

From Vaudeville to the Silver Screen: Popular Entertainment in Lancaster 1900-1930

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American society changed drastically in the early twentieth century. With the rise of a new, urban-industrial environment, streams of immigrants and other workers moved to the city of Lancaster. This heterogeneous mass of people found an alternative to the factory and neighborhood in popular amusements such as vaudeville and the movies. People from different classes and backgrounds met to share common experiences as they sought similar releases from the tedium of everyday life. Although all patrons who viewed the same show may not have received the same message from the acts, they could all use the vaudeville show or movie as a common reference point with which to identify in the changing urban-industrial society.

While vaudeville and the movies may have together served as common experiences for the people, vaudeville and movie theaters competed with each other for patrons. At first, these forms of entertainment held class-specific clienteles, with vaudeville attracting the middle class and the movies catering to the working class. When advances in the movie industry increased with movie theaters' appeal to a broader, less class-specific group of people, competition between vaudeville and movie theaters became intense.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Lancaster County possessed the richest farmland in the United States. The population in the agriculturally-oriented city of Lancaster resided within one mile of Penn Square at the center of town.¹ As in many towns in America, Victorian values prevailed. Leaders of public opinion, especially ministers and educators, believed in the elements of the classic Victorian "character." These included moral integrity, self-control, sober earnestness, industriousness, and the belief that all activities should be constructive. Across America, the wealthier classes tried to promote these

values within their communities by building art galleries, museums, libraries, and, in Lancaster, the Fulton Opera House.² Ministers and other reformers censored theatrical performances and wrote editorials denouncing anything they saw as "risque."³ As one source stated, the city of Lancaster exercised care in the matter of scrutiny of public amusements: "no immoral shows are allowed."⁴

Ultimately, during the latter part of the century, American society changed as the United States became an urban-industrial nation.^{5,6} In Lancaster, people began to move from the farms to the city in the 1890s. Agriculture remained the major source of wealth in the county, but large manufacturing industries soon gave the farms some competition. New scientific inventions, such as electric and gas lights and gas heat, made the city more attractive and the streets safer at night.⁷ As newcomers from abroad and from rural areas moved to the city in greater numbers, they found that cheap housing was available. A comfortable brick house with hot and cold running water could be had for twelve dollars a month.⁸ Electric street railways ran from the center of town and provided transportation for a nickel a ride.⁹ The economic slump of the early 1890s disappeared; and partly as a result of the Spanish-American War, business and industry in Lancaster boomed. The tobacco and brewing industries hired many more workers. Lancaster organized an Improvement Company to help large manufacturing industries to locate in the city, and formed the Lancaster Board of Trade to regulate the industries once they moved in.¹⁰

By 1901, Lancaster could be described as a "modern city." The population had increased from 17,000 in 1860 to 46,000 by 1900. As a result of a "business outbreak," unemployment was "non-existent."¹¹ The Hamilton Watch Company, dating from 1892, earned the slogan, "the watch of railroad accuracy" soon after the turn of the century. The Hamilton plant covered two entire city blocks.¹² Armstrong Cork Company moved into the city in 1907 and employed additional thousands of workers. Steel and iron works and the tobacco processing plants became leading employers as well.¹³ By 1909, Lancaster ranked fourth in manufacturing among the cities of Pennsylvania.

Changes in transportation made possible an even greater increase in population in the area. People could live farther away from the center of town but still travel there to work without too much trouble. The Hershey Caramel Company, predecessor of The Hershey Chocolate Company, began using an automobile for deliveries in February of 1900; but most people relied on the electric railways, which by 1910 encompassed one hundred and fifty miles of suburban track alone. Most people preferred the cheap, fast transportation offered by the electric railway companies, such as the Conestoga Traction Company, to the idiosyncrasies of the early automobiles.¹⁴

As is evident in Lancaster and the rest of the country, the character of cities also underwent a change at this time. The transformation from a rural, agricultural society to an urban, industrial society held wide-spread implications. These can be seen as the character of public amusements was transformed.¹⁵

The working classes spent between eleven and twelve hours on the job per day. They had neither the time nor the money to indulge in such upper-class pleasures as the Fulton Opera House or country clubs. Lodges and church organizations fulfilled some social functions. Neighborhood saloons, dance halls, and pool rooms fulfilled others.¹⁶ Bowling at the Franklin and Marshall alleys became the rage after 1900.¹⁷

Yet the working class required something more. Genteel standards of morality and ideal beauty did not appeal to the new working class as avenues of recreation. Instead, the urban-industrial population wanted an escape from routine and a better understanding of American society. Migrants both from the farms and from other countries had difficulty assimilating to city life. Most neighborhoods lacked a sense of community, and many residents did not identify with the city of Lancaster as a whole. A growing sense of identity and community came as one consequence of vaudeville. Vaudeville evolved as elements from earlier forms of entertainment, such as variety shows, minstrel acts, dime museums, circuses, and burlesque houses, were combined into a continuous performance of incredible diversity.¹⁸ Vaudeville thus overcame the lack of versatility present in most of these other amusements and attracted a broad-based audience from the working and middle classes.

