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Opera Houses of the Genesee Country: Perceived Indicators of Economic and Cultural Success

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Opera Houses of the Genesee Country
Perceived Indicators of Cultural and Economic Success

By
Jane Ellen Oakes
May 17, 2003

A thesis submitted to the Department of History of the State University of New York College at Brockport in partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
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Perceived Indicators of Economic and Cultural Success

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Abstract of Thesis

During the half-century following the end of the Civil War, over fifty opera houses were built across the Genesee Country of New York State-a region extending from the western edge of the Finger Lakes to the eastern border of the Niagara region. Although little different from their earlier counterparts, called ‘halls’, the conscious choice to call a newly built or acquired entertainment hall an opera house reflected a desire on the part of both town and builder to be thought of as appreciative of higher culture and the arts, and of having the financial stability to create and support such a venue. These opera houses were what I believe to be perceived indicators of a town’s cultural and economic progress: that is, they were understood on the part of the financier and community at large to be visible evidence to outsiders of the town’s cultural sensitivity and financial security.

In addition, the construction of an opera house conferred on the builder/financier a secure place within the town’s social hierarchy as that of benefactor and promoter of the common good. Eloquent speeches outlining the town’s gratitude for such a place of entertainment were often a major part of opening night ceremonies at the new opera house. Thus, the perception of an opera house as being representative of economic and cultural success exists on a dual level— that of the political entity and its inhabitants, and that of the individual builder.
Leisure time was increasing during the last part of the 19th century, due to changes in technology and labor laws, and in many social circles attending performances at the local opera house was considered to be preferable to attending those at vaudeville theaters, burlesque houses, circuses, or taverns. Opera houses were perceived as offering a higher, more morally desirable quality of entertainment than many other venues— a perception often utilized by acting companies and theater managers in their advertising. By studying the plays, touring and local acts, newspaper advertisements and playbills associated with local opera houses, it is possible to further our understanding of how a community’s opera house reflected cultural transitions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These changes were happening nationally as well, as an agrarian society changed to one more urban- and industrially-based.

New technologies, economic growth, and increasingly more complex national rail infrastructure influenced the rise in popularity of the opera house both in the study region and on the national level. Conversely, all these factors also played a role in the demise of the opera house as cultural icon. Still, even though their heyday has long since passed, many citizens of towns which possessed one of these structures have spoken with pride in the fact that their town once had one. More than a century after these structures were built, the perception that an opera house represented their town’s elevated level of prosperity and cultural achievement still exists in this region today.
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Why Opera Houses?

Between 1865 and 1912 the cultural phenomenon of the village opera house grew, peaked, and declined across the Genesee Country of New York State. Before 1865, in the study area, there were none designated as such, and after 1912 no new ones were being constructed. Why? The earlier term for a public meeting room, commonly with some sort of stage or performance platform was a ‘hall’. This is the most frequently found appellation for these public auditoriums prior to the 1870’s, yet the name ‘hall’ seems to have fallen out of favor for newly constructed, privately owned entertainment facilities after that. What were the factors that led to a conscious decision on the part of the owners of a roller skating rink like “The Casino” in Bath, New York, to remodel it into a theater and change its name to “The Casino Opera House” in 1885? Or for a community of only 1,000 inhabitants, Cohocton, to aspire to have the same amenity as communities with a population twenty times its size? How frequently was the term ‘opera house’ used in this area during the sixty years 1860 and 1920? What was the lure of the term, and what did it mean to the people using it? How frequently was grand opera performed in these communities, that an ‘opera house’ was considered desirable within the village? And finally, was having an opera house within a community a matter of pride for its inhabitants?

I offer the theory that these structures were thought of by many citizens in a community as an outward symbol to visitors and other area residents of their town’s cultural and economic achievements. On a different level, the construction of such a structure, or the remodeling an earlier hall and subsequent change of name to an
opera house, was a mark of personal economic success, cultural sensitivity, and public-mindedness on the part of the financier(s). These buildings played a central part in the leisure, educational, civic, and cultural activities within communities. They were 'perceived indicators' in that a feeling of cultural superiority is an internalized perception. It can only be measured externally by:

1.) Comments made by inhabitants at that time as to how proud they were of their opera house, and how its amenities may have been more modern or more beautifully designed than others.

2.) Frequency of the structures in a geographic area. Can new construction of opera houses be linked to a ‘keeping up with the Joneses’ attitude between towns?

3.) Placement and architectural design of the opera house within the landscape of the village. Was the structure intended to impress viewers?

Opera houses and the activities that went on in them are connected to many themes studied by historians, anthropologists, economists, architects and educators. Their popularity and decades of construction was not isolated to only this area of Western New York, but is connected to development across the United States as well. But to understand the forces leading up to the era of the opera house in the Genesee Country, it is important to have a background on the area itself and the economic and cultural factors that affected the area prior to and during the study period.
The Genesee Country

The 'Genesee Country' was a recognized region of New York State in the early days of American settlement after the War for Independence, and the designation is still commonly used today in reference to the counties geographically close to the Genesee River. Long the home of the western-most tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy, its original borders comprised "all the lands west of Geneva" to the Niagara River and Lake Erie. The soil was generally fertile, with a plentitude of waterfalls suitable for mill sites and attractive locations for towns. Land speculators, entrepreneurs, and settlers began arriving in the 1780's, and many that settled here would find prosperity. By the 1820's, the rapidly growing village of Rochester, located at the falls of the Genesee River close to its confluence with Lake Ontario, had become a major force in the flour milling industry because of its central location to developing wheat growing communities. Until the opening of the Plains States and the wheat growing industry there, the Genesee Country was considered the breadbasket of the nation because of its wheat and flour industries. Businesses and trades connected to flour and shipping flourished as well- coopers, boatbuilders, canal grocers and suppliers, lumber suppliers, distilleries, taverns and hotels all found various levels of prosperity.

The Erie Canal opened from Albany to Rochester in 1823, easing transportation costs and the exchange of information for traveler, merchant, and

1 Daniel Fink, Barns of the Genesee County (Geneseo, New York: James Brunner, publisher, 1987), xv
farmer. The Erie was fully open to Buffalo in 1825, connecting the state as it had not been connected before, and facilitating westward expansion here and around the Great Lakes. It would become a pivotal part of the rapidly expanding infrastructure of natural and man-made waterways, turnpikes, and roads in Western New York. The drastic reduction in shipping costs for merchants and farmers combined with inexpensive, fertile land increased the appeal of the Genesee Country to a diverse population of New Englanders, Southerners, and immigrants. In time, other canals and both steam- and electrically- powered railroads would connect many of the cities and towns of this region, further facilitating communication and travel between communities and allowing touring entertainers and artists from the major urban centers of the United States and Europe easier and more rapid access into the interior of the country.

For the purposes of this study, I am concentrating on the ten counties which are closest to the Genesee River: Orleans, Monroe, Wayne, Ontario, Livingston, Genesee, Wyoming, Allegany, Steuben, and Yates (figure 1).

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3 Robert William Fogel uses a quotation from Carter Goodrich that is applicable: “Although the early canals were soon supplemented and later overshadowed by the railroads, it must not be forgotten that the initial reduction in costs provided by canal transport, as compared with wagon haulage, was more drastic than any subsequent differential between railroads and canals.” Robert William Fogel, Railroads and American Economic Growth (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1964), 9
This region has an interesting, culturally rich history, and many local citizens played a part in the development of certain social and religious movements that affected our nation. Spiritualism and the Mormon religion originated here. Utopian communities, such as the Shakers at Sodus and Groveland, and the followers

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of Jemima Wilkerson, “The Public Universal Friend” in Penn Yan, chose to locate here. By the mid-1800’s, the area was known for being a hotbed of social activism and reform. Frederick Douglass founded his abolitionist newspaper, The North Star, while living in Rochester, and was a regular speaker in local halls. Susan B. Anthony, lecturer and activist, also lived in Rochester, and spoke in local halls on behalf of the women’s rights, temperance, and abolition movements. Religious revivals, Lyceums, and Chautauqua lectures all played a part in creating a population that was (for the most part) striving to become intellectually well-developed, socially aware, and who were eager to keep up with artistic and cultural movements found in major cities such as Philadelphia, New York, and Boston.

In this regard, the inhabitants of the Genesee Country were part of a national trend that had developed in the 18th century and had been revived in the 19th—the belief that “what was done in Philadelphia” (for which we can as easily substitute Boston or New York), “sanctioned...what was fitting and proper.” Although shortly after the Revolution there were conflicting opinions (in New England, particularly) as to the appropriateness of continuing to follow Europe’s lead by assuming refined manners and participating in what were considered the amusements of the aristocracy—balls, theater, and assemblages—Americans soon were enjoying these pastimes as the urban circle of influence from major cities grew out into the agrarian countryside. This movement of ideas and attitudes would be found in the Genesee

6 Bushman, 194, 222.
Country as well. They can be tracked by examining, among other things, the geographic distribution of opera houses over the forty-seven year period during which they were being constructed, and by studying the changing attitudes of the general population and clergy as shown in the newspapers and magazines read in the area.

**Early Theater in the Genesee Country**

The first theater in this region was built at the comer of Morris and Steuben streets in Bath, Steuben County. Captain Charles Williamson, agent for a consortium of land speculators, diligently worked to bring he felt were the civilized amenities of larger urban areas to the wilderness very quickly, in a bid to attract buyers for his employers’ lands. A troupe of actors was hired in from Philadelphia to come to the new theater and perform, and one can only imagine the commentary of this group of players as they traveled over rutted dirt roads bracketed by stumps, only to arrive at a small group of log structures, one of which was the promised theater. The playhouse was evidently a topic for commentary among others in the region as well not all of it complimentary. A Presbyterian minister, the Reverend James H. Hoskin, reported, "The state of society (in Bath) was very dissolute. The Sabbath was disregarded. Drinking, gambling, carousing, horse-racing, attending the theatre, with other concomitant vices, were very general." And he was not the only one who disapproved of the pleasures/ vices afforded to settlers in Bath. " Jacob Lindley, sent by the Yearly Philadelphia Meeting on a religious visit to the West examined the progress of settlement all the way up the Williamson road to the ‘thiving village of
Bath’. There he paused long enough to ‘have an interview with Judge Williamson’ and ‘enter his protest against horse racing, and exhibition of plays which were commencing there.’". It would take many years before religious leaders in America would change their view that theatrical performances were unfailingly linked with vice and moral corruption.

Professional actors, entertainers, lecturers, and musicians did make their way into the area, however, notwithstanding the arguments of the ministry. So long as there was a demand for their services, they found places to perform- usually in the public rooms of inns, taverns, and very occasionally in churches, as there were few other places for large numbers of people to congregate indoors in the early days of the settlement period. A Rochester editor had the following opinion as to the amenities of the young village. "Although Rochester is in point of business the first village in the state, we are too young to ape the fashions or merit the name of a city. "Our streets are neither paved nor lighted, we have no markets, no shipping, no theatres, or public gardens, no promenades for exquisites…".

It is difficult, given the small amount of the editorial quoted by Mr. McKelvey, to tell whether the editor thought the lack of a theater was a good thing or not, but we do know that in 1825 the Rochester Board of Trustees was sharply divided over whether to even allow theatrical licenses and ban theaters and traveling

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7 W.W. Clayton, History of Steuben County, New York (1879), 172.
8 Clayton, 161.
10 McKelvey, Growth of a City, 27.
showmen altogether within their village. A compromise was made there by voting to charge a stiff thirty-dollar licensing fee per week for traveling players, thus assuring that "non-residents among us may contribute to the improvement of our village."\(^{11}\) They were not talking about the moral improvement of the village- too many prominent local citizens were adamant in their protests over the talking, drinking, and "blackguardism" of audiences found at public theatrical performances, and the "degraded and besotted set of characters, void of virtue and moral principle" that made up the theatrical companies themselves.\(^{12}\) The high licensing fee certainly padded Rochester's village treasury and hopefully was put to more worthy, 'morally acceptable' uses.

The types of amusements touring companies and individual performers brought into the area were varied. Circuses appeared early on, as well as travelling musicians. In Moscow, now known as Leicester, in Livingston County, a traveling exhibition of waxwork figures in 1824 was accompanied by an organ and advertised under the respectable title of a "Museum". An unlucky snake charmer provided amusement to the people of Conesus in the same county by allowing his venomous assistants to crawl over his body. He was unfortunately bitten on the lip and soon died, possibly providing a livelier topic for future conversation than if he had survived his act.\(^{13}\) The Smith-Davis Company even wrote and performed a "New

\(^{11}\) ibid., 28.

\(^{12}\) Monroe Republican (Rochester) 20 November, 1825 and 28 November, 1826. Nellie Bitz, "A Half-Century of Theater in Early Rochester- a record of the struggle to establish a permanent theater" (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University, 1941), 11-13, 27.

\(^{13}\) Lockwood R. Doty, The History of Livingston County, New York (Jackson, Mich:
Melodrama” based on local history, called “The Vale of the Genesee, or Big Tree Chief”, with the names of prominent settlers thinly disguised. In the mid-1820’s Rochester papers advertised the performances of the operas “The Mountaineers, or, Love and Madness”, and “The Purse, or, The American Tar”. These were not the Italian operas that would gain popularity by the mid-19th century, but rather the style known as the ballad opera, which had originated in England during the 17th and 18th centuries and had been brought over to her American colonies. Their romantic, sometimes melodramatic plots were performed in English and often incorporated currently popular songs into the plot, through appropriate changes in the lyrics. They combined spoken dialog with songs, making them more appealing to a wider audience than Italian opera, and they can be considered one of the ancestors of the modern musical. This type of opera was also seen in the young Republic as being slightly more egalitarian than Italian opera, requiring no foreign language skills- an important point during the time when the study of foreign languages was not a part of common school curriculum and Americans were still trying to define “a consistent American character…and moral base.” Historian Blake McKelvey posits another theory that Italian opera also may not have been as popular in this region because of the staunchly anti-foreign “Know-Nothing” party’s following here during the 1840’s.

