"MAGNIFICENT BARBARISM":

THE RUBE AND THE PERFORMANCE OF THE RURAL ON THE AMERICAN VAUDEVILLE STAGE, 1875-1925

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

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ABSTRACT

The "rube" character, a burlesque of the rural working class, was among the most popular caricatures in American vaudeville performance. The comic, agro-pastoral rube figure blended together the legitimate stage's "Yankee" character, the blackface stump speaker of the minstrel tradition, and the caricature of ethnic types on the stages of vaudeville's golden age. Beginning on the variety stage with Denman Thompson's 1875 debut as "Uncle Josh Whitcomb," the rube character became a favorite of the vaudeville audiences, and, over the next five decades, it made stars of Frank Bell, Will M. Cressy & Blanche Dayne, Byron Harlan & Frank Stanley, Cal Stewart, and Chic Sale.

In the 1890s, the rube emerged from the cultural caricatures of the vaudeville stage. Although the rube character has roots in the history of the Yankee figure in American drama and the rural type in world comedy, it shares a lineage also with minstrelsy and vaudeville's blackface single and duo comedy, Dutch comedy acts, and Irish caricature. The rube is a version of the vaudeville stage's cultural caricature, adapting its style and characterization from the blackface stump speech. Rube caricature displayed
two parallel lines of development: the yeoman, a country type in the pastoral mode, and the barbarian, a shiftless and violent stereotype.

By the 1920s, the rube was among the preeminent comic forms on the popular American stage and in the fledgling recording industry. In the context of evolving conditions of race and culture in the early twentieth-century United States, the rube figure articulated the connections among the representation of American rural ideals in the burlesque of African American slave life of the minstrel show and the caricature of the white rural working class in twentieth-century American theatre and film. Achieving popularity at a time when the historic tensions between the country and the city crystallized in massive changes in American society and culture, the rube played a critical role in the negotiation of the vanishing American rural ideal and its successor, the burgeoning urban image of American commerce, industry, and empire as representative of the modern United States.
Dedicated to my father,
Lawrence D. Bryan, Ph.D.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The notes at the conclusion of each chapter use the following abbreviations:

KAI Keith-Albee Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries. Iowa City, Iowa.

LC Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress. Washington, D.C.

MSHRC Minstrel Show Collection of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, the University of Texas at Austin. Austin, Texas.

TPHRC Tony Pastor Collection of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, the University of Texas at Austin. Austin, Texas.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W.E.B. DuBois remembers a family he had known when he was a schoolteacher in rural Tennessee in the 1880s. "They used to have a magnificent barbarism about them that I liked," he wrote,

They were never vulgar, never immoral, but rather rough and primitive, with an unconventionality that spent itself in loud guffaws, slaps on the back, and naps in the corner.¹

He described the Burke family, in whose "one-and-a-half-room cabin in the hollow of a farm" he often boarded on the weekends when "once upon a time" DuBois had "taught school in the hills of Tennessee."² Though he recalled these rural people warmly, they evinced a kind of "barbarism" that fascinated and attracted the young scholar.

DuBois identifies simplicity and primitiveness in communities geographically removed from urban centers of political and intellectual power. His attribution is not an uncommon phenomenon in twentieth-century writing. The
modernization of the European and American worlds in the
nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the "progress" that
DuBois endeavored to chart in the chapter in which he
recalled the Burkes, was in many ways predicated on the
professionalization and urbanization of cultural and national
communities. The migration to U.S. cities not only by
displaced rural laborers from the country but also by
immigrants from Europe created much of the cultural landscape
of the modern United States. But the impulse to caricature,
infantilize, or distort the character of the rural was
nothing new and not particularly American."

DuBois' celebration of the rural condition he
encountered, a "barbarism" that was not fearsome but
fascinating, closely mirrors the attraction of urban American
audiences to the comic "rube" character on the vaudeville
stage. This study traces the evolution and history of the
comic, agro-pastoral "rube" figure in American variety and
vaudeville theatre in the period between Denman Thompson's
1875 debut as "Uncle Josh Whitcomb" and the height of rube
comedian Chic Sale's career in the mid-1920s. Offering a
history of the rube character through assessments of key
performers, this study follows the character from its
beginnings--as a pastiche of the characteristics of the
popular stage "Yankee," the blackface stump speaker of the
minstrel tradition, and the caricature of ethnic types on
the stages of vaudeville's golden age--to its height as one of the preeminent comic forms on the popular American stage and in the fledgling recording industry.

In the context of the unstable boundaries of race and culture in the early twentieth-century United States, this study explores the connections among the representation of American rural ideals, the burlesque of African-American slave life of the minstrel show, and the caricature of the white rural working class in twentieth-century American theatre. Achieving popularity at a time when the historic tensions between the country and the city crystallized in massive changes to American culture, the rube played a critical role in the negotiation of the vanishing American rural ideal and its successor, the burgeoning urban image of American commerce, industry, and empire as representative of the modern United States.

The divide between the country and the city in American society was manifested in the sectionalism of culture and politics. The idea of region is essential in American history; the essence of American sections, literal and metaphorical as distilled in popular thought and representation, often supersedes the observable, practical exigencies of life in the city and the country, or the north and the south, or in the factory and on the farm. Michael Lind, reflecting on recent American electoral politics, posits that the best "clue to the U.S. electoral map lies in
ethnography." "Ideology and region," he writes, "are surrogates for race and ethnicity in the U.S." In 1922, comparing the sections of the United States to the countries of Europe, Frederick Jackson Turner wrote:

There is not here the variety of language and race nor the sharp contrast in cultural types; there has not been the same bitterness of class conflicts; nor the same pressure of economic need, inducing the various regions to seek by arms to acquire the means of subsistence, the control of natural resources. The burden of history does not so weigh upon America. The section does not embody the racial and national feeling of the European state, its impulse to preserve its identity by aggression conceived of as self-defense. But there is, nevertheless, a faint resemblance.

The extraordinary changes in business, industry, agriculture, and transportation that characterized modernity in the United States brought a new sectionalism, a new "faint resemblance." Without the "burden of history"—language, race, competition for natural resources—the spirit of section in U.S. culture required new boundaries and new meanings.

After the Civil War, a new sectionalism, a bias of the modern and urban, drew lines between the progress of the city and what must have been, for reasons of historical narrative if for no other reason, its opposite beyond the city limits.
For example, in his 1936 *Social History of American Agriculture*, Joseph Schaefer refers to the “cultural laggards” on “the farms of America.” “The peasant spirit here, as elsewhere,” he writes, “manifests something of that sullen resistance to an uplift impulse which is the normal attitude of those who have persisted as a down-trodden class in Europe for a thousand years.” Schaefer does not simply indict the “cultural laggards” of American rural space for their barbarism; he attributes their “sullen resistance to an uplift impulse” to one thousand years of western culture.

As the seat of polity, religion, and education in Europe since classical times, the city plays the central role in the history and literature of western culture. In western culture, the country serves as the city’s negative image: reversed, upside down, or dark where the image might be light. The tradition in western drama of developing a cultural division between rural and urban characters and spaces is as old as the earliest extant classical plays. It is an impulse that ebbed and flowed with the currents of European culture over the ensuing centuries in the popular literature and theatre of western societies. Reflecting on the western literary canon, Raymond Williams describes the basic dichotomy. “On the country,” he writes, has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea of an achieved centre: of
learning, of communication, light. Powerful hostile associations have also developed: on the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation. A contrast between country and city, as fundamental ways of life, reaches back to classical times."

The tragedies of Euripides, the comedies of Plautus, the characters of the commedia dell’arte, the "Hanswurst" type of German popular theatre, the figures of the Russian drama from the early period to Chekhov, and the geopolitics of Elizabethan, Caroline, and Restoration English comic traditions are examples of this constant division in world drama.

We see this division between the rural and the urban even in the derivation of Indo-European languages. The Latin "barbarus," for instance, derived from the description of bearded ("barba") non-citizens beyond Rome’s walls to the north and came to mean "barbarous, rude, uncivilized" and "savage," giving us the "barbarism" that fascinated a young W.E.B. DuBois. The now archaic English word "outland," which denoted "outlying or remote areas" or "hinterlands," is now only commonly heard as the root of the adjective "outlandish," connoting the "very odd, strange, or peculiar."("Outlandish" is the word rube comedian Cal Stewart in 1905 used to describe the "lingo"—"somethin’ like, ung tong oowong lang kai moí oo ung wa"—of a Chinese New Yorker his
"Uncle Josh Weathersby" meets on a trip to the city, in the sketch "Uncle Josh in a Chinese Laundry." And as British critic William Empson points out, the English word "clown" itself [is originally] a word for the simple countryman." "Clown" derives from the French "colon" and from the Latin "colonus" ("farmer" or "settler"). By the time, for instance, of William Shakespeare's use of the word "clown" had evolved into its contemporary usage as a noun describing "a clumsy, boorish, or incompetent person" or a performer who amuses with outrageous antics. 

Empson, in his 1950 study, Some Versions of the Pastoral, equates the historical understanding of the pastoral in drama and literature--writings that celebrate the "peace, innonence, and simple virtue" that Williams identifies--with "either patronising or 'romantic'" expressions of rural, working class life." Embraced by European Romantic writers, the pastoral tradition that Empson traces through English literature reaches back to the classical writers; Vergil's Bucolics (also known as the Eclogues, c. 37 B.C.E.) is perhaps the earliest extant example of the form. But the classical poet, too, wrestled with the tension that Empson would later identify: while Bucolics presents an escapist dream world of idealized natural life among rural shepherds, his later Georgics (c. 30 B.C.E.) is a much more realistic portrayal of the life of farm laborers.
"One would expect," writes Empson "the democratic spirit of America to have produced" a truly "proletarian" pastoral literature. Instead, Empson sees in modern American cultural expression only the "moralistic tragedy or melodrama" of William Faulkner in which the Mississippi novelist only focuses on the rural, working class because "their lives more than most are grudgingly and obviously ruled by Fate."

Likewise, Empson identifies the "stoical simple man" of Ernest Hemingway's fiction "who gets most directly the sensations any one would get," a variation on the historic structural role of the pastoral type in western literature in which "'the fool sees true.'"13 "The essential trick of the old pastoral, which was felt to imply a beautiful relation between rich and poor," writes Empson, "was to make simple people express strong feelings (felt as the most universal subject, something fundamentally true about everybody)."14

He continues:

The simple man becomes a clumsy fool who yet has better 'sense' than his betters and can say things more fundamentally true; he is 'in contact with nature,' which the complex man needs to be, so that Bottom [from Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream] is not afraid of the fairies; he is in contact with the mysterious forces of our own nature, so that the clown has the wit of the
Unconscious; he can speak the truth because he has nothing to lose.  

"The realistic sort of pastoral," Empson continues, also gives a natural expression for a sense of social injustice. So far as the person described is outside society because he is too poor for its benefits he is independent, as the artist claims to be, and can be a critic of society . . ."  

And, indeed, this figure, "outside society" who is able to give "a natural expression of social injustice," may indeed be the first truly "American" figure on the U.S. stage, a European-North American hybrid figure of the early American drama that would become known as the "Yankee."

The Yankee, who celebrated the nascent American culture's position "outside society," valued practicality, individualism, and the wisdom that comes from the challenges of rural life. It is an image cultivated not only in the literature of the day but in the lives and popular hagiography of the most prominent figures in the American eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In Notes on the State of Virginia (1785), Thomas Jefferson carried on a public debate with European intellectuals, the Count de Buffon, Cornelius de Pauw, and the Abbé Raynal, over the merits of environmentalist philosophy and what Jefferson perceived as the eventual superiority of North American society.  

Washington Irving, in his Life of George Washington (1855-59),
fashions George Washington’s privileged youth to fit the
Yankee model. Likewise, John Leacock’s propaganda play
_The Fall of British Tyranny_ (1776) presents a General Washington
whose connection to the American landscape prompts him to
“rejoice” in the humanity of his Native American “savage”
allies and whose Yankee honesty condemns European “bribery,
deception, and chicanery.”

Carl Sandburg called the popular figure of Abraham
Lincoln--carried into national politics as a plain-spoken
rail-splitter, raised in an Indiana log cabin and tempered in
the Black Hawk border war--the “folk-lore” Lincoln. In the
preface to _Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years_ (1926),
Sandburg describes the evolution of Lincoln’s footwear,
tracing the sixteenth president’s Yankee origin and rise to
urban respectability, even in the “vortex” of the industrial
age in the United States:

The history of transportation, of world
colonization and world markets based on
power-driven machinery, of international trade,
finance, and standardization, weave [sic] through
the destiny of Lincoln. He wore home-made
moccasins as a boy, rawhide boots from a factory as
a young man, and dressed calfskin shoes in still
later years.\(^8\)
Indeed, the preponderance of nineteenth-century American presidential campaigns that highlighted a candidate's birth in a log cabin demonstrates the powerful myth of the Yankee figure in American culture.

The Yankee figure in popular entertainment emerged almost unchanged in the persona Will Rogers made famous in the 1910s and 1920s in vaudeville, popular journalism, and the cinema. But it is a figure also that transformed after the Civil War because fundamental connotations with the rural image changed. By the Reconstruction era, the rural ideal as representative of America had become a much more complicated formulation in U.S. culture. The traditions that had and continued to ravage black culture through the masquerade of American minstrelsy offered an alternate, parallel rural formulation on the American stage. Despite their apparent differences, from the perspective of the post-war northern city, the (white) Yankee of ante bellum theatre and the (black) "Zip Coon" of ante bellum minstrel performance seemed to share a distinctly similar cultural geography. Both were tied to an agrarian past, the nostalgia for which had a corrosive power in the new city.

The Yankee that had characterized American dramatic literature spawned both black and white cousins in the popular performance forms of the 1870s. The new forms reflected the tension of modernization in the eastern American city. The political and cultural forces that
commodified American character and rationalized the reality of being a settler colony at the edge of the world inspired the Yankee of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century stage. Likewise, the forces that inspired the popular character of the rube reflected the changing cultural position of the American people. They began to gaze out from the cities and back at the country rather than back across the Atlantic from the new world. It was a point of view glimpsed in Europe for centuries. The minstrel burlesque of rural African Americans and the rube comedians’ burlesque of the rural, white working class comprise a parallel evolution of the theatrical expression of rurality in American entertainments. They reflected the division between alternate constructions of American life: the progress of the city and the stultifying stasis of rural life.

Richard Slotkin has theorized that ideas of the frontier and the city relied on their interdependence in order to have meaning in the rapidly expanding and industrializing American culture of the nineteenth century. So too has the notion of American progress relied on ideas of its negative image embedded in American cultural bodies, racial or national groups, and the regions of the United States. American rural space at the turn to the twentieth century in the United States bore the burden of the complicated associations with liminal, frontier space and also a responsibility for not sharing in the Progressive Era. The metaphor of American
rural space that emerged in popular literature and performance during the period propagated this deep misunderstanding of wide swaths of the American landscape and of the people, white and black, who lived there.

This study is a history of the "rube" character on the popular stage. It charts the relation of the rube to the theatrical transformation of nineteenth-century minstrelsy into the "whiteface" ethnic knockabout comedy of the turn-of-the-century vaudeville stage. In turn, it places the rube among the "ethnic" comedies that dominated vaudeville from the 1890s to the 1920s. The performance model for rube comedy evolved from the rural blackface characters of minstrel stump speeches.

In the context of the late nineteenth century's undefined borders of race and culture, Weber & Fields, Harrigan & Hart, the rube comic Frank Bell, the Russell Brothers, J.W. McAndrews' "Watermelon Man," Luke Schoolcraft of Schoolcraft & Coe, "Dutch" comic Frank Kennedy, and dozens of similar acts carried and transformed the practices of blackface minstrelsy into white working-class representations that introduced new fictions of historically marginalized groups in the United States. The figures that emerged from the minstrel tradition were reinscribed in the popular performance of cultural caricatures on the vaudeville stage.

