The Grand Opera House on the corner of Twelfth and Market Streets. Built on the site of Washington Hall, which was destroyed by fire on November 30, 1875. The Grand seated about 1100 in its second floor auditorium.
WHEELING'S VICTORIAN THEATERS AND CONCERT LIFE
by
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Wheeling's location on the Ohio River, National Road, and later the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad made the city a natural stopping place for almost every major concert artist, entertainer, and theatrical troupe which toured America during the nineteenth century. This provided Wheeling a musical and theatrical life which was far greater than would normally be expected for a city her size. Throughout the nineteenth century Wheeling experienced steady growth in the number and quality of plays, concerts, and musical theater productions which were presented in the downtown halls. This growth peaked shortly after 1900, when on a typical evening one could choose from as many as five different performances ranging from vaudeville to concerts and opera.

EARLY THEATRICAL AND CONCERT LIFE

A Thesopian Society existed in Wheeling perhaps as early as 1818. It consisted of a group of young men who aimed to cultivate an appreciation of oratory, debate, and drama. The society's first dramatic performance was a play called Speed the Plow, and this was presented in either 1819 or 1820 in the building of the Lancasterian Institute located on Chapline Street where the Paxton House now stands. The Thesopian Society continued to be active in Wheeling during the 1820s and 1830s. While this society was composed of local men, it also supported touring troupes and helped to provide an audience for such troupes.

One of the first Wheeling theaters was a hall known as the Globe Assembly Room. While the specific location of the hall is uncertain, it appears to have been connected with the Globe Tavern or Globe Inn, which was operated by E.S. Graham. This hostelry was also known as Mr. Graham's Hotel at the Sign of the Globe. It was on Main Street adjacent the old courthouse, which was located on today's 10th Street between Main and Market. The Globe Tavern was the site of the formal dinner for Henry Clay, when he visited Wheeling at the end of March 1829. One hundred gentlemen attended this dinner, and it is possible that the hall in which the dinner was held was the same hall as the Globe Assembly Room.

An advertisement in the Wheeling Gazette for 22 September 1827 reads: "THEATRE. On Monday Evening September 24, at the Globe Assembly Room, will be presented Coleman's much admired Comedy of the POOR GENTLEMAN. AFTER THE COMEDY, Song--Bachler's Prayer, The story of Uncle Ben, or Jonathan's visit to New York, Comic Song--Beautiful boy, The whole to conclude with the Comic Opera of THE POOR SOLDIER. The company is very numerous, and have performed with much applause at Albany, Rochester, and other large towns. For particulars see Bills." This announcement is typical of American theater troupes of that date. Actors and actresses were expected to be skilled not only in drama, but in singing, dancing, and sometimes as instrumental musicians. Incidental music was a part of every theatrical performance, and such music constituted the first professional concerts in Wheeling as well as most American cities.

A week later the newspaper carried another announcement which undoubtedly referred to the same theatrical troupe as had performed earlier that week. It reads: "Theatre. This Evening, (Sept. 29th,) will be presented THE MUCH ADmired COMEDY OF THE WAY TO GET MARRIED. SONGS, &c. &c. To conclude with the Laughable Farce of the SPOILED CHILD; For Characters see Bills. Doors open at half past 6, performance to commence at 7 o'clock." In all probability there were several performances of each work and the newspaper referred only to the opening night. Touring troupes normally determined how long a given show would run by the audience reaction.

The weekly Wheeling Gazette for 23 February 1828 contains an interesting letter concerning the behavior of Wheeling theater audiences. It is addressed to R.I. Curtis, who was the newspaper's editor and publisher.

FOR THE GAZETTE

Mr. Curtis--On Saturday evening last, the Tragedy of Barbarossa, with the after piece of Love a la mode, was performed with much and deserved applause by the Thesopian Society of this place, to a crowded and respectable audience. It would be ungenerous to enter into a critical analysis of the performance, suffice it to say, the parts were (with a few exceptions) well sustained, and all seemed actuated with a determination to excel.

The managers ought to preserve better regulations in the pit, by preventing the audience from rushing to the front seats, and obstructing a view of the stage from the boxes. These gentlemen have taken great pains in fitting up a theatre for the amusement of our citizens and consequently have incurred considerable expense; for the first they are entitled to much praise, and the latter gives them irresistible claims on our patronage.

Feb. 22d, 1828

W.

The writer of this letter undoubtedly wrote it with the fact in mind that the Thesopian Society was planning another performance on 23 February. An announcement in the paper for that day reads: "Theatre. This Evening, Saturday, February 23d. Will be performed by the Thesopian Society, the favorite Comedy of JOHN BULL. This evening's entertainment to conclude with an OLIO, consisting of Comic and Sentimental SONGS. For characters &c. see Bills." It is unfortunate that none of the playbills from this period seem to have survived. An olio was a song and dance presentation that was later incorporated into the American minstrel show. This announcement again illustrates how theatrical and music entertainments were always part of the same program.

Another letter from "W." appeared in the Wheeling Gazette on 8 March 1828. It reads:

FOR THE GAZETTE

Mr. Curtis--The popular opera of the Mountainiers was produced the second time this season to a tolerable house, as times go, though not so good as the merits of the piece deserved. It is disagreeable to make objections to a particular
part of a play, especially if it is generally well performed, but the first scene went off rather insipidly, in consequence of the indisposition of the gentleman who was to perform Sadi, and the part being given to another at too short notice. Octavius was played in a manner that manifested nice perception and sound judgment, and the repeated plaudits which he received, denoted the abundance of gratification which he afforded. --Magrim, in the Blue Devils, was well sustained and evinced considerable talent. --James, was admirably well done and brought down thunders of applause.

The tragedy of Douglass, was announced for Saturday the 8th inst. and from the manner in which the characters are cast, there is no doubt but it will afford a rich treat to the lovers of good acting, and draw a brilliant house, which always heightens the enjoyment of the entertainment.

With due deference to those who are better acquainted with such matters, I would beg leave to remark that it would be very desirable if the performers would speak loud enough to be heard in the boxes, and that a part of the audience who indulge in the squirrel like propensity of cracking nuts, would desist from it until the curtain drops, it would afford the actors a better chance of being heard.

March 6, 1828

W.

This letter indicates that "W." was still trying to reform audience manners. It also shows that theatrical presentations occurred which were not advertised in the paper, since advertisements for these performances do not seem to exist.

Even though Wheeling's population in 1828 was listed as only 4,183 persons, the village continued to support weekly theatrical presentations. On 15 March 1828 the Wheeling Gazette ran an ad announcing the tragedy of Barbarossa concluding with a farce, My Grandmother. As usual, there was music between the play and the farce, and a Mr. Wood was scheduled to sing the "favorite Comic Song" of "The Beauty," as well as "What Are You After." Tickets were 50 cents for a box seat and 25 cents for the pit; they were sold at the bookstore of A. and E. Pickett. Pickett's store was next to the Globe Tavern and thus provided a convenient box office for the theater, which apparently was still using the Globe Assembly Room.

An advertisement in the Gazette on 2 August 1828 implies that a new theater had been built (remodeled?) for Wheeling. It states, "The Egyptian Mummy with its sarcophagus...just arrived from Philadelphia, and is now open for exhibition, at the New Theatre opposite Market St. Wheeling." The enigmatic reference to "opposite Market St." seems to imply a different location than the Globe Assembly Room. The Wheeling Gazette is strangely silent in reporting any theatrical activities during the fall of 1828. Perhaps the paper was too busy reporting the stories of the Jackson-Adams presidential campaign and Jackson's election. However, theatrical ads reappeared as of 24 January 1829 when the Thespian Society announced that evening's presentation (for the first time in Wheeling) of the tragedy of Evadne or The Statue, followed by a number of favorite songs and concluding with the "laughable Farce" Too Late for Dinner. A week later there was a benefit performance, and the complete announcement reads:

THEATRE
For the Benefit of Mrs. WILSON.

MRS. WILSON has the honor of announcing to the citizens of Wheeling and its vicinity, that her Benefit will take place on This Evening, Saturday, January 31st. when she trusts her endeavours to please will be crowned with success. The evening's entertainment to commence with a PROLOGUE, spoken by Mr. Jefferson. After which, the much admired Tragedy of EVADNE, or, THE STATUE. AFTER THE PLAY An EPISODE, spoken by Mrs. WILSON, A great variety of favourite SONGS. &c. The whole to conclude [sic] with the truly laughable Farce of LOVER'S QUARRELS, OR LIKE MASTER, LIKE MAN. For characters, &c. see bills.

This same ad ran again on 14 February, except that this time the concluding farce was The Day After the Wedding or A Wife's First Lesson.

An interesting statement in the theater advertisement for 29 February 1829 indicates that these theatrical events had been regularly presented in Wheeling for several years. It states that for "the first time here for several years Morton's justly celebrated comedy" of The School of Reform or How to Rule a Husband would be presented that evening. Mrs. Wilson was to be featured again. The only other play which the Wheeling Gazette recorded that spring was Kotzebue's tragedy of Pizarro, scheduled for performance on 6 April and including a variety of songs and recitations along with the farce, Raising the Wind.

