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City University of New York

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THE HISTORY OF THE COHOES MUSIC HALL, 1874-1901

by

RICHARD L. JONES

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1984

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

THE HISTORY OF THE COHOES MUSIC HALL, 1874-1901

by

Richard L. Jones

Adviser: Professor Vera M. Roberts

This dissertation represents the first history of the Cohoes Music Hall, Cohoes, New York, 1874-1901. The dissertation contains the following elements: preface, table of contents, various charts and figures, the body of text divided into eight chapters, bibliography and the appendix, providing a chronological listing of all productions at the theatre from 1874 to 1901.

Chapter one outlines significant events in the history of the city. It demonstrates how the growth of Cohoes depended upon the harnessing of water power provided by the cataracts formed by the confluence of the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers. In addition, the chapter discusses the development of the city's textile industry and profiles its working-class.

Brief biographies of the owners, the manner in which they independently acquired the land, and their agreement to build the Music Hall are included in the second chapter. A complete listing of the craftsmen who participated in the

construction of the building and theatre is provided.

Chapter three gives a detailed description of the physical theatre. Numerous reproductions of photographs included in the text help to suggest the theatre's quaint beauty. Possibilities of staging are suggested and the various renovations of the theatre are detailed.

The balance of the text, chapters four through eight, presents a season-by-season history of the theatre, its management, and the performances it presented. The fourth chapter details the first three seasons, 1874-1877, in which the Music Hall got off to a shaky beginning. The fifth chapter covers the pivotal fourth season, 1877-1878, in which the original owners divested themselves of control of the theatre. The sixth chapter describes the years in which the Music Hall was closed, 1878-1883. The seventh chapter deals with the re-opening of the theatre and its period of greatest success, 1883-1891. The eighth chapter treats the Music Hall's final decade, 1891-1901.

At the end of chapter eight is the dissertation's conclusion. The conclusion points out that the Music Hall was built at an economically unpropitious moment and that the theatre suffered competitively due to its proximity to larger houses in Troy and Albany. Other important points include the generally poor management of the theatre and the manner in which the fortunes of the Music Hall were tied to the sociology of Cohoes.

PREFACE

In January, 1874, William Acheson and James H. Masten began construction on a new music hall located at the corner of Remsen and Oneida Streets in Cohoes, New York. The following November, the hall was opened with a performance of Dion Boucicault's London Assurance. For the next twenty-seven years, with intermittent interruptions due to litigations or economic problems, the Music Hall was the scene of a wide variety of theatrical entertainments.

Almost immediately after the building was erected the delayed effect of the Panic of 1873 jolted Cohoes' economy. Acheson and Masten felt the effects immediately in terms of the rental spaces on the lower two floors of the four-story structure. Although the Music Hall was located in the center of the main business district, in an urban matrix of mills, residences, and businesses, tenants left the building due to lack of trade. By 1884, neither owner retained any interest in the building, having lost the entire investment. The National Bank of Cohoes made an effort to sustain the theatre, but with the coming of F. F. Proctor's vaudeville houses to Albany in the late eighties, the Music Hall was no longer competitive.

In 1901 the Music Hall was closed due to the depressed condition of Cohoes which, like other mill towns of upper New

York and New England, underwent an economic catastrophe with the rise of trade unions and the subsequent exodus of corporate money to areas of cheaper labor. The entire 75' x 62½' four-story building was left untouched until 1968 when the City purchased it from Marine Midland Bank (which occupied the ground floor) with the intention of turning it into a new city library.

When the seal was broken on the fourth floor, the forgotten theatre was discovered and the New York State Historical Society, recognizing the Music Hall as a cultural landmark from the period in the nineteenth century when the largest knitting mills in the world were located in Cohoes, petitioned for and received from the federal government a subsidy to restore the Music Hall.

At the turn of the century the bank became the only tenant in the building and the upper floors, in a state of disuse, were locked up. The theatre, therefore, was well preserved. There were few noticeable changes and, like a latter-day Drottningholm, much of the original fabric remained. Several playbills and other memorabilia were found and graffiti scribbled on the walls testified to an exciting past and the performers who created it--including Buffalo Bill Cody, Eva Tanguay, John Phillip Sousa, and Tony Pastor. Architecturally, the theatre typifies an ornate "road house" which provided livelihood for touring combination companies, minstrel troupes, and vaudeville shows. Its beauty serves as a monumental statement of civic pride from our recent past.

This research represents the first complete history of the theatre from 1874 to 1901. While the Music Hall is unknown to most historians, the fact that it still stands hardly changed from its original appearance gives it indisputable value as a living archive of nineteenth-century American theatre history.

There seems to have been a substantial amount of material left in the theatre, but it has since disappeared. According to a source at the New York State Historical Society, this material included playscripts altered for specific productions, musical scores, and dance notations. I had varying degrees of success in recovering some of these items. Therefore, rather than relying on account books of the various companies that played the Music Hall, original sketches of scenery, and special effects machinery, I drew heavily on newspaper accounts contemporary with the period. Where appropriate I have augmented these secondary sources with material from public documents, deeds, contracts, original posters, programs, playbills, renovation blueprints, interviews with people involved in the renovation, city histories, year books, theatre histories, and--most importantly--the architectural remains of the original building.

The research is designed to fall into three main categories: the cultural and economic background of Cohoes; a detailed description of the design and construction of the physical theatre; and a complete production history with profiles of significant performances. Because these three components are

often interdependent, and because I have sought to flesh-out the narrative with cross-connections, each category is discussed throughout the entire dissertation.

Most of the data comes from newspaper articles and reviews. Small town chauvinism and the unique fact that the chief journalist was also one of the Music Hall's original owners makes this data obviously biased. However, even the self-serving editorials point to a certain body of facts and an attitude about these facts. In the interpretation of these elements certain progressions begin to develop:

1. That the construction of the Music Hall was an untimely event.
2. That the Music Hall was always in financial difficulty.

Once these ideas were isolated, a certain explanatory logic offered itself. The failure of the Music Hall to be solvent for either the long or short term can be attributed to the unstable economic condition of the city. This instability becomes a major factor in the theatre's decline but was, by no means, the only cause. Competition from rival theatres in Albany and Troy as well as poor management practices emerge as contributing factors in the theatre's demise. Whether or not these speculations are accurate is overshadowed by the sheer historical value of the building, the existence of which provides a valuable conduit to our theatrical past.

I would like to thank Professors Charles Gattmg, Stanley Warren, Stanley Kauffmann, and Vera Roberts, without whose guidance, this manuscript could never have been completed.

I would also like to thank my wife, Mary, who, as an act of love, participated fully in the creation of this project.

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I. THE CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY OF COHOES

The Early Days--The Development of Water Power

Long before Henry Hudson sailed the Half Moon from Long Island Sound up the river which bears his name, Mohawk Indians paddled the white-water cataracts formed by the confluence of the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers. Enough braves lost their lives in the plummeting waterfall that the region became known as "Cohoz," the land of the "plunging canoe." Although the waters were hazardous, the land was prized by both Mohawk and Mohican for its rich forest and abundant game. Hudson himself wrote of the splendor of the Cohoes Falls and may have influenced the patroon, Kiliaen Van Rensselaer, to obtain the first land grants in the area.

Van Rensselaer was an Amsterdam gem merchant who used a small portion of his wealth to buy 700,000 acres of land from the Mohawks in a series of purchases from 1630 to 1637.¹ Today this immense tract comprises 2½ counties of East Central New York State. Dutch settlers from Albany, eight miles to the south, gradually moved into the region, although they scorned Cohoes as "the most insignificant part of the Rensselaerwyck Manor."² Farmers found little tillable land on

¹S.M.Halloran, The Arts and the Urban Environment (Troy, N.Y.: Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, 1973), p. 1.

²Albany Evening Times, 19 September 1874.

the sharply sloping terrain of the Hudson's west bank and agriculture was confined to cereal grains. The narrow flatlands which were to form the city's manufacturing center one hundred years later had fewer than fifty inhabitants at the turn of the eighteenth century. There was no industry, except for a saw mill in the 1720's, and residents lived with neither church, tavern, nor store.³

During the French and Indian Wars the British, who succeeded the Dutch in the area, needed transportation links between the Hudson and their northern forts on Lakes George and Champlain. In mid-century they constructed the King's Highway that ran through Cohoes and accordingly increased the settlement's importance as a population center. A bridge was built over the Mohawk in 1795 and commerce increased for the next fifteen years.

War continued to play a vital role in the development of the area when, during the War of 1812, the iron industry flourished because of the need for armaments and building materials. Many ironworks were located in Troy and Watervliet (the town immediately south of Cohoes). Nevertheless, Cohoes was strategically located to outfit troops against British attacks from the northern forts and from Niagara Falls to the west. This pivotal location undoubtedly induced businessmen to incorporate the Cohoes Manufacturing Company in 1811. They had working capital of \$100,000 and intended to compete with

³Halloran, p. 2.

neighboring towns in the manufacture of iron mongery.⁴

The managers recognized the need for hydraulic power and leased sixty acres of farmland with water rights on the Mohawk for a yearly rent of seven bushels of wheat. They realized modest profits from the manufacture of wood screws and were able to make capital improvements such as construction of a school house and employee tenements. But Cohoes, which in 1800, "could not boast an aggregation of houses approaching a hamlet,"⁵ was simply too small to rival Troy as an iron center. The tiny factory burned in 1815. After the fire, management planned to dig even more canals, build more factories, and convert the operation into textile manufacture. There was neither capital nor technology to support these ambitions and, after stagnating for a decade, the Cohoes Manufacturing Company dissolved in 1825.

The significance of this first attempt at industrialization is threefold. First, the owners recognized the potential of water power. Second, the owners attempted to create their company in the image of similar concerns in Troy (an impulse which was at the root of Acheson and Masten's decision to build the Music Hall). Third, the owners ultimately realized that to establish a niche for Cohoes, the industry would have to offer a product as necessary as iron goods but valuable

⁴Samuel Rezneck, "Cohoes: The Historical Background 1811-1918," Smithsonian Studies in History and Technology 26 (1975): 121.

⁵Albany Evening Times, 19 September 1874.

because it was not produced elsewhere. Their choice of textiles was symbolic for the future of "Spindle City."

In 1817 the United States embarked upon a great project which would further demonstrate how water determined Cohoes' development. Using federal funds accumulated through gradual sales of the land acquired by the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, the government commenced construction of the Champlain and Erie Canals. When completed, the canals would connect Albany with Canada (the Champlain) and open a route for commerce and migration to the west (the Erie).⁶ When the project was completed in 1823, Cohoes was at the junction of four waterways --the two canals, the Hudson, and the Mohawk. The density of locks in the area made the village a center of activity, attracting both people and industry.

The onslaught of cargo and laborers benefitted not only Cohoes, whose population grew to 1,850, but also the whole upper Hudson area. For example, Troy had a fourfold increase in population from 1820 to 1840 when its census showed twenty thousand inhabitants.⁷ While this growth was far greater than in Cohoes, the prosperity of towns like Troy and Albany encouraged Cohoes entrepreneurs that their town might some day match its burgeoning neighbors in size and wealth.

Unlike the growth in the latter half of the nineteenth

⁶Halloran, p. 3.

⁷Arthur H. Masten, History of Cohoes, New York (Albany: 1877), p. 45.

century that was due to foreign immigration, the mid-century spurt primarily involved settlers from Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Vermont who migrated west to work in Cohoes' fledgling textile industries. Their presence was a start towards large scale industrialization, but the village needed more capital to exploit the water that made the cloth.

An important step was taken in 1826 when one of the first utility companies in the United States, the Cohoes Company, was formed by Canvass White, Stephen Van Rensselaer, and Peter Remsen with working capital of \$250,000. The utility had control of the falls on both sides of the Mohawk and sold water-power that was distributed through the area by means of a canal system. The hub of this system was a dam above the falls built in 1831 that permitted steady regulation of the water feeding the canals. Leading from the dam was a mile-long diversion canal that fed water on several levels to various waterwheels in the village.⁸ By these means the growing industries of Cohoes were supplied with mechanical power at a nominal cost. "The water power was leased to the independent factories at a rate of \$20 per horsepower per year, a cost so low that the largest mills could operate non-stop at an expense of only \$1000 per year."⁹

Thus waterpower from the sixty-foot high falls hurled the village into the Industrial Revolution. The Cohoes Company

⁸Rezneck, p. 121.

⁹Halloran, p. 5.

helped start many new businesses. What was once farmland latticed with power canals soon became an industrial complex of loading wharves, gate houses, and small but profitable mills.

The Maturation of Industry--Harmony Mills and Textile Manufacture

An Albany shopowner, Egbert Egberts, settled in Cohoes because he was intrigued by the possibility of converting manual knitting frames into hydraulically powered machinery. In 1832, with the help of Joshua and Timothy Bailey, Egberts started the "first factory in which knitting machinery was successfully run by power."¹⁰ By 1880 Egberts owned twenty-five mills employing over 3500 workers. While Egberts accomplished much, another concern would eclipse his operation by far.

In 1835 Spaniard Peter Harmony arrived in Cohoes and founded the Harmony Manufacturing Company on a sixty-acre tract costing \$100,000. He too produced textiles, but, unlike Egberts, used weaving rather than knitting. Initially, some of the stockholders in this new enterprise were the same as those of the Cohoes Company. When New York financier John Garner acquired both Harmony Mills and the Cohoes Company in 1850, the union of capital, manpower, and waterpower dominated the city for half a century.

¹⁰Albany Evening Times, 18 September 1874.

Harmony Mills' first factory was completed in 1837 and housed 3000 spindles. The company was unable to expand before 1850 due to limitations of capital, uncertain technology, and intermittent work stoppages. Rather than being the fault of Harmony's management, this slow beginning demonstrates the dependence on water power. All of Cohoes' industry experienced slow development between 1835 and 1850 due to the collapse of the Cohoes Company dam in 1839 and the relocation of the Erie Canal further west in the same year. A new dam was eventually rebuilt and the power corporation was permitted to use the abandoned canal as a private waterway.¹¹

This acquisition shows that even in times of adversity, the Cohoes Company/Harmony Mills conglomerate managed to turn the situation to its own advantage. Its increasing economic power was a double-edged sword for Cohoes in that it kept the town financially secure while acquiring almost monopolistic control. For example, the utility increased rates for water power 160% from 1837 to 1846, thereby enlarging its profits but hindering independent economic growth by forcing small businessmen out of the marketplace. While the city lived by water power, citizens began to complain about the many canals cutting through the city, impeding commercial and private traffic.¹² A running dispute developed over who held respon-

¹¹ Rezneck, p. 122.

¹² Ibid., p. 123.

sibility for maintenance of the many bridges and safety railings. Neither the Cohoes Company nor the city would accept the task and, in 1850, a bridge collapsed with a full passenger carriage on it. Public outrage forced the city to sue the corporation, but the suit was denied.

This decision demonstrates how economic and financial control brought with it control over the city's political mechanisms. Yet Cohoesiers were willing to let the conglomerate have its way because of the amazing growth it engendered. Garner spent much of the fifties buying or erecting factories adjacent to the original mill. Spindle capacity was doubled as more than 3000 workers produced 1,600,000 yards of cloth yearly--a 15% increase over the previous decade.

Garner, an absentee owner, imported outstanding managers who continued the rapid expansion during the Civil War decade. By the war's end, Harmony Mills had six factories containing 130,000 spindles and 2,700 looms. At the beginning of the new decade it was producing 24 million yards yearly. It had a payroll of over \$1 million and "during peak periods. . . employed more than 5000 people. . . at least one member in every family in Cohoes worked in the mills."¹³

1870 represents the apex of Cohoes' economic prosperity. The village had been incorporated as a city one year earlier. Its population had grown geometrically: 4000 in 1848, 8800 in 1860, 16,000 in 1870. In this last year the first newspaper,

¹³The Times Record, Troy, N.Y., 6 April 1967.

the Cohoes Advertiser, was started. Arthur Masten (prominent attorney and son of the co-owner of the Music Hall) detailed the new city's prosperity:

At present (1869) the city numbers over 16,000 inhabitants. Its manufactories comprise six extensive cotton mills, eighteen large knitting mills, two foundaries, three machine shops, a sawing and veneering establishment, and many other large and flourishing industrial concerns. The aggregate capital invested in manufacturing operations is estimated at \$20,000,000. The mercantile interests of the city are represented by over three hundred large and prosperous retail establishments. The religious wants of the community are supplied by six large and magnificent churches. Two splendid fire engines of great power are at the service of the fire department. 14

The last thirty years of the nineteenth century saw open battle waged between management and labor--the formation of the Knights of Labor in 1869, the terrorist activities of the "Molly Maguires" in 1877, the formation of the American Federation of Labor in 1886, and the disastrous Homestead, Pennsylvania strike at the Carnegie steel mills in 1892. Throughout industrialized New England workers reacted to this strife and fought for control even as their entrepreneur/managers fought amongst themselves for control of the burgeoning marketplace. Financial failures were the inevitable result of this competition. The organization of the labor force came slowly but inexorable to Cohoes. The Garner estate kept the mills until 1910 when they were sold to the Draper Company, which kept the building until 1932. Today, the plants are

¹⁴Masten, p. 61.

about 90% occupied by a variety of small manufacturers and mill outlets.

The Working Class of Cohoes

Just as water power gave rise to the textile industry, so industry attracted successive waves of immigration of English, Irish, and French-Canadians who shaped the cultural life of the city. With the influx of English and Irish in the 1840's Cohoes population reached 4000, a modest figure but to men like Acheson and Masten a veritable swelling that pointed to a tremendously prosperous future. The Music Hall's owners must have anticipated a substantial audience from this working class and from the middle-class managers. Cohoes had become a company town with a highly structured lifestyle. Undoubtedly, Acheson and Masten foresaw the Music Hall as the leisure time component of this structure.

The economic dominance of Harmony Mills ultimately manifested itself in control over the city's social dynamics. The company leased eight hundred tenements and five boarding houses, began a Sunday School for workers' children, and administered a company store where employees bought food. Rent and food purchases were deducted from wages.¹⁵

As Harmony Mills expanded these row houses took over the

¹⁵Daniel J. Walkowitz, "Working-Class Women in the Golden Age: Factory, Community and Family Life Among Cohoes, New York, Cotton Workers," Journal of Social History 42 (1976): 476.

entire section of the city known as Harmony Hill. Later this complex spread throughout the city, bordering the Music Hall directly to the north, and even today representing a substantial portion of Cohoes' residential units.

Within this tenement community the workers were sustained by the patriarchal Harmony conglomerate. Even during the depression-riddled seventies Harmony employees could rely on the company to meet its payroll each month. The tenements were of solid brick construction and paved streets were lined with shade trees and kept very clean. There were regular garbage collections, sidewalks were paved with asphalt, and grounds were kept neat. Many workers had space for modest gardens. Compared to the experience most immigrant families had undergone in their native England, Ireland, or Quebec, the situation on Harmony Hill was most attractive.

Yet the very security that the Harmony Company offered its workers was largely responsible for creating a social anomaly. Cotton manufacturing entails a great many jobs which require little physical strength.¹⁶ The mills attracted a great many women to fill these light jobs and a unique social situation ensued. The city became a magnet for widows and deserted wives who could settle into the relative comforts of the Harmony Hill community. One quarter of the mill families were headed by women.¹⁷ Rather than being repelled

¹⁶Ibid., p. 465.

¹⁷Ibid.

by the drudgery of factory life these women knew that they could get better jobs in the cotton mills than they could in Albany and Troy where the demand for skilled iron workers left openings only for domestic menials.¹⁸ This plethora of one-parent broken homes was a function of the attractiveness of the tenement community where the women could keep house when not working and be assured that their teenaged children could work at the looms.

The relative comfort of Harmony Hill life was not, of course a function of the company's altruism but rather a paternalistic consequence of its overall profit motive. Arthur Masten points out:

The existence of a manufacturing concern of such magnitude has of course been the utmost benefit to Cohoes in a business point of view, and contributed largely to its prosperity. Through its means large accessions have been made to the populace, and the constant expenditures made by the corporation in wages, in the erection of buildings, and in various improvements have been of marked advantage to the commercial interests of the place. 19

These modest comforts served to narrow rather than broaden the lives of the workers. All of life was company related. Cultural advances were impossible because the existence of the working class Cohoesier centered on hard labor. Schooling was ignored, hours were long, and the limited form of upward mobility that existed placed a premium on physical

¹⁸Ibid., p. 480.

¹⁹Masten, p. 241.

skills rather than intelligence.

The manufacture of cotton fabric involves three distinct processes: carding (the combing of raw cotton fiber until the strands line up parallel to each other), spinning (twisting the fibers into a continuous thread), and weaving. Harmony Mill Number 3--better known as the "Mastodon Mill" after the discovery of a fossilized skeleton during excavation of the foundation--built in 1868 was one of the largest mills in the United States. In the 70' x 600' weaving room there were 1000 looms manned by 300 operators. The noise was deafening: "the effect upon a person unaccustomed to the scene is something like that experienced when standing on the brink of Niagara, or near a ponderous and mighty moving railway train."²⁰ Nearly all of the weavers were women, tending between three and five looms each, depending upon their competency. The moldings on the walls were painted in gold and elaborately decorated, doing "credit to any well appointed parlor."²¹ But there was no sound-proofing and no regular examinations of employees for hearing damage.

The hundreds of boys and girls employed by the plant had it somewhat easier working in the carding room. The noise level from the slower-moving picking machines was far less than that of the high-speed looms, but a pall of dust from

²⁰Diana S. Waite, "Number 3 ("Mastodon") Mill 1868 and 1872, Harmony Manufacturing Company, Cohoes," Smithsonian Studies in History and Technology 26 (1975): 100.

²¹Ibid.

loose soil and cotton lint filled the air and coated the walls, machines, and human skin (to say nothing of its effect on the lungs). Following common practice, Harmony Mills placed these pickers (machines that perform the first cleaning process on raw cotton) in a separate wing isolated from the rest of the factory by fireproof doors. The separation was necessary because pickers could easily cause fire if small stones hurled into the air struck the metal machines and caused the sparks to ignite the mass of cotton.²² Thus, although the children were relatively safe from noise pollution, they worked in the most hazardous area of the plant in terms of fire.

Yet there was an even more hazardous area of the mill--the hydraulic turbine rooms in the basement. Only adult men were permitted to work near the two Boyden-type eight hundred horsepower water wheel. The turbines gave off a deafening roar and many water tight connections were subjected to great stress. Should a rupture occur, the entire room would be flooded and the whole floor would be sealed off to protect the rest of the mill. The turbine workers would be trapped inside.

Such were the working conditions at Harmony Mills. Given the hazardous nature of the work, the paternalism of the company appears to be a marginal "benefit package." Yet it cannot be expected that the workers should be aware of

²²Ibid., p. 112.

their exploitation. The facts of life in a company town dictate that the workers must take whatever they are given.

Even those who were not employed by the conglomerate fell under its monopolistic control. The Cohoes Company not only sold water power, it also owned much of Cohoes' land. When leasing land and accompanying water rights to newly formed businesses, its policy was to require rent, prescribe the types of buildings that might be erected, and to legislate the type of enterprise. For example, in 1846 the utility entered into an indenture with Samuel H. Baldwin, a machinist:

The usual restrictions were repeated including a prohibition against establishing a tavern on the land, "without license from the grantor, nor a public house of entertainment nor any livery stable, nor sell any spiritous liquors of any kind in any shop, store or other building" (Indenture, 1846). This would appear to have been an unusual degree of social and business regulation in a free enterprise age, reflecting not only the business interests but also the social standards of a puritanical society. 23

The social control exerted by the business conglomerate in Cohoes had significant bearing on the fortunes of the Music Hall. The working-class formed the majority of the city's population, but they were at once protected and controlled by the minority. The standards to which the workers had to adhere were therefore externally imposed. However, there were aspects of daily life--the choice of entertainment, for example--that were not prescribed by management. Nevertheless, the general insulation of the workers effected the scope of

²³Rezneck, p. 123.

their artistic taste. It would have been unrealistic to expect the working class to appreciate the same forms of entertainment as the educated management class. Thus it was difficult to schedule productions at the Music Hall that appealed to the whole social spectrum of the city.

Had Acheson and Masten comprehended this fact, they probably would have built the Music Hall just the same. If it is correct to assume that the theatre was built because the owners were intoxicated with the growth of Cohoes in mid-century, then it is likely that they anticipated their audience would come primarily from the managerial class. The types of entertainment offered at the Music Hall by the middle of the first season indicate that the audience was predominantly working class. Acheson and Masten's inability to predict their audience might well have been caused by another aspect of the insulating effects of life in a company town--profitable growth of the monopoly breeds undue optimism.

The predominantly working class populace was not prepared to spend their wages on theatrical entertainment and the Music Hall closed in 1879. Its failure was a harbinger of the dark days that awaited the city. Bitter strikes over wage reductions and the company's refusal to recognize unions hit Cohoes in 1880 and 1882. Mill workers as well as non-working wives and children intimidated "scabs" comprised of newly immigrated Swedes. It was the first recorded instance of labor trouble and large scale ethnic problems in the area in the city's short history.

United States Census figures for 1860 and 1880 reveal changes in Cohoes' demographic patterns that suggest possible explanations for the social unrest. The 1860 Census shows that most textile laborers were not native Americans. More than half were Irish immigrants, one quarter were American by birth, and the rest were English, French-Canadians, and others. The Irish and Canadiens, in particular, were primarily unskilled laborers performing custodial duties. Few of these workers owned any property. By 1880, when Cohoes had a population of 19,416, 80% of the laborers were either Irish or French-Canadian in their first or second generation. This change had a dramatic effect on the mill labor force because it pitted the two ethnic groups against each other.

The influx of the new ethnic group, the Quebecois, most of whom spoke only French, further inhibited growth of the Music Hall. The number of single parent, broken homes increased to 33% by 1880 and 60% of the cotton workers were women. It is virtually impossible to develop a reliable theatre clientele in a community with disorganized family life. Just as the urban environment, the rigors of mill work, and the fact that Cohoes was a company town contributed to the social anomalies of the seventies, so the pre-eminence of the French-Canadian community in the eighties brought a new type of disorganization--ethnocentric isolation.

The new immigrants from the north had much more to gain than to lose by working at the mills. Although they constituted a majority in Quebec, French-Canadians had difficulty

securing employment there. When they emigrated to Cohoes they were very ready to work the arduous seventy-two hour week. They also were ready, more than their English and Irish predecessors, to send their children to the factory. Two-thirds of the female French Canadians at Harmony Mills were under twenty years old.²⁴

The French Canadian community remained strong because its members seldom married outside of ethnic boundaries. This was one of the primary forms of social insulation that influenced the future Music Hall. At first all these families lived on Harmony Hill and they developed a community based on an involved network of religious, fraternal, and political clubs that offered them security, socializing, and occasional entertainment. The Music Hall's limited success during its first five seasons depended very heavily on the degree to which it produced shows that approximated those given in church, ethnic, and nationalistic groups such as the French Dramatic Club and (for other immigrants) the Fenians, Clan na Gael, and the Friendly Sons of Scotia. Ethnic comedians and local amateur talent almost always drew better audiences than travelling companies out of New York City. "Masonic clubs, fire brigades, baseball clubs, and even ethnic politics (Parnell was a great local hero) were an essential part of the culture of the working class."²⁵

²⁴Walkowitz, p. 475.

²⁵Ibid., p. 485.

The wave of French Canadian immigration placed increased pressure on the working conditions at Harmony Mills. More than ever, uneasiness developed between workers and management, at first on social and political levels and later on economic levels.²⁶ Labor conflicts, spurred on by bilingual strike rallies were one dimension of this friction. Blatant demonstrations of unrest, like the street fighting of 1880 and 1882 manifested themselves in connection with the mill since it dominated everyone's life.²⁷

These troubles ultimately burst the Harmony bubble. The opinion expressed in the Census of 1880 was that labor unrest was the natural consequence of the factory system that "necessitates the employment of women and children to an injurious extent, and consequently tends to destroy family life and ties, domestic habits, and ultimately the home."²⁸ Such an opinion accurately applies to the Harmony Company, given the danger and drudgery of working conditions and the unique preponderance of single mothers that it attracted.

In 1860 an adult common laborer received 75¢ for twelve hours work. A skilled spinner could make \$1.50 while most women and children made 30¢ per day. There was one payday per month and tenement rent of \$6.00 per month was deducted from wages. The average widow with two children at work in

²⁶Rezneck, p. 120

²⁷Walkowitz, p. 468.

²⁸Ibid., p. 467.

in addition to herself would earn less than \$25.00 per month before deductions.

Thus, when the Music Hall opened in 1874 the working class was beset by grueling labor and low wages but uplifted by the camaraderie of its tightly knit institutions. Masten and Acheson could hardly have picked a worse time to open their theatre since 1873 saw the first of a series of financial panics in the United States. Harmony Mills reduced wages after 1874 and was subsequently beset by constant work stoppages and rising operational costs. The exodus of skilled labor at the turn of the century to more lucrative industries in the East and South was the logical result of declining conditions in the last quarter of the century.

Although bad times were ahead in 1874, the city perceived itself as prosperous and exciting. Inflated self-opinion prevailed throughout the entire region as the following description, written by an Albany journalist, clearly demonstrates:

Among the progressive places of this region, we do not know of one that exhibits more native vitality and indomitable energy than our busy neighbor, the prosperous, promising "City of the Mills." While other manufacturing localities with apparently equal advantages are groaning under the nightmare of commercial stagnation and seeking safety in inaction, Cohoes drives her water wheels and plies her shuttles and goads her spindles to a frenzy of industry. 29

This attitude demonstrates the inability of Cohoesiers to understand the impending economic problems. They saw only

²⁹The Albany Evening Times, 19 September 1874.

prosperity and began a construction boom, no doubt to emulate their industry-rich neighbors, Troy and Albany:

elegant residences and comfortable homes have sprung up, as if by magic. . . Important and valuable improvements have been made, new streets have been opened and graded, old streets have been widened and extended, miles of sewers have been put down, some of the more important thoroughfares have been paved, and thousands of yards of durable sidewalks have been laid. A large number of bridges and culverts of the most permanent kind have been constructed and several expensive public buildings have been erected. 30

From the safety of hindsight, it is clear that Cohoes was immersed in an atmosphere of overconfidence, bred of the prosperity brought about by water power, textiles, and cheap immigrant labor. The erection of the Music Hall in 1874 was a function of this social climate.

³⁰Ibid.

II. PRE-OPENING HISTORY OF THE MUSIC HALL BLOCK

A Profile of the Owners

The Music Hall Block was constructed to be both a retail business complex and a theatre. Acheson and Masten were more or less akin to developers of shopping-centers in the present day. They had great expectations for immediate financial gain and hoped to amortise their considerable initial expenses against steadily increasing profits. They were landlords first and foremost. Intoxicated with the rapid growth of their town in the twenty years preceding the erection of the Music Hall, they made a decision which, in retrospect, was ill-conceived. To understand that decision it is necessary to know something of these two men.

James H. Masten was a politician/entrepreneur who holds a somewhat legendary position in the history of Cohoes. Born in Owego, New York on 13 May 1828, he received a common-school education and then apprenticed to a printer. He worked for the Joel Munsell publishing firm in Albany (the same company which later printed his son's history of Cohoes) and, in 1851, worked as an editor for the Albany Evening Journal. This paper was published by Thurlow Weed, a staunch supporter of Abraham Lincoln and the infant Republican Party.¹

¹Alonza Parker, Landmarks of Albany County, (Albany: 1893), p. 112.

Although Masten's biography proves him to have been an energetic individual with multiple interests and numerous accomplishments, an association with powerful political bosses typifies his rise in power. Much of his success came as a result of his marriage to Almeda Arthur in 1854. She was sister to Cohoes School Principal, Chester A. Arthus, who moved from Cohoes School Principal, to Collector for the Port of New York, and ultimately to the twenty-first Presidency of the United States. It was Masten's close political ties, via his brother-in-law, to Roscoe Conkling's New York Republican machine that assured his financial prosperity.

Masten was widely recognized as an industrialist noted primarily for his patented design and manufacture of prefabricated iron cornices. The Music Hall displays these massive, detailed structures on three of its four sides.

His journalistic career began with his employment by Weed in 1851. That same year Masten bought the Cohoes Cataract and he continued to control publication of it until 1871. A conservative, pro-Republican editorial policy helped the Cataract dominate circulation among Cohoes' four daily newspapers. For eighteen of the twenty years Masten was publisher he also served as editor. In 1879 he bought co-ownership in the Cohoes Daily News and a minor interest in the Weekly News, a Republican rally-sheet that ceased publication in 1880. He kept an interest in the Daily News until 1889. Thus, for a period of thirty-eight years (excepting the hiatus of 1871-1879)

Masten had direct control of at least one Cohoes newspaper. Even during the eight years indicated above he maintained a strong influence over the editorial policy of the Daily News through his close friendship with its publisher, Samuel Monk. Masten always used his journalistic influence to present the Music Hall in the most favorable terms.

He lived with his family on Remsen Street, only a stone's throw from the future site of the theatre. He held many church offices including trustee of the First Baptist Church in 1844, superintendent of the Sunday School 1855-1881, usher in 1869, and deacon from 1877 to 1881.² He helped draft the constitution of the Cohoes Y.M.C.A. in 1858 and was elected chairman of the Board of Education in 1862. He was an active fund raiser for Civil War volunteers' families and was water commissioner of Cohoes as well as election inspector for the fourth ward from 1872 to 1874.

His remarkable record of civic service and political achievement was crowned by his appointment as Cohoes Postmaster in 1865.³ No sooner was he confirmed by the United States Senate, than he moved the Post Office to his building on the future site of the theatre. Postmaster was a very powerful political position. Among his responsibilities was that of censor. Masten had the right to seize and destroy all cards containing "profane, slanderous, or libelous communications."⁴

²First Baptist Church of Cohoes, A Brief History, (Cohoes, 1939), p. 22.

³Masten, p. 250.

⁴Ibid., p. 298.

Although he was able to institute same day mail service to Troy in 1869, he attracted adverse criticism during the next five years due to the deteriorating service within Cohoes. One critic charged that Masten's numerous other business interests detracted from his performance as Postmaster. Masten had the luxury of owning his own newspaper, the Daily News, in which he could publicly refute the charge, saying, "It is true that I have a great deal of outside business to attend to, but it is false that I allow it to divert my attention from the faithful performance of my official duties."⁵

For reasons unknown, Masten resigned as Postmaster in 1874 but, one month after President Grant's inauguration in February, 1877, he was reappointed and held the post until 1886 when the Democrats returned to power. He spent his last years as paymaster for several knitting mills.

Masten's political power and his record as a land speculator--in 1854 he turned a 100% profit on river land near the town's southern boundary⁶--partially explain his eagerness to build the Music Hall at a time when the town's main industry had shut down for month and banks were failing throughout New England. He was a rich man who had seen Cohoes' population increase 800% since his birth and envisioned his community as another industry-rich Troy with its palatial mansions,

⁵Cohoes Daily News, 26 October 1874.

⁶Cohoes Daily News, 10 September 1874.

broad avenues, and theatres. He was undoubtedly aware that federal spending necessitated by Reconstruction of the South had inflated the dollar, but it was too soon for him to realize that Cohoes, like the rest of the nation, was on the brink of economic chaos in the form of the first major American depression, the Panic of 1873. The fantastic output of 24 million tons of cotton woven by Harmony Mills in 1866 made eternal optimists of men like Masten. They ignored the company's steadily declining output after the Civil War that led to the thirty-day lay-off of 5000 workers in October, 1873. They also probably viewed as good management practice Harmony's decision to initiate widespread wage reductions once work resumed. What the company was attempting to do was reduce its \$1 million annual payroll. In reality, this decision caused the company to be plagued by strikes and rising costs at each of its five mills for the rest of the decade.⁷

Even more than the success of Harmony Mills, Masten's own ingenuity and enterprise gave him cause to feel confident. In addition to his cornice/hardware manufacturing plant he had begun a surveying company, a travel agency, and a real estate office by 1873.

Acheson lived with his wife and three sons who assisted him in his wool business from 1863 to 1873. He had built a modest reputation as a benefactor to the poor, having initiated relief for the five hundred Cohoesiers displaced by the

⁷The Times Record, 6 April 1967.

flood of 1858.⁸ He also had attempted to organize a Board of Trade but was rebuffed by his fellow businessmen. That his attempts at reform were ignored by mercantile interests points out an important difference between Masten and him. While Masten succeeded in civic, business, and political arenas, Acheson succeeded only in such civic-minded duties as President of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society in 1875.⁹

After building the Music Hall, Acheson owned a meat stall in the Music Hall Block from 1879 to 1880. He died two years later, having seen his accumulated wealth squandered in the theatre venture.

The Acquisition of the Land

Before 1873 there is no record of business activity between the two men, although they undoubtedly knew each other as prominent members of the community. On 14 October 1873 the new partners, firmly believing that the new Music Hall would "supply a long felt need in this enterprising city,"¹⁰ made it known that they would build an opera house on the corner of Remsen and Oneida Streets--the heart of Cohoes' business district.

This announcement followed a period of thirteen years during which the two men independently purchased virtually

⁸Masten, p. 262.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Cohoes Cataract, 31 January 1874.

the entire tract of land. The parcel was a farmer's field until 1826 when the Cohoes Company bought it for development and divided it into three lots, identified on the Platt Map of 1840 as numbers 7, 8, and 9. The easternmost and middle lots (7 and 8) measured 25' x 75' and extended from Oneida Street to an alley. Lot 9 was 25' deep and, on its western side facing the Erie Canal, measured 65' to the alley (see figure 1).

In 1836 John Wilkinson purchased the entire parcel. As Remsen Street became the main thoroughfare, Wilkinson subdivided lots 7 and 8 into three tracts and lot 9 into two.¹¹ The three lower lots (A, B, and C) each measured 25' x 50' and the westernmost lots (D and E) measured approximately 12½' x 65' (see figure 2). The lots changed ownership numerous times before Masten bought lot C from John Hay in 1860 for \$3000.¹² Acheson acquired lot A from John Knickerbacker in 1863 for \$1400.¹³ Four years later Acheson purchased lot D from Michael Conway for \$300 with the idea of using the building standing on the plot for his wool business.¹⁴ Lot B was sold by Margaret Powers to Acheson and Masten on 24 September 1873 for \$8250.¹⁵ Finally, Acheson sold Masten the north half of

¹¹Book of Deeds of Albany County, #280, p. 87.

¹²Book of Deeds of Albany County, #197, p. 159.

¹³Book of Deeds of Albany County, #180, p. 23.

¹⁴Book of Deeds of Albany County, #234, p. 201.

¹⁵Book of Deeds of Albany County, #266, p. 366.

lot D on 31 October 1873, thus giving each partner ownership of half the entire parcel (see figure 3).¹⁶

An important agreement concerning ownership of the theatre was struck on 2 April 1874, wherein Acheson and Masten agreed to share equally in the profits or losses of the Music Hall. Furthermore, the series of sales and purchases detailed above created the unique situation of Masten owning the northern half of the building and Acheson the southern half. The floorplan of the theatre was such that Acheson owned the entrances and Masten owned the water closets. Thus the 1874 agreement also stipulated that neither partner could deny the other access to any part of the third and fourth floors. Had either party defaulted on their respective mortgages, the agreement would have been nullified.

A map dated 1856 and the 1872 Assessment Rolls for Cohoes' Second Ward indicate that there were at least five buildings on the tract: the Post Office, a brick store, and Simon's Corner Market bordered Remsen Street each having residential units above; while Acheson, in order to expand his wool business, had built a structure next to the one he acquired when he bought lot D. Most of these buildings were devastated by arson on 18 August 1873.

Newspaper accounts indicate the fire started in a nearby barn and spread quickly through the wooden structures. A

¹⁶ Book of Deeds of Albany County, #267, p. 511.

Fig. 1: Detail, Facsimile of
Platt Map, ca. 1840.