W.J. Van Deusen, 1905), 332.
11 Bitz, 25.
12 Bitz, 7, 11.
13 William J, Mahar, Behind the Burnt Cork Mask (Chicago, Ill: Universith of Illinois Press, 1999), 103
14 Bushman, 193
and 50's. Thus, theater and opera had entered the region during a time when many inhabitants were living in log homes, with few of the amenities that were associated with ‘civilized’ living at the time.

Performing companies, circuses, and theaters in general languished in many parts of the Genesee Country from the late 1820’s through the 1840’s. A series of religious revivals, led by Charles Grandison Finney among others, brought about a stream of sentiment against ‘worldly’ activities and such religious fervor that the area became known as the “Burned-Over District”. Finney himself was vehemently against theater. He once almost refused a speaking venue in New York City because it had previously been used as a theater. This prejudice may have been reflected in some of his sermons targeting the worldly pleasures that he felt good Christians needed to eschew if they desired salvation. Rochester, which included among its civic groups during that period the Moral Reform Society, the Sabbath Observance Movement, the Ladies’ Temperance Society, and the Young Ladies’ Temperance Hope Society, was one of the towns in the area in which resident and touring theatrical companies and circuses found little support In hope of appeasing Rochester’s Female Charitable Society, the local theater held a benefit performance in the Society’s name, but when the money raised was offered to them, the ladies summarily refused it, stating that they would not accept it “from a channel which they

18 McKelvey, Rochester on the Genesee, 67.
20 Hardman, 249.
are, by their efforts, endeavoring to persuade children to avoid as a noisome sink of immorality.\textsuperscript{22}

Later in the century, anti-theatrical feelings would still be found among some that had taken to heart the morals promoted during the great revival era. The grandmother of Caroline Cowles Richards, who lived in Canandaigua, Ontario County, was one such person. On July 4, 1857 young Caroline made the following entry in her diary:

July 4- Barnum’s circus was in town to-day and if Grandmother had not seen the pictures on the handbills I think she would have let us go. She said it was all right to look at the creatures God had made but she did not think He ever intended that women should go only half dressed and stand up and ride on horses bare back, or jump through hoops in the air. So we could not go.\textsuperscript{23}

Yet another local resident, Minerva Davis of Livonia, reflected that she had seen much change in the attitude of the Church toward entertainment over her lifetime.

From the pulpit the truth was made very plain. Worldly amusements and Sabbath breaking were among the sins not to be tolerated by Christians, The preaching is different now...the church and the world walk together more comfortably than when I was a girl.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Rochester Observer}(Rochester) 11 January, 1828. Quoted in Bitz thesis, 45. It is particularly interesting to speculate on the conversations in the Frederick Whittlesey household in Rochester at the time of the refusal. Mrs. Whittlesey was a board member of the Society, while her husband had read an oration on the opening night of that theater praising the local pioneers who now could enjoy “the arts which his free energies have nourished”, among which ‘Drama’ was specifically mentioned. (Monroe Republican(Rochester), 23 May, 1826., quoted in Bitz thesis, 18.)

\textsuperscript{23} Caroline Cowles Richards, \textit{Diary}, 1852-1872 (Canandaigua, NY), 81.

\textsuperscript{24} Minerva Davis, \textit{Reminiscences of Eighty Years Ago} (Livonia: The Gazette Press, 1915), 29
Changing Attitudes Toward Opera, Theater, and the Arts

As disreputable as theaters and actors had been considered during the Burned Over District era, changes were happening in the churches and across the country that softened attitudes toward public performances, paving the way for the rise of the opera house. “Religious attacks on theater... declined substantially by mid-century... The early religious warnings on the inherently corrupt and degenerative nature of theater and drama were replaced by hopeful, optimistic polemics proclaiming that theater and drama could be beneficial.”25 Locally, this concept ties well with to Dr. William H. Channing’s sermon, “In Defense of Popular Amusements”, given at Corinthian Hall in Rochester.26

Music, in particular, was perceived as one of the amusements that could ennoble a people. An 1837 article in a Geneseo newspaper contained an account of the author’s visit to Germany, and his delight and surprise in finding that nearly everyone there sang or played an instrument of some kind. At an impromptu evening concert featuring “nearly the whole of Haydn’s ‘Creation’ “, he was astounded at the ease with which the village population entertained themselves and their guest.

The recollection of this evening’s entertainment has often occurred to me as illustrating the happy influence of music upon domestic life and social habits. If you would have your young people to love home, induce them to cultivate music. It will beguile many a winter night, which might otherwise be spent in far different and more questionable pursuits. I would seriously recommend to such young workingmen, as have any fondness

for music, to look a little into the state of this matter among our more respectable German Emigrants, or in the Moravian Settlements in Pennsylvania. That which among us is a luxury imperfectly enjoyed by the rich, is among them the free inheritance of the yeomanry. There are few pleasures cheaper, more innocent or nearer home. The best instrumental music in our great towns is produced by the aid of foreigners.... I would, however, go a step further, and say that the subject is one of so much importance in a national and moral point of view, that public spirited men should attempt some concerted action for the encouragement of latent genius among the people.27

The author of this article had attributed the musical skill of the average German citizen to the fact that “Music is taught in the schools as an indispensible part of common education”. He chastised parents for neither encouraging children to learn an instrument, nor “setting “no proper value on music, either for pleasure or as a moral instrument.”28

The belief that there was a connection between music and morality was logical. After all, were not some of the most beautiful musical works of the time written for use in religious settings? The writer in the previous article had praised the German villagers’ rendition of ‘The Creation’, and certainly the ability to create a work of beauty came from a ‘higher power’, the Christian God. Therefore striving for beauty, refinement, and delicacy in manners, was in accord with Christian values and could be considered, in some people, an outward manifestation of inner grace. The Family Circle magazine stated in 1850, that “The benevolence of the Deity is strikingly displayed in that inherent love of the beautiful, which he has so kindly

27 “Popular Cultivation of Music”, The Livingston Republican (Geneseo), 24 October, 1837.
28 Ibid.
made a part of the common nature of man.” Music, then, was one of the first of the arts to be more widely accepted in public and private venues. Opera itself may have come to be considered a more acceptable, more elevated form of theater because of its melding of theatrical entertainment with music.

By the middle of the 19th century, grand opera, both Italian and German, had entered into the language of everyday life. One could purchase opera glasses, or opera cloaks, or dance to a musical piece (still played by old-time fiddlers today) called “The Opera Reel”. A scarf dubbed “The Diva” was offered to women. Opera companies were touring the United States, and a young Swedish opera singer named Jenny Lind was taking the country by storm under the management of the magnificent humbug himself, P. T. Barnum. Miss Lind appeared in Rochester in 1851, drawing such crowds that the streets and rooftops outside Corinthian Hall were crowded with people hoping to hear her through the open windows of the hall, as no room was left inside even for standing. In a marked contrast to an earlier situation, the Rochester Female Charitable Society did accept from Miss Lind a portion of the proceeds of a benefit concert she had done for the charitable institutions of the area.

Opera and opera singers had become one of many cultural points of common reference that most people were expected to have. In a parody of Shakespeare's “All the World’s A Stage” speech, this satirical poetry, published in an 1864 Albion newspaper, combines references to Shakespeare and prima

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29 Quoted in Bushman, 324-325.

donna's, the accoutrements of attending the opera, and a healthy lampooning of modern society. Note that even someone who frequented an oyster cellar, not a particularly reputable place, was capable of having an opinion in 1864 as to the merits of different operatic performers.

All the world's a lie-
A mighty, jolly, and enormous bouncer.
And all the men and women merely liars.
They have their 'white lies' and their 'nigger whoppers,'
And one man, in a day, tells many lies,
According to his notion. There's the schoolboy,
Who says he's sick when he has played old hookey.
Then there's the lover, sighing like the bellows
Then there's the soldier, who kills men and eats 'em
As he would larks. And then the fashionable lady
Reading the papers in her rocking-chair.
Then comes the broker, shaving notes and charging
Like a mad trooper. Then the grocery man
Who lives by selling roasted corn for coffee,
Sand for sugar, slate for coal, and camphene
For Cognac brandy. Then the brigadier,
Who, knowing nothing of the art of war,
Leads men to slaughter, just to give him practice.
To these succeeds the oyster-cellar critic,
Who swears Miss Tompkins sings like Madame Grisi,
Alboni, Jenny Lind, and Guerrabella-
The whole four nightingales rolled up in one;
But soon the lie's found out, and he is left
Sans wines, sans oysters, kids and opera tickets.31

Another illustration of how some types of theater, and opera in particular, had become an acceptable and suitable form of recreation for even young ladies can be found in Little Women, by Louisa May Alcott. Daughter of prominent educator

31 "All the World's a Stage" The Orleans Republican (Albion) 17 February 1864.
Bronson Alcott, She wrote a scene into her best-selling novel in which the girls and their friends are amusing each other at home by writing and producing an opera. Some familiar aspects of grand opera that would have been recognizable to her readers were inserted into the home grown production: foreign, or fantastic setting and names, a witch and supernatural being, a truly reprehensible villain, melodramatic acting style, and a pair of star-crossed young lovers. Even the bedroom had been set up so that the girl in the audience were able to sit in the ‘dress circle’, one of the more expensive areas of a theater, where the ‘best sorts’ of people usually sat.

On Christmas night a dozen girls piled onto the bed which was the dress circle and sat before the blue and yellow chintz curtains in a most flattering state of expectancy. There was a good deal of rustling and whispering behind the curtain, a trifle of lamp smoke, and an occasional giggle from Amy, who was apt to get hysterical in the excitement of the moment. Presently a bell sounded, the curtains flew apart, and the Operatic Tragedy began.

“A gloomy wood,” according to the one playbill, was represented by a few scrubs in pots, green baize on the floor, and a cave in the distance. The cave was made with a clotheshorse for a roof, bureaus for walls, and in it was a small furnace in full blast, with a black pot on it and an old witch bending over it. The stage was dark and the glow of the furnace had a fine effect, especially as real steam issued from the kettle when the witch took off the cover. A moment was allowed for the first thrill to subside. Then Hugo, the villain, stalked in with a clanking sword to his side, a slouched hat, black beard, mysterious cloak, and the boots. After pacing to and fro in agitation, he struck his forehead and burst out in a wild strain, singing of his hatred for Roderigo, his love for Zara, and his pleasing resolution to kill the one and win the other.

By writing such a scene, it is evident that play-acting at home among family and friends, and operas themselves were acceptable entertainments in ‘good’ homes
by the time Alcott wrote the book in 1868. And so, if operas were a respectable form of entertainment, where could one go to see one? Opera houses seem to have been an urban phenomenon during the mid-19th century. New York City, the closest major urban area to the Genesee Country had two theaters specifically referred to as opera houses in place by 1847—Palmo’s Opera House and the Astor Place Opera House. In addition, other theaters may not have been designated as opera houses, but were concentrating on featuring operatic productions as part of their season.

**Opera Houses and Rural Populations**

If theater, opera and other amusements were being patronized and supported in urban areas, what excuse had the more recently populated regions of the country further inland for withholding their support from these cultural institutions? Indeed, the failure to provide the cultural amenities considered necessary in the larger Eastern cities drew a tart rebuff from the editor of *The Olive Branch*, a pro-suffrage newspaper in Boston. A gentleman from Tennessee had written to the paper, asking if one of its female editors would consider moving into both his state and the state of matrimony. Her reply, quoted in one of the local newspapers as a humorous human interest article, stated, "The idea of a Boston girl, who goes to the opera, patronizes Jullian's concerts, waltzes once a week, eats ice cream, rides the omnibus...going to Tennessee, except she goes there as wife of one of your first class citizens, is

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ridiculous." The ability to go to the opera had been placed first in her list of amenities the city offered which rural, "uncivilized" areas could not possibly possess, making them undesirable and reinforcing the advantages of urban living from her viewpoint.

As the nation's population expanded westward, they became further removed from the sphere of influence of the East Coast cities which had for so long dominated culture, and which afforded a wide variety of amusements for those close enough to enjoy them. Yet many who went out to the wilderness still longed for that connection to the fashionable life, and 'society'. Richard Bushman, in *The Refinement of America*, discusses the perception that country dwellers seeking refinement had of "urban superiority on the scale of civilization". And, despite the desires of some founding fathers of the country to institute an egalitarian, classless society in the new nation, eschewing all aristocratic ways, this simply had not happened. Stratification of classes had indeed occurred, and wealthier people sought to restrict access to some forms of entertainment, such grand opera and Shakespearian plays. Both of these had their origin in Europe, which seemed to add to the cachet they had with the citizens who felt themselves to be the social elite. Lawrence W. Levine states, "The idea that Americans, long after they declared their political independence, retained a colonial mentality in matters of culture and intellect is a shrewd perception that deserves serious consideration." American art forms and

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34 The Livingston Republican (Geneseo) 23 November 1854.
35 Bushman, 222.
36 Lawrence W. Levine, Highbrow/Lowbrow, The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America
American actors simply were not thought of as being up to the standard of imported European arts and artists.

It was specifically a battle between supporters of rival Shakespearian actors, coupled with resentment against the American aristocracy of New York City, that led to the Astor Place riots in 1849. English actor James Macready and American Edwin Forrest both had supporters within the city, but working class audience members of the city protested Macready’s appearances at the Astor Place Opera House- first with disruption from the audience when he performed, then with handbills protesting his continued appearance at the “English Aristocratic Opera House”, and finally with “bricks and stones” thrown at the opera house during the ensuing riot. The National Guard was called out, and fired on the protesters, killing twenty-two and injuring many more. This battle was less about actors than it was about struggles between the upper and working classes.

