

# Early Lancaster Playbills and Playhouses.

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Public shows and amusements are probably nearly as old as the human race itself. We know they have existed among all civilized nations from their earliest history. In Greece, where they reached their highest early development, they were in existence five hundred years before the Christian era. It is more than likely that even barbarian nations had their public shows of a rude kind even thousands of years before that period. No nation or tribe has even been found that did not have its sports or amusements, although we may not be justified in dignifying them by the name of theatre, but they were undoubtedly the gradual steps that led to the development of the theatre among the Greeks.

Of course, theatrical performances antedated regularly constructed theatres themselves. The latter grew out of the necessities of the case. There were regular companies of players in England as early as about 1450; regularly-constructed theatres did not make their appearance until several hundred years later, perhaps about 1576. Prior to that time the performances, such as they were, were held in churches, the yards of inns and even private houses; anywhere, in fact, that offered suitable accommodations for performers and spectators.

While, therefore, the first regular theatre in the United States was built at Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1752, that date must not be taken to mark the appearance of theatrical representations in this country. No doubt strolling actors, "barn-stormers," in the fullest sense of that word, had for

a hundred years previously been giving such representations in the cities and towns of the country, in barns and taverns, and wherever the circumstances would allow. Theatres were the rage in Shakespeare's day, say as early as 1600, and we may well believe the English colonists in America, everywhere, perhaps, except among the Puritans and Quakers, brought their love for play-going with them, and that such performances prevailed in the larger places from an early day. That splendid piece of folly, the "Mischianza," at the Wharton House, in Philadelphia, during Lord Howe's occupation of that city, demonstrated the English love of amusement and pageantry, and what a hold it had upon the people.

If further evidence was needed of the prevalence of theatrical performances throughout the country at that time, I think it would be afforded by the following resolution, passed by the Continental Congress, on October 16, 1778:

"Whereas, Frequently play-houses and theatrical entertainments have a fatal tendency to divert the minds of the people from a due attention to the means necessary for the defense of their country and preservation of their liberties;

"Resolved, That any person holding an office under the United States, who shall act, promote, encourage, or attend such play, shall be deemed unworthy to hold such office, and shall be accordingly dismissed." (See Journal of Congress.)

It is possible that the great expense attending the "Mischianza" in the way of dress and adornment may have led the Congress to pass the above resolution, for although the costs were for the most part borne by the English officers, the women in attendance were almost exclusively natives of Philadelphia, and the expenses attending the

getting up of their costumes were not a little.

Measures had been taken at a still earlier period by the Quakers to curb the growing tendency towards plays. As early as the summer of 1759, Governor Denny sent to the House a bill entitled: "An Act for the More Effectual Suppressing of Lotteries and Plays." He also laid it before the Provincial Council, where it was not favorably received, it being alleged "that the prohibition of plays was a most unreasonable restraint on the King's subjects, from taking innocent diversions, and that such an Act of the Province was passed in the Eighth Year of Her Majesty, Queen Anne, when the Quakers made a majority of the Assembly; but when it came before the Queen in Council it was disapproved, and Her Majesty repealed the Act on the Twentieth of October, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Nine." The just referred-to action was taken in consequence of a recommendation by the Lords of the Privy Council to the Crown, that "we do not see any Sufficient reason for an Absolute prohibition of all Theatrical Representations in Pennsylvania, and, therefore, beg leave to propose that this act. may not receive His Majesty's Allowance, Yet we do not mean, my Lords, to encourage the unbounded & irregular Use of them. We are thoroughly sensible of the mischiefs which might ensue from the establishment of anything that had even a probable Tendency to introduce Idleness and prodigality in a Colony which seems so peculiarly indebted for its prosperity to frugality and industry." In accordance with this recommendation, the King disapproved of the proposed law, and theatrical representations have prevailed in Pennsylvania ever since.

When theatrical performances, or what purported to be such, were first

given in Lancaster I have not been able to discover, but as Lancaster, from as early a period as soon after the Revolutionary War, was accounted the largest inland town in the United States, and held that record until into the nineteenth century, it is only reasonable to suppose that strolling players found their way to this ancient borough at an early period.