The first advertisement for Wheeling's theater season of 1829-1830 appeared in the Gazette for 3 October 1829. It announced that Mrs. Harper would have a benefit on Monday evening, 5 October, and the performance would feature Kotzebue's The Stranger. There were the usual songs plus the farce. Mrs. Harper had another benefit on 26 October when she was featured in Goldsmith's She Stoops to Conquer. The closing farce that night was The Spotted Child. All the original songs, duets, etc. of the "Melodrama" of the Mountainaires were featured beginning 2 November, with Animal Magnetism or No Magnet Like Love being the farce. Saturday, 21 November saw another "Melodrama" of Raymond & Agnes, while only two days later the Thespian Society presented Damon & Pythias for the benefit of the Wheeling Benevolent Society. A communication in the Gazette for 28 November 1829 states that "lovers of Drama have for some time been highly gratified with the Performances of Mr. Smith's Company of Comedians. I understand that on Saturday the 28 inst. will be their last night, and it is hoped that there will be a full house. The correct deportment of the members of the Company entitle them to our respect, and their good acting to our patronage." One can only wonder whether this reference to the company's good deportment implies that such was not the case with some theatrical troupes.

The spring of 1830 featured a change of pace when an advertisement informs us: "MR. HART, FROM LONDON--THE GREAT FIRE-EATER, WILL perform again at the Wheeling Theatre...The performance will be new and more splendid than has ever been exhibited in this city. He will be at considerable expense for new scenery, &c. and hopes to meet with generous encouragement. He has engaged a full band of music for the occasion."
Wheeling Gazette for 3 April 1830 reports a return to more normal fare with this ad: "THEATRE. MR. ALLEYNE'S BENEFIT. ON SATURDAY EVENING, APRIL 3d. Will be presented (for the second time here, by particular request, it having been received with unbounded applause on its first representation,) the very laughable Farce of BEAUX WITHOUT BELLES, OR LADIES WE CAN DO WITHOUT YOU. Mr. CAMBRIDGE will give imitations of several celebrated Tragedians. The whole to conclude with a CONCERT of Vocal and Instrumental Music. Assisted by a number of gentlemen who have kindly volunteered their service." The closing reference to gentlemen refers to local amateur musicians, and it indicates that Wheeling had some type of amateur musical group, perhaps the Willissian Society which presented a concert on Christmas Eve of 1830.

The editor of the Wheeling Gazette must have been much taken by the talents of Miss Lane, for the issue of 10 April 1830 devotes three different items to her benefit that evening. The ad reads: THEATRE. MISS LANE'S BENEFIT. AND POSITIVELY HER LAST APPEARANCE...A musical piece called TURN OUT." Songs included "I'm Marian Ramsey," "All the world was born to vex me," "Here's a health bonnie Scotland," "Draw the Sword Scotland," "The Knight Errant," a duet entitled "When a little farm we keep," and a quartet called "Your jesting and jeering." Featured singers were Mr. and Mrs. Kinloch assisted by Miss Stanard and Miss Lane. As a news item the paper reports, "MISS LANE.--This 'infant Roscia' has been performing in this place for a few evenings past, and has admirably sustained more than a dozen different characters much to the gratification of our 'play going people.' She will take her Benefit, and make her last appearance this evening." As if this were not enough promotion, the editor then adds the following poem.

Wend ye to the play tonight!
Half the Bells in town are going,
Beauty there will shine most bright,
And every box be overflowing.
Ev'ry Blood and Blade of spirit,
Ev'ry Beau who loves the Fair,
Ev'ry Friend to mirth and merit,
Doubtless will hasten there.

Wend ye to the play tonight!
Where's the Churl who will not go!
Brighter still will be the light,
Which genius round will throw.
The Lane that leads to pleasure,
And turns the mind from care,
--A rich Dramatic treasure--
Invites your presence there.

Wend ye to the Play tonight!
None at home will sure remain,
Who desire to catch a sight,
Of the witching wondrous Lane.
Dull and witty, young and old,
Brown and fair, and grave and gay,

And many, who are not yet untold,
Will flock in crowds to see the Play.

Obviously all this publicity had the desired effect, since the Gazette for 21 April 1830 carried a card which stated, "Mr. KINLOCH, has the honor most respectfully to tender his very grateful acknowledgements to the Ladies and Gentlemen of Wheeling, for the kind patronage bestowed on the six Dramatic performances of Miss Lane..."

Even after the six performances featuring Miss Lane, Wheeling must still have had appetite for more entertainment, since the same 10 April issue of the paper carried another ad wherein Mr. Cambridge "RESPECTFULLY in forms the Ladies and Gentleman of Wheeling, that [having engaged MRS. HARPER,] he will open the Theatre on the first of next week, with the very successful and splendid Melo-Drama of the GAMBLER’S FATE, OR A LAPSE OF TWENTY YEARS." This was a lot of theatrical activity in a village of Wheeling's size. The Gazette for 24 July 1830 reports the 1830 census for Wheeling showed 2,667 white males, 2,349 white females, 94 free blacks, and 101 slaves for a total population of 5,211. This compared with a total of 1,567 in the 1820 census.

By now it is apparent that the Wheeling Theatre was busy whenever a troupe was in town. Performances tended to come in seasons of a couple weeks at a time, and between these periods the theater was dark for varying periods of time. The late summer and fall of 1830 serve to reinforce this observation. The Wheeling Gazette for 25 September 1830 carries the following item.

It is hoped the lovers of the Drama will bear in mind, the indefatigable exertions of the Manager of our little Theatre to please, and that he has incurred great expense to gratify them. -- The appearance of Mrs. Drake on our boards was a treat we cannot expect every day -- The only way to insure a repetition, is to patronize him.

I understand our old friend and favourite "Uncle Ben," is shortly to have a Benefit--Certainly his comic powers deserve a full bumper--and I move that we give it him.

Z.

The advertisement in this same issue indicates that Uncle Ben's Benefit would feature the interesting Melo-Drama of The Maid and Magpie along with songs and recitations. The evening would conclude with the "capital Farce" of Love Laughs at Locksmiths. The ad stated that after three more evenings the theater would be closed "for several months."

Actually the theater was dark for only about four weeks, since the Gazette for 30 October 1830 carried a notice that the theater would open on Tuesday evening with "a strong and effective Company" including Messrs. Palmer, Conner, Cambridge, Carter, and Madesma Crook, Carter, Conner, Misses Carter, Conner, and Master Conner. "Many new pieces will be produced during the season, to render the entertainments worthy the patronage of the citizens of Wheeling." This advertisement clearly shows the manner in which families worked as a troupe in nineteenth-century American theater.

We can conclude the survey of Wheeling's theatrical and concert life from this early period by citing an advertisement in the Gazette for 18 December
married woman she would be a proper teacher for young ladies, whereas a male teacher might lead to improper relationships.

These advertisements indicate that both vocal and instrumental instruction were relatively available in Wheeling around 1830. Consequently, local musicians undoubtedly were available for such events as the dancing or cillion parties held in the Globe Assembly Room during 1828 or the Masonic Hall during 1829.10 Likewise, the 4th of July festivities for 1829 included “Patriotic Songs during the intervals, accompanied by instruments.”11 It can be understood that choral music was supported by the local churches, and probably the R. Degge and W. Brown mentioned above were basically singing school teachers.

During the 1827-1830 period we are considering, Richard Lane and Company operated a large general store in downtown Wheeling. Their stock included musical instruments, and some of the advertisements which they ran in the Wheeling Gazette include these: “An invoice of Violins, Flutes, Fifes, and Clarionets; Piano Music and Violin Strings” (17 May 1828 and several following weeks); “MUSIC. Violins, common and best quality: Clarionets: Fifes: Flageolets: Violin Strings, Bows, Bridges and Screws: Books of Instruction for the Violin, Flute, Clarionet, Fife and Flageolet: Music for Violin, Clarionet, Flute and Piano” (11 October 1828 and several weeks following); new goods for spring including violins from $2 to $20 (23 March 1829); “A few real Octave Flutes and Clarionets; one French Horn” (25 July 1829 and following weeks); “A good assortment of MUSICAL Instruments, Such as Violins, Flutes, Flageolets, Clarionets, Fifes, & Bugle Horns, with Instructors, &c.” (7 November 1830).

It was even possible to purchase pianos in Wheeling during this period as the following advertisement from the Gazette of 11 October 1828 attests. Superior Piano Fortes, JOHN LOUD, OF THE FIRM OF LOUD & BROTHERS, Piano Forte Manufactures, Philadelphia, RESPECTFULLY would inform the citizens of Wheeling and vicinity, that he has opened at the store of J.M. THOMPSON & Co. corner of Main and Union streets, where they will remain but a very few days, an elegant and superior assortment of PIANO FORTES, which for goodness, durability and beauty, he can safely warrant, and to which he invites their inspection.

The advantages resulting to such of the citizens who may be in want of the article, of being able to select from a good assortment, and without being at the risk of carriage, must be fully apparent...

Wheeler residents could also purchase pianos from the store of Z.B. Curtis. Probably the W. Brown who was the agent for these pianos was the same W. Brown who conducted a singing school cited above. A Gazette advertisement on 24 October 1829 reads, “W. BROWN, Agent for C.F.L. Albrecht, Philadelphia, has just received from the Manufactory and offers for sale two Pianos of superior tone and excellent workmanship. The instruments may be seen at the store of Z.B. Curtis and Co., Main St.” Either these pianos were very slow in selling, or else W. Brown received subsequent shipments, because this same advertisement continued to run in the newspaper for several months.
From these accounts it now becomes apparent that early Wheeling had ample opportunities not only for the study of music, but for the purchase of musical instruments. From these many opportunities a firm foundation was established for the rapid growth of concert life and theaters in the next generation. This growth was aided by a large influx of German immigrants starting at mid-century, and these thousands of new citizens brought with them a desire to establish in Wheeling an imitation of the musical and theatrical life they had known in their homeland.