By bringing opera, opera houses, and European art forms into smaller cities and villages, Americans were leveling the distinctions between the classes and the art forms each was allowed access to. The very act of constructing an opera house in a rural town- even though it may have been perceived as elevating local culture- was a tangible although possibly unwitting statement that an ideal democracy recognized no class barriers, and that all should have access to arts previously enjoyed only by the wealthy. At the very least, these opera houses were considered to bring the refined

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Dennis Berthold, “Class Acts: the Astor Place Riots and Melville’s ‘The Two Temples’” American Literature 71, no.3 (September 1999) 429-431.
amentities of the cities into outlying towns, as mentioned in several of the newspaper articles contained in Appendix 3. The Seymour Opera House in Mt. Morris was said to be “second to none in the state outside the cities”\textsuperscript{38} The Palmyra Opera House, too, was said to be “one of the nicest opera houses outside of the cities”\textsuperscript{39} It was believed, if one considers these assertions, that the amenities of the city, combined with the advantages of a more rural location could be brought together in one building – the opera house.

**Opera House Construction in the Genesee Country, 1865-1912**

Rochester was the first of the municipalities in the study area to have an opera house. Not that there weren’t public assembly rooms available before this—almost every town had a hall named either after the owner of the building (ie: Palmer’s Hall, Cuba), or bearing a name that honored a famous individual (Washington Hall, Corning), the state or country (Empire Hall, Painted Post; Union Hall, Nunda), implied dignity or classical leanings (Minerva Hall and Corinthian Hall, Rochester), or simply proclaimed that music might be found within (Concert Hall, Geneseo; Orchestron Hall\textsuperscript{40}, Hammondsport). These halls performed all the functions of opera houses, but usually did not have fixed, curving rows of seating as some opera houses had. Their open floor plans allowed for almost any activity to take place, and they were a facility found in nearly every town. These halls, like opera houses, provided an alternative location for fashionable people to congregate without

\textsuperscript{38} Mt. Morris Union (Mt. Morris) 15 September 1887.
\textsuperscript{39} “Our New Opera House” Rochester Democrat and Chronicle (Rochester) no day/month 1886.
\textsuperscript{40} The orchestrion was a mechanized organ. Hammondsport’s Orchestron Hall boasted one of the most
having to use the ballrooms of taverns or inns, considered slightly suspect since the temperance movement began, as they often sold liquor on their premises.

In 1865, the Metropolitan Theater on South St. Paul Street changed hands and reopened as the Rochester Opera House. There may have been perceived pressure to keep up with the amenities offered by rival canal town Buffalo, which had an opera house listed in its city directory as of 1864.41 In any case, Rochester’s was the first officially named opera house in the study area. A local newspaper gave praise to the new venture:

We may at last positively assert without fear of contradiction and not in a spirit of boasting that our city has an established first-class theatre—a want long felt. It will be conducted in the most liberal manner, No expense will be spared, no attractions lacking, to make the Rochester Opera House the fashionable evening resort of the city. Last season’s visitants of the Metropolitan will scarcely recognize the auditorium in its new coat of paint, new curtains, matting, etc.42

Shortly after the first Rochester Opera House burned in 1868, another quickly opened just around the corner. The Ely Street Opera House was short-lived, though, and never had quite the reputation of the first opera house. It closed before the new Rochester Opera House was completed in 1871. Within the study area, the opening of the Rochester Opera House seems to have been one of the catalysts for the increase in the amount of opera houses in the next four decades. An increase in the amount of rail laid and railroads financed, constructed, and merged also played a major role in the development of the theatrical network, not only in this region, but expensive in the area.

41 Thomas’ Buffalo City Directory for 1864 (Buffalo, NY: E.A. Thomas,1864)
42 Rochester Daily Democrat (Rochester) 26 August 1865.
across the areas serviced by railroads. Compare this section of an 1860 map of New York’s railroads to the section of the Cram’s 1888 railroad map which will be used in the following pages to track opera house growth and distribution in the area. Whether or not a town was located on a rail line had lasting economic effects on a community, affecting its growth. Railroads literally “held the power of life or death” over a town. They contributed to not only the economy, but also the cultural growth of a town, allowing access to goods, services, and the exchange of ideas and social/artistic trends. Fashion travelled by rail.

Figure 2. Section of Colton’s 1860 railroad map showing rail lines operating in study area in 1860.

44 Fogel, 9.
Figure 3. Section of Cram's railroad and town map showing rail lines operating in the study area in 1888.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{45}George F. Cram, Cram's Railroad and Township Map of New York. Chicago, Ill.: George F. Cram, 1888.
The growth of opera houses is aligned with the rail lines. Only very occasionally does an opera house appear in a town which did not have one or more rail lines going through them. The 1860 map shows only towns directly on rail routes, but those towns may have benefitted economically from earlier access to rail travel. Twenty-six of the towns in the study area which were on the earlier rail lines had opera houses. In total, fifty-two towns in the target area had opera houses, which brings the distribution of opera houses in towns along the earliest rail routes to fifty percent. The number of opera houses with confirmed construction dates over the forty-seven years when they were being built or renamed shows that the peak decade for building them was the 1880's.

Over the years, opera houses within towns sometimes changed names, due to management or ownership changes. In other towns, new opera houses would be constructed to replace another opera house destroyed by fire, the usual cause of opera house destruction at this time. A listing of opera houses by county and town shows the following opera houses to have been in existence at some time during the 1865-1912 time span, with the same structure undergoing a name change designated by an arrow between the names (→).

46 I have chosen to include opera houses which underwent a change in name from hall to opera house into my charts and maps because the conscious choice to rename a hall (ie: Bent’s Hall to Bent’s Opera House) was based on just that-choice. Many halls retained that appellation, but a number of them swayed to the vagaries of fashion and went with a more ‘modern’ and evocative name. The changing of a hall into an opera house was usually accompanied by remodeling and a grand re-opening under the new, hopefully more marketable name.
Figure 4. Graph of opera houses constructed or renamed from 1850-1930.
Figure 5. Distribution of new or renamed opera houses between originating between 1861 and 1870. ♠ = opera house location.
Figure 6. Distribution of new and renamed opera houses originating between 1871 and 1880. ▲ = opera house location.
Figure 7. Distribution of new and renamed opera houses originating between 1881 and 1890. ★ = opera house location.
Figure 8. Distribution of new and renamed opera houses originating between 1891 and 1900. = opera house location.
Figure 9. Distribution of new and renamed opera houses originating between 1901 and 1910. ★ = opera house location.
Figure 10. Distribution of new and renamed opera houses originating between 1911 and 1920. ★ = opera house location.
Figure 11. Total opera house distribution across the study region.  
\(\star\) = opera house location.
Names of Opera Houses and Their Locations

Allegany County
Richburgh: (now Richburg)- Baum’s Opera House, Brown’s Opera House, Opera House
Cuba: Keller Opera House
Bolivar: Bolivar Opera House
Wellsville: Wellsville Opera House
Friendship: Crandall’s Opera House

Genesee County
Batavia: Dellinger Opera House
Leroy: New Opera House, Central Opera House, Opera House
Oakfield: Oakfield Opera House, Weaver Opera House

Livingston County
Geneseo: Smith’s Opera House → Fauld’s Opera House
Mt. Morris: Seymour Opera House
Dansville: Heckman Opera House, Opera Hall
Livonia Station (now Livonia): Prettejohn Opera House
Avon: Hall’s Opera House
York: York Opera House
Caledonia: Perhamus Opera House

Monroe County
Rochester: Rochester Opera House (burned and replaced), Rochester Opera House → Grand Opera House, Cook Opera House, Ely Street Opera House
Fairport: Shaw’s Opera House
Brockport: Ward’s Opera House

Ontario County
Canandaigua: Canandaigua Opera House → McKechnie’s Opera House
Kingsbury Opera House → Canandaigua Grand Opera House → Davidson’s Opera House
Shortsville: Harlow Opera House
Victor: Jacob’s Opera House Hotel
Geneva: Smith Opera House, Linden Hall Opera House
Clifton Springs: Williamson-Gersch Opera House
Orleans County:
Lyndonville: Stokes' Opera House
Albion: Pratt Opera House
Medina: Bent's Opera House
Holley: Frisbee-Sawyer Opera House

Steuben County
Hornellsville (now Hornell): Shattuck Opera House
Corning: Barry's Opera House, Corning Opera House
Bath: Casino Opera House, Purdy Opera House
Painted Post: Bronson Opera House
Cohocton: Warner Opera House
Blood's Station (now Atlanta): Waite Opera House
Canisteo: Opera House
Prattsburgh: Pinney Opera House
Hammondsport: Frey's Opera House
Woodhull: Opera House
Greenwood: Greenwood Opera House

Wayne County
Palmyra: Palmyra Opera House
Sodus: Sodus Opera House, New Opera House
Red Creek: Opera House
Lyons: Parshall Memorial Opera House
South Butler: Opera House
Newark: Sherman Opera House (burned, rebuilt), Sherman Opera House
Clyde: Opera House
Wolcott: Opera House
Savannah: Gregg's Opera House
Marion: Clark's Opera House

Wyoming County
Perry: Olin Opera House (burned and replaced), Olin Opera House
Warsaw: Irving Opera House
Attica: Williams Opera House → Attica Opera House
Pike: Opera House
Castile: Castile Opera House

Yates County
Rushville: Rushville Opera House
Penn Yan: Cornevall's Opera House, Opera House
For towns which did not have an opera house or a hall, or for a person who wished to see a show at another such theater, railroads would provide transportation, running special excursion trains for theatergoers. A Livonia newspaper carried an advertisement for a “Washington’s Birthday Excursion To Rochester”, mentioning that passengers would find ‘Special holiday attractions at all of the theaters (on) account of Washington’s Birthday.” Opening of opera houses were also a cause for special excursion trains, as when the Rochester Opera House opened, drawing rail passengers from as far away as Mt. Morris. Cook Opera House in Rochester sometimes advertised its weekly show schedule in the Livonia newspaper, investing advertising money into drawing an audience from another county. Rail travel not only connected acting companies to theaters, but audience members as well.

If rail travel was a key factor in making opera houses and theaters easily accessible, what was the need for a town to support an opera house, or take pride in its construction, when there might be another one just a short distance away by rail? In figure 11, it can be seen that opera houses were actually quite close together in some areas, particularly in Wayne, Steuben, and Orleans counties. Were there other reasons for building an opera house other than the convenience of not having to take a short train ride to attend a performance?

47 Livonia Gazette (Livonia) 13 February 1903
Opera Houses as Perceived Indicators

When the oil boom hit in southern Allegany County in 1881, one of the first amenities that went up in the towns of Bolivar and Richburgh was an opera house.

Richburgh, in fact, boasted two- as described below.

By fall the valley was a forest of derricks. Everyone was gripped with a mad hysteria for oil, golden oil that was so easily transformed into solid gold. Within nine months Richburg had a population of eight thousand people. The transformation was incredible with 2 banks, 2 narrow-gauge railroads, a morning, an evening, and 2 Sunday papers, telegraph and telephone service, 56 hotels and boarding houses, 24 saloons and restaurants, 2 bottling works, 17 wholesale and retail grocers, 11 oil well supply stores, 8 laundries, 9 livery stables, 4 nitroglycerine dealers, 5 drug stores, 5 clothing stores, 2 iron and tool works, 2 hose companies, 12 lawyers, 9 doctors, 4 jewelers, 4 milliners, 5 policemen, 3 justices of the peace, 2 opera houses, 7 billiard parlors, a skating rink, and more than 20 bagrios (brothels), including one for colored clientele.

Opera houses were part of this boom town’s landscape, and considered necessary, for when the Baum Opera House burned down in 1882, it was immediately replaced by the Brown Brother’s Opera House. Other opera house owners replaced their theaters when they burned, too. The Sherman Opera House in Newark, The Rochester Opera House, as well as the Olin Opera in Perry all were rebuilt after fire had destroyed the original. Had there been no expectation that the title ‘opera house’ was a desirable one, the names of these structures may well have been changed.

The designation ‘opera house’ carried connotations of gentility, of higher quality entertainment, and of entertainment usually reserved for the upper classes.

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49 Ibid, 12.

50 It would not be until the second decade of the twentieth century that opera houses would begin to be
During New York City’s Astor Place riot in 1849, one of the cries the crowd was heard to have shouted as they attacked the opera house with bricks and stones was “Burn the den of the aristocracy!”\textsuperscript{51}, and for working class people, the attitude that an opera house automatically meant a higher quality of performance than a theater seems to have continued for many years. This perception may have lasted longer in more rural parts of the study area. Opera houses continued to be built for a longer period of time in the outlying towns than in the largest urban center of the area, Rochester.\textsuperscript{52}

Rochester’s Cook Opera House was advertising itself as the “Home of High-Class Vaudeville” at a time (mid-1890’s) when the Lyceum Theater just down the street was attracting more of the ‘legitimate’ theater and touring opera companies.\textsuperscript{53}

Although the frequency of opera house construction had dwindled between 1900-1910, new opera houses were still being built in the area up to 1912.\textsuperscript{54}

The building of an opera house was newsworthy both in its own town and others. The Syracuse papers reported on opera houses under construction in Sodus and Lyons, Batavia newspapers reported on opera houses in Oakfield and Attica, and the construction of the Palmyra Opera House was reported in Rochester. Opera houses were a topic of interest, possibly mixed with overtones of rivalry and competition. Building an opera house seems to have brought with it a sense of joining a club- the fraternity of towns economically and culturally advanced enough that they

\textsuperscript{51} Peter G. Buckley, To the Opera House: Culture and Society in New York City, 1820-1860. (Stonybrook, NY: SUNY Stonybrook, 1984), 16.