Vaudeville appeared in Lancaster around 1900. The Fulton Opera House started presenting some vaudeville shows at the end of the nineteenth century, and the Orange Street Opera House and the Orange Street Family Theatre occasionally showed vaudeville also. But vaudeville flourished in Lancaster only after the Family Theatre moved to 220-224 West King Street in 1905. Soon thereafter, vaudeville houses, such as the Colonial Theatre and the Roof Garden of the Woolworth Building, appeared quickly on King and Queen Streets. The pattern of vaudeville houses shows that they clustered around the center of town, where most of the people lived and where streetcar lines ran.¹⁹ The ease of access to vaudeville houses may have contributed to their popularity.

Some of the vaudeville houses followed the practice of the Fulton Opera House and other "legitimate" theaters by running a winter season only. These theaters closed from June to August. However, during the summer, the Family Theatre's manager, Ed Mozart, moved his vaudeville shows to Rocky Springs Park Theatre on the outskirts of town.²⁰ The Roof Garden of the Woolworth Building also presented vaudeville during the summer months.²¹

Vaudeville became a big business in some cities, and in Lancaster it was at least a "valuable addition to the city's business interests."²² As one source noted, "the economic development of vaudeville followed the general American trend toward the combination of enterprises" as vaudeville managers circulated shows by becoming part of a network of booking offices.²³ The Colonial Theatre in Lancaster became part of the B. F. Keith Company, which controlled the booking interests in America from New York to San Francisco.²⁴

Booking shows from all over the country enabled managers of vaudeville

houses to obtain a variety of acts, enough to please a diverse range of patrons. Musical numbers were an important part of the show. Such acts as "The Four Musical Maids," "The Paris Chambers Trio," "The Famous Miners' Quartet" (who sang Scotch and Irish melodies and favorite old ballads), and "Hayes and Suits," who advertised song, talk and dancing, came to Lancaster's theaters. A typical performance usually included an act that eluded reality. Magicians, ventriloquists, female and male impersonators, and "Onaip the Hindu Mystery" entertained Lancastrians. Most shows that came to Lancaster included some sort of acrobatic act, such as "Arminta and Burke, Famous Gymnasts," "The Demacos, America's Speediest Ring Act," "The Flying Lamars," "Momos Arabs, Six Great Whirlwind Acrobats," and finally, "Hoop Rolling by the Gene Muller Trio." A vaudeville show would not be complete without an animal act such as "Wesley's Sea Lions," the monkey "Alfred the Great," who attacked one of the dwarfs from another act, and a troop of performing cats. Dramatic "playlets," performed by groups such as "Blanche Washburn and Company," "Summerlin and McMullin," and "Madame Besson and Company," were a favorite part of many vaudeville shows. Patrons also enjoyed the many comedy pieces, including "Emerson and Baldwin - Just returned from Australia! - A Great Comedy, Juggling Novelty, with Special Scenery and Beautiful Electrical Effects!," "Ellsworth and Lindon in a Screaming Farce, 'His Day off'," and "Hap Handy and Company with their Comedy Soap Bubbles." Occasionally, a vaudeville show would include a minstrel or "blackface" act; "Miss Josephine Saxton and her Quartette of Colored Youngsters" were popular. Managers of vaudeville houses usually placed the star attraction right before the last act. Performing in this capacity, Francesca Redding—"one of America's brightest vaudeville stars"—came to Lancaster, as did "Patti's Diving Girls," who performed in a huge tank of twenty tons of water. Finally, most vaudeville shows ended on this note: "good moving pictures will conclude the show."²⁵

Acts like these attracted huge crowds of patrons. The growing popularity, first of the Family Theater and later the Colonial, can be seen in the newspaper advertisements and reviews. From 1905 to 1906, the Family Theatre's ads appeared as a few lines under the large ad typically published for the Fulton Opera House, which at this time still focused its entertainment on "legitimate" plays and concerts. Ads for vaudeville usually appeared over the weekend, and were usually placed on page 5 of the newspapers. With the beginning of 1910, ads for the Fulton and Family began appearing on page 2. Reviews of performances at the Fulton came under the heading of "Amusements"; but reviewers placed the Family's acts under their own heading, showing the more prominent position of the Family Theater at this time. However, when the Colonial Theatre opened in 1912 at 166 North Queen Street, its ads immediately eclipsed those of the Family Theatre, which was under new management.²⁶ The Colonial held a position as the leading vaudeville house in Lancaster for many years, its ads becoming even larger than the Fulton's.

