. Smith's Great American Circus on Sept. 22 and 23.

The season of 1857 consisted mainly of minstrels and circuses; however, there was a concert by Charles Wynen, the violinist and a reading by a Mrs. Menken to offer some variety. By this time the river showboats were traveling in groups of three, and on Dec. 22 and 23, the following group appeared at the Baton Rouge landing: Spaulding & Rogers Great Elephant Show on the Floating Palace, Ned Davis' Olio Minstrels on the steamer Banjo, and Dave Reed's Ethiopian Serenaders on the steamer James Raymond.

The season of 1858 opened on the first day of the year with a performance by Hyatt and Co's Varieties. The Campbell Minstrels on board the steamer Banjo played on Jan. 26, 27, and 28. On Feb. 5, Col. Wood's Museum of Living Wonders exhibited on board the James Raymond.

13 The Daily Comet, Jan. 29, 1856.
On March 3 and 4, Spaulding and Rogers New Orleans Circus exhibited on board the Floating Palace. On March 25 Buckley’s Circus, and on May 24 and 25, Mabie’s Circus played here. On August 4 and 5, the Ethiopian Serenaders played at the old court house, and on August 23 and 24, Mr. J.C. Fredericks, “the Eminent Tragedian and Elocutionist”, presented readings of Richard III and Macbeth.

In 1858, the editor of the Daily Gazette and Comet was still campaigning for a theatre building in Baton Rouge, and wrote of it three times within a month’s time. The articles are interesting and enlightening because they give an insight into the social, political, and economic conditions of the period. For that reason all three articles are included here.

The Theatre— This necessary adjunct to the city— and where the mirror is held up to nature, the hand-maid of true religion, has as yet at the capital of the State no representative. It is not that there is not sufficient capital lying about loose to form a joint stock company on, that have no temple to the muses; but because we have too much money invested in the sugar interest, and the cotton business. It is one of the advantages of our peculiar institutions that the people are either very rich or very poor. The rich are indifferent, and the poor are satisfied with obtaining a living in some way and it matters very little “how”, so that labor has not to be performed, which in this climate is very degrading. We have land enough, and it is rich enough, but it is all laid off in large patches, for people who are not, satisfied with enough but must have the very considerable satisfaction of knowing themselves to be lords of all they survey. The same kind of monopoly, threatens to depopulate our towns of the middle— which is generally the best class of society, because the mechanic and artizan, who is prudent, soon acquires a corps of black mechanics, who have no families to support; no taxes to pay, to keep up the cumbersome machinery of government and of course they can be worked for less, and compete to the successful ruin of free labor. These are some of the evils at home which do not require the
wisdom of our northern kinfolks to paint up. We feel
them. They are the compensating balance for a full
share of blessings. Free society is beset with evils
more gross and glaring — evils that stab at the best
interests of society. This community is poverty-
stricken—starving to death and jeopardising the inter-
est of its soul and spirit, in the lack of the social
amenities— the mental food that music, the drama and
the fine arts, furnish. Such things are enlarge the
soul, and give it noble and godlike aspirations, we
have not. The Drama is the handmaid of religion. If
vice creeps into the third tier of boxes, in its most
loathsome form it comes from without, and society is
responsible for it. If obscene deformities and vulgar-
ities get on the stage, it is because a depraved taste
in the audience calls for them. We have long labored
under the delusion that our Christianity is as good as
the average, and yet we will give either three of our
half dozen churches for a theatre. 14

The Circus Coming. The Star Circus of Spaulding
& Rogers, will be here in a few days on the Floating
Palace.... Could Messrs. Spaulding & Rogers be entertain-
ed during the months of February and March, at public
expense, it would be a great saving of time and money
to the State. It would obliterate the necessity of ad-
journing the legislature on Thursday of each week, in
order to allow the members a chance to go to New
Orleans, and patronize metropolitan shows. This has
always had a bad effect on Monday morning legislation.
If country members must needs go to the city once a
week, during the session, would it not be well to have
a standing committee on "visitations", to take charge
of them, and see that they do not get coaxed off into
evil company. 15

The Show. On Friday and Saturday nights, (Dec. 17
and 18), last, the show camped out in front of the
Presbyterian Church, did a land office business. Hun-
dreds of persons were forced to leave the door unable
to get in. Had the tent been thrice its size, it would
have been full. And after all, what was it? A man with
a performing dog, a little juggling and dancing— nothing
more. This goes to show again, in the most striking manner, the absolute necessity of a public Hall or Theatre. Is there not one of our capitalists who can see a good thing of it, in the erection of a Theatre, or such a hall as the times demand.16

The entertainment season of 1859 consisted mainly of circuses and a dramatic reading by Miss Eloise Bridges. The editor of the Daily Gazette and Comet again appealed for the erection of a theatre building in Baton Rouge.

.....It is the cause of wonder to strangers visiting the Capital of the State, that there is here a population of nearly if not quite ten thousand souls, (we include in this estimate, our fellow-citizens living near enough to town to visit it on occasions) and no place larger than the old Court-House for the public to assemble in. It is even as our neighbor says: --- The enterprising folks up in Alexandria, Natchitoches, and Shreveport, have their regular theatrical seasons, and the consequence is, they have cultivated a popular taste for the drama and song, greatly to the prejudice, too, of the interests of itinerant charlatans and mountebanks who infest the country and make fortunes out of the gullibility of country society. Why is it that Baton Rouge cannot have the same advantages for amusements and entertainments?17

The season of 1860 opened with a reading of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark on Jan. 5, by Dr. Welsh. On Jan. 28, the Empire Minstrels opened an engagement. On Feb. 24 and 25 Spaulding & Robers Circus exhibited along with the Campbell Minstrels. By February of this year, plans had been made for a Joint Stock Company to build a "Theatre and Concert Hall." On April 18 and 19 there were concerts by the Opera

16 Ibid, Dec. 21, 1858.

Troupe of the Theatre D'Orleans; on June 5 and 6 a concert by Madame Anna Bishop; on Nov. 20 and 21, performances by the Star Minstrels; on Dec. 4 and 5, performances by Dan Rice's Circus; on Dec. 11 and 13, performances by the Drayton Troupe and their Parlor Operas at Academy Hall. The bill on Dec. 11, was *Never Judge by Appearances* and part second of the operetta *Love's Labor Lost* by Henri Drayton; on Dec. 13, the opera *Love is Blind*. On Dec. 24, 25, and 26, Shorey, Duprez and Green's New Orleans and Metropolitan Minstrel and Brass Band played here, and the year concluded with a performance on Dec. 31 by the company of "Artists" from the Theatre D'Orleans playing, in French, the first of a series of Vadevilles in the Opera Comique.

Information about the 1861 season was sketchy, but the following attractions were seen in Baton Rouge: on Jan. 26, the last performance by the Christy Minstrels at Academy Hall; and on Jan. 28, Adelina Patti's farewell concert to America in Representative Hall; on Jan. 29, Wells and Long's Star Minstrels and Brass Band on board the Banjo; and on Feb. 16, Dan Rice's Great Show.

By the beginning of 1862 there was a regular company playing in Baton Rouge every night at a theatre called Thespian Hall which was located on the corner of North and Church Streets. The name of the company was Campbell and Gobay's Varieties and the personnel included Mr. A.H. Campbell, acting manager; J. Gobay, stage manager, Sig. Oliveira, musical director; Prof. Stein, pianist, and
Job. Jameson, costumer. At the same time another company was playing nightly at Academy Hall, and the Weekly Gazette and Comet said:

The two establishments flourishing. Whilst there is nightly a full house at the Academy, there is a jam at the Varieties on North Street, and yet the interest in the drama does not abate, but grows and gains strength. Certainly, this season, at least, we have had evidence abundant of the will and ability of the people hereabouts to sustain a good company of actors; this evidence is hailed as the dawn of a new era.19

On Jan. 27, 1862, the Varieties company performed the comedy of the Widow's Victim and the "Grand Musical Burlesque Burletta of Po-ca-han-tas, written by John Brougham, Esq., in which all the company will appear." On Feb. 5, 1862, the Varieties company produced the "original Roll of the Drum from the printed copy of Thomas Egerton Wilks--with the farce of the Dumb Bell." This seems to have started some controversy because the Weekly Gazette and Comet for Feb. 1, 1862 carried the following article:

Is it a New Roll or the Old? The Confederate Theatre down town is about to produce a new piece entitled the "Roll of the Drum", written by one of the Company as we understand. This calls out the up town Company, in a lively and interesting spirit of rivalry and competition, with the old original "Roll", the first act of which is in France, the second in Germany, and the balance about in spots, as we understand it. It is a fortunate thing for we provincials, who lay no claim to great depth in theatrical matters,

18Weekly Gazette and Comet, Jan. 18, 1862.
19Weekly Gazette and Comet, Jan. 28, 1862.
that here at the dawn of the drama, there are two
good companies to watch over each other, also some body
else might lay claim to the property of the Bard of Avon
in the play of "Catherine and Petruchio". The original
"Roll of the Drum" is at least twenty years old, and
it will be far-fetched indeed to adapt it to the martial
music now beating around us.

From the material available at this time it is difficult to
determine which organization was designated as the up town
company and which the down town company. Also nothing is
known concerning the company playing at Academy Hall.

There seems to have been a lapse of theatrical
activity in Baton Rouge from the spring of 1862 to the fall
of 1863. This was probably caused by the military turmoil
that the town was experiencing at the time; Federal troops
demanded the surrender of Baton Rouge on May 7, 1862, accom-
plished this surrender, and occupied the town on May 9, 1862.
When the theatre reopened in town it was under the banner of
the Union Theatre, situated on Church Street between Main
and Laurel. The company was managed by G.A. Pratt and Miss
Emma Forrest, and presented "farces, Vaudevilles and dramas
to suit the present times."20 On Sept. 12, 1865 the bill
consisted of Rosina Meadows with Mr. Pratt as Jethro Baxter,
with an after-piece offering The Two Gregories. The bill
on Oct. 3 was Faint Heart and The Loan of a Lover. On
Oct. 10, the bill was taken by the Monitor Minstrels. On
Oct. 14, Mr. G.C. Brydon took a benefit at the Union Theatre

20 Ibid, Aug. 29, 1863.
Bulwer's *Lady of Lyons* with Miss Forrest and Mr. A.H. Campbell (from the Varieties) supporting him. On Oct. 24, Mr. A.H. Campbell took a benefit at the Theatre, the location of which was definitely fixed as being on the North side of the "Methodist Church South."  

The season of 1864 opened on Jan. 1 with the Baton Rouge Varieties under the management of C.S. Smith, and with G.A. Pratt as Acting and Stage Manager. The performances were given at the Harney House Hall, and the bill for Jan. 1 and 2 was *Buttons All Over Me!* and *The Yankee Lion*. On Feb. 1, Miss Forrest's Dramatic Company opened at the Harney House Hall with the following personnel: Mesdames Forrest, DeWitt, Lester and Hawthorne; Messrs. Lewis, Morrison, Mester, Brydon, Pratt, Baker and Signor Antonio. According to the paper of the day, "good scenery, an effective wardrobe, good stage arrangements, a constant succession of novelty, and above all, admirable police regulations and accommodations attended by gentlemen—cannot but ensure for the fair lessee, complete success."  

Miss Forrest's first production was *The Cricket on the Hearth*, with a cast as follows: Perrybingle, Mr. Morrison; Toy-maker, Mr. Brydon; Dot, Miss DeWitt; Tilly, Miss Forrest; Blind Girl, Miss Lester;  

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and Mary, Miss Hawthorne.

In the *Weekly Gazette-Comet* appeared a rather cryptic remark referring to the conditions of the time:

The *Varieties*. The growing popularity of this local institution is such, that more room is demanded for it to spread itself; but unfortunately the "other end of the house" which was not touched by the lamp-posts of Com, Farragut, does not admit of expansion. The stage is in the hands of Brydon, and the characters, well bestowed on Mesdames DeWitt and Lester, with Pratt and Morrison to do the heroic. The honest and appreciative people before the footlights are indebted for all this to the management of Miss Forrest. Speaking of the footlights reminds us of the new order of the manageress. The front seats are reserved for white ladies during the season—no smoking allowed.

Commodore Farragut was the Federal officer whose gunboats captured New Orleans, and steamed up the Mississippi River to capture Baton Rouge. Sometime during the 1864 season the Forrest troupe moved from the Harney House to Academy Hall which was called Union Theatre in the contemporary press. The troupe closed there sometime in July, and reopened at the Harney House Saloon in November. Miss Emma Forrest was still the manageress of the troupe. This was the last season for the Forrest troupe in Baton Rouge.