\textsuperscript{52} See appendix I

\textsuperscript{53} original programs from the Cook Opera House and Lyceum Theater, Rochester, c. 1892-1920.
were capable of having someone to finance an opera house as an individual or a consortium, or, if no one stepped forward to do so, to build one as a publicly financed section of the town hall itself.

There is an ample amount of primary source evidence to show that towns felt that they 'deserved' and 'needed' an opera house. In addition to the articles contained in appendix 3, the *Corning Journal* complained that "A village of the size and enterprise of Corning should have a first class Opera House." In Geneva, the lack of an opera house felt since the Linden Hall Opera House burned brought about a series of articles in the local newspapers entreati ng "Here is an opportunity for a man favored with abundant capital like Wm. Smith, Wm. J King, S.K. Nestor, T.C. Maxwell to invest in a profitable undertaking and perpetuate his memory in a building to bear his name."  

Many men, and a few women, stepped forward and invested in their communities by financing an opera house. Not all bore their names, but most were men of commerce. There seems to have been no one type of business that took a prominent position in the undertaking. Professions of financiers varied, including among others a hops merchant, physician, boat builder, brewer, coal and produce dealer, lawyer, banker, hardware store owner, and hotel owner. All, however, could expect to receive the accolades of their town both in public and in the newspapers.

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54 See figures 4-10 and appendix 1
55 *Corning Journal* (Corning) 16 April 1885.
57 See appendix 2
across the region. Not only was this good for business, but it cemented a person's reputation across a wide geographic area as someone who was economically solvent, canny in business, public-minded, culturally aware, and generous. This perception would be reinforced every time someone attended a show in the theater or passed by the opera house that bore the financier's name.

Even the structures themselves were usually noteworthy. Many were designed in the Italianate or Second Empire style with elaborate facades and towers. Others, completed for less cash outlay, still seemed to try to command attention through the use of false fronts on the building or elaborate stencilling inside—a technique no less impressive for being economical to install. Usually these theaters occupied the top floor of a commercial building, allowing the trusses of the roof to bear the weight, rather than having the audience's view of the performance blocked by support joists. Economically, it was a canny accommodation, too. The businesses on the lower floor gained the cachet of advertising that they could be found 'in the Opera House Block', and the owner of the building gained income from rents even when there was no group paying for the use of the hall upstairs. Rental prices for the opera house itself varied from town to town, and local fraternal organizations as well as community drama groups and music societies were common customers.

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58 see appendix 3
Largest County Store in Western New York. Also Proprietor of Stokes’ Opera House. Seating capacity 500.

LYNDONVILLE, N. Y.

Figure 12. Stokes' Opera House, Lyndonville. Here is a good example of how simple an opera house could be—little more than a large room above a county store.

Figure 13. South Butler's Opera House, now moved to Genesee Country Museum, Mumford, N.Y., is another good example of a simple, yet effective opera house above a merchantile establishment. While simple on the outside, the opera house's interior was lavishly stencilled.
Figure 14. The Shattuck Opera House, Hornell. This is a fine example of an opera house designed to impress viewers. Note the architectural similarity between this and the following two opera houses.

Figure 15. The Purdy Opera House, Bath. This structure was unusual in that the stairway to access the theater was operated like a drawbridge and came down into an alley beside the storefronts.
Figure 16. Interior and exterior views of the Parshall Memorial Opera House, Lyons.
Figure 17. Contrast the simple interior plan of the Prettejohn Opera House in Livonia with the interior of the previous opera house. This helps illustrate that the term opera house was less applicable to the structure of the building than an appellation important to the community at large.

Opera houses, whether the most elaborate or the most simple, were one of the anchors in their town, providing a point of reference for the whole community. When the town of Mount Morris held its centennial celebration in 1894, townspeople were directed to congregate at the Seymour Opera House for literary exercises to follow the parade. The Seymour Opera House also was listed as being the starting and finishing point of footraces to Sonyea and back.59 No street address was given for the opera house- none was needed. It was one of the buildings in Mt. Morris that was a well known part of the community landscape.

59 “Program of the Centennial Celebration” Mount Morris. 15 August, 1894.
Other towns and businesses assumed the same point of reference for their own opera houses. They were a matter of community pride-an amenity in the village which engendered respect and were considered worthy of use when advertising a communities' benefits to outsiders. Attica, Lyons, and Sodus all used their opera houses in promoting their villages. In the booklet, Lyons, N.Y.-1911, published by its chamber of Commerce and the Republican Press, it states on page 4, "The Opera House, with a seating capacity of 1,600, is acknowledged to be one of the best-patronized in the State." Similarly, The promotional booklet Along the Rochester and Sodus Bay Line, another of the sort that touted the benefits of local communities, said of Sodus, "Sodus is justly proud of its Opera House, which has been built but a few years and is one of the handsomest between Rochester and Syracuse." An undated advertisement from a 1900 Attica newspaper asking businesses to consider moving there lists "Opera House- One of the Finest" as one of the many amenities of Attica.

Opera Houses were commented on as being worthy, welcome additions to a town. Community pride is evident in the way details of an opera house's construction and furnishings were lavishly described in local newspapers. In keeping with the concept that the arts were a refining factor in people's lives, the aesthetic aspects of the opera house were considered to be of interest to local readers. The most detailed information on the opera house's color schemes, ornamentation, lighting, stage, scenery and seating arrangements was all duly reported by newspapers. Pride is

60 Lyons Republican Press, Along the Rochester and Sodus Bay Line (Lyons, NY: Lyons Republican Press, c.1911), 27.
61 See appendix 3
evident as well, when the firm designing the opera house, usually Leon H. Lempert and Son of Rochester, was the same for them as had been used for some of the larger, more elaborate urban theaters. Communities felt their opera houses reflected well on them and their accomplishments, and thus can be considered ‘perceived indicators’ of economic and cultural success.”

The Business of Play

This was the height of the ‘Gilded Age’, a period of time marked by determined capitalism, expanding industrial networks, increased leisure time as a result of revised labor laws, rapidly changing demographics as immigrant populations increased, conspicuous consumption on the part of the monied classes, and the beginnings of the progressive era and its concerns over social justice. Class divisions based on country of origin, economic status, and education existed, and the wealthier, more refined citizens often worried about providing what they perceived as wholesome, morally and intellectually uplifting entertainment for the masses which would wean them away from “entertainments which were not only bereft of educational value; but often downright degrading.” The opera house movement combines three major themes of this era- increasing leisure time, conspicuous consumption on the part of the wealthy, and increasing concerns over social reform and control over the working class. An opera house was a desirable addition to a town’s landscape because it would provide a more wholesome class of entertainment than a burlesque house or dance hall. Even

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See appendix 3

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though dances could be held in an opera house (in fact the local theatrical architect firm of Leon H. Lempert and Son offered plans for opera house with removable chairs and floors that could be lowered into a level position to facilitate dancing) dance halls themselves had an unsavory connotation in some social circles. Villages and cities in the Genesee Country sought reputable venues for their entertainment needs. As the population grew, larger, more flexible spaces which could serve many functions became a priority.

One of the misconceptions about 19th century opera houses is that they showed operas. Nothing could be further from the case in the study region, and across the country. Opera houses performed many functions in the community in addition to providing a venue for touring theatrical companies. In the Genesee County, as in other regions of the nation, opera houses were the place in town where the high schools graduated prior to the building of schools with their own auditoriums. They held poultry shows, dances, concerts and plays by local amateurs which raised funds for local organizations. They were the site of political caucuses and speechmaking, of “Tom Thumb Weddings” and Kirmisses. Roller skating, boxing matches, and basketball games provided entertainment in them as well as the occasional touring show. Sometimes the home entertainment was more appreciated than the professional. The editor of the Mount Morris Union soundly chastised the

63 Glassberg, 353.
theatergoers of that town for not providing a good audience for a touring opera company in 1887.

The Montegue-Turner English Gem Opera Company will probably never appear in Mt. Morris again. They are, and have good reason to be, thoroughly disgusted with the town. The first night their audience numbered less than 300 and the second night you could not count 50 people in the house. Entertainment of such high merit as are given by this company are evidently not appreciated by Mt. Morris people, consequently the light attendance. A ten-cent comedy company seems to be what our people want. There is one coming.

In Avon, one disgruntled performer gouged the following into the backstage area of the Hall’s Opera House, “THIS IS A ROTTEN SHOW TOWN- 1907”. As amateur theatrical organizations grew in number, so did their local following. English actor, Henry Neville commented, “Amateur performances, I am afraid, have done much to destroy the old mystery and romance of the stage. I believe the lack of enthusiasm in our audiences is due to this.” Gilbert and Sullivan operettas seem to have been the most popular form of opera ever performed by these groups. Blanche Jennings Thompson of Geneseo remembers,

Not all the theatrical productions which graced the stage of Concert Hall were performed by itinerant theatrical troupes. On many an evening, local talent trod the boards. Then, indeed, was excitement rife, for romance could ask no more than to see the local hotel proprietor, growing a trifle corpulent but fine indeed in the Admiral's costume in Pinafore while the plump but charming wife of a criminal lawyer sang 'Buttercup' with charming effect. Our young hearts were torn with anguish when the popular young tenor sang in melting tones.

66 Mount Morris Union (Mt. Morris) 8 December 1887.
"Farewell my own, light of my life, farewell!
For crime unknown I go to a dungeon cell."

Sometimes an amateur company from a neighboring town was invited to perform for our enjoyment. Usually after these performances supper was served and dancing followed.\textsuperscript{68}

An opera house was a cohesive factor in the social life of their community. It was a common meeting ground where all economic classes within the community were levelled. The lawyer and the coal merchant were welcome to perform or view performances on equal footing, making a small town opera house one of the great exemplars of democratic society and village life in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Opera houses were part of the landscape of villages across the Genesee Country during the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries. The viewing of opera had become an acceptable form of entertainment by the mid-19\textsuperscript{th} century in America's great urban centers. After 1865 in the study area, opera houses became part of the small town and county village's social and economic life. They represented a municipal entity's attempt to become part of the larger urban movement that was overtaking a formerly agrarian-based nation. Their existence was a symbol of economic success, and cultural success for their town as well as their financier. Opera houses became the venue for many different functions necessary to communities,
encompassing the political, social, economic, cultural, and technological spheres of small town life. They provided a meeting place where many different nationalities and economic classes found a common ground, and helped the spread of culture and ideas throughout the region. Railroads provided access for communities at large to exchange ideas and information, creating a national network between opera houses and their audiences. Evidence in the form of newspaper articles, diaries, theatrical posters, playbills, and the increasing physical presence over time of the structures themselves point to thesis that opera houses represented perceived indicators on the part of a community that they were economically and culturally successful.

68 Blanche Jennings Thompson, "Concert Hall" undated essay in Livingston County Historical Society collection. Concert Hall later became Smith’s Opera House.
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Appendix 1

TIMELINE
of
OPERA HOUSE and HALL CONSTRUCTION
with additional
Performances and Occurrences of Note

(Opera houses newly constructed, having a change of name, or converted from other structures that year have been highlighted.)

1798
Theater built of logs in Bath, Steuben County

1815
Stagecoach runs between Canandaigua and Rochester twice a week
Erie Canal open from Albany to Rochester

1816
Village band started, inspired by traveling musician: Rochester, Monroe County

1823
Erie Canal opens from Rochester to Albany

1825
Erie Canal complete to Buffalo

1826
Theater opens: Rochester, Monroe County

1828
Circus building built- shows plays as well as animal acts: Rochester, Monroe County

1829
Sam Patch leaps off the Genesee River Falls and dies. Local ministers tell congregations that if they were there watching, they contributed to his death: Rochester, Monroe County

1830
Charles Grandison Finney begins months-long religious revival in Rochester and surrounding towns: Rochester, Monroe County

1836
Town Hall with stage: Rose, Wayne County

1837
Chang and Eng, Siamese twins, perform: Geneseo, Livingston County
Completion of a railroad from Rochester to Batavia

1 This timeline has been constructed from data found in works cited in the bibliography. This does not represent a complete timeline because several known opera houses and many halls not listed here have not yet been successfully documented as to construction date.
Rochester Sketchbook boasts that there are no theaters or circuses to be found in the village: Rochester, Monroe County

Genesee Valley Canal complete from Rochester to Mt. Morris

Empire Hall: Painted Post, Steuben County
National Hotel, site of concerts, dances, plays: Perry, Wyoming County
Genesee Valley Canal reaches Dansville
Railroad completed from Rochester to Auburn

Tom Thumb performs at the Morton Hotel: Rochester, Monroe County

Palmo’s Opera House, New York City

Astor Place Opera House built on the corner of Broadway and the Bowery, New York City

Stone’s Hall, a.k.a. St. Paul Street Theater: Rochester, Monroe County
Eight public halls listed in directory: Rochester, Monroe County
Fox sisters hear rappings from ‘spirit world’: Hydesville, Wayne County

Corinthian Hall: Rochester, Monroe County
Mechanic’s Hall: Painted Post, Steuben County
Astor Place Opera House riot kills 22 people, injures over 150: New York City

Atwater Hall: Canandaigua, Ontario County

Concert Hall: Geneseo, Livingston County
Jenny Lind sings at Corinthian Hall: Rochester, Monroe County

Horace Greeley speaks at Concert Hall: Geneseo, Livingston County

Stone’s Hall remodeled, renamed Metropolitan Theater: Rochester, Monroe County
Irving Hall (would later become Irving Opera Hall): Warsaw, Wyoming County

Franconi’s Colossal Hippodrome performs: Dansville and Geneseo, Livingston County
First U.S. patent issued for ‘Opera Chairs’