This apparent acceptance of vaudeville by the newspapers is in direct contrast to some factions in Lancaster who opposed the institution. After a description of Lancaster's amusements which featured the Fulton, one source stated that, "those not inclined to the legitimate stage could find plenty of vaudeville entertainment."²⁷ The new Lancaster Law and Order Society, under the direction of the Reverend Clifford G. Twombly, launched an anti-vice crusade in 1914 that touched the vaudeville houses. Managements at the Colonial and elsewhere took care to choose acts that would not be censored by the Society's inspectors.²⁸

In any case, vaudeville appealed to the working classes of Lancaster. Working class life presented a grim picture. Constant drudgery and poor living conditions produced a need to escape the dirt, loneliness and deprivation of their reality into the glitter of vaudeville.²⁹ As John Kasson says, vaudeville also served as a safety valve. Workers in other countries tended to create disturbances and destruction within the factories as they had no other way to unleash their feelings. Vaudeville provided a means of social release and control that led to the acceptance of the cycle of production and consumption factory and other workers were caught in.³⁰

Vaudeville managers made an effort to keep vaudeville prices reasonable so the working class could afford to attend. Prices for vaudeville shows ranged from 10 and 20 cents for a show at the Family, far less than the price range of between 50 cents and \$1.50 for an average show at the Fulton.³¹ Vaudeville house locations in the center of town along streetcar lines helped the people who lived in town and those who lived close to the outlying factories to get to the shows. Therefore, for only a small fee and little trouble, a working class family could gain instant pleasure and gratification.³²

Eventually, others besides the working class turned in increasing numbers away from the Victorian "gospel of work," that stated every activity should be productive, to a new "gospel of relaxation" as vaudeville and other amusements became more accessible.³³ As the economy became organized more and more around consumption and leisure as well as production, amusements such as vaudeville became the "new opiate of the people."³⁴ The working and middle classes became attracted to the magic of vaudeville. Its unique properties, "committed to no particular tradition, capable of infinite variations"³⁵ held out a gravitational attraction for many, regardless of class.

The contrast between the glamorous decor of most vaudeville houses in Lancaster and the homes of the middle and working classes alone provided an incentive to attend the theater. People entered the doors into a world of light and color which "purged them of the mundane activity of the street."³⁶ As one source expressed it, "the ornate facade" of a vaudeville palace "reinforced the message of the show."³⁷ In Lancaster, when both the Family and Colonial Theatres opened, the front pages of the newspapers stressed the beauty of the architecture and design. Mosaic tile floors, brass chandeliers, marble decorations,

and paintings on the ceilings were just some of the attractions. The Family Theatre's lobby featured an elegant stairway leading to the main auditorium, and columns flanking the entrance to the auditorium gave the effect of a colonial mansion.³⁸

"The palatial theaters themselves, whose splendor easily outstripped most spectators' desire for evidence of success...built up expectations and inspired images."³⁹ Many people in Lancaster wished to raise their status in life, and the sight of these glamorous surroundings encouraged them by showing where success could lead. Workers and their families saw others like themselves succeed on the stage and in the vaudeville business. The middle class saw a glimpse of how the rich lived. All watched dramas which took place in elaborate stage settings, and whose participants wore elegant clothes. Even though the props were just that, the audience saw them as reality. If we work harder or if we are lucky, they must have thought, we could live like that.

Vaudeville houses also showed the audiences the avenues to this prosperity: glamour, glibness, and know-how. The shows presented performers who flaunted the symbols of success: clothes, noise, and self-confidence.⁴⁰ The institution of vaudeville became a manifestation of the belief in progress, the pursuit of happiness, and the hope of material gain.⁴¹ Ultimately, people thought, they would obtain reward for their labor. More importantly, through vaudeville, success came to be viewed as a right for all those who lived in the new, heterogeneous city.⁴²

Occasionally, audiences could even participate in the entertainment. Vaudeville houses in Lancaster regularly held amateur shows. People could also join in a benefit because in an effort to further endear vaudeville to the middle class, some vaudeville managers occasionally gave proceeds to a local charity. Sometimes, amateur nights and benefits were combined, as when the Family Theatre held a week of regular and local acts to benefit the Lancaster General Hospital.⁴³ Vaudeville house managers often held contests to draw in customers and help the people to feel more a part of the business and success of vaudeville. From 1906 to 1913, the Family Theatre gave away hats, candy, Christmas turkeys, and cash, to name a few of the prizes in various contests.⁴⁴