The season of 1865 started on Jan. 18, at the Harney House with an entertainment by Messrs. Collins, Emerson, and Gayner, which seems to have been a variety show of song, dance and comic skits. In February and December

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Seth B. Howe's Great European Circus played in town. In October Messrs. G.W. DeHaven & Co's "United Circus" exhibited. On Dec. 16 and 18 The Withers Minstrels appeared at Pike's Hall. This was a new theatre and with its construction, a new theatrical era opened in Baton Rouge.
CHAPTER III

1866 - 1885

It is appropriate that a study of this period should begin with a description of the new theatre in Baton Rouge. This theatre was named Pike's Hall, and was to be the only real theatre in Baton Rouge until the spring of 1900. It seems probable that the building was constructed sometime in 1865, but the interior was not completed until 1866. A personal interview with Mr. Vincent Moran and Mr. Benton Booth, two local men who had performed in Pike's Hall, disclosed facts about the building: (1) it was in the second block of Third Street, halfway between the present site of Walgreen's Drug Store and the Istrouma Hotel; (2) the theatre was raised from the ground some distance so that the front entrance was gained by ascending a number of steps; (3) in the front part of the hall were offices; (4) the theatre proper was about one hundred feet long and had an inclined floor; and (5) there was no balcony. For more complete description of the building the following newspaper account is excellent:

Third Street Theatre. The completion of the interior of this edifice, renders it an ornament to our city and worthy the resort of the masses that rank among "the heavenly nine".

For theatricals, concerts, lectures, or other public entertainments, the Third Street Theatre is now most
admirably adapted, combining as it does one of the largest and most beautiful halls, stages, gas chandeliers, etc., that can be found in any of the cities, north or south. We are indebted to Mr. McVay, the architect, for the following statement, showing the inside dimensions of the Theatre. Auditorium, 90 x 52 feet; story, 24 feet high in clear. Stage, 45 x 50 feet; Proscenium, 24 feet wide by 10 feet deep; Drop Curtain, 25 x 8 feet; 2 private boxes on stage, 6 x 8 feet; Lobby or entrance hall, 30 x 42 feet.

In January of 1866, Thayer & Noyes Great New Orleans Circus was scheduled to exhibit on the 16th and 17th; however, the steamer Ida May on which the troupe was traveling sank while coming down Red River so the troupe did not really play until Feb. 6, 1866. In this year, the fad for tableaux was started in Baton Rouge by the churches. On Jan. 25 and Feb. 3, Tableaux Vivants were presented by the ladies of the Episcopal Church, and on Feb. 13, the ladies of the Methodist Church presented their tableaux. Sometime in the first week of February, 1866, the Star Theatrical Troupe arrived in town and started performing at Pike's Hall. The only mention of a programme is that for February 8 when the following bill was presented: The Way to Win Him, a commeditta; In and Out of Place, a farce; and Pleasant Neighbour. On July 16, 1866, an unusual performance was given — that of the Southern Pantomine Troupe at the Deaf and Dumb Asylum.

In this year the Thespian Association was very active in theatrical and social circles. Six programs were presented in the fall of 1866; the first, given on August 29 at the

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1Tri-Weekly Gazette and Comet, Nov. 13, 1866.
Deaf and Dumb Asylum, consisted of *His Last Legs*, a minor drama, and the tragical farce of *Nature and Philosophy*. On September 11, the same program was repeated with the addition of *Bamboozling*, a farce in one act. The third program was on September 26 and consisted of *La Mazurka Grand Pas* by Miss Kate Woods, the "very laughable vaudeville", *The Loan of a Lover*, and a comic-drama entitled *Nan, the Good for Nothing*. On November 17 and November 31, the Thespians appeared as Ethiopian Minstrels, and on December 22 gave their sixth program, which was composed of music, *Jeu-d’esprit*, and a new pantomine.

On the 25th and 26th of January, 1867, the Thespians played in Clinton, Louisiana, at the Masonic Hall. In that year the Thespians sponsored most of the entertainment in town. On February 22, they promoted a "Grand Fancy Dress and Masquerade Ball to Celebrate Washington's Anniversary". On April 30, they presented a pantomine, *Antiparos*, by a member of the association, followed by the laughable farce of *The Wandering Minstrel*. On May 15, the Thespians presented a tableaux and a pantomine which were enthusiastically received. On June 29, they presented the following bill: *Jocko, or the Brazilian Ape*, Gymnastic Exercises,

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2Ibid, Aug. 28, 1866.
3Ibid, Sept. 13, 1866.
5Ibid, April 30, 1867.
6Ibid, April 30, 1867.
Bombast as Furioso, and an occasional song. At the close of the exhibition there was a dance in the theatre. On August 27 the Thespians presented a "beautiful pantomime" entitled The Living Statue, and concluded with the "laughable burlesque" of Terry O'Rouke, the Irish Tutor. On Nov. 13, the Thespian bill was Box and Cox, the Frolicsome Tailor and Uncle Jeff. On December 7, the Thespians presented a Grand Ethiopian Minstrel Entertainment and as a special feature they raffled off a city lot. The whole purpose of the entertainment was to raise funds for establishing their Reading Rooms on a permanent basis. The season closed with a performance by Harry Macarthy at Tunnard's Hall for the benefit of orphans.

On December 23, 1867, Tri-Weekly Advocate gave the following:

Tunnard's Hall. This fine hall on Main street has recently been tastefully refitted by the Major and presents a fine appearance. It will seat a large number of guests and will be opened tonight for the first time by the celebrated Harry Macarthy, assisted by Miss Lotta Estelle and Prof. O'Reardon. The entrance is on Main street, just above Randolph & Bates. Major Tunnard deserves great credit for adding the large, fine hall which bears his name to the inducements which exist for talented troupes to visit this city.

This theatre was possibly used by one of the companies during the war years. The Thespians had used it for their third

7Ibid, Aug. 27, 1867.
8Tri-Weekly Advocate, Nov. 13, 1867.
production under the name of Tunnard's Carriage Factory. The hall was refitted in late 1867 and was described in the Tri-Weekly Advocate as above.

The season of 1868 offered little in the way of theatrical entertainment; only three references of any value were found in papers of the day. The first was to Robinson's Combination Circus and Menagerie to play in Baton Rouge on January 17; the second was to an entertainment by the Baton Rouge Thespians on May 23; and the third to Johnny Thompson's Great Variety and Combination Troupe appearing at Pike's Hall on June 12 and 13, 1868.

Theatrical activity for the next ten years must remain unknown because there are no newspapers available anywhere for the period. However, it might be safe to draw the following conclusion: Baton Rouge had a theatre which was very adequate for the times, and it is probable that a number of troupes were accommodated during the period.

The next recorded productions after June 13, 1868, were on May 20 and 21, 1879, when the Plaquemine Dramatic Association gave a benefit for the Confederate Memorial Fund. The pieces played were Sunshine Through the Clouds, The Fellow Who Looks Like Me, The Seven Clerks, and The Literary Wife. In the Weekly Advocate of May 30, 1879, a plan was

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10 Weekly Advocate, May 2, 1879.
advanced which was never used, but which was interesting in its details:

A good idea has been suggested to us by a gentleman who takes a great interest in drama, and we throw out the suggestion for the consideration of our readers. It is this: That our citizens make arrangements for a grand entertainment to take place at some feasible date in the coming fall or winter for the benefit of the Confederate Memorial Association, that a prize be offered to the best Amateur Dramatic Troupe among the troupes organized in the parishes of Iberville, Ascension, East and West Feliciana, Pointe Coupee, East and West Baton Rouge and other parishes who may desire to compete; that a professional actor be selected to select from all of these troupes a cast to play, for instance, the "Lady of Lyons" on that occasion. The play is an excellent one and would make the affair very attractive and remunerative, the benefit to be for the Confederate Memorial Association. If it was organized at an early date the Amateur Associations would have ample time to prepare themselves for October of November.

In 1879 there was an attempt to organize an amateur dramatic club in town. The editor of the local paper was very enthusiastic about the project and made this comment:

There is some talk of organizing a Thespian Association in our city. We are glad to hear it. Every town should have two things: a good amateur dramatic troupe and a good brass band. Baton Rouge has the latter--as good as ever fluttered the keys of a horn-- and now our young ladies and gentlemen should organize a first class Dramatic Association. One like our clever friends in Plaquemine have.11

On December 22, 1879, "Old John Robinson's mammoth menagerie and circus" exhibited here, and was the last attraction to appear until the end of 1880 when the Fay Templeton Star Alliance played on December 28, 29, 30, and 31.12

The Fay Templeton referred to here is probably the same one who

11Ibid., June 6, 1879.
12Ibid., Jan. 7, 1881.
appeared later in George M. Cohan's *Forty-five Minutes from Broadway*, and in 1926 as *Buttercup* in a Shubert revival of *Pinafore*.13

The season of 1881 was relatively devoid of interesting dramatic activity and the editor of the local paper attributed it to the facts that Pike's Hall and its inducements were not made known to the public and that the rent was too high.14

The season of 1882 opened a new phase in dramatic history in Baton Rouge, because it was in this year that legitimate companies started to appear regularly in town. On August 31, 1882, the J.G. Stutts Theatrical Combination commenced an engagement at Pike's Hall, and was the first stock company that had appeared in Baton Rouge in a number of years. The first production, on August 31, was Victor Hugo's *Historical Tragedy, The Duchess of Ferrara, or A Mother's Love*. On September 1, the production was *The Soldier of Fontenoy* with Mr. Stutts as the Soldier Galley-Slave and Miss Alma as Madeline. On September 2, the matinee was *Rip Van Winkle* and the night show was *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room*. On September 4, the company produced *Fanchon, the Cricket*, and the review in the paper the following day was interesting:

> The Stutts Combination performed to an excellent house last evening. *Fanchon*, an idealistic drama, was


presented by the company. The stage attachments were specially arranged for scenic effect, and the mounting was good. Miss Marie Adair, as Mother Fadet, fully sustained the necromantic character. J.E. Stuttz, as the imbecile twin, was par excellence and the popular Alma, from inception to marriage, was applauded throughout. J.G. Stuttz, as Landry, the youth of faithful, constant and unwavering love, proved his devotion, and won his girl. Toler Wolfe as Father Barbeaud, was en rapport, with the stolid hateful nature of a senile pa. Mr. Stuttz is to be credited for enlivening the Capital and affording legitimate amusement. Tonight the Company will produce "Niagara", and tomorrow the sensational play of "Under the Gas Light" will be rendered.\(^1\)

On September 8, the Company gave a benefit for the Highland City Lodge No. 2662, of the Knights of Honor, and the play was *Zingara, or the Gypsy Queen*. On September 9, the Company gave a benefit for the Pelican Hook & Ladder Company, and the play was Shakespeare's *Hamlet* with Mr. J.G. Stuttz as Hamlet. A review stated:

> The benefit given the Pelican Hook and Ladder Company by Mr. J.G. Stuttz, on Saturday night, was a success. There was not that response from the public that the occasion merited, but there were more present than upon any night previous, and the Fire Company received not less than sixty dollars in cash. Hamlet was rendered on this occasion to far better effect than we could have expected, in view of the fact that Mr. Stuttz was so poorly supported, with inferior costumes and meagre stage furniture. Immediately before the last act T.B. Dupree, Esq., appeared in front of the drop curtain with Mr. J.G. Stuttz, and in the name of the Pelican Hook and Ladder Company, presented him a beautiful gold badge of the company with appropriate inscription. The presentation was made with brief remarks from Mr. Dupree, which were responded to by Mr. Stuttz in most feeling terms. The troupe left yesterday, and carry with them the best wishes of our community.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) *Daily Capitolian Advocate*, Sept. 5, 1882.

\(^2\) *Ibid*, Sept. 11, 1882. (Unfortunately, the review failed to say if Mr. Stuttz played the last act of *Hamlet* with the gold badge pinned to his tunic).
In the Daily Capitolian for September 22, 1882, appeared an announcement about a forthcoming event at Pike's Hall; the article is interesting for its information about travel conditions into Baton Rouge at that period.

