

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Long Ago Theater

The event of the theatrical season on July 22, 1908, in Monterey was the "The Great Divide," starring Henry Miller, which played for a packed house at the Work Theater, then the workshop of the Wharf Players. It was later the Monterey Theater.

The New Era reported that the great actor and his much heralded play proved to be all that was expected. The week previous, Nancy O'Neil and her company presented "Magda" to a large audience in the same theater. Richard Jose had also appeared in the laughable farce comedy "Don't Tell Your Wife," which brought out a large audience of townspeople.

About this time a Victory Theater opened which proved so successful that an even larger building was needed. Manager R.A. Riffe secured the room in the Preble-Work Building next to the first post office in California, now torn down. The new location had a seating capacity of 500 and was "well ventilated, cool, airy and pleasant," according to the new item in the New Era.

Kolb and Dill with their entire New York production of "Lonesome Town" came to the Work on 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 was later Mission Inn and is now the 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 music entertainment," C.D. Casper was the proprietor. The balcony and 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 Theater.

The opening performance at the Bagby Opera House in 1903 was the Allen Stock Company show, supporting the "phenomenal child actress, little Verna Felton in high class repertoire." Miss Felton in later years took

the part of the mother on the Red Skelton radio program.

Frank Bacon returned to the Bagby in August of 1903, in rural comedy "The Hills of California." Two specialties were introduced including Lee Johnson's latest ballad, "Don't Make Them Scandalous Eyes at Me." (Bacon made his great hit in "Light'nin'"). He was a native of California and had many relatives in the San Jose area).

Miss Pearl La Verne, the 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 residents of Monterey and flocked to see her on the two nights she played in her home town.

"Miss La Verne is a native of Monterey where she spent her childhood as Pearly Soberanes," according to the item which appeared in the New Era. "She is the daughter of M.G. Soberanes. Later she developed a fine soprano voice, and went east with the Columbia Opera Company. After signing for the past 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 Theater is March 12, 1889, when the records of that day were: "Notwithstanding the weather was extremely moist, a large audience greeted Royce and Lancing's Comedy Company. The lady members of the company acquitted themselves well and the various impersonations were immense."

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

James Ward came to the Bagby for five nights in 1900 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 the Daylight," and "After Dark."