A reference to Ellis & Evans' History of Lancaster County alludes to the early theatres here in this wise: "During the town and borough existence of Lancaster, and for years even after it was incorporated as a city—in 1818—dramatic exhibitions and concerts were usually held in hotels or taverns, or in contemporary contiguous structures or enclosures. It was not until some time in the 'teens of the present century that a special permanent building was devoted to that purpose. The 'Red Lion Hotel,' now better known as the 'Cooper House,' the 'Swan Hotel,' or 'Hubley House,' on Centre Square; the 'Grape Hotel,' better known as 'Michael's Hotel,' were conspicuous among those that entertained and accommodated dramatic and musical exhibitions."

Unfortunately, no further particulars are given concerning these early theatrical performances. No special date is mentioned. Some account of these during the "town existence of Lancaster," that is, between 1730 and 1742, or even between the last-mentioned date and the year 1800, would now be most welcome. Doubtless none such were accessible to the writer of the paragraph just quoted, and we are not even told upon what basis the statement is found. Of the general fact, however, there can be no reasonable doubt.

In the manuscript narrative of Mrs. Christian Wolf (before her marriage, Anna Maria Krause), we have satis-

factory evidence of this fact. Her uncle, Henry Dering, in 1777, came to Lancaster and opened a hotel on the Conestoga river, where the road from Lancaster to Philadelphia crosses that stream. He also kept the ferry at that place, and became a prominent citizen. Towards the close of the year he purchased a large house in the town, and started a brewery. It was situated on North Water street, on the site of the buildings numbered 120-122, now occupied as a cigar factory.

Mrs. Wolf, then a young girl, was an inmate of her Uncle Dering's family, and gives the following account of what she witnessed at that period in the following language: "Lancaster, at this period, was crowded with prisoners of war. The success of our arms at Trenton and Princeton had thrown several thousand prisoners into our hands. Many of the British officers were accompanied by their wives; others, whose wives were in New York or elsewhere within the British lines, sent for them to share the hardships of their imprisonment in Lancaster. Some came voluntarily and sought out their husbands. A number of these officers and their wives boarded with Mr. Dering. They were allowed many privileges under their parole, but were restricted to keep within six miles of the town. To their active minds the ennui of such a life became almost insupportable. Casting about for means to divert themselves, they bethought them of the drama. Mr. Dering's spacious brew-house would be just the thing. They lost no time in applying for its use, and, having obtained his permission, proceeded at once to convert it into a theatre. The greater part of these gentlemen and ladies were familiar with the plays of Shakespeare, hence it was not difficult to prepare themselves in this respect. Whilst the necessary alterations were making, re-

hearsals were attended to, costumes and scenery improvised, all of which was the work of amateurs." Miss Krause was not only a spectator, but was admitted to the mysteries of the "green room," and, through it all, learned some of the plays and songs. This is the earliest direct and authentic information we have of theatrical performances in this city.

This brings me to the particular play-bill which has induced the preparation of this brief article. There lately came into my possession a small play-bill, bearing the date of January 2, 1800, printed in this city by that able, but irascible, editor and politician, William Hamilton. The bill is the smallest of all I have seen descriptive of performances in this city. It was found among the papers of Mr. Adam Wolf, a well-known citizen, who for many years and up to the time of his death lived in a house in the second square of North Duke street, west side. The bill has been very carefully preserved, being almost as fresh looking as when it came from Hamilton's press. It is the oldest of the many play-bills that I have seen referring to theatrical entertainments given in this city, a good many of which have come to light in recent years. Here is the bill to speak for itself.

The performance was given, as the bill recites, at the public house of Mr. Archibald Lanegan, the "White Horse" tavern, which was located at what then was the eastern end of East King street, at the northwest corner of Ann, on the property now occupied by Mr. Charles J. Swarr, the old Henderson homestead. This tavern was not always known by that name, however. I find that it was later known as the "Olympic Garden," a name suggestive of other things besides a tavern, theatrical performances, perhaps, and still later as the "Union Hotel," owned by

BY DESIRE OF

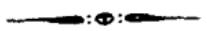
# GOVERNOR M'KEAN,

Who means to honor the Theatre with his presence.