Managements of vaudeville houses attempted to keep their heterogeneous clientele happy, not only by providing a variety of entertainment but by presenting a glamorous successful front. While the elegant setting and various contests had attracted the audience to the show, the comforts the managers provided made the audience feel like royalty and made the people want to come back. Consideration for the patrons, regardless of class, sex, or age, became a prime concern of the managers. "The general construction, equipment, and operation of a vaudeville house, from the selection of a site to the running of a nursery, from staff management to advertising policy, became the subject of careful study."⁴⁵ The Colonial and Family Theatres again provided good examples of this phenomenon in Lancaster. Both theaters held seating for over one thousand



people. The Colonial boasted retiring rooms for ladies and gentlemen on each floor (with hot and cold running water). The Family also furnished both men's and women's toilet and retiring rooms. The Colonial advertised steam heat; and the Family, as well as being heated with "scores of radiators" in the winter, kept "Six Monster Ice Cooling Fans" for hot days. The Family, as its name indicates, encouraged children to attend with or without their parents, and provided a room with the penny machines that the children liked. Managers of vaudeville houses also had to consider audience safety. Fire remained a cause of concern for many vaudeville patrons, and the Family Theatre had ample provisions for security. These included the use of metal and asbestos in the construction, numerous exits, and fire plugs to provide the water to extinguish a fire. Thus patrons could enjoy the comfort of the theater relatively free from worry.⁴⁶

As patrons enjoyed the comfort of the vaudeville theaters, they learned, too. Certainly they learned the fruits of success, but they gained something more. Lancaster's rapid growth crowded in an urban area many people who shared a rural upbringing. These people needed models for behavior and guides for living in the modern city. Vaudeville combined images of rural life with the

new and exciting images of the city through the surroundings, stage routines, and etiquette presented.⁴⁷ The stage routines and managements' policies helped people to learn behavior and appearances that made them more able to secure an identity as part of the new urban, industrial society.

Vaudeville taught different social conventions in different ways. For direct controls on audience behavior during a performance, managers used boldly printed signs. Floormen and bouncers passed out small printed cards asking unruly patrons to calm down. These methods toned down exuberant conduct and taught patrons to use applause and rapt attention to signal their approval of a performance. Deadly silence became a signal for disapproval.⁴⁸ Vaudeville houses taught modes of speech and fashion more indirectly. The performers' smart talk, quick comebacks, and easy phrases caught on with the patrons because they enabled the people to communicate in a concentrated form of speech suitable to fast-paced city life. Performers usually dressed up for their acts, and the fashions they wore, combined with the very act of wearing "Sunday best," had an impact on the fashions of the patrons. Some routines, especially acrobats, jugglers, and animal acts, stressed efficiency and discipline and showed that even animals could learn self-control. The precision and timing of certain acts stressed the need to follow the clock, as rural Lancastrians accustomed to following the sun's movements needed to learn.⁴⁹

A sense of community gradually developed as more people discovered that vaudeville's qualities could contain more than entertainment. The different classes of people, whatever their country of origin, began to see the vaudeville house as a place to share a common experience. Formerly, most modes of entertainment restricted clientele to a few. Lodges only admitted men, and church functions usually drew only members; but vaudeville held an appeal for everyone. Actresses as well as actors appeared, and were equally successful. Acts often had an ethnic orientation, and the immigrants united to laugh at themselves.

If vaudeville meshed so well with life in Lancaster in the early twentieth century, why did vaudeville begin to decline after 1910? An analysis of Lancaster's City Directories shows that the period when most vaudeville houses closed (1913-1914) coincided with the period of the most movie houses present in the city in the decade. Previously, vaudeville had held the patronage of working- and middle-class audiences in Lancaster. The movies had appealed to the working class alone, and most middle class people would not have considered attending the early motion picture shows. What changed in society and in the movie industry to attract all classes away from vaudeville after 1910? An analysis of the phenomenal development of movies may suggest an answer.

Far from feeling that the first movies provided a threat, most vaudeville managers included a few minutes of moving pictures in their vaudeville shows when movies became available. These first movies, not much more than a minute long, often depicted vaudeville acts, curiosities and skits little different from what the audience saw in a live vaudeville show.⁵⁰ Vaudeville managers usually

put a dozen of these one-minute films together to make up the final vaudeville "turn" in the program.⁵¹ In 1905, the Family Theatre in Lancaster offered movies at the end of a vaudeville show which also included a comedy sketch, a novelty duo, jugglers, and a comedian. In the summer of 1906, an ad for the Family Theatre heralded the "Six Monster Ice Cooling Fans," seven big acts, and the "greatest of moving pictures." Also in Lancaster, the Electric Vaudeville Palace at 10 West King Street advertised vaudeville and moving pictures, and the Colonial Theatre offered four acts of vaudeville and three reels of movies for only a nickel.⁵²

In Lancaster, this pattern of vaudeville combined with movies changed before 1910. A few vaudeville theaters began advertising only movies. The Electric Vaudeville Palace advertised vaudeville and movies in 1908, but by 1909 advertised movies alone.⁵³ At this time also, names of theaters offering only movies appeared in *City Directories* and in newspaper ads.