CONCERT LIFE AND THEATERS AT MID-CENTURY

While plays and theatrical entertainments with music comprised the typical concert and theater life of the 1820s and 1830s, things were about to change. Thanks to improved roads and the beginnings of railroads throughout the eastern United States, travel became easier after 1840. Some of the braver and more curious European concert artists began to tour America, and in most cases this included a stop in Wheeling. On 27 January 1853 the Wheeling Intelligencer proudly stated that in recent years such artists as Brahms, Russell, Jenny Lind, and Catharine Hays had all visited Wheeling. John Braham (1774-1856) was a noted English tenor and composer who toured America in 1840-1842, and apparently he performed in Wheeling during this tour. Unfortunately Wheeling newspapers are very incomplete for the 1840s, so it is difficult to document details of Braham’s concert or those of other artists who visited Wheeling before the Wheeling Intelligencer began publication 24 August 1852. Henry Russell (1812-1900) was an English concert singer and composer of such Victorian “tear-jerker” songs as “The Old Arm Chair” and “Woodman, Spare That Tree.” He visited Pittsburgh in 1843 and probably included his Wheeling stop at that time. Catharine Hays (1825-1861) was a noted Irish mezzo-soprano who came to America in 1851 and returned to England in 1856. She probably visited Wheeling in either 1851 or 1852.

Jenny Lind was one of the greatest European operatic sopranos of her century, and her 1851 concert tour in America under the management of P.T. Barnum introduced a new chapter not only for Wheeling concert life, but for concert promotion throughout the United States. The phenomenal success of Lind’s tour started Barnum on his career as the greatest American show business promoter of the century. Barnum asked a minimum of $5,000 for each concert, and he proudly announced that all profits over that amount would go to charity, with the specific charities being determined by agreement with Barnum and the local sponsor. A sum of $5,000 in 1851 dollars equals about $65,000 today. In each city where Jenny Lind stopped the seats were sold by auction, and there was always great competition to see who would bid for the first and choicest seat. While Wheeling had both a Melodeon Hall (located at 1220 on the east side of Main Street) and a Union Hall on the west side of Main Street during the 1850s, neither was deemed suitable for the Jenny Lind performance. Consequently, the sponsoring committee arranged for the concert to be held in the Fourth Street Methodist Church, which had been constructed in 1836 and which was the largest public building in Wheeling.

As was customary, seats were auctioned, and Wheeling tailor Michael Imhoff purchased the first ticket for $250 (equals about $3,250 today), choosing a seat in the most conspicuous part of the church. For the concert he procured an imitation of a large eagle, which he caused to be sumptuously covered with gold leaf; this was secured on his back and shoulders, the outstretched wings of the bird hovering with protecting wings over his head, forming a canopy under the overshadowing pinions of which he sheltered his aesthetic cranium. Obviously he achieved his aim of attracting the attention of all present. The ordinary price of tickets was $10, though the largest number sold at any one price was $5, which entitled holders to seats in the church galleries. The street in front of the church was crowded with spectators who stood for hours to catch a glimpse of the famous songstress. After meeting the $5,000 guarantee, the sponsoring committee realized a profit of several hundred dollars.

Unlike today, when concert singers usually tour only with themselves and a pianist, Jenny Lind had a large entourage which accompanied her. Featured performers in addition to Lind included Giovanni Belletti, a noted Italian operatic baritone; Signor Salvi, a tenor; Sir Julius Benedict, pianist and conductor, and one of the most noted conductors in England during the Victorian Era; and a small orchestra composed of principal players from New York. P.T. Barnum personally travelled with the troupe to see that all arrangements were satisfactory. According to Rosenberg’s book, Jenny Lind in America, the party left Cincinnati on the boat “Messenger No. 2” after their final concert on Monday, 21 April 1851, and they arrived at the Wheeling suspension bridge about sunset on Wednesday, 23 April. This means that the concert occurred the next evening, which would have been Thursday. While an actual copy of the Wheeling program does not seem to be extant, the Oglebay Mansion Museum in Wheeling does have a copy of the program booklet from Cincinnati, and undoubtedly the Wheeling concert was similar—albeit not identical. The program was exactly like one that might have been presented in a major European city of that day. We can only wonder how a Wheeling audience of 1851 reacted to such a “high brow” concert. The Cincinnati program opened with the overture to Auber’s Masianni played by the orchestra. The remainder of the first half included the duet “Se in ciniasi a prender moglie” from Rossini’s L’Italiana in Algeri sung by Salvi and Belletti, the recitative “Caro Compagno” and cavatina “Come me sereno” from Bellini’s La Sonnambula sung by Jenny Lind, the romanza “In terra ci diverso” from Mercadante’s Le due illustri Rivali sung by Salvi, and the aria “On Mighty Pens” from Haydn’s The Creation sung by Jenny Lind. The second half opened with the orchestra playing the overture to Auber’s Fra Diavolo. Then followed the cavatina “Vi ravviso” from Bellini’s La Sonnambula sung by Belletti, Meyerbeer’s “The Gipsy’s Song” sung by Jenny Lind, the romanza “Bella adorata” from Mercadante’s Il Giuramento sung by Salvi, and the program closed with Taubert’s “The Bird Song” and Bishop’s “Home, Sweet Home,” both sung by Jenny Lind. Rosenberg writes thus about her reaction to Wheeling: 14

Indubitably, Wheeling has a look about it which is by no means common, in the United States. The town is tolerably clean. Its bridge is a magnificent specimen of new human labor. It has plenty of life in it—if we are to judge from the amount of humanity which I encountered, on this evening, in the streets. Yet it has all the appearance of an indubitably old town. Its very brick is dingy, and does not seem to dress itself in that lively red which colors the rest that is made in America.
A Chapel had been provided for the Concert Room... Out of an audience, which certainly could not have counted more than nine hundred persons--judging from the size of the chapel--there were at least three hundred pretty females.... It would be needless to say that the concert went off well, and that Jenny was applauded every time she sang. I must confess, nevertheless, that, with the female portion of the audience, Belletti was the chief favorite, contrary to the usual practice, on the part of the ladies, of admiring the tenor.... About ten, we were again in the steamer, and shortly after we had passed under the suspension bridge, and were again rapidly proceeding up the Ohio.

Rosenberg reports that the boat arrived in Pittsburgh on Friday morning, and he thought that the murkiness of Pittsburgh almost equalled that of Manchester. Wheeling residents probably smirked at Pittsburgh when they heard that the audience in Pittsburgh was so rowdy that Jenny Lind declined to give a second concert as originally planned, so the party left early to travel to Baltimore. He states, "Nothing, I may frankly confess, on our whole journey so much raised my spirits as quitting the dense mass of smoke and fog in which Pittsburgh was buried."

Two details surrounding Jenny Lind's Wheeling concert have conflicting testimony. Whereas Rosenberg estimated the audience in the Fourth Street Methodist Church at 900, J.H. Newton15 states that this church was "a large and commodious building, with galleries, and capable of holding nearly two thousand persons." All reports indicate that the church was crowded, but it seems likely that Rosenberg's account is more accurate, since the Lind tours party was accustomed to estimating the size of an audience. Another bit of conflicting data occurs in Wingert's History of Greater Wheeling and Vicinity16 where he states, "Jenny Lind and her troupe, with P.T. Barnum as manager, left Wheeling after her concert in a 'chartered' coach of the Stockton line for the east." Rosenberg's book clearly states that the party traveled to Pittsburgh by boat, though it is possible that the group split so that some went by boat while the others traveled by stagecoach.

All references to Jenny Lind's Wheeling concert state that her reception was excellent, and that Wheeling residents talked about her visit for many years afterwards. There is little doubt that Jenny Lind was one of the great singers of the nineteenth century. Theodore Thomas, the noted conductor, had heard all the great singers who came to America in his day, stated that all of the singers he heard, Lind and Sontag were certainly the greatest.17

The early 1850s must have been an exciting time to live in Wheeling, for not only was Wheeling basking in the fame of the suspension bridge and such events as the Jenny Lind concert, but 1852 and 1853 witnessed completion of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, and construction of both the McHare House and Washington Hall, Wheeling's first large concert hall located across from the McHare on the site of today's Lacomia Building. August 1852 also marked the establishment of the wheeling intelligencer, and the ready availability of almost all issues of the wheeling intelligencer from that time to the present makes research into Wheeling history much simpler. When it comes to theaters and concert life, these events are all interrelated. Artists could travel from the east coast to Wheeling in a day's journey by rail, they had a first-class hotel in which to stay, and their concert hall was just across the street. Moreover, the wheeling intelligencer invariably publicized and documented all the activities.