THIS EVENING, January 2, 1800,

*At the House of Mr. LENEGAN, in East King-street, Lancaster.*

*At the Sign of the White Horse.*



The LADIES & GENTLEMEN of Lancaster are respectfully informed, that this evening will be presented the greatest variety of amusements that has ever been exhibited in this town, consisting of

Pantomime, Singing, Hornpipe *Dancing*, Tumbling, SPEAKING, &c. &c.

And in particular an Indian WAR and SCALP Dance,  
by Mr. Durang and Mr. F. Ricketts.

Doors to be opened at six and the performance to begin at 7 o'clock.  
Tickets to be had at Mr. Lenegan's and at Hamilton's Printing-Office.

LADIES and GENTLEMEN who wish to engage seats may have calling upon MR. ROWSON at the Theatre.

ROWSON & Co.

*Printed by William Hamilton, King-street, Lancaster.*

*No. one Box was appropriated and occupied by the Librarian.*

Henry Keffer, in 1828, and again changed to the "White Horse," in 1830, in which year it was kept by Thomas Logan.

Although this, as I believe, is the earliest play bill of a theatre held in Lancaster that has survived the wreck of time, or at least that has so far been discovered, there is no reason to believe it refers to the first theatrical performance held in this city. On the contrary, it in itself furnishes negative evidence that it was not. It is not at all likely that, if such had been the case, evidence of the fact would have been given. We may rest assured advantage would have been taken of the occasion to inform the public that it had now, for the first time, the rare privilege of seeing a grand exhibition of dramatic art, and every effort made to attract public attention to such a hitherto unknown and unseen occurrence. As nothing of this kind occurs on the play-bill, and the distinct assertion is made on the printed bill that "the greatest variety of amusements that has ever been exhibited in this town will be presented," seems to me very satisfactory evidence that such performances were well known to the citizens of Lancaster borough prior to the year 1800.

The next older play-bill of which I have any knowledge was owned by the late S. H. Zahm, bookseller. It was the earliest one of a series owned by that well-known gentleman. It bears the date of July 4, 1811, on the evening of which day "The American Heroine; or the Glory of Columbia," a patriotic melo-drama, in which the battles of Lexington, Bunker Hill, and the death of General Warren were depicted, was rendered. The play was very appropriately suited to the day. A comic opera, "The Poor Soldier," in two acts,

by John O'Keefe, followed. It was presented at the Fountain Inn tavern, on South Queen street, then kept by Mr. Whiteside. Box tickets were fifty cents, and gallery seats, twenty-five cents. Mr. Durang, the same person, evidently, mentioned on the first bill, was the manager. By a reference to the files of the Lancaster Journal, I discovered the following notice in the issue of June 28, 1811:

"MR. DURANG,  
"Lancaster Theatre,

Most respectfully acquaints the ladies and gentlemen of Lancaster and the vicinity, that for the remainder of the season he will have the honor to bring forward the most splendid and admired performances, together with dancing, singing, dramatics, etc. Days of performances will be Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays. There will be a performance on the Fourth of July, expressly for the occasion."

That was "The American Heroine," which, as we have seen, came off as announced on the bill.

Doubtless four performances were given weekly, as stated in the newspaper notice. The bill for the next later one was dated July 13, 1811. It was Tobin's well-known and then very popular play, "The Honeymoon." The afterpiece was Isaac Bickerstaff's "The Sultan." On July 15 the bill calls for Charles Kemble's play, "The Point of Honor," followed by a comic farce as an afterpiece, "Modern Antiques." Another bill of the series bears date of Friday, July 19, 1811, when Goldsmith's world-renowned comedy, "She Stoops to Conquer"—a comedy which has held the boards down to the present hour—was given. Here, too, we have an allusion to earlier theatres, as the bill states that this was the first time this comedy had ever been given to a Lancaster audience.

In the following year, 1812, I find

this impresario, Durang, again making his bow to a Lancaster audience. By reference to the Journal newspaper, it was learned that for three successive weeks, the first time on August 14th, he had an announcement, one-third of a column long, in that paper, in which he tells the public his company will again hold forth so soon as a suitable place can be found. As in the play-bills of the present day, Mr. Durang was most profuse in his declarations of the exalted character of his theatrical representations. Everything an intelligent and appreciative audience could possibly desire was promised. He refers to the liberal patronage previously received from the people of Lancaster, which may be taken as conclusive evidence that this was a good field to glean in.