The web of cross-pollination and influence that begins with minstrelsy's earliest composites of working-class white
and black outland cultures was distilled into a whiteface version by the vaudevillians of the generation that produced Frank Bell and Weber & Fields. The new cultural caricatures of the closing decades of the nineteenth century employed the structures of minstrelsy, creating a blackface surrogate for the Irish, German, or Jewish immigrant, or for the rural outsider. The audience's appetite for such representations was met during this period by the rubes of the vaudeville stage, the rural comedy and "coon" songs exported to middle class living rooms by popularly published sheet music and, subsequently, the new recording industry, and the silent film producers who marketed films like A Tale of the Backwoods (1910), The Strike at the Mines (1911), A Feud in the Kentucky Hills (1912), Nature's Vengeance (1913), The Code of the Hills (1916), Mountain Madness (1920), andPrimitive Life in Tennessee (1921). The popularity of the rural, as opposed to frontier, outsider figure would later crystallize in the immense popularity of middle-class entertainments like Jack Kirkland's stage adaptation of Erskine Caldwell's Tobacco Road, which ran for a record five years on Broadway in the 1930s, and Frank Capra's film Mr. Deeds Goes to Town, one of the most profitable and critically lauded films of the late 1930s. The two lines of rube character development—uncouth, churlish backwoods barbarians and benevolent, rural
yeoman—capture and express an American ambivalence, even a national dissonance, to which the stage gave voice in the period between the 1870s and the 1930s.

The subject of "'Magnificent Barbarism': The Rube and the Performance of the Rural on the American Vaudeville Stage, 1875-1925" spans several theatrical media and fifty years. It traces the evolution of a comic figure as part of the conflicting processes of acculturation and nostalgia in American culture. The method, however, involves following a series of representative performers and performances whose careers or historical moments embody the processes on which this study focuses. Through the microcosm of Weber & Fields transformation from a blackface act to a whiteface act, for instance, one might glimpse the larger transformation in American vaudeville.

Through as much archival, primary evidence as possible, I have attempted to construct a history of the rube character, a new figure of the rural on the American stage, from its beginnings in blackface to its tremendous popularity on the stage in the 1920s. I make extensive use of the archives of the University of Iowa, the University of Texas, and the Library of Congress. This study privileges managers' report logs from vaudeville touring circuits (the University of Iowa's Keith-Albee collection alone provides a unique perspective on the multiplicity of acts on touring circuits from 1902 to 1923), financial records and extant ticket
information, contemporaneous descriptive journalism (for instance, "CHICK SALE and some of his Make-ups" from a 1911 edition of The Keith News or "Mr. Cressy Talks with the Matinee Girl about His Career," from a 1901 edition of the Providence News), archival photographic evidence, and contemporaneous celebrity journalism and biography.

There are a number of twentieth-century scholarly works on American vaudeville, but their number is easily exceeded by the volumes of popular, contemporaneous literature on the form. While a range of periodicals devoted space to reviews and essays during the period on which this study focuses, celebrity and entertainment journalism attended to seemingly every facet of major performers' lives. Popular biographies of vaudeville performers began to spring up in the 1920s and have continued to be published throughout the twentieth century (particularly during the 1950s and 1960s as the last generation of the original vaudevillians grew old). Editions of jokes and sketches, as well as "How-To" books such as the Home Correspondence School's 1915 Writing for Vaudeville, became available to consumers during vaudeville's heyday. These sources form an archive with a unique utility when complemented by excellent scholarly studies like John DiMeglio's Vaudeville U.S.A. (Bowling Green U Popular P, 1973) and Robert Snyder's The Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York (Oxford, 1989), as well as more contemporaneous studies of American vaudeville, such as
Douglas Gilbert's *American Vaudeville: Its Life and Times* (Whittlesey House, 1940). In many cases, the focus on the popular reading audience, what makes these books unscholarly -- their aim of reaching and satisfying a popular reading audience -- is what makes them a unique kind of primary source material.

This dissertation is focused on the performers and audiences for the vaudeville stage in the population centers of the eastern half of the United States, reached by the acts, circuits, and theaters of Tony Pastor, F.F. Proctor, the Gus Sun circuit, the Western Vaudeville Managers Association, Martin Beck's Orpheum circuit and the later Keith-Albee-Orpheum circuit, United Booking Office, and Vaudeville Managers Association, controlled by B.F. Keith and Edward Albee. The records of the Keith-Albee theatres receive the greatest focus in this research. Indeed, the breadth of the extant archive of Keith-Albee materials governed to a great degree the regional focus of this study.

Region is often the defining element in American cultural narratives; in this case, a study of vaudeville acts and audiences in the eastern U.S. takes into account the major touring circuits for theatre and film (the centers of mass culture entertainment in America), the location of the long standing tensions of immigration and slavery, and the major centers of urban industry and commerce, the oldest and largest American cities seen in sharp relief against the
boundless rural space at their doorsteps. This research excludes the cultural caricatures of the vaudeville stages of the West and the Pacific Coast (the popular representation of frontier whites, Asian characters, Native Americans, and the blackface images which followed performers from the East). The function of the "rube" figure in the creation of the western stereotype in popular theatre and film is an important result of the processes that this study explores.\textsuperscript{3}

The rube, however, was literally a liminal figure, from beyond the city but not quite beyond the bounds of civilization. His foreignness derived from relations to both the city and the frontier in his mediating ground, the country. The rube’s world was connected to the world of the urban audience, figuratively, through the strictures of culture and civilization (legal disputes between rubes, for instance, became a staple of the form), and literally, by interstate trade, navigable roads, and new rail lines (the rube’s negotiation of railroad cars and stations is a hallmark of many rube monologues and scenes).

This study is arranged chronologically, dividing the period of study into three eras: 1875-1890, 1890-1905, and 1905-1925. I have organized each chapter around a case study or set of studies, microhistories of phenomena on the popular American stage between Reconstruction and the Great Depression.\textsuperscript{24}
Chapter Two (1875-1890) begins with a case study of vaudevillian Denman Thompson’s “Uncle Josh Whitcomb” and the 1886 play *The Old Homestead*, which introduced the character to the world. Thompson’s original performance as his rube character, Uncle Josh, in 1875, is perhaps the first appearance of the rube on the variety stage. The subsequent drama that featured the old rube’s search for his son in the city whetted the appetite for rube performance in American theatre audiences in the 1890s, thus launching the careers of Will M. Cressy (who is discussed in Chapter Three) and Cal Stewart (who is discussed in Chapter Four). Thompson’s *The Old Homestead* provides this study with a model of the two forms that the rube character would take in subsequent formulations: the yeoman and the barbarian.

Uncle Josh, the character Thompson would play until his death, is the prototypical yeoman. Sharing many of the characteristics of the legitimate stage’s Yankee, the yeoman is a comic character, possessed of country wisdom, patient yet codgerly, sturdy yet harmless. In Josh’s neighbor, “Cy Prime,” Thompson offers the other side of the rube. Cy is less worldly than the yeoman (a character anything but worldly himself); he is given to random acts of violence; and he looms as a possible sexual threat. In the country, he is, at the same time, grossly comic, incompetent, and, seemingly, innocuous. In the city and out of his element, as seen in Josh’s destitute son, the barbarian rube is shiftless, drunk,
and desperate. The yeoman is an alien in urban society; the barbarian lacks even the yeoman’s skill to maneuver in the city and his total alienation makes him dangerous. The barbarian has the body of a man and the mind of a child.

In Chapter Two, I trace the role of Thompson’s rubes during the period that pre-Civil War minstrelsy exerted tremendous influence on the development of the cultural caricatures of American music hall, museum, and saloon entertainment. The chapter includes a sketch of some of the early Irish acts (Harrigan & Hart, the Russell Brothers, Needham & Kelly, and Bradford & Delaney) and an assessment of their connection to the working-class audience. I examine the changing patterns for representing blackness on the popular stage: the cultural position of the minstrel show; the negotiations of comics Bert Swor, Fred Brown, and the Kernell Brothers from blackface acts to white; and the advertising for J.H. Haverly’s minstrel entertainments. I compare the practices of “Negro impersonators,” like comedian Frank Cushman, with the code of blackface as a signifier of comic action in the early career of comedians like Al Jolson (when he was part of Jolson, Palmer & Jolson), contrasting dialect comedians with those who relied on make-up and costume. I conclude with a case study of the 1883 debut of the “Dutch” comedians Weber & Fields at John Carncross’s minstrel theatre in Philadelphia and the popular history of their negotiation with Carncross’s minstrel audience. I
examine the beginning of the duo’s career, from their first performances as a blackface act and ethnic quick-change act, to the beginnings of their whiteface “Dutch” act in the context of the Reconstruction era, the new post-Civil War sectionalism, the cultural consequences of immigration during the period, and the rise of American empire.

Chapter Two’s scope spans the American Gilded Age, a period characterized by rapid economic growth and expansion. The architects of the post-war Reconstruction sought to bring African Americans into the political process and provide access to education, but the wealth of the south was not redistributed after the Civil War; there was, for instance, no significant land reform (despite the myth of “40 acres and a mule”). Though, legally, African Americans had franchise and property rights and few laws limited their social and political intercourse, the federal government offered few concrete protections. The passage of “Jim Crow” laws crippled the freedoms of African Americans as legal and cultural expressions of racism increased throughout successive decades.

These years of racial discord also marked the beginning of the most intense period of immigration to the United States. A massive expansion of public education was undertaken, in part, to Americanize new citizens. And
assimilation became the primary struggle for America’s new citizens, freed from bondage in the south and from oppression overseas.

In Chapter Three (1890-1905), I focus on the rise of the rube character during the last years of the Gilded Age and the beginnings of the Progressive Era. Vaudeville, during these years, ascended from the rough variety theatres of the late nineteenth century to its place as the new middle-class pastime and mass-culture entertainment. Though urban political machines gained power in eastern cities, the Progressive Era (1895-1925) is known for reform and opposition to the corruption of the Gilded Age. Large, limited liability corporations became the norm in American business and antitrust legislation was passed to reign in the power of American enterprise (though, as many scholars have suggested, such regulation may have done little more than solidify the status quo). Skilled labor began to give way to automation and scientific management. Scientific management defined and prescribed physical labor, transforming the practices of the urban factory. Increasingly, automation made specialized knowledge obsolete; management gained more power and exacted minute control over largely unskilled workers. Agricultural crises in the midwest and west produced a surplus of unskilled workers in American cities.

Before the 1890s, the economy depended largely on capital goods (e.g. iron production, the burgeoning railroad
system). After the deflation of the 1880s, American capitalists directed their investments toward consumer goods (ready-to-wear clothing, leisure items, household goods). For the first time, the production of such goods became dominant, as the small trading store transformed, for example, into the department store. These years comprise the shift from liberal capitalism to monopoly capitalism. The shift was swift and fundamentally changed the conditions of American working and middle class life. Alan Trachtenberg argues, in The Incorporation of America: Culture & Society in the Gilded Age, that the “economic incorporation” of the late nineteenth century 

wrenched American society from the moorings of familiar values . . . The deepest changes in these decades of swift and thorough industrialization and urbanization lay at the level of culture, difficult for contemporaries to recognize, and baffling for historians. The deepest resistances and oppositions also lay there, in the quality as well as the substance of perceptions, in the style as well as content of responses. 

The collision between rural and urban--the pastoral American past and the industrial, urban American future--in the rapid changes brought on by the incorporation of American business was a process so revolutionary to the material circumstances of American life that it inspired a “resistance” to
modernity. American audiences engaged in the "resistances and oppositions" to which Trachtenberg refers by embracing entertainments that appealed to a nostalgia for an oftentimes fictional past. The nostalgia for a premodern American landscape expressed in this fiction of rural life obscured the representation of the rural working class, white and black, in the following decades.

In the last years of the nineteenth century, vaudeville producers like Tony Pastor in New York City transformed variety entertainments from disreputable, oftentimes lurid amusements for largely male, working-class audiences to the middle-class, family-oriented fare which typified the touring circuits and the major vaudeville theatres in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. On these stages, the comic fascination with ethnic and cultural differences produced not only a tradition of stereotypical and oftentimes racist caricatures, but also a large body of acts and performers that hybridized vaudeville's versions of cultural caricature.

The chapter is largely devoted to the rise of the rube figure on the vaudeville stage. The rube has yet to receive such a treatment in theatre scholarship. I explore the structure of the traditional rube act, the ignorant rural figure lost in the city, adapted from the "Zip Coon" of the minstrel stage. In this chapter I use a 1902 show journal, comprising dozens of individual managers' reports, to track the new popularity of rural comedy and the rube form on the
vaudeville stage at the turn of the century. I provide a brief historical sketch of a number of early rube acts and assess the work of such acts as the Litchfields’ “Down at Brook Farm,” in which “Uncle Zach” returns from his odyssey in the city, entering to the strains of “Turkey in the Straw,” a song popularized by “coon” song singers and adapted from “Old Zip Coon”; the Crane Brothers’ “Mudtown Minstrels,” an act that blended the old minstrel form with rube performance; and the careers of Frank Bush, known for his “Yankee” farmer character, and Frank Bell, who became famous as sheriff “Rube Whipple” in the play, Way Down East, and went on to be the first star of 1890s rube comedy. I explore the relationship between rube comedy and what author William Dean Howells called “the pastoral playlet” by analyzing the work of vaudevillians like the Litchfields and Frank Leary and developing a case study of the careers of Will M. Cressy and Blanche Dayne, the king and queen of rural comedy on the vaudeville stage.

The chapter also explores the role of women in rube caricature. Many female performers played the straight character to their male partners’ rube comedy, as in the act Blanche Dayne shared with her husband, Will Cressy. But the solo acts of Ray Cox, Kate Watson, and Constance Abbott, whose monologue, “A Trip to the City,” is examined, performed on the vaudeville stage as independent solo monologists and singers.
In Chapter Four (1905-1925), I explore the rise of the rube comedian in the twentieth century, as the form became commonplace on the vaudeville stage. For example, theatre manager F.J. O'Connor, describing a 1905 performance by Cal Stewart as "Uncle Josh," noted the familiarity of the character and called the sketch's narrative an "old-time story of a countryman discovering a relative in New York." I examine the theme of the particularity of locality in the acts of such performers as Frank Crumit, whose act evoked his coal country Ohio home; Walter C. Kelly, whose monologues forever associated him with western Virginia; Chic Sale whose act was once described as "Urbana [Illinois] (vaudeville-ized)"; and Cal Stewart, whose act blended the New Hampshire Yankee of his mentor, Denman Thompson, and Stewart's own southern mountaineer upbringing. I place the entertainment form in the context of American culture during the period, including the new sectionalism, the popularity of post-Reconstruction literature of north-south reconciliation (e.g. Thomas Dixon's novel The Clansman), and the new wave of European immigration to American cities.

A case study of the career of Stewart is at the heart of Chapter Four. Relying on managers' reports, journalism, Stewart's recordings for Edison and Columbia from 1897 to 1919, and Uncle Josh's Punkin Centre Stories, published by the vaudevillian in 1905, my study follows Cal Stewart's hugely successful career as rube "Uncle Josh Weathersby."
Stewart's monologues focus on class, politics, and technology. I document his evolution as a rube performer from blackface to white and I describe the development of the comic bits that came to comprise his most famous acts. Stewart's career mirrors similar performers of this period. (For instance, Quinlan & Mack's "Travelling Dentist," Imhof & Conn's "The Man from Klondike," and Cal Stewart's "Uncle Josh at the Dentist's," were effectively the same act, but one featured a blackface performer in the comic role, one an Irish performer, and one a rube.)

In addition, I explore the "pastoral playlets" of the early twentieth century, providing analysis of Lew Sully's "The Limb of the Law" and William Henry Coyle's "Si Perkins, The Waiter," in which the urban fear of unskilled labor is dramatized in a manager's offer of employment to the comically unqualified bumpkin, Si Perkins (a standard character of the rube form), who receives a weekly salary nearly double what laborers in manufacturing earned at that time.

Chapter Five concludes the study. In it, I posit that the early twentieth-century audience's attraction to the rube is a result of the union of the yeoman and barbarian types. The appeal rested in the duality of the rube figure. The yeoman's potential for violence, the rube as potential barbarian, is the key to understanding the type in later comic discourses. The rube on the vaudeville stage and in
the cinema became a comic version of the American stage's "noble savage," equally possessed of the yeoman's country wisdom and innocuous fumbling in the city and the barbarian's shiftlessness, sexual threat, and proclivity to violence. Chapter Five includes a brief epilogue to the study that explores this duality in the production history of Frank Capra's Academy Award-winning, *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936); *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1969-1970), the television series adapted from the film in the late 1960s and developed for ABC television in order to combat the massive success of *The Beverly Hillbillies*; and *Mr. Deeds* (2002), the Stephen Brill-directed feature film remake of Capra's film, which has been criticized for its main character's indolence and fits of violence.