We take pleasure in calling attention to the announcement, in this issue, that the celebrated Big H Minstrels will give a performance at Pike's Hall, on next Monday night. The company numbers no less than twenty first class actors, who have won by the excellence of their performances, a national reputation. Their clever agent, Mr. Morris, arrived here yesterday, and has set to work making every preparation to give our people a genuine treat. He tells us that since the completion of the Natchez and Jackson railroad, good troupes can hereafter perform at Jackson and Natchez, thence they can reach here by steamer, and after holding forth among us, can either go down by rail to New Orleans or go to Alexandria and Shreveport. Heretofore, Baton Rouge was outside of the line of travel, hence but few troupes could afford to visit us. The "Big H" are first class, and we hope that a crowded house will greet their coming, both to enjoy a merry evening and also to encourage stage performances at the Capital City.

The "Big H" show was very well received: "A very commendable feature in last night's exhibition was in the absence of the vulgarities that are usually indulged in by negro minstrels. The Big H are agreed delineators of the negro character, good singers and dancers; and their orchestra makes very sweet music."17

On December 4, 1882, the Basye Dramatic Troupe arrived in Baton Rouge to present a week's program of plays. The Company was composed of Florence Webster, Frank Hartwell, Miss Stuart, Messrs. Cortrill, Bowers, Warren and Wales. The

opening play was The Banker's Daughter, which was followed by Lost and Won, The Hidden Hand, Sam'l of Posen, The Factory Girl, and A Miner's Trust. The Basye company returned regularly after this first appearance.

The season of 1883 opened with a performance by Blind Tom on February 13. On May 4, 5, and 7, 1883, there was an entertainment at Pike's Hall under the management of Fred P. Smoky. The papers gave no indication of the character of the entertainment, but it was free of charge. The May 7 show featured two acts entitled The Night Mare and The Young Person from Clinton, along with a variety of other fun. On November 12, 1883, the Basye Dramatic Company, with new personnel, returned to Baton Rouge and opened with The Galley Slave. The review in the Daily Capitolian-Advocate of November 13, 1883 said:

Miss Maude Atkinson appeared in the role of Cecily Blaine, and Mr. Frank P. Lindon as Sidney Norcott. As leading characters they performed their parts well, and were ably supported by Mr. Harry Gray as Baron de Bois, Mr. R.J. Johnson as Franklin Fits, Mr. Leonard Wales as Dr. Oliphant, Mr. Claude Kramer as Francisca Remeni, Miss Ella Lindon as Miss Psyche Gay and Miss Ada Hart as Mrs. Phoebe Gay. The love scenes between Miss Cecily and Sidney were very affecting indeed, and the little affair between Dr. Oliphant and widow Gay was decidedly amusing, and points a moral that bachelors should remember when they "would a wooing go", and that is to beware of widows. Franklin Fits the part exactly that he took, and Miss Psyche made it lively if not gay for him.

On November 13, the troupe performed The False Friend with Miss Maude Atkinson as Kate Medland and Frank Lindon as Gilbert. On November 14, the production was The French Spy
with Miss Atkinson as Henri St. Aime, Matilde de Meric and Hamet, and Mr. Lindon as Colonel de Courcy. On November 15, the company presented Hazel Kirke with Miss Atkinson as Kazel Kirke and Mr. Lindon as Dunston. The show for November 16 was Fanchon the Cricket with Miss Atkinson as Fanchon and Messrs. Lindon and Johnson as Landry and Diddier. On November 17 the company presented The Galley Slave as matinee and The Planter's Wife at the evening show. On December 10, 1883, the Golden Dramatic Company opened a week's engagement at Pike's Hall. The paper, the Daily Capitoliian-Advocate, said:

The Goldens have come, and they are fully determined to give the people of our city at least one week's amusement. As an evidence of their desire to please the public they opened their season last night at Pike's Hall, with that stirring English drama "Meg, or a Farmer's Daughter". Meg is one of those plays that is full of interest from the beginning of the "old mill" scene to the "happy denouement". Bella Golden is an excellent actress and she has a fine support. The play throughout was well received by the audience, who manifested much interest in the story of Meg as she passed from one period to another in the five acts of the play. We have not the space to give a description of the play and to do justice to the performers in their several parts. All that we can add is that Mr. and Mrs. Golden are ably supported by little Fannie, Mrs. J.M. Rodi, Miss Emma Purcell, Miss Emma B. Crisp, Mr. Frank McCoy, Mr. J.H. Cook, Mr. Will E. Tucker, and Mr. G.T. Martin. Their silver cornet band, composed of 12 pieces, is superb. Their orchestra is excellent. Prof. Rodi handles his band with ability. Tonight, this talented troupe will present the "Daughter of the Regiment", and our readers may expect to see something really fine. Mr. Golden was well pleased with his house last night.

On December 11, the bill was The Daughter of the Regiment, and the farce Dodging for a Wife. The December 12 show was the society drama, Fate. On December 13, the troupe presented
Forget me not with Bella Golden as Stephanie. The Daily Capitolian-Advocate of December 14 commented on the play and said: "Mrs. Bella Golden, in her character of Stephanie, excelled her acting in the pieces of the precious nights. In this piece she proved to the audience her powers as a delineator of character and as a songstress. She has a fine voice and she knows how to use it to advantage." On December 14, the Goldens presented The French Spy with Mrs. Golden in the three-character feminine lead of Henri St. Alme, Hamet, and Mathilde de Meric. On December 15, the play was An Unequal Match; on December 17, Forget-me-not; on December 18, a repeat of The French Spy; and on December 19, the Golden played The Daughter of the Regiment as a farewell to Baton Rouge. The troupe left town with the good will of the citizens, and the Daily Capitolian Advocate of December 20, 1883, said: "During their stay here, this excellent troupe have won the respect and friendship of all with whom they have come in contact, as they have done wherever they have visited. Mrs. Golden is an accomplished lady, and Mr. Golden is a gentleman who acts on the "square" in his dealing with his fellow man."

The season of 1884 was opened with a two-day engagement of the Bertha Welby Dramatic Troupe, which included John Hazelrigg, James Aldredge, and Floride Abell. The company presented Sheridan Knowles' comedy, The Hunchback, on January 29, and again at a matinee on the thirtieth of January. On the same day, at the evening performance, the
troupe played Camille, which prompted the reviewer to say that "as an emotional actress she (Miss Welby) has not been equalled by any one who has visited this city, a fact fully demonstrated by her acting in the play of Camille last night. Her support was ample. She had a good audience, and all were pleased." Odell, in his Annals of the New York Stage, treated her more lightly by saying: "Bertha Welby, never very exciting, played here during the week of the 16th (April 1882), in One Woman's Life; posterity has not cherished the names of her supporting cast."18

On February 5, 1884, Leavitt's Gigantean Minstrels performed at Pike's Hall. The review said:

This troupe consists of twenty performers, each one of whom is a 'whole team within himself'. Their songs were good, their music fine, their acting splendid, their jokes were fresh—the whole being seasoned with an originality, and with wit and humor that minstrel troupes heretofore visiting Baton Rouge have been innocent of.19

On October 17, 1884, the Young Men's Literary and Social Club presented All That Glitters is not Gold at Pike's Hall. This was the first amateur performance in Baton Rouge in some time and the cast contained the following people: Mr. T.L. Granary, Mr. T. Willie Walsh, Mr. Ed Klotz, Mr. M. Seidenbach, Mr. B.J. Goodman, Mr. B.A. Forchermer, Miss Fannie Lefever, Miss Addie Magrath, and Mrs. Emile Levy.20

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18 George C. Odell, op. cit., XII, 194.
19 Daily Capitolian-Advocate, Feb. 6, 1884.
20 Ibid, October 18, 1884.
On October 27, 1884, the Kendall Dramatic Troupe presented Our Bachelors with the following cast: Lizzie Kendall, George Kendall, Robert Barrett, Dollie Bardell, Rose Weaver, Addie Haight, H. Gray, and S.T. Shaw. On October 28, the troupe presented Joshua Whitcomb with George Kendall playing the Yankee Farmer.

On November 17, 1884, the Basye Standard Dramatic Troupe played another engagement in Baton Rouge; this time the troupe consisted of Mrs. Ella Salisbury, Mrs. A.J. Mackley, Miss Maude Stuart, Miss M.D. Salisbury, Messrs. Hatch, Percy, Bowers, Kreamer, and Hughes. Performances were given of Rooms for Rent, A Celebrated Case, M'Liss, the Child of the Sierras, Mabel Heath, Frou-Frou, and My Mother-in-law.

On November 26, Tremaine's Grand Art Entertainment commenced a six nights' run at Pike's Hall, and on December 8 and 9 the Robinson & Van Amburg New York and New Orleans Great Consolidated Shows exhibited. On December 2, 1884, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Company arrived in Baton Rouge to give an exhibition, but failing to find a suitable place, the show moved on to Plaquemine.

On December 19, 1884, the season was closed by a performance of the Young Men's Literary and Social Club in All That Glitters Is not Gold.

On January 27, 1885, the new season opened with a five nights' run of the Royal Danish Illusionist, Herr Aug. Guise, Champion Prestidigitcomedian. Sometime in the week
of March 13, 1885, the California Marionettes played at Pike's Hall. On October 8, King, Burke & Co.'s Great American Allied Shows, Museum, and Trained Animal Exposition visited town. On November 13 and 14, 1885, the Adelaide Moore Troupe appeared at Pike's Hall in The School for Scandal and The Lady of Lyons. Miss Moore played the leading role in each of these plays. On November 20 and 21, the Georgia Minstrels appeared in town, and gained much favorable comment from the newspaper. On November 25, 1885, S.H. Barrett's new united monster Railroad Shows, Triple Circus, World's Menagerie, Museum of Wonders, Elevated Stage, and Grand Racing Carnival played in Baton Rouge.

On November 30, the Kersands' Minstrels played at Pike's Hall, and the paper said: "Kersands' Minstrels played--before a large audience, whom they delighted with their excellent music, dances and originalities in negro minstrelsy." The Jenny Holman Combination played Divorce with Jenny Holman as Florence Grantley, on December 28; Kathleen Mavoreen on December 29; The Banker's Daughter on December 31. This was the last play given in Baton Rouge in 1885.

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21 Ibid, November 21, 1885.
22 Ibid, December 1, 1885.
CHAPTER IV
1886—1900

The season of 1886 opened on January 1, with a matinee performance of *Ten Nights in a Bar Room* played by the Jenny Holman Combination; at the evening show the troupe played *Over the Hill to the Poor House*.

On January 2, 1886, the Atkinson Comedy Company played Peck's Bad Boy. The Daily Capitolian Advocate said: "It is a genuinely American piece of humor, in which the typical bad boy is portrayed to a nicety. Our people should not miss this treat. The Atkinson Company are highly spoken of everywhere".

On January 11, 1886, the Katie Putnam Troupe presented *Lena the Madcap*. Miss Putnam was supported by "that young comedian" James Devlin according to the play bill in the paper. On January 12, the troupe played *Little Barefoot*, and on January 13, *Old Curiosity Shop*, with Miss Putnam in the dual role of Little Nell and The Marchoness.

On March 5 and 6, 1886, Homer D. Cope appeared at Pike's Hall, and performed the play of *Damon and Pythias* in which he appeared as six different characters. Cope was a popular dramatic reader.

On April 27 and 28, 1886, D'Alvini, the "King of Prestidigitators, and his Superior Company of Illusionists"
played at Pike's Hall.


There were a few more incidental and unimportant events in town during the summer of 1886, but on November 29, the Fowler and Warmington Company played in Skipped by the Light of the Moon, "introducing new features, new specialties, and all new music, with Tony Farrell, as Frankie and a brilliant coterie of comedians."

On December 6, 1886, the Harry Webber Company performed Nip and Tuck.

On December 20, Bidwell's Star Dramatic Company performed The Martyr Mother, which the paper said was "artistic in every respect, as was fully attested by the applause which ran through the hall and at times bursting forth very inspiringly."

On December 28, the famous Therence and Dowerins Minstrels, "supported by six great comedians", performed in Pike's Hall.

The season of 1887 was full of dramatic activity. It opened on January 1, with a performance by Prince Wells, the World's Champion Cyclist.

On January 7, 1887, the Plaquemine Amateur Opera Company appeared in The Mikado at Pike's Hall.

On January 12, the Harry Webber Comedy Company appeared in Confusion, and on January 13, in The Hornet's Nest.
On January 24, 1887, the Chanfrau Dramatic Company played Kit, the Arkansas Traveler.