Doubtless he carried out his intentions, but at this point Mr. Zahm's series of bills closes, and I have found no further notices in the Journal. I have, however, found a notice of the death of a Mrs. Durang, at Harrisburg, on September 12, 1812, in her forty-fourth year, which may have been the wife of one of the Durangs, for there was a family of them. In the play, "She Stoops to Conquer," Mr. C. Durang, Mr. F. Durang, Mr. Durang, Master A. Durang and Miss Durang all took parts, showing there was a family of actors of that name. The Mr. Durang who appears on the bill of 1800 was undoubtedly one of those who also appeared in the later bills mentioned. The last time Mr. Durang's company of barnstormers appeared in this city, so far as the bills I have found show, was on July 19, 1819. This shows that for a period of nineteen years or more he had been giving our grandfathers and great-grandfathers something to divert them from the hum-drum affairs of everyday life.

But Mr. Durang was not the only man-

ager who was trying to make our forefathers laugh about that time. I find that on September 2, 1812, Monk Lewis' drama of Castle Spectre was given, not at the Fountain Inn, where Durang held forth, but at Mr. Hatz's tavern, sign of "Franklin's Head." A farce called "The Citizen" was given as an afterpiece on that occasion. On the Friday evening following, the tragedy of Jane Shore was on the boards. This latter performance was for the benefit of a Miss French. A Mr. Drummond and a Mrs. Allport also had benefits during the season.

Our President, Mr. Steinman, has also in his possession several play bills, but not of so early a date. The oldest one goes back no further than July 24, 1820. On the evening of that day a patriotic drama, called "She Would be a Soldier," written by M. M. Noah, was presented, after which a farce, "Blue Devils," was given. There was a ballet. Captain Hambright's military company, the Lancaster Phalanx, and the Military Band attached to Captain Reynolds' Company made their appearance on the occasion. A camp with the military in view and the reveille by the band formed a part of the performance.

As was to be expected, there were no buildings specially constructed at that early day in Lancaster to accommodate wandering theatrical troupes. It was not until a much later day that these came along. The consequence was that strolling players were compelled to accommodate themselves to what they could find at the old-time Inns and Taverns. The holding of such an entertainment at a tavern naturally led to a good deal of drinking, and they were accordingly welcomed wherever the circumstances allowed of a suitable room being provided for them. From the number of Inns at which theatres were held, there

seems to have been considerable rivalry between the hotel keepers. We have already seen that performances were given at "The White Horse," "The Fountain Inn," and "Franklin's Head," but these were not the only places. "The Grape," "The Swan" and "The Red Lion" Taverns were also used for this purpose.