The first issue of the intelligencer18 reports that construction on the McHare House was almost done except for interior work, and that the walls of Washington Hall were complete, but the building was not yet under roof. The third floor of the hall was to be for the Masonic lodge, the second floor would be the main meeting room, while the first floor was for businesses. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad was completed just before Christmas in 1852, and a major celebration was planned for Wheeling on 11 and 12 January 1853. Although Washington Hall still had interior furnishings to complete, the building was able to host the grand banquet and the ball sponsored by Wheeling, Baltimore, the states of Maryland and Virginia, and the railroad. The second and third floors of Washington Hall accommodated about one thousand dignitaries and guests for the banquet. As the intelligencer reported on 14 January, the two spacious rooms of Washington Hall "presented a scene of splendor but rarely witnessed." Each hall was 104 feet long, and "in the first story, Capt. Holland's Band of Baltimore, and in the second story, the German Band of this city, enlivened the proceedings with the choicest music." This event and the subsequent balls the next evening are usually considered to mark the opening of Washington Hall, though the official opening of the building as a concert hall was not to occur until November. Likewise, while the McHare House was able to accommodate some of the visitors, the hotel did not officially begin to receive travelers until 26 January, as a notice in the intelligencer for that date indicates. The reference to a German Band from Wheeling is of interest because it indicates that some type of instrumental group was already functioning in Wheeling on a regular basis.

Meanwhile, the old Melodeon Hall on Main Street continued to serve as Wheeling's principal concert hall, while some events were scheduled in Union Hall on the other side of the street. A typical concert was advertised in the intelligencer on 24 January 1853 for a "Grand Ballad Entertainement at Melodeon Hall" on 25 January by Mr. Turner, American balladist. The program would include "E Pluribus Unum," "I would not die in Springtime," "Katy Darling," "Lament of the Irish Emigrant," "Angels whisper," "Grave of Napoleon," "The Harp that once in Tara's halls," etc. Admission was fifty cents or one dollar for "a gentleman and two ladies." It seems rather strange that a gentleman was supposed to bring two ladies.

The intelligencer for 25 January advertised that Mason's Metropolitan Serenaders would appear in Melodeon Hall on 28 and 29 January, and the troupe would include a violinist, dancer, trumpeter, comedian, readers, etc., in a program of songs, dances, and burlesques. This group was so popular that the Melodeon booked them for a return performance on 14 and 15 February after they had completed their engagement in Pittsburgh. One of the features of this return performance was the introduction of a new song which had never been sung in Wheeling. It was S.C. Foster's "My Old Kentucky Home."19

Other musical events this season at the Melodeon or Union halls included a concert by three local men, Messrs. Fickelson, Ritter, and Weidrick on 10 March in Melodeon Hall, and a musical entertainment by the Blakely family in Union Hall on 7 April. John Fickelson operated a music store at 199 Main Street and was the composer of "The Wheeling Bridge Polka," which he dedicated to "Chas. Elv; Esq.," The polka was a piece of sheet music for piano, and the cover included a drawing of the Wheeling suspension bridge. This polka received a modern performance at a special program of
Wheeling music in February 1857 at the Stifel Center of Oglebay Institute. The Blakely Family's program included songs, duets, trios, quartets, and several overtures and marches by the orchestra, which consisted of piano, four hands, by two ladies, first and second violins, and double bass. The "vocal score" comprised two ladies and four gentlemen. The Blakely Family must have been well received, since they scheduled a second program "by request" on 9 April. On 15 April the Intelligencer announced the "Third Annual Visit of Kunkel's Nightingale Opera Troupe" featuring "the wonderful youthful vocalist Master JOHN ADAMS." This event was called "Grand Drawing Room Entertainments" and was scheduled for 18, 19, and 20 April at the Melodeon. Admission was twenty-five cents. These events were typical of the regular musical entertainment in Wheeling theaters during the 1850s. One must not be misled by the reference to an opera troupe, since almost every music/theater group of this period referred to themselves as an "opera" troupe. Likewise, almost every town in Victorian America sported an "opera" house where these troupes performed.

Occasionally more colorful characters also arrived to present concerts. On 12 April 1853 the Intelligencer reported that a Miss C.S. Worrall "from Nobility's Concerts, and Principal Soprano at the Established Church, Wardour street, London" would present a "Soiree Musicale" at Melodeon Hall on 13 April. However, four days later the paper had an item headed "CAUTION," warning newspapers and the public that Miss C.S. Worrall was a strange combination of insanity and villainy, with the villainy being more prominent. Apparently after taking the receipts for her concert she left town without paying any of the expenses, including the ad in the newspaper. The editor warned his readers to look out for a woman apparently 35 or 40, with a "foreign" strut, great black eyes, and "who talks like thunderr[1]"

Melodeon Hall was active in presenting plays as well as concerts throughout the spring of 1853. At this time the hall was managed by Joseph C. Foster. Since the new Washington Hall was not yet complete, the Melodeon continued to serve as the Wheeling's principal theater. Union Hall was used more for social events and dances, though it occasionally had theatrical events and concerts.

During the fall of 1853 workmen were busy completing the final appointments for the interior of Washington Hall, and on 26 November 1853 the concert hall received its grand opening with a program by two area artists, Richard J. Turner and Professor Weber, who gave a ballad entertainment. The Intelligencer for Monday, 28 November reports, "This splendid Hall was opened to the public for the first time on Saturday evening." However, singer R.J. Turner had a cold, and his voice was so hoarse that the paper felt he should not have continued with the program. Obviously Turner felt the same way, so he gave a free public concert on 17 December to compensate for being in poor voice at the opening program, and this concert was very well received.21

On 1 December the Intelligencer ran an announcement that Ole Bull, one of the great virtuoso violinists of the nineteenth century, would shortly give a program in Washington Hall assisted by Adelina Patti and Maurice Strakosch.22 This was to be part of his "farewell" tour in America. The program by Bull and Patti marked the first concert in Washington Hall by major international artists, and from this time onward Wheeling became a regular concert stop for almost every major musical artist who toured America. Bull and Patti gave their program on 21 December 1853, and the editor of the Intelligencer was ecstatic in his praise, terming the event as the greatest and most brilliant assembly of the season.23 The complete program was printed in the newspaper on 20 December, and it reads as follows:

WASHINGTON HALL,
GRAND CONCERT!!

OLE BULL’S
FAREWELL CONCERT IN AMERICA!!

OLE BULL respectfully announces to the citizens of Wheeling, that he will give a Grand and positively only Concert in this city, at Washington Hall, on Wednesday evening, December 21, on which occasion he will be assisted by SIGNORINA ADELINA PATTI, the musical phenomenon, and MAURICE STRAKOSCH, the great Pianist, Musical Director and Conductor.

PROGRAMME
FOR OLE BULL’S CONCERT.

Part I.

1.-La Sylphide Fantasie Romanique, composed and executed on the Piano Forte by Maurice Strakosch
2.-Brilliant Cavatine from Verdi’s Opera of Ernani, (see American Concert Guide, page 9; No. 24; words in Italian; English translation and music,) sung by Signorina Adelina Patti
3.-Soldier’s Dream, Polacca Quarringa, composed and executed by Ole Bull
4.-Magic Bell, Fantasia Sentimental, composed and performed by Maurice Strakosch
5.-Coming through the Rye, (see American Concert Guide, page 18; No. 2; words and music,) sung by Signorina Adelina Patti
6.-Fantasia Appassionate, from the Operas of La Sonnambula [sic] and La Favorita. Composed and performed by Ole Bull.

Part II.

1.-Musical Rockets, “A Scherzo Capriccio,” composed and performed by Maurice Strakosch
2.-The Mother’s Prayer, Adagio Religioso, composed and performed by Ole Bull
3.-Jenny Lind’s Echo Song, (see American Concert Guide, page 7; No. 21; words and music,) sung by Signorina Adelina Patti
4.-The Carnival of Venice, (see American Concert Guide, page 11; No. 27; []) composed and performed by Ole Bull

Books of the concert, called the “American Concert Guide,” containing Music, Italian and English words for the concert of the evening. Also, the Music, Italian and English words, of the principal ballads, songs, arias and duets as sung by the most celebrated artists who have given, and will give concerts in the United States. For sale at the ticket office and at the door.
Admission prices were $1.50 for reserved seats and $1.00 for general admission. Tickets were sold in advance at John Fickeisen's Music Store, and the public were requested to occupy their seats ten minutes before the concert began, which was 8 o'clock.

After the Civil War Bull again was touring the United States during the closing weeks of 1868, and a week before his concert in Wheeling he almost lost his life when the steamboat in which he was riding collided with another on the Ohio River below Cincinnati. The collision occurred about 11:30 p.m. on 4 December, and the Intelligencer carries a detailed account in the issue of 7 December. Apparently Bull was on the "America" ascending the river, when it collided with the "United States." The "United States" was carrying a quantity of petroleum which caught fire, and both boats burned with a large loss of life. Bull jumped overboard with his violin and some music in his violin case, reaching shore with "violin and person alike intact," struggled up the bank, and walked until daylight to find shelter. Bull and his company lost all their luggage, but only one concert was cancelled, and the second after the accident he performed in Cincinnati, "but was obliged to appear in his travelling dress." According to the newspaper ads Bull's concert in Washington Hall on 10 December included numbers by Miss Barton, a Boston soprano; Gustavus F. Hall, baritone; and Egbert Lansin, pianist and accompanist. The morning after the concert the Intelligencer reported that there was a full house and that every performer was encored.