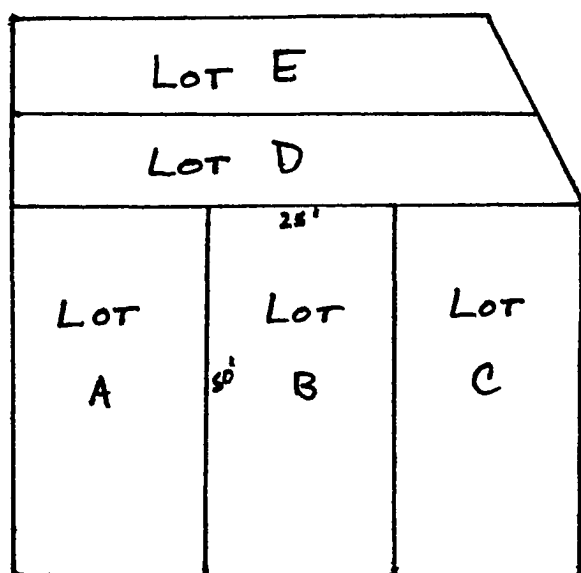
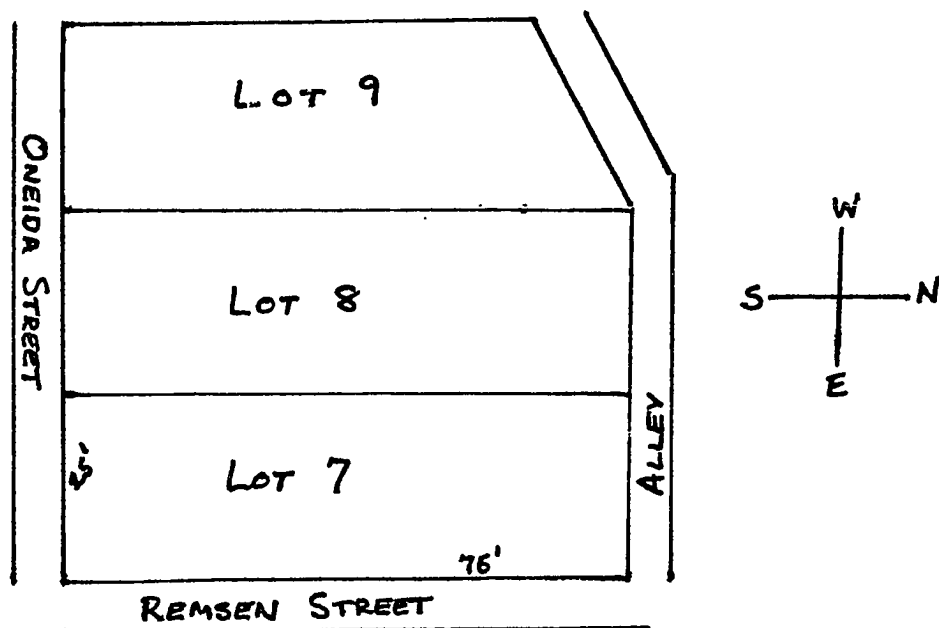


Fig. 2: Sub-division of original
lots, ca. 1861.

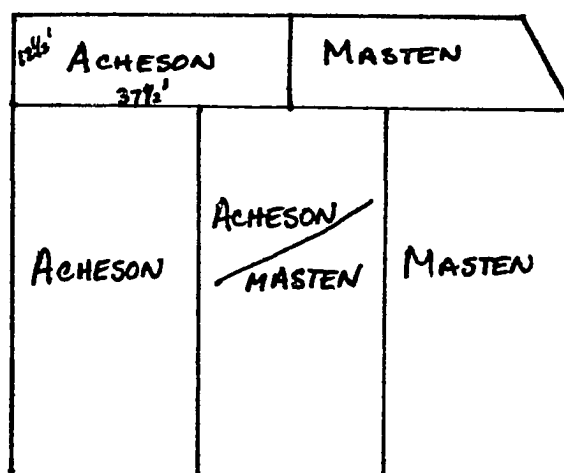


Fig. 3: Ownership of sub-divided
lots, ca. 1873.

private residence on lot E was completely destroyed as was the store and residence on lot B, owned by Mrs. Powers. Masten's Post Office barely escaped the conflagration which was "one of the most threatening that has visited the city in a long time."¹⁷ Of the \$24,000 damage, Acheson lost \$10,000 in the destruction of his wool store.

The fire forced Acheson to make a critical choice. Confronted with a business literally in ashes and high taxes on what was, by this time, a valuable property in the downtown business district, he made a bold gamble to recoup his fortune. Since the middle lot was completely devastated, the Powers family was ready to sell. Hence Masten and Acheson purchased lot B barely one month after the fire for the aforementioned, hefty sum of \$8,250. Ironically, this middle lot was the key to the Music Hall's creation and, years later, the focus of the struggle that led to the theatre's closing.

Planning the "Temple of Amusement"

The precise manner in which the two men got together is unclear. It is likely that, faced with restoring the charred remains, Acheson and Masten decided to demolish the burnt shell and start fresh. Their intention was to erect "substantial brick buildings that shall be a credit rather than a disgrace to the city."¹⁸ It is likely that the partners bought

¹⁷The Cohoes Cataract, 18 August 1873.

¹⁸The Cohoes Cataract, 4 October 1873.

the middle lot before they decided upon the exact nature of the business in which they would participate, because two months elapsed before Masten commissioned the well known architectural firm of Charles B. Nichols and J.B.Halcott to design a "temple of amusement."¹⁹ At any rate, the erection of a single, massive, brick building served the dual purpose of creating many rental spaces and insuring against future fires.

The building was initially named the Central Hall Block but Arthur Masten refers to it as the Music Hall Block, another indication that the owners had decided to enter business before they decided to build a theatre. In 1885, according to the Cohoes City Directory, it was referred to as the Opera House Building and finally, in 1892, was christened the Cohoes Opera House. After permanent closing of the theatre in 1901 the structure became known as the Cohoes National Bank Building, the name still shown on a massive granite tablet atop the roof facing Remsen Street.

Preparations for construction actually preceded the formal announcement in October. A month earlier, work had begun on gutting and disposal of the charred buildings. A workman was seriously injured when he dropped through a floor laden with heavy rubble. This treacherous and time consuming task forestalled actual construction until January, 1874, when the partners hoped that a mild winter would recover the time lost in demolition.²⁰

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., 27 September 1873.

The one structure that escaped with minor damage, the Post Office, was moved to the northern end of Remsen where it was to remain until the Music Hall Block was near completion. Eager to occupy his new building, Masten brought the Post Office back in July, when only the first floor of the edifice was completed. While it may appear that a federal employee renting space from himself represents a conflict of interest, the practice of civil servants operating out of private headquarters was common to the time.²¹ The move to the Music Hall Block actually made Masten's job more difficult. He was accused of letting mail sit undelivered while mailroom clerks ate supper and watched the upper stories being built. Characteristically, Masten swept aside these complaints with an editorial disclaimer in the Cohoes Daily News.²²

In January, 1874, Nichols and Halcott submitted their plans and construction began. Nichols had been responsible for the design of St. Mary's Church in Albany and simultaneously supervised construction of the Music Hall Block and another Cohoes project, St. Joseph's French Catholic Church. The churches, like the Music Hall, demonstrate Nichols' main architectural trait--ornate interiors.

The partners instructed the architects to be so elegant

²¹Masten, p. 250.

²²The Cohoes Daily News, 26 October 1874.

as to "take the shine off any other block in the city."²³ Nichols and Halcott responded with plans designed "with special reference to the security and strength of the building, while (not overlooking) symmetry and architectural effect."²⁴ The structure would run the full length (75') of the Remsen Street frontage and would be 62½' deep. Its height would be 70', divided into four floors. The first floor was designed for three stores and the Post Office. The second floor would have a ticket office, eight office spaces, a large closet, and a hallway with egress to the stairs. On the top two floors would be the Music Hall.

Acheson and Masten apparently decided against a general contractor in favor of hiring individually. This method saved money since it allowed the partners to bargain separately with each craftsman rather than deal with the bottom-line estimate of a single company. The owners had an ulterior motive aimed at creating favorable pre-opening publicity--whenever possible they hired local tradesmen. "The work is to be done by Cohoes mechanics and it is needless to promise that it will be well done."²⁵

Such procedure carries the risk of creating an overly eclectic style. Fortunately, the constant supervision of Nichols and Haldecott preserved the building's architectural unity.

²³The Cohoes Cataract, 27 September 1873.

²⁴The Cohoes Cataract, 3 January 1874.

²⁵Ibid.

The first of the locals to be hired were Dooley and Foley, masons. They began laying the foundation as soon as the site was cleared in January. They were followed by other Cohoes artisans including John Land & Sons, carpenters; Horace Schleuter, upholsterer; Dunn and Wilson, plumbers; E. Mickel & Son, frescoers; Nathan Shaver, painter; and William Fleming, steam fittings.

When craftsmen could not be found in Cohoes, the owners still tried to hire from the surrounding area. From Troy came W.F. Horrobin to install the iron works. Albany sent John G. Meyers & Company to hang the curtains and drapery, H. B. Silliman to install the glassware, Samuel Brooker to paint the ceiling as he had done at the Albany Opera House, and John Meehan to direct the construction of the stage and its mechanical effects.

Only two aspects of the theatre were left to craftsmen outside the area. B.H. Koechling & Company of New York City supplied the opera chairs and Fred Stanfields, eminent Buffalo artist, was commissioned to paint the act curtain.

Financing the Music Hall was undoubtedly one of the costliest ventures either Acheson or Masten had ever undertaken. True to their promise that "no expense has been spared to make the Music Hall, in completeness of detail, second to none in the state,"²⁶ the owners ran up costs for land and construction in excess of \$75,000, half of which was spent outfitting the elaborate theatre.

²⁶Cohoes Cataract, 21 November 1874.

It is likely that Masten's manorial position in Cohoes society, reminiscent of the seventeenth century Dutch patroons, influenced Acheson to put up \$30,000 as his equal share in the construction costs of the Music Hall. Masten paid \$24,000 from his private resources and the balance from a \$6,000 mortgage taken in September, 1874. Acheson paid \$26,000 in cash and took a ten-year mortgage for \$4,000. When the Music Hall opened, Masten had paid or mortgaged \$37,125 and Acheson \$38,925.²⁷

The 1874 census lists the population of Cohoes as 17,000. At full capacity of almost 475, the theatre could accomodate 1900 people per week, based on one matinee and three evening performances. Before 1877, tickets cost 15¢ for matinees and 35¢ for evenings, yielding a maximum weekly gross of \$570. A conservative estimate of 50% capacity would produce a yearly gross of approximately \$14,250. Thus, without considering any overhead or interest due on mortgages, the owners would have had to wait five years (assuming they could average 50% attendance) to recoup their initial outlay. Music Hall records of 1887 indicate that one day's running expenses averaged \$12.25, or approximately \$2,450 per year. If performers received $\frac{1}{4}$ of the gross--\$3,565 at 50% capacity--the yearly net would be approximately \$8,000. In addition, the mortgages from the National Bank of Cohoes carried a 2% interest rate that, if amortized over five years, would have cost an additional

²⁷Cohoes Cataract, 23 November 1874.

\$1,600. It therefore seems likely that on the basis of production receipts alone, the owners would have had to wait ten years before the building showed a profit.

Although neither Acheson nor Masten had any prior theatrical experience, simple arithmetic would have shown them that for 50% capacity, 5% of the population would have had to attend the Music Hall. The owners, assuming they engaged in similar budget projections, clearly had to increase the building's profitability. One possibility was to draw audience from neighboring Troy--seven miles down and across the river and from Albany, ten miles to the south. Troy's population was nearly five times that of Cohoes and Albany's was nearly double. However, these cities had theatres which were beset by the same problems of profitability in spite of the larger populations. Since these cities were older and larger than Cohoes, it would have been difficult to draw audience away from their established theatres. Furthermore, transportation to and from Cohoes was possible only by carriage or railroad since the Hudson is not navigable north of Troy and since it is a tidal river with a current alternating from upstream to downstream at various times of day.

A more likely solution to increase receipts was to rent retail and office space on the first two floors of the building. The plan submitted by Haldecott and Nichols corroborates this idea. Acheson and Masten might have seen the rental income as the majority of their profit since they wanted to rent the spaces even before the theatre was ready to open. As summer

began in 1874 the Cohoes Cataract announced: "The large plate glass windows, 5 x 13 feet in size, have been placed in the Music Hall building this week. The stores will be completed and ready for occupation in a week or two more."²⁸

The same week in July, 1874, that Masten returned the Post Office to the Music Hall Block, Boughton the Hatter moved into space number one on the ground floor.²⁹ He sold everything from lap blankets to mink coats. On 26 September 1874 Kahn and Company's Temple of Fashion signed a one year lease for space number two. Kahn sold millinery and men's furnishings, and his advertisements indicate that he directed his business at Cohoesiers who were in the habit of journeying to Troy for their apparel needs.³⁰ With Kahn's tenancy, the ground floor was completely rented (including the Post Office and George Simon's market in space number four).

Acheson kept the offices of his wool enterprise on the second floor and in October, 1874, George Graves and Mr. Parkhurst rented two spaces above the Post Office for their Cohoes Conservatory of Music. They gave piano lessons and solo and ensemble vocal training.³¹ The last space was occupied by the Western Union office.

The initial tenants were businesses that attracted the management class--furriers and private music tutors--and

²⁸The Cohoes Cataract, 13 June 1874.

²⁹The Morning Whig, 24 November 1874.

³⁰The Cohoes Daily News, 10 September 1874.

³¹The Cohoes Cataract, 10 October 1874.

service enterprises (the Post Office and telegraph) that attracted the entire society. Thus, the Music Hall Block was seemingly planned properly at the outset to be a centralized locus for the important needs of the community, particularly the affluent citizenry. This fact reinforces the idea that the Music Hall itself was initially built to cater to the entertainment of non-working class Cohoesiers.

III. THE PHYSICAL THEATRE

When the Music Hall was closed in 1901 it lay dormant for nearly seventy years. This long period of disuse preserved the internal decor of the building and theatre. In the present day it retains much of its late nineteenth century appearance.

The construction of the Music Hall Block represented a bold step towards architectural elegance in Cohoes. When completed, the building towered over the business district and was widely recognized as the finest architectural achievement in the city. Its aesthetic triumph encouraged the design and construction of other grand edifices such as the City Hall, the H.B. Silliman Memorial Presbyterian Church and Buildings, the Cohoes Savings Bank, and St. John's Episcopal Church.

The Music Hall exterior epitomizes the urban design concept of the period. It is a fine example of post Civil War commercial architecture with traces of French Renaissance design. The nearby Harmony Mills were actually designed by a French architect and undoubtedly influenced Haldecott and Nichols to maintain the motif.¹

The following physical description is based, in great

¹J. Charles Cataldo, Historic Structures Report: Restoration of the Cohoes Music Hall, Cohoes, New York (Cohoes: 1971), p. 2.

part, on the inestimable research performed by J. Charles Cataldo, the Restoration Architect.

The building consists of four floors plus a high-ceiling, attic, and a cellar. The predominant element of the exterior facade is the common red brick fired in Cohoes by masons Dooley and Foley.² Because this brick is soft it was painted in 1897 for weather-proofing purposes. By 1917 the original marble facade on the east elevation, framing the main entrance doorway on Remsen Street, had become badly chipped and broken. It was replaced by matching dark green, richly grained Vermont Verde Antique marble cut in pilasters. To make this change, the old central stair well to the second floor was removed and replaced by twin stairways.³

The metal pan roof is in the mansard style, having two slopes on each of its four sides, the lower slope being steeper than the upper. Newspaper sources indicate that this roof was originally burnished tin plate with raised lead seams, typical of the style of its installer, W. Horrobin of Troy. However, Cataldo found galvanized steel sheet as the material used for the mansard faces, ledges, gutters, coping, frieze, and ornamentation. Thus a major renovation must have occurred on the roof sometime after 1901. The upper, flat surface of the roof was covered with gravel embedded in a tar-like

²The Cohoes Cataract, 6 December 1873.

³Cataldo, p. 67.

material. By itself this covering weighed nearly 13,500 lbs.⁴ In winter, the added weight of accumulated snow must have put an incredible strain upon the roof trusses. Water damage in the Music Hall shows that the roof was the weakest part of the structure.

Two gabled windows formed the east and south elevations of the roof above the fourth floor. Below these windows was another set of tall, double-hung windows with two-over-two sashes. Heavy ornamental window labels, or cornices, crowned each of the windows. Masten himself designed and manufactured the cornices out of an alloy that was almost entirely composed of zinc. All of the exterior trim including the belt course are made of the alloy which, although painted in recent years, has aged extremely well. Five chimneys adorned the building, "each corbelled into a graceful, fluted line in keeping with the aesthetics of the rest of the interior."⁵ In 1897 two of the chimneys were removed and two of the remaining three were shortened and capped.

On the south elevation a covered exterior stair runs from the street level to the second floor. The stair was built by the Bank of Cohoes, the building's owner, after 1882. In August, 1900, the bank installed on the first floor a 392-cubic-foot vault, weighing 45,000 lbs. In order to get the safe into the building a large hole was broken in the southern wall at ground level. When the hole was closed a door was

⁴The Cohoes Daily News, 6 August 1874.

⁵Cataldo, p. 40.

added in the wall, giving access to the stairway to the second floor offices.⁶ The staircase was enclosed in 1929 (see figures 4 and 5).

Some time shortly after the original construction, a wooden tower was added to the building at its northwest corner. The structure, which rises the full height of the building, contained an elevator on rope pulleys that apparently was used to facilitate the handling of large pieces of scenery (see figure 6). That this tower was not part of the original design represents a glaring oversight in the architectural plan. None of the original stair units were wide enough to accomodate easy transportation of scenery.

The Music Hall Block's foundation consists of perimeter masonry-bearing walls that form the underlying structural system. The original foundation is in excellent condition in the present day. The cellar has interior masonry bearing walls and wood joist floor framing. The first and second floors have similar walls with the additional support of castiron columns. The same columns can also be found on the main floor of the theatre. The balcony that forms the fourth floor is supported by six tension rods hung from four large wooden trusses that support the mansard roof structure. The trusses are over twelve feet deep and span a distance of sixty-two feet. It is possible that the strain of the great weight atop the roof has caused rotting at the base of these trusses. In any case, the roof is the aspect of the building most severely

⁶The Cohoes Republican, 3 August 1900.



Figure 4, Photo of Cohoes Music Hall Taken in 1901.



Figure 5 , Photo of S.E. Corner of Building as it Stands Today.



Figure 6, View of northwest corner of the building showing the alley and the external, wooden elevator housing used for the transportation of scenery.

affected by age.

The cellar runs the entire length of the building at a height of 7'7". Today, the height varies six inches at the western and eastern ends, suggesting the present concrete slab-on grade was added sometime after 1874 when the foundation was begun. Most likely this change was made in 1917 when a central heating system for the entire building was installed. Separated from the stage by two floors, the basement was never used by the theatre. Its series of unfinished rooms were utilized by various businesses occupying the first two floors. Bank artifacts found in the rooms indicate that the basement was used primarily for storage and ancillary purposes. There is no evidence of any extensive or significant water damage, attesting to the care with which the foundation was constructed. Because of the excellence of its sub-structure, the Music Hall, unlike most other historic structures, has level floors and ceilings and walls that are square and plumb.

The first floor covers 4,320 square feet, all of which is usable. It was, for many years beginning in 1882, the home of the National Bank of Cohoes. Prior to the bank's occupancy, the first floor appeared in its original form--subdivided into four segments intended as commercial enterprises. The bank moved into the southern half of the first floor and removed the temporary dividers that prior tenants had erected (see figure 7).⁷ At the first floor center of

⁷Cataldo, p. 63.

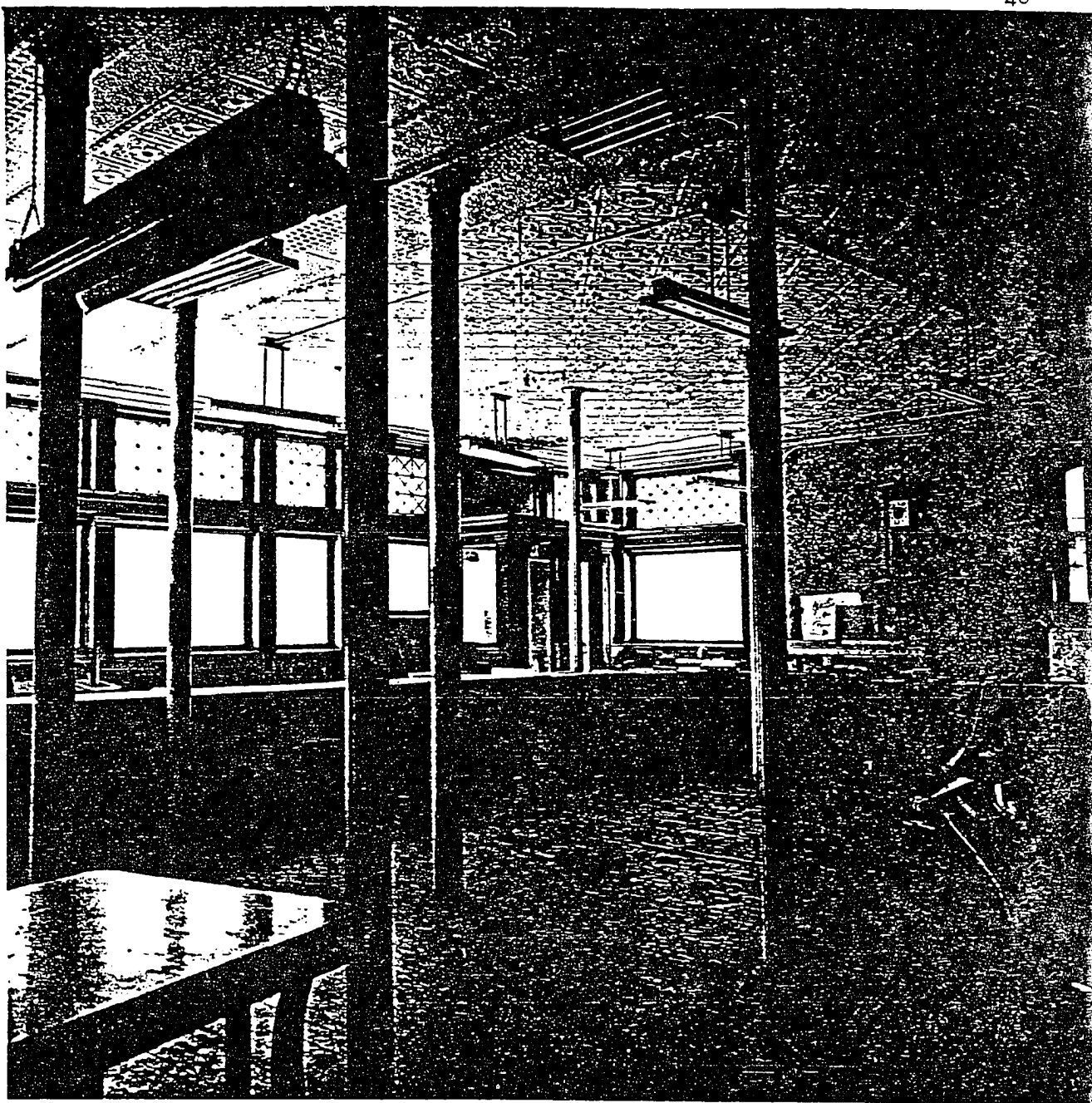


Figure 7, View of First Floor Showing a Portion of the Bank.

the building on Remsen Street, between spaces two and three, was a large marble stairwell that provided the only public access to the theatre. There was a smaller staircase in the back of the building that was used by performers and stagehands. Cataldo has determined that the marble was added in 1917 when the original staircase was reinforced with steel pipe columns.

The second floor has the identical floor space of the first. Originally, it contained eight office spaces (usually leased by two or three tenants), a storeroom, ticket office, and lobby. The existing ticket office, which is the original, was initially centrally located at the top of the main stair leading to the street level. However, during the renovation of 1917 the original stair opening to the second level was floored over and the present entrance placed approximately twenty-five feet away from the ticket booth.

Since the bank rarely used the second floor it has done little renovation there. Much of the original fabric remains including gas fixtures, doors and trim, radiators, lavatories, wallpaper, metal ceilings, and water closets. The partitioned professional offices surrounding the ticket office all retain the original windows. A particularly striking feature on this level is the planked, hardwood floor which, although worn, is in sound condition.

The second floor lobby is an L-shaped hallway. The ticket office is located on the interior wall of the hallway and defines the intersection of the halls. The exterior of

the ticket office has two ticket windows, one on either face of the interior wall. One of these windows is shown in figure 8, as are the decorative wood chevron panels which form a vertical continuation of the wooden wainscot. The inside is comprised of painted plaster walls, wooden wainscot, and a high plaster ceiling. The walls are covered with ticket seller's graffiti and notations which have been preserved by the restoration architect by means of a protective polyurethane finish. Much of the graffiti is dated in the 1890's and pertains to memoranda, names, cost computations, etc. Perhaps the interior walls were intentionally made of painted white plaster in order to provide for spontaneous notations. However, a substance found on the walls suggests the possibility that the room might have been covered in wallpaper that was later removed.

An examination of the tread nosings of the stair from the lobby to the third floor theatre suggests that the stairway was originally carpeted. The ceiling of the stairwell probably had the same type of applied, painted canvas which formed the striking ceiling of the theatre. Because there are two sets of stairs, it is likely that this one was used by ticketholders in the rear orchestra (variously referred to as the dress circle or parquet circle) and the balcony (gallery). A plastered, semi-ornate ceiling arch above the other stairwell suggests that it was used by patrons in the more extensive lower orchestra or, at the very least, was the primary route of ascent to the theatre.

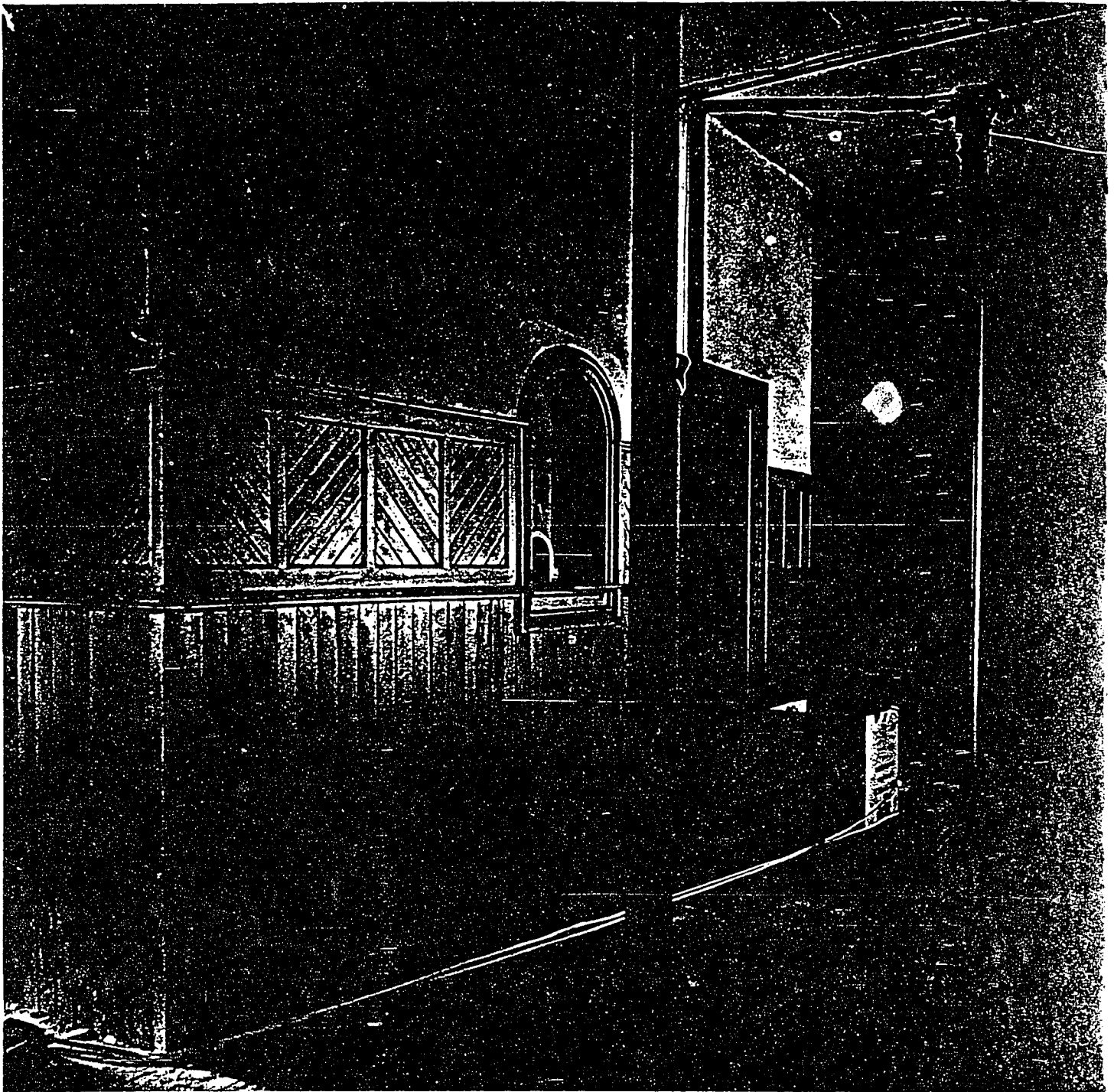


Figure 8, Second Floor Corridor and Ticket Office.

Restoration workers found the original exterior main entrance doors stored in one of the rooms on the second floor. The tall doors are almost completely comprised of glass. They are painted the same green color as the existing roof dormers. Another room had been partitioned by a divider wall sometime after 1880, suggesting that the owners attempted to increase rental spaces.

The top two floors house the theatre. The third level is the real gem of the building. On first entering the orchestra, one is struck by the elegant antiquity of the surroundings:

The third floor orchestra level visually encompasses the entire primary function of the building for which it was originally built and forms the basis and motivation for the proposed restoration of this architectural treasure of a bygone era. Upon ascending the stairs from the ticket office lobby, one enters into the main hall. The eye is drawn immediately toward the stage, and yet, at the same time is fully conscious of the surrounding elements and decor all of which lends itself to an overall view of exquisite symmetrical beauty. ⁸

The total space available on the two floors, including the two loge boxes, is 7,520 square feet, 20% of which is taken by the stage and wings. The capacity of the theatre was approximately 475 persons.

In the third week of September, 1874, the main floor was outfitted with "stationary seats elevated and arranged in a semi-circular form so that each sitting shall command an

⁸Ibid., p. 53.

unobstructed view of the stage."⁹ The chairs were bent-wood padded with goosedown and were supplied by B.B. Koechling & Company of New York City, upholstered by Gustav Schleuter.¹⁰ Cataldo found an iron chair standard with upholstered leather arm rest in the attic space of the building. This was undoubtedly a segment of the original chair installation. A portion of leather visible under some paint on the arm rest revealed a silver bronze color described in an early newspaper account of the theatre interior on opening night: "The orchestra chairs are painted pearl color, and the seats, arms, and backs are covered with silver bronze leather."¹¹

Originally, there was a sloping floor raked gradually up from the stage at the rate of one inch per $1\frac{1}{2}$ feet. In 1897 the floor was made level for reasons that will be discussed later in this study. One sees evidence for the original raked floor in alterations and additions made upon the wood wainscot and the descending dado on the perimeter walls. Furthermore, Cataldo discovered a visible tread nosing and riser at the plinth of the columns on each side of the loge boxes. This indicates that one stepped up from the orchestra pit, which was perhaps at the level of the present flat floor. Musicians probably entered the pit through an existing opening at the right front of the stage, connecting the pit

⁹Cohoes Cataract, 3 January 1874.

¹⁰Cohoes Daily News, 13 August 1874.

¹¹Cohoes Daily News, 24 November 1874.

to the dressing rooms (see figure 9). Further evidence for the raised floor hypothesis is found in visible alterations to the wood stair stringer and base to one side of the orchestra, and at the back where additional treads and risers were added when the floor was leveled to meet the original height of the chair-circle (see figure 10).

The orchestra terminated at this raised parquet which initially seated forty patrons in two rows of seats. That the parquet was curved supports the Cohoes Cataract article cited above that describes the rows in the orchestra as being curved. An examination of the floor for wear patterns in order to determine the location of the aisles revealed nothing since the floor of 1882 apparently had chairs set parallel to the proscenium wall.

Immediately behind the chair-circle is a small hallway, 20' x 25'. The hallway and a similar landing in the balcony are so small and cramped that the second floor lobby in front of the ticket office must have been the main congregating area when the theatre was in operation. All lobbies and landings were originally covered by a plush, crimson carpet supplied by B.F. Moseley & Son of Albany.¹²

The proscenium opening on both sides is flanked by two gilded loge boxes, the first approximately five feet above and adjacent to the stage, the second twenty feet above the stage. These were the "showcase" seats for important spectators like Masten's father-in-law, Chester A. Arthur,

¹²Cohoes Daily News, 15 August 1874.

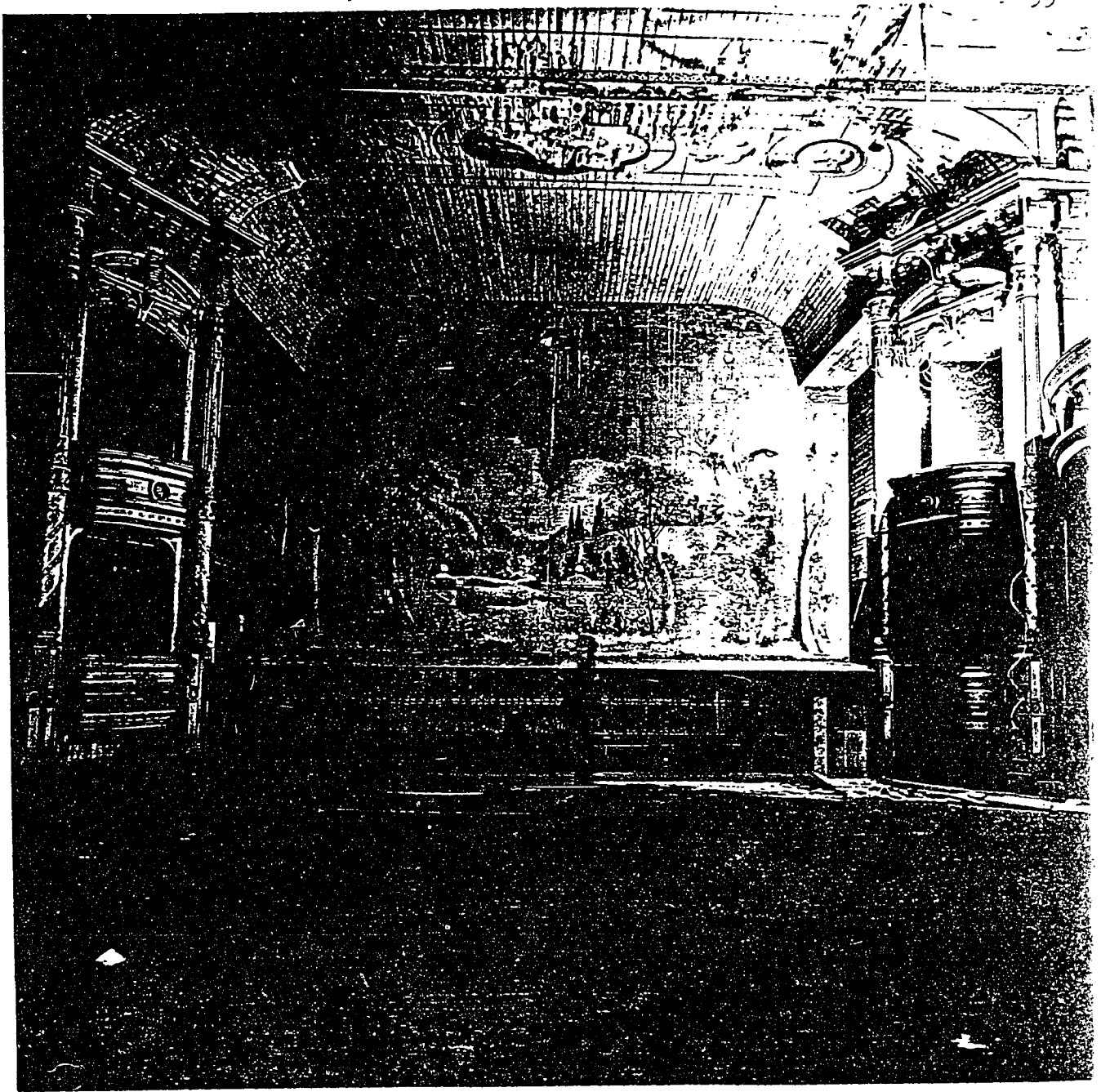


Figure 9, View of Stage and Proscenium Boxes Showing Doorway to Dressing Rooms Under the Stage.

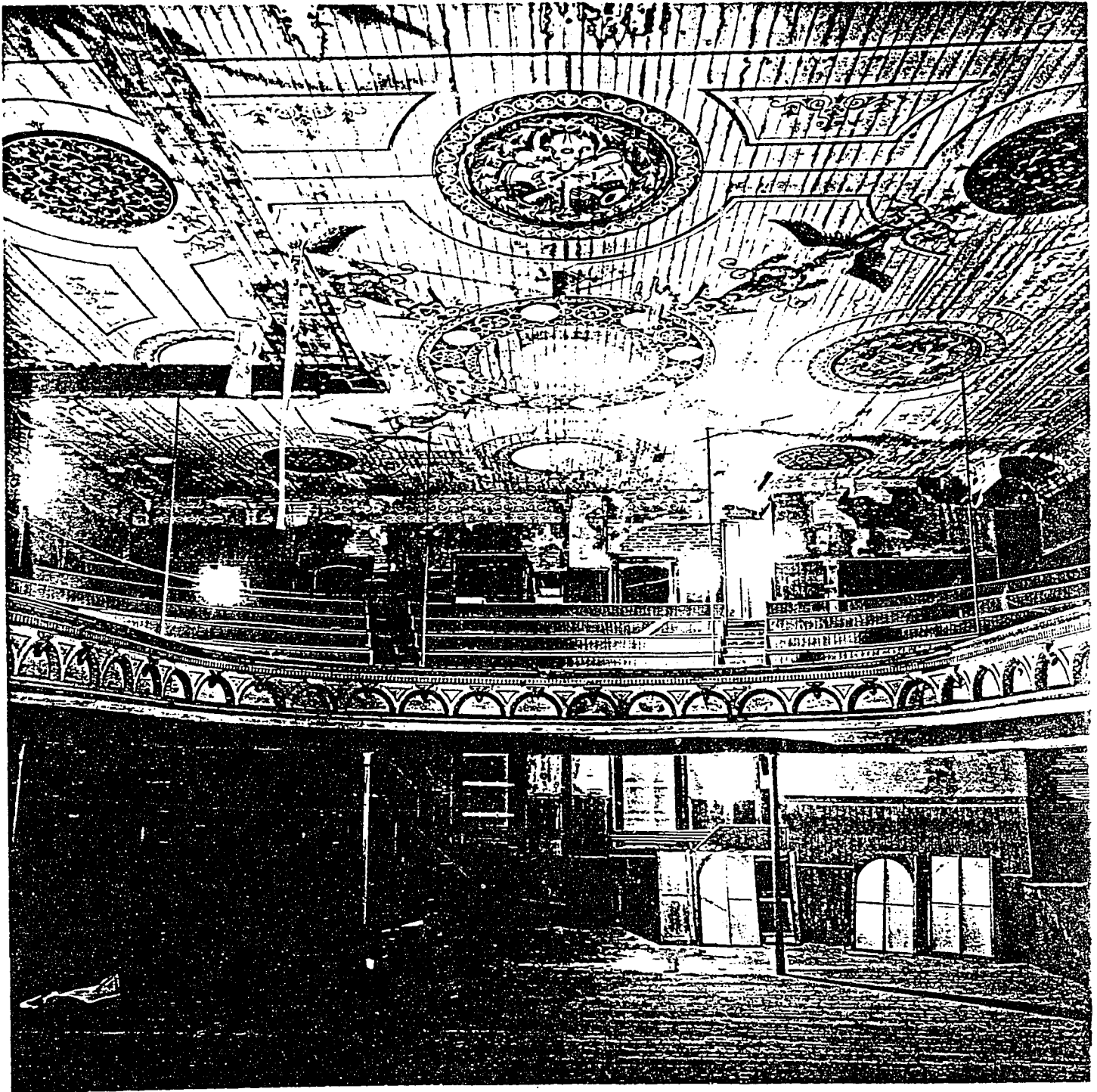


Figure 10 Rear View of Auditorium and Balcony.

who undoubtedly frequented the Music Hall. While the view these boxes afforded of the stage was poor--four feet upstage of the apron's edge, looking directly into the wings--they offered their occupants total visibility to the other patrons. The loges are very ornate with gilded railings, framing composite columns, red velvet trim on padded arm rests, and plush carpeting. In one box was found a stuffed rocker similar to the one from Lincoln's Box at Ford's Theatre.

The proscenium arch rises to a height of twenty-four feet above the auditorium floor, and continues another six feet to the ceiling. Its intricately designed border, which continues around the perimeter of the theatre, was painted by Cohoes artist, E. Mickel, who also painted the frescoes on the loge-box walls. At the border's center on each side wall are circular panels with painted groups of musical instruments (see figure 11). Acheson had wanted a bust of Shakespeare to be painted at the center-top of the proscenium arch, flanked on either side by painted medallions of Beethoven and Mozart. Complications arose and these decorations were not added until August, 1875.

