

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Memorable Days

"The-never-to-be discourteously mentioned years of our pioneers '49 and '50, were memorable ones in the thespian records of Monterey," says the little old guide book of Monterey.

In those days California's First Theater was opened with brilliant success, and then the long-forgotten Bingham appeared in the long-forgotten drama, "Putnam, The Lion Son on '76."

They were memorable days indeed; for Lt. Derby, known to the literary world later as "John Phoenix" and "Squibob," was one of the leading spirits of the stage. But the thespian records came to an untimely end, and soon Monterey no longer tempted the widely strolling players.

Theatrical records of old Monterey newspapers reveal that in 1905 the Bagby Opera House was the popular theater; but Monday evening, Dec. 11, of that year, T.A. Work opened his playhouse on lower Alvarado street.

Al Hoffman, who in later years presided over the fascinating shell shop on the old wharf, was in his youth an actor and producer. He made a record of the theater and their attractions since Oct. 12, 1905, when C.H. Bagby presented "The White Slave," featuring Dorothy Grey, I his Opera House. He advertised profusely in the "Monterey New Era."

This attraction was followed on the 19th by "Under Southern Skies" and on the 21st by "Britt-Nelson," a fight picture. Other plays which attracted large audiences in November and December were "Dora Thorne" with Cuba Niblo in the title role and Carol Arden in "Polly Primrose," a comedy by Paul Wilstreach.

The opening play at the T.A. Work theater was roundly roasted, but the second night's bill received very good reviews. The theater was under the management of the Monterey Opera Company. "Shadows on the Hearth" was presented by Arthur G. Aiston for the first night; the bill was changed to "At the Old Crossroads" for the second performance.

Opening the 1906 series at the Work was Albert Gallatin in "Cousin Kate" with Wilfred Rogers in the male lead. For days before Jan. 21 the Old Town was excited over the coming appearance of Nance O'Neill in the "Fires of

St. John," with McKee Rankin and Andrew Robson. The house was sold out.

"Hooligan in New York," with James L. McCabe in the title role, came to the Bagby Opera House on Jan. 18, 1906. In February the Star Amusement Co. presented moving pictures and illustrated songs each Sunday night at the Opera House.

Probably the first minstrel shows appeared in Monterey in February of 1906 at the Work. There was a "small but appreciative" audience at the Work when Frederick Warde gave a recital, "Shakespeare and His Plays." Another sold out house was John Cort's presentation of Florence Roberts in "The Strength of the Weak" by Alice M. Smith.

Everyone flocked to the Bagby Opera House on May 21 and 22, 1906, to see stereopticon views of the San Francisco earthquake and destruction.

July 11, 1906, saw the opening of still another theater in Monterey – the Theater Comique – at Main (Calle Principal) and Franklin streets.

The building, formerly used as a skating rink, was remodeled with a gallery and seated over 400 people. The new enterprise was under the management of the Monterey Amusement Company, F.L. Ordway, president; James Cross, secretary, and Dr. Thorpe Arnold, manager.

The theatre opened on Jul 11, with vaudeville, music and pictures, Louine (sleight of hand), a female impersonator and a small chorus.