This study traces the rise and popularity of the rube on the vaudeville stage in the context of the changing nature of American cultural geography. This is a study of both the theatrical constructions of rube caricature and the cultural resonance of the rural figure on the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century stage: (1) the yeoman and barbarian faces of the character (particularly the rube's transposition of blackface's benevolent uncle to the yeoman figure and the malevolent predator of older, racist formulations of African American character to the barbarian figure); (2) the combination of Yankee and blackface origins; (3) the evocation of place and culture in rube performance (the south
and the north, the emergence of the midwest, the gradation of
the landscape from the civilized to the outland); (4) the
tensions of the city (the "rube in the city" plot line, the
rise of technology, the transportation and communication
revolutions, the forces of urbanization); (5) the rube's
interaction with a classed society, with the institutions of
culture and law, and with women and marginalized ethnic
groups; (6) the role of violence in the diegesis and
discourse of the rube form; (7) the relationship between the
rube protestations of being "true to life" and the burlesque
of rural life that they offered; (8) the popularity of the
rube with middle class audiences (from the prestigious, urban
Keith-Albee circuit to the public that purchased phonograph
recordings); (9) and the heritage of the rube form, in the
American culture that preceded it, the urban audiences who
made it one of the most successful forms on the vaudeville
stage, and the reinscription of the yeoman and the barbarian
in American entertainment throughout the twentieth century.
ENDNOTES


2 Ibid., 47 and 43.

3 DuBois’s description of the family he had known was not an uncommon means of characterizing rural families and communities in American cultural and intellectual expression. The conflict of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s 1925 novel The Great Gatsby (New York: Scribner, 1935), for instance, is predicated as much on social geography as it is on class in America’s “Jazz Age.” At its heart are the very real differences between the urban and the exurban. His characters, all “Westerners,” have escaped from “the ragged edge of the universe” (7), “that vast obscurity beyond the city” (169), the world of “shiftless, unsuccessful farm people” (104). In the introduction to The Predicament of Culture: ‘Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1988), intellectual historian James Clifford uses William Carlos Williams’ 1923 poem, Spring and All to describe this divide in early twentieth century thought. Clifford posits that Williams’ poem is emblematic of “the predicament of ethnographic modernity,” the poem suggesting the “rootlessness” of the modern state and the relationship, physical and cultural, of the physician and imagist poet gazing luridly at his servant (1-7). But one might just as easily make note of the passage from which Clifford quotes not for its ability to bear the weight of such a “predicament” of modernity, but for its focus. Williams, like DuBois, is absorbed by the primitive in the rural person before him. He attaches to Appalachian (“mountain folk from Kentucky”) and rural types a crude sexuality and locates in the exurban space to the west ancestrally-linked chievery, “promiscuity,” “devil-may-care men,” “young slatterns, bathed / in filth,” “peasant traditions,” and intervention by welfare agents, all while leering at his hired-help’s “great / ungainly hips and flopping breasts.” Clifford cites part eighteen of Spring and All by William Carlos Williams (New York: Contact, 1923), 64-7.
Michael Lind, “America’s Tribes,” Prospect (http://www.prospect-magazine.co.uk/highlights/essay_lind_tribes/). “While New England has conquered the tiny bastions of education and taste,” he continues, the south, with a little help from the west, governs the much bigger territory of American popular culture. . . . American radio stations and music video channels are still ruled by versions of southern black music (rock, rap, jazz, R&B) and country and western (actually southern white) music. Today’s mass media, like the minstrel shows and vaudeville acts of the 19th century, disseminate southern music and slang to the white working-class inhabitants of every region.

Though Lind simplifies the complicated web of masquerade and burlesque that produced the “minstrel shows and vaudeville acts” to which he refers, he is surely right to argue that popular representation was and is a vital part of the new world tribalism that maintains the sectional divide that Du Bois experienced between the college-educated teacher and the “primitives” he served in the hills of Tennessee. Lind’s essay theorizes that in the U.S., political power has always rested with a northern party (Protestant Europeans in the Yankee tradition in league with southern African Americans) and a southern party (the old Cavalier class, exemplified by Thomas Jefferson, in league with northern Catholics and working class immigrants. “The fissures in U.S. culture parallel those in U.S. politics,” he writes, “America’s cultural elite is north-eastern; its popular culture is southern and western.” In 1922, the American historian Frederick Jackson Turner agreed: “We in America are in reality a federation of sections rather than of States. State sovereignty was never influential except as a constitutional shield for the section. In political matters the States act in groups rather than as individual members of the Union.” (“Sections and Nation,” The Yale Review 12.1 (October 1922), 6)


Collins Latin-English, English-Latin Dictionary (Collins, 1957) and Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language (Simon & Schuster, 1984). "speed" and "Launce" are servants to city gentlemen in The Two Gentlemen of Verona but are described as clowns. The "clowns" of A Midsummer Night's Dream are manifestly urban craftsmen. The "clowns" of As You Like It and Twelfth Night, Touchstone and Feste, are court figures.

Empson, 8.

Ibid., 9-10.

Ibid., 11.

Ibid., 14.

Ibid., 17.

See chapter three, "Deficiency," of Bernard W. Sheehan's Seeds of Extinction: Jeffersonian Philanthropy and the American Indian (Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1973; rpt. W.W. Norton, 1974) for a discussion of the dialogue between Jefferson and the Europeans. Jefferson's models of "civilization" and "barbarism," however, seem discordant with his ardent environmentalism. Jefferson suggested, for instance, in a 6 September 1824 letter to William Ludlow on the subject of the Native Americans cultures, that if a philosophic observer commence a journey from the savages of the Rocky Mountains, eastwardly towards our seacoast...he would observe in the earliest stage of association living under no law but that of nature, subsisting and covering themselves with the flesh and skins of wild beasts. He would next find those on our frontiers in the pastoral state, raising domestic animals to supply the defects of hunting. Then succeed our own semi-barbarous citizens, the pioneers of the advance of civilization, and so on in his progress he would meet the gradual shades of improving man until he would reach his, as yet, most improved state in our seaport towns. This, in fact, is equivalent to a survey, in time, of the progress of man from the infancy or creation to the present day. I am eighty-one years of age, born where I now live, in the first range of mountains in the interior of our country. And I have observed this march of civilization advancing from our seacoast, passing over us like a cloud of light, increasing our knowledge and improving our condition, insomuch as that we are at this time more advanced in civilization here than the seaports were when I was a boy. And where this progress will stop no one can say. Barbarism has, in the meantime, been receding before the steady step of amelioration; and will, in time, I trust, disappear from the earth.

The letter is included in Writings of Jefferson, v. 16, p. 74-6. It is reprinted in Sheehan, 25-6.
Irving’s *The Life of Washington* was published in five volumes between 1855 and 1859 by the New York Publishing Company. *The Fall of British Tyranny, or American Liberty Triumphant* is attributed to John Leacock and was first published in pamphlet form in Philadelphia in 1776. The character “General George Washington” appears in the fifth act; the quoted text comes from the Norman Philbrick’s anthology of propaganda plays from the Revolutionary era, *Trumpets Resounding* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1972), 57-132. The quote from Sandburg’s *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years* comes from the Blue Ribbon Books edition (New York, 1926), vii.


The popularity of the rube, moreover, in versions both benevolent senselessly violent, is perhaps the progenitor of the violent rural characters of the legitimate drama and of the enormous popularity of “hillbilly” types in the early cinema. (J.W. Williamson, in *Southern Mountaineers in Silent Films*, notes, for instance, that “there were at least 476 movies made” between 1904 and 1929 “about Southern mountain people.” Williamson, *Southern Mountaineers in Silent Films* (McFarland, 1994), 1.


Critic J.W. Williamson has noted particularly films like D.W. Griffith’s 1912 short, *A Feud in the Kentucky Hills*, as “choked with spectacular violence as platoons of mountain combatents who now one another down in a beautiful mountain meadow” (8). He suggests that the film was an early experiment in the “vast battlefield panoramas” that Griffith would perfect in *Birth of a Nation* shortly thereafter.
Lind, “America’s Tribes.” Lind very astutely observes that the “conflation of south and west” in contemporary culture “reflects a little-known quirk of U.S. cultural history”:

In the 19th century, most of the west—from the prairies to the Rockies to California—was actually settled, primarily, by pioneers from New England and the Yankee midwest, along with Germans and Scandinavians. Southern migrants got no further west than Texas and Oklahoma. Nevertheless, in Hollywood movies, westerners usually have southern accents, rather than the authentic greater New England accents. Because the south was the most rural region of the U.S. in the early 20th century, when the movie industry got started, the “southern rube” stereotype became the western stereotype as well, on stage and screen. To compound the irony, the most violent part of American in the 19th century, as it is today, was not the west, but the south. In 1880 you were much more likely to be shot on a street in Mississippi than Nebraska.

In his recent Review Essay in Theatre Survey (“Writing History Today,” Theatre Survey 41.2 (November 2000)), Thomas Postlewait writes, in assessing recent microhistorical works by Marc Baer, W. Davies King, and Joseph Donohue,

In some cases, microhistories illustrate a return to narrative history, but it is now shaped not only by social cultural history but also by a critique of positivism. Usually, the measured, stylistic voice of the historian carries a modernist tone of multiple, ironic perspectives. In the process the documents are often foregrounded, so that their problematic status is openly acknowledged. The scholar conjectures and conjures with possible meanings. Thus, the idea of a case study has been given a new configuration. Within the microcosm one discovers signs and symbols of the macrocosm. Just as importantly, one discovers the possibility of several, sometimes contending perspectives that cannot be explained away. Documented evidence—that glory of the archive—is paramount in microhistory, but it provides the catalyst for conjectures (97).


F.J. O’Connor, report of week of 11 December 1905, Boston. Report books collection, KAI.

CHAPTER 2

NEGOTIATING WITH THE AUDIENCE, 1875-1890

Denman Thompson first took the stage as “Uncle Josh Whitcomb” in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on a February evening in 1875. His performance that night at Harry Martin’s Varieties Theatre may mark the first appearance of the American rube character on the vaudeville stage.

Of course, versions of the country figure had been a part of American popular entertainment from its beginnings. Landless farmers and simple-minded rural laborers whose cultural geographies determine their fates have populated European comedy and pastoral literature for centuries. American audiences were thoroughly introduced to these characters by English theatrical repertory in the colonies’ earliest theatres, from the plays of Shakespeare (“Corin” in As You Like It) to the later comedies of William Wycherley (“Margery” in The Country Wife) and Richard Brinsley Sheridan (“Bob Acres” in The Rivals).

The agro-pastoral characters of the American stage descend from the plays of the late eighteenth century in the earliest “Yankee” figures, dramatic hybrids of the
environmentalist philosophy of the framers of early U.S. culture and the city and country conflicts of eighteenth century English sentimental comedy. The Yankee was a fixture of the popular American stage from the Massachusetts shepherds in John Leacock's *The Fall of British Tyranny* (1776) to the time of Thompson's first performances as Uncle Josh. Theatre historian Richard Moody, in fact, draws a direct line from "the first notable" Yankee, "Jonathan," in Royall Tyler's 1787 play, *The Contrast*, to "the last, Joshua Whitcomb in Denman Thompson's *The Old Homestead.*"²

The Yankee, an environmentalist enfoldding of European moral values into the cultural geography of North America, is the first natively American European settler character in the drama of the United States. It was perhaps the most recognizably American contribution to English-language dramatic literature for a century: a character type both unsophisticated and wise, the American Yankee type reformulated the simple rustics of the English stage into admirable, representative Americans. The American Yankee mask transformed the rural character of English comedy from the fool to the figure of wisdom.

Robert Spiller has described the "central American theme" of *The Contrast* as "the contrast between the pseudosophistication of provincial society and the crude honesty of the native American Jonathan."² From this "crude honesty" evolved the Yankee on the American stage. The
Yankee figure idealized the American democratic virtues that were located in the "natural" morality of the undeveloped, unspoiled American landscape. The Yankee was practical, honest, and possessed of the virtues that only the natural world of the North American continent could provide. Arthur Hobson Quinn attributes to Tyler's Jonathan a mixture of homely shrewdness, provincial conservatism, and unaltering self-respect, which delighted those who saw in the better qualities of Jonathan traits they like to believe were national, while they were quite willing to laugh at his ignorance, credulity, and uncouthness on stage.¹

The Yankee is exemplified by characters like "Jonathan Ploughboy," from Samuel Woodworth's The Forest Rose (1825), a romantic comedy of middle class villagers, and "Adam Trueman," from Anna Cora Mowatt's social comedy, Fashion; or, Life in New York (1845). Jonathan Ploughboy is a rural New Jersey farm laborer whose honesty and trusting nature propel the romantic plots of the play's well-heeled main characters. The character was later played by Henry Placide, George Handel Hill, Dan Marble, and Joshua Silsbee, each of whom was among the most accomplished Yankee character actors of the nineteenth century. Adam Trueman, the rural New York farmer whose actions critique the new capitalists in Mowatt's satire on ante bellum urban life in New York City, is, unlike
Woodworth’s Jonathan, impervious to the city characters’ plots and schemes; he is both the play’s moral center and its least foolish character.

Democratic, honest, and practical, the Yankee figure was above all rural, its virtues derived from this cultural geography. In this way, the character is closely related to the frontiersman characters of the late nineteenth century stage. In a range of frontier dramas on the late nineteenth century stage, however—{}from the romance of Frank H. Murdoch’s Davy Crockett (1872) and Bartley Campbell’s My Partner (1879) to the stark realism of William Vaughn Moody’s The Great Divide (1906)—{}the frontiersman is characterized by the extremity of his outsider status. The Yankee, and indeed the later rube, was a figure of rural society, an outsider in urban circles, but a character from the edge of civilization, rather than entirely beyond its boundaries. The Yankee character represented a version of civilization, a rural ideal.

The idea of rurality was so central to the Yankee, in fact, that by the beginning of the twentieth century, vaudeville managers often used the terms “Yankee” and “rube” interchangeably. The term “Yankee” was often also used to describe a regional variation on vaudeville’s rube. The “Yankee,” in later vaudeville parlance, was the New England rube.
The rural type did not exit the stage with the decline of the Yankee play during the mid-nineteenth century and was not subsumed by the rube on the vaudeville stage. Like their forebears throughout western drama, comedies that utilized the tension between country and city persisted throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One may see this particularly, for instance, in the post-war popularity of Dion Boucicault's *Rip Van Winkle* (1865) with Joseph Jefferson III. "Rip Van Winkle" would become Jefferson's signature role. One of the greatest comic actors that the United States has produced, he was also well known for playing "Bob Acres" in Sheridan's *The Rivals*, one of the pre-Yankee country types imported to the American stage from Britain, and "Salem Scudder" in Boucicault's *The Octoroon* (1859), a character that Denman Thompson would become known for in Canada and Britain.

Versions of the Yankee and the rube had seemingly always been a part of variety theatre in the United States. Vaudevillian Joe Laurie, Jr. recalls that "in the early days of variety (and even on the legit stage) the farmer or rube was portrayed with a large straw hat, overalls tucked in his boots, a long chin piece, and a straw in his mouth. He was supposed to be a 'sucker' for 'city slickers.'" Charles Seabert's sketch *A Miner's Life; Or, The Poor Man's Home*, produced between 1866 and 1883 by vaudeville impresario Tony Pastor, begins with a seriocomic expression of the basic
narrative of rube comedy that Laurie described. The short
play, in which a miner’s wife runs off to New York City to
escape her “dull, dreary life” and “wild and desolate home,”
opens with Richard, the miner, steering his young wife away
from dreams of New York with an anecdote about his father:

When he arrived in Jersey City, the first man he
met pretended to be a friend of his and after a
while induced my father to loan him fifty dollars,
the old man having nothing less than a hundred
dollar bill—the savings of many a long day—he
gave it to the man to get changed while he waited
for him at the depot; and that was the last he saw
of the man or money either. My father said
often that, that it would be better to lose
yourself down in the mine, without a lamp to guide
you, than to be drifting about New York, friendless
and alone.

Seabert’s short comic melodrama strips the narrative of much
of the comic potential realized by later rube acts. But rube
performers in the following decades would produce comic
variations on Seabert’s theme—in Laurie’s words, the rural
“sucker” swindled by “city slickers” (e.g. in Cal Stewart’s
“Uncle Josh Weathersby’s Arrival in New York City,” Len
Spencer’s “Hezekiah Hopkins Comes to Town,” and Neil
Litchfield’s “Down on Brook Farm”).

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The late nineteenth century vogue for rube performance began with the popularity of the work of Denman Thompson (1833-1911), from his first appearance as "Uncle Josh Whitcomb" to the success of The Old Homestead, a popular comic melodrama of rural virtue and and the dangers of city life adapted from "The Female Bathers," the sketch in which Uncle Josh first emerged on the American variety stage. The Old Homestead premiered in 1886 and held the stage in various forms until after the death of its creator and star in 1911. (The final, four act version of The Old Homestead was co-written with George W. Ryer, with whom Thompson also wrote the rural comedies The Two Sisters, Our New Minister, and The Sunshine of Paradise Alley.)