The ceiling of the Music Hall is certainly the most outstanding example of artistic craftsmanship in the building's interior. It is covered with a hand painted canvas lavishly, but tastefully, depicting in neoclassical style various personalities and symbols associated with the fine arts.¹³ The

¹³Cataldo, p. 35.

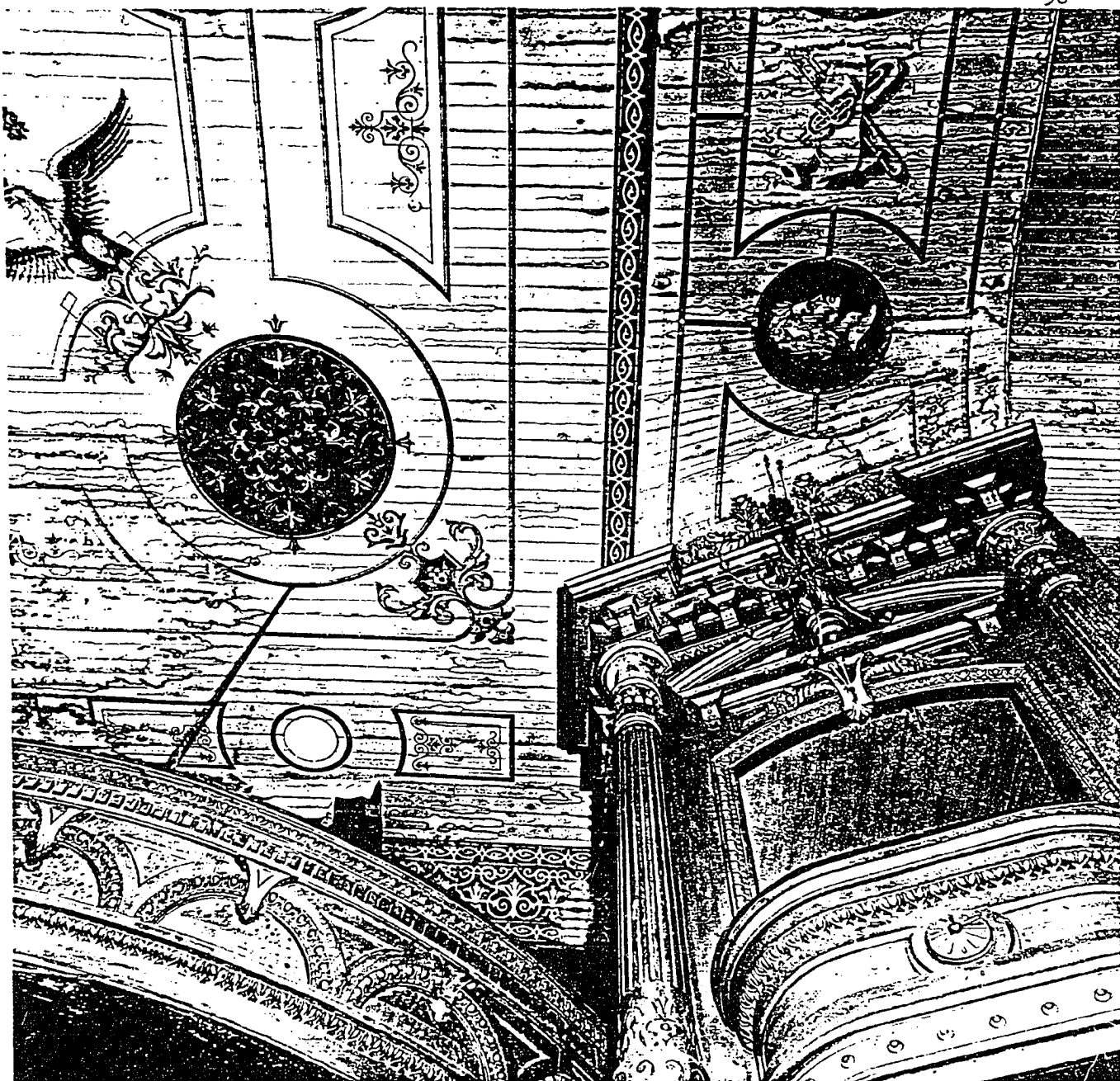


Figure 11. View of Ceiling at the Proscenium Showing the Elaborate Ornamentation.

artist, Samuel Brooker of the Albany Opera House, painted a large circle of soft blue with golden rays emanating forth and bordered with cherubim.¹⁴ The background is primarily pearl color with delicately painted panels and motifs. The colors are varied, richly balanced, and harmonious with the overall symmetry of the design. The painted canvas sheets are glued to a wood board ceiling. Unfortunately, Cataldo found considerable deterioration of this canvas and the plaster walls immediately below the ceiling due to water seepage from the leaking roof. In spite of this damage, the entire design remained virtually intact and nearly 60% was salvaged and restored without replacement.

Incorporated into the ceiling design are four circular wood grilles (see figure 12). Originally, they were both decorative and functional since they provided a mechanism for ventilation and exhaust. The wooden ceiling is suspended from the roof trusses, creating a crawl-space approximately two feet high. Within this space the grilles are covered with hinged doors that could be opened and closed as required in order to dissipate or contain heat within the hall. A few months after the theatre was completed bats moved into the crawl-space and could be heard rustling about when the auditorium was empty.¹⁵

The loge boxes, proscenium border, and ceiling were

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Cohoes Daily News, 26 December 1874.

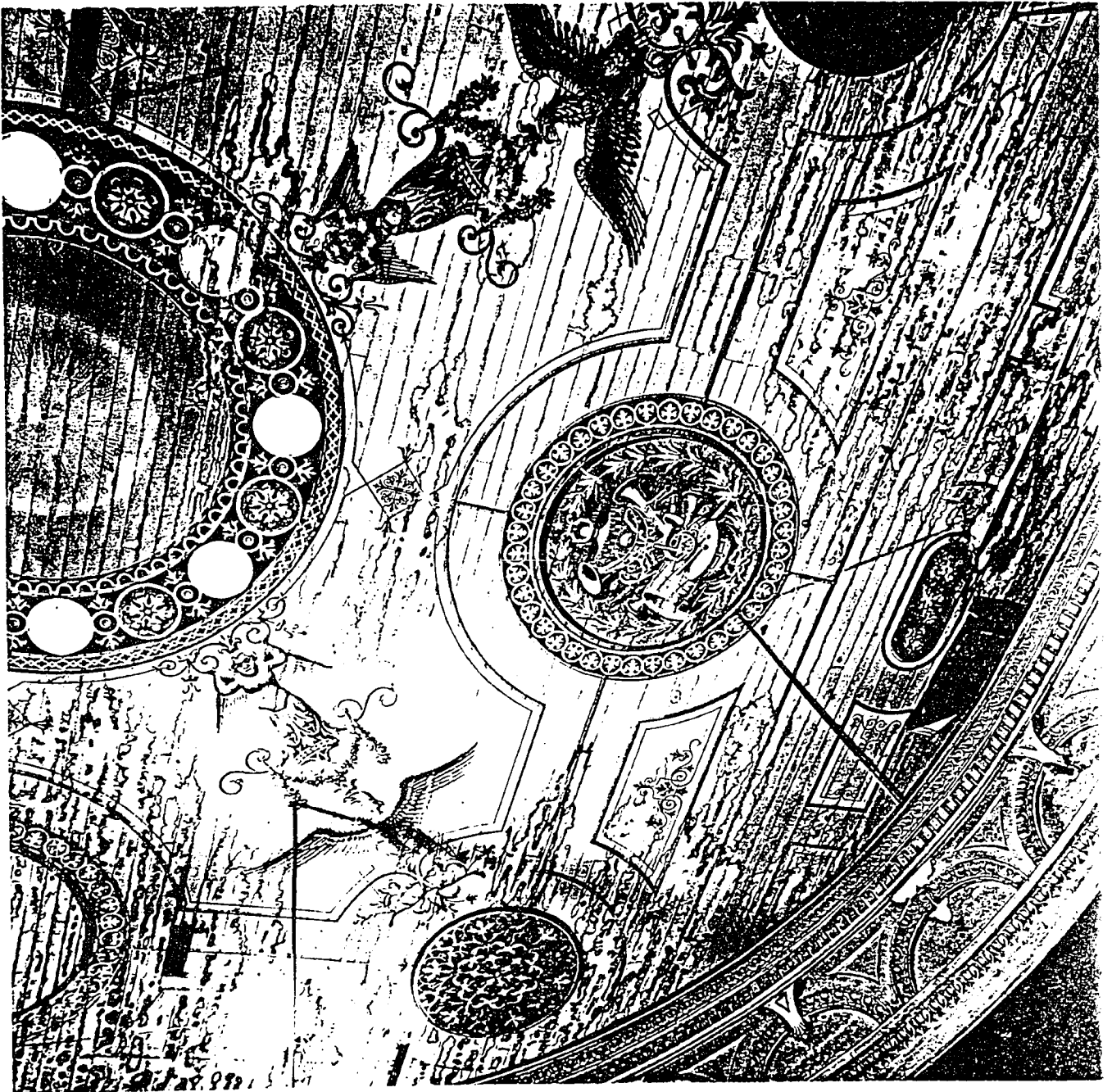


Figure 12 Partial view of the ceiling showing (at bottom) one of the four circular wood grilles.

highlighted by two handsome, twelve-globe gasoliers on either side of the proscenium and two more that hung over the auditorium's center (see figure 13). They were fashioned in brass by Hilton and Grant.¹⁶ Their gas jets were enclosed by clear crystal fashioned by H.B. Silliman. Dunn and Wilson, who supplied the gas fixtures, also installed four fixtures with mirror-type reflectors over the stage. They served as primitive strip lights for set illumination.¹⁷ Projecting gas pipe outlets and wall escutcheons that once held the gas fixtures used for lighting the interior of the hall are visible on the side of the balcony railing facing the stage. It is likely that gas footlights ran across the front of the stage. While there are no gas fixtures in the dressing rooms, remaining pipes and outlets give evidence that gas was also the medium of illumination there. Cataldo found the lighting system of the building to be a mixture: the first floor was entirely electric, the theatre was entirely gas, and the second floor had some installations of each type.

The profusion of gas fixtures throughout the Music Hall provides an important clue to the theatre's demise at the turn of the century. Half a dozen years after Covent Garden was converted to electricity (1881) many of the significant theatres in the United States used Edison's electric bulbs. By the early 1890's almost all American theatres were electrically

¹⁶Cohoes Daily News, 10 August 1874.

¹⁷Cataldo, p. 53.

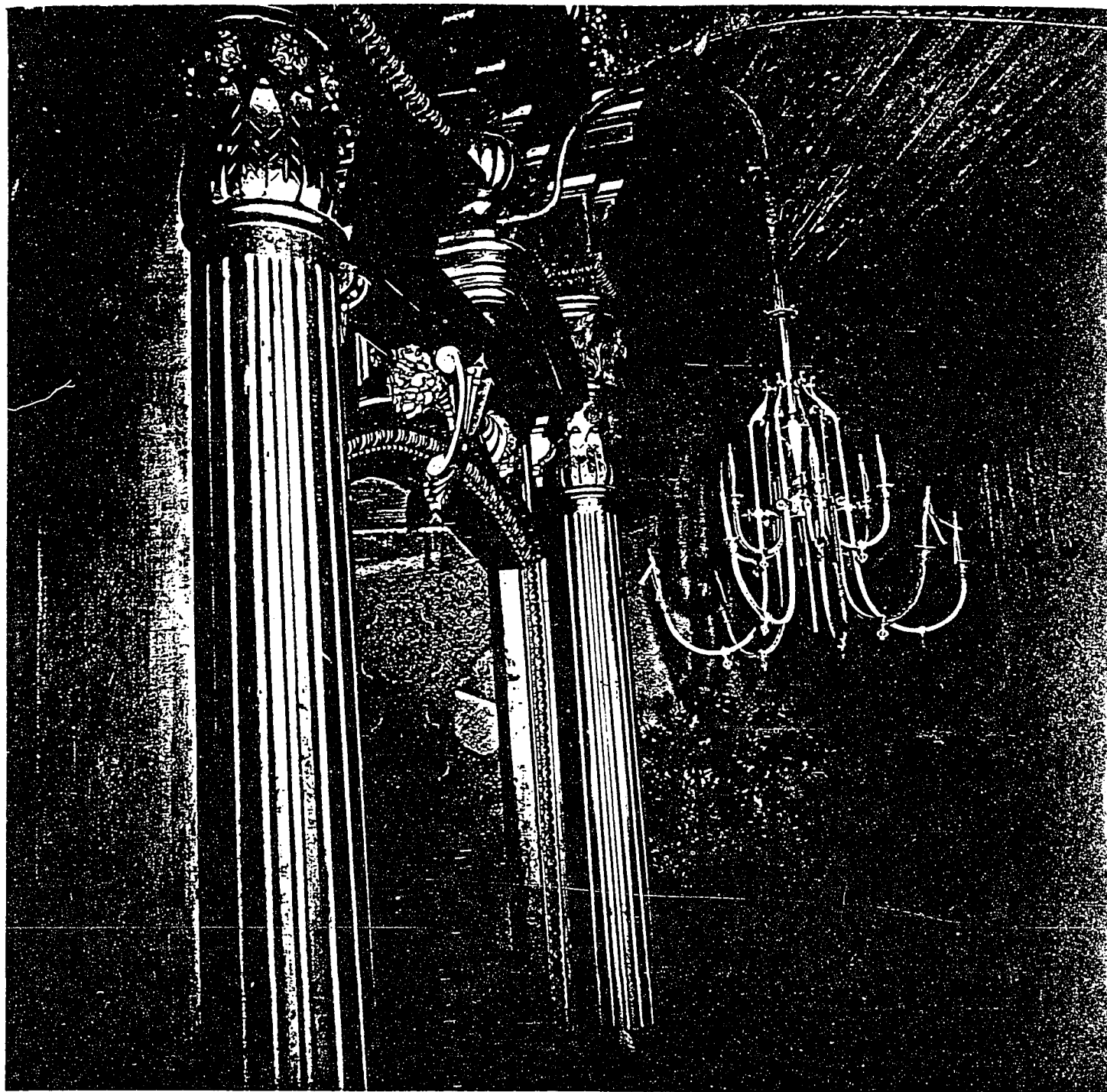


Figure 13 Close Up Showing the Gas Chandelier which adorns Each Box.

illuminated. ". . . during the sixty-year reign of gas. . . there had been a total of three hundred eighty-five disastrous fires in England, France, and America."¹⁸ A major contributing factor in the failure of the Music Hall was public fear of fire. Patrons had to climb three flights of stairs to the theatre. There was only a single route of egress and the auditorium was encircled by pipes filled with rushing gas. The existence of gas fixtures in the Music Hall testifies to the incredible shortsightedness of its management after 1890.

The theatre traditionally had difficulty meeting fire safety requirements. After only three seasons, the Music Hall was judged a fire-trap by the Cohoes City Council. A resolution by this body closed the theatre on 13 January 1877, but Acheson's widow, Bridgette, managed to reopen the theatre after only four days. The first significant safety improvement was made during the five years the Music Hall was closed, 1878-1883. On 15 December 1882 a new fire escape was added, running from the balcony to the alley on the north elevation.¹⁹ The problem, however, was hardly solved. The main stairway remained the only escape for patrons on the main floor. Short of building another large stair which would have involved breaking new exits on the ground level, nothing could be done. Six days after the close of *Egypta*, the last production at the

¹⁸Vera Mowry Roberts, On Stage: a history of theatre (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 376.

¹⁹Cataldo, p. 69.

Music Hall, the city officially condemned the third and fourth floor theatre as a fire hazard (18 March 1901).

In 1969 the renovators installed new electric wiring, removed the original staircase by replacing it with twin stairs, and added three additional exits housed in fire-proof poured concrete towers. Nevertheless, the spectre of holocaust doggedly stayed with the theatre. At the end of 1979, the regional theatre company that occupied the Music Hall filed for bankruptcy. Chief among its problems was its inability to finance physical improvements involving provisions for the handicapped and--ironically--increased fire protection.

In 1874 the only fire-fighting equipment in the auditorium and backstage was the Hall-patent fire extinguishing system installed by John Meehan of Albany, the individual commissioned to build the stage and mechanical effects.²⁰ It featured three rows of sprinklers that ran horizontally over the stage and were gravity-fed by a reservoir tank on the roof. Cataldo discovered early vintage sprinkler heads in the dressing rooms under the stage and in the fly gallery. The crawl-space also contains sprinklers but they are of a later date than the others and may have replaced the original system after 1901 when the Music Hall was no longer in use.

Originally, the Music Hall was heated by steam from eight cast iron radiator units installed by William Fleming.

²⁰ Cohoes Daily News, 19 November 1874.

Early newspaper accounts described the radiators as tastefully framed by the same pearl and parti-color woodwork with which Nathan Shaver adorned most of the theatre. Although one of the original, antique radiators was discovered in a room near the stage, little remains of the first heating system which apparently was overhauled and altered around 1891. It was replaced with a network of exposed heating pipes which were still in existence when the hall was "rediscovered." The second system, in turn, either became inoperable or inefficient as evidenced by the coal-burning stoves found in various locations in second floor offices.

The front center of the auditorium was dominated by a massive, canvas drop-curtain painted by Buffall artist, Fred Stanfield.²¹ Unfortunately, none of the original fabric remains from the curtain which "no one could appreciate from a pen and ink description."²² Of the many accounts of the curtain's captivating, eye-catching quality the most detailed is found in an opening night review:

From half-past seven until the drop curtain was raised for the first time before the public, all were closely scrutinizing the new temple of amusement and agreed that the reality excelled the description. First, the eye lighted on the drop curtain, which is a symmetrical and artistic painting representing a scene of Lake Lugano, the coloring rich, soft, and subdued, the mountains standing out in bold relief, and the objects surrounding painted true and agreeable to the eye of nature. 23

²¹Cataldo, p. 55.

²²Cohoes Cataract, 28 November 1874.

²³Cohoes Daily News, 24 November 1874.

Wing curtains and teasers were supplied by John G. Myers & Company and were made of red velvet which matched the padding on the railings of the loge boxes and balcony.²⁴

The proscenium opening is twenty feet wide. Cataldo found a stage that ended at the plaster line, making the depth to the back wall only twenty feet. Three pieces of physical evidence strongly support the idea that the stage once projected further into the auditorium. First, the face of the stage was obviously altered from the original. Second, sight lines from the balcony and loge boxes dictate some sort of thrust. Third, hinged doors within the passage directly behind the stage front and underneath the stage proper suggest access to a storage space under the one-time projecting stage. It is likely that a small apron of about six feet in depth extended towards the house. Behind the proscenium the stage and wings span the entire width of the building, sixty-two feet. Thus, if the apron did exist, there was approximately 520 square feet of playing space flanked on either side by approximately 420 square feet of wing space.

The ratio of wing-space to playing-space, nearly $1\frac{1}{2}:1$, indicates that many complete scene changes could be stored offstage. In this respect the Music Hall, although a provincial theatre, compares favorably with New York City theatres built in the same time period. For example, Booth's Theatre (opened 3 February 1869) had a ratio of slightly less than 7:5

²⁴Cataldo, p. 55.

and Daly's Theatre (the completely remodeled Broadway Theatre, opened 17 September 1879) had a ratio of less than 1:1.²⁵

A newspaper account refers to "thirteen different sets of flats (that were) rolled into place,"²⁶ suggesting that, since the reviewer was part of the audience, scene changes were effected in full view. This assumption is borne out by the fact that the theatre was not equipped with a drawn traveler-curtain. The common practice was to drop the act curtain only before intermissions. The rear of the stage was slotted with "panoramic grooves" moving in a curve downstage. Apparently, large flat-units were placed in this track and revolved from one wing to extreme upstage center where they formed a background. To change the scene, the flats continued around the curve to the other wing where they were struck. A new set, originating from the same side of the stage as the first, would then roll onto the stage (see figure 14).

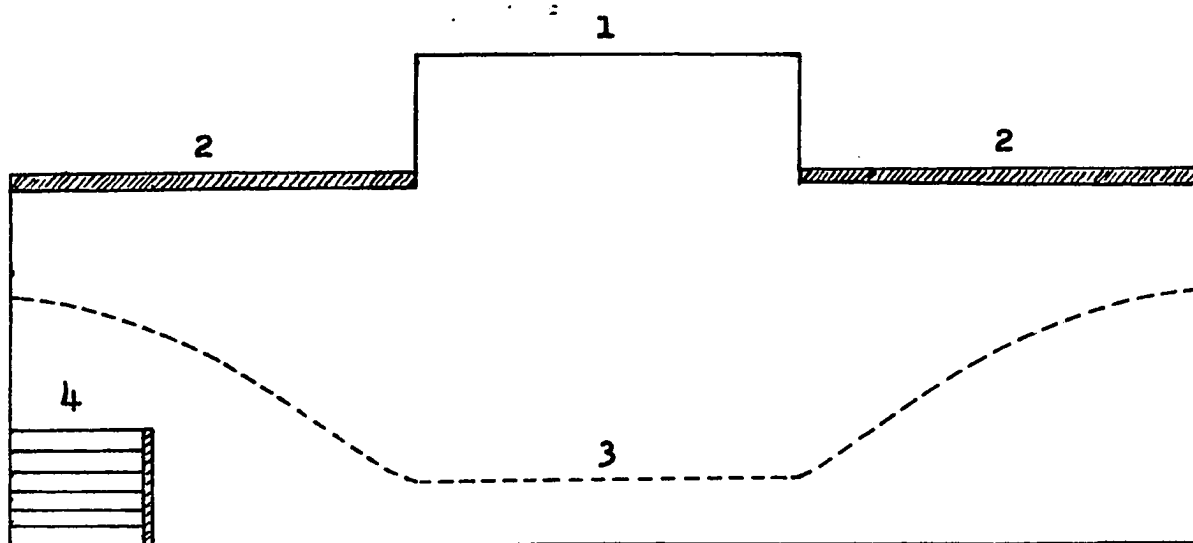
Approximately one-sixth of the wing space stage left is taken up by a wooden stair tower. In addition to serving as an access to the dressing rooms beneath the stage, the stair tower was used to move scenery into and out of the building. On the tower's west face was a tall, narrow door that opened into the exterior wooden elevator structure at the northwest corner of the building. Taking into account the size of the

²⁵William C. Young, Documents of American Theatre History: Famous American Playhouses 1716-1899 (Chicago: American Library Association, 1973), p. 195 ff.

²⁶Cohoes Cataract, 24 November 1874.

Figure 14. Overhead view of stage and wing area showing:

1. Stage apron
2. Proscenium wall
3. Location of "panoramic grooves"
4. Backstage stair tower



Scale: 1"=10'

doorway and the fact that the elevator was apparently manually operated by rope pulleys, it is doubtful that any of the "wild west shows" occurring throughout the Music Hall's production history contained any animals.

The wing space stage right contains a wooden stair to the dressing room level as well as a wall ladder to the fly gallery. Each wing appears to be quite spacious particularly when compared to the curiously small, four hundred square-foot stage.

The exposed wood floor of the stage is raked towards the orchestra. At its rear end is a framed opening leading to the dressing rooms. It is possible that this opening was also used by performers as access to the stage or for transportation of props and scenery. Originally, the stage floor had three traps equally spaced across the mid-point of the stage's depth. They were "double traps," having two hinged doors that could be opened individually or together. Cataldo determined the stage to be five feet above the flat auditorium floor. Thus, there was a low-ceilinged work space beneath the stage floor where machinery for use in conjunction with the traps could be placed.

Two major series of renovations involved the stage, wings, and auditorium during the active years of the Music Hall. The first, in 1891, included the painting of a plaster fresco on the brick masonry-bearing wall at the rear of the stage, the construction of various wooden partitions in the wings, the lowering of the proscenium arch, and the addition of a ceiling over the stage, built to compliment the new arch profile.

The last change is perhaps the most interesting since the new ceiling blocked off a fly loft that originally rose thirty-five feet above the stage floor. Before the renovation of 1891 the loft contained a catwalk and gridiron, the framework of which still partially exists. There remains evidence of an ample number of counter-weighted pulleys for flying scenery and a well worn pin rail. There is also an inoperative but intact winch that was used for operating the act curtain. The ceiling created an attic that was apparently unlit, thus obscuring the walls which were covered with old playbills, perhaps hung by stagehands who once worked in the loft (see figure 15). Also visible is the large truss structural system that supports the roof and balcony. It must be concluded that the ceiling was installed because the new scenic concept of box sets obviated the need for a fly gallery and because the ceiling improved acoustics and lowered heating costs.

The second major renovation of the theatre occurred in 1897. In late April of that year newspapers carried an announcement that the Music Hall was being painted and improved.²⁷ On 14 May 1897 the first dance was held in the Music Hall.²⁸ Since the original seats had been permanently installed and the auditorium raked, a dance would have been impossible. Thus it must have been some time in the spring of 1897 that

²⁷Cohoes Republican, 12 May 1897.

²⁸Cohoes Republican, 13 May 1897.

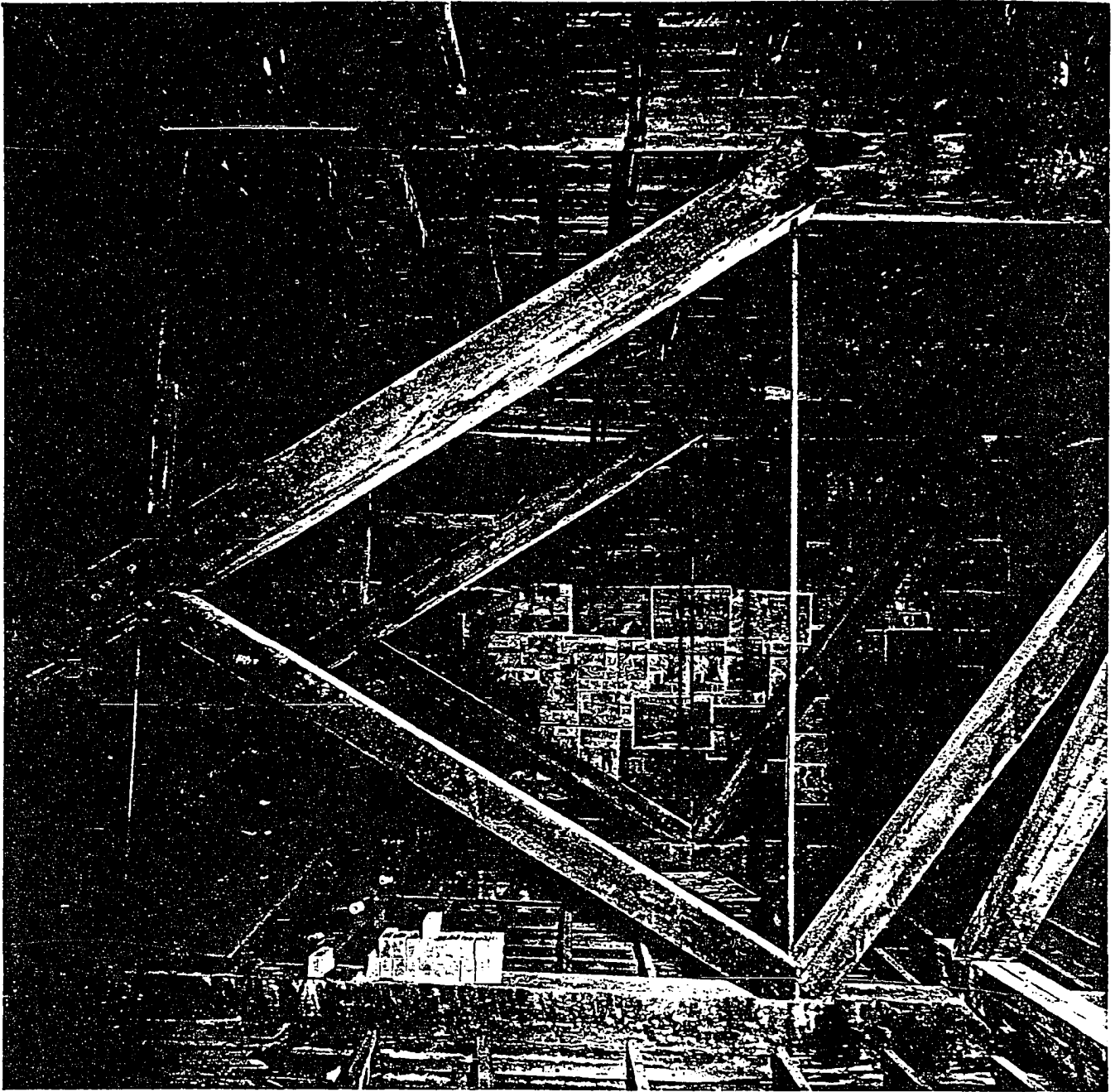


Figure 15, The Attic Showing Portions of the Large Wooden Roof Trusses and Old Playbills on the Fly Loft Wall.

the original seats were removed and the wooden superstructure that formed the raked floor was taken out in order to create a level surface.

Beneath the stage and wings were four dressing-rooms each of which measured a cozy 12' x 14'. Access to these rooms was by the iron-railed staircases described above. The changing rooms remain virtually unchanged as can be seen by graffiti dating back to the 1890's on the walls. There are indications that one of these small, wood paneled rooms was used by ushers for changing clothes. When Cataldo removed several boards from a partition wall he found an old portable metal ticket collection box filled with ticket stubs dated as far back as September, 1881. (see figure 16).

The fourth floor of the building is a horseshoe-shaped balcony, or gallery. It extends along the perimeter of the auditorium and terminates at the loge boxes on either end of the stage. It is structurally supported by iron columns located behind the third floor dress circle and along the sides of the orchestra. Additional intermediate support between and above the columns is achieved by means of steel tension rods hung from the roof truss framing system (see figure 17). Haldecott and Nichols designed the balcony "with special reference to the security and strength of the building while symmetry and architectural effect have not been overlooked."²⁹

Gallery patrons sat upon four rows of padded, wooden

²⁹Cohoes Cataract, 3 January 1874.

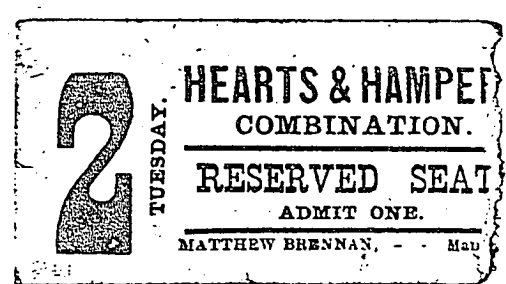
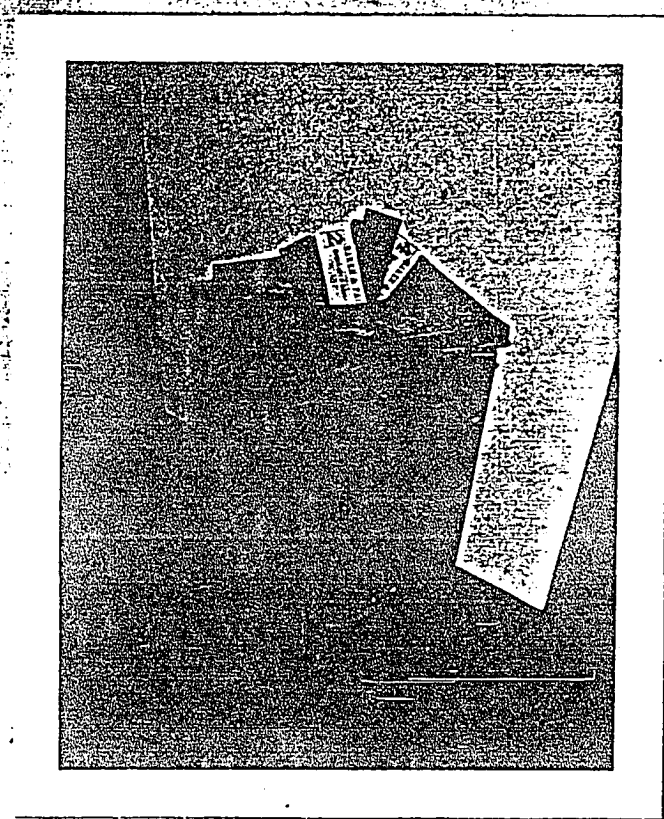
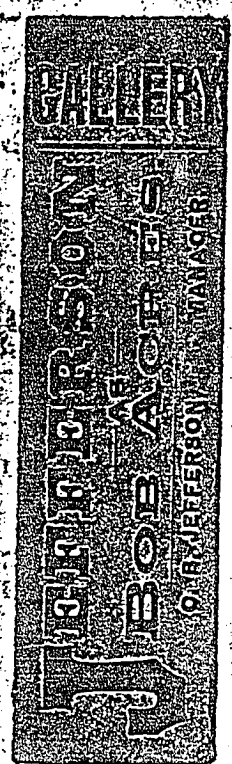
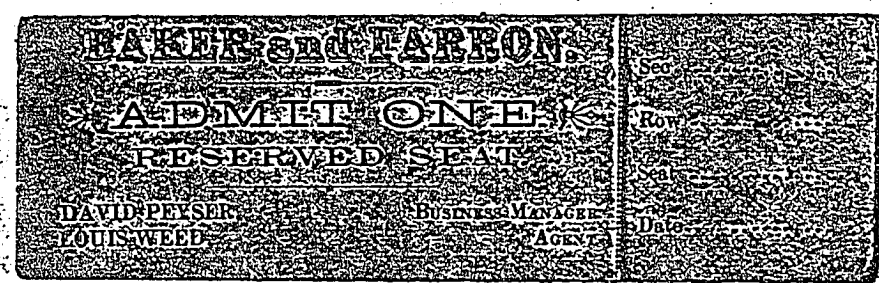
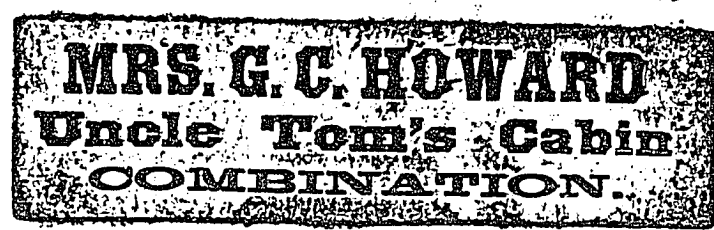
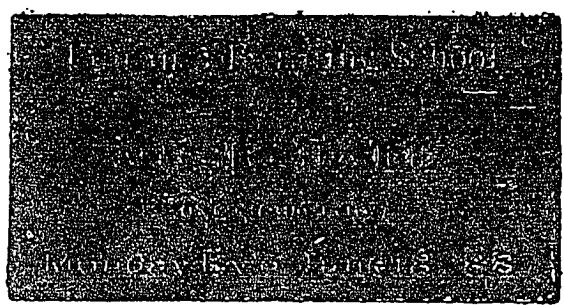


Figure 16, Music Hall tickets from the period 1881-1883 found in old ticket stub container shown. The container was found beneath the floor framing of Proscenium Box No. 305.

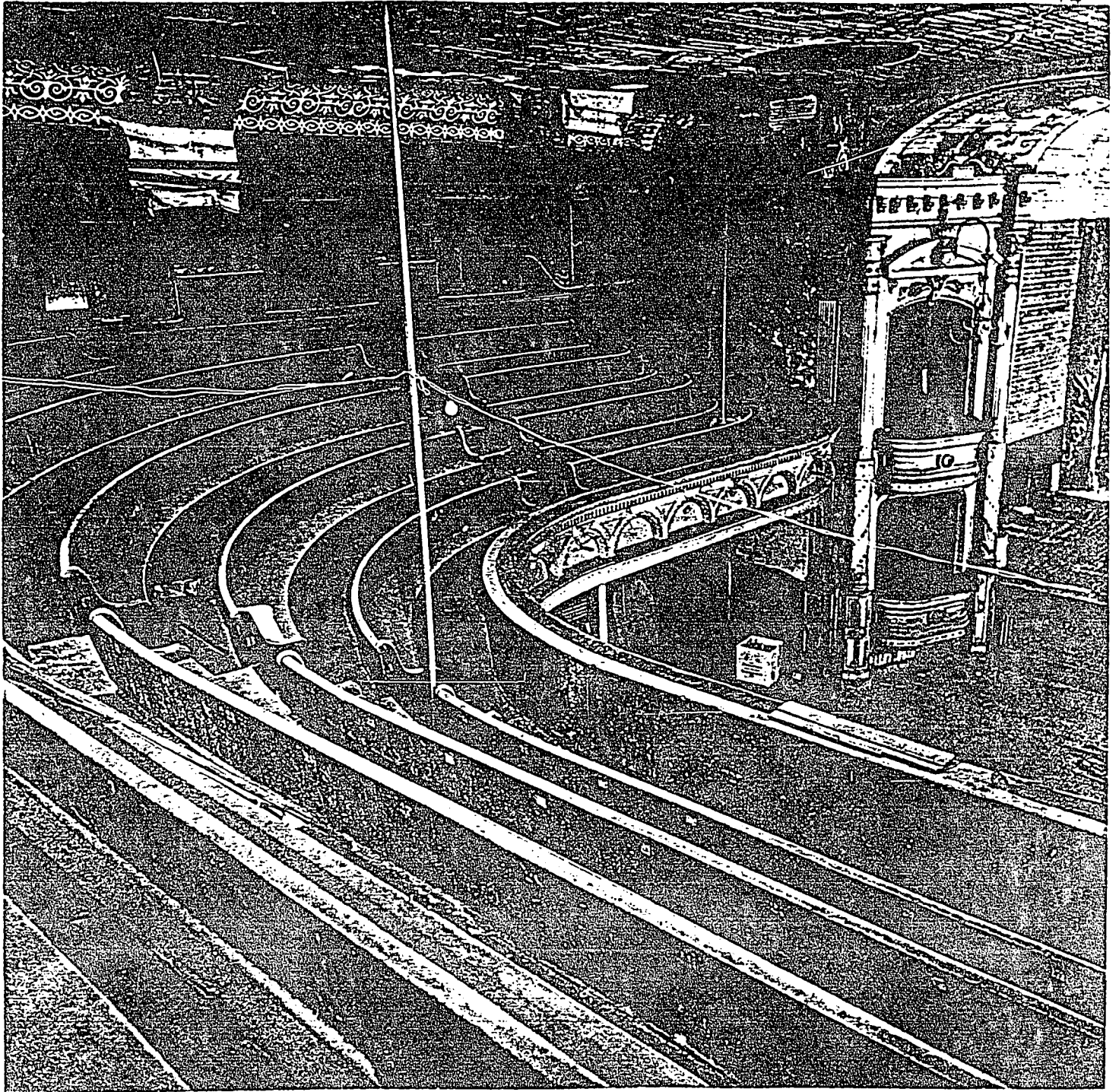


Figure 17, View of the Fourth Floor Balcony Showing Gallery Seats.

benches resembling church pews. The benches conform to the curved configuration of the balcony, each successive row being stepped down towards the stage. Unlike the main floor seats, the balcony benches are painted green. The wood floor and aisle stairs were undoubtedly carpeted originally. The walls are wood wainscot with painted red plaster above. Originally, the plaster walls matched the rest of the auditorium. The balcony facade has an attractive curving surface that is ornately decorated with polished maple arches and festoons hand-carved by John Land & Son. Like the delicate ornamentation on the facade of the loge boxes, gold-colored, formed-metal ornamentation in the shape of egg and dart, dentils, etc. adorns the carved wood. A wooden railing topped with padded red velvet runs along the entire facade.

Although early newspaper descriptions of the Music Hall attest to the excellent visibility from the balcony, it is difficult to see the extremities of the stage when seated along the sides of the horseshoe. The problem becomes more pronounced in the balcony seats near the proscenium wall. Either "excellent visibility" refers to the center and downstage areas, or Masten's interests in the Cohoes Cataract and Cohoes Daily News exerted editorial pressure on the reporters.

In 1969 the City of Cohoes purchased the Music Hall for \$1 from the Marine Midland Bank--the new corporate owners of the old National Bank of Cohoes. The city greatly desired to renovate the Music Hall and create a home for a regional theatre. Estimates for renovation totaled \$552,000--nearly

ten times the cost of construction in 1874, but less than half of what it would cost today. With the help of a grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), restoration was completed.

The renovation further altered the theatre from its original appearance. The original drop curtain had long since disappeared and was replaced with a travelling draw curtain. David Hall, the artist who restored the original ceiling design, was unable to reproduce the scene of Lake Lugano on the act curtain. Painting directly on the curtain fabric, he created a rendering of the Cohoes Cataract. Although the new painting is an inaccurate restoration, the cataract lends a flavor of local color to the theatre decor. An apron was built that extended eight feet past the proscenium opening.³⁰ Minor alterations included polishing the tin roof, sand blasting the exterior brick, and refinishing the floors and woodwork.