Movie theaters in the first decade of the twentieth century catered to the working classes. Entrepreneurs tried to make movies accessible to these people by showing movies in storefronts or storerooms downtown where the people could easily reach the movies by streetcar, and by making the price cheap—usually only a nickel. George M. Krupa opened a "Nickelodeon" in Lancaster at 43 North Queen Street in 1906. "Dreamland," housed in a large storeroom, could seat up to one hundred and sixty persons. For their nickel, patrons saw a two-reel feature, one Pathe newsreel, and a fashion film for the ladies. Live piano music accompanied each silent fifteen-minute reel. Krupa purchased his first projector for this theater from a Sears, Roebuck and Co. catalog.⁵⁴ The quality of these early projectors in nickelodeons such as Dreamland left much to be desired. The feed mechanism on the projectors made the screen image flicker and flash. Films deteriorated rapidly from use and so became harder to watch at each presentation. The rate of movement on the screen changed from reel to reel since cameras were operated by hand and the rate of frames per second varied.⁵⁵ However, as the daughter of George Krupa said, "this was the best to be had at the time and everyone was happy with it."⁵⁶

At the time the Krupas opened their nickelodeon, New Jersey provided the setting for many films. In 1893, the Edison Company had begun making motion pictures in West Orange. As mentioned before, the content of the early films paralleled vaudeville acts.⁵⁷ Around 1900, filmmakers "advanced" to making risqué films with sexual themes, perhaps in order to compete with the popularity of burlesque theaters, at the same time. However, since many middle-class citizens objected to these films, producers gradually began to make films that told a more wholesome story.⁵⁸ Edwin S. Porter started the trend in 1903 with "The Great Train Robbery." As Robert Sklar states,

Porter was the first to unite motion-picture spectacle with myths and stories about America . . . He was reaching beyond the vaudeville turn, the burlesque skit, and the magic act into the realm

of the dime novel and the stage melodrama, the picture book and ballad, the uncharted ground . . . where folklore and commercial entertainment met and mingled . . . In 'The Great Train Robbery,' Porter gave life to legend.⁵⁹

Through the movies, Porter had brought the Western story of bandits and their fate to the people who could witness the story as they never had in a vaudeville theater.

Movies now offered audiences something that vaudeville did not. The possibilities of the new medium are brought out in Robert Sklar's comment on movies: "what excited audiences of the earliest large-screen projections was not films of vaudeville acts but scenes never before seen inside a theater—crashing waves, onrushing locomotives, the wonders of nature and machines, far-off places, rare and unusual sights."⁶⁰ The movies could provide a picture of life beyond the scope of any vaudeville act. Not even an act featuring Princess Wan-A-Tea (with real Indian songs and the Great Indian Rain Dance)⁶¹ or the monkey, "Alfred the Great," who acted almost human,⁶² could show an audience events that happened at a distance, at a range people could not experience any other way. A cameraman who filmed an "execution" complete with the effect of a severed head showed his audience a much more realistic death than any vaudeville act could. This cameraman and others realized the ability of movies "to give viewers access to events that happened when they were not there, to the dangerous, the fantastic, the grotesque, the impossible, at a close but safe remove."⁶³

In Lancaster, audiences enjoyed such early Westerns as "A Western Maid,"⁶⁴ and "The Squaw Man."⁶⁵ Actual war scenes such as the exploits of the "U-35"⁶⁶ and scenes of foreign countries like "Kerensky in the Russian Revolution"⁶⁷ and "From the Manger to the Cross," which was filmed in the Holy Land.⁶⁸ Movies like these broadened the horizons of many who would never otherwise get a chance to view these scenes, or who might not wish to view these scenes live, as in the case of the war movies! As Anita Stewart, an "international screen favorite" interviewed in a Lancaster newspaper, said: "people whose interests centered chiefly within four walls of their homes were awakened to an interest in the outside world through the screen." She also stated, "motion pictures have stirred up the imagination and aroused interest in the likes, habits and problems of others."⁶⁹

A few years after Edwin Porter and others noticed the potential of movies to stir up the imagination, a New York showman, Adolph Zukor, decided to explore this potential and to experiment with longer and more expensive films to appeal to a new audience, the middle class. Zukor tried to make movies modeled after more familiar middle-class forms of entertainment, such as plays starring well-known stage actors and actresses. Zukor began by purchasing the rights to a four-reel French film, "Queen Elizabeth" which starred Sarah Bernhardt, one of the most famous stage actresses of the time.⁷⁰ "Queen Elizabeth" appeared

in Lancaster in 1912 at George Krupa's new theater, the Hippodrome at 150-152 North Queen Street.⁷¹ Adolph Zukor then asked Edwin Porter to make more movies of famous plays with famous players and Porter soon made "The Count of Monte Cristo" with James O'Neill (father of Eugene O'Neill) and "The Prisoner of Zenda" starring James K. Hackett,⁷² which both appeared in Lancaster in 1913.⁷³ Zukor's stage formula seemed to work as the middle class across the country began attending his movies to see Italian or American films of plays or novels.⁷⁴

Later, movie-makers used other strategies to get audiences to come to their shows. They began making serial stories and running a continuous story with one episode released each week. George Krupa's daughter said that in Lancaster, people became so excited over the "thrill-packed two-reelers . . . that nothing could have kept patrons from returning the following weeks to see how the hero and heroine could possibly have found a way of escape from their almost certain-death predicaments. "The Perils of Pauline," starring Pearl White, "Ruth of the Rockies," starring Ruth Roland, and "The Million Dollar Mystery" and its sequel, "Zudora," broke attendance records in Lancaster around 1914.⁷⁵ The element of suspense in these long-running serials kept Lancaster citizens coming back to the movie theaters week after week.