On January 27, 1887, the Adamless Eden Company appeared at Pike's Hall. The Daily Capitolian Advocate remarked: "The girls are young and pretty and the piece has been received with much favor by admiring audiences everywhere. They will present a world of joy and bliss that captures in sight, and the audience is immediately carried away by the beautiful tableaux, marches and poetic concerts of their artists."

The Daily Capitolian of January 31, 1887 had the following statement which the present writer has not been able to support from other sources: "Mr. A.H. Huguet, the enterprising manager of Pike's Opera House, has made arrangements with Thompson's Dramatic Company to play here on the 10th, 11th, and 12th of February. This is a very good company, and they will present The Gold Ring, For a Life, and Rip Van Winkle."

On February 9, 1887, the Romelldi Grand Opera and Concert Company gave a program of vocal and instrumental selections.

On February 18, 1887, the Golden Dramatic Company played Jo at Pike's Hall, and on February 19, they played The Daughter of the Regiment at a matinee and Beatrice at an evening performance.

On February 24, 1887, the Chanfrau Dramatic Company appeared in The Octoroom. The Daily Capitolian Advocate
said that the Baton Rouge performance would use the new and original scenery from the New Orleans production, and that Mr. Chanfrau would appear as Solem Scudder. Chanfrau was an important actor of this period. He had appeared as Haemon in the first professional performance in New York of Antigone at Palmo's Opera House on April 7, 1845. It was Chanfrau who popularized another native type, the tough city lad, as Mose the Fireboy in *A Glance at New York.*

On March 6, 1887, the McNish, Johnson & Slavin Minstrel Company played at Pike's Opera House. The paper said that: "...every part of their entertainment was fully up to the standard claimed for the company, and in every sense excelled anything of the kind that had ever visited our city. Their witticisms, were fresh and were entirely free from the least tinge of 'smut'."

On March 12, 1887, Madame Janish and her company played at Pike's Opera House in Sardou's *Princess Andrea.* The review was interesting so the whole of it is here included.

Last Saturday night according to previous announce-
ment Madame Janish appeared at Pike's Opera House with her talented company and played Sardou's Princess Andrea to a large audience. Her success in this play was well earned. At the commencement of the play the audience were disposed to view her acting with a feel-
ing of disappointment, which no doubt she observed with the quick intuition of one who knows how to read human faces, but she seemed in no hurry to win applause.

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continuing to work her way carefully through the first parts of the play to that part where she could make some display of her talent and power as an actress. In the third act she was afforded the opportunity of doing herself justice, while the scene is perhaps one of the most effective in the whole play. Janish made the most of the occasion and before the curtain fell she had firmly established herself in the good opinion of the audience. Her acting is of a quiet, unobtrusive sort. Her pathetic scenes were especially well acted. At all times brimful of womanly gentleness she was continually permitting the audience to catch glimpses of an under current of intense passion, boding and baleful.

On March 20, 1887 the Baton Rouge Seminary Literary Association gave a benefit for the Presbyterian Church, and played the farce *The Champion of Her Sex*.

On April 21, 1887, the Pansy Circle, an organization of young ladies, presented *Our Boys*, and on April 22, the same group presented the pantomine, *Cinderella*.

On June 22, 1887 the young ladies of Prof. Fay's Academy presented *The Fairy Fountain*, a musical play of five acts, as part of the closing exercises.

On June 30, 1887, the Lotus Club Amateurs of Plaquemine presented *Chimes of Normandy* at Pike's Hall.

On October 6, 1887, the Berland Combination opened an engagement at Pike's Hall. The company included Mrs. Berland, "the Empress of Magicians," Mr. Berland, "Physiognomist from Paris", Miss Bertrand, "Polyglot and Prima Donna".

On October 10, 1887, *Only a Woman's Heart* was presented by Miss Helen Blythe and her company.

On October 22, 1887, *Two Old Cronies* was played by Miss May Ten Breeck supported by John E. Henshaw and
Frank Wills.  

On November 1, 1887, The Basye-Davis Ideal Company appeared in *A Cardinal Sin*. The cast included the leading actress, Miss Annie Burton, Mollie Hammett, and Maude Stuart. On November 2, the company played *Fogg’s Ferry*; on November 3, *Called Back*, and on November 4, *Hidden Hand*. On November 5, the play was *White Lies* and on November 7, *The Count of Monte Cristo*. The last performance was *East Lynne* on November 8, 1887.

On November 12, 1887, the Haverly Minstrels played at Pike’s Hall. One of the feature attractions was Hilton, who performed the feat of "standing on the top of the backs of two chairs, fully four feet from the floor of the stage, bending backwards and catching with his mouth the end of a cornucopia shaped cloth placed immediately under him on the floor".

On December 5, 1887, the Juvenile Opera Company of New Orleans presented Andraus’ beautiful comic opera, *The Mascot* and on December 7, *Fatinitza*.

On December 8, 1887, the Basye-Davis Ideal Company returned for another engagement. The first show was *Fate, or Lost and Won*. On December 9, they played *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and on December 10, *The Planter’s Wife*.

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2See *American Vaudeville*, p. 126-127.
On December 17, 1887, Robert Downing appeared in The Gladiator, and wore the same armor which the "famous McCullough wore the last time he appeared on any stage". He was billed as the successor to McCullough, and was said (by his press agent) to have qualifications that McCullough lacked—personal magnetism, and voice of great melody as well as power.

On December 30, the McIntyre and Heath Minstrels played at Pike's Hall.

On January 9, 1888, Miss Charlotte Thompson appeared at Pike's Opera House and filled an engagement of one night in Drifting Clouds.

On January 13, 1888, Marie Prescott and Mr. R.D. McLean appeared in Incomer with Mr. McLean in the title role and Miss Prescott as Parthenia. On January 14, the same team presented Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice, in which Miss Prescott played Portia and Mr. McLean played Shylock.

On January 21, Miss Charlotte Thompson returned to star in Jane Eyre.

On February 9, 1888, the Lottie Church Dramatic Company played Pe-pete, Walter Fletcher's amusing four-act comedy drama. Miss Church appeared as Monte, Pe-pete and Bell Brandon. On February 10, the company played in John A. Stevens' five-act melodrama Unknown, and on Saturday night Lottie Church played American or Born.
On February 18, 1888, Miss Lizzie Evans appeared in her specialty drama, Our Angel.

On February 24, 1888, the Bartram & Burbridge Comedy Company played A Night Off with great success.

On March 9, 1888, the Pete Baker Dramatic Company played Chris and Lena. Mr. Baker was supported by Miss Lucie Miller as Lena.

On March 19, 1888, Miss Lillian Lewis and her company appeared in As in a Looking Glass. Miss Lewis played Lena Despard, and the paper said, — "her superior acting, beauty and figure, forcibly recalled to our memory the charming Mrs. Scott Siddens, when this lady took our city by storm, some seventeen years ago". On March 20, 1888, the Lillian Lewis company played L'Article 47.

On April 2, 3, and 4, 1888, Prof. Zera Semon's novelty combination played at Pike's Hall.

On October 15, 1888, the Howard Company played Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde which was advertised as a romantic play, full of strong dramatic interest. Sensational situations, startling tableaux, novel stage effects were featured.

On November 5, 1888, The Basye-Davis troupe played Dad's Girl; on November 6, The Young Tutor; on November 7, Called Back. The paper said "Miss Burton, and Messrs. Fox, Bell, and Wightman sustained their parts excellently, and were ably assisted by the company". On November 8, the troupe played The Lady of Lyons, and the paper commented
"the company has appeared in every variety of drama, from comedy to tragedy, and proven itself adapted to either". On November 9, the company played A Dangerous Woman, and on November 10 closed the engagement with The Young Tutor at a matinee and Only a Factory Girl at an evening performance.

On November 17, 1888, the Wills, Henshaw and Ten Breeze Company played Two Old Cronies at Pike's Hall.

On November 30, 1888, the Pansy Circle gave an entertainment at Pike's Hall which consisted of tableaux, recitations, and minstrels.

On December 1, 1888, Miss Lillian Lewis and her company presented Donna Sol, a translation from the French of Victor Hugo by Mrs. Lawrence Marston. The paper said, "This great play will be given for the first time in this city with all the original scenic effects, magnificent costumes, and mechanical appointments which made its first production such a marked success".

On December 3, 1888, Miss Maude Atkinson and her troupe began their engagement with Ingomar. On December 4 the troupe played Reddy's Luck; on December 5, the play was Forget Me Not; on December 6, Leah, the Forsaken was presented, and on December 7, 1888, The French Spy was given.

On December 8, 1888, Augustin Daly's New York success, A Night Off, was presented by a company that included
Mr. Gaston, Mr. Burbidge, Mr. Spangler, Mr. Rignold, Mr. Verney, Mr. DeLesser, Mrs. Eberle, Miss Harned, Miss Willard, and Miss Livingstone.

On December 11, 1888, George T. Ulmer and his company presented Col. Mulberry Sellers. The paper had this comment to make:

While of course Mr. Ulmer suffers in consequence by the comparison with John T. Raymond's "Sellers", yet he resembles that great actor in many ways. His interpretation of the character was strong and artistic, and he never failed to please the house by his numerous local hits. Miss Lizzie May Ulmer made an excellent Laura Hawkins, and sustained that difficult part with credit. The support was quite good.

On December 12, the Ulmer company played For Congress with George Ulmer as Gen. Josiah Limber and Mr. J.H. Clark as Peter Woolley.

On December 15, 1888, Baton Rouge was treated to a rare opportunity in drama by the appearance of Mme. Janauschek who played in Meg Merrilies.

All lovers of legitimate drama and truly artistic acting should not fail to attend the theatre tonight when Mme Janauschek appears, it is said, for the last time at this place before her retirement from the stage. The play "Meg Merrilies" is a powerful dramatization of Sir Walter Scott's novel "Guy Mannering", and those who are familiar with it can appreciate what a splendid scope there is for dramatic action. Mme Janauschek needs no introduction to the American public, and her company is spoken of as a particular strong one. Already almost all the reserved seats have been sold, and the great tragedienne is certain of a cordial reception.?

No review of this performance appeared.

On January 14 and 15, 1889, Nellie Walters played in Crissa Cross.

3Dec. 15, 1888, Daily Capitolian.
On January 21, 1889, Prescott and McLean played in James Sheridan Knowles tragedy *Virginius* at Pike's Hall.

On January 23, and 24, 1889, the Jos. D. Clifton Ranch King Company with "that charming soubrette", Miss May Treat, played at Pike's Hall and presented "special scenic effects, refined specialties, and a whirlwind of laughter".

In the *Daily Capitolian* of February 2, 1889, appeared an advertisement for a production of Leonard Grover's comedy-drama, *Lost in New York*, which featured special scenery by Harley Marry and Gustav Lewis. The description of the scenery is interesting.

**Synopsis:**


On February 18, 1889, Fisher's great musical extravaganza, *A Cold Day* was presented at Pike's Hall. A note in the advertisement of this production read: "SPECIAL—this company carries Special Scenery for this entire production".

On February 25, 1889, the J. C. Stewart Comedy Company played *Two Johns*.

On March 25, 1889, Miss Myra Goodwin appeared in E.E. Kidder's comedy, *Sis*. 
On June 7, 1889, the Pansy Circle presented its last affair. It consisted of three tableaux, Pocahontas, The Captive Slave, and Returning from Harvest, a one-act farce, The Mouse Trap with Miss Selina Kugler, and Mr. St. Clair Favrot, and the pantomine, The Mistletoe Bough.

In the Daily Advocate of September 4, 1889, an advertisement for the opening of Pike's Opera House for the fall season appeared. The attraction was German's Musical Comedy Company under the management of Jack Curry playing the Irish comedy Irish Hearts of Gold. The advertisement adds: "Irish Hearts of Gold enlivened with new songs, new music, Irish jig and reel dancing, new and appropriate scenery, representing the Lakes of Killarney by moonlight, an Old Time Irish Fair, an Irish glen with a CATARACT OF REAL WATER! A grand display of mechanical effects."

On October 17, 1889, The Leslie Davis Ideal Company presented Miss Annie Burton in Sea of Ice, a melodrama. The paper said: "...Miss Annie Burton appearing in the title role of 'Ogarita' .... Each act is presented in perfect detail by the company's own special scenery and will be the greatest scenic display ever in the city. A valuable addition has been made since the last appearance of this company in Baton Rouge in the form of a military band and operatic orchestra and the patrons may expect a rare musical treat." On October 18, the troupe presented Stricken Blind, or the Queen's Evidence, and on October 19, a matinee,
On October 28, Effie Ellsler appeared at Pike's Hall in her successful society comedy *Marza.*

In the *Daily Advocate* of October 25, 1889, an editorial appeared which deserves mention here:

Baton Rouge society has felt the need for sometime of an amateur dramatic company, and several attempts have been made to organize one, but have all failed, not on account of scarcity of good material and talent, but from the fact that no permanent organization could be maintained. For a city of its size, Baton Rouge can boast of as much amateur talent, dramatical or musical as any city in the South.