In spite of the several changes, the Music Hall, when fully restored in 1973, retained much of its original character and beauty. It stands today as one of the few links with nineteenth-century American theatre still surviving in the upper Hudson valley. In a time when older buildings are being thoughtlessly demolished, one can appreciate the thinking of the New York State Historic Trust:

(The) architectural value of this building is significant for many reasons. . . . It is

³⁰Cataldo, p. 54.

such a well-preserved specimen--both inside and out--because it has not had any notable changes made. . . and retains so much of the original fabric. . . and because of the cultural importance not only locally but regionally, as an example of American architecture from an era of the most dramatic change in American history. 31

³¹Ibid., p. 59.

IV. PRODUCTION HISTORY: THE FIRST THREE SEASONS, 1874-1877

The first three seasons of performance at the Music Hall were characterized by a healthy beginning followed by a steadily accelerating decline. The initial season, 1874-1875, had generally well-attended productions, especially during the first two months. In the second season the theatre was unable to capitalize on its successful beginning and the season was curtailed by three months. By the start of the third season, fall of 1876, the Music Hall had become a part-time venue. This chapter seeks to highlight significant performances in these first three seasons and attempts to explain the theatre's rapid demise after its promising beginning.

The Music Hall never had a resident company. Initially, Acheson and Masten procured the shows and financed them from their personal fortunes. In order to book productions the owners had to individually contact producers in New York City, Boston, and--to a lesser extent--smaller New England towns whose own resident companies had been forced on the road by the advent of larger and more prestigious touring troupes.

Thus, the Music Hall may be considered a perfect example of the "road house," a theatrical institution that developed as a consequence of the rapid improvements in transportation in the first five years after the Civil War. During this

period over 50,000 miles of new highways were built to accommodate the continuing, steady population growth. A similarly rapid expansion occurred in the American railway system. Railways offered starts the opportunity to tour the nation with their supporting actors and scenery. This complete packaging of an entire production became known as a combination company. Such troupes were the logical outgrowth of the advent of touring stars (begun in the 1820's by Junius Brutus Booth and others), and touring stars and supporting players (begun in the 1840's when many stars felt that resident companies could not provide adequate supporting actors).

Since the Music Hall was entirely dependent upon road companies, Acheson and Masten were immediately faced with the problem of determining whether Cohoesiers wanted to see established stars, local and/or regional talent, or a mixture of both. The predominance of professional companies during the first season indicates that the owners believed their audiences wanted established stars. However, delivering big name performers on a regular basis was no easy task. There were simply not enough quality troupes available to meet the demands of Albany, Troy, and Cohoes.

The Music Hall could not effectively compete for talent with its larger neighbors. It was the newest theatre in the area and it was located in the most remote and smallest of the three cities. After a few years of operation, the Music Hall had developed a negative reputation regarding its audiences. It became known as "the Hook," (possibly from the

legendary theatrical custom of forcibly removing bad acts from the stage by means of an enlarged shepherd's crook) a place where audiences "sat on their hands."¹ Such putative hostility, combined with the provincial lack of sophistication of its neophyte producers, made the Music Hall a likely target for second-rate companies who frequently failed to appear or were poorly prepared.

Actors in these lesser companies led much more difficult lives on tour than did those in the better-established combination companies. To reach Cohoes a troupe had to endure the hardships of stagecoach or riverboat travel. Once in town, the actors were given makeshift lodgings since the one hotel was almost always filled. The small companies tried to schedule dates that would give them the opportunity to play several performances and the novice actors often had to learn a large repertory of roles and give as many as three different portrayals per week. Such performers might earn as little as five dollars per week while being required to furnish their own costumes and equipment.²

Against such formidable conditions, Acheson and Masten tried to book the most innovative and popular theatricals available to them. From 1874 to 1901 they produced every conceivable form of entertainment that could be loaded into the small elevator to the fourth floor. Yet the marked drop in attendance in only the second season was a harbinger of

¹Cohoes Cataract, 2 July 1876.

²Lloyd Morris, Curtain Time, (New York: Random House, 1953), p. 58.

trouble for the owners' dreams of "culture," symbolized by the bust of Shakespeare and medallions of Mozart and Beethoven above the stage.

The First Season, 1874-1875

It is possible that the stronger audience response during the first year was due primarily to local curiosity. Since the shops were rented and opened a full four months before the theatrical premiere, Cohoesiers had the opportunity to scrutinize the construction of the theatre from a close vantage point. The building became a source of wonder for the populace as they watched materials constantly being unloaded and taken to the upper floors. Although they might see the opera chairs or curtain fabric, the theatre interior remained a mystery to most citizens until opening night.

The owners were aware of the civic curiosity and Masten used his newspaper to promote it: "Monday evening next, Music Hall will be opened to the public for the first time, and our citizens will have an opportunity to satisfy their curiosity in regard to the handsome, neat, and cozy temple of amusement."³ It is clear from the pre-opening publicity that Acheson and Masten conceived the building to be a combination cultural center and commercial complex, not unlike present day shopping malls. It appeared to be a proper development strategy for an urban area approaching 17,000 in population.

³Cohoes Daily News, 19 November 1874.

Cohoesiers had become accustomed to journeying to Albany or Troy for first class entertainment. The trip was long and difficult. The opening of the Music Hall meant that they could shop and attend theatre just a few blocks from their homes. To this end, in a "Card to the Public," Masten wrote:

The undersigned have built the Music Hall for the sole purpose of catering to the amusement of the Citizens of Cohoes, believing that a well conducted place of entertainment will prove both beneficial and constructive and keep our citizens from going abroad to seek enjoyments that can as well be furnished them at home. 4

Early in the morning on 23 November 1874 rain poured down in Cohoes. By noon the rain was mixed with snow, making ankle-deep slush on the newly paved sidewalks along Remsen Street.⁵ Despite the inclement weather, Mayor Charles Bogue and family, Harmony Mills President, Robert Johnston, and approximately three hundred other prominent Cohoesiers attended the gala opening of the new Music Hall. After a dedicatory address by choral teacher, Florence Chase, the audience was treated to a performance of Dion Boucicault's London Assurance.

The acting troupe was the J.W. Albaugh Company of Albany. Co-managed by husband and wife, this troupe was the last remaining professional resident company in the area. Although their home base was the Albany Opera House, the Albaugh Company had been forced by the many combination companies that

⁴Cohoes Daily News, 20 November 1874.

⁵Cohoes Cataract, 24 November 1874.

performed in the Albany theatre to tour Troy, Schenectady, and Cohoes. Albaugh performed at the Music Hall numerous times, usually on consecutive days. In addition to the premiere, this company gave the second performance at the Music Hall, Lady of Lyons (24 November 1874), and a New Year's Eve performance of the melodrama, The Man on the Mountain.⁶ For each of the first two performances, incidental music was provided by the newly-formed Cohoes Orchestra under the direction of Horace Green.

Although the theatre on opening night was filled nearly to capacity, "the confusion generally attending the opening of a new hall was overcome by the admirable manner in which the ushers attended to their duties."⁷ If the local papers which were heavily controlled by Masten can be considered a reliable source, the premiere was a total success. Not only did the reviews relate that the audience's expectations were greatly exceeded, they also reinforced the notion that the Music Hall could equal, if not eclipse, its counterparts in Albany and Troy: "it seemed as though we were seated in some first class theatre in one of the larger cities."⁸ From the very beginning, Masten used the press to instill in Cohoesiers' minds a sense of competition with neighboring theatres: "Our citizens should show their appreciation by giving the under-

⁶Cohoes Cataract, 1 January 1875.

⁷Cohoes Cataract, 24 November 1874.

⁸Cohoes Daily News, 24 November 1874.

taking a proper support. It is far cosier and more comfortable than the Griswold Opera House in Troy. The present company is superior to the stock companies that have attracted people from this city to there."⁹

The press nicknamed the Music Hall "the Gem," and for the first few weeks audiences flocked to see its opulent beauty. The theatre's fare consisted primarily of classical repertoire, farces, melodrama, and new forms engendered by changes in the programming strategy of New York City theatres.

In the early 1870's the repertory concept was gradually giving way to single plays that were designed for a long run. The strategy, which seemed imminent after Uncle Tom's Cabin played an incredible three hundred consecutive performances in 1852-53, created a demand for new plays and new forms of entertainment. Thus, in addition to the standard fare mentioned above, the Music Hall hosted a variety of forms in its first three seasons including adaptations of novels, burlesques, frontier dramas, minstrel shows, extravaganzas, and the ubiquitous "Tom show."

When not engaged in theatrical production, the Music Hall was used as a civic center for social sings, band concerts, spelling bees (often pitting one town against another), temperance meetings, and lectures. There was free admission to the theatre for these civic engagements, with the exception of some lecturers who charged a fee.

⁹Ibid.

Usually, performances were three or four acts followed by a farcical afterpiece. The afterpiece became increasingly less frequent--after the fashion of the time--until it disappeared around the end of the third season. Acts were separated by a ten minute intermission during which patrons were encouraged to "wet their whistles" at a choice of neighboring taverns. A typical evening's entertainment lasted about three hours.

Melodramas were great favorites with Cohoesiers perhaps since tales of intrigue and suspense were available only in the form of dime-novels to those who could not afford a round-trip ticket to the Albany or Troy theatres. After Albaugh finished his premiere engagement the Music Hall presented Ada Gray in the venerable thriller, East Lynne (25 November 1874). A testament to melodrama's popularity, this piece would be presented in Cohoes two more times in 1875, twice in 1877, once in 1878, and again in 1886.¹⁰

Since Cohoes was heavily populated with immigrants, comedy was often characterized by impersonations and humor at the expense of an ethnic group. Typical in this regard was Deitcheror: The Three Pals of Crime, presented by a Dutch dialect comedian with the unlikely name of Little Tut. He was the first solo performer to be held over at the Music Hall, giving performances on December 7 and 8, 1874.

¹⁰Cohoes Daily News, 3 February 1875, 6 June 1875, 7 October 1877, 9 December 1877, 14 February 1878, 17 March 1886.

On 26 December 1874, P.T. Barnum presented an extravaganza featuring "Hunky Punky, the baby elephant." How the manually powered elevator ever bore the beast aloft remains one of the unsolved mysteries of the Music Hall. Not only would it be virtually impossible for any number of men to hoist the creature, the width of the third floor door was too narrow to accomodate even an infant pachyderm. It is likely that "Hunky Punky" was led up the main staircase and through the double doors that opened into the auditorium.

During the first three weeks of 1875 a series of eight social sings was given. Arthur Masten Jr. stated that, "Of the entertainments held in the Hall during the (first) season, those of chief local interest were eight evenings of social singing which were well attended."¹¹ The interest must have been substantial since a portion of the sings took place while numerous complaints were being registered concerning lack of heat in the theatre.¹² Although there are no records of the nature of the repairs, the problem was apparently solved when Masten announced, "There is now no difficulty in keeping the Hall comfortably warm."¹³

Another highly popular form of entertainment was the frontier melodrama. On 29 January 1875, and again three nights later William F. Cody presented his version of how the

¹¹Masten, p. 151.

¹²Cohoes Daily News, 5 January 1875.

¹³Cohoes Cataract, 18 January 1875.

West was being won in Scout of the Plains. The program of this performance reads, "His powerful American drama will abound in Historic and Picturesque truth; illustrating and relating to the struggles between the Aborigines and the Pioneers."¹⁴ "The Great and Only Buffalo Bill" brought with him a combination company featuring Kit Carson Jr. (no relation to the historical figure).

Between the two Cody performances was the premiere of Shakespearean drama at the Music Hall, Richard III performed by the Albaugh company on 30 and 31 January 1875. By mid-winter, 1875, the theatre had offered a combination of popular and refined entertainments suggesting that audiences were drawn from both the prosperous management/merchant class and the mill workers. The initial popularity of the Music Hall led Acheson and Masten to believe they could increase the number of performances, "It is the intention of the management, in the coming months, to offer matinee and evening performances six days per week."¹⁵ Presumably, the owners planned to have two different productions presented by the same acting company each day.

There is no indication, however, that these plans came to fruition. At twelve performances per week, it would have been extremely difficult to fill the hall regularly. The Music Hall must have attracted much repeat business in its early days since there was a population of only 17,000 to draw

¹⁴Cohoes Daily News, 28 January 1875.

¹⁵Cohoes Daily News, 9 February 1875.

against. In 1871 the average female worker was paid 75¢ for twelve hours of work--20¢ less than her male counterpart. Assuming that wages had not significantly changed by 1875, for a working couple to attend an evening performance at 35¢ each, the cost would equal forty percent of their combined daily wage. Clearly, this couple could not afford to attend the Music Hall much more than once a week, if that often. The repeat audience then, must have come largely from the middle and upper classes. Even at a generous estimate of one quarter of the population being at least middle-class, the theatre had an effective pool of only 4000 people who could afford to attend more than one performance per week. Thus, for the management to continue to draw good houses, they could not possibly offer twelve performances per week; moreover, fare had to be pointed at the more affluent Cohoesiers.

Such deduction serves to explain the popularity and repeated performances of the Albaugh Company during the first season. After each performance the press extolled the virtues of the company. Typical praise is exemplified in these comments concerning the performance of Maggie Mitchell in the title role of Albaugh's production of Jane Eyre, 10 February 1875.

Magnificent Maggie Mitchell was greeted with a large audience on Wednesday evening and all present were highly pleased with the evening's entertainment. We trust the large assemblage will give sufficient encouragement to Mr. Albaugh and the managers of Music Hall, to induce them to present other first class artists to the Cohoes public. 16

¹⁶Cohoes Cataract, 13 February 1875.

Frank Mayo was just such a "first-class" artist and he gave his famous portrayal of Davy Crockett on 19 February 1875. An analysis of the first season (see Appendix 2) reveals that productions by well-known performers were nearly double the number of shows by hypnotists, animal acts, and other lesser-known entertainers.

By March, 1875, a pattern had developed in the scheduling of Music Hall performances. Just as January had been a quiet month after the reasonably active programming in the fall of 1874, March saw a return to non-theatrical presentations. The highlight of this month was the public outrage caused by the appearance of evangelist, Mordecai Brown. Attempting to save souls through the medium of a revivalist meeting, the Protestant Pastor was run out of the theatre by the conservative French-Canadian and Irish Catholic audience. Of only four theatrical events in this month, the Niblo's Garden Company's performance of Uncle Tom's Cabin, 15 March 1875, drew a surprisingly meager house, perhaps due to an unusually heavy March snowfall.

Attendance improved in April with Albaugh's production of Hamlet and with the Cohoes premiere of that venerable institution, the minstrel show. The Lady Minstrels, who performed on 26 April 1875, were typical of the large cast minstrel shows appearing across the United States after 1870.¹⁷ There were a total of 104 women appearing in the second act,

¹⁷Oscar G. Brockett, History of the Theatre, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1974), p. 376.

or "olio" portion, entitled, "The Parisian Sensation Troupe." Given the size of the Music Hall stage and wings, this number would seem to be an exaggeration. In any case, minstrel shows appeared with regularity in the spring and summer of 1875. In some cases, the shows were combined with other popular forms such as the ethnic comedy. An example of the combination was the offering of McGill & Strong's Emerald Isle Minstrels, who appeared 10 May 1875. This troupe replaced the traditional olio with a one-act farce drawing upon Irish folklore. Press accounts indicate that minstrel shows during the first season were almost always well-attended.

On 14 May 1875 a travelling star, Charlotte Thompson, appeared in Jane Eyre. Although Miss Thompson performed with her own company, there were nine Cohoesiers in the production, marking the first time locals supported a star attraction at the Music Hall.¹⁸

There were only twelve productions during June and July, none of which were particularly noteworthy. On 5 August 1875 Tony Pastor, who in the 1890's would revise burlesque into suitable family entertainment (vaudeville), debuted at the Music Hall. His travelling company featured the Garnella Brothers, a trio of musician/acrobats. The show was not yet vaudevillian in form. Rather, it resembled burlesque in its dependence on pretty girls and big production numbers.¹⁹ Advertisements for Pastor's troupe suggested the show to be

¹⁸Cohoes Daily News, 15 May 1875.

¹⁹Brockett, p. 424.

more than capable of arousing male prurient interests.

The East Lynne Grand Central Theatre Company, appearing in late August, was a closer approximation of vaudeville than Pastor's presentation. The Massachusetts-based company offered ten acts--such as the Onzalo Brothers on the horizontal bar--and ended their performance with a short farce, A Kiss in the Dark.

The theatre closed for the first two weeks of September, 1875, marking the end of the first season. The two-week interval was to be the shortest hiatus between seasons in the Music Hall's history. There were a total of fifty-five professional productions during the first season plus twenty-five civic functions or amateur presentations. Thus the theatre was in use on eighty days, or twice per week. While these figures fall far short of the owners desire to stage six performances per week, the first season must be considered successful. Newspaper accounts indicate productions were generally well attended, the hall was regularly used for ten months, and Cohoes audiences were introduced to some of the best performers available.

The Second Season, 1875-1876

A significant change in the Music Hall's second season was the increase in performances by combination companies. Perhaps the success of Buffalo Bill in the preceding season encouraged more troupes to include Cohoes in the established upper Hudson circuit of Albany, Troy, and Schenectady. Cody

began the season with another frontier spectacle, Life on the Border, 13 September 1875, and was followed one week later by Frank Frayne who staged a frontier melodrama and gave marksmanship exhibitions on stage. On 25 September the nationally known entertainer, George L. Fox, and his supporting company presented the pantomime, Humpty Dumpty, with Fox clowning in the title role.

A comparison of press accounts reveals that the largest audience in the short life of the Music Hall attended the 11 October 1875 performance of Uncle Tom's Cabin. Over four hundred patrons saw the six-act version performed by the famous Howard family.²⁰ George C. Howard no longer acted the part of St. Clare but his wife still played Topsy, and his daughter, Cordelia, played Little Eva (a role she had performed since 1862). It is interesting to speculate why this performance was so popular when the Niblo's Garden production had failed a season earlier. Perhaps the Howards' success was due to local appeal. They had premiered the play in Troy thirteen years earlier. Another reason might be the publicity value of the elaborate street parade staged by the Howard company on the day of the performance. The Niblo's Garden company had performed in March and the weather had obviated any outdoor promotional festivities. At any rate, after the Howard performance, "Tom shows" continued to be popular at the Music Hall. The play was a perfect blend of melodrama, the "drama of common life," and the characterization

²⁰ Cohoes Daily News, 12 October 1875.

of national types.²¹ Its popularity in Cohoes was part of a nationwide mania for the play that created a tenfold increase in the number of productions from 1879 to the mid-nineties.

Another major event in Music Hall history occurred on 6 November 1875, when:

Cohoes is to be favored this evening by the appearance of the celebrated tragedian Mr. E.L. Davenport, at the Music Hall, in that grand old play Othello, the Moor of Venice. This will give our citizens an opportunity of witnessing one of the grandest plays ever put upon the stage here, as presented by one of the oldest and best theatrical stars in the country. 22

Surprisingly, there are no extant reviews of Mr. Davenport's performance.

The Albaugh company made their first appearance of the season on 13 November 1875 with Maggie Mitchell starring in Fanchon the Cricket. For the next two weeks, the Music Hall hosted lesser known groups such as the Guy Family Opera House Company and the John Thompson Variety Troupe.

The next important event of the season was the Thanksgiving matinee/evening performances of Edwin Adams in Enoch Arden. "His genius is sparkling, powerful, and full of emotion. As Enoch Arden, the hero of the most beautiful of Tennyson's poems, he is inimitable."²³

Such journalistic fawning was typical of the publicity

²¹Roberts, p. 365.

²²Cohoes Cataract, 6 November 1875.

²³Cohoes Cataract, 20 November 1875.

engineered by Acheson and Masten. At times, however, the publicity failed, as can be seen by the relatively poor showing at the 14 December 1875 Music Hall debut of Barnum's newest attraction, General Tom Thumb and Wife. Despite vigorous pre-show publicity, the famous midget drew less than half the house.²⁴ His performance almost certainly had to be better than that of Imogene Johnston, wife of the President of Harmony Mills. One week after the Tom Thumb performance Mrs. Johnston played to near capacity in an amateur production of Broken Chains.²⁵

Attendance was poor for the January, 1876, return engagement of "one of the brightest and best stars who has yet visited our city," Ada Gray, in East Lynne.²⁶ In spite of the impressive list of performers (Davenport, Tom Thumb, et. al.), the Music Hall had not staged a professional box office hit since the "Tom show" three months earlier.

It is tempting to explain the sudden downturn on the severity of the Cohoes winter, especially since attendance had been poor in December and January of the first season. Yet the Albany and Troy theatres regularly produced profits during the cold months and research indicates that the winter of 1875-76 was no exception. Perhaps the many outdoor pageants and winter festivities centering around the frozen Cohoes Falls made the holiday season a poor time for the Music Hall. If so, then why did the amateur melodrama do so well? Did

²⁵Cohoes Cataract, 22 December 1875.

²⁶Cohoes Cataract, 1 January 1876.

Harmony Mills employees turn out in force to impress their boss?

In general, such amateur theatricals met with great success compared to the apathy Cohoesiers extended to professional performers (with a few notable exceptions, such as Cody and Mayo). This preference is also underscored by the success of civic events at the Music Hall during the same period.

As in the premiere season, programming in January and February consisted mostly of social sings and lectures. A contemporary account of socialsinging stated, "The 'social sing,' under the direction of N. Mansfield at Music Hall on Monday evening was, like all others, well attended, the Hall being filled. These socials have been among our most pleasant evening entertainments."²⁷ This statement taken with that of Arthus Masten, Jr. quoted above (see note 11), indicates that these community gatherings may have been the most popular of all Music Hall events. The "sings" were given free, and their frequency in winter may indicate that the owners, unable to get much professional entertainment in the winter, chose to keep the furnaces fired (which saved them money), and preserve a continuity of interest in the theatre.

Lectures were given free or at rates approximately one half the price of theatrical events. Although the topics were diverse--"Marriage," "The Irish in England," "Wine,

²⁷Cohoes Cataract, 15 April 1876.

Water, Women, Wit, and Wisdom,"--attendance was generally poor, except when the speaker was a nationally known figure such as Kit Carson, who lectured about "Border Life in Mexico" on 16 August 1876.²⁸

For two and a half months the only presentations at the Music Hall were sings, lectures, and--unbelievably--three performances of the melodrama, Two Orphans, by three different travelling companies, none of whom got good reviews. By March, 1876 the theatre's management was giving clear indication that its management and/or resources were sapped.

Unimaginative programming and poor attendance were not the only indications of troubled times for the Music Hall. As early as 28 September 1876, the owners began divesting themselves of the theatre. On that date, Acheson technically transferred the deed for his share to his wife, Bridgette. The specific reasons for this move are unknown, but it was undoubtedly prompted by Acheson's rapidly deteriorating health. Masten intended to keep control of his half, but in less than one year he too would sell out.

Another sign of economic problems was evident in the activities of the leasees during the first two years of operation. The city had never really recovered from the paralyzing effects of the Panic of 1873 and the retrenchment of the Harmony Mills conglomerate in the winter of that year. Like much of New England, the hard economic times spawned high unemployment in Cohoes, and, in particular, crippled the

²⁸ Cohoes Cataract, 17 August 1876.

construction industry. The result was a plethora of rental opportunities in the many shops built before 1873. In this "renter's market" landlords found themselves in stiff competition for tenants.

Like many business properties, the Music Hall suffered under these conditions. On 15 February 1876 the first two floors were badly vandalized. Glass doors were broken and gas fixtures were ripped from the wall; the shops were closed for one week.²⁹ The attack accelerated the exodus of the Hall's quality tenants. Boughton the Hatter had left in 1875, after a tenancy of not quite one year, and was replaced by F.T. Dunn's Music Hall Cash, Tea, and Flour Store. After the vandalism, the Temple of Fashion moved across Remsen Street and its vacated space remained unoccupied for fifteen months until A. Kain's wholesale clothing company came in--typifying the lesser quality of the replacement tenants. Parkhurst dissolved his partnership with Graves in June, 1876, and M.C. Lansing's insurance agency rented half the space formerly occupied by the music school.³⁰ Lansing vacated after only one month and was replaced by a rival firm under the management of William Conliss.³¹ With marginal theatre receipts and unstable rentals, the building was quickly becoming a liability.

²⁹Cohoes Cataract, 16 February 1876.

³⁰Cohoes Daily News, 7 July 1876.

³¹Cohoes Daily News, 17 August 1876.

In addition to its economic woes, the Music Hall Block became the object of semi-serious superstition for laborers living in the Ogden Mills tenements on the north side of the building. Controversy was aroused by letters to the Editor of the Cohoes Daily News in June, 1876, complaining of ghosts stalking the building. Tenement residents claimed that a clinking sound like chains or silver coins rang out from a frosted-glass window on the second floor. Strange bursts of light were said to be emanating from the building. Masten retaliated by accusing the owner of Rand's Opera House in Troy of starting the rumors. Considering the secure financial position of the Troy theatre and the lack of competition for audiences between the two houses, this accusation was perhaps more farfetched than the rumors themselves. Although Masten's claims were without substance, they indicated the degree of frustration attending the serious decline in Music Hall business.

The owners, however, did not give up. As spring approached in 1876 they relied primarily upon return engagements. Albaugh revived Hamlet and Richard III on March 17 and 18 to moderately receptive audiences.³² Other return engagements featured the Sheridan and Mack Combination Comapny and McGill and Strong's Emerald Minstrels. The most popular of the returnees was the ubiquitous Cody whose 15 April 1876 performance received the following flowery review:

³²Cohoes Daily News, 21 March 1876.

Long before the doors were opened, the streets and lobby of the theatre were thronged with people seeking admission. The boys, old and young, went wild. . . and before the play was ended the enthusiasm of the actors in their wild and desperate scenes spread to the audience from gallery to pit. ³³

The appearance of Cool Burgess and his Haverly Minstrels on 17 April 1876, has the historical significance of being the first time an all-Negro company played the Music Hall. Regrettably, there are no recorded reactions to this event. Probably, Burgess was met with the same audience indifference that appeared to be the normal reaction in the first quarter of 1876.

The languishing Music Hall was afforded an excellent opportunity to renew interest in itself by participating in the National Centennial Celebration of 1876. Cohoes was to be an important part of New York State's commemorative plans. Hendrick Hudson was said to have anchored just downstream from the confluence of the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers, and to have explored the land that became the City of Cohoes. The State planned a large riverfront celebration to reenact these historic events. As its part in the celebration the Music Hall produced Pilgrim's Progress, a three-day (April 20-22) pageant billed as "a grand entertainment of Art, Music, and Lecture, including six colossal paintings covering 5,310 square feet of canvas."³⁴

³³Cohoes Daily News, 16 April 1876.

³⁴Cohoes Centennial Yearbook, (Cohoes: 1967), p. 8.

The Centennial could have been a godsend for the theatre since it promised a built-in audience for three consecutive performances (part of the Music Hall's problem in the second season was its inability to provide audiences for multiple performances of the same production). Pilgrim's Progress relied heavily on its dioramas. However, other more elaborate dioramas were shown on larger stages in Albany and the Music Hall production played to quarter-filled houses.³⁵ This single financial loss could have bankrupted Acheson and Masten had not the New York State Centennial Commission subsidized a portion of the project.

The failure of Pilgrim's Progress so devastated the owners that they shied away from any further involvement in Centennial activity and, in fact, offered only four more productions during the rest of the season. In only their second year, the amateur theatrical entrepreneurs found their future to be bleak.

The Third Season, 1876-1877

The loss of revenue due to the theatre's premature closing was magnified by continued instability in the rental spaces. In the summer of 1876 both the second insurance agency and Western Union left the building. Their exit left the entire second floor vacant with the exception of a small piano studio maintained by George Graves, who was slowly

³⁵Cohoes Daily News, 23 April 1876.

slipping into bankruptcy.³⁶ Fortunately, Bernard Acheson, City Librarian and son of the owner, needed more shelf-space than was afforded in the cramped quarters of Egbert's Institute.³⁷ The library took occupancy of all the unused area on the second floor in June.

As a municipal institution, the library was not able to pay as much rent as the commercial enterprises that had preceded it, and thus the problem was far from solved. In October, Dunn's Tea and Flour Store vacated the first floor.³⁸ The new tenant, C.O.D. Clothing, was another of the many cut-rate wholesalers in the city. The original variety of shops that had been present at the Music Hall Block's opening, and hence its drawing power to Cohoes' middle-class, was gone.

An ailing partner, failing theatre, continued vacancies, and a recently bankrupted hardware business finally persuaded Masten to sell his half of the Music Hall. In January, 1877, James Van Santvoord, assignee of Masten's creditors, sold Masten's portion to Mary Acheson, the daughter of Masten's former partner. After Miss Acheson assumed Masten's mortgages and debts, he was left with 25¢ out of an original investment well in excess of \$30,000.

Newspaper records indicate only seven productions at

³⁶Masten, p. 225.

³⁷Cohoes Daily News, 19 June 1876.

³⁸Cohoes Cataract, 28 October 1876.

the Music Hall between the aforementioned Kit Carson lecture on 16 August 1876 and January 1877. The premiere of the third season was the Olympic Novelty and Pantomime Troupe's matinee performance of King Gobblemeup or The Ogre Who Destroys So Many Girls and Boys, on 21 September 1876. This performance represented an innovation--children's theatre--that might have created a new audience at the Music Hall had not financial problems diverted Masten's attention away from programming.

From 1877 to 1878 the Music Hall was fully owned by the Acheson family, specifically Bridgette Acheson and her daughter, Mary. It is impossible to determine precisely which family member ran the theatre, but whoever it was encountered a staggering number of problems from the very beginning.

On 13 January 1877 the Cohoes Common Council inspected the theatre "with a view to the better protection of the public and the facilities for escape in case of panic."³⁹ There can be little doubt that the sudden municipal interest in the Music Hall was directly influenced by the disastrous Brooklyn Theatre fire and panic that there resulted in 292 fatalities on 5 December 1876. Not surprisingly, the councilmen determined the theatre to be a fire hazard and recommended certain changes for the protection of its patrons.

The Council demanded that the gallery doors be made to open "outwardly" that is, toward the stairwell. Also they ordered the stairs leading from the auditorium to the second

³⁹Cohoes Cataract, 13 January 1877.

floor to be widened at least four feet, with a decrease in the slope to no more than 45 degrees and the addition of good hand rails. The stairwells further had to be altered so that the audience retiring from the orchestra and the gallery would not confront one another on the landing. Outside the building, the councilmen decided that a covered staircase was needed, running from Oneida Street to a set of already existing doors on the second floor.⁴⁰

The Council informed the Acheson family of the required improvements and directed Mayor Johnston to close the Music Hall until the alterations were made. Acting out of either indecision or defiance, the owners ignored the edict and, on 17 January 1877, William F. Cody and entourage appeared at the theatre in an all-new production, The Red Right Hand or Buffalo Bill's First Scalp for Custer, featuring a blond look-alike for Custer, Captain Jack.

The following week, the angry Common Council reacted to the Acheson's rebuff:

The Mayor is hereby directed to close and prevent by force if necessary, the occupation of the said hall by an audience or congregation of people until the changes proposed in the report of the committee appointed by the Mayor to examine said hall shall be complied with, and the license for said hall shall be revoked until said changes are made. ⁴¹

Three weeks later, 9 February 1877, the Council reconsidered its action and decided, "the resolution in reference to change

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Cohoes Cataract, 20 January 1877.

in the Music Hall be referred back to the committee for the purpose of modifying said resolution, if a compromise can be agreed to."⁴²

It is impossible to know precisely what transpired in the three weeks between the forced closing and the rescinding of that decision. It is hardly likely that either Bridgette or Mary Acheson were able to obtain a legal restraining order. Also, the family had little political clout, except for Bernard who was only City Librarian. Probably Mayor Johnston or his wife (who had appeared at the Music Hall the previous year) persuaded the Council to soften its position. Or perhaps Masten, still a politically powerful Cohoesier, exerted his influence. Although the Music Hall was allowed to reopen, it was a Pyrrhic victory for theatre in Cohoes, since none of the changes were made and the threat of fire continued to be the building's nemesis.

The Council's retraction did not help the theatre, even in the short term. For two and one-half months. February through April, the few troupes who had been booked at the Music Hall cancelled out. Typical of this trend, the New York City-based Hutchinson Combination Company failed to perform on two separate occasions in March, each time citing "illness" as an excuse. Since cancellations had been rare in the first two seasons, their frequency in the third must be attributed to the Music Hall's negative reputation as a fire-trap.

⁴²Cohoes Cataract, 10 February 1877.

Occasionally, the Achesons were able to cover the cancellations with amateur nights. The theatre had ten such talent contests in February, March, and April, six of which were sponsored by the St. Vincent de Paul Society. An outside agency like the Society (of which William Acheson had been president) becoming a production company testifies to the desperate financial condition of the Music Hall. The tenth amateur effort was the performance of the lampoon, Colleen Ban and Roy O'More, financed by the City Library and produced by Bernard Acheson.

Young Mr. Acheson became the official manager of the theatre at the beginning of May. It is likely that the Music Hall had been unofficially under his stewardship ever since Masten sold his interest. Acheson succeeded in getting professional entertainment back into the theatre, even though he was inexperienced and lacking in sophistication. This last trait is evidenced by his press release for the 12 May 1877 performance of a Dutch dialect comedian, "If you want to laugh unt grow fat, go unt see the Dutch Recruit at Moosick Hall. Tarree more entertainments--dis afternoon, dis evening, unt Monday evening."⁴³

Acheson's first modest success was a return engagement of Tony Pastor's troupe featuring Gus Williams, Watson and Ellis, and Fields and Hay on 26 June 1877.⁴⁴ The remainder

⁴³Cohoes Daily News, 11 May 1877.

⁴⁴Cohoes Cataract, 27 June 1877.

of the third season was filled sporadically with second-rate performers even though Acheson lowered ticket prices from 35¢ to 25¢. The last performance of the season was the 24 July 1877 choral concert under the direction of John G. Parkhurst.

There is no evidence that the Common Council ever followed up on their order to close the Hall, nor that any improvements were made. The third season had presented barely over ten per cent the number of productions of the previous year. The season represented a continuation of the ignominious decline of the Music Hall from its promising beginnings. Poor economic conditions, ineffectual management, and the threat of fire plagued the theatre as it shakily approached its fourth year.

V. PRODUCTION HISTORY: 1878, A YEAR OF CRISIS

In order for a theatre to succeed, it must successfully overcome certain initial barriers. It must develop positive relations with the press and other publicity mechanisms. It must cultivate a hard-core, habitual audience who will attend regardless of the offering.

There can be no doubt that Masten's positions with the Cohoes newspapers assured a positive public image for the Music Hall. Certainly, the theatre was properly promoted. Newspaper announcements, handbills, street parades, and other nineteenth-century publicity hoopla were all used. The offerings were sufficiently diverse to attract a broad spectrum of the population. The impresarios, although unschooled in theatrical management, worked unceasingly to learn the business. Operating costs were moderate. Why, then, did the Music Hall fail to cultivate a habitual audience?

The obvious solution to this puzzle is that Cohoes had insufficient population to support its own theatre. The largest group of inhabitants, the working-class, had little money available for leisure activities. Furthermore, the Music Hall, however modest its aims and sincere its management, could not compete for the entertainment dollars of its middle and upper-class citizens. Albany and Troy theatres offered big-name travelling stars.

These challenges were assumed by the Music Hall when Acheson and Masten made the imprudent decision to build it during hard economic times. If such inherent problems were not enough to destroy the theatre, the fourth season brought external problems that dealt further blows to the Music Hall.

Two major new problems beset the theatre in its fourth season. First, travelling companies became less reliable in terms of quality, and sometimes defaulted on engagements altogether. Second, changes in ownership brought about interneccine disagreements:

In spite, or perhaps because, of these problems, 1878 was a banner year in Cohoes for the theatre historian. Litigations, suits, counter suits, and foreclosures drew to the theatre journalistic attention which was unprecedented save for the first few months after 1874. The interest in the legal problems of the Music Hall spilled over into a greater interest in reviewing the productions, making it easier to reconstruct the season.

The Fourth Season: Difficult Beginnings

The fourth season at the Music Hall began on 4 September 1877 with Yeast Lynne, performed by the Opera Buffalo and Burlesque Combination Company. The production was a burlesque, that is, a comedy that ridiculously exaggerated the melodrama and sentimentality of the popular classic, East Lynne.

By the middle of September widespread mill shut-downs had depressed the city's economy and had pinched the entertain-

ment penny to the extent that the theatre was dark the entire month of October and empty for most of the fall and winter months. Neither two more productions of the perennial favorite, Uncle Tom's Cabin (10 September and 5 November), nor another performance by Buffalo Bill (29 November) showed profits.¹

One of the few bright spots in the season was Robert McWade's successful four-day run as Rip Van Winkle, concluding on New Year's Day. Advance publicity releases indicated that McWade was capitalizing on Joseph Jefferson's dozen years of success in the title role. Jefferson had appeared as Rip in Albany for the first time in 1879 and would eventually play the Music Hall as Bob Acres in The Rivals in 1884.

A second production was scheduled for the evening of 1 January. It was common practice to book as many companies as possible during the holiday season because theatre attendance was at its peak. The scheduled fare was The Little Orphan to be performed by Chapman's Fifth Avenue Company. A fair-sized audience of between 200 and 250 restlessly waited thirty minutes after curtain-time. Finally, at 8:30 all money was refunded due to the no-show of the Chapman troupe. During the confused exist, gallery spectators came downstairs to the main floor and exited through the parquette doors.² The ruse was accomplished by the balcony patrons in the following manner: a number of them came downstairs through the "freight" stairwell located at the stage end of the balcony (northwest corner

¹Cohoes Daily News, 1 December 1877.

of the building); the enterprising gallery folk descended the stairs, entered the orchestra, and joined the rear of the line exiting through the parquette doors. Enough people who had paid 35¢ for admission to the "heavens" were refunded 50¢ by the unsuspecting management that the receipts were exhausted leaving approximately forty people holding stubs for which there was no money. They began to shout for the house manager, W.D. VanArnum, and when he could not be found they began to rip the seats until the Cohoes police intervened.³

VanArnum was unable to pay Miss Chapman, the company manager, \$200 in a back claim owed for the previous week's engagement at Troy's Rand Opera House. She retaliated by failing to appear at the Music Hall. Apparently, Bernard Acheson had hired VanArnum at the beginning of the fourth season because the latter was experienced in theatrical booking, having managed the Troy theatre since 1866. It is likely that Acheson believed VanArnum's connections with the profitable Rand's would help in booking big-name entertainers who played Troy but were hesitant to travel eight miles north to Cohoes. Thus, although Acheson attempted to aid the Music Hall, the association with VanArnum caused immediate and serious difficulties.

VanArnum sent a letter to the Cohoes Daily News that he had written on 31 December 1877 to F.M. Chapman, Esq. By so doing, the manager attempted to acquit himself publicly

²Cohoes Daily News, 2 January 1878.

³Ibid.

of any responsibility for the cancellation on New Year's Night. The letter detailed VanArnum's dissatisfaction with the holiday business Chapman's troupe had generated in Troy. In particular, he was embarrassed by the negative response by both public and press to the productions of two farces, Big Bonanza and Lemons.⁴

Like many travelling companies, Chapman's group doubled parts. The Troy papers took exception to the practice and VanArnum said "it ruined what little merit the company possessed."⁵ The Rand Opera House, like the Cohoes Music Hall, was a horseshoe-shaped house designed to funnel an actor's voice to the last row of seats. Acoustically, this design was excellent for the audience but difficult for the actors who experienced an echo effect of their own words in addition to the audience noise. For this reason, neither Rand's nor the Music Hall had a "prompter's box" on the apron. Instead, the prompter stood in the wings at the position farthest upstage. Since Chapman's actors did not know their lines, the prompter gave cues incessantly and loudly and was easily heard throughout the house. The problem was magnified by the players allegedly prompting each other on stage.

In defense of the Chapman troupe, it must be said that they were not the first company to default on a performance at the Music Hall. The conditions in Cohoes were enough to test the most zealous troupier. There were no decent boarding

⁴W.D. VanArnum to F.M. Chapman, Esq., 31 December 1877, City of Cohoes Collection, New York State Library, Albany, New York.

⁵Cohoes Daily News, 2 January 1878.

houses in the city and the round-trip from Troy took sixty minutes by train (once a day) or two hours in a dusty, horse-drawn day coach. The Music Hall had water closets but no sinks in the rear of the building; removing makeup was thus a difficult task.