In 1913, however, D. W. Griffith had changed the movie industry when he began making movies using extremely innovative techniques. He based his movie, "Judith of Bethulia," on a Biblical story and created a lavish spectacle of a type never before seen. He used the "Montage" style, or the "building up of impressions through the juxtaposition of separate shots, in order to create a single, complete mental image or emotional state." By constantly shifting the camera's range of vision, Griffith produced a complete world in which the audience witnesses "every act, every gesture, every secret."⁷⁶ A Lancastrian approved of this style, describing "Judith of Bethulia" as one of the best films of 1913.⁷⁷

In 1915, Griffith previewed his signature movie, "The Birth of a Nation," an epic about the American Civil War and Reconstruction, and the most popular movie of the year. Griffith wanted this film to be significant enough to convince the middle class once and for all that the movie could be every bit as good as live drama. In this movie, the longest made up to that time, he succeeded in demonstrating to many community leaders and opinion makers that movies could "appeal to their emotions and please their aesthetic tastes."⁷⁸ However, the film's racism caused a great deal of controversy in Lancaster County, where it was shown at the Columbia Opera House, and elsewhere.⁷⁹

Even a film like "The Birth of a Nation" did not fully convince middle-class Lancastrians of the value of the movies. As had been the case with vaudeville, the protectors of the city's morality looked with alarm upon the new medium. Five groups investigated the moving picture shows in 1917; a committee from the Iris Club, the Social Welfare committee of the Lancaster Chamber of

Commerce, a group of private individuals, a group of college men, and the Lancaster Ministerial Association.⁸⁰ The ministers found what they called a "serious situation." They believed that moving pictures promoted particular standards of life, and that the moving pictures influenced "the lives and characters of the young people of America far and wide, for good or for evil."⁸¹ The ministers believed that the movies' potential for bad influence should be investigated, and that parents should think before allowing children to attend films they, as parents, knew nothing about. These twenty-three ministers viewed the realistic scenes in movies as anything but wonderful. They believed that children, and even some adults, were so susceptible and impressionable that they might try to use the ideas in the film in real life. The ministers classified thirty-one of the one hundred and thirty-four movies they viewed as "bad" in moral and ethical quality and capable of influencing weak minds. Thirty movies classified as bad showed scenes of marital infidelity, bigamy, illicit love, immorality or lust, in "unnecessary and objectionable ways." Twenty-six movies had one or more murders or suicides in them, nineteen showed intemperate drinking and drunkenness, fourteen showed robbery and theft and their methods, twelve showed gunplay and ten showed gambling. Seven movies surveyed showed "poisoning, chloroforming, the giving of 'knock-out' drops or the taking of drugs," seven showed "the low resorts and habitués of the underworld," and five showed kidnapping and blackmailing.⁸² The ministers suggested the censorship of movies that express these vices.

Studies such as the one cited above had more than one beneficial effect. Besides making "decent citizens" aware of the vices movies could suggest, they helped to make the middle class more aware of the potential for positive influences the movies held, if only high standards could be set. Several ministers in the above survey noted that they were convinced of the possibilities of moving pictures for "wholesome instruction and entertainment"⁸³ as well as "innocent amusement or elevating influence."⁸⁴ They noted that movies could be clean and moral and still be popular, an encouraging fact. As The Rev. George I. Browne and The Rev. C. Elvin Haupt said, "the moving picture is with us to stay. It can be made a mighty means of instruction and ethical uplift, of moral inspiration" if guarded by standards.⁸⁵ As "One Mother" wrote to a Philadelphia newspaper, "The 'movie' is an unlimited force for good, an unparalleled factor educationally and morally."⁸⁶ Anita Stewart even argued that movies stimulated reading, and that movie theaters closed saloons, gambling houses, and pool rooms!⁸⁷ As a cheap, accessible form of entertainment which provided exciting shows, the movie theaters became an alternative experience and an alternative environment for people who had frequented these other amusements. To the guardians of the family's morals (mothers and clergymen), the movies became more acceptable than places where one could lose money or sobriety. For whatever reason, as an alternative evil or a potential good, the middle class came to accept the movies as a valid form of entertainment.

