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Ithaca, N.Y.



View of the old Dryden Opera House on Library Street. Built in 1893. First Professional play presented on its stage was on January 1, 1894 by the Ella Fontainbleau Dramatic Company. House shown next to theater was home of Dr. Jennings, followed by the residence of Theon Johnson.

Beyond the Footlights

Story of Dryden Opera House
1893-1936

By SAMUEL A. CLOYES
Curator, DeWitt Historical Society



1968

DEWITT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Acknowledgments

This story does not pretend to be a complete history of the Dryden Opera House, but rather an effort to collect and put into preservable form some record of the service it rendered Dryden neighborhood as an entertainment center.

It brings to the writer some reminiscences of when he, as a youth living in the village, delivered handbills from house to house for several professional stage plays.

We base our narrative upon news stories gathered from the weekly issues of The Dryden Herald from 1893, the year the Opera House was built, and add pertinent material from old show programs in the possession of the writer.

Our thanks are extended the Southworth Library in Dryden for the use of its files, and especially to the cooperation and assistance rendered by Mrs. Opal Bond, librarian.

We appreciate, too, assistance given by the late Francis D. Howlett, a former manager of the Opera House. We are grateful to Emmett Fox, Raymond Rockefeller, Mabel Bartholomew, Earle F. Lupton, Chester B. Cartledge and many others who contributed so much to make this story possible.

Finally, we owe sincere thanks to Walter H. Stainton, president of DeWitt Historical Society, and William Heidt, Jr., city historian, both of whom read the entire manuscript and offered many valuable suggestions.

Samuel A. Cloyes.

DeWitt Historical Society
February 10, 1968.

"OUR BOYS"

The most successful comedy ever produced is to be presented at the

Dryden Opera House Tuesday Evening, Mar. 21

By Home Talent, under direction of Z. B. Lormor

This comedy in three acts is invariably received with hearty laughter and applause from beginning to end. Two hours of fun and amusement.

No Waiting Between Acts!

Good Specialties!

Cast of Characters.

Sir Geoffrey Champneys, a country magnate	Mr. Lee Mosso
Talbot Champneys, his son	Mr. Max Graham
Perkyn Middlewick, a retired butter man	Mr. Arthur J. Hines
Charles Middlewick, his son	Mr. Z. B. Lormore
Kempster, Sir Geoffrey's man servant	Ross Rockefeller
Poodles, Middlewick's butler	Arthur Myers
Violet Melrose, an heiress	Miss Emma Smith
Mary Melrose, her poor cousin	Miss Nellie Baker
Clarissa Champneys, Sir Geoffrey's sister	Mrs. Dawn Lormore
Belinda, a lodging-house slave	Mrs. Anna Clark Sweetland

Synopsis.

ACT I.—At the butter man's. Scene—Perkyn Middlewick's country house

ACT II.—At the baronet's. Scene—Drawing-room in Sir Geoffrey's. Seven months are supposed to have elapsed.

ACT III.—Mrs. Patchem's, three pair back. Scene—Third floor of a London lodging-house. Time—The present.

Miss Ruth Wilson will render a violin solo during the evening.

The Dryden Orchestra of Twelve Pieces will Furnish Music

POPULAR PRICES:

25 Cents to all parts of house below Balcony; Reserved Seats, 35 Cents

In the Beginning

On a certain spring morning in early April 1893, a man was observed on Main Street in the Village of Dryden, talking earnestly to a small group of citizens. He seemed possessed with an idea that he was expounding to them.

Why shouldn't the community have a building, a meeting place, where townspeople could gather for an evening's entertainment? Why not a place where local as well as professional talent could put on plays, band concerts, lectures, dances and even hold political rallies?

As the village had no such proper facility, the more the man talked, the more convinced he became of its possibilities and chances of success.

This man, speaking so earnestly, was John W. Dwight, one of the leading citizens of the village.

He further told his listeners that Dryden had long needed a place for holding entertainments, but no systematic effort to obtain one had been made. So, he had decided that there was no reason why Dryden should not have an Opera House.

To realize his dream, Dwight talked with several persons of the village whom he thought would be interested. He explained his purpose, solicited funds and obtained monetary pledges for an opera house suitable in every way to the needs of the community. In one day he obtained financial support sufficient to cover the cost of a simple building.