Yet these conditions were hardly worse than those to be found in most of the whistle-stops on the western route across New York. VanArnum had every reason to be upset by the Chapman Company's cancellation. The Music Hall occasionally was able to book on short notice performers who had played Albany and Troy and found themselves with an open date or two. After Christmas, 1877, the Troy theatres had poor attendance, meaning that Cohoes was not liable to get any "follow-up" performances. Thus, the Chapman performance was particularly important to VanArnum. He was, in Cohoes, willing to guarantee Chapman \$150 against the company's demand for \$300, providing they play The Little Orphan rather than the farces that had failed in Troy. VanArnum contended that, because Chapman directed one of the several travelling branches of Augustin Daly's renowned Fifth Avenue Company, he was willing to pay up to \$500 had the shows been successful. After the cancellation, VanArnum ruefully admitted to discovering that only two or three actors had ever been employed by Daly and that the rest were totally unaccustomed to performing "society" plays.⁶

It is possible that VanArnum was victimized by a wildcat company--a bogus group that depended upon a fast talking

⁶Ibid.

front man who jumped about the country booking one and two night stands, sometimes booking multiple performances for the same evening.⁷ In any event, this fiasco seriously threatened the theatre's steadily deteriorating financial position and robbed the Music Hall of the little credibility it still had with Cohoesiers.

There were no productions in the theatre for the next three weeks in January. VanArnum released word that the Post Lyon, a local patriotic organization, would sponsor North and South, a military extravaganza performed by a combination of professionals and amateurs, and featuring Charlie Collins and Dick Steele. This performance was a type of patriotic review featuring songs, sketches, and precision marching. While such shows were modestly popular during the Reconstruction Period, one had never been performed in Cohoes. That VanArnum should begin advertising six weeks in advance of the performance indicates that he was hoping North and South would recoup the losses of January.

Temperance meetings were held regularly throughout the year at a rental fee of \$40 per evening. The common practice of the speakers was to solicit a "suggested donation" to defray expenses.⁸ In January there were two such meetings. Coincidentally, or perhaps in response to the Music Hall's difficulties, "Professor" Mike Donovan announced the grand opening of Mozart

⁷Barnard Hewitt, Theatre U.S.A. 1665 to 1957, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1959), p. 248.

⁸Cohoes Daily News, 5 January 1878.

Hall, on the Hudson waterfront, 19 January 1878. Donovan planned to serve liquor and give rough-shod "comicalities, specialities, and music." The big feature of the male-only club was a boxing match each Friday night.⁹ Mozart Hall continued to provide entertainment until it closed in May, 1878.

Improved Management: Sylvester Bleeker

Just as Mozart Hall opened VanArnum booked still another military extravaganza, The Drummer Boy of Shiloh, to be performed by the Chadwick Guards in late February. This booking was the last official act at the Music Hall by VanArnum, who was fired by Bernard Acheson on 19 January 1878. VanArnum was replaced by Sylvester Bleeker. There is no existing information on Bleeker's background, but the immediate improvement in attendance that followed his hiring testifies to his competence.

Bleeker's first act as manager was to announce the booking of General Tom Thumb and his wife, Minnie Warren. The famous variety show was in Bennington, Vermont, on the day of Bleeker's hiring. Knowing that the troupe would take the Erie Canal to Rome, New York, for a performance the following week, Bleeker found George Peck the show's agent, and arranged a one-day-only performance on 24 January with an afternoon show at 3 p.m. and an evening show at 8 p.m.¹⁰ As a special inducement, Bleeker lowered the admission from 35¢/25¢ to a flat

⁹Cohoes Daily News, 8 January 1878.

25¢ for the matinee, and from 50¢/35¢ to 30¢/25¢ for the evening performance. Clearly, the idea was to fill the orchestra and parquette seats with reduced-rate ticket prices. Bleeker later was to become the first manager at the Music Hall to discount children's tickets, charging 15¢ for all performances.

Tom Thumb drew no more than half a house despite the presence of his featured act, "the skatorial (sic) and comic genius, Major Newell."¹¹ Yet compared to the \$30 the Music Hall grossed from orators like the Reverend W.B. Affleck (26 January 1878), the Barnum show, netting approximately \$60, was a sign that performances could continue at the theatre, if only on a limited basis.

The featured part of Tom Thumb's review had Major Newell in a safari sequence surrounded by a jungle that "surpassed verity."¹² The jungle was formed from three-dimensional set pieces to which Cohoes audiences were unaccustomed since the stage was equipped with "panoramic grooves" for sliding bundles of shutters back and forth. Although outmoded when the Music Hall was built, wing and drop sets continued to be used in small houses well into the early twentieth century.¹³

¹⁰ Cohoes Daily News, 21 January 1878.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Cohoes Cataract, 25 January 1878.

¹³ Garrett H. Leverton, The Production of Later Nineteenth Century American Drama. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), p. 7.

The Music Hall had a shallow apron and thus was perfectly equipped to handle the box sets which came into vogue after 1875. However only the most sophisticated travelling companies carried flats and the Music Hall was not equipped with a scene shop. Thus Cohoesiers had to content themselves with the stock drops used by most troupes.

On 29 January 1878 Bleeker booked the newly merged Barlow and Wilson-Primrose and West Minstrel Show. The performance was greeted by a splended house, many of whom paid top price of 75¢. The troupe's "gimmick" was to hold a giveaway during the "olio" portion and then to conclude with a spectacular burlesque of wild west shows which, on this night, "kept the audience in continual laughter."¹⁴

With North and South to be performed in two weeks, Bleeker wanted to maintain audience momentum. He refused a return engagement by Affleck and booked Harry Bloodgood's Minstrels for one show, the evening of 7 February 1878. The performance played to a small house although "old Harry was as jolly and comical as ever."¹⁵ Perhaps Cohoesiers were saturated with minstrels, having seen the Barlow company only nine days earlier, or it may be that Bloodgood engaged in some deceptive advertising that backfired on him. Typical of this period, Bloodgood inundated the town with window cards and small window bills known as "half-sheets."¹⁶ While the half-sheets were

¹⁴Cohoes Daily News, 30 January 1878.

¹⁵Cohoes Daily News, 8 February 1878.

¹⁶Morris, p. 42.

dominated by the wording, "Minstrel Show," in large, bold type, the performance was actually nothing more than an extended comic sketch entitled, "He's Got to Come," performed by five comedians, none of whom was in blackface.¹⁷ Had Bloodgood clearly publicized the true nature of his show, the minstrel-weary Music Hall audience might have been larger than the 150 people who were in attendance that night.

Although the mediocre response to the Bloodgood engagement undercut the positive reception given the two previous productions, early February saw the Music Hall enthusiastically promoting the upcoming North and South. Billed as "The Great Military Drama," the show starred Charlie Collins and the regionally famous Dutch comedian, J.C. Steele. The performance had four sections: a short melodrama titled, "True Blue, the Scout of the Shenandoah," with the aforementioned stars; a demonstration of precision drill maneuvers and martial skills by the C.H. Adams Zouaves, a local group; the Arion Double Quartet and Social Glee Club singing patriotic songs; and "thirty young ladies in tableaux" with music by J.P. Green.

The extravaganza had a threefold purpose--to raise funds (a portion of the gross receipts were for the benefit of widows and orphans of soldiers), to encourage young men to enlist, and to sustain the staunch, anti-Confederacy sentiments that lingered on thirteen years after Lee's surrender. While political Reconstruction effectively ended in April, 1877,

¹⁷Cohoes Daily News, 4 February 1878.

when President Hayes withdrew federal troops from South Carolina and Louisiana, northern industrialists were determined to keep the South economically subservient.¹⁸ The determination was particularly marked in Cohoes, where the textile industry depended almost entirely on southern cotton. This economic dependence probably explains why the performance was substantially financed by the mill-owners.¹⁹ By fostering negative memories, they hoped Congress would continue to subjugate the South and, particularly, keep the price of raw fiber to a minimum.

There are few existing financial records from the Music Hall's early years. Whenever actual counts or journalistic estimates of audience size are unavailable, attendance figures herein are postulated by comparing adjectives used to describe the house. For example, crowds that can be numerically verified at 250 were generally considered a "good" sized house by the Cohoes press. "Very good" or "excellent" usually indicated attendance in excess of 300.²⁰ This system of reckoning suggests that attendance at the first two performances of North and South probably exceeded 250, and the Thursday night crowd around 300. The last two nights were documented sell-outs.

A sell-out was an extremely rare occurrence at the Music

¹⁸Ray Allen Billington, American History Before 1877, (Paterson, New Jersey: Littlefield, 1964), p. 230.

¹⁹Cohoes Cataract, 8 February 1878.

²⁰The relationship between audience size and the adjectives used to describe that size is based upon a comparative analysis of accounts of the first two seasons.

Hall. Not since Albaugh's Company had performed their classical repertory during the first two seasons did the theatre enjoy consecutive full houses. While Charlie Collins was repeatedly encored for his portrayal of Karl Schlager in the melodrama, it is possible that the vast presence of "seldom seen people"²¹ was a function of the fact that much of the talent seen in the rest of the show was that of local residents.

The same explanation could hold true for the next event at the Music Hall, the 19 February 1878 Scottish Concert performed by the Friendly Sons of Scotia. A Schenectady based group, the Sons sold out the theatre. Such a turn-out for a non-dramatic event was unprecedented in Cohoes. The audience consisted in part of the city's elite--mill owners, bankers, and industrial managers.²² According to the reviewer for the Cohoes Daily News, the "posh" audience loved soprano Jeanie Watson's performance and showered the stage with bouquets. Even though a critic from the Cohoes Courier condemned Miss Watson's falsetto, saying, "she gave the Cohoes Cataract to those expecting Niagara Falls," he admitted that she had a marvelous lower register.²³

It appeared that Bleeker was putting together a winning streak that derived its strength from the appeal of home-grown talent. There were also packed houses on 20 and 21 February 1878 for the performance of Le expiation and La Soueur de

²²Cohoes Daily News, 20 February 1878.

²³Cohoes Courier, 23 February 1878.

Jacrisse given by the French Dramatic Club for the benefit of St. Joseph's Church.

Just as the complex metal products manufactured in neighboring Troy required labor skilled in the mechanical arts, so too did the cottonmills of Cohoes require more of a labor force than the indigenous population could supply. The floods of immigration from Europe and Canada brought to Cohoes, and the United States in general, a vast supply of labor, both skilled and unskilled. All of the upper Hudson cities became polyethnic communities in which a relatively small middle class, predominantly Anglo-Saxon and Protestant, employed and controlled a considerable variety of other ethnic groups including Irish, German, and French-Canadian. The primary religion of these groups was Catholic.²⁴

It was the Catholic French-Canadians to whom the above-mentioned performances were directed. By 1870, half the population of Cohoes were recent immigrants from Quebec.²⁵ They filled the Music Hall to hear Miss Beatrice Amyot play a specially imported organ for the two pieces which were a type of melodramatic miracle play. To understand the tremendous drawing power of this patently ethnocentric production, it is useful to consider an 1882 report of the New York State Assembly. Charged with investigating labor conditions, the committee declared that the testimony of seventeen randomly

²⁴ Samuel Rezneck, "Historical Addendum: Ludlow Valve Manufacturing Company, Troy, N.Y.," Smithsonian Studies in History and Technology, Number 26, p. 70.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 84.

selected employees of the Harmony Cotton Mills "very clearly establishes. . . (that) very few families are enabled to save money, while a majority of them barely manage to make both ends meet at the close of the year."²⁶ For such a group to spend money on a play indicates a heretofore unfulfilled demand for ethnic entertainment.

The end of February saw the four-night run of The Drummer Boy, or the Battlefield of Shiloh, the "military allegory" booked by VanArnum a month earlier. While opening night, 27 February 1878, reviews claimed that the house was even larger than that for North and South, it becomes clear after reading subsequent newspaper accounts that The Drummer Boy was inferior to its predecessor. It featured precision marching by the Seventh Separate Company's Drum Corps and "splendid tableaux by a number of young ladies," but lacked the melodramatic punch of North and South. In place of the vignettes of war intrigue, The Drummer Boy contained low comic blackouts featuring A.F. Nail as "Uncle Joe, the humorous darkey."²⁷ Although the prices stayed at 25¢/35¢/50¢ (the reduced prices instituted after Bloodgood's run) the uniqueness of this type of entertainment was gone. A Cohoes Daily News reviewer, commenting on the closing performance (2 March 1878), stated that "the best house of the engagement was pleasantly surprised to see that the performance had improved with practice."

²⁶Walkowitz, p. 465.

²⁷Cohoes Daily News, 1 March 1878.

Astoundingly, in spite of excellent attendance for February productions, the Music Hall was dark most of March. Perhaps Bleeker had exhausted the pool of local talent that he had lucratively showcased. The only events at the theatre in March were the ubiquitous temperance meetings and "moral lectures" given by area churchmen. It was not until 1 April 1878 that the next theatrical performance was given--Texas Jack and his Original Great Scout Combination in Scouts of the Plains. Although the title suggests a "Wild West Show," Texas Jack's production, like those of William F. Cody, were more frontier melodramas than displays of horsemanship. The physical design of the Music Hall precluded the appearance of animals on stage. Texas Jack's production featured Ira A. Paine, "the celebrated pigeon-shot," as its only cowboy stunt. Otherwise, it was little more than "a reverse of dry goods drama" and drew mediocre audiences.²⁸

One week later, 8 April 1878, one of Dion Boucicault's travelling companies brought The Shaughraun to the Music Hall for a one-night engagement. While Boucicault's play certainly holds its own as a piece of dramatic literature when compared to other American plays of this period, it is difficult to assess the quality of this particular production in light of the very unfavorable reviews it received in the local press. Perhaps both the critics and the audience reacted with the same type of close-minded provinciality that led Albaugh's Albany

²⁸Cohoes Daily News, 1 April 1878.

Company to discontinue their classical repertory after only two seasons. The Cohoes Daily News reviewer concluded his "panning" of the play by stating: "The play is wisely divided into three acts. This concentrates the leading ideas and prevents yawns and tediousness. Nothing short of tragedy should have five acts. All other plays should consist of three acts."²⁹ The prescription of this latter-day Castelvetro indicates the type of small town conservatism that was reinforced by the audience reaction to this performance. Only a "fair-sized" house was attracted and they were very noisy throughout because there was no orchestra playing. The music-loving Cohoesiers struck upon the happy idea of creating their own music and, led by the gallery, stomped their feet and whistled "Yankee Doodle" throughout the performance. The stage was illuminated chiefly with gas footlights and proscenium lights. At 8 p.m., one-half hour before curtain, a lamplighter lit the gas jets and was bombarded with paper and food as he attempted to complete his task.³⁰ It is interesting to note that the previous time such rowdyism occurred in the Music Hall was when the Fifth Avenue Company failed to show for a performance of The Little Orphan. It is possible that the antagonism of the audience might have been due to the fact that both troupes were based in New York City.

A much more popular success was the three-night run of Mirror of Ireland, 25-27 April 1878. The production was little

²⁹Cohoes Daily News, 9 April 1878.

³⁰Cohoes Daily News, 9 April 1878.

more than a dramatic travelogue starring Dan and Josie Morris. Because of the vigorous advertising of general agent W.J. Babcock, the ethnic appeal to the Irish community in Cohoes, and the fact that panoramas (which represented to Music Hall audiences the zenith of spectacular stage effects) were used, Mirror of Ireland played to houses in excess of 300 per night.

Bleeker had scheduled Pat Rooney's Great New York Star Troupe for two performances the following week. Due to immense public pressure, Bleeker had to cut Rooney's appearance to a single show (1 May 1878) in order to host the tenth anniversary party of the International Order of Good Templars. It seems unusual that a theatre manager could be forced to cancel a potentially profitable performance in favor of a local celebration from which the Music Hall would draw approximately three cents per person.³¹

The party "filled to overflowing" the Music Hall. Bleeker realized approximately \$20 gross for the affair as opposed to an estimated \$70 gross for the Rooney performance.³² Bleeker accepted the loss because the I.O.G.T. was a German immigrant fraternal order composed of the same working-class people as those who comprised the theatre's steady customers. To have refused the Templars would have been a public relations blunder that perhaps could have resulted in a loss of revenue

³¹Unlike lecturers, fraternal orders traditionally rented the theatre for even less than \$40. The \$15 gross is an estimate based on known rental fees in 1874.

³²Estimated gross for the Rooney performance, based on a half-filled house (200) at an average price of 35¢.

far exceeding that incurred by the cancellation of Rooney.

When Rooney did play the Music Hall, he drew barely 200 people. Although no reasons are given for the poor turnout, those attractions that advertised "prices as usual" generally did poorly. "As usual" meant 35¢ for the gallery and 50¢ for the parquette and orchestra with no discount for children. Most of the performances given at the lesser prices--Tom Thumb, North and South, and the French-Canadian plays--were successful.

A five-night stint by "Hartz! The Magician" (6-10 May 1878) benefitted from the reduced rates. Hartz, who billed his show as "Two Hours in Fairyland," had more "gimmicks" with which to draw crowds besides reduced prices. He would randomly bestow gifts upon members of the audience--groceries, flatware, vases, goblets, and the like. He was immensely popular and had to put on extra matinees to accomodate the overflow audience.

After Hartz' success there was barely more than one month left in the fourth season. Unfortunately, Bleeker was unable to cap his season with a blockbusting finale. On 9 May 1878 one Colonel Cole gave a naturalist lecture, "Around the Campfire," for the benefit of Post Lyon. The small crowd he drew was typical of the reception that most lecturers received. It is surprising that Bleeker would continue to book speakers when the profit margin was so slight. It must be assumed that since the road season was nearing its end, it was more difficult to get companies to stop for one night in Cohoes when they were but a day's journey from New York City or one

and one-half days from Boston.

Two troupes that Bleeker did manage to get were the Union Square Company which performed A Celebrated Case! on 15 May 1878 and Miss May Fisk's Blondes, who jiggled through their "sensational extravaganza" on 3 June 1878. There exists no critical commentary on either performance, a lack which suggests that neither drew appreciable crowds.

Bleeker planned to end the season with still another lecture. The speaker was the nationally famous educator, Henry Ward Beecher. Originally, Beecher was to have spoken about "Wastes and Burdens of Society" on 28 May 1878, but he cancelled. The lecture was re-scheduled for 10 June 1878 and a disappointingly small crowd of 150 attended. Thus, the 1877-78 season closed on an unhappy note despite a modestly successful second half.

An Economic Overview

By means of careful conjecture, it is possible to assess the financial picture of the fourth season. Based upon a six-day work week there were 240 available performance days between 4 September 1877 and 10 June 1878. The theatre was occupied with productions, lectures, or meetings only 75 of these days. Verified and estimated audience totals combine for approximately 14,000 customers. Thus, while the average attendance per event was nearly 200 (half capacity), the fact that the Music Hall was dark seventy per cent of the time reduced the figure to approximately sixty people per available

date.

The 400-seat theatre had approximately 200 seats in the orchestra, 65 in the parquette, and 135 in the gallery. Price structures ranged from 30¢ in the parquette and orchestra and 25¢ in the gallery (with no discounts for children), to 35¢ for children, 50¢ for gallery adults, and 75¢ for orchestra adults. Therefore, the average price of a ticket was approximately 40¢. For an imaginary per available date adult audience of 60, the gross would have been \$24. Assuming that performers averaged a take of about forty per cent, and that overhead was another forty per cent, the net profit available per day was \$4.80, or approximately \$1150 for the season.³³ At this rate, it would take over forty years to re-coup the initial cost of the Music Hall.³⁴

The Closing of the Theatre

The summer of 1878 began quietly enough. In June, John Silcocks moved his Fancy Goods Store into the first floor. His occupancy capped a trend, throughout the year, of better enterprises as leasees. Silcocks shared the ground floor with George Graves Pianofortes, Isaac Passner's Dry Goods, Boughton the Hatter, and the Post Office. The upstairs offices were occupied by Isaac Hiller and Henry Strong, Commissioners of Deeds; Lansing and Hastings, Insurance Agents; and Isaac

³³The figures assume that the ratio between present day operating costs and profits was approximately the same in the nineteenth century.

³⁴See the analysis in Chapter II, "Pre-Opening History of the Music Hall Block," p. 36.

Lansing, Attorney.

Another good sign was the 3 July 1878 completion of much-needed repairs to the street and sidewalks at the intersection of Ontario and Remsen Streets (one block from the theatre). However, on 28 July 1878, the National Bank of Cohoes foreclosed upon the \$8,000 mortgage that was taken by Acheson and Masten in 1874 to purchase the central portion (25' x 50') owned by Mary Powers.

The terms of that mortgage were unlike present-day agreements. The Powers family received only \$2000 of the total price. The bank was to keep this first \$2000 in payments and then would split subsequent payments with the Powers family. the bank getting the interest on the loan, the Powers getting the principal.³⁵ However, no payments were made by the owners during the first four seasons. Interest and penalties had swelled the original debt to \$10,000. Of this amount, the bank was entitled to the \$2,000 it initially gave to the Powers and all the interest which came to nearly \$3000. Thus, of the total owed by the Achesons, the bank and the Powers family were due approximately equal amounts, \$5,000 each. The result of the foreclosure was that the Acheson family owned 2/3 of the Music Hall Block, and the Powers family and the National Bank of Cohoes owned 1/3.

On 22 August 1878, less than three weeks before the opening of the fifth season, Daniel McElwain, lawyer for the Powers family, directed workmen to tear down the main stairs

³⁵Book of Deeds of Albany County, #266, pp. 366-367.

to the upper floors as "quite a crowd gathered and regretfully viewed the work of destruction."³⁶ The demolition of the marble stairway appeared, at first, to be a vindictive act on the part of the Powers family. Before the foreclosure, the Achesons had offered the Powers 26% of the net income of the rentals and theatre until the debt was paid. The Powers refused since, at figures like those suggested above for net profit accrued during the fourth season, the Powers family would have had to wait at least thirteen years before they were compensated.

When this offer was rejected, the Achesons offered to sell the entire property and divide the proceeds on a pro rata basis according to the number of square feet owned by each family. The property was assessed at \$40,000, but the Powers family rejected this second offer probably because they believed the property could not be sold at more than half its assessed value.³⁷

Although the Powers family never publicly stated why they ordered the stairs removed, it soon became evident that they were not merely seeking revenge on the Achesons, but rather were attempting to salvage some earnings out of their 1/6 share of the building.

The Cohoes press ran stories stating that the intention was to construct brick walls on the north, south, and west

³⁶Cohoes Daily News, 22 August 1878.

³⁷Ibid.

sides of the stairwell and build two offices on the ground-floor while still providing a narrow passageway to the offices above. While a narrow stair could accomodate the traffic to and from the offices, Powers clearly intended to force the library and the theatre out of the building, since the proposed stairs would be wide enough for only a single individual. The library occupied the whole front of the second floor. By making it impossible for the library to remain in the building, Powers would have lost only 1/3 of the library's modest rent (since he owned that amount of its floorspace after the foreclosure), while at the same time creating a vacancy in 2/3 of the second floor owned by Acheson. This strategy, coupled with the fact that the Acheson family was closely connected with the library, shows a certain degree of vindictiveness on the part of the Powers clan.

The groundfloor space belonging to Powers contained not only the stairwell, but half of the stores on either side of it. Therefore, in addition to the 2/3 rental loss on the second floor, the Achesons would lose 1/3 rental space on the ground floor. A part of the removal of the stairs involved the demolition of the center walls that formed the stairwell. Architects protested that such a move would seriously weaken the building.³⁸

Acheson and the leasees effected by the proposed changes threatened to sue Powers. They argued that his refusal to

³⁸Cohoes Cataract, 24 August 1878.

sell had caused a great devaluation of the property which, including the land the building, was originally worth \$70,000.

The stairs were torn down, but McElwain ordered work discontinued before the walls were broken. Meanwhile, Acheson planned to construct an exterior stairway on the Oneida Street (south side) of the building.³⁹

The Music Hall Block's frightful state of disrepair prevented a normal September opening of the new season. No theatrical entertainment played in Cohoes until 10 October 1878, when Glassford's Combination Company brought Uncle Tom's Cabin to Egbert's Hall for a matinee performance.

Two days later, the City of Cohoes brought suit against the Powers estate in order to restrain it from constructing a wooden partition in alleged violation of the fire limit laws.⁴⁰ The city argued on the grounds that the partition was outside the outer walls of the building and thus would break the statute requiring outside or party walls of buildings erected within the fire limits to be built of brick or stone. Integral to the argument was the idea that the Powers family's share of the Music Hall Block constituted a distinct building. Stimson, the attorney for the Achesons, was joined by municipal prosecutor Crawford, while the Powers were represented by McElwain and Hinman.⁴¹ The latter's defense was based on the

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Cohoes Daily News, 13 October 1878.

⁴¹Ibid.

contention that the fire limit law did not apply to partitions constructed inside perfect buildings, and they moved for non-suit on these grounds. On 12 October 1878, Magistrate Brooks ruled that the motion for non-suit be granted and that the jury be discharged since there was no proof of a wooden structure having been erected.

Although McElwain was successful in dismissing the suit, the Powers family never followed through on their plans for the middle third of the Music Hall Block. It is likely that they felt defeated both by the architectural caveat and by the suit itself. The Achesons did build the outside staircase (which survives to the present day), but it was woefully inadequate as an access to the third floor theatre.

The impasse between the two families was a natural result of the dangerously overextended financing of the original owners. Indeed, as one views the difficulties surrounding the Music Hall in its first four years it becomes clear that all its troubles stem from the original decision to build it, made by inexperienced men.

With the closing of the theatre, Cohoesiers had to content themselves with Egbert's Hall, a ballroom with a portable stage, and see occasional performances of pantomimes, extravaganzas, "jig dancers," oratorios, and a few plays--usually Fench-Canadian dramas.⁴²

While the closing of the Music Hall was the most signifi-

⁴²Cohoes Daily News, 23 December 1878.

cant occurence in 1877-78, a review of the fourth and embryonic fifth seasons reveals other facts pertinent to the theatre's continuing financial distress. Even though new managers tapped new sources of entertainment offered by local talent, and even though these productions were highly successful by Music Hall standards, only thirty per cent of the available nights were taken up by performances. Clearly, there was not enough local talent to offset the dearth of first-rate performers caused by competition with larger neighboring cities. The professional companies that did play the Music Hall were almost always of inferior quality and it is possible that Cohoes audiences, disappointed by cancellations and shoddy performances, developed a prejudice against professional travelling troupes.

These problems were capped by the legal battle between the Achesons and the Powers, a logical result of the animosity that had built up during four unprofitable seasons. The press followed these disputes daily. The theatre was partially demolished. For the first time, the Music Hall was publicly viewed as a failure.

⁴²Cohoes Daily News, 23 December 1878.

VI. 1879-1883: THE DARK YEARS

As the new year--1879--rang in, the Music Hall remained closed. The feud between the co-owners of the building affected both the theatre proper and the offices and shops located on the first and second floors. When a millinery shop moved out of the ground floor, the Achesons opened up a meat stall in the vacated spot, thus helping to assuage the loss of still another rental space. The other first floor spaces were veritable revolving doors for sewing machine dealers, fruit shops, and cut-rate clothiers. The rapid turnover of tenants was undoubtedly due to the state of general disrepair that the building had fallen into both inside and outside. Maintenance had been cut back after the close of the theatre and the structure became an eyesore and a safety hazard. In March, two women pedestrians were nearly struck by a huge chunk of ice that fell from the eaves.¹

The building's state and county land taxes and municipal water taxes had been delinquent since 1876. In the spring of 1879 the Music Hall Block was offered at \$25,000 to the public in a tax sale, but no one was interested in assuming such a liability.²

A major problem contributing to the stagnation of the

¹Cohoes Daily News, 17 March 1879.

²Cohoes Cataract, 11 April 1879.

property was the confusion over the building's ownership resulting from the foreclosure sale in 1878 (see appendix C, Chronology of Ownership). The problem centered on the middle 1/3 of the building that was shared by the Powers family and the National Bank of Cohoes after the foreclosure.

Internecline Squabbling

At the time of the foreclosure sale, Powers and the bank were allies, having as a common goal compensation from the Achesons for the middle lot. However, the demolition of the stairwell (see p. 113) came as a surprise to the bank. In 1878 the Powers family had won dismissal of a suit filed by the City of Cohoes and the Achesons on the grounds that no new structure had been constructed on the site of the original stairwell (see p. 116). The bank played no part in that action, and afterward waited to see what the Powers family intended to do with the space. One year later, October 1879, the space was still a pile of rubble. Technically, the bank and the Powers family shared the middle lot. Perhaps since it owned 1/6 of the building, the bank felt that it would eventually own the entire Music Hall Block, and decided to move its offices into the front half of the ground floor. But the Powers family would not rehabilitate the middle space and the bank was forced to situate its offices on either side and to construct an alternate entrance on Remsen Street. In retaliation for this expense the bank removed a drain, thus effectively cutting off the Powers family from the main plumbing

system of the building. The situation must have been ludicrous. On one hand, the largest financial institution in the city had its main offices clustered on either side of a gaping, cluttered hole. On the other hand, the Powers family, frustrated by their inability to construct separate walls in the space, and denied use of the plumbing, stubbornly refused to clean the mess.

In January, 1880, another suit was filed against the Powers family. This time the bank was involved and appointed Gilbert H. Vermilyea to represent them. The action went to court on 23 January 1880, and was quite similar to the earlier suit that had been dismissed. After three months of litigation, the verdict was decided:

The suit growing out of the Music Hall difficulty between Gilbert H. Vermilyea, receiver, and Margaret Powers, has been decided by Judge Learned in favor of the latter. The questions involved were quite novel in their character and related to the right of the Powers family to make wooden partitions between their property and the plaintiff's, who contended that their parti-wall should be constructed of brick. The plaintiff also claimed Powers had no authority to conduit water from their roof over his property or through his drains and sewer. As the judge has decided that they have these privileges in common with the other owner of the property, the question naturally arises: had the defendant the right to tear down the stairs and block up the hallways? Law is very queer and very good--for the lawyers--but mighty bad for the clients. The query now is, what will the next move be? It certainly does not look much like an unraveling of the Music Hall conundrum. 3

³Cohoes Daily News, 7 April 1880.

the immediate result of this ruling was that the bank had to pay for the reinstallation of the drain at a considerable cost. Once again the Powers clan, a working-class family, had defeated a plaintiff in a highly publicized litigation. The vitriolic court proceedings and the cost and embarrassment to the bank for the removal and replacement of the drain made unthinkable any future alliance between the bank and Powers.

Egbert's Hall

While the Music Hall was closed, Cohoesiers had to content themselves with performances at Egbert's Hall. As previously mentioned, Egbert's was a ballroom with a portable stage, and was first used for theatrical performance on 10 October 1878, when the Music Hall failed to open for its fifth season.

Egbert's seems to have attracted a rougher trade than the Music Hall. There were numerous complaints of open drinking in the audience and loitering in the cavernous vestibules that encircled the dance floor/auditorium.⁴

Performers were generally equal in stature to those who had played the Music Hall and attendance was proportionately similar, given the smaller (capacity 250) confines of Egbert's. Even if the productions were satisfactory, however, the miserable stage appurtenances and lack of conveniences in the

⁴Cohoes Cataract, 15 August 1878.

front of the house mitigated against a pleasant evening.

The following review gives an indication of the seedy atmosphere in the old hall:

. . . under the great drawbacks of scant stage, dearth of scenic arrangements, and lack of those necessities which a cross-road hamlet would put to shame. . . Egbert's Hall was built for a much earlier condition of things. At the time, Cohoes was a village, and the hall was really a credit to it and compared favorably with those of other places of equal pretensions. Music Hall, since built, for several years monopolized the show business, being handsomely fitted-up with comforts and liberally arranged to meet the requirements of the drama. This is all changed now. Through the dispute of owners it remains closed, and has fallen into disuse, with its properties abused by neglect. Thus the owner of Egbert's Hall is not so blameable for its failure to present better accommodations, as it answers the purpose to which it will be relegated in the event of the reopening of the present opera house or building of another, either contingency being equally unlikely. Yet withal, a few suggestions will not be out of place with regard to Egbert's Hall. The scenery and drop curtain, and some seats and the pole, with which latter the janitor (when he is visible) controls the supply of oxygen by manipulating the windows, have passed the period of usefulness and for reason of old age deserve a better fate than to be paraded before the flippant youth of this irreverent age. By the way, the windows of the place remain tightly sealed; many who gasped for a whiff of fresh air looked in vain to see the janitor with his staff threading his devious way through the narrow aisles, to release⁵ the pent-up air by hauling down the windows.⁵

The newspapers had few kind words for Egbert's Hall.

The press had a clear bias for the Music Hall, and probably

⁵Cohoes Cataract, 19 December 1879.

exaggerated the negative aspects of the older space. In general, reviews of performances at Egbert's were longer than those for Music Hall productions and were almost always negative. No aspect of the Egbert's Hall operation was spared:

The proprietor of the hall should erect a derrick by which to raise the curtain. As it is now, one end goes up in advance of the other, and thus has a bad effect on the scene represented--a pleasure party in a boat on a lake surrounded by mountains--as it occasionally elevates the lake above the mountains thereby doing great injustice to the intention of the artist. 6

Even the conduct of the ushers was fair game for the critical pens of the reporters:

If a person buys a seat for an entertainment, takes the trouble to have it reserved for him or her, and pays for the privilege, they certainly should have it, and not be obliged to argue with an usher their right to occupy a chair for which they have paid their money and hold a receipt in the form of a stub marked with the number and section.⁷

Frustration and Muckraking

In spite of the bad press, there is no evidence of strong public disapproval of Egbert's Hall. The journalistic efforts to mold negative public opinion against the old hall were symptomatic of a generally biting tone in the newspapers with regard to the Music Hall dilemma.

Typifying this tone were references to Acheson and Powers

⁶Cohoes Daily News, 10 October 1879.

⁷Cohoes Cataract, 23 April 1881.

as weak-willed "oysters" who failed to protect their "pearl" from the ravages of "starfish" such as tax collectors and lawyers. More damaging than this awkward, submarine name-calling were the constant rumors circulated by the press about plans for a new theatre. Another frequently heard rumor affirmed that the Music Hall would reopen simultaneously with a new luxury hotel across the street from the theatre. These rumors gave false hope to Cohoesiers during the summer of 1879; but, when the reports were shown to be false, the newspapers attempted to place the blame on Acheson and Powers:

It is a mistake that there is a prospect for any settlement of the Music Hall difficulties. The parties owning it are very much more interested in their efforts to keep each other from getting an advantage than they are in the gratification of the public or in making more money from their investment. 8

In fact, it was not reasonable to expect the Achesons to reopen the Music Hall. William Acheson had lost the bulk of his wealth on the theatre from 1874 to 1878. The family could not even pay the delinquent tax on the building because of serious financial difficulties unrelated to the Music Hall.

Records of the Supreme Court of the State of New York show three cases in which the Achesons were "dismissed with costs" on 8 May 1879. The cases were all brought by plaintiff creditors to set aside conveyances of real estate made by William Acheson to his wife, Bridgette. The real estate was to be held as collateral for debts incurred by Acheson when he

⁸Cohoes Daily News, 25 September 1879.

attempted to expand his wool trade to Brooklyn. Fortunately for the family, a change of venue was granted and the hearing moved from Kings County to Albany County where Circuit Court Judge T.B. Westbrook ruled in the Acheson's behalf in all three cases.⁹

Just as it was unreasonable of the press to expect the Achesons to re-open the theatre, it was unfair to hold John Powers totally responsible for its closing. His intention was to salvage something of his family's original investment in the "middle lot." The repeated alterations to the main entrance and central stairway that Powers initiated were intended to keep the building viable as a rental property. In reality, the changes substantially abetted the deterioration of the building. Makeshift entrances and piles of rubble made it difficult for the public to use the shops in the Music Hall Block and tenants found themselves forced to vacate the building in spite of the owner's attempts to hold them. Deprived of the glamour of the theatre's luxurious interior, the public was otherwise not attracted to the Music Hall Block as a "shopping-mall," and the merchant-tenants suffered. Furthermore, vandalism and animal damage to the theatre gave a depressed aspect to the whole property. Seats were either ripped to shreds or eaten by moths. Scenery mildewed from damp air blowing through broken windows. Birds and bats nested in the roof. Rats gnawed through the act curtain.¹⁰

⁹Supreme Court of the State of New York, Book 5, #25, p. 172.

¹⁰Cohoes Daily News, 13 August 1879.

Although the general public never saw this damage first-hand, Masten's newspapers made sure they knew about it.

Rumor had it that the birds and bats were not the only unwanted squatters in the neglected Music Hall. Once again, nearby residents feared the building was haunted. A neighbor of the Music Hall wrote to the editor of the Cohoes Daily News describing strange appearances of light and noises coming from the building. Seizing the opportunity for a good story, the newspaper made sure everyone knew of the bizarre report:

Many anxious inquiries have been made as to the source and cause of the mysterious illumination of so interesting an edifice. . . a few claim that certain sounds not at all in keeping with the silent vigils of spirits, emanate from the locality. The chink of silver coin, "go you one better," "raise you," "d--n it," and the like are the most familiar noises one can hear, now and then a stealthy footstep on the stairway leading to the room betokens the approach of an investigator of, or a participant in the midnight mystery--what can it be? ¹¹

While the public was content to titillate themselves with ghost stories, the newspapers attempted to blame the entire problem on the owners. Obviously, the responsibility for the closing was theirs, but the newspapers never attempted to air their individual feelings, choosing instead to castigate them endlessly. The press portrayed the problem to the public as a matter of civic shame, thereby harming the memory of the Music Hall. If the theatre was ever to re-open, it would be

¹¹Cohoes Daily News, 7 October 1881.

necessary to first restore the sense of pride that Cohoesiers once felt for it.

If there can be any villain in the whole situation, James Masten would be the likely candidate. He was a loyal member of the upstate New York Republican machine, the father of a prominent local historian, Postmaster of Cohoes, Editor/Publisher of the Cohoes Daily News, and controlling partner of the Cohoes Cataract. Because he had the foresight to sell his half of the Music Hall in 1876, his wealth increased while the Acheson family fortune crumbled. His power within Cohoes was tremendous.

Rather than treat the failure of the theatre with compassion and gallantry, Masten used every possible opportunity to remind the public of the Music Hall's "disgrace." He attacked the owners from every conceivable angle, often using the most ridiculous triviality as a springboard for his muckraking. Along with baseball, rowing matches, and "pedestrianism" (walking-races), one of the great fads of the early 1880's was a number puzzle in which fifteen tiles were placed in a square which had one blank space. The player had to slide the tiles about until they appeared in numerical order, reading across the square in four rows. Using this innocuous pasttime as a starting point, Masten wrote, "Anyone who has passed through the various stages of the disease called the 'game of fifteen' can lose what little brains they have left by trying to solve the problem of the opening of the

Music Hall."¹²

The prolonged closing of the Music Hall was due not so much to the ineptitude or malice of its owners as it was to a general malaise that befell Cohoes at the turn of the decade. Business failures reached an all-time high. The workers of Harmony Mills, the largest employer in the city, followed the lead of textile laborers in Fall River, Massachusetts, and went on strike. New construction was at a standstill. In 1879, the only event that even hinted at municipal progress was the opening of Cohoes City Park.

Beset by these problems, the working class hardly had the time or inclination to protest the closing of the Music Hall and, following the line of least resistance, made the transition to the entertainments at Egbert's Hall. The rich continued to frequent the first-class theatres in neighboring cities, just as they had done when the Music Hall was operating. Regardless of class, Cohoesiers who could afford the luxury of theatrical entertainment readjusted to the loss with little apparent difficulty or complaint. It appears that, in 1879-1880, few citizens were adversely affected by the closing of the Music Hall.

The press continued to portray the indifferent public as militantly demanding the theatre's re-opening. Editorials gave vent to a paranoic distrust of lawyers, suggesting that the owners had been duped by their respective attorneys who had collaborated to prolong the proceedings and enlarge their

¹²Cohoes Cataract, 19 March 1880.

fees.

In particular, Masten's Daily News demanded that the owners come forth and explain themselves. James Acheson, eldest son of William Acheson, agreed to an interview. The result was an inside glimpse of the costs of producing plays at the theatre.