Washington Hall received its first major competition when the Athenaeum opened its doors to the public on 11 January 1855. The Athenaeum was located on the southeast corner of Market and 16th streets, and when it opened it claimed to be the largest theater in Virginia, exceeding Washington Hall as well as the theaters in Richmond. Kunel's Opera Troupe presented Macbeth, King of Colored Men for the opening night, and the next evening the company presented Buy It Dear, It's Made of Cashmere, plus The Three Lovers "in addition to the Grand Musical Soiree by the company"--as the ads put it. These productions competed against Sanford's Opera Troupe which was then entertaining at Washington Hall. Wheeling must have had a theater-going populace in those days, for the Intelligencer reports on 13 January that both the Athenaeum and Washington Hall were enjoying fine and crowded houses.

Despite its festive inauguration, the Athenaeum was not fully successful as a theater, and Washington Hall remained the superior auditorium. The Athenaeum burned early in the morning of 10 October 1868, and the Intelligencer for 12 October states: "The Athenaeum [sic] was erected ... by Geo. Hardman ... at a cost of $57,000 ... It was originally designed as a theater, the ground floor being for the use of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. For theatrical purposes, the enterprise was not a success, and, to the best of our information, it has never occupied by the railroad company." It was used as a theater only from 1855 through 1860; during the Civil War it became a military barracks and prison. At the time it burned the building was owned by Butterfield & Co. and was used to manufacture malt as well as for the storage of grain.

On Saturday, 8 December 1860 Adelina Patti gave one of her "Farewell Concerts in America" in Washington Hall. She was assisted by Signor Lotti, tenor; Ettore Barili, baritone; Nicola Barili, bass; Signor Biscaccianti, violin; and Maurice Strakosch, director and conductor. All seats were $1, and the Intelligencer for 10 December reports that a very brilliant audience was at times really rapturous in applause.

During the Civil War Washington Hall continued to function as a concert hall and meeting hall, while the Athenaeum was a military prison. On 27 March 1862 the Intelligencer announced a program by the Old Folks, "The Most Popular Company in the World," featuring Mrs. Emma Nichols and new songs. An announcement on 8 April said that the great American pianist Louis Moreau Gottschalk was planning to visit Wheeling, but subsequent papers give no indication that Gottschalk actually gave a concert in Washington Hall, though he was enroute from the east coast to the Midwest at this time. M'ma Anna Bishop, assisted by baritone Edward Seguin and pianist Gustave de Speiss did give a program in the hall on 23 April. This was Bishop's second visit to Wheeling.

As a sample of major musical events in Washington Hall during the mid-1860s, here are some of the main attractions during 1865. While Gottschalk appears not to have played in Wheeling in 1862, he did appear with his company in Washington Hall on 31 January 1865. This was part of "Gottschalk's Positive Farewell" tour of America before he departed for Havana and Mexico. He was assisted by a "young and talented Cantatrice" Miss Lucy Simons, baritone Signor Ardavani, and musical director Signor Muzio. Tickets were $1. Wheeling concert goers must have favored operatic singers more than pianists, since the Intelligencer for 1 February states that the hall was "about three-fourths full." The audience was more than average, but not the most appreciative--the newspaper reporter had seen in the hall, though "the great performer was listened to with marked interest." The reporter also found Lucy Simons to be a sweet singer whose freshness of style was attractive, no less in person than in voice. Campbell and Castle's English Opera Troupe of 40 persons (including orchestra) were in the hall for a full week of grand opera beginning on Monday, 27 March. Tickets sold for $1 and for 50 cents for single admissions. The opera season included: Balfie's The Bohemian Girl on Monday, W. Vincent Wallace's Mentana on Tuesday, Fra Diavolo by Aubert on Wednesday; Balfie's Rose of Castile on Thursday, Bellini's La Sonnambula on Friday, and concluded with Donizetti's Elifor on Saturday. The newspaper reports that a very large and fashionable audience was present for the opening night, and that the opera was well attended. Wheeling again was treated to grand opera on 13 and 14 November 1865 when a company from the New York Academy of Music directed by Max Strakosch presented performances of Verdi's La Traviata and Gounod's Faust. Admission for these operas was $2 and $1. A couple weeks later on 27 November Bateman Concerts presented Mlle Euphrosyne Parepa, prima donna; Mr. J. Levy, cornet; Carl Rosa, violin; T.M. Brown, pianist; and Carl Anschutz, conductor, in a mixed program of arias, piano, and cornet solos. The overtures were played on piano four hands, and not by an orchestra. This company must have found their Wheeling reception to be satisfactory.

On 17 December 1866 Parepa Rosa, Carl Rosa, and Jules Levy all returned to Washington Hall, though the remainder of their company this time included tenor Brookhouse Fowler, baritone P. Ferranti, and pianist George Colby. The year 1865 must have been an especially active year in Wheeling concert life because of the end of the Civil War. Blind Tom, the famous Negro pianist, gave four concerts in Washington Hall from 21 August through
24 August. Apparently this was Blind Tom’s second visit to Wheeling, since a story in the Intelligencer for 17 August states that he “will revisit this city.” The ad for Tom’s concerts on 17 August was headed, “The World Renowned Blind Negro Boy Pianist, Tom, will give four concerts commencing Monday evening, August 21st.” Admission was 50 cents, with 75 cents for reserved seats. The paper reported that Tom had large audiences and that he even gave a matinee (apparently added) on 24 August.

Washington Hall continued to be Wheeling’s premiere theater for several more years, though it met severe competition after Hamilton’s Opera House opened at 14th and Market streets in 1873. On the morning of 30 November 1875 fire broke out below the roof of the third floor, apparently from a defective flue. At that time the West Virginia legislature was meeting in the theater, while the Masonic lodge still occupied the third floor. The ground floor was occupied by businesses. Although the fire at first spread slowly, Wheeling’s fire companies were unable to obtain sufficient water to fight it, and by noon the entire building was consumed except for the walls.

WHEELING MATURES: THE OPERA HOUSE

The burning of Washington Hall gave the new Opera House built by James Hamilton an opportunity to solidify its position as Wheeling’s premiere theater. Hamilton’s Opera House had its grand opening on 6 October 1873 with a production of Shakespeare’s The Tempest. The Opera House was located on the northwest corner of 14th and Market streets, where Wheeling Dollar Bank now stands. The main entrance and lobby were on Market Street, while the stage entrance was on 14th Street. The Intelligencer for 7 October gives a fairly detailed description of the hall. The stage measured 29 by 64 feet and was equipped with nine scenes; the house seated 185 in the orchestra, 350 in the dress circle, and 400 in the family circle for a total of 935. In later years of its history (after 1880) the Opera House was owned by the German Fire Insurance Company.

During the season the Opera House presented almost daily evening performances of plays, minstrel shows, operas, musicals, lectures, and concerts, plus matinees on Wednesday and Saturday. While plays were the most common presentations, those usually included some singing and dancing, and a small orchestra was in residence. The Opera House Orchestra of about a dozen players became Wheeling’s best instrumental group, and this orchestra provided the nucleus for dance orchestras and concerts during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Actually there is a continuous line of development from the Opera House Orchestra to the Court Theatre Orchestra of the early 20th century to the Wheeling Steel Orchestra at WWVA radio and eventually to today’s Wheeling Symphony.

Let us consider a sampling of the many programs which were presented in the Opera House. On 2 and 3 January 1874 the Kellogg Troupe presented Balle’s The Bohemian Girl and Gounod’s Faust with a “full chorus” and “grand orchestra.” On 24 January of 1874 the Weissel Musical Institute presented the “first grand concert” of the institute’s third season in the Opera House. It included a variety of solos, piano music, and orchestral music.

The Royal Imperial Band from Mainz on the Rhine played on 4 and 6 April 1874. These programs by the Royal Imperial Band and the Weissel Musical Institute are indicative of the shifting of Wheeling’s musical and theatrical life from an English-Scottish emphasis in the period from 1820-1860 to a German emphasis from the Civil War to World War I. The population of Wheeling likewise shows this change as one sees the increasing prominence of German surnames among Wheeling residents. From 1853-1961 eleven different German singing societies operated in Wheeling at various times, and these groups had a decisive impact upon Wheeling’s theatrical and musical life. Had it not been for the support these societies provided local theaters and musicians, it is very doubtful whether Wheeling would have become the theater center that it was around 1900.

A sample of the type of program Wheeling musicians—both professional and amateur—could stage is offered by the benefit concert for the Wheeling Children’s Home which was presented by the Harmonie, Maennerchor, and Beethoven singing societies on 16 February 1875. The program (as given in the Intelligencer for 13 and 16 February) included an opening overture by Bellini played by the orchestra, “On the Beautiful Blue Danube” by the combined societies and orchestra, a Mendelssohn violin solo [concerto] played by Louis Vaas with orchestra, “Morning Greeting” sung by the Maennerchor directed by Hermann Ebeling, a duet from Norma sung by Mary Michel and Mary Welty, and a vocal solo entitled “My Angel” by A.S. Roe with violin obligato to conclude the first half of the program. Following intermission the orchestra played another overture, “Jean de Paris,” and the program continued with a “Nightly Wandering” by the Beethoven Society directed by H. Vaas, Ab’s “Good Night, My Child” sung by Mary Michel, “The Hunter’s Song” by the Harmonie Society directed by W.C. Kreuter, a duet called “Sul Compo della Gloria” by Dr. Martin and C.Y. Lucas, and the concert closed with the “Chorus of the Armorer” from Wagner’s Rienzi for the combined choirs and orchestra directed by Professor Schaefer. The paper reports that the Opera House was “crowded with an audience such as has seldom been seen inside its walls.” The orchestra was the combined Kramer and Weissel Musical Institute orchestras, and performers were all local musicians thus showing the extent to which Wheeling’s musical life had matured.