According to the Dryden Rural News of June 13, 1963, "Mr. Dwight was the most liberal contributor when the Opera House was built at a cost of \$3,500."

Ultimately, there resulted an enterprise which grew and prospered for many years.

It was Monday, April 24, 1893, when Dwight called a meeting of subscribers in the office of George E. Goodrich to or-

ganize a company called "Dryden Opera House Company, Ltd., Dryden, New York."

Thirty interested citizens attended this first meeting. The following directors were elected: Theron Johnson, William H. Sandwick, D. T. Wheeler, C. D. Williams, F. D. Hill, W. J. Lumbard, James Fulkerson, E. C. French and Dr. F. S. Jennings. C. D. Williams was elected temporary chairman.

Possible sites for the new building were discussed with the following considered: Sweet property on South Street, vacant lot near Grove Hotel, lot belonging to J. H. Pratt, and land owned by F. D. Hill on the west side of Library Place.

This meeting adjourned, with a statement as reported in The Dryden Herald of April 26:

"It is the intention to begin work as soon as possible, and a building will be erected which will not only be a great convenience but a help to the village on account of the better class of entertainment it is likely to draw."

On Wednesday, May 17, the following appeared in The Herald: "A meeting of the stockholders of the Dryden Opera House Company will be held at the office of Geo. E. Goodrich Friday evening at eight o'clock. All subscribers are requested to be present as the stock is ready for signatures. Chas. Williams, President."

Agreement was reached at this meeting to purchase the land owned by F. D. Hill on the west side of Library Place as site for the new building. It was voted that the company should be governed by a president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, and a seven-member board, and a manager.

At a meeting of stockholders on May 19, bylaws were adopted, thus completing the organization. The following officers were elected: president, C. D. Williams; vice-president, W. J. Lumbard; secretary, J. Dolph Ross, and treasurer, E. C. French.

June 21, the board of directors again met to consider plans for the new opera house as drawn by D. P. Bartholomew.

The Herald on July 5 reported "the plans and specifications for the opera house are now ready for the contractors. The

building proposed is to be of wood 45x80 feet with posts 20 feet high and the ceiling to be 5 feet higher in the center than at the sides. The stage will be 27 feet deep with curtain opening 25x15 feet. Gallery 12 1-2 feet wide in center and 6 feet wider at each end, with raised seats. The vestibule will be 6x16 with box office and check rooms, and kitchen and dressing rooms will be provided under the stage. The finish will be of fancy ceiling, and altogether the edifice will be well adapted for all purposes for which it is to be required. The designs finally adopted are the work of Mr. D. P. Bartholomew, and are especially neat in appearance. It is expected that the contract will be let within a week or thereabouts and the trustees hope to have the building enclosed by about the first of September."

The building was to have a capacity, including that of balcony seats, of about 600.

The contract for building the Opera House was awarded Bartholomew & Loomis, the lowest bidder. However, through some misunderstanding the contractors failed to sign the contract. The Board then engaged William Park as foreman and general superintendent and instructed him to proceed with construction of the building.

"Active work was begun on the opera house this week by the excavation for the foundation, and a large amount of material is being drawn upon the library site in readiness for the masons," reported The Herald of August 2.

On September 23, "work was continuing and the carpenters were very busy and attracting much attention from citizens of the village." By September 27 the framework was completed.

Although the Opera House was not entirely completed at the time, the Republicans held a rally, the first public meeting, on Friday evening, November 3, 1893. The principal speaker on this occasion was the Hon. W. W. Hicks of Florida. Dryden Concert Band, under leadership of Will Baker, furnished the stirring music. On this date there were no heating facilities in the building.

It is interesting to note the comment which appeared in The Herald of November 8: "It was unfortunate that the Opera House was so cold, as many persons were unable to stay on that account."

With a Republican rally by an enthusiastic audience of loyal supporters being held, a speaker from Florida, and a cornet band fervently playing "Onward to Victory," the new building should have been warmed and shaken to the rafters, one may be permitted to observe.

Under date December 13, it was reported that "although the Opera House is not yet completed, its use has been courteously granted to the Presbyterian Sunday School for its Christmas entertainment, and a cantata prepared under the leadership of Dr. F. S. Howe, which will be presented by the school Monday evening, December 25."