Bemis Hall: Canandaigua, Ontario County

Chang and Eng, Siamese Twins, perform at Bemis Hall: Canandaigua, Ontario County
1857
Washington Hall: Tabor’s Corners, Livingston County
Smith’s Hall: Perry, Wyoming County
P.T. Barnum’s circus performs: Canandaigua, Ontario County

1858
Buffalo Metropolitan Opera Company performs: Rochester, Monroe County

1860
Burrow’s Hall created out of Baptist Church: Albion, Orleans County
Metropolitan Hall, later Metropolitan Theater: Rochester, Monroe County

1861
Mrs. Anna Bishop performs selections from grand opera: Rochester, Monroe County
The Zoave Operatic Concert Troupe appears at Awanaga Hall: Flint, Ontario County

1862
Civil War begins

1863
Civil War ends

1864
Bent’s Hall: Medina, Orleans County (would later become Bent’s Opera House)

1865
Metropolitan Theater changes management, reopens as Rochester Opera House: Rochester, Monroe County
First mention of Leon H. Lempert as Scenic Artist for Rochester Opera House
Ghioni and Susini Opera Troupe perform “Faust” at Rochester Opera House

1866
Frederick Douglass lectures at Canaseraga Hall: Dansville, Livingston County.

1867
“The Black Crook” plays at the Rochester Opera House
Washington Hall: Corning, Steuben County

1868
Shaw’s Hall (would later become Shaw’s Opera House): Fairport, Monroe County
Rochester Opera House burns on November 6- local newspaper begs relief for actors who lost everything in the fire: Rochester, Monroe County
Ely Street Opera House opens in remodeled Catholic church: Rochester, Monroe County

1870
Bradley Hall: East Bloomfield, Ontario County
Ely Street Opera House changes name and closes within the year: Rochester, Monroe County

1871
Rochester Opera House, later known as the Grand Opera House rebuilt, same site: Rochester, Monroe County
Union Hall created from Universalist Church: Nunda, Livingston County
Decker Block built with theater/ballroom: Brockport, Monroe County
1872
Metropolitan Hall burns: Wellsville, Allegany County

**Palmer's Hall:** Cuba, Allegany County

Clark's Hall created from Reformed Church: Marion, Wayne County
c. 1872 Starr's Hall: Leroy, Genesee County (would later become opera house)

1873
Union Hall: Victor, Ontario County
Lemon's Hall created from Presbyterian church: Attica, Wyoming County

**Shattuck Opera House:** Hornell, Steuben County
Wetmore Hall: North Cohocton, Steuben County

1874
Trimble Hall created from Universalist Church: York, Livingston County

**Dellinger Opera House:** Batavia, Genesee County
Village Hall built with theater: Albion, Orleans County
William Cody, a.k.a. 'Buffalo Bill', moves to Rochester, Monroe County
Honeoye Amusement Hall: Honeoye, Ontario County

1875
**Jacob's Opera House Hotel,** a.k.a. Jacob's Hall: Victor, Ontario County

1876
**Hall's Opera House:** Avon, Livingston County
Grange Hall with stage: Trumansburg, Steuben County
Orchestrian Hall: Hammondsport, Steuben County
Opera House programs show a resident acting troupe: Rochester, Monroe County
Buffalo Bill performs at Rochester Opera House: Rochester, Monroe County

1877
**Perhamus Opera House:** Caledonia, Livingston County

1878
**Opera House:** Woodhull, Steuben County
**Sodus Opera House:** Sodus, Wayne County
Bemis Hall remodeled into **Canandaigua Opera House,** a.k.a. **McKechnie's Opera House:** Canandaigua, Ontario County

**Purdy Opera House:** Bath, Steuben County

1879
Corinthian Hall remodeled, renamed Academy of Music: Rochester, Monroe County
Buffalo Bill appears at **Ward's Opera House:** Brockport, Monroe County
Rochester Opera Club formed: Rochester, Monroe County
Monroe County Poultry Show at Ward's Opera House: Brockport, Monroe County

1880
**Parker House** built with entertainment rooms upstairs: Dalton, Livingston County

**Williams Opera House:** Attica, Wyoming county
Barden Hall: Pembroke, Genesee County
The Casino opens as roller skating rink: Bath, Steuben County
Washington Hall sold, reopens as **Barry's Opera House:** Corning, Steuben County
Union Hall and Watkins Hall burns: Rushville, Yates County
Walker House Hotel built with theater/ballroom upstairs: Bergen, Genesee County
1881
Parshall Memorial Opera House: Lyons, Wayne County
Gird House built, with entertainment hall upstairs: Rushville, Yates County
Oil boom: Allegany County
Cain’s Opera House: Bolivar, Allegany County
Baum Opera House, and another unnamed opera house:
Richburgh, Allegany County

1882
Baum Opera House burns: Richburgh, Allegany County
Brown’s Opera House: Richburgh, Allegany County

1883
Union Hall: Nunda, Livingston County
Warner Opera House: Cohocton, Steuben County
Rushville Opera House: Rushville, Yates County
Metropolitan Opera House built in New York City

1884
Keehn Hall: Rochester, Monroe County
Kingsbury Opera House: Canandaigua, Ontario County
Opera House: South Butler, Wayne County
Sherman Opera House: Newark, Wayne County
Barry Opera House burns: Corning, Steuben County
Village Hall, a.k.a. Williamson and Gersch Opera House: Clifton Springs, Ontario County
Opera House begun by the Allison Brothers— they go bankrupt, and it is not completed by them: Canisteo, Steuben County
Professional theater directory lists Olin’s Opera House: Perry, Wyoming County

1885
Concert Hall: Springwater, Livingston County.
Riddle Hall: Canisteo, Steuben County
Casino Opera House created from remodeled rollerskating rink:
Bath, Steuben County
Village Hall with stage: Clifton Springs, Ontario County
c. 1885 Opera House, Leroy, Genesee County
Leon H. Lempert, scenic designer for the Rochester Opera House begins a theatrical design firm which becomes Leon H. Lempert & Son, Theatrical Architects:
Rochester, Monroe County

1886
Heckman Opera House: Dansville, Livingston County
Gregg’s Opera House: Savannah, Wayne County
White’s Hall built for theater, roller skating, and polo: Perry, Wyoming County
Palmyra’s Village Hall remodeled into Palmyra Opera House:
Palmyra, Wayne County
1887
Opera House: Canisteo, Steuben County
Genesee Opera Club presents “HMS Pinafore”, by Gilbert and Sullivan:
Genesee, Livingston County
Seymour Opera House: Mt. Morris, Livingston County

1888
Lyceum Theater, “largest stage between New York and Chicago”:
Rochester, Monroe County
Bronson Opera House: Painted Post, Steuben County
Frisbee-Sawyer Opera House: Holley, Orleans County
Local drama group performs Gilbert and Sullivan operettas: Webster, Monroe County

1889
Kingsbury Opera House foreclosure- purchased by James McKechnie: Canandaigua, Ontario County

1890
Grand Opera House, former Rochester Opera House, burns:
Rochester, Monroe County
Canandaigua Grand Opera House (former Kingsbury Opera House) opens:
Canandaigua, Ontario County
Pratt’s Opera House, Albion, Orleans County

1891
Cook Opera House under construction: Rochester, Monroe County
York Opera House created from Scotch Presbyterian church: York,
Livingston County
Corning Opera House and Conservatory of Music: Corning, Steuben County
Opera House remodeled by Leon H. Lempert & Son: Canisteo, Steuben County
Olin Opera House block burns: Perry, Wyoming County

1892
Cook Opera House opens on site of Grand Opera House: Rochester, Monroe County
Linden Hall Opera House burns: Geneva, Ontario County

1893
Burgess Hall: Caledonia, Livingston County
Olin Opera House rebuilt: Perry, Wyoming County

1894
Smith Opera House: Geneva, Ontario County
Keehn Hall closes: Rochester, Monroe County
Waite Opera House: Blood’s Depot (now Atlanta), Steuben County
Burgess Hall burns: Caledonia, Livingston County
Opera House: Red Creek, Wayne County
Gilbert and Sullivan’s “Iolanthe” performed by local actors at Ward’s Opera House:
Brockport, Monroe County
1895
Burgess Hall rebuilt: Caledonia, Livingston County
Arnold House Hotel built with large hall upstairs: Oakfield, Genesee County
Lillian Russell and her opera company play at The Lyceum Theater: Rochester, Monroe County
Village Hall built with theater: Honeoye Falls, Monroe County

1897
Town Hall built with theater: Lindley, Steuben County
Loomis Memorial Hall: Rushville, Yates County
Grand Opera House sold to Chas. Robinson and Alexander Davidson: Canandaigua, Ontario County.

1898
Corinthian Academy of Music burns: Rochester, Monroe County
Sherman Opera House burns: Newark, Wayne County
Baker Theater: Rochester, Monroe County
Opera House burns: Victor, Ontario County
Opera House: Oakfield, Genesee County
Amusement Hall opens: East Groveland, Livingston County
Town Hall built with theater: Perry, Wyoming County

1899
Town Hall with stage built: Victor, Ontario County
Sherman Opera House rebuilt: Newark, Wayne County

1900
Village Hall with stage built: Nunda, Livingston County
Cook Opera House advertises itself as “The Home of High Class Vaudeville”: Rochester, Monroe County

1901
G. Frey Opera House: Hammondsport, Steuben County
Bolivar Opera House burns: Bolivar, Allegany County
Perhamus Opera House closes: Caledonia, Livingston County

1902
Miller Hall created from remodeled Baptist Church: Attica, Wyoming County
Opera House burns- arson: Oakfield, Genesee County

1903
Prettejohn Opera House: Livonia, Livingston County
Grand Opera House becomes Davidson’s Opera House: Canandaigua, Ontario County
Farman Theater: Warsaw, Wyoming County

1904
Corinthian Theater built on site of Corinthian Academy of Music: Rochester, Monroe County
Empire Theater torn down: Rochester, Monroe County

1905
“New Opera House”, designed by Leon H. Lempert & Son: Sodus, Wayne County
1906
Smith’s Opera House sold- becomes **Fauld’s Opera House**: Geneseo, Livingston County
Village Hall with theater built: Wyoming, Wyoming County
Town Hall with theater built: Bristol, Ontario County

1907
Miller Hall sold to Masonic Lodge: Attica, Wyoming County
Village Hall built with theater on second floor: Addison, Steuben County
Yates Lyceum burns: Penn Yan, Yates County
Davidson Opera House renamed Davidson’s Theater, showing movies: Canandaigua, Ontario County

1908
Town Hall built with theater on second floor: Geneseo, Livingston County
Gregg’s Opera House burns: Savannah, Wayne County
Town Hall with theater created from Baptist Church: Middlesex, Yates County

1909
Atwater Hall demolished to make way for post office: Canandaigua, Ontario County
Williams Opera House sold- becomes **Attica Opera House**: Attica, Wyoming County
Town Hall built with theater: Savannah, Wayne County
**Weaver Opera House**: Oakfield, Genesee County

1910
Casino Opera House burns: Bath, Steuben County
Ward’s Opera House burns- bottom two floors saved: Brockport, Monroe County
**Opera House planned by Frederick I Swarts**: Penn Yan, Yates County

1911
Palmer Hall purchased by Harry Keller- renamed the ‘**Keller Opera House**’: Cuba, Allegany County
Concert Hall purchased by town for use as hall: Springwater, Livingston County
Farman Theater sold to Village of Warsaw: Warsaw, Wyoming County

1912
Cook’s Opera House closes: Rochester, Monroe County
Keith Family Theater (movies and vaudeville) opens in former Cook Opera House: Rochester, Monroe County
**Opera House**: Penn Yan, Yates County
Wonderland Theater shows movies in old Burgess Hall: Caledonia, Livingston County
Frisbee-Sawyer Opera House is showing movies: Holley, Orleans County

1913
Fauld’s Opera House leased, shows movies: Geneseo, Livingston County
New Bath Theater opens: Bath, Steuben County
First sound movie shown in Rochester, Monroe County at the Temple Theater

1914
Windom Hall foreclosed on, purchased by village as hall: Scottsville, Monroe County
1915
Trimble Hall razed: York, Livingston County
Grange Hall with stage: Barre, Orleans County

1916
McKechnie Opera House remodeled into offices: Canandaigua, Ontario County

1917
Opera House renamed Powers Theater, showing movies as well as live theater
c. 1916: Red Creek, Wayne County

1918
Baker Theater becomes Gayety Theater, a burlesque house:
Rochester, Monroe County
Ellicott Hall burns: Batavia, Genesee County

1919
Weaver Opera House sold to Levi Phillips- becomes almost exclusively a movie house: Oakfield, Genesee County

1921
Concert Hall (Smith’s, later Fauld’s Opera House) sold, becomes auto dealership:
Geneseo, Livingston County
Heckman Opera House sold to owners of new Star Theater (movies and vaudeville):
Dansville, Livingston County

1925
Sherman Opera House burns: Newark, Wayne County
Palmyra Opera House partially burns

1926
York Opera House sold to town for a hall, then burns: York, Livingston County

1927
Building razed which was once the Ely Street Opera House: Rochester, Monroe County

1928
Corinthian Theater burns: Rochester, Monroe County

1929
Gayety (old Baker) Theater razed for parking garage: Rochester, Monroe County
Remains of Corinthian Theater razed for parking lot: Rochester, Monroe County
Grange Hall built with stage: Tuscarora, Livingston County

1930
Weaver Opera House sold to Joseph Baglio, renamed ‘Star Theater’.
Oakfield, Genesee County

1931
Old Heckman Opera House sold, converted to a bowling alley:
Dansville, Livingston County

1932
Oakfield Opera House building burns- arson: Oakfield, Genesee County
Warner Opera House building burns: Cohocton, Steuben County