On 15 October 1874 the 60-piece Theodore Thomas Orchestra gave their first performance in the Opera House, with Emma Cranch as featured vocalist. The Intelligencer did not print the complete program, but a review the following day stated that every seat was taken except in the family circle, and the program included the “Andante” from the Beethoven fifth symphony, a Rossini cavatina, a “Fantasia Capriccio,” an excerpt from act three of Lohengrin, and a new “meditation” by Gounod.

The Hutchinson Family, Victorian America’s most noted family singing troupe, appeared in the Opera House on 1 and 2 June 1877. Actually the Hutchinson Family Singers had appeared in Wheeling many years earlier about New Year’s Day of 1849. John Wallace Hutchinson writes in his book, Story of the Hutchisons (Tribe of Jesse) that the family had been in Cincinnati visiting an Uncle Kendrick Leavitt, and “On December 30th we bid our many friends a long farewell and took the boat for Wheeling, stopping at Ripley on our way with Rev. Mr. Rankin, a noble Abolitionist.” They were in Wheeling about 1 January and made a short stop in Pittsburgh. As yet no Wheeling newspapers or other accounts have been located concerning this early visit by the Hutchisons.
There is more documentation for the Hutchinson's 1877 visit to Wheeling. An Intelligencer advertisement for 30 May 1877 states that the Hutchisons would give a concert on Friday and Saturday, 1 and 2 June in the Hamilton Opera House. "The HUTCHINSON FAMILY, who have been greeted with crowded houses in all the large cities of this country and in Europe, will give two of their Grand Concerts as above, in the interests of the TEMPERANCE CAUSE in this city." Tickets were reduced to 25 and 35 cents. The following day the newspaper review read, "The Hutchinson Family gave a concert in the Opera House last night before a fair audience, who apparently enjoyed the entertainment. A second concert will be given this evening, when children will be admitted for fifteen cents." Another item in the paper states that the concert was the last for the family this season, and "they leave for their mountain home in the Granite State on Monday morning." The family claimed to have given over eleven thousand concerts in America and Europe during the past 37 years.

The concert by Wheeling's own Madame Kate Rolla, daughter of Wheeling residents Mr. and Mrs. George K. Wheat, on 9 September 1897 was certainly one of the most colorful events in the Opera House's history. The Intelligencer gave a detailed account of this concert the following morning. A standing-room-only audience packed the hall, and many persons unable to get tickets stood outside offering $5 or $10 for a ticket. Over half the audience was in formal evening dress, and a large crowd gathered on 14th Street to watch for the arrival of the performers. The review called it "a great feat of music" for Wheeling and Wheeling's response did her infinite credit." The audience threw flowers and large bouquets onto the apron of the stage during the thunderous applause. After the concert "as the songstress rolled away in her carriage her friends followed her with shouts of congratulation." As printed in the Intelligencer on 10 September the program consisted of the overture to Ruyard by Thomas as played by the Opera House Orchestra; the Suicide Aria from Ponchielli's La Gioconda sung by Kate Rolla; a "Romana" for violin played by Wheeling's H.M. Schockey; an "Ave Maria" sung by Emma Bingler, a pupil of Madame Rolla's from Pittsburgh; "Infelice" from Verdi's Ernani sung by baritone Dan Bullock from Pittsburgh; "Connaiss le pays" from Mignon by Thomas, sung by Kate Rolla; and two choruses, "The Elder Tree" by Schmidt and "The Earth's Prayer" by Zoller as sung by the Arion Society. Wheeling's most prestigious German singing society. The Opera House Orchestra opened the second half of the concert with selections from Gounod's Faust; Kate Rolla followed with the "Spinning and Jewel Song" from the same opera. Wheeling pianist Joseph Kell played two Chopin etudes in A major and F minor, and the Litz "Dance of the Gnomes," "Emma Bingler sang Danza's "If Thou Didst Love Me"; Dan Bullock sang "Old Heidelberg, Thou Fair One" by Jensen; and the program concluded with Kate Rolla singing Flore's "The Last Rose of Summer" and Tosti's "Good Bye." There were also several unlisted encores.

Wheeling's Opera House served the area until the night of 29 April 1902, when the curtain rang down for the last time. The performance for that final night was the play Under Southern Skies. The new Court Theatre was then under construction and was planning to open in the fall. William Richardson, stage carpenter since the Opera House had opened in 1873 and slated to have the same job in the Court, marked the event with a special luncheon on stage for the Opera House employees.

After the disastrous fire which destroyed Washington Hall, the Washington Hall Association decided to rebuild on the same site, and on 1 February 1876 the Intelligencer proudly carried an advertisement headlined "Announcement Extraordinary!" heralding the public grand opening of the "Wheeling Opera Hall" in the Washington Hall Building with "Uncle Tom's Cabin" on 5 and 6 February. This was no ordinary "Uncle Tom's Cabin," but included the Plantation Jubilee Singers in plantation melodies, songs, and dances by "genuine freedmen." The B&O arranged to run a train from Barnesville, Bellaire, and Benwood to accommodate persons wishing to attend the opening. While this event marked the public opening, the rebuilt hall officially celebrated with the "Mathews Light Guards Ball on 1 February (named in honor of West Virginia Governor H.M. Mathews). This was a concert and dress ball featuring Josie Kramer's 13-piece orchestra. A program of operatic selections was presented before the dancing commenced. There was some difficulty deciding what name the rebuilt hall should bear, and the Washington Opera Hall soon became Charles Shaw's Academy, and this was followed by the name, People's Theatre. When O.C. Genther became manager he changed the name to Grand Opera House, and thus it remained as long as the building was a theater. While the Grand hosted a variety of concerts and plays, including regular visits from the Cincinnati German Stock Company with German-language performances sponsored by the Federated German Societies of Wheeling, it always seemed to play a secondary role to the Opera House in booking the top events. The Grand seated about 1100 persons as opposed to 935 in the Opera House.

During its later years the Grand offered a variety of entertainment including vaudeville, concerts, wrestling, and motion pictures. From October 1909 thru early March 1910 the theater was home to Hall's Associate Players, which became a Wheeling-based stock company. However, during the 1910-1911 season the Grand showed only motion pictures, and it was evident that the competition from Wheeling's newer theaters was becoming too much for the old playhouse. Consequently, the Grand Opera House officially ended its career on 1 July 1911. A story in the Intelligencer on 4 July reads: "Saturday night the Grand Opera House [sic] ceased to exist so far as the amusement world was concerned, and yesterday a force of men under the direction of Manager Charles A. Feinler began the dismantling of the theatre. The Grand was the city's oldest playhouse, and it is to be torn out to make way for the improvements of the German Bank, which will convert the building into an office structure." The German Bank occupied the ground floor of the building, and its brass doors today form part of the decor of the entrance to Elby's Restaurant, which is now in that location. The old Grand was completely remodeled and provided with stone facing so as to become today's Laconia Building. However, evidence of the former theater is still seen in the repositioned corner on 12th and Market streets, and in the different stone facing around what used to be the entrance to the theater in the store front on the alley next to today's Federal Building.

The demise of the Opera House in 1902 and the Grand Opera House in 1911 marked the end of the truly Victorian chapter of Wheeling's theaters and concert halls. Newer theaters took over. These were the Court at 12th and Chapline, which opened 8 September 1902 and featured plays, concerts, musicals, and operas; the Bijou at 1406 Market, opening 30 October 1905
and specializing in vaudeville; the Wonderland at 46-14th Street, which opened 9 September 1907 and emphasized vaudeville; the Virginia on 12th Street, which was the largest theater of all and which opened 20 January 1908 and featured plays, concerts, musicals, and operas; the Victoria, which still stands on Market Street and specialized in vaudeville when it opened 5 October 1906; and finally the Apollo at 44-14th Street, which was built from the former and short-lived Bijou and Wonderland theaters. After a couple years the Apollo changed its name to the Orpheum, and it was designed primarily as a vaudeville house. 40 Wheeling residents of today are surprised to learn that for some years between 1900 and 1910 one could have a choice of as many as five different stage shows on a given night in downtown Wheeling.

As of 1988 only a few of the buildings connected with Wheeling’s active Victorian theatrical life still survive, and none are presently in use as theaters. The Grand Opera House exists in remodeled form as a business and office building which is the Laconia Building at 12th and Market. The Court Theatre still exists, though it was reduced in size and its entrance moved from Chapline Street to the corner of 12th and Chapline during a major remodeling some years ago. The Victoria sits empty and deteriorating on Market Street, and no remnant remains of either the Apollo-Orpheum or the once-grand Virginia, which survived as a home for Wheeling Symphony concerts into the early 1960s before it was turned into a parking lot.