The structure of sketches like Seabert's influenced the narrative of Thompson's Uncle Josh, a rural figure who journeys to New York in search of his son. Thompson's Uncle Josh, however, deviates from the "hayseed" characters that preceded him by blending country ignorance, malapropism, and dialect with traits of the stump speech of the minstrel tradition, from which his characterization also derived.

The comedy of the minstrel stump speech lay in a deficiency of language common to earlier burlesques of African American speech and the newer portrayals of non-English speaking immigrants. The privileged status of the native urbanite--or American, or white worker--was enforced by a verbal literacy that the cultural clowns of the
vaudeville stage were without. The stump speech combined this wounded language with punning, elision, and dialect comedy. Thompson’s rube shared with the blackface stump speech an exaggerated dialect and costume, verbal comedy rooted in malapropism and transposition, satirical treatments of contemporaneous political topics, and narratives of ignorance, which evolved in the comedy of the rube from an ignorance of the city to an ignorance of the conditions of modernity. Thompson’s Uncle Josh, moreover, borrowed the social position of the voices of the stump speech, morphing the outsider moral authority of the Yankee into the folk wisdom of the blackface "uncle" figure.

Thompson’s solo "Uncle Josh" act may also have had structural roots in the Yankee tradition itself. Arthur Hobson Quinn notes that James H. Hackett, the first of the major Yankee character actors on the American stage, took "advantage of the popularity of the Yankee character" by "telling the Yankee story of 'Uncle Ben'" to audiences in 1827. Quinn calls the act an "impersonation" and attributes to it Hackett's "earliest success." It and other "impersonations" formed the basis for an act that Hackett performed at Drury Lane in London. In On The Real Side: Laughing, Lying, and Signifying, Mel Watkins suggests that the minstrel stump speaker "spoke in a black version of the familiar vernacular dialect of the Yankee or Frontier type." Watkins, an editor and literary critic, offers a description
of the stump speech that suggests still another borrowing, as
the minstrel speaker is influenced by the whiteface
forerunners of vaudeville’s rube.10

A child of middle class New Hampshire parents, Denman
Thompson grew up in northern Pennsylvania and West Swanzey,
New Hampshire, where Thompson’s maternal grandfather was a
prosperous and well-regarded country physician (the Boston
Telegraph obituary of the vaudevillian called his grandfather
“famous” among rural New Hampshirers).11 Though he trained
as a woodworker, Thompson began his theatrical career as a
circus acrobat in 1850 at the age of seventeen. He made his
legitimate stage debut shortly thereafter in a supernumerary
role at the Howard Athenæum in Boston in a production
starring Charlotte Cushman. Thompson spent the war years
outside the United States, playing legitimate drama in London
and Toronto, where he excelled as “Salem Scudder,” the Yankee
character in Dion Boucicault’s The Octoroon, and as “Uncle
Tom” in Uncle Tom’s Cabin. On the English stage in the
1860s, Thompson became equally facile at playing both the
white Yankee and the blackface Uncle Tom.

In the early 1870s, Thompson made the transition to
variety theatre, where he created the character of “Uncle
Josh Whitcomb,” the rube he would make famous in “The Female
Bathers,” “Uncle Josh Whitcomb,” and The Old Homestead.
Thompson’s obituary called the act an “impersonation of the old New England farmer” and “a classic of the American stage.”

The Old Homestead opened at the Lyceum Theatre in Boston in 1896. Purportedly based on the real life of New Hampshire farmer Joshua Holbrook, the play was wildly successful in Boston, toured to Britain, where it was performed for Queen Victoria, and subsequently ran for four years in New York City. The play follows Uncle Josh Whitcomb, from his home in rural New Hampshire, to the home of his boyhood friend, Henry Hopkins, now a New York City millionaire. Henry helps Uncle Josh search for his son, Reuben, referred to as “Reub,” who is lost in the city. The Old Homestead is literally a “rube in the city” plot, perhaps suggesting even the etymology of the word in vaudeville parlance. (“Rube” is a uniquely American word; indeed, it is absent from the Oxford English Dictionary and defined by Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language as slang derived from the nickname for “Reuben” for “a person from a rural region who lacks polish and sophistication; rustic.”) In the final act, Josh and Reub return to the old homestead, where Josh and his sister, Matilda, welcome home the prodigal son (a theme popularized shortly thereafter in Vitagraph’s The Prodigal Son, a popular short film included on Pastor’s vaudeville circuit in 1902). The Old Homestead would give the rube act of the vaudeville theatre a form, a structure, and two of its most famous and
influential performers. It also provides a template for the two versions of the rube character, the yeoman and the barbarian, that comprise the poles of rube performance during the period of this study. Thompson’s Josh exemplifies the yeoman, the benevolent rube type. Josh’s neighbor, “Cy Prime,” exemplifies the yeoman’s less civilized counterpart, the barbarian rube.

Uncle Josh is a landowning farmer, in his mid-sixties. He is not prosperous (“we have to scratch around up here like a hen with forty chickens to pay taxes and keep out of the poorhouse” (171)), but he is successful enough to own his land and employ agricultural and house laborers. Although he is an employer of agricultural workers, the first line of The Old Homestead places Josh “down in the meadow helping the hired men” (167). He is generous, taking in a “tramp,” Jack, whom the housekeeper, Rickety Ann, describes as “a wild man escaped out of a menagerie” (170). But he later confesses to Henry, his millionaire friend, that “the yield [on the farm] ain’t quite so good as they used to be, and it’s ben a leetle worse this year than ever” (189).

From his first entrance, Josh displays the country ignorance that would characterize the “rube in the city” thereafter. He mistakes his guests’ tennis racquets for fishing nets. He has never “sot foot” in New York City, which he assumes is “a pretty smart sort of village” (171), though he has, it turns out, once spent two weeks in Boston,
where the streets were "so crooked," he hired a boy to "put a halter on me and take me up to the Common every morning" with "a handful of oats" (198).

"Call me uncle and Matilda aunt," Josh instructs his house guests (who are unrelated to Josh and Matilda) on their arrival at the beginning of The Old Homestead (169). The appellation "uncle" is not a transgenerational sign of respect in The Old Homestead; Josh is "uncle" even to Henry Hopkins, his boyhood friend and contemporary (185). It is a designation that indicates Josh's role and his socioeconomic standing within the play's narrative, and, discursively, the character's lineage from the "uncles" of the minstrel stump speech. The preponderance of similar "uncle" characters in the subsequent decades of rube performance owes as much to the lineage of these rural performances, blackface and whiteface, as it does to the enduring influence of Thompson as the progenitor of the form. The "uncle" figure, the older African American male complement to the female "mammy" in Civil War and Reconstruction era literature ("Uncle Tom" of the novel and play, Stephen Foster's "Old Uncle Ned," Joel Chandler Harris' "Uncle Remus" stories, "Uncle Gabe" of Thomas Nelson Page's In Old Virginia, "Uncle Julius" in Charles W. Chesnutt's The Conjure Woman stories), translated to the rube form from its beginnings and continued most famously in Cal Stewart's "Uncle Josh Weathersby," inspired by Thompson's "Uncle Josh Whitcomb."
The secondary characters at the Whitcomb homestead further introduce variations on the American rube figure. Rickety Ann serves as the housekeeper of Josh’s old homestead, as well as the forewoman of their hired help. Called “Rickety” since a childhood affliction with rickets (as she explains), Rickety Ann is asked by Frank Hopkins (one of Josh’s tennis playing guests from New York City, Frank is Henry Hopkins’ son) if she’d always lived on the Whitcomb homestead. “No,” she replies, “I was borrowed out o’ the poorhouse jest to help Aunt Tildy” (173). Rickety Ann came to the Whitcomb homestead as metaphoric property, “borrowed” from an institution for warehousing the destitute. She continues, “Aunt Tildy says if I am a good girl I may stay here jest as long as I want to, and I’m going to try to be good” (173). Rickety Ann appears to provide a variety of labors for the Whitcombs in exchange for room and board. Her description of life in the poorhouse (little food except on “prize days,” when the inmates could compete for a piece of pumpkin pie) is cut short by the arrival of the Whitcombs’ cows; Rickety Ann exits to “go and drive them into the barnyard” (173).

The interaction between Rickety Ann and Aunt Matilda at the opening of the play recalls the “mammy” figure already popular on the Reconstruction stage. Though the housekeeper calls Matilda “aunt,” it is Rickety Ann who plays the role of mammy (and rube) throughout the scene. Matilda is seated
with Rickety Ann standing behind her when the play opens. With Matilda, she is subservient, chopping wood while Matilda sits in the shade, bearing the chiding of her employer when she briefly sits beside her ("Never mind what I think," says Matilda, "you do what I say") (167). But when left alone on stage, Rickety Ann displays her own keen voice, harumphing about the new hired girl in her charge and spouting rube one-liners:

Well, that new hired girl don't know enough to blow hot soup. Put the ice in the well the other day to cool the water. She don't know nothin' (168).

The "new hired girl" is "Maggie O'Flaherty." Unable even to boil potatoes without supervision, she speaks in a thick dialect (though it reads more Cockney than Irish--"If ye plaze, mum, shall I peel the potatoes or bile them with their jackets on?" (170)) and announces each entrance by singing "an Irish ditty" (173). Though Matilda and Rickety Ann both complain about her incompetence, what she is indeed able to do, apparently, is provide an available sexual object for the visiting Frank, as the direction for her second appearance suggests:

Enter MAGGIE from house, singing an Irish ditty, looking around now and then at FRANK in a flirting way and exit. FRANK in meantime is following her up, returning the flirtation (173).
Sexuality, here, is limited to the urbanite and the Irish character. The rubes in *The Old Homestead* are conspicuously chaste. Even in a family-friendly industry where prurient references were few, sexuality would be absent from the rube acts of vaudeville for decades. But though there is little reference to consensual sexuality, there does linger, in Cy Prime, the possibility of sexual threat.

Cy Prime exemplifies the negative counterpart of Josh’s yeoman, the barbarian. At his first entrance, he appears to be the harmless, ne’er-do-well rube that the vaudeville stage would come to know well. Singing “Roll on, silvery moon,” Cy spies Matilda and soliloquizes:

There she is--the smartest woman that ever fried a nut cake or turned a flapjack. I heve been trying for nigh on to thirty years to ask Tildy to have me for better or worse, but could never muster up courage enough to pop the question; but I’ll do it now or bust my galluses. I got a bran new speech all rit out that I’m goin’ to speak to her--hev been studying it for the last six months (174). Cy, of course, is immediately tongue-tied and does not ask Matilda to marry him. Shortly thereafter he does propose, but to thin air, as Matilda has just exited the stage. He is foiled again as he stumbles over a pail ("I have just kicked
the bucket’’ (177)). Cy, like Josh, lives with his sister, both couples playing the roles of “American Gothic” domestic farm couples in chaste sibling relations.

But when Cy Prime is introduced, just before his first entrance in a song sung by Rickety Ann, he is a character capable of extraordinary violence: “Cy Prime had a wife but I guess he killed her ...” (174). The first mention of Cy, the most unrepentantly uncivilized of Josh’s friends and neighbors, associates him with spousal abuse and murder. He spends most of the fourth act fighting on stage. He is contentious and childlike, exposing his bare arms as he entreats another rube to fight. Cy Prime, the rural laborer capable of despicable sexual violence and murder, while still playing the most grossly comic bits in The Old Homestead (the bucket gag, for instance) represents the dark side of the rube character, the transgressive consequences of the barbarism of DuBois’ observation. Cy Prime emerges as a figure of lust and violence, even though he is shrouded in the perceived childlike simplicity of the Whitcomb homestead. Frustrated by Matilda and ignored by the others in the household, his re-entrance in Act Four is motivated solely by his desire to provoke a fight with another rube, Seth Perkins. The two “square off to fight, country-style” (210), a stage direction Thompson also used in a city scene in which Uncle Josh challenges a working class urbanite on the street (202). Here, Josh intervenes between Cy and Seth, though
their fighting continues throughout the act. “Once a man,” says Josh to Matilda, “twice a child” (211), a reference to Cy’s advanced age. But Cy Prime fulfills for the urban audience a perceived threat that had been common to the burlesques of the rural African American male on the popular stage for decades: a man prone to violence, with the body of an adult and the mind of a child.

Uncle Josh, however, is the template for the Empsonian pastoral rube, benevolent and unspoiled by modernity. Though subsequent variations on his Uncle Josh would combine the two sides of the rube character (notably Cal Stewart’s, a character who cackles with glee as he recounts his vicious attack on a Chinese store clerk), The Old Homestead presents a discrete exemplar of both. Will Cressy and Cal Stewart, who, with perhaps Frank Bell in the 1890s and Chic Sale in the 1920s, were the most successful rubes in vaudeville history, began their careers with Thompson’s troupe. Cressy played Cy Prime; Stewart understudied Thompson as Uncle Josh. The acts that the two men made famous in subsequent years borrowed from both versions of the rube, the yeoman and the barbarian.

Thompson’s Uncle Josh has, like Stewart’s later Uncle Josh, a boyhood friend who is now a millionaire living in New York City (the inspiration, for the later comic, for “Uncle Josh Weathersby on an Automobile,” in which Stewart’s Josh takes a ride with his Henry, and “Uncle Josh in Society,” in
which Josh visits Henry’s grand home in New York. In The Old Homestead, Henry provides for Josh while the old farmer searches New York for his long lost son. His presence at Henry Hopkins’ Central Park home focuses the play on middle class social climbing in the Gilded Age American city. Like Adam Trueman in Fashion, Josh is a reminder of the family’s humble roots, which Henry’s wife has endeavored to leave behind:

Uncle Josh: Let me see,--you was a Richardson, warn’t ye?

Mrs. Hopkins: Yes, Mr. Whitcomb.

Uncle Josh: Betsy Richardson!

Mrs. Hopkins: (haughtily). Elizabeth Richardson!

Uncle Josh: Yes, I remember we used to call you Bets for short. I can remember the first time I ever saw you just as well as if ’twas yesterday.

Mrs. Hopkins: Indeed!

Uncle Josh: Yes. You druv down to the store with your father on a load of wood.

(MRS. HOPKINS is very much mortified . . .) (186)

The Hopkins’ guest, Judge Patterson, calls Josh “terribly embarrassing, but . . . awfully funny” and Annie Hopkins, Henry’s daughter, suggests that Josh “didn’t look half so funny in the country,” his native environment (187).
In the city, Uncle Josh Whitcomb is a symbol of the past as much as he is a visitor from the country. The Hopkins' son, who has brought Uncle Josh down from New Hampshire, tries to apologize: "Mother, we wished to surprise you with old recollections" (187). Josh later disturbs Henry's upper class urban household as he cajoles his millionaire friend to pull off his boots (Henry accounts for his home's lack of a "boot-jack" by explaining that "we have [boots] made so they will come off easily," referring to the new trade in individually sized, ready to wear footwear). "What's the matter, Judge? That's the first boot-jack you ever see like that, I guess, ain't it?" asks Uncle Josh. The judge laughs, "No; but it's the first one I have seen in a great many years" (195). Uncle Josh's intrusion into Hopkins' Park Avenue home, a confrontation between the rural and the urban, constitutes a confrontation between the past and the present." "Dear old Joshua," says Henry Hopkins, "he is the very embodiment of honest and rural simplicity" (195).

Bringing with him the past in still another way, Josh tells Henry tales of mutual friends living (and dead) from their little town in New Hampshire. Here, Josh is furthest from the Yankee and most conspicuously influenced by the minstrel solo acts. Their old friend, Bill Patterson, "got tangled up with politics and whiskey and a piece of rope" and was hanged "out to Montany." Deuteronomy Divine acquired a new glass eye that he only wears on Sundays, though it was a
bit too large, and once, when he fell asleep in church with
his good eye closed and his glass eye open, he scared a woman
in the next pew so badly that he recently took it “to the
blacksmith’s and got it filed down” (189). Nick Ludlow died
the previous April. “What complaint?” asks Henry. “No
complaint—everybody satisfied,” Josh deadpans (189). Having
told his stories of small town eccentricities, each story a
rube monologue itself (followed by an elaborate comic
sequence in which he mistakes an upholstered footstool for a
pillow), Josh admits “with pathos” that there is “no use
talking . . . I’ve got a boy all alone in this great city”
about whom he is “dreadfully worried” (190).