1934
Lyceum Theater closes, is razed for parking garage: Rochester, Monroe County
Heckman Opera House building burns: Dansville, Livingston County
1935
Dellinger Opera House building burns: Batavia, Genesee County

1937
Bennington Town Hall built with stage and auditorium:
Bennington, Wyoming County

1940
Honeoye Amusement Hall burns: Honeoye, Ontario County

1941
Prettejohn Opera House converted to bowling alley and billiards room:
Livonia, Livingston County
Farman Theater dismantled and remodeled: Warsaw, Wyoming County

1945
Palmyra Opera house remodeled into community center, removing its sloped floor
and balcony.

1953
Prettejohn Opera House building burns: Livonia, Livingston County

1960
Leroy Opera House building burns: Leroy, Genesee County

1962
Lemon Hall building razed to provide site for bank: Attica, Wyoming County

1963
Canisteo Opera House building burns

1966
Union Hall/Academy of music razed: Nunda, Livingston County
Irving Opera Hall building razed: Warsaw, Wyoming County

1974
Cook Opera House building razed: Rochester, Monroe County
Kingsbury Opera House building burns: Canandaigua, Ontario County

1975
Shaw's Opera House building razed for urban renewal: Fairport, Monroe County

1985
Bradley Hall building burns: East Bloomfield, Ontario County

1991
Addison Village Hall building destroyed by arson: Addison, Steuben County
## Appendix 2
### Occupations of Opera House and Hall Builders

(Builder refers to the person who funded the construction, not the contractor)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OPERA HOUSE/HALL</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>BUILDER</th>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bath Theater/Opera House</td>
<td>Bath</td>
<td>1798</td>
<td>Charles Williamson</td>
<td>land agent/entrepreneur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empire Hall</td>
<td>Painted Post</td>
<td>1841</td>
<td>A.H. and F.E. Erwin</td>
<td>foundry owners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone's Hall</td>
<td>Rochester</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td>Enos Stone, Jr.</td>
<td>land speculator, businessman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corinthian Hall</td>
<td>Rochester</td>
<td>1849</td>
<td>William Reynolds</td>
<td>businessman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanic's Hall</td>
<td>Painted Post</td>
<td>1849</td>
<td>A.H. and F.E. Erwin</td>
<td>foundry owners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concert Hall</td>
<td>Geneseo</td>
<td>1851</td>
<td>James S. Wadsworth</td>
<td>landowner, farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bent's Hall</td>
<td>Medina</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>Don C. Bent</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bemis Hall</td>
<td>Canandaigua</td>
<td>1855</td>
<td>George D. Bemis</td>
<td>bookseller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rochester Opera House</td>
<td>Rochester</td>
<td>1865</td>
<td>group of businessmen</td>
<td>varied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradley Hall</td>
<td>East Bloomfield</td>
<td>1870</td>
<td>Bani Bradley</td>
<td>farmer, Justice of the Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Opera House</td>
<td>Rochester</td>
<td>1871</td>
<td>Judge Fincke</td>
<td>businessman, Judge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decker Block</td>
<td>Brockport</td>
<td>1871</td>
<td>J. D. Decker</td>
<td>banker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palmer's Hall</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>1872</td>
<td>Joseph Palmer</td>
<td>businessman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark's Hall</td>
<td>Marion</td>
<td>1872</td>
<td>Thomas Clark</td>
<td>businessman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Hall</td>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>1873</td>
<td>E. C. Bristol</td>
<td>butcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wetmore Hall</td>
<td>North Cohocton</td>
<td>1873</td>
<td>J. C. Wetmore</td>
<td>merchant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shattuck Opera House</td>
<td>Hornell</td>
<td>1873</td>
<td>Dr. Sewell E. Shattuck</td>
<td>physician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trimble Hall</td>
<td>York</td>
<td>1874</td>
<td>Joseph Trimble</td>
<td>businessman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dellinger Opera House</td>
<td>Batavia</td>
<td>1874</td>
<td>John Dellinger</td>
<td>merchant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Hall with stage</td>
<td>Albion</td>
<td>1874</td>
<td>Village of Albion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob's Hall/Opera House Hotel</td>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>Albert Jacobs</td>
<td>businessman, hotelier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hall's Opera House</td>
<td>Avon</td>
<td>1876</td>
<td>? Hall</td>
<td>merchant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchesterion Hall</td>
<td>Hammondsport</td>
<td>1876</td>
<td>Mrs. Fred Fach</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKechnie's Opera House</td>
<td>Canandaigua</td>
<td>1878</td>
<td>James and Alexander McKechnie</td>
<td>brewers, boatbuilders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purdy Opera House</td>
<td>Bath</td>
<td>1878</td>
<td>M.C &amp; W. H. Purdy</td>
<td>merchant, music store owner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ward's Opera House</td>
<td>Brockport</td>
<td>1870's</td>
<td>George Ward</td>
<td>grocer, mayor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Williams Opera House</td>
<td>Attica</td>
<td>1880</td>
<td>Charles and Elizabeth Williams</td>
<td>bottling works, livery</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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1 All information on this chart has been derived from sources listed in the appendix.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OPERA HOUSE/HALL</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>BUILDER</th>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parshall Memorial Opera House</td>
<td>Lyons</td>
<td>1881</td>
<td>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Dewitt Parshall</td>
<td>businessman and his widow</td>
</tr>
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<td>White's Hall</td>
<td>Perry</td>
<td>1881</td>
<td>Daniel C. White</td>
<td>businessman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gird House (hotel with stage)</td>
<td>Rushville</td>
<td>1881</td>
<td>Frank Harris</td>
<td>hotelier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivar Opera House</td>
<td>Bolivar</td>
<td>1881</td>
<td>John Cain</td>
<td>entrepreneur</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brown Brothers Opera House</td>
<td>Richburg</td>
<td>1882</td>
<td>A.D. and F. H. Brown</td>
<td>entrepreneurs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Union Hall</td>
<td>Nunda</td>
<td>1883</td>
<td>group of five businessmen</td>
<td>varied</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rushville Opera House</td>
<td>Rushville</td>
<td>1883</td>
<td>Dr. William Carson, S. Judson Jones</td>
<td>physician and druggist</td>
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<td>Warner Opera House</td>
<td>Cohocton</td>
<td>1883</td>
<td>Thomas Warner</td>
<td>hotelier, lumber</td>
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<td>Kingsbury Opera House</td>
<td>Canandaigua</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Sherman Kingsbury</td>
<td>grocer, lumber</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opera House</td>
<td>South Butler</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Frank E. Davis</td>
<td>merchant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sherman Opera House</td>
<td>Newark</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Durfee Sherman</td>
<td>businessman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Hall (later opera house)</td>
<td>Clifton Springs</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Village of Clifton Springs</td>
<td>varied</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opera House (begun)</td>
<td>Canisteo</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Allison Brothers</td>
<td>bankers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concert Hall</td>
<td>Springwater</td>
<td>1885</td>
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<td>varied</td>
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<td>Heckman Opera House</td>
<td>Dansville</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>L.B. Heckman</td>
<td>farmer</td>
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<td>Gregg's Opera House</td>
<td>Savannah</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>Alexander Gregg</td>
<td>grocer</td>
</tr>
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<td>Opera House, aka Riddle Hall</td>
<td>Canisteo</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>Riddle family</td>
<td>physician, varied</td>
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<tr>
<td>White's Hall</td>
<td>Perry</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>Daniel C. White</td>
<td>businessman</td>
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<td>Seymour Opera House</td>
<td>Mt. Morris</td>
<td>1887</td>
<td>N. A. Seymour</td>
<td>merchant</td>
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<td>Bronson Opera House</td>
<td>Painted Post</td>
<td>1888</td>
<td>William C. Bronson</td>
<td>banker</td>
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<tr>
<td>St. Mary's Parish School and Hall</td>
<td>Rexville</td>
<td>1889</td>
<td>St. Mary's Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canandaigua Grand Opera House</td>
<td>Canandaigua</td>
<td>1890</td>
<td>James McKechnie</td>
<td>banker</td>
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<td>Frisbee Opera House</td>
<td>Holley</td>
<td>1890</td>
<td>Charlie Frisbee and Henry Sawyer</td>
<td>merchant</td>
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<tr>
<td>York Opera House</td>
<td>York</td>
<td>1891</td>
<td>C. N. Stewart, Dr. Filkins</td>
<td>businessman, physician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corning Opera House</td>
<td>Corning</td>
<td>1891</td>
<td>Corning Opera House Company</td>
<td>group of businessmen</td>
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<td>Cook's Opera House</td>
<td>Rochester</td>
<td>1892</td>
<td>Frederick Cook, Jacob H. Gerling</td>
<td>businessmen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Olin Opera House</td>
<td>Perry</td>
<td>1892-3</td>
<td>M.H. Olin</td>
<td>businessman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Smith Opera House</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
<td>1894</td>
<td>William Smith</td>
<td>nurseryman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opera House</td>
<td>Red Creek</td>
<td>1894</td>
<td>Henry and Cordelia Van Alstein</td>
<td>hoteliers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waite Opera House</td>
<td>Blood's Depot (Atlanta)</td>
<td>1894</td>
<td>W. E. Waite</td>
<td>hardware merchant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Village Hall built with stage</td>
<td>Honeoye Falls</td>
<td>1895</td>
<td>Village of Honeoye Falls</td>
<td>varied</td>
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<tr>
<td>Town Hall built with stage</td>
<td>Lindley</td>
<td>1897</td>
<td>Town of Lindley</td>
<td>varied</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opera House</td>
<td>Oakfield</td>
<td>1898</td>
<td>Warner H. Smith</td>
<td>businessman, fire chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town Hall built with stage</td>
<td>Perry</td>
<td>1898</td>
<td>Town of Perry</td>
<td>varied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherman Opera House rebuilt</td>
<td>Newark</td>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Durfee Sherman</td>
<td>businessman</td>
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<tr>
<td>OPERA HOUSE/HALL</td>
<td>LOCATION</td>
<td>YEAR</td>
<td>BUILDER</td>
<td>OCCUPATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stokes' Opera House</td>
<td>Lyndonville</td>
<td>1899</td>
<td>G.T. Stokes</td>
<td>general store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Hall Built with stage</td>
<td>Nunda</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>Village of Nunda</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Frey's Opera House</td>
<td>Hammondsport</td>
<td>1901</td>
<td>G. Frey</td>
<td>winery owner</td>
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<td>Miller Hall</td>
<td>Attica</td>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Hugh Miller</td>
<td>businessman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prettejohn Opera House</td>
<td>Livonia</td>
<td>1903</td>
<td>Theodore Prettejohn</td>
<td>dealer in coal, grain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Masonic Temple built with stage</td>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>1903</td>
<td>Masons</td>
<td>fraternal organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Opera House</td>
<td>Sodus</td>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Ray &amp; Warner Mills</td>
<td>printers/publishers</td>
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<td>Village Hall Built with stage</td>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>Lydia Coonley Ward</td>
<td>benefactress</td>
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<td>Town Hall Built with stage</td>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>Bristol Improvement Company</td>
<td>group of businessmen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Village Hall Built with stage</td>
<td>Addison</td>
<td>1907</td>
<td>Village of Addison</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Village Hall Built with stage</td>
<td>Geneseo</td>
<td>1908</td>
<td>Village of Geneseo</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Town Hall Built with stage</td>
<td>Savannah</td>
<td>1909</td>
<td>Town of Savannah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weaver Opera House</td>
<td>Oakfield</td>
<td>1909</td>
<td>Lyman A. Weaver</td>
<td>businessman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grange Hall Built with stage</td>
<td>Irondequoit</td>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Grange</td>
<td>fraternal organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keller Opera House</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Harry Keller</td>
<td>attorney</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opera House</td>
<td>Penn Yan</td>
<td>1912</td>
<td>Frederick I. Swarts</td>
<td>businessman</td>
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Newspaper Coverage of Opera House Construction and Opening Nights

Note: Throughout this appendix, I have chosen to use bold print to highlight language praising the opera house financier where it occurs in all articles, and to insert underlining to denote instances where the happiness or pride of a community to have such a structure occurs. Such alterations to the original text have been done by myself for the purpose of focusing attention on points pertinent to this study, and do not appear in the primary source articles.

The Gazette (Livonia) 22 August 1902.
L. T. Prettejohn is to erect a building 50 X 100 on his land at the corner of Big Tree and Commercial streets. It will be two stories above the cellar. He will use the ground floor and basement for business purposes, but the upper story will be made into a hall for entertainments. It will have commodious dressing rooms, and the stage will be large and fitted with all conveniences. All of the upper part will be finished in Georgia pine. Work will be commenced at an early day. The new building will be a great addition to the business part of Livonia, and the enterprise of Mr. Prettejohn is to be commended.