During and after World War I, Lancaster newspaper ads testify to the growth in popularity of war movies and their promotion of the middle-class value of patriotism. In 1918, the Hamilton Theatre at 160 North Queen Street ran large ads in the newspapers to tell about their feature film, "The Spy," starring Dustin Farnum. Reviewers spoke of the timeliness of the movie which told about German spies in the United States.⁸⁸ Audiences could view the film in the afternoon for ten cents, plus a one-cent war tax, and in the evenings for fifteen cents. The same week "The Spy" ran, the Hamilton also previewed "Kerensky in the Russian Revolution," which showed Russian leaders, prisons and other scenes to make Americans more aware of the country "which is attracting so much attention at the present time."⁸⁹ Also in 1918, the Hippodrome Theatre presented "Miss Jackie of the Army," a film with a "fine patriotic vein running throughout."⁹⁰ By 1920, the Hamilton showed the exploits of the "U-55," a German submarine. According to the newspaper ad, "the actual sinking of the Allies' ships is shown in the production which should be seen by anyone who has a drop of red blood in their veins."⁹¹

The growth of popularity of the movies in general can be seen as the newspapers steadily increased their coverage of movies' advertisements and reviews at this time. By 1920, Friday and Saturday issues of Lancaster Newspapers featured a large headline, "At the Movies," under which fell columns of large ads, reviews, and occasionally, news of national and international movie stars.⁹² Sometimes, the newspapers ran pictures of stars especially for fans' scrapbooks. According to George Krupa's daughter, some of the favorite stars of the silent movies were Charlie Chaplin, Mabel Normand and "Little Mary" Pickford, among others. The "Cowboy" Tom Mix, a particular favorite of Franklin and Marshall undergraduates,⁹³ was at one time a guest of the Krupas.⁹⁴ The newspaper ads showed that movies starring these actors and actresses frequently came to Lancaster. The Hippodrome often featured movies with Tom Mix, such a "The Speed Maniac."⁹⁵ The Scenic Theatre at 141-143 North Queen Street often featured Charlie Chaplin movies,⁹⁶ also favorites with Franklin and Marshall students.⁹⁷ Mary Pickford came to the Grand Theatre, 135-137 North Queen Street, in such movies as "Heart O' The Hills."⁹⁸ Sometimes, the Krupa children let their friends from Franklin and Marshall preview these films over the weekend before the movies' official opening the following Monday.⁹⁹

Theater owners had attracted a middle-class audience with films of plays or novels, and had kept the audiences coming back with suspenseful serials and war movies, and movies with well-known stars. After films like "The Birth of a Nation" had more firmly secured a large clientele for the movie theaters some movie managers began to feel that the movies needed a new environment before they could convince middle-class movie-goers to become steady patrons.¹⁰⁰ Middle-class educators, clergymen or charity-workers who ventured into the early storefront theaters had been shocked by the atmosphere of crowding darkness, and stale, unpleasant air.¹⁰¹ This became one of the reasons the middle class

denounced the early movies. Clearly, theater owners who wished to attract the new audiences could not lure the middle class into such a setting, particularly if they wanted to compete with vaudeville theaters, which had presented glamorous decor in Lancaster since at least 1905. The tastes and expectations of the middle class required a new atmosphere that movie theater owners began to provide. The beauty of this idea of making the theaters larger and fancier was that the working class appreciated the new ambiance as much as the middle class; and far from changing clientele, theater owners found that they had in effect doubled the number of people attracted to the movie theaters.

Like the proprietors of vaudeville houses, movie theater owners also discovered that the exotic architecture, design and furnishings of the new theaters would help remove patrons from their everyday lives. Theaters built on a scale comparable to palaces, hotels, or homes of the very rich would put patrons in "a suitable frame of mind for the fantasies on the screen."¹⁰² The theater "palace" helped people step from a dingy, mechanized world into another, slower paced time and place where they felt like royalty.¹⁰³ In Lancaster, the Krupas remodeled the Hamilton Theatre in 1916 to transform the theater into a palace for the people of the city. Marble floors and columns and luxurious chairs and couches decorated the lobby. High decorated mirrors reflected the images of the patrons surrounded by elegance. A huge pipe organ provided the music of many different instruments to accompany the silent films. The Krupas employed ushers whose attention helped the patrons feel like royalty.¹⁰⁴ The Hippodrome Theatre also exuded luxury, attracting patrons in early days with a large fountain in the center of the lobby, and later with a magnificent chandelier that contained soft revolving lights.¹⁰⁵