Two buildings which have not been mentioned previously in this study because they were private halls rather than theaters as such are the old Turner Hall at 909 Market Street and Arion Hall at 20th and Main Street. However, both of these did once play a prominent role in Wheeling’s cultural and social life. The old Turner Hall must be one of the oldest and most remodeled buildings in downtown Wheeling. Originally constructed as a Presbyterian church in 1832-1833, the Wheeling Turnverein purchased the building and converted it into an auditorium with a 28-foot deep stage equipped with footlights, drop curtains, and scenery, while the basement included dining and gymnastic areas. 41 The Turners frequently rented the hall for public events of all types—concerts, dinners, balls, and plays. After 1900 the Turnverein declined, and in 1908 the hall was leased to C.D. Thompson for remodeling into a modern theater, opening on 1 January 1907 as the Gayety Theatre, a vaudeville/burlesque house. 42 However, it was not very successful, and for several years was intermittently dark, a theater, or a motion picture house. In 1919 it became an automobile service garage, and it served more or less in this capacity until purchased by M. Marsh & Son in 1941, who still own it today. The windows of the auditorium with their fan design at the top still exist at the front of the building. The interior has been drastically changed, including the removal of a gallery from the auditorium and construction of a second floor. 43

After the Maennerchor and Harmonie German singing societies merged in 1879 to form the Harmonie-Maennerchor and subsequently the Arion Association, they purchased a building on the southeast corner of 20th and Main and remodeled it (with further extensive additions in 1894) to become Arion Hall. The ground floor had two business rooms, the second floor housed the dining and club rooms with service areas, while the third floor was an auditorium which was designed to be a somewhat smaller version of the old Washington Hall. It could accommodate several hundred persons for a concert and was also used for theater and dancing. The Arion Association would rent the hall to outside groups for special events. After World War I the Arion no longer functioned as a German singing society, but the hall was rented for dances, programs, etc., until about 1936 or 1937. Today the ground floor is occupied by Seymour Auto Parts; the upper floors are either vacant or used for storage. Some remnants of the once-pride auditorium still exist on the third floor. 44

As of 1988 Wheeling no longer is a major theater center and theater, though Ogolby Institute’s Towngate Theatre does continue the long tradition of community theater groups that began with the Thespian Society of the 1820s. Likewise, the WWVA Jamboree to some degree maintains the city’s history as an entertainment center, and occasionally touring New York companies stop at the Capitol Music Hall to present a play or musical. The Wheeling Symphony continues to function, and its members form a nucleus of performers for other community musical activities—much as was true with the players in the old Opera House Orchestra of Victorian times. However, recent years have seen a disturbing trend in that an increasing number of symphony players are from outside the greater Wheeling area and thus are not a regular part of the city’s musical life. With the demise of the Frazier Concerts in the mid-1960s, concerts and recitals have moved from downtown to the Ogolby Institute Stifel Center, Ogolby Park, and the West Liberty State College campus. The only major exception is the series of sacred musical events at historic St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church. Thus, when one walks through downtown Wheeling on an evening in 1988 the streets are quiet; the theaters are either dark or gone. But one should take a moment to pause at 12th and Market and glance at the Laconia Building with its bustling Elby’s Restaurant. The distinctive angled corner brings back memories of the old Grand Opera House, and perhaps—just perhaps—we can almost hear some echoes from Victorian times and see the throngs crowding into the old playhouse at the former 12th Street entrance by today’s Federal Building.
NOTES


2. See issues of the Wheeling Gazette for 22 September 1827 and 12 January 1828.

3. Ibid., 4 April 1829.

4. Ibid., 31 May 1828, which states, "The population of this place has nearly doubled in five years. In March last it was 4,183."

5. Ibid., 26 June 1830 advertisement announcing that a hatter had moved into the storeroom attached to the Gobe Inn and formerly occupied by A. & E. Picket.

6. Ibid., 31 January 1829.

7. Ibid., 4 April 1829.

8. Ibid., 3, 24, and 31 October; 21 November 1829.

9. Ibid., 13 March 1830.

10. Ibid., 12 January 1828 and 7 March 1829.

11. Ibid., 27 June 1829.

12. See the book by Charles G. Rosenberg, Jenny Lind in America (New York: Stringer & Townsend, 1851) for a fascinating account of the Lind tour.


18. 24 August 1852.

19. Wheeling Intelligencer, 14 February 1853.

20. Ibid., 7 March and 7 April 1853.

21. Ibid., 26 November and 19 December 1853.

22. Adelina Patti (1843-1919) was a Spanish prima donna whose family moved to New York in 1844. She toured extensively in Europe and America and was a member of the Metropolitan Opera. Her manager was Maurice Strakosch (1825-1887), a Czech-born pianist, impresario, and vocal coach who married Amalia Patti, Adelina's sister.

23. Intelligencer, 22 December 1853.


25. Intelligencer, 21 April 1862. Anna Bishop (1810-1884) was an English soprano who came to New York in 1847. She made several world tours.

26. Ibid., 20-28 March 1865.

27. Ibid., 8 November 1865. The New York Academy of Music was a predecessor to the Metropolitan Opera.

28. Ibid., 27 November 1865. Euphrosyne Parepa-Rosa (1836-1874) was a Scottish soprano whom impresario H.L. Bateman brought to America to work with conductor Theodore Thomas. She married violinist Carl Rosa (1842-1889). Jules Levy (1838-1903) was an English virtuoso cornetist who made his American debut in Boston in 1865. He was an early recording artist for Edison and was affiliated with C.G. Conn, the noted band instrument maker. Karl Anschutz (1815-1870) was a German conductor who came to New York in 1857 to direct the Strakosch-Ullmann Opera Troupe.

29. Ibid., 15 December 1868.

30. Ibid., 1 December 1875.

31. Ibid., 30 December 1873.

32. Ibid., 23 January 1874. The Weisel Musical Institute was a private school named for Henry Joseph Weisel, M.D. (1840-1873) who lived in Wheeling and was also a musician and composer.

33. Ibid., 1 April 1874.

34. For a detailed study of these German singing societies see Edward C. Wolf, "Wheeling's German Singing Societies," West Virginia History 42 (Fall 1980/Winter 1981): 1-56.

35. Intelligencer, 30 May 1877.


37. Intelligencer, 30 April 1902.
A LIST OF WHEELING THEATERs BEFORE 1900

GLOBE ASSEMBLY ROOM — This was a hall used for general purposes that appears to have been connected with the Globe Tavern or Globe Inn operated by E.S. Graham on Main Street at today's 10th Street, adjacent the old court house on 10th Street between Main and Market Street. It operated during the 1820s as a site for plays and musical entertainments.

WHEELING THEATRE — In August 1828 the weekly Wheeling Gazette mentioned that the "New Theatre" had opened "opposite Market Street" in downtown Wheeling, apparently referring to today's Market Plaza area. This playhouse operated for a number of years, but disappears from mention by mid-century.

UNION HALL — Located on the west side of Main Street just south of 12th Street, Union Hall was actively operating about 1850 and continued into the 1870s. It hosted plays, concerts, balls, and banquets. During the early 1870s it was rented by the Beethoven Society, one of Wheeling's principal German singing societies.

MELODEON HALL — This hall served as Wheeling's primary theater and concert room before Washington Hall opened. It was located at 1220 on the east side of Main Street and was still used for meetings (but no longer as a theater) during the 1870s.

WASHINGTON HALL — During 1852 the Washington Hall Association constructed this historic building on the northeast corner of 12th and Market Street. The building was first used on 11 and 12 January 1853 when it housed the grand banquet and ball sponsored by the cities of Wheeling and Baltimore, the states of Maryland and Virginia, and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad to mark completion of the railroad from Baltimore to Wheeling. However, outfitting of the theater itself was not completed for several months, and the concert hall officially opened on 26 November 1853. The ground floor was rented to various businesses, the second floor was the auditorium, while the third floor housed the Masonic Lodge. Washington Hall burned 30 November 1875 while the West Virginia Legislature was in session on the second floor. The Washington Hall Association rebuilt the structure, and it re-opened 1 February 1878 with a concert and dress ball in honor of West Virginia's governor, H.M. Mathews. The new building was briefly known as both Charles Shay's Academy and People's Theatre before being christened as the Grand Opera House — its name for the last quarter century of its life. The Grand seated about 1,100 persons and presented concerts, plays, lectures, and meetings as well as vaudeville, wrestling matches, and motion pictures after 1900. It ceased life as a theater on 1 July 1911 when the German Bank (which then owned the building and occupied the first floor) began extensive remodeling which turned it into today's Laconia Building.

ATHÉNAEUM — The ill-fated Athenaeum on the southeast corner of Market and 16th Street opened its doors 11 January 1855. It proudly claimed to be the largest theater in all Virginia. The ground floor was for commercial use, while the auditorium was on the second
floor. From 1855-1860 it housed an assortment of plays and musical programs. One of its finest moments occurred 22 August 1860 when it was the site of the grand concert for a regional Sängerfest sponsored by Wheeling's German singing societies. During the Civil War the Athenaeum served as a military barracks and prison. After the war Butterfield & Co. used it to manufacture malt and store grain. The building burned early in the morning of 10 October 1868.

