

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

March 15, 1963

Monterey's Theatrical Seasons

The event of the theatrical season in Monterey was "The Great Divide" starring Henry Miller, which played to a packed house at the Work Theatre now The Wharf Theatre, on July 22, 1908. The New Era reported that the great actor and his much-heralded play proved to be all that was expected.

The week previous, Nance O'Neill and her company presented "Magda" to a large and appreciative audience in the same theatre. Richard Jose had also appeared in a laughable farce comedy "Don't Tell Your Wife," which brought out a large audience of townspeople.

About this time, a Victory Theatre opened which proved so successful that a larger building was soon needed. Manager C.A. Riffe secured the room in the Preble-Work Building next to the post office (now gone). The new location had a seating capacity of 500 and was "well ventilated, cool, airy and pleasant," according to the news item in the New Era.

Kolb and Dill with their entire New York production of "Lonesome Town" came to the Work in July of 1908, and on Aug. 17, May Robson came to Monterey to appear in her greatest New York success, "The Rejuvenation of Aunt Mary," and played before a crowded house at The Work.

The Casper Music Hall, a new and attractive place of amusement, opened on Saturday night, Nov. 15, 1902. The Music Hall later became Mission Hall and in the future is to be, known as Casa Estrada. The newspaper of the day described the Hall as "a permanent place of amusement where one can take his family and enjoy refined vaudeville and musical entertainment." C. D. Casper was the proprietor. The balcony had reserved seats and the entrance was through the Casper Hotel. Seats were on sale for 25 cents and general admission was 10 cents to the lower part of the house. A California ladies orchestra played for the opening. By Dec. 8, the Casper had been changed to the Orpheum Theatre.

The opening performance of the Bagby in 1903 was the Allen Stock Co. show, supporting the "phenomenal child actress, little Verna Felton, in high class repertoire." Miss Felton later took the part of the mother on Red Skelton's radio program.

Frank Bacon returned to the Bagby in August of 1903 in the rural comedy "The Hills of California." Specialties were introduced, including Lee Johnson's latest ballad, "Don't Make Them Scandalous Eyes at Me." Frank Bacon was a native of California and spent his youth in San Jose.

Miss Pearl La Verne, leading lady in the "Husband on a Salary" company which appeared at the Bagby Opera House on Jan. 16, 1902, had a special appeal for the residents of Monterey who flocked to see her on the two nights she played here.

"Miss La Verne is a native of Monterey where she spent her childhood, and is better known as Pearl Soberanes," according to the item which appeared in the New Era. "She is the daughter of M.G. Soberanes, and when she left here some years ago was noted as a pianist. Later she developed a fine soprano voice and went East with the Columbia Opera Co. After singing for the past five years in comic opera in New York and other Eastern cities, Miss Soberanes decided to take a Western trip and visit her native state. She has many old friends and acquaintances who will witness her appearance before the footlights."

The earliest date we find for the opening of the Bagby Theatre is March 13, 1899, when the reports for that day were "Notwithstanding the weather was extremely moist, a large audience greeted Royce and Lansing's Comedy Co. The lady members of the company acquitted themselves well and the various impersonations were immense."

In Pacific Grove the Bon Ton opened October 1, 1909 and advertised as "the home of refined moving pictures and illustrated songs." H. McConnell was the manager.

James Ward came to the Bagby for five nights in 1909 and played the famous war play "Old Glory," with a whole regiment of soldiers on the stage in uniform, good songs and up-to-date dances. During the remainder of the engagement he produced "Through by Daylight," "Ranch 10," "Streets of New York," and "After Dark."