Josh encounters a variety of urban figures as he
searches out his Reub. He commiserates with Henry’s French
butler “Francois,” a liveried servant who, it turns out,
isn’t French at all, but, as he whispers to Josh, “Hi-ber-ni-
an,” which means nothing to Josh.

Uncle Josh: Gosh! If I didn’t know you was
French, I’d think you was Irish.

Francois: Oui-sui; certe mong!

Uncle Josh: Hello, hello! What kind of lingo
is that?

Francois: Shure, that’s Frinch. I do be
hearin’ so much o’ that kind o’ talk
I don’t often know whether I am a
New York French Irishman or an Irish

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French Canadian New Yorker, or a Bulgarian.

Uncle Josh: Well, you’ll get so mixed up some o’ these days, they will have to run you through a separating machine.

New agricultural technology offers a fanciful solution to the problem of the changing city’s ethnic tensions. The centrifugal separator used in dairy processing was invented in 1879, shortly after Thompson made his debut as Uncle Josh and seven years before The Old Homestead premiered; by the height of the play’s popularity in 1900, there were nearly 40,000 separators in use in the United States.¹ Josh’s solution to Francois’ identity dilemma also suggests the ethnic hierarchy of the Gilded Age American city; cream, when separated, rises to the top.

Uncle Josh juxtaposes urban high culture with country morality when he asks Francois what his hosts do with their marble bust, a female nude, “when the minister comes.” When “nothin’” is the answer, he is incredulous:

I’ll bet ten dollars if I put that up in my cornfield I would be arrested before night. It’s darn lucky I didn’t bring Matilda with me, she’d put for home jest as soon as she see any sich sight as that (193).

On the streets of Manhattan, where Josh compares himself to “a dog that has lost its owner” (198), he eventually
discovers Reub Whitcomb, "sleeping off a drunk" in a doorway. He is a jobless and displaced farm laborer, unable to find work in the city. He conforms to the urban worker's perception of the unskilled, unsophisticated rural laborer in the city.

At the time when performers were beginning to burlesque rural life as rube comedians, popularizing the agro-pastoral, comic figure on the American stage, American agriculture was in the midst of a crisis that persists to the present day, shrinking at a constant rate and exporting its laborers and children into the urban workforce. After the Civil War, with expansion further into the west, the number of farms in America doubled. The introduction of new agricultural technologies revolutionized farming (the 1870s alone saw the invention of the disc harrow and the combine harvester and thresher, still in use today). But unchecked expansion, prompted by new lands and technology, led to price declines. Land productivity decreased by fifty per cent between the end of the Civil War and the turn of the century.16

Increasingly, urban, native-born, white, working class men, already facing cheap immigrant labor and the new African American workforce emigrating from the South, had to contend with displaced farm workers, themselves native-born, white, and working class. The Order of the Knights of St. Crispin, one of the early union-like organizations in American labor history (they comprised nearly one sixth of all union
laborers in 1870), was formed to protect the jobs of skilled workers from the "green hands" of unskilled labor." The rube type, and particularly the popular "rube in the city" structure, may have indeed responded to yet another fear of working class urban audiences, the influx of unskilled "green hands," like young Reub Whitcomb, from the American outland. Josh's son, the original "Rube," is a variant on the barbarian type, unskilled and drunk, living on the margins of urban working class culture.

The yeoman Uncle Josh comes to New York City to find and retrieve this wayward prodigal son. He makes inquiries about his son with the people he meets on the street (and is amazed that a constable, or "policeman" as he learns constables are called in the city, knows neither Henry Hopkins nor Reuben Whitcomb). The older rube explores Manhattan's downtown all night, in search of his son. "I never set up all night but once or twice in my life," he tells the policeman, emphasizing even the difference between the circadian rhythms of country life and existence in a city on the gaslight grid.

Josh's excursion into the city offered the rube tradition a basic structure and at least one bit that became an often repeated favorite among rube comics: having only just been introduced to the street side mailbox, Josh attacks a postman who is picking up the mail. Fearing the man is stealing the mail, Josh's small town vigilantism (and rube barbarism) gets the better of him. The bit became a rube
favorite and a standard of Cal Stewart’s “Uncle Josh Weathersby” act, published as “Uncle Josh and the Fire Department” in 1903 and recorded for Columbia in 1904. At the end of a week of searching, Josh still has not found his son, though he has “seen more wickedness and misery in that time than [he] ever thought could exist in a civilized community” (205). His New York is oxymoronic; it is an “uncivilized” city. The rube’s perception turns modern urban culture on its head, making it not only unfamiliar, but in fact the outland that Josh’s rural New Hampshire must have seemed to Thompson’s audiences. (For Thompson’s original audience, Josh has unwittingly made an ironic joke. The Old Homestead is still produced annually in Thompson’s native Swanzey, New Hampshire by the amateur Swanzey Players in conjunction with the Westmoreland Town Band. For today’s Swanzey audience, as it might have been for the Swanzey audience of 1886 had there been such an audience, it is a straightforward, if pathetic, observation.19) When Uncle Josh finally finds Reuben, the old man is overjoyed. The fourth act brings the Whitcombs back to their homestead, where, it seems, they belong.

After the second and third acts of The Old Homestead, Thompson “goes before the curtain . . . [and] bows awkwardly—never stepping out of character,—is always JOSHUA” (196). And Denman Thompson was Uncle Josh Whitcomb for the rest of his career. By Thompson’s own estimation, he had played the
role of "Uncle Josh" fifteen thousand times." Thompson's "Old Homestead' Octette," played a condensed version on the vaudeville stage well into the twentieth century. Using a special cut scenic drop, the troupe played "in one" and "in two" (vaudeville managerial jargon for using the smallest increments of the stage space, the six feet of stage closet to the audience, often from the apron to the first curtain as "in one," and from the first curtain to the second as "in two").

The 1910 Boston Telegraph obituary of the vaudevillian, reported that Thompson had created a short sketch based on his old "Joshua Whitcomb" act with which he had toured for two months before his ill health cut the circuit short. "This year," reports the obituary,

the old fascination of the footlights returned stronger than ever and early in the season he started out with his "Old Homestead" company, playing in New York, Philadelphia and Washington, and planning to close the season with the company in Boston, but rheumatism and failing health forced him to abandon the idea."

Thompson died while "The Old Homestead Octette" was playing an engagement in Providence. The act then featured Charles Clarke, Gus Kammerlee, Fred Clare, George Patch, and Maggie Breyer, each of whom had been with Thompson for at least a decade and in several cases more than twenty years (Kammerlee
originated the role of Judge Patterson in New York in 1887).

The act still prompted demands for encores as late as 1912, a year after its creator's death. At B.F. Keith's Theatre, in Boston, performing on the same bill as rube comics Rawson & Claire, "the original Denman Thompson double quartet, dressed as Rubes" pleased the audience and "got a number of [calls for] encores." A month later, playing Philadelphia, theatre manager C.E. Barns noted that the octet "went over well," with considerable advance interest because "the name of Denman Thompson counts for a good deal here." 22

Will Cressy credited his casting as Cy Prime in The Old Homestead with the launch of his very successful career. 23 And Cal Stewart, who had understudied Thompson himself as Uncle Josh Whitcomb, made a career out of his own Uncle Josh Weathersby, a character clearly inspired by his teacher's most famous role.

Denman Thompson's early foray into the new rube form on the variety and vaudeville stage provided a template for the rubes of the ensuing decades. It reflected the debt the rube owed to its immediate progenitors, the Yankee of the legitimate drama as well as the blackface rural figures of the minstrel stage. The transition of aspects of one form to the other is likely a product of the highly imitative, innovative, and flexible form that American vaudeville became. But it is also a part of the evolution of the "ethnic" comedians of the vaudeville stage. The comic
travesties of Irish, German, and Jewish immigrant life reflected the audience's changing attitudes toward race and majority culture. Many of the performers who became famous as rubes, Irish types, and "Dutch" and "Hebrew" comedians, began their careers as blackface artists and adapted their own burlesques of marginalized cultures from the established form.

The code of burnt cork and the blackface character on the vaudeville stage signaled a very specific body of racial assumptions to American audiences during the period. Blackface masquerade conflated constructed comic burlesques with the supposed reality of the black experience in the United States. It was a highly problematic sign system. It was sometimes an indication, simply, of genre; blackface make-ups, structures, and dialogic bits marked performance as comedy. Blackface, however, simultaneously operated as a powerful means of excluding the black performer and the reality of African American life from the popular stage.

During the career of Denman Thompson, the long-popular Irish acts of such performers as the Russell Brothers, Needham & Kelly, and Pat Rooney "predominated, blackface ran a close second, and Dutch, or German, dialect made an important third." During the 1880s and 1890s, blackface minstrel practices evolved from a form that capitalized on the historical oppression of African Americans into the ethnic comedy vaudeville acts that pitted nativist sentiment
against a burlesque of immigrants. For white middle and working class audiences in the United States of the 1870s and 1880s, it was a process that transposed one performance of the comic other for another.

The appropriation of minstrel practices in ethnic comedy and rube performance is a deeply complicated process in the development of popular representation in American entertainment. But for the performers, the extraordinary influence of blackface minstrel practices on the new ethnic comedy and cultural caricature that came to dominate the variety and vaudeville stages of the late nineteenth century was simply a part of the evolution of popular comedy, taking elements from an established tradition in order to enter the marketplace with a "new" form and profit from its newness, for as long as the audience would bear it.

In the 1880s, for instance, like many other acts of their era, the Dutch comedians Weber & Fields stopped "blacking up." Instead of affecting the dialect of the "Tambo and Bones" of minstrel performance, Joe Weber (1867-1942) and Lew Fields (1867-1941) channeled the voices of recently arrived Americans, affecting an Irish brogue or a German accent. But they otherwise maintained the basic comic formulations of their blackface acts. This process, as vaudevillian Joe Laurie, Jr. saw it, was a way to "get better dough and billing":

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After a while many performers "washed up," or took off the cork, and went into other characterizations--Irish, Jewish, Italian--but the minstrels who went into vaude and had a rep as blackface comics stuck to their make-ups and identification. In the early days of variety everybody was trying to get away from the cork because there were so many of them, and naturally the smart ones tried to break away so they could be different. But the codes of the burnt cork mask survived the loss of the mask itself. The object of fantasy and identification of the nativist white audience shifted from the fiction of black culture of the minstrel show to the fiction of immigrant life of the Dutch and Irish comedy artists and the portrayal of the rural working class in rube comedy.

Vaudeville reinterpreted and reinscribed fictional constructions of the "real" black figure during the rise of the rube comics. As white minstrel performers, black minstrel performers, white comics in blackface, and white ethnic comics competed on American variety stages, veracity, verisimilitude, and the truthful representation of difference became a battleground for advertisers, publicity agents, and performers. By the late 1870s, for instance, J.H. Haverly, of the United Mastodon Minstrels, had two very different companies on the road: the United Mastodons, white performers whose acts were "closer to vaudeville and musical
comedy," and the Colored Minstrels, a company of black actors who performed in blackface. "Haverly," Robert Toll writes, "presented the white Mastodons as the most sophisticated professional entertainers in America, while he presented his black performers, not as entertainers, but as . . . representative plantation blacks put on exhibit—like animals in a zoo". "THE DARKY AS HE IS AT HOME, DARKY LIFE IN THE CORNFIELD, CANEBRAKE, BARNYARD, AND ON THE LEVEE AND FLATBOAT." Haverly advertised his Colored Minstrels as "show[ing] what the negroes do . . . at home on the plantation." The producer extolled the entertainments of nostalgia for the plantation explicitly, in the program of a Colored Minstrel performance in Britain in 1880, years after Emancipation and Reconstruction.

The negotiations between the "reality" of the so-called "Negro impersonators" of the 1860s and 1870s and the constructed versions of blackness and whiteness that follow the evolution of many vaudeville acts are often at the center of popular histories of American vaudeville. Laurie, for instance, recalls Al Jolson's first use of blackface in 1903 while playing a bellboy in a sketch with Jolson, Palmer & Jolson. Jolson was unable to "get over" with the audience, so James Francis Dooley of Dooley & Sales "suggested that Al black-up." "He did," remembers Laurie, "and from then on Al did black; no dialect—just did a Northerner's idea of a Negro dialect." Jolson biographer Michael Freedland
proposes that Dooley suggested blackface because “it'd go perfectly with that Southern accent” Jolson already employed." The code of rural Southern dialect (later to become so central to one strain of rube performance) and the code of so-called "negro dialect" are combined in Laurie's version. Laurie's narrative suggests the distinction between the casual realism of earlier "Negro impersonators" and the later codification of the blackface mask in early vaudeville comedy. Writing on the resurgence of blackface acts in vaudeville's "Golden Age," Laurie notes that "singles," solo comic performers, "put on 'black' and talked 'white.'" They employed "no dialect," he continues, they "didn't even try, in fact some of them told Hebe stories in blackface! For what reason they blacked up will never be known."30

Bert Swor, who had a long and successful solo career in blackface and also without makeup, began his career with Haverly's company, before becoming the principal comedian in Al Field's company. At the height of his career, Haverly's pupil "attained the distinction of being the most realistic impersonator of the real southern negro before the public."31 (Swor later co-starred in Why Bring That Up?, the 1929 Paramount sound debut of blackface artists George Moran and Charles Mack, the preeminent blackface duo of the time.) The New York Dramatic Mirror remembered comedian Frank Cushman's performance of "A Symphony in Black" at Proctor's 23rd Street Theatre in April of 1899 as a "true to life" reproduction of
both the contemporary African American and "the old plantation darky." The reviewer noted and made a distinction between the "imitations" of Irish and Dutch comic types and the "reproduction[s]" African American life:

Frank Cushman [. . . ] calls his act "a symphony in black," and it is one of the most effective now before the public. Mr. Cushman is now one of the very few who can give a correct idea of the manners and eccentricities of the up-to-date negro and the old plantation darky, presenting two distinct characters and dialects. Cushman has made a close study of the ways and manners of the American negro, and he reproduces him true to life. In his make-up, method of singing, dialect, walk, and the peculiar idiomatic lingo of the black man, he stands alone. [. . . ] He has an amusing monologue in which he introduces imitations of Irish and German singing . . . .

(Cushman himself would later alternate between the use of blackface exclusively and the "whiteface" forms that followed.)

The negotiation of the cultural mask in American comedy continued throughout the decades that preceded the turn of the century. In September 1902, the former minstrel stump speaker Fred Brown made an appearance in Boston as a whiteface act, one of his first transformations from
blackface comic to whiteface rural comedian. J. Keating, the manager of the Boston theatre controlled by the circuit of B.F. Keith and Edward Albee, recorded that Brown was contracted to do three shows per day of a ten minute comedy act, performing his act "in one." Keating wrote:

This man is an artist in his way, but we have never been able to see him in this house since he began working in white face. When he did his old act in blackface and sung and talked, he went quite strong, but today he was practically a frost, and only did 6 minutes in the afternoon show. I am going to read the riot act to him, and if he will not give us what we want, will cut him out."

By 1904, Brown had apparently ceded to vaudeville managers what they wanted; theatre manager S.K. Hodgdon described Brown's Christmas week shows in New York as "a good act" by a "blackface singer and dancer.""

Such transformational narratives dominate histories of vaudeville's comedians of cultural caricature. The derivation of the rube from minstrel practices was preceded by the caricatures of German, Jewish, and Irish immigrants that hybridized existing theatrical types and the language of the minstrel stump speech. Walter Meserve writes, "Before 1860 the principal character types--the Yankee, the Indian, the Negro, and the Irishman--had been successfully introduced to the stage."" The Irish act of the vaudeville stage, like
the rube and the blackface comedian, had its roots in the earliest dramatic conventions in American theatre. Further, vaudeville’s Irish acts shared the cultural space of the rube, oftentimes focusing on the quality of rural labor and the cultural position of marginalized white workers.