"Livonia's New Hall," The Gazette (Livonia) 30 January 1903.
As has been announced, the new Prettejohn Opera House will be opened to the public on Thursday evening, Feb. 12, when Uncle Tom's Cabin will be given for three consecutive evenings, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, Feb. 12th, 13th, and 14th, by the old favorite Livonia company, which has which has made such a success of it at intervals of a few years since 1879. It is safe to say that nearly two thousand people in this village and surrounding townships in the neighboring villages, in places distant a three hours' drive or two hours' railroad trip, as well, and for miles each way from Livonia, are anxiously awaiting this event, which is of double interest, coupling as it does the opening of what will probably (sic) the finest and best equipped entertainment hall in Livingston County, and the appearance after eight years of our own company in the old favorite "Uncle Tom", which is always new and always wanted, when given by our own excellent company. The Prettejohn Opera House is 50 X 100 feet in size, and will seat from six to eight hundred people. It is reached by one flight of short stairs, seven feet wide and nine feet long. The front entrance is on Commercial street and the box office is at the foot of the stairs, where also will be the cloak and toilet room. It will be seated with folding chairs, all numbered, so any seat may be sold by coupon, and all the seats are approached from the end of the opera house opposite the stage, so no passing in front of the stage is necessary. Next to the Commercial street end the seats are placed on a graded rising floor for twenty-two feet. Next to the stage, which is on the west end, a space 50 X 50 feet is flat, so the seats may be removed for dancing, making the largest dancing floor ever used in town, with plenty of room left for spectators. The entire hall is finished in white oak and Georgia pine, with the ceiling finished in natural wood and shaped to the roof, the
sides lathed, plastered, and wainscoted. The stage has a twenty-six foot front opening and is twenty feet deep, with dressing room capacity 7 X 36 feet, divides into three rooms. The scenery is being painted by Lempert and Son of Rochester, who have placed scenery in some of the largest theaters in the United States, and are acknowledged leaders in their profession. It will be a large and complete set of elegant scenery, consisting of an elaborate drop curtain, landscape, lawn, wood, street, handsome parlor, kitchen, and prison scenes, with sky and overhead borders for each set, and side pieces appropriate to every one. Besides these are a number of set pieces- a house, a cottage or cabin, a bridge, two sets of rocks, a river bank, and any number of smaller pieces. The scenery is all built and worked after the latest approved models and can be arranged to make a large number of distinct and different stage settings. Mr. Lempert is also painting a special scene for use in Uncle Tom's Cabin, representing the Ohio river by moonlight, the river banked with snow and ice and filled with floating cakes. The hall and stage will be lighted by electricity, and the stage fitted with border and footlights in white, green, and red, so moonlight, twilight, and transformation effects may be produced as well as is done in the larger theaters. The auditorium and stage are heated by two large furnaces, and there is a special exit to use in case of emergencies. Mr. PRETTEJOHN has spared no pains or expense to make this a model opera house in every way, both for the comfort of the people in the auditorium and on the stage. Harvey Ripley has had charge of the carpenter work, and E.L. Stedman of the electric lighting, and the result is a credit to both gentlemen. More than all, there should be a warm spot in everyone's heart for Mr. PRETTEJOHN, who has accomplished what often has been dreamed of in Livonia, but never realized, until he came to the front with his capital, enterprise, and pluck. Now, the main interest is centered in the opening, when the new opera house will be seen for the first time, and at the same time see the attraction which has always proved to be Livonia's drawing card. The LIVONIA Uncle Tom's Cabin company has tendered its services to Mr. PRETTEJOHN as a testimonial of its appreciation of what he has done for the village and the surrounding country. (At this point appeared a list of cast, their roles, and a synopsis of scenes.) The version of Uncle Tom's Cabin our home company will play is the old, original Geo.L. Aiken dramatization, unabridged and unaltered, the same as was played at its first production on any stage at the Troy museum in 1852. There have been several versions produced, but this is the only one which has stood the test of time, and proved to be, but experienced once, the only one the people want. Our home company uses no clap-trap or circus-like devices and attractions to distract attention from the true merits of the piece, uses no blood-hounds, donkeys, ponies, jubilee singers, or brass band. Popular prices will prevail- 25 and 35 cents, and seats will be placed on sale Monday, Feb. 9th, at Bronson and Richardson's drug store. E. R. BOLLES

"Opening of the Opera House," The Gazette (Livonia) 13 February 1903. People may have tired of reading about Uncle Tom's Cabin, but that they are not tired of seeing it played was apparent last night, when the new and elegant opera house, for which the public has Mr. PRETTEJOHN to thank, was filled with a most enthusiastic audience. Reserved seat tickets were placed on sale Monday morning, but there are still desirable seats in the reserved section that may be had for Saturday.
The opening of Mr. Prettejohn's spacious hall, or rather, opera house, for it is worthy of that name, was an event of more than local interest, which has been keenly anticipated. The play of Uncle Tom, as given by the Livonia company, changes a little every time it is put on the stage, but the change is only an advance in the artistic manner in which it is presented. Last night it reached the top-notch. It will be even better to-night and to-morrow night. The gentlemen and the ladies who have put in so much time in the study of their parts and in rehearsal, under the direction of Mr. Bolles, have rendered a real service in entertaining the public. The minor characters as well as the leading ones were exceptionally well taken, and among the several specialties those introduced respectively by Mr. And Mrs. Bolles as Gumption Cute and Topsy, in the song and cake walk, Uncle Tom's "Old Folks at Home", Deacon Perry's love song, with the encore that followed, the music by the quartette, and the exciting river scene, with Marks in the ice water, were among the best features. Mr. Sanger as Legree well sustained his reputation made long ago. A complete description of the opera house has been published in the Gazette, but a reference to the scenery, which has been painted especially for it by W. J. Fetters of Philadelphia, under the direction of Mr. Lempert, may be of interest. This firm painted the scenery for the new National theater in Rochester, and the work advertises the ability of the artists. All the scenery was used in the presentation of the play last night. The drop curtain, a water scene, is 26 by 10, and all told there are seventy-four different pieces of scenery, which of course include the wings, set doors, etc. The drop curtain is hung with counterweights and an endless line. The scenery was used for the first time Monday night. Eight men are required to handle it, and although it was new to the stage manager as well as the other members of the company, no trouble was experienced. The electric lighting of the building is complete in every way, about 250 lights being used. There are twenty-one circuits controlled by the switch-board on the stage. One hundred and thirty-eight lights are on the stage, fifty in the auditorium, and fifty-three in the electric sign over the entrance, besides those in the entrance and box office. There are three rows of overhead border lights, two of which rise and fall the same as the drop curtain, in addition to the foot lights and a row on each side of the stage. In the auditorium there is a row of lights on each of the trusses and a border around the proscenium arch. The trusses, pillars, and proscenium arch are painted apple green. The walls are plastered. The floor is of maple, and the wainscoting and stairway is of white oak, with the ceiling finished in natural wood. The acoustic properties are of the best, and with raised seats at the farther end, no one will have any difficulty hearing or seeing. The chairs, which are of the folding pattern, are of natural wood, the reserved seat chairs being veneered and shaped. The stage has a twenty-six foot opening, and is twenty feet deep, with a dressing-room capacity 7 X 36, divided into three separate apartments. Next to the Commercial street side there is a rising floor for twenty-two feet. Next to the stage, which is at the west end, a space 50 X 50 is flat, so that the seats may be removed for dancing, making the largest dancing floor ever provided in town, with plenty of room left for spectators. The house, when completed, will comfortably seat from 600 to 800. A public hall of the character of the Prettejohn opera house is something Livonia has longed for, but never expected, and in meeting this want, Mr. Prettejohn has rendered the public a lasting service.
Author's note: In a time when the use of electric lighting was still a novelty in more rural towns, the whole passage relating the uses and distribution of the lights amounts to a celebration of how modern and up-to-date their new opera house was, compared to older ones which may still have been using gaslights.

“The Erection of a Handsome Block Contemplated,” Mount Morris Union
(Mount Morris) 20 January 1887.
It is quietly rumored about town that N.A. Seymour and another gentleman, whose name we are not permitted to mention, contemplate the erection this spring of a handsome, two-story brick block on the site south of the Genesee House where now stands a frame building, the property of Mr. Seymour. We learn that if the building is put up, the first floor will be fitted up for a grocery for Mr. Seymour and the second floor will be an opera house constructed in the most modern style.

Mt. Morris Union (Mt. Morris) 15 September 1887.
The opening of the new Seymour opera house occurred last evening with the rendition of “The Potomac, or ’61 to ’65.” There was a fair sized audience present which would have been larger no doubt had it not been that the play is to be given three nights. Those present last evening were highly pleased with the play and more than delighted with the appearance of the opera house which they had an opportunity of viewing for the first time since it was completed. Manager Seymour received many compliments, all of which he is justly entitled to. He has furnished the village with an opera house second to none in the state outside the cities, and the least our citizens can do now is give it their support.

“Opening of the Smith Opera House,” Geneva Gazette (Geneva)
2 November 1894.
Every seat filled—“Standing Room Only” for late comers. The beautiful Smith Opera House was opened Monday night by O’Neill’s superb dramatic company. The auditorium proper is in a completed state, but the approach thereto is completely wide open, and cannot be covered yet for a week or two. An immense crowd thronged the beautiful playhouse, and all were profuse in its praises for the beauty of the finish and the fine arrangement of comfortable seats, all commanding unobstructed view of the stage. Between the second and third acts Mr. S. F. Gascoigne stepped before the drop curtain and eloquently voiced the sentiments of all Genevans in praise of Mr. William Smith for providing this handsome play house for their entertainment; and calling for a further expression of public appreciation of his enterprise by a “show of palms,” a sea of uplifted hands responded. When Mr. Smith himself appeared and modestly assumed a back seat, a storm of applause greeted him. The house not only has an ample auditorium in its three tier of seats and several spacious boxes, but the stage is commensurately capacious for the production of drama, opera, concerts, etc. The whole house lights up beautifully even with gas; it
is also well equipped for electric lighting. The play presented was Dumas' great masterpiece of "Monte Cristo" with Mr. James O'Neill in his varied characters as Edward Dantes, as the count, and as the Abbe, requiring a varied exhibition of dramatic talent. He proved grandly equal to the several roles. It is a thrilling and engrossing production, commanding the closest attention from rise to fall of curtain, the last scene being a sword duel which ends the career of the last and worst of Dante's persecutors. It was a most auspicious opening of Geneva's new play house-the forerunner, let us hope, of many equally good entertainments.

"The New Opera House," Ontario Repository and Messenger (Canandaigua) 6 February 1878.

The New Opera House- The work of remodeling Bemis Hall, which has been in progress for some weeks, is now nearly completed and that dingy old room has been converted into as neat, comfortable, and commodious a place for public amusement as will be found in any other village in Western New York. The entrance to the hall has been widened five feet and now leads direct to the hall, a great improvement on the former narrow winding passage through which it would have been almost impossible for an audience to escape in case of fire or other danger. The gallery, which has been constructed in the north end of the room, is provided with a separate entrance and is capable of seating about 300 persons. The stage, now in the south end, is 26 X 47 ½ feet, to which are attached large and commodious dressing rooms. It is also provided with seventeen sets of new scenery, and a beautiful drop curtain decorated with a fine painting, "The Highlands of Scotland." The proscenium front is highly decorated in gold and colors, with masks of tragedy and comedy and musical emblems, while over the center is a portrait of Frederick Handel, the author of Opera. On each side are life size representations of classic statuary, Apollo Belvidere and Perseus. The walls and ceiling are finely frescoed, colored, and paneled. The dome, in the center of the ceiling is 25 feet in diameter, the panels of which are decorated with four fine paintings, companion pieces, from Cole's famous production, "The Voyage of Life", the alternate panels bearing representations of classic statuary, with bronze pillars and highly ornamented cornice and ceiling. The lights in the auditorium, gallery, stage, and dome are separately controlled by globe valves on the stage. The seats in the rear will be elevated, and the parquet will be provided with folding opera seats. The hall is now heated with a furnace, the old stove being done away with. The work of remodeling the hall has been under the charge of Mr. Hugh King, of this village, which is a sufficient guarantee that is has been well done. The frescoing, painting, &c. have been executed by Messrs. D. S. Crane and Sons, Scenic Artists, of Rochester, whose ability for excellent work in that line, as shown by the appearance of the new Opera House, is not to be excelled in this state. The house will be opened to the public by Mr. Crane, on Friday evening, the 15th inst., for which the occasion of a first-class dramatic company and orchestra have been engaged; and all who wish to see the new Opera House and enjoy a grand entertainment, should be sure to attend.
“Kingsbury’s Opera House,” Ontario Messenger (Canandaigua)
4 September 1884.
Canandaigua has one enterprising citizen, who has added an attraction to the many others which give our fair village a name and fame among the beautiful ones of the Empire State. We refer to the Kingsbury Opera House, soon to be opened, and predict that when opened its owner will receive the plaudits of many more than can fill its seatings. A correspondent of the Elmira Tidings has this well timed description.

“It combines grace, beauty, and the greatest possible strength. The building was begun in September, 1882. The brick work was executed by our well-known contractors, McNulty and Murphy, and reflects great (sic) on those gentleman. The foundation walls are laid up two feet thick of quarry stone and water lime. The brick walls are sixteen inches thick, the full height of the walls being forty feet. The center of the building in the basement is supported by fifteen heavy iron columns. The timbers are of yellow pine, 12 by 12, and the joist 3 by 12. The size of the audience room is 63 by 64 feet; the stage 37 by 63 feet. The ceiling is of dome shape, with upper and lower domes. The upper dome is twenty feet in diameter. The floor is on a curve from front to back, rising about eight feet. The gallery extends around the entire room, the front of which is on a true circle. From the main entrance on Beeman Street are two stairways extending east and west, leading to the auditorium, each six and one-half feet wide, making an entrance of thirteen feet. There are two exits under the stage, each five feet wide; also one from the stage into Kingsbury’s store, making a total exit of twenty-six feet all well provided with hand-rails, etc. There are four private boxes on each side of the stage, and the entire theater is illuminated by Seman’s patent gas burner, which has a capacity of 500 candle power. There are also sixteen front and back circle lights, which make illumination equally as complete as the rest of the building. The chairs are of the folding pattern, from the well-known firm of Baker, Pratt, and Co., New York, and are nicely provided with hat and umbrella racks, which are a great convenience for theater-goers. Mr. Dennis Flood, of Rochester, the accomplished scenic artist, has had charge of the decorations of the building, and the fruits of his labor will stand as long as the building stands, as a monument reflecting credit on the modern Michael Angelo (sic). Not being an expert, we are much at a disadvantage in attempting to describe the beauty of the decorations. The upper dome is painted with a clouded sky and four beautiful vases, from which start vines with flowers extending around the circle. The lower dome has a border in moresque style and the main ceiling is laid out in twelve radiating panels, in four of which are the muses, Tragedy, Comedy, Music and Dance. The remaining eight are decorated in imitation of silk demesque, with gold and silver flowers. In the proscenium arch are the emblems of the drama, which include the comic and tragic masques, the lyre, etc. The panels on either side are decorated in imitation of silk demesque. The private boxes are in moresque style, painted in parti colors and gold; the upholstery, hangings, etc. in blue and old gold. The curtain, which is a perfect masterpiece, is painted to represent a scene of Naples and Mt. Vesuvius. The idea is that of a picture painted on red satin, surrounded by a border of old gold plush. The grand proscenium border, wings, and doors are in moresque style, and over each door...
is a picture of the drama. There will be twelve complete sets of scenery for the opening night and more to be added at once. The stage machinery is of the most modern style, and includes all the appliances for rapid and perfect settings of every description. The contract for enclosing the building was let to our well-known contractor, W.S. Townsend, while the work on the interior was executed by Messrs. Dan Saunders and Clarence Mead. The building will have a seating capacity of nearly 900, and cost the proprietor, Mr. Sherman Kingsbury, of this village, $50,000.