At long last, the formal opening of the new Dryden Opera House was scheduled for about December 15, 1893. The scenery had been purchased from a Chicago firm, the same which furnished the scenery for the Lyceum Opera House in Ithaca. There were five scenes depicting a forest, street and prison scene, two interiors, and a kitchen and parlor scene. Thus all was in readiness for the gala occasion.

The heating problem had been solved when a new coal-burning furnace was installed by Treman, King & Co. of Ithaca.

From the December 20 issue of The Dryden Herald, we learn that "the Opera House will be in entire readiness for the reception of audiences by January 1st. The chairs have been shipped and will be put in place.... The scenery has arrived."

With the heating plant installed, the scenery on hand and the chairs enroute, the formal opening of the Opera House could not be far off. Meantime, it may be imagined there was no topic of discussion in the village that underwent public consideration comparable to that furnished by the possibilities suggested by the new venture. It was a time of impatience.

The Curtain Rises

So, after many months of planning and hard work the great day finally arrived—the official opening of Dryden's new Opera House! It was January 1, 1894, when the first professional play was presented upon its stage. A troupe known as the Ella Fontainbleau Company staged a three-night engagement, with a different play each night.

“This company has just been playing a week's engagement in Ithaca to crowded houses, and receives the enthusiastic praise of all our citizens who have been fortunate enough to be present,” so reported *The Herald*.

Scheduled were three plays, the first, entitled “Our Boys,” set for January 1, was to be followed next night by “East Lynne,” and on January 3, “Her Fidelity” was to be staged. All three starred in the leading role Miss Ella Fontainbleau who, according to the reviewer had “three things in her favor: youth, good looks and an abundance of animal spirits.”

However, despite planning by the Fontainbleau Company, plans went awry and problems arose which had to be settled at the last minute. “Our Boys,” scheduled for the first night, was set back to the third, owing to illness of a member of the cast. An Irish comedy, “Kathleen Mavourneen,” was substituted for the opening presentation.

The enthusiasm with which the new Opera House was received by its patrons on this opening night was recorded by the following account in the local paper:

“An event which had been awaited with great interest by the residents of Dryden and vicinity took place Monday evening—January 1, 1894—when the new Opera House was formally opened to the public by the Ella Fontainbleau Dramatic Company.

“A large audience filled nearly every seat in the house, and

it was very pleasurable to find that from all parts of the edifice an excellent view of the stage could be obtained and that there were no poor seats anywhere.

“Those in the gallery expressed themselves as decidedly gratified with their location and equal satisfaction was expressed by occupants of every part of the house.

“The handsome interior and the artistic drop curtain presenting an Italian lake scene were admired before the opening of the Play.”

It is interesting to note that while the comedy as presented “has been favorably received in other places, the Dryden audience did not get ‘waked up’ until the second act when the applause grew more frequent.” Something good must have come from this play, however, when we read that “the parts were well sustained throughout.”

On the second night the company presented “Her Fidelity,” which was received by “greater enthusiasm” while “the costuming was said by all to be fine, and the applause elicited by different scenes generous.”

Miss Fontainbleau played the role of a “young society woman gracefully and was pleasing to her audience who testified their appreciation in an unmistakable manner.”

Although “East Lynne” had been originally scheduled for the second night’s performance, it apparently was not staged at this time.

The third night’s performance of “Our Boys” was received with great enthusiasm. The review by the press stated:

“The presentation of ‘Our Boys’ by the Ella Fontainbleau Company at the Opera House Wednesday night drew out even a larger house than greeted the company on the previous evening and the play was one that elicited almost unanimous praise from those present.

“The parts were well taken and the reception was such that the company decided to make another engagement here sometime in February.

“The gross receipts of the three nights are said to have been nearly \$500.”

Rules and Regulations

As each play was given from the stage of the new Opera House, it was accompanied by a printed program which listed not only the names of the players and characters portrayed, together with advertisements, but also some rules and regulations for the guidance of its patrons. These were laid down by A. M. Baker, manager of the theater. They were presented under the heading, "House Notices," and read as follows:

"Tickets cannot be laid aside unless paid for.

"No fees of any kind allowed to ushers or attachees.

"Smoking positively forbidden in any part of this Opera House.

"Seats for this Opera House may be obtained by mail or telegraph.

"Patrons finding lost articles will kindly leave them at the box office.

"Patrons are requested not to eat nuts, fruit, etc., in this Opera House.

"Patrons will please report to the manager instances of inattention or misdemeanor on the part of any of the attachees of this Opera House.