Near the end of The Old Homestead, Will Cressy’s Cy Prime encounters a neighboring farmer, an Irish immigrant who had lived in New Hampshire for twenty seven years. “It’s a wonder to me that you don’t go over to Ireland once more,” says Cy, “jest to see the old folks.” “Why, man,” the old farmer replies, “I’ve been here so long and I have got so Yankified I’m afraid they wouldn’t understand what I’d be sayin.’” The shifting identity of Prime’s neighbor exemplifies the relationship between the Irish type and the rube burlesque of the rural working class. The Irish figure’s white skin privilege allows him to pass, and in this case, twenty seven years later, become so “Yankified” as to become another of vaudeville’s cultural caricatures, the rube, a form that bears the “Irish” act’s marginalized status while being otherwise white and natively American. The Irish immigrant character, despite being manifestly white, Christian, and European, was often seen by nativist audiences as something distinctly other; the rube that evolved beside it was infected with a similar otherness, despite the rube’s perceived majority status.
The earliest "Irish" acts traded on the currency of shared white skin with audiences of what James Dormon calls "veritable Americans," while focusing their comedy on the perceived racial difference of their subjects. "Going over" with the audience, for many Irish acts, was predicated as much on shared white-skin privilege and fear of African Americans as on the differences between Irish immigrants and "veritable Americans." Ned Harrigan (1844-1911) & Tony Hart (1855-1891), "The Merry Partners," began their careers in Chicago just after the Civil War and rose to fame after joining the company at Tony Pastor’s New York City variety theatre in 1872. Harrigan & Hart’s most famous act was what vaudevillians called a "mixed" act, with Harrigan playing the white Irish character "Dan Mulligan" and Hart playing his blackface foil. In Harrigan’s plays, writes Dormon, "the blacks of lower Manhattan were not only comical in their pretensions, but also assertive, even aggressive, and in their proclivity for violence, potentially dangerous."

By the 1880s, performers like the Russell Brothers, Bradford & Delaney, and Needham & Kelly delighted variety audiences with their burlesques of Irish laborers in the United States (e.g. the Russell Brothers’ drag performance of servant girls, Kelly & Ryan’s "Lackawanna Spooners," two coal shovelers of eastern Pennsylvania). The acts played to Irish audiences as well as predominantly non-Irish audiences; they balanced between prescriptive caricature (immigrant
Irish working-class culture acquired a reputation for rough behavior) and the burlesques of marginalized cultures that became popular with the growing middle class audience.

Needham & Kelly's signature song, "The Roving Irish Gents," embodies both the 200-year-old stereotype tradition of the stage Irishman, its conventions adapted to the American Gilded Age, and a burlesque of rural working people:

Oh we are two rollicking roving Irish gentleman,
In the Pennsylvania quarrie we belong.
For a month or so we're working out in Idaho,
For a month or so we're strikin' rather strong.
Oh, we helped to build the elevated railway,
On the steamboats we ran for many a day.
And it's divvil a hair we care for the kind of work we do,
If every Saturday night we get our pay. Right there.

The comics then held their hands out to the audience. The chorus followed:

We can dig a sewer, lay a pipe or carry the hod.
In the western states our principles are strong,
We're advocates of all hard workin' men,
And if that's the case you cannot say we're wrong.
Are we right?"

The humor derives in part from the oxymoronic construction "Irish gentleman": what are "Irish gentlemen" if not
laborers in a Pennsylvania quarry or an Idaho mine, men who "dig a sewer" or "lay a pipe"? Moreover, these sites of rural labor are where they "belong." "The Roving Irish Gents" employs the outland working class as an object in a transaction of cultural marginalization by omission. The joke on the "Roving Irish Gents" of Needham & Kelly's act is that they, as "Irish Gentlemen," are on the same social footing as natively American, rural day laborers.

In the "Roving Irish Gents," moreover, the characters are made the antithesis of the "hard workin'" Americans they seem to celebrate. Tied neither to community nor trade, they are unskilled laborers invading a market. They care only for their Saturday night paycheck and the opportunity to move into the next community and work, presumably, at a discount. Their advocacy of working one month and "strikin'" the next suggests the unstable labor situation of the period between Reconstruction and the First World War and the role of immigrant and black replacement workers in the labor conflicts of the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s. They identify the new sectionalism of industrial America, making explicit the separation of the "western states" from the east coast, echoing the historic difference between eastern and midwestern industrial workforces.

Bradford & Delaney's Irish working men sing of recent immigration ("Six weeks ago we struck this country"), work as day laborers ("We've struck a job so handy, with the shovel
we’re the dandies”), and violent labor conflict (“When we’re on strike the people watch the ruction, / For it’s then we give them a sample of our style”). Their act combined the long standing stage stereotype of the Irishman as quick to violence (“ruction” is, in fact, a corruption of “insurrection” in Irish English) and the new tensions of the American workforce. Bradford & Delaney’s Irishmen, having been in the U.S. only “six weeks,” are literally fresh off the boat (a position that has been another means by which historically marginalized immigrant groups have exercised power within: the hierarchy of the recently arrived over the more recently arrived) and ensconced in an “easy job” (“Now we have an easy job. / For the man up top does all the labor, / And we do nothing but carry up the hod”).

But the transformations inherent in the rise of vaudeville’s ethnic comics were not a simple matter of performers deciding not to “black up.” “Human nature,” Dutch comics Weber & Fields once wrote, “as we have analyzed it, with results that will be told by the cashier at the bank—will laugh harder and oftener at these spectacles, in the respective order we have chronicled them, than at anything else one might name.” The comedians go on to list the sorts of comic abuse that came to characterize their brand of knockabout Dutch comedy at the turn of the twentieth century: the finger in the eye, choking and shaking, the kick in the pants, knocking one another down, stomping on a partner’s
foot. The catalogue is part of a brief contribution to Associated Sunday Magazine, "Adventures in Human Nature," written by the well-known vaudeville act and published in 1912. The veteran comedians attributed their success in knockabout, a cousin of the barbarian rube sketch, to "human nature." But in their earliest performances, it was imperative for the duo to renegotiate the "natural" perceptions of their audience. The act that a young Weber & Fields performed for the white audience of the Carncross Minstrels in Philadelphia in 1883 did not appeal to the audience's "human nature," nor was their formula proven out "by the cashier at the bank."

Weber & Fields began their careers at the beginning of the age of American empire and during one of the periods of significant immigration from Europe. The sectional division of the nineteenth century in the United States reasserted itself in the guise of new and particularly urban racist and anti-immigrant sentiment. The transformation of Weber & Fields' dime museum act from blackface to whiteface in the waning decades of the nineteenth century is a critical early moment in the development of vaudeville's cultural caricatures, but one about which history records little beyond the anecdotes of biographers and the celebrity journalists of their day.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the minstrel form, the development of which relied so heavily on the
interaction of extrarurban white and black cultures, became hugely popular among the mainstream entertainments in eastern, industrial cities." But by the time a very young Weber & Fields began to make their mark on the museum stages of New York's Lower East Side, minstrelsy as a distinct form in New York City was in decline (by the mid-1870s, there was only one non-touring company of minstrels in the city). Blackface, however, was alive and well."

The elements of this originally rural tradition were so ingrained in the variety entertainments of late nineteenth century New York that, on the occasion of their debut in 1877 for the Elks Serenaders Social Club in New York, at the Turn Hall on Fourth Street, the young comedy team of Weber & Fields performed their variety routine in blackface. George C.D. Odell's "Annals of the New York Stage describes the engagement, by the two ten-year-olds, as a "dance and flip-flap" act that "failed miserably." The most recent scholarly treatment of Weber & Fields, Armond and Marc Fields' "From the Bowery to Broadway" (1993), closes its chapter on Lew Fields' childhood with an anecdote about that performance taken from Felix Isman's 1923 celebrity biography of the comedians. In Isman's version, the author is amused by the duo's relative lack of success in "blacking up" for that first performance." Fields and Fields suggest that they had only succeeded in "making their faces look extremely dirty, but not at all black." In Isman's version,
seemingly the sole source from which Fields and Fields have
taken the anecdote, Weber & Fields had produced a look
"unquestionably dirty, but unmistakably Aryan." The
anecdote itself, and particularly Isman's 1923 expression of
it, suggest that the cultural mask in this context aspired to
some version of the real even as it served to indicate a code
of comic performance, completely divorced from any element of
the representation of true American blackness in this case.
The humor of the anecdote for Isman is in the failure of the
young Weber & Fields to hide their white faces, not in
failing to achieve "blackness" but in failing to hide
"whiteness."

During the early 1880s, Weber & Fields modeled their
variety act on the patter and rhythms of the minstrel show,
performing both with and without blackface. Their earliest
performances trumpeted their skills at playing dialogic comic
bits culled from the minstrel show in multiple versions of
the ethnic masks that would become popular on New York's
Gilded Age stages. Odell reports that only weeks after the
duo's failure before the Elks, they were performing their act
at George Middleton's Globe Museum on Bowery Street, "passing
from black-face to 'Dutch.'" In the fall of 1882, just
months before they would appear without burnt cork at John
Carnegro's minstrel theatre in Philadelphia, the teen-aged
comedians played a brief engagement at Bunnell's New Museum
at Broadway and 9th Street in Manhattan. It was a "turn
[which] probably combined Dutch, Irish, and blackface routines in a kind of ethnic quick-change act.” During the week of 20 November 1882, Weber & Fields were appearing “in specialties, changing from black to white, in what they called ‘the Cream de la Cream’ of comedy” at the National Theatre on Bowery in New York City. And at the nearby London Theatre, in January of 1893, the boys were performing as “‘the smallest Dutch Team in the World,’ in Teutonic song and dance, and in The German Fancy Ball, ‘making a complete change from white to black in fifteen seconds.’” We have, unfortunately, little further evidence of their performances at this time. The manager of the Cook Opera House in Rochester, New York, in the 1902 journal of producer Tony Pastor’s touring shows, does, however, suggest that this was a tactic which would continue in Weber & Fields’ early work. He invoked the Bowery comedians in his description of the Kingsley Sisters routine:

Nicely dressed and fairly good singing sister act, in which one introduces piano playing, while the other makes a quick change from dress to a black-face boy, similar to that used in the Weber & Fields chorus in the “Rosy” song, after which she changes back to dress, but retains black-face make-up.

The move that the young Weber & Fields made from blackface comedy to versions of whiteface comedy is not at
all unique; the influence of minstrelsy on variety entertainments in the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century is extraordinary. The act that Weber & Fields would subsequently make famous, variations on their original "Mike and Meyer" routines, exemplified the influence of the older form on the new "ethnic" comedy. Their act blended the repartee of the minstrel show's endmen, the costume of the minstrel interlocutor, and the malapropisms of the later solo blackface characters that had evolved from the stump speeches of the minstrel show.

The "Mike and Meyer" sketches were, indeed, enormously similar to the stump speech comedy of the olio show in American minstrelsy and the rube monologue in the work of rural comedian. The humor in each case arose from the endeavors (and failures) by the characters to speak and interact in urban American culture. "Variety artists and circus clowns," write Fields and Fields, "were quick to adapt the stump speech format, performing it in Irish, Dutch, rube, and eventually, Jewish dialects." Indeed, the stump speech of the minstrel show provided the foundation of American single and duo comedy. "So stylized and stereotyped was the comedy of the [1880s]," remembers Douglas Gilbert, "about the only changes in the W[eber] and F[ields] routine when they went on as Dutch comedians ... were the chin whiskers, German
accent, and pale faces.”57 (“Chin whiskers” and “pale faces” would later become parts of the rube mask in American theatre and film.)

The act that Weber & Fields would make famous relied on the slapstick physicality of knockabout comedy. Gilbert’s 1940 American Vaudeville calls the comedy of Weber and Fields “sadistic.”58 “Providence liked our murder act,” remembered Lew Fields, recalling an 1885 trip to Providence, Rhode Island in which the trunk containing Weber’s protective padding had not arrived before the show. The subsequent abuse Weber took from Fields during their performance drew blood. The audience and producers on that night were delighted: “when we bled our audiences seemed to like us all the better.”59 “All the public wanted to see,” recalled Weber of their “Mike and Meyer” act, “was Fields knock the hell out of me.”60 Gilbert’s study even suggests that the particularly violent element in the work of Weber & Fields was a “comic exaggeration” of the two working class comedians’ “actual experience” growing up in the violent neighborhoods of immigrant New York.61 The knockabout comedy of “Dutch” comedians, Weber & Fields, contemporaries of Thompson and his Old Homestead company, was characterized not simply by their violence, but by their intimate relationship. “Vot are you doing?” asks Meyer of Mike. “Voiking in a nut factory,” Mike replies. The dialogue continues:
MEYER: Doing vot?
MIKE: Nutting.
MEYER: Sure--but vot are you doing?
MIKE: Nutting, I tole you.

MEYER (poking his finger in Mike's eye):
Ou-u-u-u, how I lofe you.\textsuperscript{52}

Fields' Meyer pokes Weber's Mike in the eye while professing his love, an act that enfolds one nativist fantasy (abusing the immigrant other) into another (that immigrant other as fundamentally "harmless"). James Dormon suggests that even as malignant versions of ethnic stereotypes pointed clearly to the 'undesirable' aspects of the new immigration, the ascriptively benign qualities of the caricature stage ethnics rendered them essentially harmless, even appealing ...\textsuperscript{53}

The knockabout comedy of "Mike and Meyer" combined the "malignant" and "essentially harmless" qualities of the immigrant, just as the vicious squabbling between two very old friends, Cy and Seth, in the conclusion of The Old Homestead combined the malignant barbarian rube with the harmless and sometimes benevolent yeoman.

It was John Carncross (1834-1912) of the Carncross Minstrels who advised Weber & Fields during their spring of 1883 performances with his company in Philadelphia, that the violence in their act was too "real" and made his audience "uneasy." "They thought you were really hurting each other,"

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Carncross suggested to his then first and only “whiteface” act. The act’s white faces, it seems, simply made their first performances too “real” for audiences accustomed to blackface comedy.

The white audience at Carncross’s Eleventh Street Opera House, accustomed to codified racist caricatures of African Americans that the company had presented with great success since 1862, were perplexed by a whiteface performance of violent, comic spectacle. “The audience,” writes Isman, “gave them dead silence from beginning to end.” The transformation of the form fomented in the hush of the spectators at Carncross’s in 1883.

Richard Butsch, in The Making of American Audiences, notes that “despite the fact that minstrelsy was the most popular entertainment of its time . . . there are very few references to actual behavior of minstrel audiences.” Indeed, we know little definitively of the composition of Philadelphia’s minstrel audience. Fields and Fields, in their biography of Lew Fields, suggest, with comparatively little evidence, that “like many native-born and rural Americans, Philadelphians made a curious distinction between the sinful indulgences of the theater and the ‘innocent’ diversions provided by the minstrel show.”

Geraldine Duclow’s entry on Philadelphia theatre in the Cambridge Guide to American Theatre, calls Philadelphia “a leading minstrel center” with no theatre more important than the Eleventh
Street Opera House (in which Carncross was the second minstrel tenant). The composition and behavior of the audience, however, is elusive.

Urban histories shed some light on the likely audience for Weber & Fields' debut. Noel Ignatiev's How the Irish Became White, for instance, tracks the tensions of the Philadelphia working class audience in the nineteenth century, tensions fueled by rapid immigration from Europe and the South that taxed the city's limited infrastructure and economic base. Throughout the 1840s, riots between nativist white Protestant Philadelphians and the growing Irish-Catholic minority brought gunfire, militia units, and martial law to the streets of Philadelphia. W.E.B. DuBois, in his 1899 study, The Philadelphia Negro, suggested that the minstrel audience before which Weber & Fields performed in 1883 was governed by a significantly "disreputable" local political machine (Republican and middle class after the Civil War) that was particularly hostile to black voters, who had not, before 1900, comprised a significant percentage of the registered voting public. The audience for Weber & Fields Philadelphia debut was culled from a city, like many others in the late nineteenth-century United States, with significant racial and ethnic tension.

It is likely that the house that evening in 1883 at Carncross's was composed largely of a new class of social climbers, men (and perhaps women, for Carncross, a Quaker,
had billed his theatre as "The Family Resort" as early as 1887) at the lower rungs of the fledgling urban middle class. Founded in 1862, Carncross's Minstrels was, according to its longtime stage manager, sketch writer, and later owner, Frank Dumont, "not only the craddle, but the nursery of minstrelsy." "Upon its stage," Dumont writes, "the greatest comedians have appeared, including J.K. Emmett, Chauncey Olcott, John J. Raffael, John Rice, and Eddie Foy"; it was the regular home of "the most popular minstrel stars in existence." The Eleventh Street Opera House sold individual tickets, by section, row, and number. The advertisements in Carncross playbills from the 1880s are dominated by luxury items and services.