With a view to establishing a permanent amateur dramatic club, certain energetic young men will hold a meeting tonight at the rooms of the Harmony Club for the purpose of forming such an organization, and it is to be hoped that their efforts may meet with deserved success.

On November 4, 1889, *A Cold Day* was presented at Pike's Hall. The review the next day was interesting because it was the first mention of a campaign to secure a new theatre in Baton Rouge. The review reads:

*A Cold Day.* This rollicking face was rendered at Pike's Hall last night to a full house and with complete success. The want of good music was conspicuous. The company expected to find a regular orchestra here and merely brought a leader, but did not succeed in obtaining assistance. Last night's performance demonstrated the necessity for a good theater at Baton Rouge. There was a large and appreciative house, an entertaining play, but poor accommodations and limited stage facilities. We must have an opera house.

On November 11, 1889, the Happy Cal Wagner Old Time Minstrels were scheduled to play at Pike's Hall, the company including "the original Billy Birch; the world's favorite, Cool Burgess; the distinguished silver-voiced tenor, Charles
Henry; the renowned banjoist, John H. Mack; the fascinating prima donna, Charles Heywood; the matchless musical sketch artists, Coleman and Morton; the famous Manhattan Sextette; the great clog dancers, Rooney and Kelly. One of the features of the show was a "new and original ideal spectacular scenic first part, copyrighted by Cap Wagner, entitled The Planter's Wedding."

On November 15, 1889, Miss Maude Atkinson's Company opened a short engagement. Miss Atkinson's leading man was John V. Melton. The engagement was comprised of these productions: November 15, J.K. Fillottson's Queens; November 16 matinee, Forget Me Not; November 16 evening, The New Magdalen.

On November 25, 1889, the Webster-Brady Company presented Dion Boucicault's After Dark. The newspaper advertisement of the play said: "A series of sensations. The London Bridge scene with huge river of real water. The realistic gambling hell. Railroad tunnel sensation. The London Concert Hall introducing Will H. Brady in his popular songs. Marie Rene, in her national dance and changes."

On December 2, 1889, the Jennie Holman Theatrical Company opened a week's engagement with Taken from Life, in which Mr. O.H. Krause played "The Tepster," and Miss Holman impersonated "Kate Denby." The December 3 show was Mother and Son; the December 4 production was Mother
and Son; on December 5, the troupe played *His Sweet Heart*; December 6, the show was *Mr. Barnes, of New York*; and on December 7, the engagement was closed with a family matinee (play unknown) and an evening performance of *Lucretia Borgia or the Poisoner of Italy*.

On December 9, 1889, R.D. MacLean and Marie Prescott played *Richard III*, and evoked this review from the Daily Advocate:

Last night was one of the most brilliant in the history of Pike's Hall. Nearly every reserved seat was taken before Monday evening, and there was a good demand for ordinary entrance tickets. As the tickets were $1 each it demonstrated that Baton Rouge is willing to pay a first-class price for a first-class performance. The want of proper stage appointments and paraphernalia militated against the success of the play, to say nothing of the horribly deficient acoustic properties of the hall. To one not schooled in the histrionic line, *Richard III* is not the most absorbing or interesting of heavy tragedies and all impressions and effects must be discounted when accompanied by the previously named difficulties. To one who had enjoyed McCullough or Booth with full accompaniments of stage paraphernalia, scenery, music and a superb support in *Richard III*, last night's play must have been far from the full measure of success. This, however was no fault of Mr. MacLean, Miss Prescott or their support.

Without pretending to give a criticism of the play it may be said to have been excellently rendered throughout, and gave general satisfaction. It was more than could have been reasonably expected under all the circumstances. The company would have done a paying business for a two or even three night's engagement, and we regret that it could not have been so arranged.

On December 21, the George H. Adams company presented *He, She, Him, Her* and Mr. Adams delighted the audience with his rough-and-tumble merriment and tip-top acting according to the paper which also said that "Toby and Tootsie took the laurels, but they were well supported by Hosea
Periwinkle, Mrs. Hill, Otto Schweltz, and in fact by the entire cast."

On December 23, the Jolly Voyagers, a variety performance, played at Pike's Hall.

On January 16, 1890, the Alcazar Comic Opera Company played The Mascot. The company included Miss Agnes Sherwood, Minerva Adams, Amy Leslie, Julia Christen, Jerome Sykes, Charles Gilbert, Russell Childs, Harry Wilber, and a strong cast.

On January 18, 1890, the Ada Gray Dramatic Company was billed to play East Lynne at Pike's Hall, but cancelled the performance because the audience did not appear. The cause of this was explained in the Daily Advocate of January 19, 1890:

Up to eight o'clock, the time for the curtain to rise, there were only two tickets sold. The cause of the Company not being able to draw a house, is entirely owing to the price of admission charged, viz: one dollar. The theatre-going people of Baton Rouge, are tired, and justly so, of paying a dollar for a fifty-cent show, and do not propose standing it any longer, as the complete boycott of this Company has proven. Miss Gray had an average fair company, and would have likely done well here had the prices been reasonable.

The Daily Advocate of January 24, 1890 carried this interesting comment:

In this age of mediocre dramatic companies it affords us pleasure to chronicle the appearance of a real meritorious attraction, "Daniel Boone", the Pioneer, at the Opera House, January 25th, afternoon and night; carry 50 people, and have 5 beautiful acting horses, who do everything but talk, real Indians, splendid scenery and a solo uniformed orchestra of 8 pieces. The parade at noon will advertise the features, and the children's
matinee will be of special interest to the little folks. The prices will not be raised and both rich and poor can have an opportunity of witnessing the "Big Show."

From the Daily Advocate of January 31, 1890:

Beautiful Mrs. Scott-Siddons will read poetical and dramatic selection, at Pike's Theatre, on February 6th. The physical loveliness of this lady has contributed much to the distinction she enjoys. Her features are of that pure cameo-like quality so seldom seen, and her skin has that delicate opaque peculiarity, also so rare.

On February 8, 1890, Robert L. Scott and Harry Mills presented their outstanding comedy success, Chip O' the Old Block, then in its third year of performance.

The Wages of Sin Company played at Pike's Theatre on March 17, 1890.

On September 15, 1890, The Georgia Minstrels played at Pike's Hall.

In the Daily Advocate of October 7, 1890, appeared the following critical comment on the previous night's performance:

The performance at Pike's Hall last night by the "Wild Goose Chase Company" was largely patronized notwithstanding that it was one of the most undeserving troupes that has yet appeared before a Baton Rouge audience. The principal objection to this company is that it absolutely contained no plot whatever and produced as leading hits some of the rankest chestnuts of the age. The audience bore patiently through each act, hoping that the next would prove more interesting, but alas, no improvement came. The same strain continued and the program was executed in three brief acts, but not, however, too short for the weary condition of the hearers.

The piano, though ancient and somewhat delapidated, afforded the most interesting feature of the evening.

We do not observe any change, or improvement in the management of Pike's Hall so far this season over that
of last year and as the Baton Rouge public has long endured this sad condition of affairs, it is well-timed for a halt to be called.

Is Baton Rouge, with her population of nearly 12,000 inhabitants and the Capital of the State of Louisiana, not intitled to better theatre accommodation?

In the Daily Advocate of October 19, 1890, appeared another editorial in the same pattern of criticism.

A Soap Bubble Company. The performance by this Company last night at Pike's Hall closed an evening of unequalled rankness in Baton Rouge dramatic history.

The attendance was somewhat small and the program short. To speak against this company and all parties concerned in its appearance in this city in terms appropriate would not be admissable in the columns of the Advocate. The sum total of the company's performance is below the average of a third-class concert hall company, and is positively underserving of public patronage. It is an outrage on the people of the Capital to have such companies as this forced on them by the manager of our would-be theatre.

Manager Huguet can not plead that he has been deceived in this company, as several leading journals throughout the section in which the company has recently performed have severely criticised it. The Bert Gibson Reveille, of the 17th instant, had the following to say of the company:

"Soap Bubble at the Opera House last Wednesday night. It played to a well-filled house. For pure cussedness this show outranks the rankest. The managers of the hall were much disgusted with the performance. It is an outrage on our people to pay 50 and 75 cents to see such nightmares."

The New Orleans Daily Picayune in an issue about the 6th instant spoke about in the same manner as the above.

The Daily Advocate of November 2, 1890, carried a review of another company that was much more friendly.

Son of Monte Christe Company. This company favored a large and attentive audience with that stirring tragedy "Son of Monte Christo" on last Friday night. (Oct.31)

On yesterday afternoon the company presented that charming society comedy "Flirtation or Love at Long Branch".
Last night the company presented the popular play of "Damon and Pythias". Mr. Frank Linden, the star, created a favorable impression in each and every impersonation. He has a commanding appearance and is possessed of remarkable oratorical and dramatic powers. The company's support to the star is very efficient and deserve special mention. Mr. Geo. M. Hays is a gentleman of fine physique, and has a powerful voice which he admirably controls.

Mr. T.B. Alexander made his best hit last night in the roll of Pythias which he filled in a masterly manner. He is painstaking, and is evidently endowed with remarkable theatrical power for one of his age. Fred Sawyer makes a genuine Irish Mick, Misses Maude Basye, Ella Mason, and May Seymour, are well adapted to their respective roles. Mr. Basye is well known in this city by theatre-going people, and his word that he will give a good play well rendered is all that this people ask for.

On November 15, 1890, Miss Mattie Vickers played in her popular and realistic comedy, *Jacqueline*, a farce comedy complete with funny situations, witty dialogues, sparkling music, songs, dances, and some excellent specialty work.

In the *Daily Advocate* of November 16, 1890, the editor again raised his voice in a plea for a new opera house.

The great need of a new and elegant opera house in Baton Rouge is recognized by all, and from time to time the matter has been discussed by leading citizens, but so far without taking definite shape or reaching any practical result. It is now a very opportune time to discuss the matter more earnestly, and there is no good reason why the money may not be raised, the plans perfected and the house built in time for the opening of the next theatrical season. We are informed that if the general interest of the community is shown by a liberal response from those who are able to contribute to the enterprise, there are gentlemen of means, here and elsewhere, who stand ready to supplement the sum raised by whatsoever amount may be needed to complete it.

There is certainly no necessity for showing the importance and value of an elegant building of this
character, from the standpoint of public benefits to be derived. Baton Rouge is now a city, and wealth, culture and refinement have gone hand in hand with its material advancement. There is no place of its size, and few of half the size, which has not a better theatrical building than Baton Rouge; in fact, Pike's Hall, well enough in its day, has served its time as a place of amusement, and must give way to the progress of general improvement.

The cost of a new opera house, elegant in construction, and built on the most modern plans, would not be very great, and the returns of the investment would no doubt be satisfactory. The basement could be used for purposes which would yield a fair rental, and the receipts from theatrical entertainments would justify a manager in paying a good annual lease for the auditorium. We must not judge of results by present experience. When a handsome opera house is built, old things will pass away and all things will become new in the matter of theatrical entertainments. An elegant hall where people can go to be seen as well as to see, will be a great attraction, and this in turn will attract the best companies to Baton Rouge, so that after a season or two they will seek and not shun us as they have generally done heretofore.

In conclusion, we repeat that it should be borne in mind that Baton Rouge is now a city, and it devolves upon those whose interests are identified with its progress to keep abreast with the new conditions. During the next year, a handsome Federal building will be erected at some central point on one of our principal streets. This should be supplemented with another building, devoted to public uses, and there is nothing more needed than a new and elegant opera house.

On December 1, 1890, R.D. McLean and Marie Prescott presented their production of Spartacus. According to the paper Mr. McLean "is a man of a fine physique and has a strong and full voice, well handled."

The season of 1890 was completed by a performance of a seal circus during the week of December 6; a performance by Robinson's Floating Palaces on December 9 and 10; and by
a performance of Stowe Bros. Great Southern Shows on December 27, 1890, at the corner of Florida and St. Hypolite Streets.