“The Opera House,” Wayne County Alliance (Sodus) 4 September 1878.
This edifice was commenced Apr. 4. It has been rapidly pushed to completion. The contractors who built it are men of energy, and well-known in this community; the carpenter work having been done by Stephen Bloss and John McIntyre; the mason work by Messrs. Orton and Teetor. The entire cost will be under $4000. The people of Sodus are under obligations to Messrs. Taylor and Thorn for the energy and public spirit displayed by them in the investment here of such a sum of money, and in providing a building so large, convenient, and artistic. They are enterprising young men who have already established here a character for integrity in this community; becoming quietly useful citizens, whose worth is, and will be appreciated. This new hall is to be opened with a series of dedicatory performances on the evenings of Sept. 10, 11, 12, 13. Citizens can afford to patronize these exercises carried through by home talent, much better than wandering circuses. Taylor’s cornet band will share largely in these entertainments; the people know this band; they are gentlemen—every one; men of honor, temperance men. They deserve support; they are devoting much time and labor, with but little compensation to furnishing pleasant and refined enjoyment to the people of Sodus. Let us sustain them; build them up, encourage them, speak kindly of their efforts. The leader of the band, Mr. Taylor has given much valuable service to its training and development; he has an able associate in Prof. Thorn, whose musical talent our people are rapidly learning to appreciate. The opera house is to be opened for all proper gatherings on reasonable terms. Churches that have so long been troubled with vexatious requests for their houses, can now send all applicants to this new hall. Town meetings and elections can be held here. Political parties can there hold caucuses, those great rallyings of the people called out by pure love of principle and high-tones patriotism. Fellow citizens, go and see the hall, we mean the inside, at the dedicatory performance, and then you will know all about its conveniences, and learn to appreciate what Sodus has never before enjoyed on so large a scale as this, a public hall, easy of ingress and egress—large, convenient, central, accessible.

“Our New Opera House,” The Rochester Democrat (Rochester) no date given on clipping except the year 1886.
The well-informed Palmyra correspondent of the Rochester Democrat has been interviewing Architect Blaby, who has submitted plans for remodeling the village Hall. According to this correspondent, a large “horse-shoe” gallery will be placed at the back of the hall, with entrance from two winding stairways at one end and two additional exits at the other end. In the gallery there will be three aisles. The floor of
the hall proper will be laid on an incline and will be seated with opera chairs. There will be five different exits from this floor. The stage will be twenty-seven feet in depth by fifty-two feet in length. In front of the stage is a large orchestra box seating twenty musicians. There are eight large dressing rooms, beside a property beneath the stage. The scenery will be very fine and will be of the latest style. The proposals for the work will close the 20th inst. And the work will be started by the 1st of September. When finished Palmyra will have one of the nicest opera houses outside of the cities.

"Mr. Sherman Banqueted," Post-Standard (Syracuse) 20 January 1899.
Newark Citizens gave expression to their appreciation. Newark, Jan. 19- (Special)
Appreciating the heavy losses met by Stephen F. Sherman, President of the Sherman Opera House Company, by the recent fire, and the undaunted enterprise with which he has decided to rebuild, the Newark Businessmen’s Association tendered Mr. Sherman a banquet in recognition of their appreciation last evening at the banquet hall in the Elliot Building. Covers were laid for 150, and Caterer Ridley served. President W.A. Roe of the association gave the address of welcome, and at the close he introduced the Toastmaster of the evening, E.K. Burnham. Fourteen toasts were responded to by Newark’s prominent business and professional men. The following were present from out of town: Abram T. Kerr and (paper torn) Prescott of Buffalo, C.E. (paper torn) Rochester, and F. J. Furman of (paper torn).

"Opera House Opened," Post-Standard (Syracuse) 30 December 1899.
Newark, Dec. 29.- The opening of the new Sherman Opera House, which has just been completed, occurred last evening. The attendance was exceptionally large and well pleased with the opening play, which was the laughable comedy, "What Happened to Jones", played by a company of metropolitan artists under the management of William H. Wright. The new theater and block, which was opened to the public last evening for the first time has been erected during the past year on the site of the old Sherman Opera House, which was built in 1884, remodeled in 1887, and destroyed by fire a year ago Wednesday. The new building has a frontage of 162 feet in Union street, is five stories and basement and contains ten stores, fourteen offices, a photograph gallery and studio, five suits of apartments with modern finish, a ballroom and dining hall and a modern theater with seating capacity of 1,000 and a stage of large dimensions. The entire building is one of the largest business and pleasure buildings in the State and the theater is the most modern between Rochester and Syracuse. The building was erected by Manager and Owner Stephen F. Sherman at the cost of $75,000 to the memory of his father and mother, Durfee A. and Susan H. Sherman.
“Striking the Balance,” Spirit of the Times (Batavia) 5 December 1874.
The committee having in charge the Opera House dedication festivities deserve great credit deserve great credit for the energetic manner in which they performed their duties, and the success of the enterprise throughout. During the past week they have been settling up accounts and find as the result of their labors the gratifying balance of $345.53 which has duly been presented to Mr. Dellinger. Aside from this, the sum of $110 was raised by subscription through the individual exertions of Mr. A.H. Chase, which was used to purchase the Flag and two beautiful Lamps that are to be placed opposite the main entrance to the building. The generosity and good will of our citizens towards Mr. Dellinger is gratifying evidence of their appreciation of his enterprise in erecting such a commodious and much needed public Hall.

The Republican Advocate (Batavia) 3 December 1874.
One of the happiest and most enjoyable events of the season occurred on Wednesday evening last, the 25th inst.- the event being the inauguration and dedication of the new Opera House completed on that day by John Dellinger, Esq. The assemblage commenced to gather at an early hour, and when at 8 o'clock the curtain rose and opening strains of the Overture from “Martha” given by Wahle’s full orchestra were heard, the hall was fairly jammed. The programme for the evening is too well known to need repetition. All of the artists engaged acquitted themselves admirably. The “Waltz” sung by the “Schubert Quartette” was admirable. Miss Jennie Barker, of Buffalo, sung a little piece entitled "Little Maid of Arcadie". Miss Barker has a fine voice but we think it should be used in singing pieces somewhat higher in tone than the selection which was given to the audience, as it evidently belonged to the “Mary Had a Little Lamb” order. Miss Lottie Snow, with that superb alto voice which so many of us have listened to at St. James Church, sung Gatty’s “O Fair Dove, O Fond Dove” in grand style. Miss Snow has a brilliant career ahead of her. But the gem of the vocal part of the evening’s entertainment was the delicious rendition of Gounod’s “Sing, Smile, Slumber” by Miss Kittie Tyrell, whose beautiful voice and exquisite articulation completely charmed every one of the immense audience. Miss Tyrell is gifted by nature by a voice such as few are gifted with, and her musical education has been carried on in such a manner as to enable her to compete for first honors among vocalists. The piano solo, “a Melody in F,” by Rubenstein, was given by E.B. Page in his usual fine manner. Mr. John Dellinger was then called to the front, and presented with a gorgeous American Flag by Myron H. Peck, Esq. in the following address:

My Dear Sir:- It may be safely said that the staid and venerable village of Batavia seldom becomes so truly demoralized- so utterly oblivious to the proper dignity and gravity of her position, as on the present occasion. Under the inspiration of some new and unusual enthusiasm, her citizens appear to have assembled en masse, moved by some common impulse and intent upon some common purpose. Age renews its youth and youth redoubles its elasticity – feasting and dancing, music, mirth and jollity rule the hour. The contagion of popular enthusiasm is indeed wonderful. You remember how aptly this is illustrated in the poetical history of that marvellous equestrian performance, so familiar to all Young America:-
"The dogs did bark, the children screamed, 
Up went the windows all; 
And every soul cried out, "Well Done!"
As loud as they could bawl."

Why, Sir, I have even found such a dignified and austere patriarch as myself on the point of *outraging all the proprieties* of the occasion by indulging in the grandeloquent outburst of the Hoosier poet:-

"Sound the Hew Gag; Blow the Dum Fuzzy! 
And let miscellaneous things rip generally!"

Unless absolutely stupified with amazement, one may well inquire in the trenchant phraseology of Tippecanoe and Tyler too- "What has caused this great commotion!" It would be quite inopportune for me on this great occasion, and more especially at this interesting phase of the festivities, to enter upon elaborate response to this inquiry. Fortunately the problem is of ready solution, the answer presenting itself in tangible form to the delighted vision of us all. This splendid edifice, elegant in design and a model of skilful handiwork in its construction, alike an ornament in our beautiful village and a *fitting testimonial to the taste and enterprize (sic) of its projector!*

This magnificent auditorium, so ample and complete in all its appointments, and supplying a desideratum so long and so devoutly wished for by our citizens! Surely, contributions to the public welfare such as these furnish ample food for public rejoicing, unlimited and unrestrained. Amid these general rejoicings over the successful accomplishment of this undertaking, and in anticipation of the public benefits to be derived therefrom, we are not unmindful of our obligations to one to whom we are so largely indebted for these beneficent results, and, for a moment, we suspend our festivities for the purpose of giving expression to our appreciation of the public spirit, enterprize (sic) and energy of the citizen. To this end, and for this purpose, I am instructed, in the name and on behalf of the citizens of Batavia, to request your acceptance of this beautiful National Emblem- the Stars and Stripes- the Banner of the Free! Pecuniarily of little worth, it is yet, intrinsically, a "pearl of great price," and significantly appropriate for the purpose intended. Here, in the coming years, myriads of stars, of greater or lesser magnitude, will shine- and here, I trust, unnumbered *stripes* will be administered upon the follies, weaknesses, and wickedness of a degenerate age. "All the world's a stage" and we are players- and whatever, in the great drama of life, may be our part, we can not fail to draw fresh inspiration from this emblem of glorious national achievements and new incentives to a higher ambition and nobler individual effort. I need not assure you, sir, that personally I am in hearty sympathy with the movement which culminates in this presentation, and with the popular sentiment in which it originated. It gives me great pleasure to be the medium selected for giving public expression to this sentiment. To me there is something peculiarly interesting in the life of the citizen, who, modestly but faithfully and efficiently, labors for the public good. Though in the humbler walks of life he may toil on his allotted term of years "unhonored and unsung"- faltering often, weary and fainting by the wayside, oppressed with
innumerable burdens, and bleeding at every pore from wounds produced by shafts of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness—yet through it all he may see a hand we can not see and hear a voice we can not hear, and at the last, as one who loved his fellow men, may find his name emblazoned high above the rest!

Mr. William C. Watson responded to the speaker on behalf of Mr. Dellinger, as follows:

In behalf of Mr. Dellinger I accept this beautiful and appropriate present and return his sincere thanks for the kindness thus shown him and for this valued token of friendship and esteem. I have no doubt that the circumstances attending this presentation will be long held by him in happy remembrance. It affords me pleasure to say upon this occasion that no man is more deeply interested in, or more closely connected with the growth and prosperity of this village than Mr. Dellinger, who has shown as you are well aware in the prosecution of this enterprise and amount of public spirit quite unusual in this village. I can entertain no doubt in the erection of this building and the completion of this magnificent hall he has been actuated not so much by the expectation of profits to himself, as by his earnest desire, by supplying a want long felt in this community, to add to the welfare of this village and to the comfort and happiness of his neighbors. It is but natural that you, my fellow citizens, should have watched the prosecution of this enterprise with deep interest. It is natural that you, in common with Mr. Dellinger, should feel tonight a degree of pride and satisfaction that this work has been so happily and successfully completed; and I am sure that no more pleasant and opportune expression of the public sentiment could have been desired than that which we have witnessed this evening. I therefore for and in the name of Mr. Dellinger accept this valued present in the spirit in which it is offered, and return for him to the citizens by whose generosity it has been contributed, his sincere and heartfelt thanks, not only for this manifestation of your appreciation of his efforts in erecting this Opera House, but also and especially for the friendship and kind feelings towards him which has prompted this testimonial and which has been so happily expressed on this occasion.

Wahle’s Orchestra, in honor of the occasion, in their magnificent style, played the “Star Spangled Banner,” after which the floor was cleared for dancing, which continued until a very late, or rather early hour. Supper was furnished by Messrs. Ey and Perrons, the gentlemen who are to run the restaurant underneath the hall and who gave manifold evidence of their skill as caterers. All in all, the occasion was a grand success, in fact very much such a success as the Opera House is.