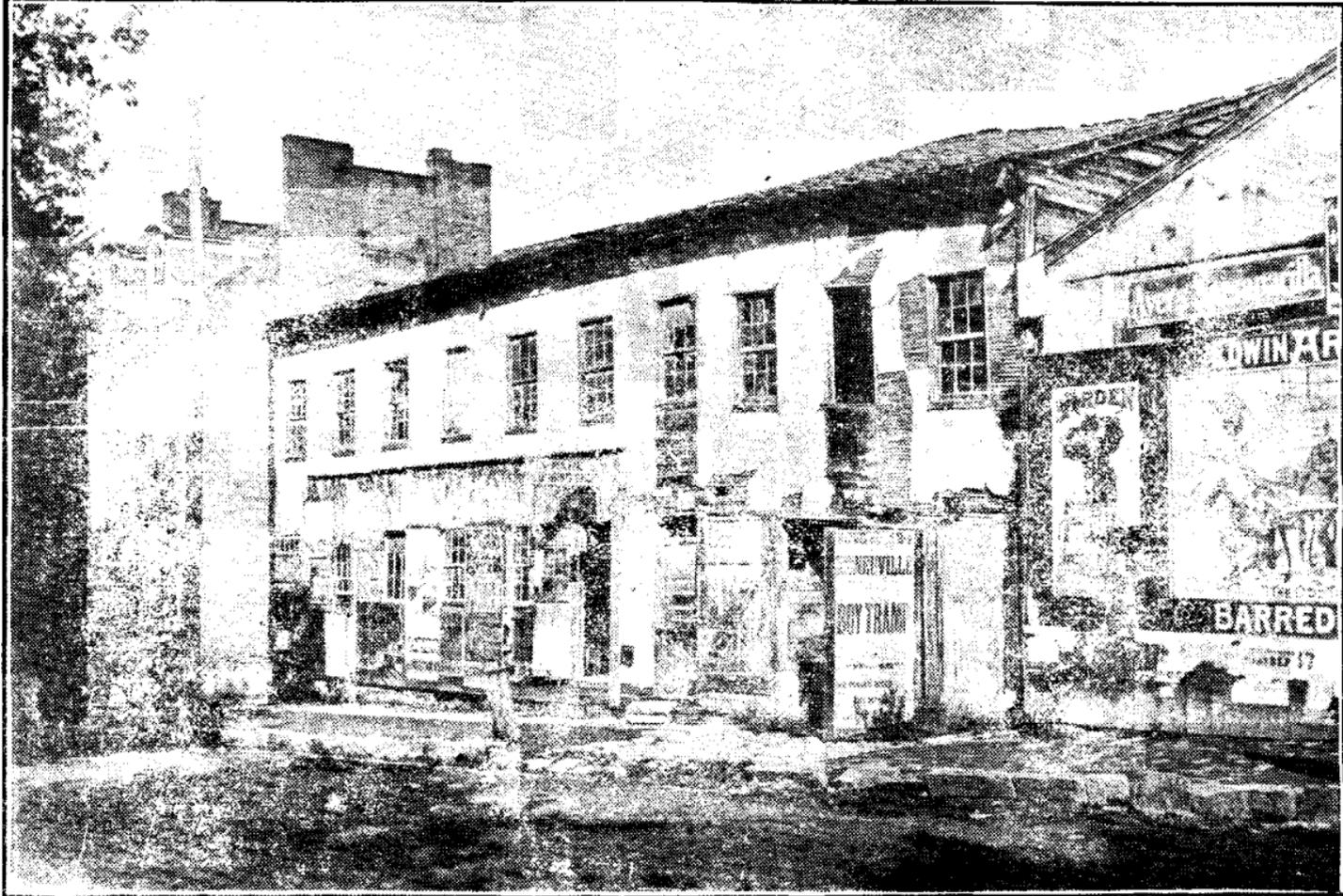
From the local history of Messrs. Evans and Ellis, I learn that prior to 1819, one Landis Beitler had fitted up a building that stood on the southeast corner of Prince and Orange streets for the accommodation of such performances. This building was sometimes called the "Circus."

John Landis, better known later as the proprietor of a "Museum," it appears was one of the proprietors of this place, and in 1819 he announced in the newspapers that he would open a Museum opposite the theatre, on Orange street. The building, according to tradition, was blown down afterwards. During the exciting Presidential canvass of 1840, a log cabin, the emblem of the Whig party, under the leadership of General Harrison, was erected on the spot, and for a season hard cider and political fireworks were administered to visitors. The Union Bethel Church now occupies the site, and the light songs of that early day have been supplanted by grander hymns of praise.

A little after 1830, a theatre was fitted up in West Chestnut street, south side, on the site where later Mayor Kieffer's foundry stood. "Home talent," as well as strolling companies, used this structure for their theatrical representations. At my request, Miss Clark interviewed Amos Slaymaker, the oldest living member of the Lancaster Bar, who well remembers the time when this theatre was in full swing. Its proprietor was named Flinn or Flynn, but he did not re-

