

OPERA HOUSE

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The Petoskey Record
Wednesday, June 12, 1901

Dolly DeVyne Robinson as Sapho.

The original version of this much advertised play was given for the first time in this city at the opera house last night.

To those who went to witness an immoral production, a disappointment was in store, for a cleaner and more meritorious presentation of a modern play has never been seen in this city.

Sapho, from a dramatic standpoint is strong, while the acting of the company left nothing to be desired.

Dolly DeVyne Robinson, in the title role, proved herself to be an actress of great emotional power and in her scenes with the lover Jean, became intensely dramatic. This lady has a magnetic personality, that carries her audience with her, and she is destined to become a strong favorite in any city that may be fortunate enough to witness her performances.

Stanley Johns, a young man with a manly bearing and a splendid voice, appeared to advantage as Jean, while Messrs. Dwyer, DeKalb and Lennox, all gave capital interpretations of Dechellette, Caudal and Mammant. Special mention should be made of Walter Robinson's performance of Ceasire. It was a character impersonation of a *blaze* old rone, acted with a finish that was quite refreshing after the constant portrayal of the balloonish comedy role we see so often nowadays.

The ladies of the company Misses Hall, Cramer and Clark, acquitted themselves creditably. Taken all in all, it was the best performance given in this city in many a day. The play was nicely mounted and handsomely dressed. (*Greenville Daily Call*, June 8.

OPERA HOUSE

ONE NIGHT ONLY,

Saturday June 15th

DOLLY DEVYNE

Robinson

AND A SUPERB COMPANY PRESENT

Sapho

**The Original
Olga Nethersole
Version.**

Direction of Mr. G. S. Greening.

Prices, 25, 35, 50, 75. Box Seats, \$1.00.

SEATS NOW ON SALE.

TO BUILD OPERA HOUSE

A Large Number of Petoskey Business Men Attend Meeting to Discuss Plans and Building.

A meeting of the business men of the city was held Monday evening at the Cushman House to discuss ways and means for building an opera house. The meeting was attended by about fifty of those interested and was presided over by B. H. Halstead. For some time a proposition has been discussed to build an opera house and Elks Temple combined and it was for the purpose of presenting this plan that the meeting was called. The building as proposed would cost about \$35,000 to \$40,000 but would be a fine credit to the city and to the Elks lodge.

The plan of the promoters is, that the business men of the city, who are interested in securing an opera house where good shows could be staged, donate \$5,000 toward the building fund and that the balance be raised by the Elks and the building be constructed by them and owned by them when finished, and also that the opera house be managed by them. The Elks lodge has nearly 250 members, most of whom are actively engaged in business in Petoskey and would take an active interest and pride in making an opera house in Petoskey a success.

The larger portion of those present were in favor of this plan and a committee composed of Will Cartwright, John L. Ferris, W. A. Major, C. H. Bromann and H. B. Lee were appointed to circulate a petition among the business men and others in the city, and this committee was at work yesterday and had planned to report to the Elks lodge last evening but another week's time has been given them because of the fact that a number of the business men from whom donations are expected are at present out of the city.

Those interested are anxiously awaiting the action of the Elks lodge on the proposition and also the report of the committee. Another meeting will be called in the near future.

No location for the proposed opera house and temple has yet been decided upon.

—Another probability as an opera house site is that of the Levinson block on the north side of Lake street, immediately adjoining the Levinson department store on the west. D. Charles Levinson has prepared plans for the proposed building, which have been placed on exhibition at the Central drug store and give promise of an excellent structure for all the purposes that have been mentioned in the erection of the other building. The Levinson location is a good one and would doubtless become very popular.

OLD OPERA HOUSE, LIVE ENTERTAINMENT, REMEMBERED

Petoskey News-Review
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Page 3 15 cents

by Betty Bader

The glamour of the stage and the smell of the grease paint has called many a young man or woman away from home throughout the ages.

In Petoskey, at the turn of the century, Trevor Latson used to visit the old Opera House and he fell in love with the land of 'make-believe', enough to make it his life's work.