One playbill, for the week ending Saturday, February 5, 1887, contains advertisements for two makers of "Spectacles and Eyeglasses"; two different "Fine Confectionar[ies]"; a maker of ladies shoes of "the latest styles"; "Henry Guatschi & Sons Superior Quality High Class Music Boxes"; "John Albert's Celebrated American Violins"; one "French Steam Scouring" service which claimed "Silks, Velvets and Laces" as "a specialty"; and the Kalium Water Spring in Collingswood, New Jersey, which implored Carncross's customers to "not forget [. . .] that it cures all diseases of the Kidneys, Dyspepsia, Dropsy, Rheumatism, etc." Perhaps most telling is an advertisement for James Gallagher & Son that boasts "Weekly Payments" for "Dress & Dry Goods, Silk Mantels,
Velvet & Plush Wraps, Carpets, Rugs" (a "$10 Bill of Goods" required "$1.00 down, then 50 [cents] a week" and so on), a service for the social climber without the means to pay up front for silk mantels and oriental carpets. Among the advertisements, which also include invitations to buy fine cocoa, dine at a "First Class" restaurant, and purchase a newly invented toy gun that "Fires Hollow Rubber Balls," are three notices that stand out, the only non-luxuries on the page: a sheet music publisher (a luxury, but an inexpensive one), a mince meat company, and "The Day Sewed Shoe Mfg. Company" at 23 North 8th Street, Philadelphia, that advertised its product as "the Most Durable" and the "most Comfortable" with "No Welt" and "No Tacks, Nails, or Waxthreads Inside to hurt the feet and soil the stockings" (another small luxury perhaps, the company's focus on comfort and clean stockings perhaps outshining its claims of durability). Subsequent playbills included an advertisement for the "Electric Needle" of Dr. J. Van Dyke, which could, "on the Female Face, on the upper lip, chin, cheeks, throat, arms, breast and between the eye brows" . . . "destroy forever" hair "without pain, scar, shock, or trace." The Carncross playbills, tempting his audience to buy fine silks and music boxes, reflect the new middle class's desires for the accouterments of wealth.

In minstrel writer Frank Dumont's later eulogy of Carncross, his former employer, he described the clientele of
the Eleventh Street Opera House. Dumont credited Carncross with bringing

minstrelsy out of the class that catered only to the rude and rough element, and plac[ing] it on a footing that has made the art of his pupils considered as cultured as all other acting."

We may assume that the audience for Weber & Fields that night in 1883 was composed not only of that “rude and rough element” but of the middle class and those who aspired to the middle class, who purchased their seats individually with the money for leisure that was not already devoted to James Gallagher & Son’s offer of weekly payments for fine goods.

Weber & Fields employed the blackface form without the cultural mask of burnt cork in their debut performance with the Carncross Minstrels. “The minstrel show,” Eric Lott writes, “appealed to workingmen because it relied on a shared (though largely empty) ‘whiteness’ . . .” But the performance of Weber & Fields was, for Carncross’s mixed class audience that night, too full of a shared, comically distorted performance of “whiteness,” not yet fully transformed into the other of European immigrants. James Dormon suggests that the transformation of such characters for white, nativist audiences had, by the 1910s, produced a comic form in which

the primary defining characteristics [of ethnic comedy acts] ... served as ethnic boundary markers
separating the bourgeois Americans from the ethnic characters on stage; separating "us" from "them."
Even as audiences are separated from players by esthetic distance, these audiences and these players were separated by ethnic distance."

But in 1883, the "ethnic distance" that interposed between performers and audiences after the turn of the century did not yet mediate between the spectacle of comic violence and the reality of the violence itself.

Minstrel structures could stand in for any number of new "ethnic" comic traditions in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, before an "Irish" or "Dutch" act, in fact, was a representation of any element of the majority culture. The tenuous and, at times, transparent borders between "whiteness" and "blackness" on the American stage produced a series of acts that varied from their minstrel forebears only in their surface elements: the names of the characters, the focus of their otherness, the color of their skin. The audience's silence at Carncross's in 1883 suggests a distinction that was in the process of being made; the "ethnic distance" that would determine audience behaviors was in its infancy. Carncross suggested a reconciliation between Weber & Fields at the end of the bit. The following night, the comics shook hands and kissed. Audiences warmed to the explicit artificiality of the spectacle, and Weber & Fields went on to great success.
The story that Weber & Fields' biographers tell may be no more than a show-biz anecdote, an episode from a period when two major acting celebrities were paying their dues. It conforms to the sort of narrative that one finds about many vaudevillians. Tony Pastor, for instance, once claimed in the pages of the New York Sun that he was responsible for the evolution of Harry and John Kernell's blackface act to an Irish act in the late 1870s (at just about the same time Pastor was telling a young Weber & Fields to "come and see [him] again in four or five years"):

It was my suggestion, after I had studied their work for a while, that they got up a little Irish sketch, playing the fathers of two boy who have a scrap. You must realize that the act was impromptu, the repartee absolutely spontaneous. They made such a hit that they immediately forsook their other roles and became Irish comedians. Such transformational narratives are the standard stuff of producers' reflections on vaudeville's golden age. But the substance of Isman's story, in which Cariocca is credited with suggesting the necessary mediation that Weber & Fields' reconciliation became, indicates at the least that a very real negotiation was necessary between a new form and an old audience, steeped in the traditions of blackface and confronted with the comparatively new spectacle of the young comedians' Dutch act.

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The audience's positive reception, in this instance, was determined by the successful mixture of this new comic other and the conventions of its predecessor. The reconciliation of the white comics, performing the "shared whiteness" that had been slyly understood in minstrel performances, defined the fiction and the reality of the new spectacle.

The transformation of aspects of blackface minstrel practices into ethnic comedy does not comprise a causal chain of events, easily followed from one performer to the next or one event to the next. The practices of American minstrels, and the heritage of the blackface figure, persisted well into the twentieth century, outliving the comics of the vaudeville stage by decades in many cases. But histories of the most successful ethnic acts of the vaudeville stage nearly always follow the narrative of the careers of Weber & Fields, Frank Beli, Lew Dockstader, Frank Tinney, and countless others from blackface to whiteface. Acts changed their make-up and dialect and reworked the details of the minstrel olio performances in a seemingly self-evident evolution to the "Dutch act" or the "Irish act," the "Hebrew" comedian or the rube.

Vaudeville's "white" ethnic acts evolved from blackface acts because the idea of "whiteness" was in the process of construction. The "Irish" and the "Dutch" acts that parodied Irish and German immigrants respectively, the "Hebrew" act that caricatured the growing Jewish population, the natively
American "rube" act, and the many cultural caricatures that would follow, responded to the waves of immigration to American cities. "Irish" and "Dutch" characterizations, for instance, grew in popularity after the mid-nineteenth-century influx of Irish and German immigrants; subsequent ethnic acts followed a similar pattern. These acts developed on the vaudeville stage during a period that embraced nineteenth-century ideas of racial biological determinism with strict pseudoscientific distinctions among the "races" and also the later twentieth-century umbrella application of white skin privilege for Americans of various European cultural backgrounds. The performers of Irish and Dutch acts operated with some of the privileges of their white skin, though audiences viewed their acts as representations of distinct non-majority ethnic groups in the United States.

The white faces that the rube form burlesqued were a part of the majority culture, imbued with the privileges of natively American, white social status. The characterization, however, evolved within the ethnic comic acts of the early vaudeville stage. The rube was part of a spectrum of comedy acts that depicted marginalized cultural groups while using the basic structure of the minstrel show stump speech. But the rube's otherness derived from the new divide between the rural and the urban in American culture, not the historic tensions of race and ethnic culture. The "Yankee" had represented American culture as a rural ideal
before the urban condition offered a significant alternative. The rural ideal, however, by the Reconstruction era, no longer represented the popular image of the United States in the uncomplicated way it had at the turn of the nineteenth century. The rube represented the rural, but evolved from the same body of blackface traditions and performers that produced the "Dutch" and "Irish" acts that became staples of the racial comedy of the vaudeville stage. The complexity of the rube in American popular theatre is a result of this disjuncture between the conditions of performance and the conditions of culture that produced it.
ENDNOTES


2 Robert Spiller, "The Cycle and the Roots: National Identity in American Literature," from Toward a New American Literary History, Louis J. Budd, Edwin H. Cady, and Carl L. Anderson, eds. (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1980), 11. Susan Harris Smith has pointed out, however, that Spiller ignores the debt that Tyler’s play owed to the sentimental comedies of the English stage. "In making this claim," writes Harris Smith in American Drama: The Bastard Art (New York: Cambridge UP, 1997), "Spiller chose to deemphasize the significant fact that the city-country conflict was just as central to the Sheridan and Goldsmith plays on which The Contrast was modeled" [63].

3 Arthur Hobson Quinn, A History of American Drama, From the Beginning to the Civil War (New York: F.S. Crofts & Co., 1946), 294. Though, as Quinn notes, there were those "who saw in the better qualities of Jonathan traits they liked to believe were national" and still laugh at the character’s "ignorance, credulity, and uncouthness," there were also those who found placing the symbolic weight of national character in such a character very problematic. William Dunlap, for instance, writing at a time when Woodworth’s "Jonathan Ploughboy" was a favorite of the American stage, suggested that "a Yankee character, a Jonathan" was a "clown" and consequently ill-suited to representing the national character (History of American Theatre, vol. 1, 1833; rpt. New York: Burt Franklin, 1963), 62.

4 Frontier characters shared with the Yankee a connection to nature and a straightforward, unschooled honesty. They were additionally, however, often romantic figures. Frontier melodramas typically included elaborate spectacle and romantic storylines. Frank H. Murdock’s Davy Crockett; or, Be Sure You’re Right. Then Go Ahead (1872), Bartley Campbell’s My Partner (1879), and William Vaughn Moody’s The Great Divide (1906) offer different versions of the popular frontiersman type.

5 The New England Yankee was indeed the standard. "It is rather surprising," writes Quinn, "that the peculiar rural types of other localities [outside New England and the mid-Atlantic states] were not oftener put on the stage" (303). Quinn cites a production of The Hoosier at the Circus, the title of which suggests the later "rube in the city" format of vaudeville’s rube comedy. Produced at the Arch Street Theatre in February of 1846, the play was "the first drama dealing with the mountain whites of North Carolina and Georgia’’ (Quinn quotes from Charles Durang’s The Philadelphia Stage, From the Year 1749 to the Year 1855. Partly Compiled from the papers of his father, the late John Durang; with notes by the editors, published serially by the Philadelphia Despatch [sic] between 1854 and 1860.

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7 Charles F. Seabert, A Miner’s Life, Or the Poor Man’s Home, a handwritten script and nine actor sides from the Scripts and Actors’ Sides, 1866-1883 series, TPRHC.


9 Quinn, 296.


11 “Denman Thompson Dead: Veteran Actor Succumbed Early This Morning to Illness of Several Weeks at His New Hampshire Home,” The Boston Transcript, 14 April 1911.

12 Ibid.

13 Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language, 2nd College ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), 1243. It was brought to the attention of the author by Thomas Postlewait that the word does not appear in the Oxford English Dictionary. Indeed, the “rube-” words in the OED are derivatives of the Latin verb rubēō (“to be red”) and adjective rubens (“red”). The American slang word “rube,” from the Hebrew name “Reuben” is unrelated.

14 Leo Marx tracks the parallel histories of the pastoral and the primitive in American culture and links the movement from city to country, a spatial and cultural operation, with time. Both the pastoral and the primitive, he writes, seem to originate in a recoil from the pain and responsibility of life in a complex civilization—the familiar impulse to withdraw from the city, locus of power and politics, to nature. The difference is that the primitivist hero keeps going, as it were, so that eventually he locates value as far as possible, in space or time or both, from organized society . . .


"... a performer appearing 'in one'... means that his or her act takes place in the approximate six-foot area immediately behind the edge of the stage or footlights. This first six-foot area and the next six feet beyond were known as 'in two,' and so on in six-foot increments to 'in four.'"

26 Laurie, 139.


27 Ibid., 30.

28 Laurie, 141.


30 Laurie, 139.

31 Unattributed newspaper clipping, MSHRC. Formed in 1886, the Al. G. Field Greater Minstrels were headquartered in Columbus, Ohio. The proving ground for many performers, the Field company produced, notably, Billy Murray, the popular recording artist and rube comedian.

32 New York Dramatic Mirror, 9 April 1899.

33 Anonymous, report of week of 24 February 1902, Hyde & Behman’s Theatre. The report notes that Frank Cushman “has gone back” to the blackface with which he’d been successful in 1899.

34 J. Keating, report of September 1902, Boston. Report books collection, KAI.


37 Thompson, The Old Homestead, rpt. in S.R.O.: The Most Successful Plays in the History of the American Stage, 216.

"Dormon, "Ethnic Cultures of the Mind: The Harrigan-Hart Mosaic," American Studies 33.2 (fall 1992), 29. Those characters, says Dormon, were "in all respects, virtually identical to the 'coon' who formed the subject of the innumerable and enormously popular 'coon songs' that became the rage in the 1890s. Dormon goes on to quote a song sung by the blackface "Skidmore Guard" characters in Mulligan Guard:

Talk about your Mulligan Guard,
Dese nigs dey can't be beat,
We march to time, we cut a shine,
Just watch dese darkies' feet,
De left foot first, de right foot follow,
De heel down mighty hard,
Ten platoons of dandy coons
March in the Skid-moore Guard (29).

"The Russell Brothers, unlike their counterparts, actually made enemies in the Irish-American community. At one point, "they actually feared for their lives," writes John DiMeglio, "because of the intimidating actions of the Irish societies," particularly the United Irish Society of New York and the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the group that instigated riots at performances of John Synge's The Playboy of the Western World. "Many times," DiMeglio continues, the Russell Brothers "were unable to complete their act and were sometimes unable to begin it." Such protests drove the regular performance of the act out of vaudeville in less than a decade. DiMeglio, Vaudeville U.S.A. (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green U Popular P, 1973), 44-5.

"This text is reprinted in Gilbert, 62.

"Excerpted from a reprinted text, Gilbert, 65. The word "ruction," is a corruption of the word "insurrection," popular in Irish English since the Irish Insurrection of 1798.

"Portions of "Adventures in Human Nature" (Associated Sunday Magazine, 6-23-12) have been reprinted in a variety of texts from Brett Page's 1915 how-to volume Writing for Vaudeville (The Home Correspondence School, 1915) to Henry Jenkins' study What Made Pistachio Nuts?: Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic (Columbia UP, 1992). References here are to the Page text, 103-4. The comedians' chronicle: "a) when a man sticks one finger into another man's eyes; b) when a man sticks two fingers into another man's eyes; c) when a man chokes another man and shakes his head from side to side; d) when a man kicks another man; e) when a man bumps up suddenly against another man and knocks him off his feet; f) when a man steps on another man's foot."


"Gilbert, in his 1940 study American Vaudeville, notes that "the majority of comedy acts in vaudeville were blackface in the eighties" (78).

7 Armond and L. Marc Fields, *From the Bowery to Broadway: Lew Fields and the Roots of American Popular Theatre* (Oxford UP, 1993) and Felix Isman, *Weber and Fields: Their Tribulations, Triumphs, and Their Associates* (Boni and Liveright, 1924). Fields and Fields note that Weber & Fields provided "contradictory information" regarding the ethnic make-up of their first performance. In an 1893 interview, they recall the performance as being in "blackface." In interviews in 1904 and 1907, they recall it as an "Irish act." And in an interview in 1912, it was a "pickaninny act" (34).

8 Fields and Fields, 34.

9 Isman, 29.

10 Odell, vol. 10, 484.

11 Bunnell's New Museum was a cradle of young vaudeville talent. Not only was its stage one of the launching points for acts like Weber & Fields, it was also the first employer of the producer B.F. Keith. His Keith Albee Orpheum vaudeville circuit made him one of the fathers of mass audience American vaudeville and cinema.

12 Fields and Fields, 55.

13 Odell, vol. 12, 109. Fields and Fields incorrectly attribute this description to the Bunnell's performances of earlier in the year (55). It is, however, likely that Weber & Fields were doing a similar if not identical act to the one in the winter of 1883 that Odell describes.

14 Ibid.

15 Tony Pastor Show Journal, May 1902, TPRRC.

16 Fields and Fields, 61.

17 Gilbert, 78.

18 Ibid., 77. "There was a sadistic quality about the comedy of Weber and Fields that did not appear in [other acts]," writes Gilbert. "[But] it is not within our meaning to imply that the sadistic element was purposeful or predominant in the work of the illustrious W. & F."

19 Fields and Fields, 55.

20 Gilbert, 77.

21 Ibid., 77. The extremity of violence and physicality that characterized the early work of Weber & Fields and the knockabout tradition did not, however, have much staying power on the vaudeville stage. By 1902, for instance, in describing an Irish knockabout act, Brooklyn producer Henry W. Behman called the "knockabout" of Two American Macs "too rough for us," concluding that the act did "not amount to much" (from the May 5, 1902 entry for Hyde & Behman's Theatre, January to May, 1905 show journal, MSHRC).