main at the head of it a long time. Later it was leased by John Jefferson, the grand-uncle of America's greatest living actor, Joseph Jefferson. John Jefferson's father, Joseph Jefferson, the first, was himself a noted actor, and appeared here as early as 1820, and, perhaps, earlier. In that year he probably played the part of "First Officer," and his son, "Jerry," in "She Would Be a Soldier." His wife, or his son's wife, was the leading lady, playing the part of "Adela." The name of J. Jefferson appears on the bill twice, one no doubt being the father Joseph and the other his son, John, but which was "First Officer" and which "Jerry" it is at this time impossible to say. Joseph Jefferson, it would appear, was also a scenic artist, as this play-bill lays emphasis on the fact that the scenery was "designed and executed by Mr. Jefferson." Mr. Slaymaker saw him play Macbeth and "Rob Roy" in the early 30's. One of his sons, John Jefferson by name, was unfortunate enough to fall down the steps of the old "Red Lion Hotel" (Cooper's), and sustained injuries that resulted fatally.

The next theatre to appear was built in 1837, on the western end of the lot now occupied by the Young Men's Christian Association building, on the corner of Orange and Market streets. In the early days it was known as "Reitzel's Hall," so named after the builder or proprietor, Philip Reitzel. In March of that year it was leased by a Philadelphia manager named Potter, who opened it as a theatre soon after. This became a noted place in a few years, as a local association named "The Conner Society" gave its entertainments in the place, and here the local talent imbibed its first lessons in the histrionic art. I well remember that old wooden structure, having known it as far back as 1851. It was



REITZEL'S HALL, WEST ORANGE STREET, 1837.

a most uninviting place, as seen from the outside. What it was on the inside I do not know, for I cannot recall to mind that I was ever on the inside, although I lived within one hundred feet of it for a period of six years.

About 1848, what was known as "Mechanics' Hall," or, "Mechanics' Institute," on the first square of South Queen street, east side, now occupied by the Heinitsh furniture store, was fitted up for a theatre, and, so far as I remember, was the place to which all the entertainments that came along, from theatres to "Ned Buntline," held forth. It held its place until the site of the old jail, on North Prince street, was converted into "Fulton Hall," and the latter into Fulton Opera House, where dramatic entertainments, and, indeed, everything in the way of important public entertainments, have been mainly held ever since. Under the wise liberality of Mr. B. Yecker it has been converted into a first-class place for all entertainments requiring first-class facilities in the way of stage, scenery and commodious auditorium.

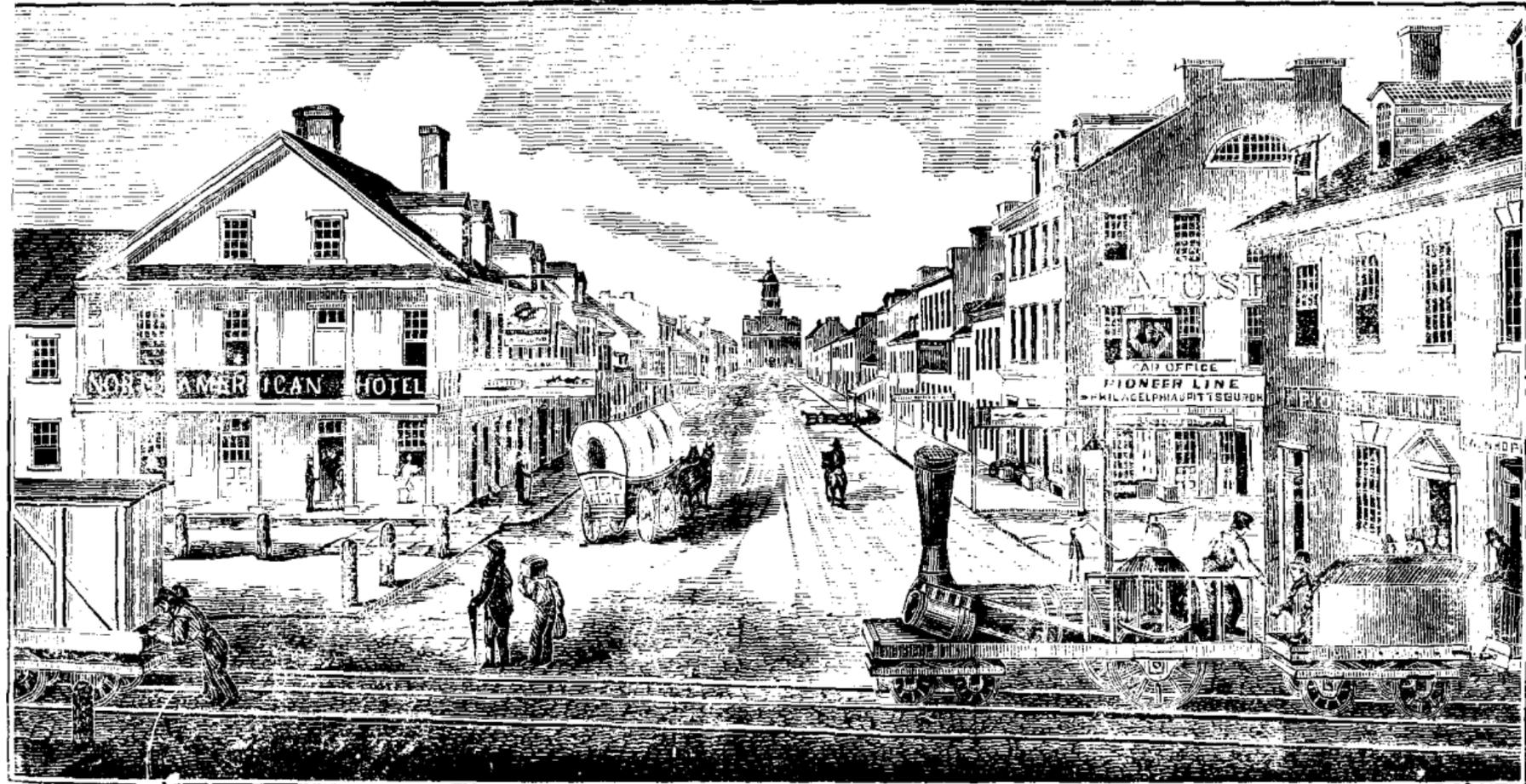
A newcomer in this line, the "Roof Garden," on the Woolworth Building, has also come within a year, and with its charming vistas of the city, as well as its many conveniences and the excellent entertainments already given there, has sprung into popular favor.