TURNER HALL — Located at 309 Market Street, Turner Hall was originally a Presbyterian Church erected in 1832-1833. In 1868 the Wheeling Turnverein purchased the building and converted it into an auditorium with a 28-foot deep stage, footlights, drop curtain, and scenery, while the basement included dining and gymnastic areas. The Turners frequently rented the hall for public events of all types — concerts, dinners, balls, and plays. For example, Turner Hall was the headquarters for Wheeling's city-wide observance of the centennial of the birth of Alexander von Humboldt held on 13 and 14 September 1869. After 1900 the Turnverein declined, and in 1906 in hall was leased to C.D. Thompson for remodeling as a theater. On 1 January 1907 it opened as the Gaiety Theatre, but was not very successful with its vaudeville offerings. For several years it was intermittently dark, a theater, or a motion picture house. In 1919 it became an automobile sales and service garage, and it served more or less in this capacity until purchased by M. Marsh & Son in 1941. The exterior walls and second-floor front windows survive today, and it must be one of the oldest — and most remodeled — buildings in downtown Wheeling.

OPERA HOUSE — Hamilton's Opera House on the northwest corner of Market and 14th Street opened 6 October 1873 with a performance of Shakespeare's The Tempest. Originally it was built and owned by James Hamilton, but around 1880 the German Fire Insurance Company purchased it, and it became known simply as the Opera House (not to be confused with the Grand Opera House at 12th and Market). The hall seated 935 persons and had a stage measuring 28 by 124 feet. It was Wheeling's premier theatre for plays and concerts and frequently hosted the top artists from New York. The stage entrance was on 14th Street, while the main lobby entrance was on Market Street. The building was the shape of the letter L, and the actual corner at 14th and Market was occupied by a drug store. The Opera House closed 29 April 1902 in anticipation of the opening of the new Court Theatre later that year.

ARION HALL — After the Harmonie and Maennerchor singing societies merged to form the Arion Association, they purchased a building on the southeast corner of 20th and Main Street and remodeled it to become Arion Hall. In 1894 the building was further remodeled and a major addition was added on 20th Street behind the original structure. The ground floor housed two business rooms, the second floor had dining areas and club rooms, while the third floor was an auditorium designed to be a somewhat smaller version of Washington Hall. It could accommodate several hundred persons for a concert and was also used for theater, dancing, etc. Especially in later years the Arion Association would rent the hall to outside groups for public programs. After World War I the Arion no longer functioned as a German singing society, but the hall was used for general purpose meetings and events until about 1936 or 1937. Today the ground floor of the building is occupied by Seymour Auto Parts; the upper floors are either vacant or used for storage.

During the last half of the nineteenth century several meeting halls were on the second or third floors of business buildings in downtown Wheeling. These halls were not theaters as such, but sometimes they were used for plays or concerts. Their names changed according to the organizations which leased them or when the owner of the building changed. Among these halls were the ASSEMBLY HALL (Lincoln Club Room) at 1221 Market Street; HARMONIA HALL (McAfee Hall) on the northeast corner of 14th and Main Street; MOZART HALL at 1205 Market Street; FRANZHEIM'S HALL at 1125 Main Street; EGERTER HALL in the Egerter Building (still standing) on Market at 11th Street; and the CARROLL CLUB AUDITORIUM at 1300 Chapline Street. There were also a number of halls in southern Wheeling such as NOLTE'S HALL, ARBENZ HALL, and WESTWOOD'S HALL.

From 1902 through 1909 six new theaters opened in downtown Wheeling, thus opening a new chapter in Wheeling's theatrical life. In chronological order these theaters were: the COURT THEATRE at 12th and Chapline, opening 8 September 1902 and featuring plays, concerts, musicals, and opera; the BIJOU at 1406 Market Street, opening 30 October 1905 and featuring vaudeville; the WONDERLAND at 46-14th Street, which opened 9 September 1907 and featured vaudeville; the VIRGINIA on 12th Street, which opened 20 January 1908 as Wheeling's largest theater and presented plays, concerts, musicals, and opera; the VICTORIA, now dark but still standing on Market Street, which opened 5 October 1908 as a vaudeville house; and the APOLLO at 44-14th Street, which was a major rebuilding and combining of the short-lived Bijou and Wonderland, and which opened as a vaudeville house 15 February 1909. After a couple years the name was changed to the ORPHEUM.

(This list was prepared by Edward C. Wolf. All dates were obtained from advertisements or stories in old Wheeling newspapers as well as from some old concert and theater programs.)
WHEELING'S GERMAN SINGING SOCIETIES

Listed by date of founding

Wheeling’s German singing societies played a major role in supporting the city’s theaters and concert life. A listing of the eleven different societies which functioned from 1853 to 1961 is given below.

1853
TURNER SOCIETY—While not primarily a musical society, the Wheeling Turnverein was founded in 1853 and did include some musical activities along with their emphasis upon gymnastics. A singing group known as the Liedertafel existed at times within the Turners. In 1868 the Turners purchased a United Presbyterian Church on Market Street and converted it into a hall. From 1868 until the early 1900s this hall was the site of many Wheeling programs and social functions. Turner Hall ceased operating around 1905 or 1906, and the building was converted into a theater. It survives today as the northernmost of the M. Marsh and Son buildings at 915 Market Street.

1855
MAENNERCHOR—Founded 15 October 1855, its membership included many leading Wheeling businessmen. The society met in various Wheeling downtown halls, and as late as 1875-76 it rented the old Melodeon Hall on Main Street. Do not confuse this society with the later Wheeling Maennerchor or the Martins Ferry Maennerchor.

1855
HARMONIE—Probably founded on 24 October 1855 (a dispute exists), it quickly became a rival to the Maennerchor. On 6 October 1879 the Harmonie consolidated with the Maennerchor to form the Harmonie-Maennerchor, which in turn became the prestigious Arion Society two years later.

1869
GERMANIA—Organized 19 February 1869, it met in various rented halls, including the top floor of the Public Library Building on Market near 14th Street. (This was the building which burned in July 1987 and housed a coffee shop on the ground floor). From about 1875-1885 the Germania was very active, but it faded from the Wheeling scene after the 1889-90 season.

1869
BEETHOVEN—Along with the Arion and the Mozart, the Beethoven was one of the “big three” of Wheeling’s German singing societies. It was organized 4 July 1869 by a splinter group from the Harmonie and the Maennerchor who wanted to sing at the Turner’s 4th of July celebration even though it fell on a Sunday. For a while the Turnverein provided encouragement, but by 1870 the Beethoven was meeting in the old Union Hall on Main Street. It remained an active society until the spring of 1961, when it officially dissolved. Edward Blumenberg served as the Beethoven’s musical director for over fifty years.

1870
CONCORDIA—A dissident group from St. Paul’s Protestant Church choir in south Wheeling founded the Concordia 1 March 1870. It was strictly a south Wheeling group and functioned only a few years before melting into the Liederkrantz.

c. 1870
LIEDERKRANZ—Organized some time around 1870, it appears to have absorbed the membership of the Concordia. It was a south Wheeling group and was sometimes known as the Liederkrantz Mozart.

1879
MAENNERCHOR II—A dissident group led by Fred Arbenz opposed the Harmonie—Maennerchor merger, and they organized this society which claimed to be the “real” Maennerchor in 1879. It prospered during the 1880s, but it weakened after Fred Arbenz moved to Chillicothe, Ohio, and it disappear after the 1890-91 season.

1881
ARION—The merged Harmonie-Maennerchor incorporated themselves as the Arion Association on 10 September 1881. The Arion purchased a building on the southeast corner of Main and 20th streets which was rebuilt into Arion Hall. The Arion was the most exclusive of Wheeling’s German singing societies, and its membership included several wealthy businessmen and professionals. Louis Stifel served as president for a number of years. The society was active until the United States entered World War I in 1917, while the association continued to operate Arion Hall until about 1936. In addition to the active members in the men’s chorus, the Arion had a large passive membership who participated in social events, an active women’s auxiliary, a literary group, and even children’s groups. Arion Hall was designed so that the auditorium was on the third floor, club rooms and kitchen facilities were on the second floor, and the ground floor was rented for business purposes. Today the building is occupied by Seymour Auto Parts.

1882
MOZART—The Mozart was founded 2 February 1882 by members from the then defunct Concordia and the southside Liederkrantz. Membership was primarily from south Wheeling, and many members were associated with the Schmulbach Brewery. Henry Schmulbach provided support and encouragement to the Mozart, and the society soon prospered. The society named Mozart Park after itself, and the Mozart served in operating the park (which was another of Schmulbach’s operations). Hermann Schockey served both the Arion and the Mozart as their musical director for many years.
TEUTONIA--The Teutonia was a small society which functioned from about 1888 until 1895.

From 1895-1917 the Arion, Mozart, and Beethoven were Wheeling's three active singing societies, and all three were quite strong. During this period old animosities were forgotten, and the societies often cooperated in such events as the 1906 Central Ohio [!] Saengerfest which was held in the Court Theatre. Social distinctions determined society memberships. Prosperous businessmen, bankers, and professionals joined the Arion; working men and craftsmen joined the Beethoven; south Wheeling employees of the Schmulbach Brewery and their associates joined the Mozart. World War I brought an abrupt end to the German emphasis in Wheeling's cultural and social life, and only the Beethoven managed to survive the effects of the war.

(Further details and documentation for this survey of Wheeling's German singing societies may be found in Edward C. Wolf, "Wheeling's German Singing Societies," West Virginia History 42 [Fall 1980/Winter 1981]: 1-56)