Acheson began the interview by placing the blame wholly on the Powers family. He was willing to re-open the theatre providing that Powers would be satisfied with an equal proportion of the net proceeds of the performances. The Powers family offered a counter proposition. They wanted \$5 in addition to their net share for each performance. Acheson claimed that this demand was unreasonable. To support his claim, he revealed the costs of production. Using records from the third and fourth seasons, Acheson explained that the maximum gross for any given performance was approximately \$25 after the performer's share was deducted. Overhead included: gas illumination--\$5, ushers--\$1, stage hands--\$2.25, heat--\$3, and janitor--\$1, making a total of \$12.25. Of the available profit of \$12.75, 1/6 each would go to Powers and the National Bank, leaving the Achesons with about \$8. Powers' demand for an additional \$5 was unreasonable since it would leave only \$3 profit, 25% of the total, to the partner who owned 2/3 of the theatre.¹³

John Powers did not think his demand caused an unfair distribution of the theatre's profits. He insisted that what

¹³Cohoes Daily News, 19 March 1880.

he wanted "was a fair compensation in case the hall was opened," and he argued that "the Achesons had acted foolishly in the course they had taken and were unwise in doing so."¹⁴ Powers further contended that the bank refused to apply all of its share of the profits to the payment of the original mortgage, thereby creating an interminable length of time before the Powers were reimbursed.

This recorded debate occurred just two days before the bank lost its aforementioned suit against Powers. Had the alliance between Powers and the bank not been severed by the litigation, it is possible that Acheson would have agreed to Powers' plan. When asked for a comment on the Powers/Acheson dispute, a spokesman for the bank curtly replied that "(the bank) simply desires and will have what they consider their own." After the dismissal of their suit, the bank warned that they would restrain any future opening of the theatre if they did not receive 1/6 of the profit.

A New Hotel and the Shopping Mall Concept

In the spring of 1880 the doves and English sparrows returned to nest in the theatre's alcoves. Nearly two years had elapsed since the theatre had housed a performance, although the drama of the legal conflict was probably as compelling as anything that might have played there. However, the situation did not get better. Property taxes on the Music Hall continued to be delinquent. The building remained torn-up

¹⁴Ibid.

and, except for Masten's newspapers, no one seemed to care.

In June, a hopeful sign appeared in the listings of accepted municipal bids. Peter Chalifaux was awarded the contract for erecting a passageway to replace the main staircase and for cleaning the stairwells leading to the third floor theatre.¹⁵ Almost immediately after this announcement, a new insurance agency and law firm took occupancy on the second floor and the music school re-opened.¹⁶

The initial success of the Music Hall had been a function of its tenants. That is, the building as a marketplace was a natural advertisement for the theatrical entertainments and, conversely, the glamor of the theatre provided a natural attraction to the shops. Any physical improvement such as the rehabilitation of the stairwell could only enhance the prospect of the theatre's re-opening. In spite of the negative economic climate, the city of Cohoes had increased its size 15% during the period 1875-80, to a total population of 20,000.¹⁷ Aware of this growth, certain Cohoesiers were determined to re-establish the city's flagging construction industries.

In 1880 there were strong election year rumors about the future site for the Republican National Convention of 1884.

¹⁵Cohoes Cataract, 1 June 1880.

¹⁶Cohoes Cataract, 5 June 1880.

¹⁷New York State Census, 1880, p. 93.

Both Albany and Cohoes were considered prime locations. Cohoes entrepreneurs felt confident enough about the final selection to begin construction on a luxury hotel to accommodate spillover from either city. Although the theatre was still an aviary in mid-July when the hotel was nearly finished, the press urged the theatre owners to engage companies for the coming season, but in mid-August there was no definite sign that the theatre would re-open. In light of the extraordinary opportunity that the Convention would present, it is surprising that the owners did not make an effort to bring theatre back to Cohoes. Perhaps they were concerned by the ominous fact that the hotel, while completed, had not opened. In any case, there were barely more than four weeks left before the traditional start of the season and Acheson, Powers, and the bank were still not on good terms.

The hotel must have been enticing at least to John Powers. On 30 August 1880, he offered to buy the 1/6 share of the Music Hall from the National Bank. This offer was for \$11,000 and the bank, which at first agreed to the sale, later backed down. When the bank refused his offer, Powers offered an equal amount to the Achesons for half of their portion. They also refused. The Cohoes Cataract ran a story claiming that Powers intended to convert 1/3 of the building into a box shop and billiard parlor, a portion of which would have occupied the auditorium.¹⁸ It is not known whether the other owners responded to the cultural acrilage implied in the

¹⁸Cohoes Cataract, 17 September 1880.

newspaper, or whether they had other reasons for refusing Powers. It is likely that at least one of the owners probably had a long-term strategy for reopening the Music Hall since they both refused a second offer by Powers, this time for \$24,000 for 2/3 of the building.¹⁹

Theatre in Cohoes, 1880-1881

At the start of the 1880-81 season, the Griswold Opera House ran a special advertising campaign designed to attract Cohoes patrons to the Troy theatre. They offered private, non-stop, chauffeuring service to the theatre door. Ironically, the chosen departure point in Cohoes was in front of the Music Hall.²⁰

Cohoesiers who chose to stay at home walked to see the likes of the Annie Ward Tiffany Company which played at Egbert's Hall with incomplete scenic effects owing to the tiny stage:

We take it for granted that most of our readers have attended at one time or another some dramatic representation at Egbert's Hall. In the same sense it is to be surmised that they are also aware that upon proper scenic effect greatly depends the success of the play. Then we go no further back than Saturday ~~25~~ September 1880 7 when H.M.S. Pinafore was murderd. The scene, as is well known, should represent the deck of a man-of-war with the quarter deck and cabin to the right of the stage. Beyond the top-gallant sail can be seen the deep blue sea with Portsmouth in the distance. What did Egbert's Hall show? A piece of yellow canvas four feet high served for the side of the ship, while four trees to right and left represented the main mast and quarter deck. Captain Corcoran

¹⁹Cohoes Daily News, 30 September 1880.

²⁰Cohoes Daily News, 27 September 1880.

comes out of the woods--on deck--and opening his telescope looks into the bedroom window of a house in the background, imagining that he was looking out to sea. Such small matters are very insignificant, certainly, but even Shakespeare would be apt to "kick" if he saw some of his creations thus mounted. The drop curtain is a masterpiece of art. A masterpiece in respect to the idea that no other artist would have thought of placing a woman sitting on a man's hand outside the stern of a boat while a man in a plug hat tries to shake hands with a person going up the mountain in the distance. Certainly there were giants in those days if the perspective of the boat's crew is any criterion. Another point of interest on the stage was when the curtain rose and disclosed a magnificent (?) drawing-room with marble or stucco pillows, but the owner of the premises of which the drawing room is supposed to be a part has forgotten to get the contract for carpetting (sic) it. And so the Knights and Ladies, princes and princesses have to tread the dusty uncarpetted floor. . . . Need we speak of the ladies and gentlemen's dressing rooms or the green room? By the immortal shades of Ellen Tree, Rose Coghlan, Mrs. Siddons, Barney Sullivan, Edwin Forrest, Edmund Kean, and "Dick" Powers, what would you say to having to don your costumes in such gorgeous cubby-holes? 21

While the entertainment--such as it was--at Egbert's was confined to the stage, the excitement at the Music Hall focused on continuing intrigues involving its ownership and the possibility of its re-opening. On 5 October 1880 Daniel McElwain purchased the 1/6 interest of the National Bank in the Music Hall Block for \$6,300. McElwain paid \$300 as a down payment and took a \$6,000 mortgage from the Cohoes Savings Bank.²²

²¹Cohoes Cataract, 29 September 1880.

²²Cohoes Cataract, 6 October 1880.

Why would the National Bank sell its interest to McElwain when Powers offered almost double the selling price two months earlier? If one assumes that the National Bank had misgivings about Powers' intentions--that is, that Powers would have kept the theatre closed by his rumoured plans for the billiard parlor, etc.--then why would the bank sell to Powers' attorney?

On 9 October 1880, McElwain was interviewed by a Cohoes Daily News reporter. McElwain said that his purchase was the "first step toward reopening the theatre." Apparently, the National Bank had sold its share to McElwain with the tacit understanding that the theatre would reopen. This explanation gains credence when one recalls that the bank occupied the entire first floor of the Music Hall Block and would benefit from any increased use of the building. Since there are no records of McElwain representing the Powers family after he purchased the 1/6 interest, it is likely that he satisfied the bank and the Achesons that he was not in collusion with Powers.

In the McElwain interview the press reiterated its belief that the reopening of the Music Hall was imminent. Yet, as Christmas approached, the only activity in the theatre were daily prayer meetings sponsored by the Methodist Church.²³ Perhaps the theatre auditorium had been cleaned and repaired to the extent that small gatherings such as the prayer-vigils could be held. On the other hand, an announcement for a social sing in the Music Hall "room" suggests that the gatherings may not have been held in the theatre.²⁴ Possibly,

²³Cohoes Daily News, 16 December 1880.

²⁴Cohoes Daily News, 24 January 1881.

the double space on the second floor once occupied by the music conservatory was the site of these events.

Cohoes endured a particularly cold winter in 1881 and it was facetiously suggested that the painted waterfall on the drop curtain had frozen solid out of disuse.²⁵ Rumors continued to circulate about the construction of a new opera house, but there was no indication that any such structure would actually be built.

It is likely that stories of a new theatre were fabricated by the press in an attempt to exert public pressure on the owners to reopen the Music Hall. The rumors consistently surfaced when they could be connected to a news item that bore some relationship to the theatre. For example, on 15 March 1881, the will of Margaret Powers was admitted to probate after a lengthy delay. In detailing the terms of the inheritance, the writer chastised John Powers, the son and executor of the estate, regarding the Music Hall: "This much needed convenience should have been opened to the public. Unless something is done soon in this direction a movement will be made for a new hall and then--good-bye Music Hall."²⁶

When similar rumors appeared in the Troy Whig, John Powers categorically denied that he had ever attempted to buy out the Achesons. He further stated that such reporting was designed to defame him and to force the re-opening of the Music Hall and that, to his knowledge, the construction of a

²⁵Cohoes Daily News, 21 February 1881.

²⁶Cohoes Cataract, 16 March 1881.

rival theatre was pure fantasy.²⁷

Yet the rumors continued. Some went even so far as to suggest that performances would be held in the Music Hall. The Cohoes Daily News ran an announcement for Cal Wagner's Minstrels, who ostensibly were to appear at the theatre on 16 April 1881. The production did take place, but at Egbert's Hall. Unfortunately, the performance was marred by violence as "a crowd of loafers turned off the gas in the hallway, and stoned the ticket agent when he went to discover the cause of darkness, cutting him badly about the head."²⁸

The Music Hall remained closed for the rest of 1881, marking two years of inactivity. The National Bank continued to occupy the first floor, while a few offices were leased on the second floor. The City Library had all but closed down, having shrunk to one small room on the second floor with only 1200 volumes.

1882-1883: The End of the Acheson Era

In the first week of February, 1882, the meat business of the Acheson family went bankrupt. By the end of the month, William Acheson, original owner of the Music Hall Block, was dead. His youngest son, James, was appointed executor of his estate.

During the period of Acheson family ownership, the Music

²⁷Cohoes Cataract, 25 March 1881.

²⁸Cohoes Daily News, 22 April 1881.

Hall Block had been legally divided into halves. The elder Mrs. Acheson owned the southern half of the building, containing the frontage on Remsen Street. The northern half was owned by her daughter, Mary. In the middle of each half was the 1/3 portion owned by Daniel McElwain.

In May, 1882, Mary Acheson sold the northern third of the building to the National Bank. That same month, Bridgette Acheson sold the southern third of the structure to her son, Bernard, who in turn sold it to his brother, James.²⁹

Two months later Masten moved the Post Office, which had occupied the rear of the first floor, two blocks south on Remsen Street to its present location. This move permitted the National Bank to occupy the entire ground floor as well as the cellar which they rented from James Acheson on 13 July 1882. An eight-ton safe was brought in on 5 September 1882 and, one month later, tellers' counters were installed.³⁰

On the evening of 8 November 1882 fire-wagons hurried to the Music Hall Block. Thick, black smoke was billowing out of the ground floor bank windows. The firemen discovered a barrel of flammable refuse that had spontaneously ignited. The building was saved from destruction, although there was considerable smoke damage on the main floor.³¹

On 12 March 1883, James Acheson sold his remaining 1/3

²⁹Cohoes Cataract 14 May 1882.

³⁰Troy Times, 11 October 1882.

³¹Troy Times, 8 November 1882.

share of the Music Hall Block to the National Bank of Cohoes for \$12,000. The sale ended the involvement of the Acheson family that had lasted ten years. Almost immediately after the sale, the bank warned that should it not reach satisfactory terms with the other owners (McElwain and Powers, each 1/6 share), they intended to "build a substantial partition wall from the cellar of their property to the roof and thus make the upper part of the building available for business purposes."³² The warning to the minority owners carried with it the threat of closing the theatre forever, and the press was quick to pressure Powers and McElwain: "If the other owners of the block remain obstinate and stubbornly refuse to make reasonable concessions in their own interest and that of the public, they will be left to reap the fruits of their folly and the hall will be permanently closed."³³

As spring began there was no further news concerning the bank's threatened renovation. Egbert's Hall, which had hosted a steadily decreasing number of entertainments for the prior six months, announced that it would present an opera. The performance marked a notable change in Egbert's marketing approach because it was the first time serious music was performed there. The small turn-out must have been very discouraging for those looking for grass roots support to re-open the Music Hall:

³²Cohoes Daily News, 13 March 1883.

³³Ibid.

there have been two good musical entertainments given in Cohoes within the last three years, one by the Barnaby troupe, and the other by the Boston Opera troupe, which gave us excellent selections from Martha last Wednesday evening. . . We need just such musical entertainments to lift us out of the gloom that often hangs over an all work and no play community. . . If this has been a lost affair for those interested it is simply a disgrace to our citizens that they cannot appreciate a good thing when it is brought into our midst. There are many persons who continually go to Troy and Albany to hear and see performances that are third rate compared to the above mentioned performance, and cost more than twice as much for tickets and fares. Yet they prefer to do it because the general class of entertainments given here are simply in keeping with the apology for a hall that our great city possesses, or the generally poor class of entertainment offered to suit the lower taste of the masses. A greater mistake was never made than to pamper (sic) to a low taste in a community at a cheap rate, when a superior quality of entertainment can be given and well patronized at a higher rate if it is well advertised and understood as being superior. 34

This letter to the editor gives a strong indication of the indifference of the general public to the lack of first rate entertainment in a first rate performance space. Nevertheless, the ground work was being laid for the eventual reopening of the Music Hall.

Gilbert Vermilyea, a so-called "neutral party" in spite of his association with the National Bank, met with the three owners of the building and proposed that, "separate leases should be drawn for each of the three parts of Music Hall, the lessees to deal with each lessor the same as if

³⁴Cohoes Cataract, 17 April 1883.

the leases were for separate rooms altogether."³⁵ The proposition meant that each owner would be responsible for setting and collecting rents only for spaces in the portion of the building that he owned. Powers and McElwain accepted the proposal and the bank representative, Murray Hubbard, promised to take the matter to his Board of Directors.

After a long consultation, the Board agreed to the proposition with two additional provisos. First, that all rents be raised and that a base rental be established, and second that a clause be inserted in each of the leases prohibiting the sale of liquor in the building. Powers and McElwain viewed the additions as unfair since it gave the bank more power than its share of the building merited. Nevertheless, Powers and McElwain agreed to the clause, probably because they were eager to realize a profit on their property.

The bank had found an un-named "Theatrical manager," who came with his lawyers to Cohoes on 21 April 1883, prepared to sign a long-term lease on the theatre. Just when it seemed that the bickering would finally end, another startling development occurred:

But when it came to arranging the details it was found that, through deference to the wishes of some of the directors, Mr. Hubbard not only insisted upon the insertion of the prohibitory clause but that a forfeit should be put up against its being broken. That stopped negotiation right there, as neither of the other owners would consent to bind themselves in that manner, and no one can blame them. 36

³⁵Cohoes Daily News, 25 April 1883.

³⁶Ibid.

During this disagreement, the position of the press for the first time shifted to Powers' side. Long considered to be the obstinate member of the triumvirate of owners, Powers was now viewed as a landlord who merely desired to rent his property. A shoe dealership, Herbert & Mollein, had recently vacated a space in Powers' portion of the building and Powers had promised the space to a party who intended to install a saloon. The press argued that Powers had the right to rent to whomever pleased him:

Now, of course, (Powers) can do as he pleases, and the liquor will be sold on the premises. Now it is for the bank directors to decide for themselves whether the sale of liquor on the ground floor, with a theatre on the upper floor, would be any more objectionable than if the upper floor were vacant, as now. We fail to see the connection between the two, and we regret that such a small matter has again prevented the opening of Music Hall. 37

The newspapers claimed that the anonymous theatrical manager, anxious to occupy the hall, had engaged scenic artists and a corps of work men to renovate the interior. The press accused the bank of denying Cohoesiers the Music Hall. Temperance was perhaps the most widespread social movement of its day and the bank felt pressure to keep the Music Hall Block dry. In a letter to the editor, Murray Hubbard explained the bank's position:

The sale of intoxicating liquors in a building in which public amusements and theatrical representations are furnished is considered by the directors so demoralizing, especially to young men, and so degrading to such entertainments, that they simply sought to prohibit

³⁷Ibid.

such sale in the Music Hall, and to this proposed prohibition the owners finally agreed; but when we came to make the agreement effectual and binding by a covenant in writing among the owners and leasee, by which a forfeiture should be paid by the party violating the agreement, Mr. Powers flatly refused to sign it. 38

On 5 June 1883 the entire matter was resolved. Powers proposed that if the theatrical manager, now identified as J.P. Callan, would lease the hall and give Powers' construction company some of the renovation work in return for a percentage of the box office, Powers would sign the clause imposed by the bank. Callan, the former manager of Albany's Tweedle Opera House, would lease the hall for five years with the option of an additional five years beginning 1 September 1883. By the terms of the lease, Callan was granted: "the right to widen the principal stairway at the northern end of the hall, which will land in the alleyway and thence on to Remsen Street, and also make such other changes in the interior and improvements as he may deem necessary or desirable."³⁹

Renovation began on 15 June 1883. Upon close inspection, it was discovered that the theatre interior had not suffered as badly as had been thought. The velvet upholstery on the boxes and the parquette railing were in good condition. There was plastering to be done and the decision was made to paint the ceiling over the parquette, formed by the overhang of the balcony. The auditorium ceiling and walls needed only

³⁸Cohoes Daily News, 26 April 1883.

³⁹Cohoes Cataract, 5 June 1883.

retouching and nothing needed to be done to the seating upholstery. The drop curtain was found to be in good condition and there was even some stock scenery, abandoned five years earlier, that was in good condition.

Since Callan was contracted to work for the Albany theatre until the start of the new season, Powers personally supervised the renovation work. Improvements included the aforementioned widened stairway at the front of the auditorium, enlargement of the box office to three times its original size, and raising the fly loft eight feet in an attempt to accomodate the increasingly complex scenic demands of the current melodramas. The cost of the renovations was \$6,000. Finally, the happy announcement was made:

At last, after all these years of waiting, and many disappointments the News, with unbounded pleasure, is able to announce that which will give no less pleasure to its readers, the fact that the late Music Hall, now the Cohoes Opera House, is nearly ready for the grand opening performance which will take place on Tuesday, August 21. This, under the circumstances, is no ordinary event for Cohoes, even were it to be opened with no ostentation. But it is a greater event from the fact that after passing through such a lengthy dearth of amusements, the city is to be supplied with an abundance of the best, in what is unquestionably the handsomest opera house in the State. This is no buncombe or gush. There is but one other house of amusement like it in the country, the famous Casino of New York. 40

The choice of the new name was made specifically to do away with the unpleasant memories attached to the Music Hall.

⁴⁰Cohoes Daily News, 9 August 1883.

While the theatre could hardly hope to match the lavish interior of the Casino which had opened ten months earlier, it certainly underwent a great transformation from its previous, disheveled state. All of the contractors were local artisans. They worked on a master plan created by Franklin H. Jones, a leading Albany architect.

A special preview of the theatre for the press was held on 7 August 1883. The reporters were particularly impressed with the silver, bronze, and gold painted proscenium which was conceived specifically for viewing under gaslight. Upon touring the dressing-rooms, the press discovered that, "there is a long row of lockers for baggage and general theatrical paraphernalia, with plenty of space to pile trunks and other luggage without blocking up the passageways, as in the days of yore."⁴¹ Of particular note to the journalists were the new precautions against fire built into the theatre:

There will be three regular exits and two additional ones that can be used in case of fire, and this will enable 500 people to get out inside of three minutes. The main stairway, leading to the parquette, is in the same location as before but has been widened two feet, has a landing in the middle, and is not nearly so steep as the old stairway. This of itself would be a great improvement; but, in addition, the outside stairway, which now stops at the second floor, will be reconstructed and extended to the gallery, and thus the gallery crowd will pass out that way instead of coming down the circuitous stairway and intermingling with the downstairs audience at the head of the stairway as before. Then at one of the side windows a drop bridge will be swung, so that in case of fire, the window

⁴¹Ibid.

can be raised and the bridge lowered and many people could thus escape. Then there is the door at the left front of the parquette which is easy of access and will be used as a regular exit, and the other extra exit is by a door, cut for the musicians, at the right front of the stage leading to the passageway in front of the dressing rooms. Owing to the great amount of work that had to be done in so short a time, the outside stairway and the bridge will not be ready for the opening, but will be completed as soon as possible thereafter. 42

Additional fire precautions included large pipes encircling the backstage area, capable of flooding the stage with water, and the redesign of all doors to open out.

Five years and two months had elapsed since the last entertainment in the Music Hall. The new owners were committed to using the space, and had assembled an experienced management team to run the operation. The Music Hall was about to enter the second stage of its theatrical life.

⁴²Ibid.

VII. PRODUCTION HISTORY: 1883-1891, AN ERA OF PROSPERITY

The remodeled Music Hall, under the new name of "Cohoes Opera House," was at full capacity for its "second opening" performance of Olivette by the Wilbur Opera Company on 9 August 1883. Traditionally, new theatrical seasons in the upstate provinces started a month later, in September. Cohosiers must have wondered why the new management had picked such an early date, particularly since physical improvements to the theatre were being made right up to opening night. Manager P. J. Callan explained that since all the best companies had committed themselves to their road seasons six months earlier, the only way he could get first-rate entertainment for the opening was to book a resident company that had not yet begun its own season.¹

The choice of the Albany-based Wilbur Company was propitious in that the company was indeed of high quality, and was reminiscent of another debut in Cohoes given by an Albany company nine years earlier. While the production received positive reviews, the star of the evening was clearly the theatre itself:

On Tuesday evening, the house was lighted up, and then for the first time the beauties of its interior showed to their full advantage, astonishing and delighting even those who had

¹Cohoes Daily News, 6 August 1883.

been about the house constantly and noted the progress of the work by daylight. ²

Such comments are virtually identical to reviews at the beginning of the first season in 1874. At that time the Music Hall got off to a successful start and then gradually lost its audience support until the theatre was closed in 1878. Fortunately, history was not to repeat itself, and the second era of the Music Hall, lasting nine seasons, was punctuated with steady profitability. What were the differences that transformed a perennial failure into a consistent success? Certainly, the major cause of the success was the new management.

A New Management and Innovative Ideas

P.J. Callan took over management of the Opera House at age 32. In spite of his youth, he was possessed of unique executive ability and was highly thought of in the professional theatrical community of the region. He had begun work as a teller at the National Savings Bank of Albany in 1869 and, within three years, had been promoted to supervisor. In 1871, Callan left the bank to become treasurer of Albany's Tweedle Opera House. There he fell under the tutelage of its manager, William J. Appleton. Appleton had excellent credentials in theatrical management, having served as box-office manager at Maguire's Opera House in San Francisco from 1860 to 1864. In 1876, Callan succeeded Appleton as manager of Tweedle's and

²Cohoes Daily News, 10 August 1883.

served in that capacity until the theatre burned down in the winter of 1882.

Upon taking over the management of the Cohoes Opera House, Callan brought with him the stage manager from Tweedle's, John Mulcahy. John Powers was appointed assistant manager and he oversaw the operation during the day, giving way to Callan, who worked at the theatre during the afternoons and evenings, selling tickets at the general window. Additional staff included Daniel Fitzgerald--gallery ticket sales, Charles Vandercook--chief usher, Arthur Geary and E.J. Doyle--assistant ushers, and E.J. Eastwood--bill poster and custodian.

A significant improvement made by Callan was his decision to give three performances per week on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. There were two advantages to this rigid structure. First, there was historical evidence to indicate that there was not enough of a talent pool willing to play Cohoes to warrant more than three performances per week. Second, scheduling on three fixed days served to identify those days with the Music Hall cum Opera House. In the past, managers would schedule troupes whenever they could get them; the result was periods saturated with productions followed by long periods of darkness. Certainly, the image of the Opera House was better served by establishing a stable schedule.

Cohoesiers were certainly not aware of a restricted schedule. On the contrary, since they could regularly depend on a new production every other day, Opera House patrons got the impression of a continuous flow of entertainment, and, in

fact, during Callan's first season there were 24% more productions than in any single year during the Music Hall's first five seasons: "From a long continued dearth, Cohoes Opera House has suddenly merged into a perfect flood of amusements and other attractions. They are coming in so thick to the theatre that one can scarcely keep track of them."³

Another benefit of the restricted but regular scheduling policy was that Cohoesiers and the Cohoes press had little time to mull over poor performances. Rather, Callan's policy was to ignore a failure and point to the next attraction. The newspapers were helpful in this regard:

We do not esteem the play, Only a Woman's Heart, in any way worthy of comparison with the preceding entertainment at the Opera House (Chimes of Normandy). It is far-fetched and overdrawn. However, in keeping with his policy of presenting a rapid succession of wonderful and startling entertainments, Manager P.J. Callan encourages all citizens to see the Japanese Sketch show tomorrow night. . . 4

Callan eliminated "social sings" from his programming, although he still occasionally featured local talent. When amateurs performed, Callan took care to insure that they produced something with popular appeal, as evidenced by the Cohoes Operatic Chorus' performance of H.M.S. Pinafore on 9 February 1884.⁵

Amateur performances were not always successful. Charlie Collins, a Schenectady native who had proven to be very

³Cohoes Daily News, 1 September 1883.

⁴Cohoes Daily News, 19 June 1884.

⁵Cohoes Daily News, 10 February 1884.

popular in the production of North and South in 1878, was greeted "by a rather small audience," who witnessed a performance in which "The want of rehearsal and preparation was painfully obvious at times."⁶

Another way that amateur talent could be showcased at the Opera House involved the fairly steady requests by touring companies for supernumeraries. Generally, would-be actors were instructed to apply to the stage manager on the morning of the performance, presumably to give the stage manager time to screen out undesirable applicants and instruct those chosen as to their stage duties. One production, Shook & Collier's Union Square Combination Company's performance of Lights O' London (26 November 1888), requested 100 extras. Since 100 people, standing perfectly still, would fill to overflowing the Opera House stage, it is likely that far fewer were really hired, although the publicity value of the request was used to the fullest.

Callan adopted a policy of flexible pricing, based on the drawing power of the play or players, evening and matinee performances, and whether the entertainment was aimed at children. During his tenure as manager Callan charged a maximum of \$8 for five lower loge boxes, \$1 for orchestra chairs, 50¢ for the parquette, and 35¢ for the gallery. These prices were reserved for only the most ballyhooed productions, such as recent New York City successes and

⁶Cohoes Daily News, 20 May 1884.

perennial favorites like Buffalo Bill. Children were never charged more than 30¢ for an orchestra seat and 10¢ for the gallery. Matinee performances were generally half the price of evening performances.

During Callan's management, the Opera House was sufficiently successful that the manager had to establish prices for another type of admission. From 1885 to 1891 reviews occasionally refer to standing room. The first instance of this phenomenon is found in a review of Baker and Farron's production of The New Chris and Lena, presented on 22 September 1885, "The opera house was packed to the doors, all standing room being occupied."⁷ Measurements of the current day theatre reveal that 85 adults could comfortably stand behind the top row of seats in the horseshoe-shaped gallery. Another 55 could have stood behind the last row of the parquette on the main floor. This total of 140 standing places represents an addition of 30% in the total capacity. Although there is no stated price given for standing-room, it is unlikely that the cost exceeded 10¢.

Perhaps the cleverest and most innovative aspect of Callan's pricing was the series of what were termed "cheap entertainments." Usually, these entertainments were fairy tale extravaganzas, variety shows, or operettas that had played the Opera House on numerous past occasions. For these

⁷Cohoes Daily News, 23 September 1885.

performances, Callan advertised unit pricing of 10¢ for all seats. It was a slightly misleading offer since patrons wishing to sit in the orchestra were required to pay an additional 10¢ to the ushers once inside the auditorium. Nevertheless, this technique enabled the Opera House to realize a profit on the most meagre of productions and kept the theatre in continuous operation during the traditionally slow portions of the year, most notably February and March.

An announcement for the performance of The Mighty Dollar (8 November 1884) carried with it a footnote that stated, "free list suspended."⁸ An investigation of advertisements for the two months prior to this performance revealed that Callan apparently had instituted a policy of admitting widows, orphans, and disabled veterans free of charge to productions. It may be surmised that the "free list" applied to almost all performances, since its suspension occurred hardly more than once a month.

Those who qualified for free tickets, often identified as euphemisms such as "our unfortunate fellow citizens," or "those to whom we owe so much," were instructed to enter their names on a list posted at Dodge's Drug Store. This enterprise, judging from the nature of its advertisements, was a turn-of-the-century emporium selling patent medicines, dry goods, "sundries," and "oddments." It was located just across the alley that formed the northern boundary of the Opera House. By the summer of 1884, as Callan was preparing for his second

⁸Cohoes Daily News, 8 November 1884.

season in Cohoes. Dodge's Drug Store was also regularly listed as a ticket office for the Opera House. It is likely that Dodge's handled only advance bookings since advertisements for upcoming productions would change their instructions regarding where tickets might be purchased from the drug store to the theatre box office as the actual performance date neared.

The association between the Opera House and Dodge's benefitted both concerns and stimulated competition:

C.S. Clute, the enterprising druggist, has made arrangement with the Leland Opera House management in Albany for the sale of reserved seats for that house in this city. By the arrangement which has been made, Mr. Clute has fifty of the choicest seats in the house reserved for his sale for every performance. The Delaware & Hudson Company will issue special theatre tickets at greatly reduced rates. This will make a trip to the Albany theatre cost but little more than to Troy and it will be much more agreeable to ride in the steam cars twenty miles than in the street-cars forty-five minutes. 9

There are two implications in the Clute/Leland agreement that suggest the Cohoes Opera House was doing good business. First, if imitation is a form of flattery, it can be assumed that Mr. Clute recognized that the sale of Opera House tickets had increased Dodge's business. Second, that the Leland Opera House should seek out audiences in provincial Cohoes suggests that the city was improving its reputation as a theatre town.

Callan countered this "invasion" of his realm with

⁹Cohoes Daily News, 18 November 1885.

some imitation of his own. On 4 January 1886 the D'Oyly Carte Company would appear in Cohoes for a performance of The Mikado. Since this event was one of the most noteworthy in the history of Cohoes theatre, Callan struck an agreement with the same railroad company and announced, "Excursion trains will run whenever practicable to accomodate suburban patrons."¹⁰ In fact, Callan had negotiated to provide rail transportation to and from Troy, Lansingburgh (directly across the Hudson from Cohoes and north of Troy), and Waterford (immediately north of Cohoes). This arrangement continued until the end of the 1890-1891 season.

New Marketing Approaches

Callan hired an advertising agent, F.M. Harrington, to work exclusively for the Opera House. This innovation proved to be highly effective since Harrington was particularly adept at constructing outdoor billboards illuminated by gas--the first of their type to be used in Cohoes. Furthermore, by centralizing all advertising, Callan eliminated any dependency on "front men" for public relations material.

There was a noticeable change in the style of preshow publicity that appeared in the Cohoes press. Harrington increasingly depended upon past reviews, particularly from New York City and Boston, to entice audiences. This technique is common today among provincial newspapers that run wire-service stories to promote local attractions. Often this

¹⁰Cohoes Daily News, 31 December 1885.

technique was highly effective since publicity agents carefully edited the reviews that advertised their stars, in order to arouse unsophisticated, small-town readers:

Miss Edith Houston, the famous beauty who will visit this city next Saturday, had had her entire stage career figured up by a New York reporter who sums it up thus: "During eighteen years of stage life Miss Houston has committed 1678 murders, and has been murdered 2,763 times including 960 times with a stiletto! She has been married 6,621 times and separated from 9,603 husbands. She has been called before the curtain 4,022 times, received 10,840 bouquets, been photographed 1,120 times and has survived 27 railroad accidents." They say that figures never lie. ¹¹

Callan looked beyond newspaper advertising in an effort to sell his product. For the 1884-85 season, he hired Mort Hanley as a "hawker." When the doors opened each evening, Hanley would stand on Remsen Street shouting out to passers-by, enticing them to buy a ticket: "How do you do, how do you do? Hurry in and hear that song. It's a daisy. Beat company and greatest show that's ever hit the road." Thus spoke the handsome and genial Mort Hanley when the reporter appeared at the door of the opera house last evening. . .¹²

A Wide Variety of Entertainments

An important trend had developed on the "road" during the decade of the 1870's.. Touring combination companies increasingly chose to tour a single play. The great success of the troupes that had performed Hazel Kirke from 1881 to

¹¹Cohoes Daily News, 12 May 1884.

¹²Cohoes Daily News, 14 October 1884.

1883 solidified this trend. As a result, Callan was able to bring recent New York successes to Cohoes rather than the older repertoire of standard hits such as Uncle Tom's Cabin. An example of this phenomenon was the 10 May 1884 performance of Edward Harrigan's McSorley's Inflation. This particular piece was typical of the author's series of "local color" plays about various immigrant groups living in the Bowery. Although New York critics unanimously panned the play, Cohoesiers filled the Opera House to capacity. They were lured, no doubt, by Harrigan's reputation as a writer of highly physicalized farce and his reputation for providing spectacular scenes to end his plays--in this case a pillow-fight in a Salvation Army dormitory.

Another instance of the trend was the 26 May 1884 production of The Stranglers of Paris, which had recently completed a run of 50 performances at the Park Theatre in New York. A combination of historical costume play and melodrama, this play was written by David Belasco and featured a cast of sixty actors, twenty of whom were supernumeraries recruited from the young men of Cohoes. It is doubtful that a troupe of this size could have fit on the Opera House stage, although an examination of the advance publicity indicates that the loge boxes on either side of the proscenium were not offered for sale. Perhaps these boxes were scenically transformed into a part of the playing space, thus allowing for the huge cast and scenic spectacle like the "escape from the convict ship." Reviews of the performance stated that, despite the

"stifling heat" in the theatre, the audience heartily applauded the "cumbersome and beautiful stage settings," further suggesting that some sort of additional stage space was required.¹³

Callan inherited control of the Opera House in an age when realism was dominant. Not the social realism of Ibsen, but rather the realism of visual illusionism, manifesting itself in special effects that were as spectacular as the floridly melodramatic plots that they embellished. The Opera House, of course, possessed none of the machinery of the New York theatres. The small companies that played Cohoes, in spite of claims that "all the original scenery is arranged to be mounted on the (Opera House) stage,"¹⁴ could not reproduce the splendor of the original.

It mattered little to Cohoesiers that the threadbare companies that played the Opera House could not live up to their publicized scenic effects, because the individual imagination could fill-in the missing splendor: "After the very realistic storm scene, this auditor was confused by the omission of the exterior lighthouse scene. The crowd, on the other hand, received the entire evening with great delight, no doubt viewing that omission as "necessary" in view of our tiny stage."¹⁵

¹³Cohoes Daily News, 27 May 1884.

¹⁴A standard advertising ploy of the period. The phrase, variously modified, appears numerous times after 1883.

¹⁵Cohoes Daily News, 8 October 1885 (review of The Black Crook).

Another significant trend that developed in the period from 1883 to 1891 was the change in audience taste at the Opera House. With rare exceptions, performers who had done well in Cohoes from 1874 to 1879 were greeted less than enthusiastically five or more years later:

The Pat Rooney Combination, which only two years earlier delighted Cohoesiers, gave a performance at the Opera House last night to a small audience. The acrobatic feats were well executed as was also the club swinging. The sketches were antiquated and the performance as a whole would receive little favor but for Pat Rooney's celebrity and even that is rapidly waning. 16

Other variety shows, with "fresh faces," did well at the Opera House. Thus, the change in taste that the above review exemplifies was not so much generic as it was a demand for talent hitherto unseen in Cohoes. Similarly, new plays--if produced by familiar troupes--tended to be received poorly: "A fair sized audience greeted the Atkinson Comedy Company last night at the Opera House, who rendered a new musical version of Peck's Bad Boy and His Pa. There was not so much applause that one might, standing in the lobby, be able to hear with help of an earhorn."¹⁷

The most popular fare was productions by touring troupes that had an affiliation with New York City theatre. For example, a "lock-stock-and-barrel sell-out" greeted a performance of Augustin Daly's comedy, 7-20-8, on 15 November

¹⁶Cohoes Daily News, 26 August 1886.

¹⁷Cohoes Daily News, 11 September 1887.

1890.¹⁸ The production was mounted by the Arthur Rehan Comedy Company, touring out of Daly's Theatre in New York City. Similarly, an audience of "at least 520" (full capacity plus at least 45 standing places) viewed the Joseph Jefferson Company, featuring Jefferson's sister, Connie Jackson, and R.L. Downing in Josquin Miller's Sierra Mountain travel adventure, Tally Ho!, on 27 December 1890.¹⁹

The two examples detailed above suggest that not only was the association with New York important for a production's success, but also an association with theatrical luminaries--Daly, Rehan, Miller, and Jefferson. Even though she was well past her prime, an "immense audience, comprised of the leading Cohoesiers" viewed the 10 December 1885 performance of Rose Coghlan in Our Joan.²⁰ This production is significant because it marks the first time there was recorded evidence of the audience demanding encore curtain calls. Opera House patrons spontaneously recalled the aging star at the end of the first act and two more times in the midst of the second act.²¹

It should not be concluded that the demand for stars made by Opera House audiences indicated a concomitant increase in the level of their theatrical sophistication. A review of the Cohoes premiere of The Mikado stated: ". . .

¹⁸Cohoes Daily News, 16 November 1890.

¹⁹Cohoes Daily News, 28 December 1890.

²⁰Cohoes Daily News, 11 December 1885.

²¹Ibid.

light house, light company, light opera. The poorest, in our estimation, yet written by Gilbert and Sullivan. Some of the music approached the classical, but there were none of those catching airs to at once become popular which grace all their other operas."²²

If Cohoes critics and audiences did not always recognize a hit when they saw one, they did enjoy Barnumesque productions. Usually included in the "cheap entertainments" series, these travelling freak shows drew large audiences, particularly if their advertising stressed exotic nationalities and unparalleled deformity:

One Week Only! Commencing Monday (17 November 1885), CHANG'S MUSEUM and Novelty Company. . . The feature show of the world! With CHANG, the Chinese Colossus nearly eight feet tall, weighing nearly half a ton with an intellectual capacity in agreement with his size. Also featuring BARON LITTLEFINGER and COUNT ROSEBUS, the guaranteed smallest mid-gets in existence! ²³

New forms of entertainment that did not exist before 1878 were highly popular at the Opera House. The advent of the all-Black minstrel show brought capacity crowds to the theatre in 1890 and 1891 to see the Callender Minstrels, "40 ALL BLACK PURVEYORS OF MIRTH."²⁴ Plays featuring children in the lead roles (capitalizing on the success of Lotta Crabtree) were also successful. For example, Mugg's Landing, featuring

²²Cohoes Daily News, 25 October 1885.

²³The Evening Dispatch, 13 November 1885.

²⁴Cohoes Daily News, 24 March 1890 and 3 October 1891.

Miss Frances Bishop, "the famous rival of Lotta," as Little Muggs played to a full house on 5 November 1889. No less than twelve performances featuring child stars were given at the Opera House between 1889 and 1890. Finally, this vogue wore off:

Of all the rot ever put upon the stage under the dignified designation of a play, Dimples, if not the worst, comes in a good second. Miss Mulle, the star, is very cute and clever, very much on the style of Lotta. But the dialogue is witless and silly, the climaxes are tame, the plot is lame, and it has not one redeeming feature. Her actions last night did not please the better portion of the audience. Have we not seen this same tired plot a thousand and one times before? 25

Another new form of entertainment that was regularly successful in Cohoes was the documentary drama. This form was like a theatrical newsreel in which sensational, contemporary adventures were reenacted. An example of the form is Storm Beaten, an allegedly faithful duplication of a recent Arctic rescue (25 December 1888).

Lectures and Prohibitionist meetings occurred far less frequently than they had from 1874 to 1878, with the exception of 1886 and 1887 in which numerous temperance rallies, known as "jubilees" and sponsored by the Salvation Army, were held in the theatre, mostly in the fall months. In the same two years, a vogue swept through Cohoes in which homespun, humorous lecturers were highly popular, such as Josh Billings' lecture on "The Probabilities of Life" (24 September 1887).