It is to be regretted that this question was not written up by some competent hand half a century or more ago. At that time many persons were still living whose recollections easily reached back to the beginning of the century, and who saw and heard the men and women who stalked the boards at that time. It may be alleged that even though we have no knowledge of these things we are not great losers thereby. In one sense that may be true, but it is a short-

sighted view to take of the question. The story of the amusements and pastimes of a people is as much a part of their history as is that of their schools and their churches; not so important, we concede, yet necessary to give us a true picture of their daily lives and actions.

It has been brought to my attention that the elder Booth and Macready both appeared on the boards at "Reitzel's Hall," the ground on which part of the Young Men's Christian Association building is erected. So far as Macready is concerned, this information is undoubtedly incorrect. He did not come to America until 1848, and it passes even a dream of romance to believe that the greatest tragedian of his time had consented to appear in such a ramshackle building as "Reitzel's Hall," built over a stable. Charlotte Cushman is also said to have appeared before a Lancaster audience in "Meg Merilles." If so, it must have been after 1853, for, where in this city was there a hall or a building in which so great an actress as Miss Cushman would consent to make her appearance? Still, as she went upon the boards in 1835, and did not leap into immediate fame, it is not impossible that one or the other of our apologies for theatres may have echoed to the sound of her attractive elocution.

Landis' Museum was removed from West Orange street to the site of the Examiner building, 7 to 9 North Queen street; later to the southwest angle of Penn Square. Then it was put into the large building on the southwest corner of North Queen and Chestnut streets, which was built by Mr. John S. Gable, and the windows were made large and numerous for the special purpose of accommodating the Landis collection, which was removed to it about 1836. Two years later he sold it to Mr. Jacob M. Westhaeffer, who, in 1839, disposed



THE LANDIS MUSEUM BUILDING, 1840.

of a half interest in the Museum to Charles S. Getz, and that firm conducted it until 1842, when Mr. Getz became the sole proprietor. About the close of the last-mentioned year Mr. Getz disposed of it to a Mr. Noah Smith, by whom it was conducted until 1849, when it was sold to Messrs. Wood & Peale, of Cincinnati, whither it was removed. For thirty years it was a feature to our citizens, and all strangers visiting here went to see it. On the North Queen street front, across the building, in large letters, was the legend, "GALLERY OF THE ARTS AND SCIENCES," while on the Chestnut street side, in equally conspicuous lettering, was the word "MUSEUM" as seen in the cut accompanying this sketch. The collection was destroyed by fire one year after it had been removed to its Western home.