"Special attention is called to the safety of this Opera House, located on the ground floor with exits on all sides. The stage and auditorium are well equipped with fire pails, stand pipes and coils of hose, connected with the water service."

Apparently these rules were appropriate and filled a need of the times. Reserved tickets were put on a strictly cash basis, and no tipping was allowed employees. No smoking in any part of the house was an essential safeguard, and provision of defense equipment is to be noted.

Another precaution was that there be no eating during performances may have been taken to secure the dignity of actors in event a play went sour.

A Bouquet Is Tossed

How well this entertainment center in the village of Dryden was received in its early years was indicated when the editor of The Groton Journal, L. J. Townley came to Dryden February 27, 1894, to look over the new Opera House. His report, as printed in The Dryden Herald, February 28, reads:

“While in Dryden yesterday we had the pleasure of looking over the new Opera House recently completed in that village. It is well built and tastefully finished. The large stage with its splendid appointments is highly appreciated. Between 500 and 600 people can be accommodated in the auditorium and gallery.

“The money for its erection was raised in the village in a short time. The stock was offered in shares of \$10 and was quickly taken. The people now have a very tasty, commodious and in every way a creditable place in which to enjoy entertainments. Groton will do well to follow her sister village in this direction.”

And so, the Dryden Opera House was off to a good start! It was already apparent that Dwight and his supporters in the building project had accurately measured the public's anticipated support of a community entertainment center. This public did not only liberally support professional theater, but manifested a strong willingness to add local-talent productions that proved of more than passing interest. It proved a happy association that endured until the coming of the movies, silent though they were. The venture finally bowed out to changes in mores of village and rural life induced by good roads and the automobile in a whirlwind of change that swept all before it.

Henceforth Dryden would shed much of its individuality and share a less challenging commonality in all things.

Home-Talent Players Take to Stage

At about New Year's 1894, several townspeople had become interested in putting on plays themselves in the new Opera House. A company for that purpose was soon formed. Among the first of these undertakings was realized when "Above the Clouds," a drama in two acts, was presented Thursday evening, February 15. The cast consisting of local talent included:

William H. Sandwick in the leading role of "Philip Ringold" who was known in the play as "Crazy Phil," a mountain hermit. Others in the cast as listed in the program in the hands of the writer, and parts they played, follow:

Alfred Thorpe—A City Nabob Mr. A. M. Clark
Amos Gaylord—A Country Gentleman Mr. D. T. Wheeler
Howard Gaylord—His Son Mr. J. D. Ross
Titus Turtle—A Gourmand Mr. J. B. Wilson
Curtis Chipman—"Chips" in the Rough Mr. A. M. Baker
Nat Taylor—A Rising Poet Mr. G. M. Rockwell
Grace Ingalls—A Young Artist Miss May Sandwick
Hester Thorne—Gaylord's Housekeeper . . Miss Rose Hubbard
Susie Gaylord—Gaylord's Daughter Mrs. E. C. French
Lucretia Gerrish—"So Romantic" . . Miss Mary Montgomery

Music was furnished by Howe's Full Orchestra under direction of Dr. F. S. Howe. General admission was 25 cents, while reserved seats were 35 cents. Tickets could be obtained at Jennings's Drug Store. The doors opened at 7 p.m. and entertainment began at 8. Furniture used on the stage was donated by "our enterprising dealers, French & Sperry."

This initial performance by local talent, received such overwhelming support by the theatergoers of Dryden and vicinity, and was such a huge success, that the company, in response to popular demand, decided to restage this play in the

summer. The following appeared in The Herald of June 27:

“Everybody should engage a reserved seat at the Opera House for the evening of the Fourth to see this play which was rendered so finely last winter by the same company. While it is a home talent affair, it is safe to say that the dramatic company is yet to appear in the Opera House which can furnish better acting in the highest sense of the term.

“The adaptation of the parts to the different characters to be represented is very happy and the play itself is good, and no one should lose this final opportunity to enjoy the entertainment.”

Like this boy who delivered handbills about town, there are other senior citizens who often in moments of reminiscence recall many of the entertainments that blossomed on the stage of Dryden Opera House.

Dryden Band Concert, Wednesday evening, April 23, 1902, featured E. E. French in a clarinet solo; Messrs. Baker and Lormore, cornet duet; and H. D. Keyser, trombone solo.