When the remodeled Hippodrome burned down in 1924, the Krupas decided to build what they felt would be the most magnificent theater in Lancaster; and as their daughter said, "they truly surpassed themselves in their efforts to provide the people of Lancaster with the finest entertainment, comfort, and convenience."¹⁰⁶ The Capitol Theatre, at 150-152 North Queen Street, opened on December 21, 1925 amidst great pomp and circumstance. The Saturday before the Monday opening, the *Lancaster Daily Intelligencer* carried a four-page "Capital Theatre Opening Supplement."¹⁰⁷ According to the newspaper, the Capitol, which would show some vaudeville along with movies, would "prove a real surprise and a real joy to the thousands of Lancaster's theater-goers who have been provided with a place of beauty and comfort to enjoy the productions of their favorites in films." The theater was "truly a work of art, an ornament to the city and county and a delight to all those who love clean amusement purveyed in surroundings that are most congenial."¹⁰⁸

In the design of the building, the managers first considered the safety of the patrons, installing the "Automatic Fireman" sprinkler system to avoid another fire like that of the Hippodrome.¹⁰⁹ The managers next considered the patrons' comfort. They chose to install smoking rooms for men, ladies' lounges



and marble drinking fountains on the mezzanine as well as an emergency room with a woman in attendance. The Krupas "spared no expense" in the heating and ventilating systems, even choosing to conceal the systems with ornamental bronze grilles.¹¹⁰ Newspaper articles in the "Capitol Supplement" also noted the beauty and simplicity in the design of the theater. The writer mentioned that the theater's plain exterior gave little idea of the "wonderful interior or its spacious and delightful atmosphere."¹¹¹ Marble decorated the lobby, mezzanine and the staircase, which was enhanced with a wrought-iron railing. A tapestry imported from France hung on one wall of the lobby. In the auditorium, a huge crystal chandelier hung from a decorated ceiling. An orchestra pit accommodated the Capitol Theatre Concert Orchestra.¹¹²

An article on the first page of the "Capitol Theatre Opening Supplement" discussed the changes made in the movies from the time of Mr. Krupa's Nickelodeon to the time of the opening of the Capitol:

"What Lancastrian would welcome a return to the days when the 'movies' were a nickel -

With 15 minute pictures?

With 15 minute 'intermissions'?

With frequent broken reels?

With draughts in the winter and -

With stench and perspiration in the summer?

With rickety seats?

With bum piano music?

Today we have:

Well-ventilated theaters;

Full dramas and comedies;

No interruptions;

Comfort in summer;

Comfort in winter;

Comfortable seats;

Excellent organ music and

First class orchestra."¹¹³

That was in 1925. In 1927, the first feature talking movie, "The Jazz Singer" with Al Jolson, opened in New York. The success of this movie ushered in the new age of talking pictures and heralded the final demise of vaudeville.¹¹⁴ Gradually, live performers took the path of the silent movie. Thousands of musicians lost their jobs, many organ companies went out of business, and because of the demand for talking movies, many theaters which were not ready to equip for "talkies" were forced to close.¹¹⁵

With the advent of the talkies, the movies' victory over vaudeville was assured. The battle for clients and their money had raged in Lancaster for over twenty years. In 1905, the Family Theatre was the most attractive and popular vaudeville theater in town. George Krupa's nickelodeon, "Dreamland," could not

hope to compete with the popular Family Theatre. In 1912, Krupa acquired the Hippodrome and remodeled the theater into a glamorous palace. In the same year, the Colonial Vaudeville Theatre opened and advertised even more glitter. However, the decline of vaudeville houses can be seen during the period 1913-1915 when movies like "The Birth of a Nation" attracted the middle-class audience away from vaudeville. In 1916, George Krupa's remodeled Hamilton Theatre continued the trend toward movie palaces, which culminated in the elaborate Capitol Theatre in 1925. Finally, movies could compete with vaudeville in the same palatial environment.

Both vaudeville and the movies began as working-class genres. Both eventually overcame stigmas associated with working-class entertainment, and finally attracted the middle class as part of their audience. Once vaudeville and the movies had established this common, broad-based audience, they stood on equal ground until the advances in the movie industry carried the movies to the front of popular amusements. The technological and aesthetic advances played an important role in the movie's success. Sad proof of vaudeville's loss is evident in the new pattern Lancaster's vaudeville entertainment took in the 1920s. Vaudeville houses reverted to more and more salacious acts to attract a newer, perhaps less reputable, clientele because their former middle-class audience had turned once and for all to the movies.¹¹⁶

The shift from class-specific to broader, heterogeneous movie audiences represented a trend toward a growing sense of identity in common experiences in the urban environment. This trend, started by vaudeville, continued in a different form of entertainment as many different types of people met on common ground—the enjoyment of the new standardized entertainment of the movies. As Robert Sklar points out, "in the realm of motion-picture attendance, the class distinctions of American society began slowly to fade."¹¹⁷ Another critic said of the motion picture, "it is the language of democracy which reaches all strata of the population and welds them together."¹¹⁸ Popular entertainment, especially movies, began to create a shared body of values for Americans that contrasted with the nineteenth-century pattern. The wealthier classes no longer could impose their values on the working class. Instead, all classes joined in the enjoyment and education of the movies, and what they saw came from the emerging capital of American mass society, Hollywood.

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