Another noticeable change in the types of entertainment

²⁵Cohoes Daily News, 27 November 1890.

offered at the Opera House was the proliferation of purely musical concerts. This trend began in the late 1880's and reached its zenith in 1890 when Callan booked the Imperial Court Orchestra of Vienna to play a Strauss program (14 June 1890). While the concerts were predominantly classical music, an occasional oddity would appear in the series, such as the 16 November 1888 performance of Alice J. Shaw, "The whistling prima donna."²⁶

The number of productions featuring animal acts indicates that they were highly popular at the Opera House. These performances were billed as "cheap entertainments" and, occasionally, were quite elaborate. On 15 December 1885 Cohoesiers viewed Professor Bristol's "Equescurriculum," featuring seventeen "mud-endowed, reason-gifted equines who understand spoken language and obey by word alone."²⁷

The National Bank Takes Control

On 30 June 1884 the National Bank of Cohoes bought the 1/6 share of the building owned by Daniel McElwain. The purchase price of \$7,000 represented an 11% gain for McElwain, who had acquired his share of the property four years earlier. McElwain thus had the distinction of being the first individual to reap a profit from ownership of the building.²⁸

²⁶Cohoes Daily News, 15 November 1888.

²⁷Cohoes Daily News, 14 December 1885.

²⁸Book of Deeds of Albany County, #1600, p. 164.

McElwain's exit left John Powers as the only owner of the Opera House other than the National Bank . In addition, Powers was an employee of the bank insofar as he was assistant manager for an enterprise of which the bank controlled over 80%. His immediate superior, Callan, was also employed by the bank as theatre manager. Thus, by 1884, the National Bank had become increasingly more visible as the financial power behind the Opera House.

Why would a conservative institution choose to invest so heavily in an enterprise that had a history of financial instability? A portion of the answer must certainly be that Callan orchestrated a remarkably successful and profitable first season.

The fall of 1883 was punctuated by consistent financial successes including minstrel shows, extravaganzas, and special events like Joseph Jefferson's appearance in Rip Van Winkle on 4 October 1883. Then, Callan's new management passed a significant acid test in January, 1884, by keeping to the planned three performance per week schedule in spite of the traditional difficulty of booking shows in Cohoes in January. In each of the first four seasons attendance had fallen in the initial month of the new year, but Callan booked some of the season's most popular entertainments in January. In three successive weeks he offered Cohoesiers the famous Barlow & Wilson Minstrels (12 January 1884), Charlotte Thompson in Jane Eyre (19 January 1884), and William F. Cody in the melodrama, Prairie Waif (26 January 1884), which filled the house

with patrons eager to see his "genuine bank of Sioux Indians."²⁹ When Pat Rooney and his New York Star Combination closed the season to a capacity crowd on 23 August 1884, it was the fifty-third sellout of the year in a season comprised of 159 performances.

In the relatively successful 1874-75 season there had been nine sellouts. Callan had sold out one of every three performances. His stewardship was characterized by steady and consistently wise managerial decisions. The following hypothetical reconstruction of the Opera House's finances for the 1883-84 season suggests the extent of Callan's success. Fifty-three sellouts at a capacity of 450 results in 23,850 patrons. If the other 106 performances were but half-filled --225 patrons--they would have yielded another 23,850 people. Thus it is likely that 47,700 people attended the Opera House in 1883-84, a staggering figure in that it represents more than double the population of Cohoes. At an average price of 30¢ per ticket, gross receipts for the season would have been \$14,310, or \$90 per performance. If overhead and payments to the actors equalled even as much as \$75 per production, the Opera House still would have shown a net profit of nearly \$2,500 for the season.

Another likely factor in the National Bank's decision to increase its involvement in the Opera House was the building's value as real estate. In retrospect, it is clear that the bank was moving towards making its headquarters in the Music

²⁹Cohoes Daily News, 27 January 1884.

Hall Block. Today's Cohoesiers still refer to the edifice as the "National Bank" building, no doubt because of the immense, cast iron name plate that adorns the top center of the Remsen Street elevation. The bank had occupied the entire ground floor and cellar ever since 1882, but had retained a flagship office elsewhere in Cohoes. Predictably, less than a month after it boughtout McElwain the bank sold its other office and moved totally into the Music Hall Block.³⁰

At the same time, a week after Independence Day, the City Library left the Music Hall Block for larger quarters at Larkins Hall.³¹ The bank then leased the entire second floor to the City of Cohoes, which used it for the offices of the Commissioner of Deeds. This changeover marked a significant development in the history of the building because it was the first time that the theatre was in operation without sharing the structure with mercantile enterprises. The "shopping-mall" strategy of Masten and Acheson was abandoned, the implication being that a properly managed theatre could survive in a multi-use building regardless of the nature of the business of the other tenants.

1880-1890: Economic Prosperity

The economy of Cohoes in the 80's had improved substantially from the widespread labor disputes that marked the beginning of the decade. Production at the looms of Harmony

³⁰Cohoes Daily News, 12 July 1884.

³¹Cohoes Republican, 8 July 1884.

Mills increased. Although Egbert's Hall had been converted into a dime store in 1887, Egberts himself had done very well. After he introduced the first power driven knitting machines, the industry had rapidly expanded in Cohoes. By 1880 Egberts had twenty-five mills in operation in the city and employed well over 3500 workers. Thus, traditional woven-goods manufacturers like Harmony Mills were supplemented by an industry that produced knitted hosiery and underwear. In addition, the burgeoning iron industry and tool manufacturing in neighboring Troy spilled into Cohoes in the form of small foundries. The city was manufacturing night and day.

The increase in production was due largely to the ameliorated working class. The labor ferment of the 1870's culminated in the Haymarket Riot of May, 1886. By December of the same year, 25 craft unions banded together to form the American Federation of Labor. Limited worker organization had begun in Cohoes when the musicians of the city started a local under the Knights of Labor on 13 October 1886.³²

Although the Knights of Labor were less powerful than the A.F.L., they were able collectively to put pressure on employers. The organization of the musicians illustrates this point. For nearly thirty-five years the vocal and instrumental music scene in Cohoes had been dominated by the presence of John P. Green. He was, at various stages of his career, a performer, teacher, conductor, and producer of musical events.

³²Cohoes Republican, 14 October 1886.

His bands frequently performed in Cohoes, Albany, and Troy, and he regularly provided musical direction for the performances at the Music Hall when it was owned by Acheson and Masten. Green died on 21 April 1886, seven months before the musicians affiliated with the Knights of Labor. Thereafter, the names of musicians playing at Opera House productions constantly change. Either travelling companies suddenly started touring with their own musicians--an historically unproven assumption --or Callan was forced to negotiate individually with musicians for each performance because some agency--like the Knights of Labor--was instructing its membership to demand certain levels of pay.

Continuing Problems With Fire Safety

On Christmas night, 1885, a frightening and ominous event occurred in Cohoes. As an audience comprised mostly of families sat in the Opera House watching Frank Frayne in the comedy, Si Slocum, a fire broke out across Remsen Street. Smoke billowed into the theatre through open transoms and the audience jumped to its feet when it heard the bells of the fire-wagons. According to journalists on the scene, "it seemed impossible to avert panic."³³ Then Powers, who was working the main box office that night because Callan was home celebrating the holiday, coolly enforced order. He went on stage and conferred with Frayne, after which Frayne left the

³³Cohoes Daily News, 26 December 1885.

stage and proceeded to walk upstairs to the gallery. Powers then orchestrated an orderly evacuation of the orchestra and parquette. Frayne, meanwhile, was in the gallery joking with the crowd and signing autographs, thus calmly detaining the gallery spectators while the main floor was cleared. Eventually, all were safely evacuated and a panicked crush in the halls was prevented.³⁴

What if an airborne spark had ignited the gas rushing through the pipes that encircled the auditorium and hovered over the stage? A critical error had been made in the renovation prior to the re-opening of the Opera House in 1883. Gas illumination was still used. By 1880 the incandescent lamp had replaced gas jets in nearly all large American theatres. By the mid-eighties many provincial theatres had converted to electricity as well.³⁵ The National Bank, Powers, and McElwain had decided not to convert the Opera House presumably because of the cost involved and/or the delay in re-opening necessitated by the installation of power lines.

There is evidence that gas might have been used improperly at the Opera House. Roland Reed, whose credits included numerous performances at the Madison Square Theatre, was in Cohoes for a performance of Cheek on 11 October 1884. A review of the performance contains alleged quotes by Reed expressing his anger over not having been photographed after

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Young, p. 211.

his performance. He complained of the fact that the photographer had a wet-plate camera that was not sensitive enough to the prevailing light in the house. Then Reed went on to state that the gas-jets, even opened up to a full blaze, were incapable of producing enough light for his portrait.³⁶

The threat of fire at the theatre occurred regularly throughout its history. Ultimately, the Opera House's poor fire safety would bring about its demise.

Exit P.J. Callan, Enter Ernest Game

The Cohoes City Directory of 1887 indicates that P.J. Callan, in addition to managing the Opera House, was proprietor of the Harmony Hotel. Perhaps this new interest influenced his decision not to exercise the six-year option on his theatre job. In any event, Callan did not manage the Opera House after the 1888-1889 season. His innovative management provided the theatre with six years of prosperity. Callan brought Cohoes theatre into the mainstream and instilled in his patrons a new type of pride: "The expression of pleasure and gratification heard among the audience while leaving the Opera House last evening were unanimous. Everybody seemed delighted and pleased with themselves at having been present. . . One of the best renditions of Hamlet we ever saw."³⁷

The National Bank bought the 1/6 share owned by John

³⁶Cohoes Daily News, 12 October 1884.

³⁷Cohoes Daily News, 14 January 1885.

Powers on 4 August 1889 for \$11,000.³⁸ In so doing, the bank became the sole proprietor of the Opera House. A week after the sale, the bank announced Callan's replacement.³⁹

Although there are no indications that performers defaulted on scheduled productions at the Opera House, "no shows" were a problem that bedevilled road houses with increasing frequency in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Double bookings and various other swindles concocted by unscrupulous "front men" would ultimately lead to the formation of the Theatrical Syndicate in 1896. Bank executives wanted someone relatively young and energetic, who could make frequent trips to New York and Boston and negotiate the Opera House season in person with company managers. They chose one of their employees, Ernest Game.

There is little biographical information available on Mr. Game other than that he was a lifelong Cohoes resident, an honor-student in high school, and chief teller at the National Bank. In his first season, 1889-1890, the Opera House continued the successes of the Callan years. Game had inherited a solid operational system and undoubtedly chose to make few, if any, modifications in it. Yet at the end of that season an event transpired that was to make Game's job far more difficult.

³⁸Book of Deeds of Albany County, #1753, p. 15.

³⁹Cohoes Daily News, 12 August 1889.

John Powers' Cohoes City Theatre

After he sold his share of the Opera House, John Powers resigned as Assistant Manager of the theatre. In August, 1890, he announced that he and James Williams would be opening a new playhouse, the Cohoes City Theatre. Powers very likely used the cash from the Opera House sale for his share of the renovation expenses of the new enterprise. The City Theatre was located north of the Opera House, next to the Harmony Mills complex. The building had been erected in 1884 as the Eldorado Skating Rink and, in 1887, was converted into a knitting mill when the roller-skating fad died out.⁴⁰

The City Theatre was located on the first floor of the three-story structure and had a capacity of 1,200. Its stage was 35' wide and 38' deep. It had two exits each in its balcony and orchestra. The only electric illumination was in the lobby and stairwells. Gas lighting was used on stage and in the house.⁴¹ Although gas was used, the facts that Powers' theatre was located on the ground floor, that the National Bank was having regular problems conforming the Opera House to the fire codes, and that the new theatre was a novelty, combined to make the 1890-1891 season at the City Theatre a success financially.

The two theatres developed a strong competition as the 1891-92 season got under way. Then, in January, 1892, a new

⁴⁰Albany Evening Dispatch, 22 October 1890.

⁴¹Cohoes Daily News, 20 August 1890.

theatre was started that would eventually ring the death-knell for both the City Theatre and the Opera House.

VIII. PRODUCTION HISTORY: 1891-1901, THE FINAL YEARS

After 1891, the theatrical history of Cohoes becomes increasingly difficult to reconstruct. A series of events, at once striking and inexplicable, occurred in the latter half of 1891 that were to alter the development of Cohoes theatre in the twentieth century.

The first event was the change of name of the theatre that is the subject of this study. In the first phase of its history, 1874-1879, the theatre was called the Cohoes Music Hall. After the four-year hiatus, in 1883, the theatre was re-named the Cohoes Opera House. At the beginning of the 1891-92 season the theatre returned to its original name, the Cohoes Music Hall.

The second event was the startling announcement on 18 November 1891 that the theatre was to be remodeled:

The old raised floor has been taken out, the chairs and parquette seats have been removed, and a level floor laid which is flush with the old floor inside the old orchestra rail. . . . It is a decided improvement upon the old floorplan, as now, if necessary, chairs sufficient to seat even a larger number than before can be placed in the hall. ¹

The last, and most significant, event was the opening of a third theatre which, much to the confusion of future local historians, took the name of Cohoes Opera House. Thus, at the beginning of 1892, there were three theatres in the city: the

¹Cohoes Daily News, 18 November 1891.

Cohoes Music Hall, the Cohoes City Theatre, and the Cohoes Opera House.

Unlike the important events in the city's theatrical history before 1892, the local newspapers gave no explanations for the developments of 1891-92. However, there is a definite thread of logic inherent in the chain of events that suggests an explanation.

The new Opera House opened in January, 1892. Five months later, the Cohoes Music Hall was functioning entirely as a civic center for lectures, dances, chorales, and band concerts. These programs, such as the Ladies Crescent Banjo and Guitar concert on 15 November 1892, were entirely amateur productions. Since dances could never have been held in the auditorium when it had permanent seating in the orchestra and parquette, it is likely that the renovation announced in November, 1891, was premeditated to accompany a radical change in programming at the Music Hall. Similarly, the return to the original name of "Cohoes Music Hall" could have been made in order to better identify the future, music-oriented performances.

While the Music Hall (as "Opera House") and the City Theatre were competitors in 1890-91, there is no evidence to suggest that Powers' theatre drove its older rival out of business. Yet while the Opera House changed back to its original name and abandoned theatrical entertainments, the City Theatre continued to produce professional theatre until 1897. Furthermore, the 1892 City Directory states that Samuel Wade no longer manages the City Theatre and that Ernest

Game manages both the Music Hall and the City Theatre. It is inconceivable that the National Bank would have permitted such a seemingly blatant conflict of interest to occur if it had not formed some sort of alliance with Powers and his theatre.

The preceding interpretation of the events of late 1891 points to a carefully planned strategy. The two theatres combined their management and diversified their fare in order to combat a common rival. That rival was the "new," or "second" Cohoes Opera House.

The New Cohoes Opera House

The new Opera House, a five-story brick and stone structure, was located north of the Music Hall at 132 Remsen Street. Its site was in a heavily trafficked part of the business district, between the Hotel Cohoes and the Masonic Temple. It was used only as a theatre and had its auditorium at street level, thereby making it more accessible than the Music Hall. Its capacity of 1500 made it 25% larger than the City Theatre and over three times larger than the Music Hall.²

The Cohoes Opera House was styled after New York City theatres and had a stage equipped with a towering fly loft and traps. At the front of the apron, the stage was over 35 feet wide. There was a large orchestra pit, spacious wings, and ten dressing-rooms beneath the stage. Seating was divided

²Conversation with Mary DeCarlo, 29 March 1980.

into orchestra section, two balconies, and a third balcony referred to as the gallery. Patrons could view the stage from any angle since the balconies were constructed in a half-circle. At the rear and center of the two lower balconies were tiers of three boxes each.³

Mrs. DeCarlo described the theatre as magnificent and highly ornate. She said the lobby and central stairway were made of solid marble. Upon purchasing the building, she found many musical instruments, including five pianos which, owing to their size and weight, had to be lowered from windows in order to be removed from the auditorium. She further explained that the building was remarkably well built and was extremely difficult to demolish.

Mrs. Thomas Scullen, who had frequented the Opera House as a young girl, reiterated Mrs. DeCarlo's remarks as to the auditoriums's beauty. Mrs. Scullen related that she had seen both vaudeville and motion pictures at the Opera House. However, she felt that the main attraction was the "amateur nights" that were held every Wednesday, circa 1910. Although these talent shows did not start until eight o'clock, the crowds were so large that, "if you didn't get there by 6:30, you wouldn't get a seat." Hooks were used to remove particularly inept novices from the stage at which point, said Mr. Scullen, the audience would roar with laughter.⁴

³Ibid.

⁴Conversation with Mrs. Thomas Scullen, 2 April 1980.

The Opera House was converted in 1926 to show motion pictures as well as theatrical entertainments. In 1934 it was managed by the Cohoes Amusement Company, headed by Louis Buttner and operated by the Shine interests. Its name was changed to "the Rialto," and finally "the Empire" Theatre, after its acquisition by Fabian Theatres, Inc., in 1938. Thereafter it was operated solely as a motion picture house until the opening of the Cohoes Theatre in 1941.⁵

For the greater portion of the next twenty years, the Opera House remained vacant. The last stage show was produced there in the mid-fifties. In 1963, Mrs. Mary B. DeCarlo, operator of the Hotel Cohoes, purchased the theatre from Fabian Theatres. She had the building demolished that same year. The site where it once stood is now a parking lot.

The Coming of Vaudeville

To assert that the National Bank and John Powers amalgamated their theatres because they knew that a new theatre would be built does not fully explain the reasons for the partnership. It seems likely that the Music Hall and City Theatre would have tried to compete with the newcomer before joining forces. Rather, the two existing theatres must have known something of the projected programming of the second Cohoes Opera House, and they must have decided that combining forces was the only way to stay in operation.

⁵Cataldo, p. 291.

Tony Pastor had played Cohoes in the 1880's. In less than a decade his variety show format, which essentially was a burlesque show with a wholesome tone, had developed into what was to become one of the most popular of theatrical entertainments--vaudeville.

The legitimate drama of the United States was a part of the cultural tradition of the immigrants who settled here. All but the most rural Americans knew what the theatre was and many Americans had read or seen at least one play in their lifetimes. Thus theatre could be produced by anyone who had the resources and inclination to perform.

Vaudeville, on the other hand, developed after New York City had become the theatrical center of the country. Performers in vaudeville gravitated to New York for discovery. Furthermore, the size of the city facilitated vaudeville because of the variety of talent to be found in the large populace. Unlike traditional theatre, vaudeville was not likely to be a home-grown phenomenon; and if a provincial theatre wanted to show vaudeville, it had to deal with New York City. Cohoes could muster its own drum and bugle corps, comedians, and actors, but it did not have the population necessary to supply the diverse pool of talent required by vaudeville.

If one accepts this logic, then it becomes particularly interesting to note that the second Opera House had absentee, New York City-based ownership. Perhaps the National Bank and John Powers saw the handwriting on the wall. Perhaps they realized that the new theatre would bring vaudeville to

Cohoes, and they foresaw that a partnership was the only road to continued viability.

The Music Hall and City Theatre had only to look to Troy and Albany to see the impact of the new entertainment. In 1887, F.F. Proctor--who began his theatrical career with Pastor as "Levantine, the great Equilibrist"--acquired the Griswold Opera House in Troy, installed a bar in the lobby, and produced only vaudeville acts imported from New York City. In 1889 he purchased the Leland Opera House in Albany, changed its name to Proctor's Albany Theatre, and dominated the city's theatre scene for over forty years.⁶

The new Opera House was not owned by Proctor until 1901, when it became the twenty-fifth theatre in his chain located throughout New York and New Jersey.⁷ Nevertheless, the first owners of the new Opera House did very well. They inundated Cohoes with a bevy of stars that their rivals could not hope to match. Specializing in vaudeville, the Opera House changed acts twice per week, on Mondays and Thursdays. In addition, a Cohoes resident, Dan Atkins opened a candy store in the lobby of the Opera House and gave away sweets to the children in the audience. "Uncle Dan" also staged impromptu entertainments of his own, ranging from tapdance to feats of magic, during intermissions. He became as popular as the performers proper and was a tremendous asset for the Opera

⁶William Marston and John H. Feller, F.F. Proctor, Vaudeville Pioneer, (New York: 1943), p. 44.

⁷"Eva Tanguay," Cohoes Centennial Yearbook, p. 14.

House.⁸

Mrs. DeCarlo supplied a list of performers who had played at the new Opera House. Although some of these stars entertained in Cohoes well after the Music Hall was closed in 1901, a comparison of her list with the lesser lights who had performed at the Music Hall gives an indication of how vaudeville brought first-class entertainment to Cohoes:

1892--Bert Williams	1902 and after--Wallace Beery
1894--Mrs. Leslie Carter	Anna Held
George M. Cohan	Thurston
1895--Gus Edwards	Arthur Treacher
Walter Hampden	George Jessel
1896--Nora Bayes	Harry Houdini
1897--Chauncey Olcott	the Castles
1898--The Barrymores	Sophie Tucker
1900--George Arliss	Jimmy Durante
1901--Bert Lytel	Al Jolson (9)

Vaudeville appealed to all age groups and social classes: "We kids could sit upstairs and look down on the 'swells' in the bald-headed row with their full dress. The ladies wore fancy gowns and furs and diamonds. It was a place where we could rub elbows with high society."¹⁰ While the "high society" arrived at the theatre in chauffeur driven carriages, the mill workers (many of whom were children) would stand in long lines down Remsen Street to purchase their gallery tickets (75¢) or standing-room (50¢).¹¹

⁸"Vaudeville," Cohoes Centennial Yearbook, p. 10.

⁹DeCarlo interview.

¹⁰"Eva Tanguay," Cohoes Centennial Yearbook, p. 15.

¹¹Ibid.

Two Famous Ladies From Cohoes

The Music Hall/City Theatre cartel tried to compete with the Opera House as best they could. The Music Hall fared best when they presented programs of high cultural enrichment such as the Cohoes Philharmonic Society's Beethoven Musicale, given on 18 January 1893. However such events more than likely drew audiences primarily from educated and affluent Cohoesiers and were therefore limited in mass appeal. Performances at the Music Hall by amateur groups like high school choruses had a similar esoteric attraction. Gone from Music Hall programming were the local small-time comedians, magicians, midgets, and acrobats who had filled its auditorium in past years. The Opera House's vaudeville shows monopolized such attractions.

The Music Hall did showcase one local talent who not only drew large crowds, but was to go on to theatrical fame. On 18 February 1893 nine year-old Adelaide Dickey charmed an audience at a benefit performance for the Cohoes Press Club. One year later Miss Dickey, now known as "La Petite Adelaide," appeared at George Lederer's New York Casino and remained there for seven years--the longest engagement in the history of the theatre. In later life, she married J.J. Hughes and together they formed one of the most popular dance teams on the vaudeville circuit, and were a worthy rival to the Castles and the Astaires.

¹¹Ibid.

While Adelaide Dickey forged an impressive professional career, another woman who called Cohoes her home would eclipse "La Petite Adelaide" in fame and notoriety. Eva Tanguay was born in Quebec in 1874. She immigrated with her parents to Cohoes and first appeared on the Music Hall stage at the age of twelve in Little Lord Fauntleroy. By 1893, Tanguay was an established vaudeville performer:

The female luminaries whom Gilbert calls the 'Madames of the Marquee' are Eva Tanguay, Nora Bayes, Elsie Janis, and Irene Franklin. Of these four women, Tanguay was the most sensational. It was she who, during the early 1900's changed the tone of vaudeville from sentiment to sex. Her box office draw was terrific, and her salary was from \$3,000 per week and up. The puritanical impresario, B.F. Keith, was shocked by her flagrant disregard of the niceties that were integral to his style. Nevertheless, her popularity was so great that he was forced not only to tolerate her, but even to agree to bill her as 'The Girl Who Made Vaudeville Famous,' a phrase of her own coinage. 12

Tanguay was not blessed with an outstanding voice, but she had a flamboyant, glittering quality that captivated audiences. Short and plump with bleached blonde hair, she was obsessed with success. She once inadvertently caused Flo Ziegfeld to hire her and fire another young singer, Sophie Tucker. She died in 1947, but left a legacy of outrageous and exciting performances as the "I Don't Care" girl, a vaudeville superstar who, at her peak, earned over \$3,500 per week.¹³

After her 1886 debut at the Music Hall, she returned two

¹²"Eva Tanguay," Cohoes Centennial Yearbook, p. 6.

¹³Ibid.

two years later in an amateur night and was resoundingly booed for her wild songs and freakish costumes. Yet the hostile response did not cause her to forget her hometown. In 1884, after quitting the Joshua Simpkins Company, Tanguay returned home to rest before going on the road for herself. She tried out the first of her self-produced productions, Reddy, the Waif, at the City Theatre on 10 September 1894, and played a return engagement of the same piece on 9 December 1894.

Theatre in Cohoes 1894-1897

The Music Hall suffered far more from the competition of the new Opera House than did the City Theatre, although neither showplace could match the excitement brought by vaudeville. The City Theatre scored a mild success with the 25 April 1894 appearance of heavyweight champion, John L. Sullivan, in Captain Harcourt, but Powers' theatre increasingly had to fall back on unprofitable civic functions such as the series of monthly community sings for the benefit of war veterans held in 1895.

The civic-center niche was to have been the province of the Music Hall. When the City Theatre began to host social sings, spelling bees, and the like, there was little demand for the older theatre. In addition, other places in Cohoes began to host events such as the Cohoes Premiere demonstration of Edison's phonograph at Egbert's Hall on 6 November 1894.

If the explanation offered at the beginning of this chapter is accepted, then the Music Hall/City Theatre partner-

ship was breaking down only three years after the new theatre opened. The Music Hall, with its remodeled interior, could not easily revert back to offering legitimate theatre. The City Theatre never scheduled vaudeville at all, thus underscoring the hypothesis that the New York City owners of the Opera House had cornered the vaudeville market in Cohoes.

The lease on the Music Hall was to expire on 1 April 1894, and it was felt that the theatre would be closed:

The house is owned by the National Bank. Manager E.C. Game of the City Theatre has held a lease on the Hall for the past three years, but owing that no one has come forth to sign a new lease, it is likely the Hall will be shut. 14

There is no record of anyone willing to assume the expired lease and the Cohoes City Directory of 1895 lists Ernest Game only as manager of the City Theatre. Without a managing director, the Music Hall from 1895 to 1897 was rarely used except for political rallies and an occasional concert. When a performance was given, it hardly captured the imagination of the majority of Cohoesiers or, for that matter, the press:

The Boston Quintette, a vocal and instrumental group, gave a very excellent recital in the Opera House in the National Bank Building (the Music Hall) to a small but cultural audience, while most of the males of Cohoes attended a sensual performance at the City Theatre by Omene, she of the midway plaisance and le danse du ventre! 15

The sensuality of Ms. Omene notwithstanding, from 1894

¹⁴Cohoes Daily News, 15 March 1894.

¹⁵Cohoes Daily News, 10 November 1896.

to 1897 the City Theatre staged shopworn plays like Uncle Tom's Cabin, boxing exhibitions, and amateur benefits. Occasionally, the City Theatre would stage a successful production, most notably a concert given by John Phillip Sousa's Band on 19 March 1895, and a demonstration of the newest rage, "Vitascope," on 4 September 1896.

A New Beginning

On the morning of 22 October 1897 a fire totally destroyed the Cohoes City Theatre. Losses amounted to over \$18,000 of which only \$8,000 was insured.¹⁶ The disaster ended the involvement of the Powers family in the Cohoes theatre scene, but opened new possibilities for Ernest Game and the Music Hall.

Upon the destruction of the City Theatre, Game immediately became involved in another management venture:

It will be a great pleasure to many people to know that E.C. Game is to be the manager of the Cohoes Opera House. Mr. Game has had large experience in the business and has the reputation of being one of the most successful theatre managers in the country. He was manager of the Music Hall for many years and acted in the same capacity with the Cohoes City Theatre for two years. Barnstormers won't get Cohoes people's money when Mr. Game takes on his newest challenge. 17

The theatrical company playing the City Theatre at the time of the fire suffered losses totalling \$5,000.¹⁸ The next

¹⁶Albany Evening Dispatch, 22 October 1897.

¹⁷Albany Evening Dispatch, 4 November 1897.

¹⁸Albany Evening Dispatch, 22 October 1897.

day a benefit performance for the company was held at the Music Hall:

The Wolves of New York Company which was to play again this evening played in Albany Wednesday night. This evening the company, who lost all their effects personal and otherwise, will produce Cad The Tom Boy at the National Bank Hall (Music Hall). The admission will be 10,20,30, and 50 cents. The company should be well patronized as they are in a sorry plight in their present condition. 19

The fire thus signalled a return of theatre to the Music Hall. Earlier in 1897 the Music Hall once again had changed its name, calling itself the National Bank Hall. With the change of name came an attempt to schedule more events in the theatre/dance hall. Most of the events were poorly attended:

The National Bank Building should have been crowded last night when an excellent musical and literary entertainment was given for the benefit of the Young Women's Christian Association, but it was not. Those who remained away missed an evening of pleasure. The Hall looks better than ever, and patrons left praising the new padded bentwood chairs. 20

During 1897, the best attended events at the Music Hall were dances:

The young people of Cohoes have held many successful social affairs but, for a real good time, the negligee dance which took place last night has never been excelled. . . When all were whirling in the waltz the scene on the floor was a most inspiring one. The bright colored waists gave a dash and prettiness to the scene that is wanting at a more formal affair. It was an evening that

¹⁹Albany Evening Dispatch, 24 October 1897.

²⁰Cohoes Republican, 12 May 1897.

all present will remember with feelings of pleasure. 21

These dances continued through the summer of 1897 and helped to identify the "National Bank Hall" as the place where the city's major social gatherings were held. The Cohoes Daily News began a new column, "City Notes," which was dominated by listings of gala functions at the old Music Hall. Thus, when the benefit for the stranded Wolves of New York was held after the destruction of the City Theatre, the Music Hall had already enjoyed a mild economic recovery.

In an attempt to capitalize upon its sudden, if modest, return to the theatrical scene, the management of the National Bank Hall sought to greatly increase the number of events it hosted. It was announced that a series of four entertainments, under the collective title, "The People's Popular Course," would be presented in later November and early December. The attractions included the Alberte Concert Company; the Capital Banjo, Mandolin, and Guitar Club; Hertz!, the Magician; and E. Melvin Robinson starring in David Garrick.²² This series, featuring local amateurs and semi-professionals, was very poorly attended. The only other event at the Music Hall in 1897 was the "Mid-winter Music Festival," held on 28 December 1897.

In 1898 the Cohoes Opera House replaced Ernest Game with Samuel Benson. Benson's first task was to oversee a

²¹Cohoes Republican, 14 May 1897.

²²Albany Evening Dispatch, 12 November 1897.

modernization of the entire theatre, highlighted by the installation of electric illumination throughout the building. This improvement struck a final death-blow to the Music Hall which, after 1898, only staged entertainments on a rental basis.

For the next three years the Music Hall was leased sporadically by the Y.M.C.A., social clubs, labor unions, and the like. The only events of note were a performance by Adelaide Dickey in The Children's Kermis (2 June 1898) and an exhibition of moving pictures by Uncle Hank Hawkins Specialty and Comedy Company (11 October 1900).

The End of the Music Hall

By 1900 the mills of "Spindle City" were rapidly shutting down again due to labor problems, lack of sales, and increased production costs. The great migration of labor southward had begun and the mill towns of the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers--Amsterdam, Schenectady, Cohoes, and Troy--suffered devastating losses of population and capital. Deserted factories and mills lined the waterfronts and the commercial centers were enclosed by concentric circles of tenement housing. The tenements, originally company built projects that were once considered a progressive example of employee welfare, fell into disrepair. They were inhabited by generations of workers who were unemployed, poor, and socially disaffected.²³ The money interests followed their mills to Pennsylvania and

²³Cataldo, p. 88.

Virginia and the rich patronage upon which the Music Hall once depended, disappeared forever.

Various local historians have asserted that the last production at the Music Hall was Egypta, first performed on 14 March 1900 and again on 12 March 1901. The production was a combination of opera, scenic spectacle, and oratorio. It was a precursor of Percy MacKaye's community pageants in that it used amateur talent and required multitudes of people. Costumes, properties, and scenery were supplied from the remnants left behind by past travelling companies.

There are, however, three pieces of evidence that strongly suggest Egypta was never performed at the Music Hall. First, publicity for the spectacle lists a cast of fifteen principals, a festival chorus of 200 adult singers, and an auxilliary chorus of 200 school girls.²⁴ There was no place in the Music Hall where over 400 performers could have been kept. Second, Anna May Bowden, who had sung in Egypta, felt sure it was performed in what she called "the new theatre."²⁵ Last and most convincing, two reviews of the production refer to the site as the Cohoes Opera House. Although theatre in Cohoes in the 1890's was characterized by frequent changes in the names of the Music Hall and inconsistent use of nomenclature in the press, after 1900 the Music Hall was known as the National Bank Hall and had not been referred to

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Cohoes Republican, 12 March 1900.

as the "Opera House" for nearly a decade.

Thus it is likely that the last theatrical production at the Music Hall occurred in February, 1901. The last time the National Bank Hall was specifically identified as having hosted a performance was 7 February 1901 when the Svengala Brothers gave a magic/hypnosis show.²⁶ Subsequent events throughout the remainder of February and the beginning of March were advertised but never reviewed, making it likely that they were cancelled.

In any event, the Music Hall continued to host high school commencements until 1905, when a roof truss collapsed. The bank chose not to repair the roof since the building remained structurally sound. The theatre, however, had a sagging ceiling and was condemned for public use. It was sealed off from the first two floors in July, 1905.

Rediscovery and Restoration

It is understandable that the unused Music Hall was forgotten by Cohoesiers. Vaudeville, motion pictures, and radio helped the memories fade. The theatre remained forgotten and neglected until 1967. In that year Marine Midland Bank, which had used the ground floor as a branch office, moved to new headquarters on the corner of Mohawk and Ontario Streets. The bank approached Paul VanBuskirk, executive assistant to the mayor, and offered either to tear down the building or sell

²⁷Cohoes Republican, 8 February 1901.

it to the city for \$1. Mayor James McDonald had promised to provide Cohoes with a public Library in his 1967 campaign. VanBuskirk thought the building would prove an excellent site for a library, and advised the Mayor to afford himself the excellent opportunity of purchasing the old building.²⁸ On 23 January 1968 the City of Cohoes purchased the structure (then known as the National Bank Building) from the Marine Midland Bank for the sum of \$1.

Before the purchase, the building had been inspected and declared structurally sound by the City Engineer. In the process, the forgotten theatre was rediscovered. It was immediately proposed that the building house the library on its ground floor. The second floor would be used as offices for the Cohoes Historical Society and as a gallery to display old playbills and other theatre memorabilia such as the original bentwood cane seats, Eva Tanguay's shoes, programs, and ticket stubs.²⁹

City Historian Dr. Edward Vandercar inspected the theatre and was one of the first individuals to recognize its historical value. He began to research it and urged that it be restored along with the first two floors. Charles Buckley, President of the Latham Community Players, was the first person to propose a resident theatre for the Music Hall. His organization worked tirelessly to clean, mop and sweep the theatre, all the while attempting to preserve whatever artifacts

²⁸Conversation with Paul VanBuskirk, 2 April 1980.

²⁹Cataldo, p. iv.

might be discovered.³⁰

It was estimated that the historical preservation would take five years to complete and cost \$1.2 million. VanBuskirk was placed in charge of the fundraising. He applied for two large grants--with the New York State Historic Trust and with the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.

State and federal officials visited the site and were enthused that "so much of historic value had survived the ravages of time." They recommended that "the Cohoes Music Hall, one of the very few remaining in the country, be restored and preserved as a responsible act of urban planning and preservation."³¹ Governor Rockefeller responded by hailing the Music Hall as an architectural treasure and announcing a \$162,500 State Historic Trust grant for its preservation and restoration.

The number of people involved in the Music Hall's renaissance grew substantially after the state grant was awarded. What had begun as a committee of interested citizens representing various groups expanded to the hiring of a staff and ultimately the formulation of a board of directors.³² Although the original grassroots support was not abandoned, the new board felt professional help was needed: "After the committee

³⁰VanBuskirk conversation.

³¹Cataldo, p. v.

³²Sunday Times Record, 23 February 1975.

succeeded in getting the Historic Trust and the New York State Council on the Arts interested in the project, the group sort of dissolved when it became apparent that its members were unschooled in making out grant applications, according to Dr. Vandecar."³³

The Cohoes Planning and Development Agency was contacted in October, 1972, and thereafter became the driving force behind the project. Upon recommendation of the Council of the Arts, Opportunity Resources--a state-funded placement agency for the performing arts--was contacted and James O'Reilly was made operations planner for the Music Hall. O'Reilly took action to incorporate the Music Hall and the incorporation was approved on 14 June 1974. Mr. Louis Ambrosio joined Mr. O'Reilly in August, 1974, to form a professional, regional theatre at the Music Hall.³⁴

The actual restoration of the building began in 1970. Replacement of the mansard roof and exterior repairs including the cleaning of brick and trim constituted the projects initial phases. Beginning funding included a \$100,000 federal grant awarded in July, 1969; the aforementioned \$162,500 state grant awarded October, 1969; and a first year grant of \$109,000 from a supplemental fund of H.U.D.'s Model Cities program.³⁵

A second phase of restoration was begun in 1971, funded

³³Times Record, 23 November 1975.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Albany Times Union, 26 August 1973.

by another \$109,000 Model Cities supplemental fund and a \$140,000 federal grant. Phase two included restoration of the third floor theatre auditorium, continued restoration of the ground floor, and repairs to the plumbing, heating, and electrical systems.³⁶

VanBuskirk had to streamline some of his original proposals since any contractor's bid that was accepted, but exceeded project estimates, was liable to be rejected by H.U.D. A five-month hiatus occurred while a re-evaluation of the final and most costly portion of the restoration was considered. The revised plan was submitted to H.U.D. and approved.³⁷

The final phase of the restoration involved the interior finishing of the auditorium, stage, and dressing rooms. Funding for the final phase came from the following sources:

Community Development	\$ 405,000
Model Cities	282,487
Federal Revenue Sharing	30,000
N.Y. State Historic Preservation	202,500
H.U.D. (Open Spaces Program)	140,000
H.U.D. (regular funds)	100,000
	<u>\$1,159,987</u> (38)

Many of the state's outstanding restoration architects bid for the work. Finally, the Albany firm of Mendel, Mesick, and Cohen was chosen to do the interior finishing. Their work was detailed in the Historic Structures Report, prepared by Cataldo and Associates of Scotia, New York, the firm which

³⁶Times Record, 23 November 1974.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

also did the external restoration. The substance of that report appears throughout this study, particularly in Chapter III.

Promising to "analyze all documentary sources relating to the building's history and to conduct a comprehensive examination of the existing fabric,"³⁹ the two firms converged upon the Music Hall. Their work was completed February, 1975. Today, the Cohoes Music Hall is a functional theatre for lease to amateur and, occasionally, professional troupes.

³⁹Ibid.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to provide a roughly chronological history of the Cohoes Music Hall. It soon became evident that the Music Hall was inextricably linked to the sociology of the city. It also became evident that the raw data, chiefly from the newspapers, required a context. Thus, it was this study's method to interpret the data in light of broad theatrical movements in the country and to place the data in the context of the city's development.

Such a method relies heavily upon the formulation of hypotheses. The last ten years of the Music Hall's history are particularly lacking in explanatory data and are filled with contrary events. The chapters detailing that decade are therefore the most speculative.

It is impossible to verify the hypotheses formulated in this study, yet they can be made more acceptable if they form a pattern. If a pattern exists it enriches the chronicle by pointing towards a larger meaning or, if you will, a "moral to the story." It is my intention to briefly suggest that a pattern does exist in the twenty-seven year history of the theatre, and to assert that such a pattern gives this study more significance than a mere history of a theatre in a small town.

The study has suggested that the fate of the Music Hall was directly related to the growth and prosperity of Cohoes. That the theatre repeatedly failed was, in part, a function

of the city's location. Cohoes, for all its water power, is not a suitable port. The very cataracts that powered its textile industry made the Hudson far too dangerous for portage. Troy and Albany were downstream, at a point where the river widens and deepens. These two cities had large ports and their commerce was naturally enhanced as a result. Cohoes simply never rivalled Troy or Albany as a commercial center. Logically, it follows that Cohoes' institutions would not be as well endowed as its neighbors, nor as well supported in a highly competitive market.