The season of 1891 opened with a two-night stand by the Newton Beers Company. The first show was on January 12, and was Lost in London with Mr. Beers playing Job Amreyd; the second show, on January 13, was Enoch Arden with Mr. Beers playing the title role. The review next morning was rather complete and interesting:

Newton Beers as Enoch Arden fills his difficult role in a most admirable manner. The splendid delivery of a well-modulated voice, striking facial expression and physical bearing, always secures for Newton Beers a hearty greeting from his audience. He has a pleasant face, is painstaking and worthy to be ranked as a first-class actor. His support last night is worthy of mention. Marie Wallesby who personated Annie Lee the loving and devoted wife is a clever and charming little actress. Miss Kate Woods Fiske and Bessie Bennett who personated Arthur and Edith Arden are a couple of sprightly and witty young folks, and secured their pro rata of applause from the audience.

On January 27, 1891, Bell's Royal Marionettes and Novelty Company opened at Pike's Opera House for a three-nights' entertainment.

On February 19, 1891, Madame Fry's Boston Concert Company appeared at Pike's Hall.

On February 26, 1891, Gorton's Original New Orleans Minstrels played at Pike's Hall.

The next comment appeared in the Daily Advocate of April 17, 1891: "Robinson's grand moral show on three floating palaces will be here Saturday, April 25th, and will give two performances, evening and night."
On the 24th of April the Mammoth Minstrel Company, a group of local amateurs gave a performance. The group included many names which are familiar in 1947 as being those of well-known business men. The star of the company was Mr. Vincent Moran, and his support included Frank T. Baker, Fred Kennerman, Benton Booth, Louis Kretz, W.H. Booth, G.W. Burgess, H.F. Brunet, Charles Terranova, and Saint Clair Favrot, who was business manager of the project.

On October 8, 9, and 10, 1891, Lawrence Grant and his company played an engagement during the annual fair. The plays were *Our Strategists*, *The Outcast*, and *The Lawyer Detective*.

On September 19, 1891, Richard Pringle's Famous Georgia Minstrels played at Pike's Hall.

On October 5, 1891, Basye's company of comedians presented *Our German Ward*, and provoked the following newspaper comment.

The comedy has a light and well arranged plot, and in the entirety the play is highly interesting, and the characters in the comedy were well personated by every actor and actress in their respective parts. Mrs. Basye was—if she will pardon us for saying it—an awfully ugly old maid, and filled the role admirably.

Miss Charlotte Wayland personated the beautiful Lucy Winslow. Miss Wayland is a tall, lithe and slender brunette whose lovely countenance was at every opportune moment graced with a maidenly and bewitching smile.

Mr. Tony Kohler, "Our German Ward", has a pleasant modulated voice, and sustained his part admirably well.

Tonight the "Great Double Comedy Bill" will be presented; performance opening with a naval engagement, and concluding with the roaring farce "Our Country Cousin."
On October 11, 1891, the Mammoth Minstrels played in Plaquemine, and on October 16, returned to Pike's Hall for another performance.

From the Daily Advocate of November 1, 1891: "The famous Kickapoo Indian Medicine Company will arrive in our city on the steamer Prince, Monday, Nov. 2. This company has a national reputation having advertised their wonderful remedies in every State in the Union."

In the Daily Advocate for November 4, 1891 appeared a notice stating that R.D. McLean and Marie Prescott would play Othello on November 9, and Cleopatra on November 10. The post-performance review stated: "Miss Marie Prescott filled the role of Desdemona. She is remarkably well adapted for the beautiful role she assumed last night." 4

In the Daily Advocate of November 8, 1891, appeared a complete description of the scenery and costumes for Cleopatra which was scheduled for November 10, but was cancelled because of Miss Prescott's sudden indisposition. The scenery description is interesting however:

The scenery which Mr. MacLean and Miss Prescott bring with them was made by the best artists in this country, Wm. Voeghlin and A.L. Reid of New York. It was made for their engagement at the ill fated Fifth Avenue theatre of that city and requires a special car to carry it. They have hitherto carried little scenery, so their artistic work is now enhanced by more attractive backgrounds. In the first scene of act

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4 Daily Advocate, Nov. 10, 1891.
first of Cleopatra, we see a hall representing an Egyptian temple, decorated with the weird hieroglyphics, and fantastic figures of that nation.

The second scene is an archway in a street in Alexandria, that leads to the entrance of the Temple of Serapis, where Cleopatra worships.

The second act is a chamber in Cleopatra's palace an exact copy of the magnificent engraving made and owned by the government of France, which is recorded as the authentic representation of Cleopatra's room, or "The Queen's Chamber".

The third act represents the housetops of the palace, which gives a fine view of the great plains near Alexandria.

The moonlight shows the serpentine meanderings of the Nile, winding like a silver thread around the pyramids and the strange buildings adjacent to the royal house.

The fourth act is in the tent of Anthony on the banks of the river Cydnus where the famous couple meet and carry on that revelry destined in a part of the history of the world never to be forgotten by man.

The fifth act is in a room in the temple of Isis, where Anthony and Cleopatra die, and where Anthony and Cleopatra die, and where Harmachus, the young Egyptian prince, who is the hero of the story meets his doom and is sacrificed on the altar of his forefathers because of his broken vows and fatal love for Cleopatra.

The ladies will be more interested in what Miss Prescott wears, which is described as follows by Mr. Frank H. Boroly, the enthusiastic advance agent for Mr. MacLean and Miss Prescott.

In the first act a rose colored crepe de chene is artistically shaped around her in Greek fashion through whose gauzy sheames can be seen the outlines of her slender figure. The pink silk garment she wears beneath is skin color, and is worn throughout the play, the outside draperies only being changed for each act.

A superb Egyptian girdle of emeralds and torquises encircles her waist and softens the lavish display of form indulged in by other Cleopatras of today. Her arms and throat are adorned by jeweled bands of the same design and color, and a gold snake with emerald eyes encircles her head. In the second act she wears
a Nile-gree crepe draped around her in the same mysterious fashion, with a strange headpiece of diamonds and emeralds and with the beautiful backgrounds of Egyptian ambergic she presents a lovely picture.

In the house-top scene she wears a misty guage of white, which in the moonlight assumes a thousand picturesque forms and folds. The fourth act a yellow crepe embroidered so gorgeously that it is indescribable. This one display has been in the museum of art in New York, and is pronounced the finest specimen of such work in America. An exquisite classique dress of cream closed Canton crepe, with borders of rarest Egyptian colors and gold makes the costume for Cleopatra's death.

All the costumes worn in this play harmonize in fine taste and make a series of beautiful pictures.

On the 10th of November, instead of playing Cleopatra, Mr. MacLean substituted Spartacus the Gladiator.

On November 27, 1891, Will E. Burton appeared in a dramatization of Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer.

On December 14, 1891, The English Opera Company presented a burlesque of Faust, and the pre-show notice warned the audience "unless your buttons are sewed on tight, an explosion of laughter may put you in an awkward predicament."

On December 18 and 19, "Eugene Robinson's Floating Palaces, museum, menagerie, and grand opera house", paid a visit to Baton Rouge.

On December 26, Anderson's Unique Comedians presented the old favorite, The Two Old Crones.

On January 9, 1892, Henshaw and Ten Broeck presented The Nabobs to open the season in Baton Rouge.

On April 20, 1892, Lew Dockstader's Minstrels played to a large audience; the leading comedians and specialty
artists were George Powers, Frank Girard, McIntyre and Heath, the Three Marvells, and Perry and Magrew. The performance was concluded by an Ethiopian farce comedy arranged by Messrs. McIntyre and Heath and entitled "Hotel Punch de Leon". At each performance Lew Dockstader appeared in a specialty entitled "Our President".

On October 10, 1892, R.D. McLean and Marie Prescott appeared in The Duke's Wife, by James Sheridan Knowles. The supporting cast was composed of Lawrence Grant; his wife, the former Inez Knowlton; Barry Johnson, and C.A. Steele. On October 11, the same cast presented Romeo and Juliet with Miss Prescott as Juliet, Barry Johnson as Romeo, Lawrence Grant as the Friar, Mrs. Grant as Lady Capulet, Dearborn Bird as Capulet, Morris Bauer as the hungry apothecary, and Miss Harriet Glynn as the faithful old nurse.

On October 14, 1892, the Mammoth Minstrel and the City Quartette Combination presented a program which featured a farce, entitled Romeo and Juliet in which Mr. Vincent Moran appeared as Romeo, and Mr. St. Clair Favrot appeared as Juliet.

On October 28, 1892, Lizzie Evans, the "Little Electric Battery" presented her success The Little Blacksmith, and during the performance danced the "Shadow Dance", and assisted by Gus Pixley, rendered her version of the latest New York success Reuben and Rachel.

On November 12, Henshaw and Ten Broeck played a return engagement of The Nabobs.
On November 19, Mr. A. Huguet, Manager of Pike's Hall, was able to secure the Larry the Lord Company before it opened at the Grand Opera House in New Orleans. The company was headed by R.E. Graham who played General Knickerbocker in The Little Tycoon.

The following review appeared in the Daily Advocate of November 22, 1892.

Miss Hettie Bernard Chase appeared last night at Pike's Hall, in her great melo dramatic comedy, "Uncle Darling". The audience was a large one and manifested its appreciation and approval by volleys of applause, especially in the third act where "Alaska, the land of ice and snow" was presented. The introduction of trained bears, dogs and reindeers upon the stage was an amusing and striking feature in the play. Every character in the caste did well, and the easy and unaffected rendition of their respective roles happily secured the good will and accord of the audience, especially when Uncle Billy invited the audience to join in the chorus in tra-ra-doom de-aye. Miss Chase is a sprightly and always amusing actress—every expression of her face, every movement of her body and every sound of her voice is perfect, and her acting is happily enhanced by an excellent company support. Frank Calburt, as Uncle Billy, who tickled the crowd was a popular person. Charles Wells, as Chinaman An Lin, who was always willing to shav-ee pig tail-ee to be all-ee same-ee like-ee Melican man, never failed to bring forth bursts of applause. Master Charley Wethen, as little Captain Ned, is a clever and precocious little fellow, and holds his own among the great big men.

The company will re-appear tonight at Pike's Hall in the same play with a few new specialties and additional scenes.

On November 26, 1892, the Al. G. Fields minstrel played at Pike's Hall. The paper of Nov. 29 said: "The minstrel was satisfactory in every respect, and we have yet to find one of the audience who was not highly amused with the play and the beautiful shifting scenery."
On December 3, 1892, Verona Jarbeau and her company performed Starlight "to a fair and appreciative audience". Miss Jarbeau was supported by Ed Sandford, and others.

On December 12, 1892, Hewes, the magician, assisted by Madame Claire, the world famous German medium, and a carefully selected company of high-class specialty artists, performed at Pike's Hall.

On January 10, 1893, Pete Baker, assisted by Billy Kennedy, an Irish character, and Miss Martha George, played Chris and Lena, or Life of the Upper Mississippi.

On February 2 and 3, 1893, there was an "Olde Folke's Concerte" at "Ye House of Assembly called Pike's Hall, near ye cross roads (where Third crosses Convention)".

On January 27, 1893, the Czarina Club presented the tragedy of Asoka for the benefit of St. Vincent's Boys' Academy.

On April 3, 1893, and April 21, local amateurs presented a three act comedy-drama, Hick'ry Farm.

In November, 1893, French's New Sensation, a floating theatre, played a two day engagement in Baton Rouge.

On November 10, 1893, local amateurs presented a complimentary benefit for Pelican Hook and Ladder Fire Company No. 1. One of the features was the one-act comedy-farce, The Rough Diamond, in which Messrs, Charles E. Bauer, Waldemar Landry, Hubert Wax, St. Clair Favrot, and Misses Selina Kigler and Elvina Reddy took part.
On November 13, 1893, The Georgia Minstrels appeared at Pike's Hall, and managed to get the following criticism:

The Georgia Minstrels were here Monday night, and had by odds the finest dollar house any mediocre troupe this season. The show was tiresome. It was not long, but you got bored. You like it, or at least parts of it, for awhile, but you feel the absence of the chick. It was very much like good bread in which the salt had been omitted, in so far as the singing was concerned, and the star of the troupe was made to appear too often. Gauze, as a female impersonator, does some excellent work, but his singing is so poor that it somewhat detracts from his real fine mimicry. That is the only part in which he is worth a powder horn full of cold water. Billy Kersands, the star is undoubtedly good in several roles, but as an end man, we are sorry to say that Billy is a failure. He is said to dance well, but there was no dancing by any of the troupe here worthy of comment. He has peculiarities which fix the attention and cause great mirth. He can yell louder in a whisper than any singer we have ever heard, and his mouth resembles the crater of Vesuvius. Billy Kersands is the Georgia Minstrels, and the audience got tired of Billy, is about the best criticism of the show that we are able to make. We think 25 cents for general admission and double that for reserved seats, is fully as much as the price of admission should have been. We know the hall has been vastly improved, but this fact does not weigh with the deluded who pay one dollar per ticket to see a show on the faith of the hall management that they will see something good. If a good troupe, one deserving of patronage should come along now the chances are they would play to empty benches, and would depart from hence never to return. Give a first-class show for a dollar, or more if necessary, but don't charge a dollar for a two-bit show. People will pay for a good thing, but they won't stand being mulcted. We will endeavor to be fair and just in our criticisms this season, and hope that our efforts will not be misconstrued by the public.