Neptune Hose Fair, on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings, November 24, 25 and 26, 1903, with concert band and orchestra. Social dancing was featured each evening. According to the program, “Grand door prizes included a \$35 gold watch, either lady’s or gent’s size, 17-jewels, Elgin or Waltham movement; \$25 sideboard, given by G. C. Sweet; set of dishes, 112 pieces valued at \$15; Oak parlor stove, valued at \$18; and \$5 French briar pipe, Amber mouthpiece.”

“Hysterics,” given by the Dryden High School baseball enthusiasts for the support of their team, on Friday evening, May 8, 1914. The program suggested “Watch for the Big Parade, See the Costumes.”

“The Famous Kitchen Band,” Friday evening, May 10, 1917, featured a cornet solo by Alice Burlingame; vocal duet given by Beulah and Zetta West; and a saxophone solo, by Georgie Fellows.

At onetime Dryden Orchestra consisted of Mrs. Mahan as drum major; Mrs. Mangang, musical director, and Mrs. T. E. Monroe, pianist.

Opera House Encore

Nothing succeeds like success, and so it was for this play. In the years that followed, "Above the Clouds" was presented many times, with an entirely different home-talent cast. It was staged for a two-night engagement on January 15 and 16, 1896, while three years later from its initial opening, it was repeated as a big benefit performance July 9 and 10, 1897.

The play as given at the latter time featured new songs, specialites, and was under direction of W. H. Sandwick. The cast included George C. Williams, a graduate of the New England College of Oratory of Boston and professor of Oratory in Ithaca Conservatory; Miss Victoria C. Moore, graduate of the Boston School of Expression, and Z. B. Lormor, also a graduate of the New England College of Oratory.

As an extra attraction, the program concluded with the funny farce, "A Regular Fix," with George C. Williams in the leading role. Others in the cast: Z. B. Lormor, G. M. Rockwell, A. M. Baker, W. W. Adams, the Misses Lizzie Lumbard and Victoria C. Moore, and Mrs. E. C. French. The Misses Ella G. Lumbard and Dora Louise Topping rendered solos.

The program for these two performances noted that the "celebrated Jacob Bros. piano used was furnished by Lent & Moore, Ithaca." Likewise announced was: "Special trains after the Saturday night performance, going north 11:20, south 12. Opening overture at 7:30; curtain rises promptly at 8."

Again the announcement stated that Dr. Howe's Full Orchestra furnished the music, and "the proceeds of this entertainment will be used to paint the Opera House."

Seats had gone on sale Wednesday, July 7, at Baker Bros. with no increase in price of admission from its original presentation February 15, 1894.

There's Music in the Air

The first musical concert was given in the new Opera House Thursday evening, January 18, 1894, by a company of five pupils from Ithaca Conservatory of Music. The company consisted of A. E. Milliken and the Misses Lena Marsh, Lena Wellar, Lulu VandeMark, and Kate Green, "all of whom are musicians of recognized merit; and people who enjoy fine vocal, violin and piano music should not miss hearing them." Solos were performed by Miss Marsh, violin, and Miss Green, piano, while the others rendered vocal selections.

On August 28, 1895, The Dryden Herald carried the following news item and comment:

"An orchestra concert will be given at the Dryden Opera House, Dryden, N. Y., Friday evening, Sept. 6, 1895, by Howe's Orchestra of 10 pieces. . . . Mr. George Green, violinist, on this occasion makes his first public appearance in Dryden. Mr. (W. Grant) Egbert, president of the Ithaca Conservatory of Music, says he considers Mr. Green one of his most promising pupils. His mastery of the violin at public recitals in Ithaca has won for him an enviable reputation and Dryden people will enjoy and appreciate his ability. Howe's Orchestra has favored Dryden audiences so many times they hardly need mentioning."

The Herald called Mr. Green "superb" and then commented:

"The orchestra concert Friday evening called out a highly appreciative audience. . . . Many a professional orchestra could not have played to the better satisfaction of their listeners, and another concert this season by the same talent would be a pleasant repetition.

"The tasteful decoration of the stage with a few rare plants showed that not a detail had been omitted in careful preparation for the evening, and the orchestra can feel that the whole entertainment was one of which they may well be proud."

Time Marches On

As the years passed, many plays, orchestra and band concerts, receptions, social events, dances, basketball games, silent movies and other entertainments were given from the stage and on the floor of Dryden's entertainment center—the Opera House. To list them all would be impossible task, but a few will be mentioned.