Latson was in Petoskey recently, visiting, and recalled the old Opera House and his early days here.

He was born in Indiana but came to Petoskey in 1896 and left here in 1906, to follow the theatrical life until retirement a couple of years ago. Latson has served as an electrician and stage hand, working in many Detroit theatres.

"I am one of the few electricians who has always worked on live entertainment" he recalled in a visit to the News-Review offices.

As a young boy he worked with Bill Tracy, stage manager of the old Opera House in Petoskey and he posted bills and helped out around the building.

Live entertainment was important to the early settlers of the area. It was so important, that the opera house was one of the first public buildings erected in Petoskey.

It was built by Hiram Rose and Guy Harwood with C.F. Caskey as contractor and finished August 1, 1882, just 23 years after the first Catholic Church, St. Francis Solanus Church on W. Lake-st., was built in 1859.

The old entertainment palace was two stories high and had a 50 foot frontage and was 150 feet deep. The stage was flanked by eight boxes, luxury seats. Cheapest seats were, naturally, in the balcony. It stood on Bay-st., across from the Perry-Davis Hotel.

Since Emmet county was organized in 1853, just 29 years earlier and consisted of both

Emmet and Charlevoix counties and since Charlevoix county wasn't organized until 1869 and Petoskey was incorporated in 1896, you can see how unsettled the area still was when the first entertainment place was built here. And, what a sense of satisfaction it must have been for the residents, to feel that they had a little bit of "culture" in the wilderness.

Brought in by Train

Touring entertainers came in by train and their scenery, costumes and necessary props were brought in by box car.

In addition to the professional presentations, local residents also produced minstrel shows and holiday dances and soirees were held in the opera hall. Political meetings and band concerts filled the building and the residents even held a wrestling match on the stage.

Movie houses were coming into being in other sections of the country and the first ones were built in Petoskey about the time that Latson left the area for Jackson, then Detroit.

He returned to Petoskey just once, professionally, though he has been a frequent visitor here through the years. It was with the road show of, "A Modern Cinderella" which was presented in the Temple Theatre, the only movie house still standing in Petoskey today.

Appearing at the Temple was an especially happy occasion for Latson because the manager, Norman J. Feldman, was one of his friends while growing up here.

The Temple Theatre had been built by Cap Chrysler, who owned a bowling alley and popcorn stand on Petoskey-ave. He sold it to the Galster family and they converted it into a movie house in 1934.

The old Opera House couldn't stand the competition of the movie houses which were popular in the early part of this century, so in time it became a roller rink and later on auto sales business. During World War I it was torn down.

Only Memories Remain
Of the many other theatres

which once flourished in Petoskey, only memories remain. Live entertainment has also almost disappeared from an area that once had such outstanding productions as Hiawatha, produced each year on Round Lake, or the Petoskey Playhouse in Oden where summer theatre delighted residents and resorters alike.

Little Traverse Civic Theatre members still produce Act I each week during the summer months at Harbour Inn, in Ramona Park and the Bay View Assembly brings a variety of musical entertainment and live theatre here during the summer months.

Other Changes

Latson has also noticed other changes in the area. During his visit to the News-Review offices, he noted that he also was a newsboy at the turn of the century.

A 'pink sheet, daily resorter' was printed, he recalled. Boys would obtain copies of the newspaper, then meet the trains and invade the hotels, hawking these copies, with much competition amongst the boys.

Live entertainment houses have disappeared in Detroit, the same as they have in Petoskey Latson said. He recalled how he opened the Michigan Theatre in 1926 in Detroit and was stage electrician there until 1938. The Michigan Theatre wasn't bringing in the necessary patrons and recently was reconverted into a posh nightclub. This also was eventually closed.

Latson spends his winters in Florida now and manages to visit each summer for a time, in Petoskey, spending the rest of the time in Detroit.

In spite of the growth in Petoskey, he stated that it seemed busier when he was a boy. "With all the trains coming in and the many hotels, it seemed a busier place and a very exciting area to live in" he recalled.