On December 9, 1893, the Al G. Field Columbian Minstrels appeared with the following actors: Al G. Field, Charles Kenna, Tommy Donnelly, Fred Russell, Dick Clark, the Alveaz Family, the Brothers Mehring, and Cradee, the Roman axe man.
On February 2, 1894, The Spoonendyke Farce in two acts was given at Pike's Hall for the benefit of St. James Episcopal Church.

On April 2, 1894, Fannie Hill's burlesque company presented an operatic burlesque Sinbad and America.

On April 14, 1894, the Mexican Typical Orchestra played a concert at Pike's Theatre.

On the 17th of May, there was a benefit at Pike's Theatre for St. Joseph's Catholic Church in which fifty young ladies took part in the Graecian rainbow dance, silent emotional postures, and the stately minuet, and other "novel, scenic, artistic, and grand presentations."

On October 8, 1894, Al G. Field Minstrels played a return engagement.

On November 1, 1894, French's New Sensation returned to Baton Rouge.

On November 15, 1894, Col. G.W. Hall's Great Railroad Show, Menagerie, Museum and Caravan exhibited, and presented in addition to the free street display, a grand free balloon ascension and parachute jump.

On November 13, 1894, the Barlow Brothers Minstrels played at Pike's Theatre, and received favorable reviews from the newspaper.

On November 18, 1894, Miss Eva Clark gave an illustration on spiritualism at Pike's Theatre.

On November 30, 1894, Sells Brothers Circus exhibited in Baton Rouge.
On December 14, 1894, Carrie Lamont presented *Is Marriage a Failure?*, and was said to have been "a highly amusing comedy of the better class, introducing catchy songs, pretty dances, and is elegantly costumed."

On December 15, the Ladies Improvement Association presented a program which closed with the laughable farce *The Elevator*.

On January 3, 1895, the Georgia Minstrels, headed by Billy Kersands, returned for an engagement.

On January 15, 1895, Miss Belle Gilbert presented her comedy success *Jane*.

On January 20, 1895, Mrs. Gen. Tom Thumb and her company of Lilliputians and royal midgets played at Pike's Hall.

On March 19, 1895, *The Shepherd's Fold* by Miss Lucille Rutland was presented with Mrs. Annie L. Pitkins and Mr. George Heath in the leading roles.

On June 27, 1895, the S.V.A. Dramatic Society presented *The Last of the Sawmills*, a play of the old Druid days in ancient Irmensaul, and the farce *A Good Night's Rest*.

On June 25, 1895, the Sisters of St. Joseph's Academy sponsored a drama in one act entitled *The Heiress* which was presented at Pike's Hall.

On October 5, 1895, J.K. Emmett appeared in his latest success *Fritz in a Mad House*, and he was supported by Misses Emily Lytten, Laura S. Howe, Kate Eckert,
Kitty Francis, Messrs. L.P. Hicks, Williard Newell, Gilbert Braithwaite, Charles Stewart, George Hernandez, Charles Prince and Little Baby Spencer Sinno.

On November 6, 1895, Barnum and Bailey’s Greatest Show on Earth played in Baton Rouge.

On October 28, 1895, M.B. Leavitt’s new company presented the spectacular extravaganza, *Spider and Fly*. The advance notice for the show said: "The scenery, costumes, mechanical, and electrical effects are all new and there are also new novelties, specialties and a superb ballet of 16 beautiful English dancers, among the specialties is the reigning novelty, the 'Trilby Dance' which is creating a furore everywhere."

On October 24 and 25, 1895, French’s New Sensation played here.

On December 5, 1895, a play called *The Fatted Calf* was presented here.

On January 8, 1895, Punch Robertson’s Company opened an engagement with *The Midnight Bell*; on Jan. 9, they played *Polly and I*, and on January 10, *The Iron Mask*.

On the 20th and 21st of January, 1896, Signorina Nica Moreska, the celebrated soprano, and Signor Alfredo Gore, the pianist, appeared at the State House under the auspices of the Baton Rouge Athletic Club.

On February 3, 1896, Oliver Byron brought his company of comedians to Pike’s Hall in *The Ups and Downs of Life*. 
he was supported by Kate Byron, Fred Warren, R.F. Russell, and Gertrude Dion McGill.

By February of 1896, the plans for a new opera house seem to have taken on a definite shape according to this article:

A New Opera House. We are glad to be able to make the announcement that the work of securing funds for the purpose of building an opera house is progressing in the most satisfactory manner. All the influential men in the city will take stock. The estimate of the amount adequate for the proposed building is $25,000. At first blush this appears to be an almost impossible sum to be realized from the citizens. We state with the greatest gratification, however, that this amount can be largely exceeded as found by the committee to be necessary. Already the scheme is being talked about at all the public places, and before many months we trust this city will have a first class modern opera house.

On February 13, 1896, Hoyt's Company played Pawón Ticket No. 210, and on February 14, the company played Trilby for the first time in this city.

On March 12, 1896, Lincoln J. Carter's spectacular play The Fast Mail was presented at Pike's Hall. It must have been quite a scenic display if the newspaper account can be believed.

...The railway has often been used by the dramatist, but never before to such an extent as in Carter's famous play "The Fast Mail". A freight train fourteen cars, a lighted caboose and full-sized locomotive, with engineer and fireman, crosses the stage in the most realistic and noisy manner while later in the play a great Mississippi river steamboat, with bells and whistles, and engines in full operation, moves and explodes with terrific force. A great scene is also given of Niagara in real tumbling water. The company is a most efficient one, and there is a great deal of fun to go with the sensational effects. A special car for the scenery is used and every detail is carefully looked to in the stage production of the play.
On April 10 and 11, 1896, Dick P. Sutton's Co. appeared in Texas, or Siege of the Alamo, and Montgomery, the Cradle of the Confederacy. At the matinee on April 11 The Yankee Farmer was presented.

On April 20 Mr. M.B. Curtis presented his famous dialect characterization, Sam'l of Posen. He was supported by Albena DeMer (Mrs. Curtis), and a competent company. The paper said "his 'Sam'l of Posen' of today is practically a new version of the celebrated play. It is written up to date and dressed in the style of today. Many new and amusing phrases and catch words today current are introduced. New situations have strengthened the piece, while all the best things of the former version are retained."

On June 10, 1896, local amateurs again presented a minstrel show, which was described in the paper:

Commencing with an overture by the entire company, Mr. Wm. Merry, a baritone of unusual range and quality of voice, will sing the celebrated heoric ballad, "A Son of the Desert am I", followed closely by Vince Moran and Frank Baker with local hits and topical songs such as are sure to arouse the risibilities of all who hear them. The dancing and tumbling of Moran, the wonderful feats of balancing by Baker and the pure and artistic melody of the Aeolian Band will tend to make the "Olio" a most enjoyable and laughable portion of the programme.

The sketches "Sim Dempsey" and "Fun in a Boarding-House", will bring out the full capabilities of the comedians, Moran, Baker and Rabenhorst—also introducing St. C. Favrot as "One of those Things". This scene in a Baton Rouge boarding-house has been in preparation some weeks, and judging by the local introduced during the scene, one may look for about as much

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5Daily Advocate, April 15, 1896.
fun and downright comedy as has ever been put upon the stage in this city.

On October 3 and 4, 1896, Baton Rouge was given its first program of the Edison vitascope at Pike's Hall.

On October 12, 1896, French's New Sensation played at the river front.

On October 16, 1896, Edward P. Elliott, impersonator of plays, appeared in a program.

On October 20, Prince's Floating Palace played at the steamboat landing.

On October 26, 1896, Sells Brothers Circus exhibited in town.

On November 6, 1896, local amateurs under the management of Mr. Wyndham presented The Siege of Vicksburg.

On November 12, 1896, W.H. Harris' Circus gave a matinee and night performance.

On January 13, 1897, John C. Stewart and his comedy company played The Two Johns at Pike's Hall.

On January 19, 1897, Ed. F. Rush's White Crook company played at Pike's. The paper said "it is one of the most elaborate productions that has ever been brought south, and is such an attraction as is rarely seen outside of the metropolitan cities. The company carries full settings of scenery for the entire performance, and the costuming is elegant." There are twenty-five people in the company, which is composed of performers and a dozen handsome burlesquers."
On February 13, 1897, Lincoln J. Carter's Fast Mail was again presented.

On March 3, 1897, Nellie McHenry and her company played A Night in New York.

On March 9, the initial performance of Alabama was played.

On March 14, the New Orleans Minstrel Company and Little Myrtle Miller appeared.

The following editorial appeared in the Daily Advocate of April 8, 1897:

The question of a new Opera House has for a long time been a leading question in the minds of a great many people of this city.

The claims of the public in this respect have been made known through the Advocate on more than one occasion, and it looked at one time as if the people here intended to make ample provision for the existing deficiency. The travel between this city and the balance of the world is rapidly growing. Hundreds of strangers are in the habit of visiting here during the winter, and whenever they visited Pike's Hall to attend any kind of entertainment that building is always more or less severely condemned by the class of people in question. Committees appointed for that purpose have made a number of appreciated innovations in the matter. At one time the report being current that a site for the Opera House had been purchased, but there seems to be a disposition on the part of the committee now to avoid a decisive reply in regard to the whole matter, and for this reason the entire affair has been held up by us for some time awaiting the final report of the committee having it in charge. There is yet considerable hope as to the final outcome of this important affair by many of our citizens, and we trust that Baton Rouge will soon have a first-class place of amusement to take the place of the illly constructed Pike's Theatre.

On December 6, 1897, The Thoroughbred was presented with Billy Griffin playing the tramp. The newspaper comment said: "the piece is a very good musical comedy. In elegance of costumes, brilliancy of music and beauty of women, it is
as good as the country affords."

The 1898 season was opened on January 1 by a performance of French's New Sensation.

On January 22, 1898, Henshaw and Ten Broeck presented **Dodget's Trip to New York**.

On January 26, 1898, Edwin Travers and the original New York cast played in William Gillette's *The Private Secretary*.

On April 15, local talent presented the play *Esmeralda* for the benefit of the Pelican Rifles.

In May 1898, Katherine MacNeill's Columbia Opera Company presented the following shows: on May 12, *La Maccotte*; on May 13, *Bohemian Girl*; on May 14 for a matinee, *Sad Pasha*, and on May 14 at night, *Olivetta*.

Ringling Brothers' World's Greatest Shows exhibited on November 21, 1898.

French's New Sensation played on November 18 and 19, 1898.

In the *Daily Advocate* of November 20, 1898 appeared this following publicity item:

Opening of the opera season—"A Turkish Bath". The company comprises such people as Miss Jeanette Lewis, for the past seasons at "Proctors", "Keiths", "Koster and Bials" and the principal roof gardens of New York City. Mr. John Keiffer is too well known to need any comment; he is a singer of reputation, his range high B, and he is in excellent voice this season. Peters and Walters are singers and dancers that have been with the best farce comedy companies on the road, and their sketch is full of witty dialogue that keeps the audience screaming for 20 minutes. The rest of the fun makers are capable people, and the prices 25, 50, and
75 cents, are the main feature of the company and one that can be appreciated, as shown by the people who nightly crowd the theatre to see Keogh's comedians in "A Turkish Bath".

In the Daily Advocate of November 25, 1898 appeared the following review of the performance:

The opera house opened last night with the first performance of this season the "Turkish Bath" combination. The theatre was packed to its utmost capacity to witness the "Humest" show that ever performed in this city.