“The Lady of Lyons,” with a cast of local talent, was given Wednesday and Thursday evenings, January 15 and 16, 1896. The cast included William Sandwick, William Adams, Prof. B. Lormor, William C. Cartledge, Benjamin Weyant, Frank Davis, Oliver Seamans, Miss Victoria Moore, Miss Rose Hubbard, Miss Lizzie Lumbard, and a Mr. Mirick and Miss Tyler.

From the January 22 issue of The Herald, the following review is presented:

“Large audiences assembled in the Dryden Opera House Wednesday and Thursday evenings to witness the presentation of ‘The Lady of Lyons’ by local talent. For weeks the cast of young people had been giving a great deal of arduous practice to this drama, and the result was very gratifying, for the play merited hearty commendation. The different roles were well taken, the costuming excellent and the most critical could not have failed to have found much to praise. To give anything but a comedy before a home audience is a difficult thing, but the task was accomplished by this company in a praiseworthy manner, and from many directions comes cordial appreciation of their efforts.”

After citing the performances of the individual members of the cast and congratulating them on their acting ability in the presentations of their various roles, the article concluded:

“The faithful drill given the company by Prof. Lormor enabled them to present ‘The Lady of Lyons’ so that little of the

machinery of acting was apparent, and the play, as a whole, was above the average of amateur entertainments."

The world-famous actress Eva Tanguay and her company played at the Opera House many times. Early in January 1895 this company presented three plays, and the following news item appeared in *The Herald*:

"The Eva Tanguay Comedy Company began its engagement Monday night with 'The California Detective'; on Tuesday evening it gave 'Triss, or Beyond the Rockies' before a large audience. Tonight the play is 'Tom Sawyer,' in which Miss Tanguay takes the part of Mark Twain's funny creation and will undoubtedly please the audience."

Mrs. Georgia Fellows of Freeville tells us that the entire company, which was staying in Ithaca, started out on Thursday for Auburn to fulfill an engagement. When they became snowbound in Freeville, Miss Tanguay and her players were forced to stop overnight at the old Shaver Hotel until traveling conditions permitted resumption of their journey.

A Benevolent Performance

Once again local talent players took the stage and presented "A Noble Outcast" on Tuesday evening, December 28, 1897. The handbills, as distributed house to house by youths of the village days before the performance, proclaimed:

"This is, perhaps, one of the best and most popular plays on the American stage to-day, and the very efficient manner in which it is handled by OUR COMPANY is a matter of no little comment. The dramatic situations are strong, ludicrous, and pathetic; being written for professionals, it has none of the dialogue effect so frequently seen in amateur plays."

This play was given for a worthy cause and "the entire profits of this performance are to be used for a benevolent purpose and everyone is cordially invited to assist.

All was promised for a modest admission of 25 and 35c—the latter was for a reserved seat.

Swing Your Partners

No entertainment program is entirely complete without a few social events and dances. To fulfill the wishes of the younger, as well as the older, set to Drydenites, who desired to show their dancing ability, the Opera House management was most cooperative.

Formal invitations, as sent out by the various organizations which sponsored these social events, read:

“Dryden Lodge, No. 390, I.O.O.F., Extends a Cordial Invitation to yourself and lady to attend a Social Reception and Dance at the Dryden Opera House, Friday evening, Jan. 17, 1896. Music by Dryden Imperial Orchestra. Concert from 8 to 9 p.m. Bill \$1.25.”

* * *

“Leap Year Social and Ball at Dryden Opera House on Tuesday Evening, Feb. 18, 1896, to which the Ladies cordially invite yourself and gentleman. Music by Blakley’s Orchestra of Moravia. Tickets \$1.00; Spectators, 10 cents. Grand March at eight o’clock. Cards and other games furnished for those not wishing to dance.”

* * *

“Yourself and Lady are cordially invited to attend an Old and Young Folk’s Dance at Dryden Opera House on Thursday evening, Jan. 14, 1897. Music by Happy Bill Daniels’ Orchestra. Bill, \$1.50.”

* * *

“Annual Reception. Yourself and Ladies are Cordially Invited to attend the Annual Reception of Dryden Lodge, No. 390, I.O.O.F., at Dryden Opera House, Dryden, N. Y. Wednesday, March 10, 1897. Music by Daniel’s Full Orchestra. Bill \$1.25.”