#### The Jeffersons.

The Joseph Jefferson mentioned above was the first of the name to become famous in the United States. He was born in Plymouth, England, in 1774, and died at Harrisburg, this State, August 6, 1832. He was the son of Thomas Jefferson, a comedian connected with the Drury Lane Theatre, in London. Jefferson's first appearance in this country was in a Boston theatre in 1795. In the following year he appeared before the footlights in New York, where he remained seven years, coming to Philadelphia in 1803. He was connected with the Chestnut Street Theatre for a period of twenty-seven years, except for brief visits to neighboring cities and towns. He was regarded as the first comedian in the country. His manner was free from grimace and extravagance. He played many roles with great success.

His son, Joseph Jefferson, the second, also an actor, was born in Philadelphia, in 1804, and died in Mobile, Ala-

bama, Nov. 24, 1842. He was a scene painter in early life, but, being in and about a theatre from boyhood, he eventually graduated as an actor and a manager. From 1835 to 1837 he was connected with the Franklin and Niblo's Garden theatres of New York. He visited many other cities, however, on his various starring tours. He resembled his father strikingly in his appearance, but inherited none of his great ability as an actor. He was generous and improvident, and had hard trouble to make both ends meet.

His son, Joseph Jefferson, and the third of the same name, was born in Philadelphia on February 20, 1829. With the example of his father and grandfather before him, and almost born and nursed in a theatre, as one may say, he could not avoid being an actor. At the early age of three years he figured as the child in the play of "Pizarro." After the death of his father he joined a company of strolling players in 1843, and they made their way into Texas, and followed the United States Army in its invasion of Mexico, in 1847. Upon his return he played minor characters in various small theatres. In 1849 he joined various strolling companies, and managed theatres in Savannah, Georgia, and Wilmington, Del. From 1850 to 1856 he was a stage manager in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington and New York. Up to this period he was regarded merely as a respectable stock actor. In 1858 he began his career in Laura Keen's theatre, in New York, taking the part of "Asa Trenchard" in "Our American Cousin." Here for the first time his natural abilities came to the front, and he quickly went to the front among American actors. Since that period he has appeared in many roles, among which may be mentioned "Neuman Noggs," in "Nicholas Nickleby;" "Dr. Pangloss," in "The Heir at

Law;" "Bob Acres," in "The Rivals." To the foregoing he in later years added a few more, the principal of which was "Rip Van Winkle," the most famous of all. This has been played in every city and town of note in the United States during the past thirty years, and is still a deserved favorite. Joseph Jefferson is also a painter of reputation.

F. R. DIFFENDERFFER.

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**Notes on the Same Subject by S. M. Sener, Esq.**

A local newspaper printed in Lancaster, in December, 1819, contains an advertisement to the effect that on December 4, John Landis had opened a museum "on West Orange street, opposite the theatre." Some few years since an aged resident informed the writer that the theatre stood near the tavern known as Beitler's, which is now the Western Hotel. The same gentleman, who was born in 1801, stated that he had seen played there the "Taming of the Shrew," with Mr. Duff and Mr. and Mrs. Entweizle in the leading parts. Also, that he had seen Mr. and Mrs. Darley perform there in the "Magpie and Maid." This same John Landis subsequently opened his museum in 1833 on West Chestnut street, where he gave theatrical performances, among them being "Punch and Judy." It stood where subsequently Kieffer's foundry was. Mrs. Duff once appeared there in the "Stranger." The original Joe Jefferson appeared in comedy, as did also his daughter, a Mrs. Chapman. The Jefferson family appeared there in "School for Scandal," "Drugget" and "Three Weeks After Marriage." They also appeared in the ball room of Cooper's Hotel on many occasions.

The late Alfred Sanderson some few years since stated in an article on

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