Without making any individual distinction we declare all the actors to be absolutely rotten. The ordinary beer saloon performance on Royal Street in New Orleans at which you pay 5 cents to see the show, outclass the actors that showed here in the play, as Barnum and Bailey's show outclass the ordinary circus given in each community. To charge the price of 75 cents to see such a gigantic fraud was obtaining money under false pretenses, and the sooner the managers of the theatre here cancel all engagements with such breezy comedies the better it will be, for many in the audience that were humbugged out of their money last night, at one time threatened to demonstrate revolutionary resolutions, condemning everything connected with the steal; but wiser counsel prevailed on them and they consented to let it go this time, promising that if it ever occurred again in the future they would do it.

Readers through the country, stay clear of "A Turkish Bath" if you don't want to be cheated.

On November 29, 1898, Baton Rouge had the privilege of seeing one of the most brilliant casts ever scheduled to appear during the nineteenth century in this town. The following description appeared in the Daily Advocate for November 25, 1898.

The engagement on Tuesday evening next, at the Pike's Opera House of the great star triumvirate, Louis James-Kathryn Kidder-Frederick Warde and their brilliant coterie of associates, brings forcibly to mind that the field of the Shakespearean or legitimate drama, as represented by actors of the old school is narrowed down to this one excellent organization. Managers Wagenhals & Kemper
have brought together the greatest of the survivors of the old school that produced Forrest, McCullough, Booth, Barret, Keene, and others. The American stage has known no greater exponents of the form of the drama known as heroic tragedy than Louis James and Frederick Warde. Of all the actors now living who have won renown in those roles which are classed in the highest realm of tragedy these two artists stand easily in the front rank. In Miss Kidder is centered one of the chief hopes of the women of the American stage. The character with which she has heretofore been chiefly identified (Madame Sams Gene) served to show various phases of her art. An important characteristic of her acting is that she can approach and cross, when necessary that thin border line which separated pathos from merriment. Miss Kidder is a happy combination of art and nature. It was the determination of Wagenhals & Kemper to offer to the American public the greatest legitimate aggregation ever seen since the days of the Booth-Barret-Modjeska Combination. With James-Kidder-Warde, they have drawn together practically all that remain of the legitimate stars of distinction upon the American stage. They have selected a repertoire of eight plays, including the brightest comedy in the language as well as the greatest tragedies of Shakespeare, with two romantic plays to give still further variety. A support of the triumvirate of stars is the jeune premier, Barry Johnstone, the veteran Harry Langdon, Collin Kemper, Norman Hackett, Thos. Coffin Cook, Charles Clark, Misses Loretta Wells, Aphie James, Mrs. Henry Vanderhoff and others.

The after-play review was just as enthusiastic as the advance publicity.

The opera house was packed to its utmost capacity last night to witness the James-Kidder-Warde combination in the "School for Scandal", and although 240 extra chairs had been put in the hall yesterday, and sold as reserved seats, when the doors opened the sign "standing room only" was hung on the wall.

The house was packed; reserved seats, raised seats and the gallery upstairs all jammed.

The play was one of the finest ever witnessed in this city and everybody in the large audience was thoroughly pleased, if the spontaneous applause from the jolly crowd was any indication. It was certainly the hit of the season.

The company is an exceedingly strong one, and everybody in it has lots of work to do, and they all do their
parts well. It was the unanimous opinion of all present that the show was bound to please any audience.

The managers of the theatre here are to congratulated upon securing such a magnificent treat for the theatre loving public of the Capital City.6

On December 3, 1898, Prince's Floating Palace gave a performance at the landing.

On December 10, 1898, a vaudeville show was presented which consisted of three plays entitled Edith's Burglar, A Pair of Lunatics, and Chums. Among the entertainers were Belle Fairchilds Bogel, S.R. Socola in an imitation of John E. Henshaw, and Little Sydney Shields.

On December 28 and 29, 1898 Cooper & Co's Famous Southern Shows played here.

On March 6, 1899, The Scalchi Opera Company played at the University Pavilion.

On March 23, 1899, Edison's great reproduction of the Passion Play was given at the University Pavilion.

On October 5 and 6, 1899 the cantata "Esther" was presented by local amateurs.

On November 9 and 10, 1899, The Players Club presented Louisiana by W.M. Barrow. The proceeds were given to the Public Library Fund.

On October 21, Al G. Field's Minstrels gave a performance.

From the Daily Advocate of October 27, 1899:

Quite a number of our prominent citizens met at the First Nation Bank last night and organized themselves

6Daily Advocate, Nov. 30, 1898.
into an organization to be known as the Opera House Association. The organization is taking especial interest in the work of building a play house which they propose making one of the prettiest in the South.

Mr. Ben R. Mayer was elected present; D.M. Reymond, vice-president; Eugene Cazedessus, secretary, and J. Weis, treasurer.

One thousand dollars was subscribed last night, and as many of the promoters of the affair were not present it is expected that it will be double the above amount by the end of the week.

The new opera house scheme is moving along nicely. Everybody who would like to become a member of the organization that has for its object the building of a playhouse are requested to make the fact known and join at once.

Only three thousand dollars more is wanted to accomplish their object and as that amount is in sight we expect to see a first-class opera house in the course of construction in our city soon.

On December 4, 1899, Uncle Josh Spruceby was presented at Pike's Hall. The production featured special scenery, two big bands, a solo operatic orchestra and a company of 35 people. The big scene was a complete saw mill and its realistic effects.

This amusing comment appeared in the Daily Advocate for December 19, 1899.

The christening of Independence No. 2's new horse at the residence of Mr. John J. Wax, detracted somewhat from as large an attendance at the opera house as otherwise would have been last night, but Pike's Hall had a fairly good crowd to witness the performance of the Barlow Minstrels. The presented a first-class and up-to-date show.

On April 16, 1900 an entertainment was presented at Pike's Hall entitled Memories of the Past and it was a series of selections from the most prominent amateur
theatrical performances given in the theatre. At the entertainment each member of the audience was presented with a souvenir and history of Pike's Hall, which was really the last program in the building since the destruction of the old place was begun the week after the program. With the destruction of Pike's Hall one definite period in theatrical history in Baton Rouge was ended, and the next period started with the laying of the corner-stone of the Elks' Theatre on May 26, 1900 at 8 p.m. This new theatre was located at the corner of Third and Florida streets, and it was officially opened on November 17, 1900 with a performance of Hall Caine's *The Christian* as played by the Liebler Company.

Since theatrical history entered a new period with the erection of the Elks' Theatre, and since it is not the purpose of this study to enter into this new period, this study is completed with the last performance in the Old Pike's Hall.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In general, it might be said that as far as recorded information about Baton Rouge is available, there seems always to have been theatrical activity of one sort or another in the town. In many respects, Baton Rouge’s theatrical history followed the pattern of other towns in its vicinity. Like New Orleans, Natchez, Vicksburg, and other towns, it boasted its own stock company and theatre in the early part of the nineteenth century; however, after Mr. Jones and his company failed to return to town following the season of 1821, the chief theatrical fare consisted of readings, circuses and concerts.

As early as 1841, Baton Rouge amateurs were organized into a dramatic producing group under the title of the Thespian Corps or Thespian Society; this group produced plays irregularly until 1847 when the movement seems to have been discontinued. The amateurs were reorganized in 1866 as the Thespian Association, and were active at least until 1868. For the next ten years there are only a few scattered newspapers available. When the newspapers were again available in 1878 there was a mention of an attempted reorganization of the amateurs. In 1884 the Young Men’s Literary and Social Club was organized, and seems to have
been active only for that year. In 1887, the Pansy Circle, a group of young ladies interested in drama, was organized and was active until June 7, 1889. The only other amateur society during the period of this study was the Players Club which appeared in only one production, *Louisiana*, in November, 1899. In addition to these organized groups, there were intermittent presentations by church and school groups of tableaux and cantatas. In retrospect, the amateur theatre from 1819 to 1900 seems to have followed a pattern which exists even as late as 1917; the pattern was one of feverish activity for several years, then several years of inactivity and disinterest, followed by activity and so forth. About the amateur theatre in Baton Rouge this one fact seems to be foremost—the reason that a permanent group could never maintain interest was the lack of a theatre building belonging to the amateurs.

In 1833, Baton Rouge was visited by its first showboat on the Mississippi River. Strangely enough, this showboat presented a legitimate play and was the only play ever recorded in the newspapers as being presented in this fashion to Baton Rouge audiences. Other showboats which followed carried minstrels, circuses or variety troupes. In 1852, the great era of showboats was started when *The Floating Palace* first stopped at the Baton Rouge landing; on this occasion it carried a circus. By 1855, the *Floating Palace* had been joined by the steamer *James Raymond*.
carrying Reed's Minstrel Company, and in 1857 they were accompanied by the steamer Banjo carrying another minstrel troupe. These boats traveled together, under the same management, and offered three shows for the price of a single admission ticket. In summary, river showboats visited Baton Rouge frequently from 1833 until the end of this study in 1900.

One of the most popular forms of entertainment in Baton Rouge was the minstrel show. This form was introduced in December, 1847, flourished as late as 1900, and probably well into the twentieth century. During the heyday of the minstrel companies Baton Rouge was visited by the best in the profession—the Campbell troupe, the Big 4 troupe, Billy Kersands and his company, the Happy Cal Wagner troupe, the famous Lew Dockstader company, the Christy Minstrels, and the Al G. Fields' company. It would be difficult to determine any particular period of extreme activity in minstrel performances. From 1847 to the turn of the century, the minstrel show was always an unusually popular form of entertainment in Baton Rouge.

Special mention should be made of the professional theatre which developed during the Civil War. Very early in 1862 there were two companies performing nightly. One was the Varieties Company at Thespian Hall and an unnamed company at Academy Hall. One of these was called the Confederate Theater which might lead to the conclusion that
the companies were playing for the entertainment of the Confederate troops stationed in town. After Baton Rouge was occupied by the Federal troops in the spring of 1862, reference was made to the Union Theater which might lead to the conclusion that the company was playing for the entertainment of the Federal troops then stationed in town. It is a fact that the performers from the Confederate Theatre were not mentioned after the occupation in 1862, and it is another fact that the performers mentioned after the occupation were unknown in Baton Rouge before that time.

When the Civil War was over and Pike's Hall was built, the theatre in Baton Rouge definitely began a new era. At first the only companies visiting the town were small because of the difficulties of rail transportation which made it impractical for large companies to appear. However, when the travel situation was made easier in 1882 by the construction of new railroads, Baton Rouge was visited by larger, more experienced and more ambitious companies, and the size of the companies increased steadily from 1882 until 1900. At first the companies were independent troupes such as the Golden company, the Basye Dramatic Troupe (also known as the Basye-Davis Ideal Company), the Jenny Holman Combination, and the Henshaw-Ten Broeck Company. By 1888, the theatrical syndicates were sending out large companies so that the town was visited by Augustin Daly's company, the William H. Brady Company, the Mike Leavitt Company, and
the Kidder-Warde-James Company. All these last named companies carried special scenery and effects for a single production in contrast to the early small companies which played a repertory of plays on each visit. With the rise of the syndicates many troupes of low quality appeared in Baton Rouge. These seem to have been shows sent out from New York under the guise of professional shows but which lacked anything of interest for the earnest theatre-goer. These shows, in addition to being poor in quality, were high in admission price and as a result the theatre public in Baton Rouge rebelled against them.

From 1882 to 1900 it is possible to trace the development of the theatre in America by noting the productions appearing in Baton Rouge; first, the small stock company producing a number of plays, then the individual star traveling with a special company and appearing in a limited number of plays, followed by the large spectacular productions, and finally the syndicate's companies of low quality productions.

In 1896, Baton Rouge had its first experience with a new form of theatre which was soon to supplant the living medium to a large extent, the Edison Vitascope. In witnessing this new form of theatre Baton Rouge had made the transition from small, inadequate stock companies in 1821, through the periods of the amateurs, the showboats, the
minstrels, the variety shows, and the traveling companies to the latest art-form of the theatre. These changes were all made in the eighty-one years from 1819 to 1900.
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Alban Fordesh Varnado was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana on December 24, 1920. He attended Catholic High School, and upon graduation in 1937, entered Louisiana State University. He received the B.A. Degree from the School of Education in August, 1941. After spending three years and four months in the Army during World War II, he returned to Louisiana State University in September, 1945 to study for the Master of Arts Degree. He became a candidate for that degree in the spring of 1947.
Candidate: Alban Fordesh Varnado

Major Field: Speech

Title of Thesis: *A History of Theatrical Activity in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1819-1900.*

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination:

May 7, 1947