Arthur Masten and William Acheson did not have demographics or hindsight to fall back upon. Their decision to build the Music Hall was a romantic act by two burghers caught up in the peculiarly American "cult of the middle-class." After all, both entrepreneurs had risen to prominence through hard work. As successful, self-made men they were treated with deference by the masses and preference by the politicians. What better way to memorialize themselves than to erect a building that could be both a cultural institution and a mercantile center?

In a different location, such men with good intentions and a modest amount of investment capital could have succeeded. Had the Music Hall been in Amsterdam, fifty miles to the west and on the edge of the central New York frontier, it only would have had to gauge the taste of its population and program accordingly. In such a remote location, there would have been no competition from larger cities.

The Cohoes Music Hall had to compete. Its owners wanted and needed both prosperous and working-class Cohoesiers as patrons. The former group habitually frequented Troy and Albany theatres. The latter group were an unknown commodity. That the Music Hall closed in 1879 after only five seasons suggests that its management could not decipher the entertainment desires of the city.

When Masten sold his interest, the theatre lost some of its vitality and the support of the town newspapers. The uneasy triumvirate of Acheson, Powers, and the National Bank failed to maintain even the low level of success the theatre had previously enjoyed. They bickered, lost money, and turned the building into the battlefield of their civil war.

We see the same ineptitude of management during the dark years, 1879-1883, as we did in the first five seasons. Why did they permit the theatre to close, and why did no individual owner step forward to lead the others? To say that the closing was due to inflated egos or pent-up resentments is not enough. The Music Hall was the only theatre in the city. The owners could have abandoned rich Cohoesiers to the sophisticated fare of Troy and Albany and concentrated on the working-class who, essentially, were a captive audience.

Perhaps the Panic of 1873 had sobered the owners. Perhaps they sensed that the virtual monopoly on textile production enjoyed by the Northeast was being seriously challenged by the astounding growth of the South's cotton industry which,

by 1880, boasted 161 textile factories.³⁹ In any case, the closing of the theatre demonstrated finally that the earlier enthusiasm of the owners had turned to cautious skepticism. The theatre probably never would have re-opened had not the National Bank gradually assumed leadership, and if they had not hired P.J. Callan.

Callan's tenure as manager proved to be the Music Hall's golden years. Unlike Masten and Acheson, Callan was able to determine what Cohoesiers wanted to see. He pleased the "swells" and the workers. Furthermore, his decision to schedule on a regular basis gave the Music Hall an image of continuity in the larger fabric of the city. It was the place to go to be entertained, and if an individual disliked any particular production he had only to wait a few days and the bill of fare was guaranteed to change.

The diversity of Callan's programming proved to be its strongpoint. He eschewed trying to force wealthy Cohoesiers into total loyalty to their home-town theatre. He was content to operate steadily and felt no need to mortgage the operation in a desperate attempt to get big stars.

That the departure of Callan coincided with the demise of the Music Hall is, in part, a testament to his sound stewardship. Yet the real problem faced by E.C. Game, Callan's successor, was not poor management but new competition in the city. The City Theatre and Music Hall never competed

³⁹Richard N. Current, T. Harry Williams, Frank Freidel, American History: A Survey, (New York: 1964), p. 445.

long enough to determine if Cohoes could support two theatres. In all likelihood, the city could not sustain two theatres, especially since the programming at the City Theatre was of the same type as the Music Hall's. It was the opening of the second Cohoes Opera House that brought the Music Hall to ruin.

Callan had established a tenuous success because he refused to compete directly with Albany and Troy. Cohoesiers, most probably the working-class, contented themselves with the minor attractions that Callan regularly paraded across the stage. The competition brought by the new Opera House, however, was far more formidable a threat. Because the management of the Opera House operated out of New York City, it had access to a multitude of young, eager performers who --although novices--brought a kind of vitality and professionalism that Cohoesiers were unaccustomed to seeing at the other two theatres.

The Music Hall and City Theatre did not produce vaudeville themselves because they had no access to the talent pool. This study asserts that the two older theatres formed an alliance to combat their new rival. Even if there were no alliance, it is clear that both theatres lost their viability when they failed to fulfill the demands of their public. Although the renovation of the Music Hall into a ballroom more or less ended legitimate theatre on its stage, the renovation itself was the most logical of the decisions made to combat the new Opera House. At least the Music Hall was tailored to a specific use, and at least that use had an

established, if smaller, appeal.

Again, in these last years, one sees the ineptitude of management at the Music Hall. With the exception of the realistic Callan, the various owners of the Music Hall always had a grandiose vision, but no effective or intelligent strategies to achieve that vision. The demise of the Music Hall under the onslaught of vaudeville was like the destruction of the resident companies by travelling stars in the 1860's. How could Ernest Game compete with professional agents in New York City? By 1900, Cohoes had lost its image as an insignificant theatre town and had become another tiny colony to be conquered by the F.F. Proctors and others. Once the rest of the world was aware that the city existed, Cohoes' own, poorly managed theatres had to give way to the bigger, the better, and the smarter.

APPENDIX 1: COMPLETE PRODUCTION LIST, SEASON BY SEASON
(Professional performances in capitals)

First Season, 1874-75

<u>Date</u>	<u>Production</u>	<u>Performers</u>
23 November 1874	<u>LONDON ASSURANCE</u>	J.W. Albaugh Co.
24 " "	<u>LADY OF LYONS</u>	"
26 " "	<u>NEW MAGDALEN</u> (mat.)	Starring Ada Gray
" " "	<u>EAST LYNNE</u> (eve.)	"
27 " "	<u>CAMILLE, OR THE FATE OF A COQUETTE</u>	"
28 " "	<u>LUCRETIA BORGIA</u> (mat.)	"
" " "	<u>NEW MAGDALEN</u> (eve.)	"
1 December	Social Sing	
5 " "	<u>ON HAND! OR TRUE TO THE LAST</u>	Starring John Thompson
7 " "	<u>DEITCHEROR:THE THREE PALS OF CRIME</u>	Starring Little Tut
8 " "	"	"
15 " "	Social Sing	
18 " "	Instrumental concert	Doring's Military Band
23 " "	<u>CHRIS AND LENA</u>	Starring Baker & Farron
24 " "	<u>THE CUT GLOVE</u>	"
25 " "	<u>CHRIS AND LENA</u>	"
26 " "	<u>VARIETY SHOW</u>	P.T. Barnum, Producer
29 " "	Social sing	
30 " "	<u>WILD CAT NED</u>	Starring Donald McKay
31 " "	<u>THE MAN ON THE MOUNTAIN</u>	Albaugh Company
1 January 1875	"	"
3 " "	Social sing	
5 " "	Grand Oratorio	J.E. O'Linda, Conductor
6 " "	"	"
7 " "	Social sing	
8 " "	"	
12 " "	"	
16 " "	"	
18 " "	"	
20 " "	"	
22 " "	"	
29 " "	<u>SCOUT OF THE PLAINS</u>	Starring W.F. Cody
30 " "	<u>RICHARD III</u>	Albaugh Company
31 " "	"	"
1 February	<u>SCOUT OF THE PLAINS</u>	Starring W.F. Cody
2 " "	<u>EAST LYNNE</u>	Starring Ada Gray
3 " "	Choral Conert	Benefit for Ladies' Aid Society

5	February	1875	MINSTREL SHOW	Duprez & Benedict Co.
10	"	"	<u>JANE EYRE</u>	Albaugh Co.
19	"	"	<u>DAVY CROCKETT</u>	Starring Frank Mayo
20	"	"	Spiritualism	Amateur hypnotists
26	"	"	<u>HAMLET</u>	Albaugh Co.
2	March	"	Evangelist Lecture	Mordecau Brown
6	"	"	<u>CHRIS AND LENA</u>	Starring Baker & Farron
7	"	"	"	"
15	"	"	<u>UNCLE TOM'S CABIN</u>	Niblo's Garden Co.
20	"	"	Evangelist lecture	Rev. G.M. Washburn
23	"	"	VARIETY SHOW	Martino's Gift Carnival
27	"	"	MINSTREL SHOW	Sheridan, Mack, & May Co.
29	"	"	VARIETY SHOW	Anglo-American Marionettes
30	"	"	"	"
31	"	"	"	"
2	April	"	Spiritualism	Amateur hypnotists
3	"	"	"	"
5	"	"	Amateur minstrels	Grand Army Minstrels
6	"	"	"	"
8	"	"	<u>HUNCHBACK</u>	Albaugh Co.
17	"	"	<u>LONDON ASSURANCE</u> (mat)	"
"	"	"	<u>HAMLET</u> (eve)	"
26	"	"	MINSTREL SHOW	Parisian Lady Minstrels
10	May	"	VARIETY SHOW	McGill & Strong Co.
15	"	"	<u>JANE EYRE</u>	Starring Charlotte Thompson
1	June	"	Social Sing	
3	"	"	<u>SHAMROCK GREEN</u>	Starring T. Grattan Riggs
4	"	"	<u>THE IRISH DETECTIVE</u>	"
5	"	"	Spelling Bee	Waterford versus Cohoes
6	"	"	<u>EAST LYNNE</u>	Starring Ada Gray
14	"	"	MINSTREL SHOW	Duprez & Benedict Co.
24	"	"	<u>LAST SENSATION</u>	Starring E.S. Washburn
30	"	"	Choral concert	Niagara College Philharmonic Club
6	July	"	VARIETY SHOW	Starring Harrigan & Hart
7	"	"	MINSTREL SHOW	Callender's Original Co.
11	"	"	<u>SI SLOCUM</u>	Starring Frank Frayne
28	"	"	VARIETY SHOW	East Lynne Grand Central Theatre Co.
5	August	"	VARIETY SHOW	Starring Tony Pastor
27	"	"	VARIETY SHOW	East Lynne Grand Central Theatre Co.

Second Season, 1875-76

13	September	1875	<u>LIFE ON THE BORDER</u>	Starring W.F. Cody
20	"	"	<u>FRONTIER SHOW</u>	Starring Frank Frayne
23	"	"	MINSTREL SHOW	Kelly & Leon Troupe
25	"	"	<u>HUMPTY DUMPTY</u>	Starring George L. Fox
29	"	"	<u>FALSE COLORS!</u>	Mme. Tentz's Minstrels

9	October 1875	MINSTREL SHOW	Bryant's Minstrels
11	"	UNCLE TOM'S CABIN	Howard Family Co.
15	"	<u>THE LOTUS FLOWER</u>	Starring Rose Wood
16	"	<u>A BIT O' CASH</u>	"
18	"	Lecture	Barnabee Doyle
20	"	VARIETY SHOW	Starring Harrigan & Hart
22	"	Social sing	
6	November	<u>OTHELLO</u>	Starring E.L. Davenport
13	"	<u>FANCHON THE CRICKET</u>	Albaugh Co.
20	"	VARIETY SHOW	Guy Family Opera Co.
24	"	<u>ZYKES, THE SHOWMAN</u>	Starring John Thompson
25	"	<u>ENOCH ARDEN</u>	Starring Edwin Adams
27	"	<u>LAST SENSATION</u>	Starring E.S. Washburn
3	December	Social sing	
6	"	Lecture	Bayard Taylor
11	"	Choral concert	Centennial Singers
14	"	VARIETY SHOW	Gen. Tom Thumb & wife
21	"	Social sing	
22	"	<u>BROKEN CHAINS</u>	Amateur theatrical
24	"	<u>VARIETY SHOW</u>	Sheridan & Mack Co.
25	"	"	"
27	"	<u>TWO ORPHANS</u>	Starring Annie Ward
28	"	<u>LED ASTRAY</u>	Tiffany
1	January 1876	<u>EAST LYNNE</u> (mat.)	Starring Ada Gray
"	"	<u>ARTICLE 47</u> (eve.)	"
24	"	Lecture	Jilt Knight
25	"	Lecture	Theodore Tilton
29	"	Choral concert	Prof. Green, Director
3	February	Social sing	
7	"	Play readings	Amateur theatrical
22	"	"	"
29	"	Social sing	
17	March	<u>HAMLET</u>	Albaugh Co.
18	"	<u>RICHARD III</u>	"
23	"	VARIETY SHOW	Sheridan & Mack Co.
27	"	<u>TWO ORPHANS</u>	Fifth Ave. Comedy Co.
5	April	<u>LAST SENSATION</u>	Starring E.S. Washburn
6	"	<u>WORLD ON WHEELS</u>	Starring John Thompson
8	"	<u>VARIETY SHOW</u>	McGill & Strong Co.
9	"	"	"
11	"	Social sing	
12	"	MINSTREL SHOW	Bryant's Minstrels
15	"	<u>LIFE ON THE BORDER</u>	Starring W.F. Cody
16	"	<u>TWO ORPHANS</u>	Harrison Combination Co.
17	"	MINSTREL SHOW	Starring Cool Burgess
20	"	<u>Pilgrim's Progress</u>	Amateur theatrical
21	"	"	"
22	"	"	"
5	May	<u>RIP VAN WINKLE</u>	Starring Robert McWade
11	"	<u>GIROLFE, GIROLFE</u>	Holman Opera Troupe
17	June	Commencement	Egbert's High School
16	August	Lecture	Kit Carson, Jr.

Third Season, 1876-77

9	September	1876	<u>PIQUE! PIQUE!</u>	Fifth Avenue Co.
21	"	"	<u>KING GOBBLEMEUP</u>	Olympic Novelty Troupe
16	October	"	<u>NECK AND NECK</u>	Rochester Opera House Co.
30	"	"	<u>THE BLACK DIAMOND</u>	Great Aiken Co.
25	November	"	<u>SWEETHEARTS</u>	Bowers New York Co.
25	December	"	<u>TICKET-OF-LEAVE MAN</u>	Starring W.J. Fleming
27	December	"	Choral Concert	J.G. Parkhurst, Director
1	January	1877	<u>MINSTREL SHOW</u>	Colored Jubilee Singers
6	"	"	<u>RIP VAN WINKLE</u>	Starring Robert McWade
17	"	"	<u>THE RED RIGHT HAND</u>	Starring W.F. Cody
19	"	"	Lecture	Rev. Father McKenna
25	"	"	<u>THE RED RIGHT HAND</u>	Starring W.F. Cody
1	February	"	Amateur Night	St. Vincent de Paul Society
2	"	"	"	"
3	"	"	"	"
15	March	"	"	"
16	"	"	"	"
20	"	"	"	"
21	"	"	Lecture	John Logan, M.D.
22	"	"	"	"
23	"	"	"	"
27	"	"	Amateur night	St. Vincent de Paul Society
23	April	"	"	"
24	"	"	"	"
25	"	"	<u>Colleen Ban</u>	Benefit for Library Fund
26	"	"	<u>CAMILLE</u>	Starring Adelaide Lennox
27	"	"	<u>THE MAN WITH THE SILVER HORNS</u>	Harry Robinson Minstrels
4	May	"	<u>MISS MULTON</u>	Starring Ada Gray
10	"	"	<u>THE COLOR GUARD</u>	Starring Charlie Collins
11	"	"	"	"
12	"	"	<u>THE DUTCH RECRUIT</u>	"
13	"	"	"	"
19	"	"	Choral concert	Young Apollo Club
28	"	"	<u>MINSTREL SHOW</u>	Duprez & Benedict Co.
8	June	"	<u>VARIETY SHOW</u>	Billy Barry Co.
13	"	"	<u>LIVING PICTURES</u>	Matt Morgan Co.
20	"	"	<u>LED ASTRAY</u>	Union Sq. Comedy Co.
26	"	"	<u>VARIETY SHOW</u>	Starring Tony Pastor
3	July	"	Colleen Brown	Amateur theatrical
24	"	"	Choral concert	J.G. Parkhurst, Director

Fourth Season, 1877-1878

4	September	1877	<u>YEAST LYNNE</u>	Opera Buffa Co.
5	"	"	<u>ON THE BRINK</u>	The Tinguards
10	"	"	<u>UNCLE TOM'S CABIN</u>	Slavin Co.
13	"	"	<u>OUR BOARDING HOUSE</u>	Grover Comedy Co.

28	September	1877	<u>HUMPTY DUMPTY</u>	Nick Roberts Co.
29	"	"	<u>THE KERRY GOW</u>	Starring Annie Tiffany
2	October	"	<u>THREE FAST MEN</u>	Howard Athenaeum Co.
18	"	"	<u>DAVY CROCKETT</u>	Starring Frank Mayo
5	November	"	<u>UNCLE TOM'S CABIN</u>	Starring "Lottie"
29	"	"	<u>MAY CODY</u>	Starring W.F. Cody
8	December	"	<u>BOHEMIAN GIRL</u>	Holman Opera Co.
1	January	1878	<u>RIP VAN WINKLE</u>	Starring Robert McWade
19	"	"	Temperance meeting	
24	"	"	VARIETY	Starring Gen. Tom Thumb and Minnie Warren
26	"	"	Lecture	Rev. W.B. Affleck
29	"	"	MINSTREL SHOW	Barlow/Wilson Co.
6	February	"	Temperance Lecture	City attorney, Niver
7	"	"	MINSTREL SHOW	Harry Bloodgood Co.
12	"	"	<u>North and South</u>	Post Lyon
13	"	"	"	"
14	"	"	"	"
15	"	"	"	"
16	"	"	"	"
19	"	"	Scottish Chorale	Friendly Sons of Scotia
20	"	"	Amateur Theatrical	French Dramatic Club
21	"	"	"	"
27	"	"	<u>The Drummer Boy</u>	Seventh Separate Co.
28	"	"	"	"
1	March	"	"	"
2	"	"	"	"
20	"	"	Lecture	Rev. R.R. Meredith
23	"	"	Lecture	The Reform Club
1	April	"	<u>SCOUT OF THE PLAINS</u>	Starring Texas Jack
8	"	"	<u>THE SHAUGHAN</u>	Boucicault Co.
25	"	"	<u>MIRROR OR IRELAND</u>	Starring Dan Morris
26	"	"	"	"
27	"	"	"	"
30	"	"	Anniversary party	I.O.G.T.
1	May	"	VARIETY SHOW	Pat Rooney's Star Troupe
6	"	"	VARIETY SHOW	Hartz, the Magician
7	"	"	"	"
8	"	"	"	"
9	"	"	Lecture	Colonel Cole
10	"	"	VARIETY SHOW	Hartz, the Magician
11	"	"	"	"
15	"	"	<u>A CELEBRATED CASE!</u>	Union Square Co.
3	June	"	VARIETY SHOW	May Fisk's Blondes
10	"	"	Lecture	Henry Ward Beecher
28	"	"	Commencement	Egbert's High School

Fifth Season, 1883-1884

9	August	1883	<u>OLIVETTE</u>	Wilbur Opera Co.
13	"	"	Social Sing	

14	August	1883	Social Sing	
15	"	"	"	
20	"	"	VARIETY SHOW	Pat Rooney's Star Troupe
21	"	"	"	"
22	"	"	"	"
27	"	"	MINSTREL SHOW	Bayou Minstrels
28	"	"	"	"
29	"	"	"	"
1	September	"	<u>LOVE'S PENANCE</u>	Union Square Co.
2	"	"	"	"
3	"	"	"	"
8	"	"	VARIETY SHOW	Parisian Sensation Co.
9	"	"	"	"
10	"	"	"	"
15	"	"	"	Joe Allen Co.
16	"	"	"	"
17	"	"	"	"
22	"	"	"	Berkshire Co.
23	"	"	"	"
24	"	"	"	"
4	October	"	<u>RIP VAN WINKLE</u>	starring Joseph Jefferson
6	"	"	Choral Concert	J.G. Parkhurst, Director
8	"	"	MINSTREL SHOW	Duprez & Benedict Co.
13	November	"	Social sing	
14	"	"	"	
15	"	"	"	
20	"	"	Choral Concert	Harmony Chorale
21	"	"	"	"
22	"	"	"	"
27	"	"	VARIETY SHOW	Starring Tony Pastor
28	"	"	"	"
29	"	"	"	"
15	December	"	Instrumental Concert	Cohoes Orchestra
16	"	"	"	"
17	"	"	"	"
22	"	"	MINSTREL SHOW	Oklahoma Original Co.
23	"	"	"	"
24	"	"	"	"
29	"	"	Social sing	
30	"	"	"	
31	"	"	"	
12	January 1884	"	MINSTREL SHOW	Barlow & Wilson Co.
13	"	"	"	"
14	"	"	"	"
19	"	"	<u>JANE EYRE</u>	Starring Charlotte Thompson
26	"	"	<u>PRAIRIE WAIF</u>	Starring W.F. Cody
2	February	"	<u>H.M.S. Pinafore</u>	Cohoes Operatic Chorus
3	"	"	"	"
4	"	"	"	"
9	"	"	<u>PRAIRIE WAIF</u>	Starring W.F. Cody
11	"	"	"	"
20	March	"	VARIETY SHOW	Wakefield Co.
21	"	"	"	"
22	"	"	"	"

27	March	1884	Lecture	Capt. H. Leonard
28	"	"	"	"
29	"	"	"	"
13	April	"	VARIETY SHOW	Pat Rooney's Star Troupe
14	"	"	"	"
15	"	"	"	"
20	"	"	Lecture	Mrs. Nellie Keller
21	"	"	"	"
22	"	"	"	"
27	"	"	Social sing	
28	"	"	"	
29	"	"	"	
6	May	"	<u>CAMILLE</u>	Starring Helen Bancroft
10	"	"	<u>McSORLEY'S INFLATION</u>	M.W. Hanley Co.
16	"	"	<u>ONLY A FARMER'S</u>	Starring Edith Houston
			<u>DAUGHTER</u>	
19	"	"	VARIETY SHOW	Starring Charlie Collins
20	"	"	"	"
21	"	"	"	"
26	"	"	<u>THE STRANGLERS OF</u>	Union Square Co.
			<u>PARIS</u>	
27	"	"	VARIETY SHOW	H.R. Jacobs Co.
28	"	"	"	"
29	"	"	"	"
30	"	"	"	"
31	"	"	"	"
2	June	"	<u>LA MASCOTTE</u>	Barnett & Moulton Co.
4	"	"	<u>CHIMES OF NORMANDY</u>	"
6	"	"	<u>OLIVETTE</u>	"
7	"	"	<u>H.M.S. PINAFORE</u> (mat)	"
"	"	"	<u>OLIVETTE</u> (eve)	"
15	"	"	<u>ONLY A WOMAN'S HEART</u>	Starring Lillian Pomeroy
20	"	"	VARIETY SHOW	Sons of Nippon Co.
21	"	"	"	"
22	"	"	"	"
23	"	"	"	"
25	"	"	VARIETY SHOW	Joe Allen Co.
26	"	"	"	"
27	"	"	"	"
30	"	"	<u>SAM'L OF POSEN</u>	Starring M.B. Curtis
1	July	"	Social sing	
2	"	"	"	
3	"	"	"	
8	"	"	VARIETY SHOW	Parisian Sensation Co.
9	"	"	"	"
10	"	"	"	"
15	"	"	Choral Concert	Harmony Chorale
16	"	"	"	"
17	"	"	"	"
17	August	"	MINSTREL SHOW	Duprez & Benedict Co.
18	"	"	"	"
19	"	"	"	"
26	"	"	VARIETY SHOW	Pat Rooney's Star Troupe
28	"	"	<u>PECK'S BAD BOY</u>	Atkinson's Comedy Co.
			<u>AND HIS PA</u>	
30	"	"	Spiritualism	Prof. Omera

Sixth Season, 1884-1885

6	September	1884	<u>TOURISTS IN A PULLMAN</u>	Starring W.A. Mestayer
			<u>PALACE CAR</u>	
19	"	"	<u>BARON RUDOLPH</u>	G. Knight Co.
20	"	"	<u>THE EMIGRANTS</u>	Baker & Farron Co.
22	"	"	<u>SPOT CASH</u>	Starring M.B. Curtis
24	"	"	Lecture	Josh Billings
25	"	"	<u>SKIPPED BY THE LIGHT</u>	Harrison & Gourlay Co.
			<u>OF THE MOON</u>	
26	"	"	<u>VARIETY SHOW</u>	Starring Camille
27	"	"	"	"
28	"	"	<u>THE WAGES OF SIN</u>	Maubury & Overton Co.
29	"	"	<u>TOD</u>	Starring Lizette Ellone
30	"	"	<u>THE WAGES OF SIN</u>	Maubury & Overton Co.
4	October	"	<u>GALATEA</u>	Starring Katherine Rogers
9	"	"	<u>POP RIDES SURPRISE CO.</u>	
11	"	"	<u>CHEEK</u>	Starring Roland Reed
13	"	"	<u>DAN'S TRIBULATIONS</u>	Hanley Co.
14	"	"	Lecture	A.A Hopkins
16	"	"	<u>OVER THE GARDEN WALL</u>	G. Knight Co.
17	"	"	<u>OUR SUMMER BOARDERS</u>	Starring Elliott Barnes
20	"	"	<u>POP</u>	Rice's Surprise Co.
23	"	"	The Secret of Black Rock	Canadian Athenaeum
24	"	"	<u>KERRY GOW</u>	Starring J.S. Murphy
25	"	"	"	"
26	"	"	Lecture	Rev. A.J. Church
1	November	"	<u>FATE</u>	Lillian Lewis Co.
5	"	"	<u>MUGG'S LANDING</u>	Starring Frances Bishop
6	"	"	"	"
8	"	"	<u>THE MIGHTY DOLLAR</u>	W.J. Florence Co.
15	"	"	<u>7-20-8</u>	Rehan Co.
17	"	"	<u>VARIETY SHOW</u>	Chang Co.
18	"	"	"	"
19	"	"	"	"
24	"	"	<u>MINSTREL SHOW</u>	Callender Co.
26	"	"	<u>LIGHTS O' LONDON</u>	Union Square Co.
27	"	"	<u>A CELEBRATED CASE</u>	Starring Bennet Matlack
29	"	"	<u>VARIETY SHOW</u>	Harry Miner Co.
2	December	"	<u>ACROSS THE CONTINENT</u>	Byron Co.
3	"	"	<u>VARIETY SHOW</u>	Fenton Combination Co.
10	December	"	<u>A BUNCH OF KEYS</u>	Starring Flora Moore
12	"	"	<u>ACROSS THE CONTINENT</u>	Byron Co.
13	"	"	<u>TWO BAD MEN</u>	Gill & Arthur Co.
14	"	"	Lecture	National W.C.T.U.
16	"	"	<u>THE LITTLE DUKE</u>	Wilbur Opera Co.
25	"	"	<u>STORM BEATEN</u>	Shook & Collier Co.
27	"	"	<u>TALLY HO!</u>	Starring R.L. Downing
1	January	1885	<u>THE TWO DANS</u>	Dublin Dan Co.
15	"	"	<u>VARIETY SHOW</u>	Hill & Gaylord Co.
16	"	"	"	"
17	"	"	"	"
12	February	"	Instrumental Concert	Ladies Crescent Banjo Co.
13	"	"	"	"
14	"	"	"	"

15	February	1885	Instrumental Concert	Ladies Crescent Banjo Co.
26	March	"	Instrumental. Concert	Doring's Bank
27	"	"	"	"
28	"	"	"	"
2	April	"	Lecture series	Roberts Harper
3	"	"	"	"
4	"	"	"	"
7	May	"	Choral concert	Cohoes Philharmonic Society
8	"	"	"	"
9	"	"	"	"
4	June	"	Variety Show	Starring Adelaide Dickey
5	"	"	"	"
6	"	"	"	"
18	"	"	<u>FUN IN A BOARDINGHOUSE</u>	Fifth Ave. Comedy Co.
29	July	"	<u>CAPTAIN HARCOURT</u>	Starring John L. Sullivan
30	"	"	"	"
31	"	"	"	"

Seventh Season, 1885-1886

22	September	1885	<u>THE NEW CHRIS AND LENA</u>	Baker & Farron Co.
23	"	"	"	"
24	"	"	"	"
25	"	"	"	"
7	October	"	<u>THE BLACK CROOK</u>	Starring E.S. Washburn
8	"	"	"	"
9	"	"	"	"
10	"	"	"	"
24	"	"	<u>THE MIKADO</u>	Holman Opera Troupe
25	"	"	"	"
26	"	"	"	"
27	"	"	"	"
17	November	"	VARIETY SHOW	Chang's Museum
18	"	"	"	"
19	"	"	"	"
20	"	"	"	"
10	December	"	<u>OUR JOAN</u>	Starring Rose Coghlan
11	"	"	"	"
12	"	"	"	"
13	"	"	"	"
15	"	"	VARIETY SHOW	Prof. Bristol's Animals
16	"	"	"	"
17	"	"	"	"
25	"	"	<u>SI SLOCUM</u>	Starring Frank Frayne
4	January	1886	<u>THE MIKADO</u>	D'Oyly Carte Co.
5	"	"	"	"
6	"	"	"	"
7	"	"	"	"
12	February	"	Choral concert	Egbert's H.S. Chorus
20	"	"	<u>COLLEEN BAWN</u>	Starring Minnie Lester
21	"	"	"	"
22	"	"	"	"
23	"	"	"	"

6	March	1886	Variety show	Post Lyon G.A.R.
7	"	"	"	"
8	"	"	"	"
16	"	"	<u>REDDY, THE WAIF</u>	Starring Frances Bishop
17	"	"	"	"
18	"	"	"	"
3	April	"	Jubilee	Salvation Army
4	"	"	"	"
5	"	"	"	"
6	"	"	"	"
7	"	"	"	"
7	May	"	VARIETY SHOW	Prof. Bristol's Animals
8	"	"	"	"
9	"	"	"	"
11	"	"	<u>UNCLE TOM's CABIN</u>	Fifth Avenue Co.
12	"	"	"	"
13	"	"	"	"
14	"	"	"	"
22	June	"	Commencement	Egbert's High School
24	"	"	VARIETY SHOW	Prof. Bristol's Animals
25	"	"	"	"
30	"	"	Exhibition	Cohoes Boxing Club
10	July	"	INSTRUMENTAL CONCERT	Sousa's Band
11	"	"	"	"
12	"	"	Choral Concert	Excelsior Quartette
13	"	"	"	"
14	"	"	"	"
15	"	"	"	"
19	August	"	VARIETY SHOW	Starring Pawnee Bill
22	"	"	<u>THE MERCHANT OF VENICE</u>	Starring Ada Higgins
23	"	"	"	"
24	"	"	"	"
26	"	"	VARIETY SHOW	Starring Pat Rooney

Eighth Season, 1886-1887

10	September	1886	<u>PECK'S BAD BOY AND HIS PA</u>	Atkinson Co.
11	"	"	"	"
12	"	"	"	"
13	"	"	"	"
24	"	"	Lecture	Josh Billings
25	"	"	"	"
26	"	"	"	"
5	October	"	Instrumental Concert	Doring's Band
6	"	"	"	"
15	"	"	Choral Concert	Kathryn Peck, Director
16	"	"	"	"
17	"	"	"	"
24	November	"	<u>THE BLACK CARDINAL</u>	Bowser's New York Co.
27	"	"	Choral Concert	Kathryn Peck, Director
28	"	"	"	"
29	"	"	"	"
30	"	"	"	"

9	December 1886	<u>THE BROOM MAKER</u>	Starring James Riley
22	"	Choral concert	J.K. Stevens, Director
23	"	"	"
24	"	"	"
25	"	"	"
1	January 1887	<u>A PAIR OF KIDS</u>	Starring James Riley
2	"	"	"
3	"	"	"
6	"	Temperance lecture	Cornelia Claffin
16	February	Temperance lecture	Prof. T. Harrison
22	"	MINSTREL SHOW	Thatcher Minstrels
23	"	Vocal Recital	Mrs. George Elliott
24	"	"	"
4	March	<u>COON HOLLOW</u>	Crowell Co.
5	"	"	"
6	"	"	"
7	"	"	"
8	April	Variety Show	Cascade Hose Co
9	"	"	"
10	"	"	"
11	"	"	"
14	May	<u>Pirates of Penzance</u>	Cohoes Philharmonic Society
23	"	Instrumental concert	Cohoes City Band
24	"	<u>CHIMES OF MOTHER GOOSE</u>	Atkinson Co.
25	"	"	"
26	"	"	"
27	"	"	"
29	June	Lecture	George Southwick
30	"	"	"

Ninth Season, 1887-1888

7	September 1887	<u>THE DEACON'S DAUGHTER</u>	Starring Lillian Kennedy
8	"	"	"
9	"	"	"
10	"	"	"
17	October	Political rally	Republican Party
18	"	"	"
19	"	"	"
31	"	<u>THE CIRCUS GIRL</u>	Crowell Co.
7	November	Lecture	Profs. Goodwin & Debden
8	"	"	"
16	"	<u>LA BELLE RUSSE</u>	Holman Opera Troupe
17	"	"	"
8	December	Spiritualism	Svengala Bros.
29	"	<u>THE TEMPTATION OF MONEY</u>	G. Knight Co.
30	"	"	"
31	"	"	"
12	January 1888	Lecture	Prof. G.R. Cromwell
13	"	"	"
19	February	<u>A FATAL ERROR</u>	Harrison & Gourlay Co.

27	February	1888	Choral Concert	Alberte Singers
28	"	"	"	"
29	"	"	"	"
9	March	"	<u>THE WAGES OF SIN</u>	Starring Ethel Tucker
10	"	"	"	"
15	"	"	Choral concert	Rotating amateur festival
16	"	"	"	"
17	"	"	"	"
18	"	"	"	"
19	April	"	Instrumental concert	Doring's Band
21	"	"	"	"
28	May	"	<u>THE BLACK CROOK</u>	Maubury & Overton Co.
29	"	"	"	"
30	"	"	"	"
31	"	"	"	"
22	June	"	Instrumental concert	Doring's Band

Tenth Season, 1888-1889

4	September	1888	<u>A WOMAN'S VENGEANCE</u>	Starring Ethel Tucker
10	"	"	Instrumental concert	Fadette Orchestra
15	"	"	<u>MR. POTTER OF TEXAS</u>	Maubury & Overton Co.
16	"	"	"	"
13	October	"	Instrumental Concert	Doring's Band
16	November	"	VARIETY SHOW	Starring Alice J. Shaw
30	"	"	Instrumental Concert	Theodore Thomas Orchestra
1	December	"	Choral concert	Yan Glinda Choir
14	"	"	Choral concert	St. Paul's Cathedral Choir
27	January	1889	VARIETY SHOW	Herman's Magic-Land
28	"	"	<u>GILHOOLEYS ABROAD</u>	Hanley Co.
29	"	"	"	"
30	"	"	<u>THE DEAR IRISH HOME</u>	Starring Dan McCarthy
31	"	"	"	"
7	February	"	<u>THE BOWERY GIRL</u>	Starring Lillian Keene
8	"	"	"	"
9	"	"	"	"
10	"	"	"	"
11	March	"	<u>THE NAUGHTY KID</u>	Myra Collins Co.
12	"	"	<u>ALBERT'S HOME</u>	"
19	"	"	VARIETY SHOW	Mott & Gaylord Co.
20	"	"	"	"
27	April	"	<u>THE MERCHANT OF VENICE</u>	Starring Elihu Spencer
28	"	"	"	"
29	"	"	"	"
30	"	"	"	"
10	May	"	MINSTREL SHOW	E. Burke Minstrels
11	"	"	"	"
12	"	"	"	"
13	"	"	"	"
24	June	"	<u>MISSY'S CHOICE</u>	Starring Little Prudence
25	"	"	"	"
26	"	"	"	"
29	"	"	Lecture	A.A. Hopkins

Eleventh Season, 1889-1890

30 August 1889	<u>LITTLE LORD FAUNTLEROY</u>	Starring Eva Tanguay
7 September "	<u>ALWAYS A WEED</u>	G. Knight Co.
19 " "	<u>QUESTIONS</u>	Starring Elliott Barnes
20 " "	"	"
23 " "	VARIETY SHOW	Chang's Museum Co.
24 " "	"	"
25 " "	"	"
6 October "	MINSTREL SHOW	Callender Minstrels
7 " "	"	"
8 " "	"	"
9 " "	"	"
15 November "	Choral concert	Mendelssohn Club
12 December "	<u>DADDY'S GIRL</u>	Starring Frances Bishop
13 " "	"	"
14 " "	"	"
15 " "	"	"
16 " "	<u>MISS CELEBRITY</u>	Starring Dimples
17 " "	"	"
18 " "	"	"
20 January 1890	VARIETY SHOW	Harry Miner Co.
23 " "	Lecture	National W.C.T.U.
30 " "	<u>THE LITTLE DUKE</u>	Wilbur Opera Co.
31 " "	"	"
13 February "	Instrumental Concert	Doring's Band
17 " "	Choral Concert	Helping Hand Mission
26 " "	<u>MILES BROON</u>	Starring W.J. Scanlan
5 March "	VARIETY SHOW	Mott & Gaylord Co.
9 " "	<u>CAMILLE</u>	Starring Irene Terry
10 " "	"	"
11 " "	"	"
16 April "	<u>LIGHTS O' LONDON</u>	Shook & Collier Co.
17 " "	"	"
25 " "	<u>TALLY HO!</u>	Joseph Jefferson Co.
26 " "	"	"
27 " "	"	"
28 " "	"	"
8 May "	Instrumental Concert	Pablo de Savasate, Violinist
14 June "	Instrumental Concert	Imperial Court Orchestra of Vienna
16 " "	Instrumental Concert	Doring's Band

Twelfth Season, 1890-1891

19 September 1890	<u>AUNT JACK</u>	Atkinson Co.
25 " "	<u>TWO OLD CRONIES</u>	Union Square Co.
30 " "	<u>THE CANUCK</u>	Starring McKee Rankin
6 October "	<u>NATURAL GAS</u>	Donnelly & Girard Co.
21 " "	<u>THE GYPSY BARON</u>	Conreid Opera Co.
22 " "	"	"

25	October	1890	<u>THE NEIGHBORS</u>	Henshaw Co.
18	November	"	<u>JOAN OR ARC</u>	Starring Maude Banks
27	"	"	Instrumental concert	Royal Edinburgh Co.
9	December	"	<u>THE BROWN PATTI</u>	Starring Mme. Selek
10	"	"	"	"
9	January	1891	MINSTREL SHOW	Wilson Minstrels
25	February	"	<u>CLEOPATRA</u>	McLean & Prescott Co.
26	"	"	"	"
27	"	"	"	"
28	"	"	"	"
5	March	"	MINSTREL SHOW	Fisk Jubilee Singers
6	"	"	"	"
10	April	"	<u>PECK'S BAD BOY</u>	Atkinson Co.
13	"	"	Instrumental Concert	Cohoes Harmonia Orchestra
16	"	"	MINSTREL SHOW	Callender Minstrels
19	"	"	<u>DIMPLES</u>	Starring Miss Mulle
20	May	"	Lecture	Josh Billings
28	"	"	<u>UNCLE TOM'S CABIN</u>	Leland Combination Co.
29	"	"	"	"
30	"	"	"	"

Thirteenth Season, 1891-1892

13	September	1891	<u>BOHEMIAN GIRL</u>	Holman Opera Troupe
14	"	"	"	"
23	"	"	VARIETY SHOW	Pat Rooney's Star Troupe
24	"	"	"	"
25	"	"	"	"
27	October	"	VARIETY SHOW	Billy Barry Co.
28	"	"	<u>COLLEEN BRAWN</u>	Slavin Co.
29	"	"	"	"
30	"	"	"	"
31	"	"	"	"
6	November	"	VARIETY SHOW	Criswell's Menagerie
7	"	"	"	"
8	"	"	"	"
9	"	"	"	"
13	December	"	Temperance Lecture	Salvation Army
25	"	"	VARIETY SHOW	Parisian Pretty Co.
26	"	"	"	"
27	"	"	"	"
5	January	"	<u>FUN IN A BOARDINGHOUSE</u>	Fifth Ave. Comedy Co.
6	"	"	"	"
13	"	"	Choral concert	Harmony Chorale
17	"	"	MINSTREL SHOW	Duprez & Benedict Co.
18	"	"	"	"
19	"	"	"	"
20	"	"	"	"
25	February	"	VARIETY SHOW	Pat Rooney's Star Troupe
26	"	"	"	"
27	"	"	<u>PECK'S BAD BOY</u>	Atkinson Co.
28	"	"	"	"

8	March	1891	VARIETY SHOW	Parisian Pretty Co.
9	"	"	"	"
10	"	"	"	"
11	"	"	"	"
23	April	"	Choral Concert	J.G. Parkhurst, Director
28	"	"	MINSTREL SHOW	Callender Minstrels
29	"	"	"	"
30	"	"	Choral Concert	Harmony Chorale
4	May	"	Choral Concert	Mme. Lillian Blauvelt, soprano
12	"	"	Instrumental concert	Doring's Band

NOTE: From 13 May 1891 to the closing of the theatre in 1901, the Music Hall was used primarily for dances. One professional theatrical was performed--CAD, THE TOMBOY benefit performance for the Wolves of N.Y. Co., on 22 October 1897.

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