* * *

Thus the Opera House management was endeavoring to fulfill the social needs and life of Drydenites in the gay '90's.

End of the Gay '90's

As the century neared its end, there were many plays and entertainments presented from the stage of the Opera House.

In 1898, there was "Lost in New York," An Original American Play, which was staged Saturday, October 1.

During the second night of the Dryden Fair, Wednesday, September 21, 1898, a comedy-drama in four acts, under direction of W. H. Sandwick, entitled "Christopher, Jr.," was put on. "Happy Bill" Daniels orchestra furnished the music with specialties between the acts.

On Friday evening, October 20, 1899, there was a Big Benefit Band Concert and Minstrel Show with 35 special artists, four irresistible end men and two interlocutors. Price of tickets 25c, 35c and 50c, with reserved seats on sale at W. H. Baker's.

Eastern Star Shines

An Eastern Star Benefit was staged Thursday and Friday evenings, March 19-20, 1908.

This was a minstrel show bearing the title "The Elite Lady Minstrels," with a cast of local talent women from the Eastern Star Lodge. According to the advertisement in the local paper, it was a "refined vaudeville entertainment, and adjusted to fit the pulse of the times." Written and directed by that "amusement innovator," Prof. W. B. Leonard, it starred 60 of Dryden's most popular female performers, singers and dancers. It was the "society fad of the hour" which was endorsed by the Clergy everywhere." The notices further proclaimed "gentlemen will kindly accept roasts gracefully."

Before the show started, an open-air concert in front of the Opera House was given at 7:15 by the Freeville Cornet Band. The doors were "unbarred at 7:30" and "play ball at 8:15."

Gentlemen, Take Your Seats

The new year of 1901 brought to the Opera House one of the biggest and most elaborate minstrel shows ever performed upon its stage. This "monster" show was given for the benefit of Neptune Hose Company of Dryden. It was presented Tuesday evening, January 22, under direction of W. H. Sandwick, and it featured a magnificent array of local talent together with four irresistible end men. Dryden Cornet Band played the Grand Opening Overture.

The program began with William Adams and Arthur Hines in their original Negro sketch which introduced songs and dances. Next appeared the "world's famous Midget Comedians, Little Willie Miller and Master Frederick Harrison Adams in their inimitable representation of the Human Giraffe."

Following this was "The 'Umpville Drum Corps" which was listed as the most laughable specialty ever introduced. It presented poems composed by Dryden folks and set to martial music, sketching the village's well-known characters. Asserted the huge, 43-inch-long handbill, "by Dryden Herald Print" and in possession of the writer, "money refunded to anyone not satisfied that this number alone is worth the price of admission."

The "Little Adams Sisters," in native costumes, followed in song and dance, "Piccaninies," taken from the celebrated opera "The Runaway Girl." As stated in the program "this number is certainly a gem."

Grand Cake Walk by the Belles and Beaux of 'Umpville; Sandwick and Adams, "Oriental prestidigitators," humorously performed some of the most marvelous feats known to occult science which was advertised as "amusing and astounding, laughable, yet awful." This concluded the evening's program.

Shadows Start To Fall

At the beginning of the 1920's, the Dryden Opera House Company, which had started off with such fanfare and high hopes of continued financial success, found itself approximately \$700 in debt.

In 1921, the Board of Directors decided that a change of management was necessary to put the Opera House on a profitable basis again. It appointed Francis D. Howlett of Dryden as manager, and George Sutfin as secretary.

Manager Howlett began with tighter management, increasing rental fees for certain types of entertainment and scheduling more events. Among them were movies, basketball games, and more high school activities such as dances and plays. The debt was paid off in four years.

He continued as manager until around 1929, when Frank Johnson succeeded him. Johnson, a son of Theron Johnson of the original directors of the Dryden Opera House Company, continued to guide affairs of the company until about 1936.

The Opera House had ceased to be used strictly as an entertainment center for professional performances and went out of business for that purpose in the early 1930's. From then on the building was used principally for high school programs and basketball games, with the Dryden Ramblers, a semi-pro team, as one of the featured attractions.

The Curtain Descends

The last public event in the Opera House was the Commencement exercises of Dryden High School for graduation of the Class of 1936, held June 23.

The motto selected by the graduates was "Veritas Omnia Vincit" (Truth Conquers All), while the flower chosen was the pink carnation. There were 22 in the class whose officers were: Robert Homer, president; Stanley Wheeler, vice-president; and Audrey Givens, secretary. On the Roll of Honor

were Robert Homer, valedictorian, and Ruth Hanford, salutatorian.

The Board of Education was composed of Dr. R. A. McKinney, president; Dr. D. M. Ryan, Arthur Hines, Albert Oltz, Mrs. A. D. Chatfield and Robert Schutt. The program:

Harp Selection Marjory Brown
Processional Class of 1936
Invocation The Rev. W. J. Linderman
Salutatory Ruth Hanford
Quartet .. Stanley Wheeler, Arland Hotchkiss, Sanford Morse,
Hamil Nicely
Duet Audrey Givens and Ruth Newlon
President's Address and Valedictory Robert Homer
Address to Graduates D. B. Harrington
Awarding Diplomas Dr. R. A. McKinney
Alma Mater:

Up among the towering pine trees
With their shades of green
Stands the school of which we're singing
Glorious 'tis seen.

CHORUS

Lift the chorus, speed it onward
Loud our voices ring
Hail to thee, our Alma Mater
For to thee we sing.

As the final curtain falls on the various activities which took place in the Dryden Opera House, it leaves one with a feeling of pensiveness over the days of yesteryear.

The Grand Finale

In 1937, Earle F. Lupton and his wife, Eula M. Lupton, of Rural Route 2, Freeville, became interested in the building. They thought it could be purchased and, with some planning and hard work, converted into an apartment house.

It was August 18, 1937, that an indenture was made "between the Dryden Opera House Co., Ltd., a corporation organized under the laws of the State of New York, party of the first part, and Eula M. Lupton, of the Town of Dryden, Tompkins County, New York, party of the second part," when the building known as the Dryden Opera House on Library Street, changed ownership. The company was represented by L. D. Tripp, president, and Betsey L. Clark, secretary-treasurer.

This sale covered the same property as that conveyed to the Dryden Opera House Co., Ltd., by Frank D. Hill of Dryden July 29, 1893. Lupton proceeded to rebuild and develop the Opera House into an apartment building with four main apartments and in the rear two smaller ones.

Among its first tenants in 1937 was Dr. C. Stewart Wallace, according to a letter of February 4, 1967, from Lupton, then living at Tavares, Fla. After he had managed the enterprise for several years, rent control during World War II made it difficult to show a profit, so he relinquished ownership of the building in 1950.

On October 26 1960, the Luptons sold the building to Roland E. Haskins of Ithaca, when it became known as the Haskins Apartments which he continued to lease until one day in late spring of 1963.

On the morning of June 11, a fire broke out in the siding on the front of the house, where a painter was burning off paint with a blowtorch. By 12:30 the fire had been put out by local firemen. At 2:30 a fire was discovered in another part of the the building. Dryden firemen, assisted by volunteer companies from Groton and Varna, extinguished the blaze, but not before six families were made homeless although escaping with no injuries. The building was valued at \$78,000.

Fire's Aftermath

Although this story is primarily that of the Dryden Opera House as an entertainment center for the village, it should include some reference as to what happened to a building gutted by fire and the heavy losses sustained by its occupants.

The owner had been within a day or two of closing sale of the apartment house, so the fire was a double loss to him, for it included most of his household furnishings recently moved from Ithaca.

Among other victims were Mr. and Mrs. Tafford Oltz who were burned out for the second time within six months.

Other occupants of the apartments were Mr. and Mrs. James Holyroyd, Mr. and Mrs. Russell Watts, Miss Anna Vorce, and Mr. and Mrs. William Wood. The Woods were out of town at the time.

Soon after the fire, Haskins sold the property to John D. MacLean of Ithaca, who assumed ownership July 13. MacLean & Son, local contractors, proceeded to repair the fire damage and restore the structure for rental. MacLean continued this enterprise until the spring of 1966, when the property was sold to Real Estate Corporation of Dryden, its present owners.

* * *

As this story comes to an end, we recall with a feeling of nostalgia that the land upon which this building now stands in Library Street is the site where once was built the Opera House. From its stage uncounted actors and actresses looked out beyond the footlights to enthusiastic and appreciative audiences.

To Dryden oldsters, remembrance of the Opera House brings a thousand and one fond memories of yesteryear.