Fields and Fields, 62; Isman, 69. The anecdote is Isman's construction, a bit of imagined dialogue, which was then reformulated by Fields and Fields for their biography of Lew Fields.

Isman, 68.


Fields and Fields, 59.


Unattributed newspaper clipping, detailing the history of American minstrelsy, by Frank Dumont, from unbound leaves of a minstrel scrapbook, 1875-1919, MSHRC. The bias of the article, which traces the history of American minstrelsy directly from T.D. Rice, to Stephen Foster, to the Christy Minstrels, to John Carncross, is apparent, of course: Dumont was Carncross's longtime protégé and the graphic of the Eleventh Street Opera House that ran with the article is identical to the one used in the Carncross Minstrels newspaper advertising.

I can find no record of the prices paid for seats at the Eleventh Street Opera House during the spring of 1883. The unused tickets in the MSHRC do contain printed prices for the sectioned, numbered seats that the theatre sold. The divisions into section, row, and number, however, suggest some sort of pricing hierarchy in the theatre.


Carncross Minstrels, Saturday, September 22, 1888. Playbill contained in the MSHRC.

"Dumont's Tribute to J.L. Carncross: Reminiscences of the Ante Bellum Days of His Famous Tutor," unattributed newspaper article from the disbound leaves of a minstrel scrapbook, 1875-1816, MSHRC.

Lott, 156.

"Iaman, 31. "Tony Pastor Looks Far Back," undated New York Sun contribution is reprinted in Parker Zellers' Tony Pastor: Dean of the Vaudeville Stage (Ypsilanti, MI: Eastern Michigan UP, 1971), 61. Zellers also quotes Pastor's "come and see me again in four or five years," 53. Zellers' source, the same as mine, is Isman's biography.
CHAPTER 3

THE RISE OF THE RUBE, 1890-1905

In his 1940 American Vaudeville, Its Life and Times, still perhaps the best of the comprehensive histories of vaudeville in the United States, Douglas Gilbert’s brief discussion of the rube character in American vaudeville places the act in a transitional moment, from the rough variety theatre of the young Weber & Fields and Harrigan & Hart to the more refined vaudeville that Tony Pastor pioneered in the 1880s. Offering one of very few such analyses in scholarship, Gilbert groups rube acts with magicians, acrobats, marionette shows, jugglers, and performers who did bird calls; “each of these,” writes Gilbert, “was a standard act in the nineties vaudeville.”

Gilbert’s brief treatment of the rube character is typical, for despite the form’s wide appeal and obvious popularity (by the 1920s, rubes like Chic Sale were among the highest paid performers in vaudeville), scholars have ignored the rube. Neither have they regularly included it with the other cultural caricatures of the vaudeville stage, perhaps for the simple reason that the rube is not an ethnic caricature. It
is a caricature of culture, region, and class. Consequently, it has become a curiosity, grouped with magicians and bird call acts, rather than with the cultural caricatures from which it evolved. The history of the Yankee figure in American drama and the rural type in world comedy further suggest to historians that the rube emerged from an entirely separate tradition of simple country cousins. Both the pastoral, yeoman types that William Empson described and the barbarian figures of ignorance, violence, or transgression have antecedents in world literature. The history of such rural types suggests a lineage that does not necessarily include minstrelsy and vaudeville’s blackface single and duo comedy, Dutch comedy acts, and Irish caricature.

Though various versions of the rural figure had been a part of American variety theatre since its beginnings, Gilbert, in fact, cites only one “rube act” by name in his chapter that introduces the rube type. He calls Sherman & Morrissey, a knockabout and acrobatic novelty act that enjoyed a brief period of popularity in the 1890s, “the funniest” of the rube duos of the time. Sherman & Morrissey “did a burlesque trapeze in fantastic make-ups—enormous, artificial bare feet adorned with bunions, corns and warts.” “The act,” writes Gilbert, “involved falls and bumps unbelievable to human endurance . . . it was so swift and so punitive the performers could stand it only for . . . eight minutes.” But even in Gilbert’s analysis, this rube act had
direct antecedents in the cultural caricature of marginalized groups on the vaudeville stage. Earlier in the same chapter, Gilbert quotes Jack Murphy on the blackface act of Basco and Roberts, who
did a very rough, almost brutal, burlesque trapeze act. They worked in black face, full black tights, large feet like apes, and frowzy wigs. ... They jumped on each other’s stomachs, kicked each other merrily in the face, fell from the traps with awful thuds that would mean a hospital case for persons less tough and calloused.⁴

Burlesque trapeze acts were an uncommon though not at all unknown feature of vaudeville in the Gilded Age (Tony Pastor himself had one such act on the road at the turn of the century. Bailey & Madison, in a May 5, 1902 New York City manager’s report, are remembered as “two men in eccentric comedy acrobatic specialities” that included “a little of everything in the way of grotesque tumbling and knock-about work”).⁵ Sherman and Morrissey, it seems, are less a representative rube act than a transitional act in the development of certain kinds of rube performance from the images of African American men and women on the popular stage. Basco and Roberts capitalized on an old and deeply-seeded racist metaphor in order to create a hybrid act that conjoined trapeze artistry with ethnic knockabout comedy.⁶
Sherman and Morrissey toured a nearly identical act but transformed the ape imagery into a comic distortion of a different kind of marginalized body.

Gilbert identifies only Sherman & Morrissey in his references to the rube (though he goes on to describe the act of rube comic Frank Bell in a discussion of blackface monologists). In singling out the acrobatic violence of Sherman & Morrissey's knockabout act, Gilbert cites only a single strain of the barbarian type rube, the childlike, lustful, violent, ignorant figure at odds with the Empsonian yeoman type. Sherman & Morrissey are barbarian rubes. The character, however, during the period Gilbert describes, tended overwhelmingly toward the yeoman-type. Rube comedy was, indeed, not limited to the transitional oddity acts, but became a facet of the most mainstream single, double, and fixed sketch comedy acts on the vaudeville stage. The rube acts of the 1890s ran from stump speech monologue to one-act "pastoral playlets," as the author William Dean Howells once described them. The acts were many and varied and, oftentimes, culled from the minstrel shows that had produced their performers.

In the years that immediately preceded the success of Sherman & Morrissey on the vaudeville stage, the comic rural character underwent a transition from the "hayseed" of the early days to the yeomen and barbarians of the rube character. The original rubes, overwhelmingly drawn from the
ranks of former blackface performers (as was the case with the Dutch acts, the Irish, the Hebrew, and so on) became some of vaudeville’s most successful single and double acts. Their monologues and sketches blended the form of the minstrel show with the new rural other of the rube. It is a process that can be seen time and again in the careers of the early vaudevillians, the majority of whom had learned their craft as minstrels: from the first generation of acts like Weber & Fields (blackface to caricature of German immigrants) and rube performers Frank Bell and Will Cressy (blackface to rube) to second generation acts like the Hawthorne Sisters, who blended blackface musical acts with Japanese caricature.³

The rube acts of the 1890s were many and varied. Sherman & Morrissey’s acrobatic act held the stage with acts as varied as Frank Bell’s rube stump speech, the dancing and baseball parody of Dixon, Bowers & Dixon’s “Three Rubes,” and the mock pastoral drama of Will Cressy and Blanche Dayne. Performance records demonstrate the permutation on the rube character and the broad appeal of the character during the period.

At B.F. Keith’s Theatre in Boston on the 24th of February, 1902, the Crane Brothers performed three shows of their “new act,” “the Mudtown Minstrels,” which was “an absurdly funny concoction [that had] novelty enough to catch even the blasé.” The manager at Keith’s that night, however, recorded the act’s name in the original typescript as the
"Mudtown Rubes." In the official report that was sent to the offices of the Keith-Albee circuit, the typed "Rubes" was crossed out and replaced with the handwritten "Minstrels," presumably to correct the manager's impression of the act with the act's official name. In subsequent Pastor and Keith-Albee manager reports, the act is known only as the "Mudtown Minstrels." It is curious that the original author of the Boston report assumed that what he had seen that night was a rube act, and not a minstrel show. A week later, in Providence, the act was performed again, as the "Mudtown Minstrels." The manager's report describes it as "a novelty act to say the least." In seventeen minutes, the Crane Brothers told "a lot of old jokes, but they are worked up in such a way as to make them go immensely." It is again curious that this manager, apparently not confused about the act's name, notes that it includes "a lot of old" and presumably, at least to a theatre professional, well-known "jokes," transformed in some fashion. Three weeks later, New York manager S.K. Hodgdon's report on the Crane Brothers (and another performer, Belmont, who had joined them) confirmed that the "Mudtown Minstrels" were hybridizing vaudeville forms:

Crane Bros. and Belmont. In "The Mud Town Minstrels." To me, this act is extremely funny, and it may be that it is more amusing to members of the profession generally than it is to outsiders,
still it went very strong with the audience and got a lot of laughs. As a satire on the old-time minstrel performance it is really a capital bit of work.

Hodgdon suggests that the Crane Brothers’ act utilized contemporary performance constructs to comment on the style of the previous generation. The act blended, we must assume from the earlier manager’s mistake, the performance of blackface minstrelsy and the appearance of the rube act. Local newspapers described their appearance in Providence during the first week of January, 1904 as a “satire on the old-time minstrel shows” and a “furiously funny burlesque on the old time minstrel shows.”[9] “Everything they said or did,” wrote the Providence News reviewer, “was greeted with a shout of hilarity, and when they were finally permitted to leave the stage, the audience was weak from laughter.”[11]

In February 1903, Henry W. Behman, of Hyde and Behman’s Theatre, described the “Mudtown Minstrels”: “Three Rubes who do fairly well in comedy . . . Their hayseed dancing is rather clever.”[12] And though Behman only confirms that the “Mudtown Minstrels” were indeed a rube act, Hodgdon described the act the following week as “Three men in a travesty on the minstrel show . . .” (He goes on to note that they “are always very strong in this house.”)[13] Theatre manager M.J. Konking described the act as a “burlesque” to which the “audience did not ‘catch on’ at the outset, but when they
did, fairly rolled out of their seats with laughter.”"\(^{14}\)
Keating also described the act as a “humorous burlesque of the country minstrel” show that had preceded it on that evening’s bill."\(^{15}\) C.E. Barns’ 1906 report of the Crane Brothers (Belmont left the act at some point during the 1904 season and was replaced by a performer billed as a third Crane brother) called the performers “three Rubes” and made special note of the “grotesque make-up” the performers wore, which “could wring mirth out of anything.””\(^{16}\) The Crane Brothers’ “Mudtown Minstrels” inspired at least one imitator, “Capitol City Trio.” H.A. Daniels, manager of Keith’s New Theatre in Philadelphia, described the “Trio” as “in the same line as Crane Bros. & Belmont; but, of course, not in their class.” Records of that act illuminate the structure of the Crane Brothers’ act as the “Mudtown Minstrels.” The “Capitol City Trio,” consisted of a young boy, a young girl, and a juvenile girl “using three chairs in one, as the interlocutor, tambourine, and bones” in the style of the minstrel show.”\(^{17}\)

Before they entered rube comedy, Frank Bell and Frank Bush had already made names for themselves on vaudeville stages as blackface artists. Schooled among the minstrels who spawned the Weber & Fields generation, Bell was still performing with the Armstrong Brothers’ Minstrels as late as January 1883, when the troupe did an engagement at Aberle’s New Theatre in New York. In the Armstrong Brothers’ company,
Bell and James Powers played "bones," with George Hammond as the interlocutor and Phil Gibbons and Andy Powers as "tambo." Later in the act, Bell appeared as "Senator" Frank Bell in his solo stump speech. Over the course of the 1880s, Bell adapted this minstrel stump speech into an innovative blackface solo act. Gilbert writes that "Bell's comedy was unusual in the eighties . . . [and] was of a piece with the later, and more pertinent, patter of Lew Dockstader." He describes Bell's "stump-speech" act:

He stood behind a table and with a battered old umbrella thumped out his points in a discourse on women's rights, political and scientific subjects. He relied mostly on misuse of polysyllabics and absurd similes for his humor."

By 1889, Bell had become a "well known" act on the vaudeville stage in New York, though perhaps not with the most affluent vaudeville audiences. Odell writes of Bell's performance at the Thalia Theatre:

When we enter the Thalia, directly across the Bowery from the Windsor Theatre, we become aware of a downward tendency in art. The productions at the Windsor rather depressed us, but those at the Thalia (late Bowery) were precisely what might have been anticipated . . . the top price of admission was now 50 cents; and what could one expect for half a dollar? Whatever the expectation, one

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received the kind of inferior offering that cheaper theatres in Brooklyn and Williamsburgh were providing.  

But by the final decade of the nineteenth century, Bell had abandoned such theatres and, in Gilbert's words, "abandoned blackface for the straw-chewing hayseed comic, a change that took him out of the vaudeville for some time." Gilbert refers to Bell's casting as "Rube Whipple," the sheriff in the rural melodrama, Way Down East, the massively popular play seen by as many as seven million people during its height of popularity in New York and in touring productions in the 1890s (and subsequently popular as a novel, adapted from the stage play, and film by D.W. Griffith [1920]).

Gilbert's sketch of Bell's transformation offers little to explain Bell's move from blackface to white. Way Down East was written by Lottie Blair Parker in 1897 and significantly revamped by Joseph Grismer shortly thereafter for the William G. Brady-produced Broadway production that went on to such huge successes after its premiere in 1899. But the timing of the Way Down East juggernaut would seem to preclude any specific influence on Bell's solo act. Indeed, in Gilbert's version, it is Bell's embrace of the rube form that led to his casting in Way Down East and his subsequent absence from the vaudeville stage. But Bell's audiences seemed to assume the opposite. Reporting on Bell's
performances in February 1904, the manager of Keith’s in New York wrote,

This performer is practically giving the same old stump speech that he used to deliver in black face, only he now dresses in a “rube” makeup after the style of “Rube Whipple,” a character that he played in “Way Down East.”

The anonymous New York manager noted not only that the rube act Bell was performing in 1904 was “practically . . . the same” as the act for which he had previously been known as a blackface performer, but also that the act was perceived as having evolved from (or at the least and perhaps more likely, profiting from) Bell’s turn as Rube Whipple in Way Down East. A week later, the manager of Keith’s New Theatre in Philadelphia (probably, at this time, H.A. Daniels) reported that Bell’s act, a “Rube monologue,” presumably the same as the New York manager described, was “very good” and was very popular with his audience. By 1906, however, Bell had returned to his “Senator” act, the pre-Way Down East form of his rube act (and his earlier blackface act). In 1904, Bell did not go over particularly well with New York audiences with his Way Down East-inspired rube act (though the manager did note its “bright bits” and ultimately judge it a “good act”), but in Philadelphia he was a drawing card. The 1906 “‘Senator’ Frank Bell” performance in New York was the highlight of the theatre’s bill:
First time in five years for this old stand-by. In his political speech to-day made quite a sensation. They seemed to devour everything he said and made the hit of the bill up to this time. The audiences were slowly going to sleep, when he made his appearance, but finally brought them back to life.\textsuperscript{23}

In Philadelphia, however, Barns reported that while “Senator Frank Bell, Topics of the Day” had a few “bright lines” and solicited “a few scattered laughs” and “once in a while a good hand from the gallery,” the act was ultimately “not strong enough to wake up a rainy day house.”\textsuperscript{24} Barns seems to respond to the Philadelphia manager’s report: in New York, Bell’s new (old) act “brought . . . back to life” an audience that was “slowly going to sleep,” while in Philadelphia, he was “not strong enough to wake up” such an audience. New York audiences may not have embraced the Bell’s Rube Whipple act as warmly as their counterparts in Philadelphia, but it does seem clear that at least to the theatre professional who recorded his observations about the performances in 1904, the act was the integration of two types of characters: a white, rural character from the legitimate stage and the blackface character of an earlier generation.

Frank Bush, Bell’s contemporary, is perhaps best known as a “Hebrew” comic, but his most popular routine involved his quick changes from one cultural caricature to another, including the burlesque of Jewish immigrants for which he
would become known as well as his Dutch and rube characters. After entering a saloon set in “grotesque Jew make-up” and performing a condensed version of his “Hebrew” act, he would exit, returning as a German character. After performing his Dutch caricature, he exited and returned again as a “Yankee farmer.” Bush’s “cow-swapping Yankee,” recalls Gilbert, “was an astonishing contrast.” Bush’s “Yankee farmer character” itself resembled the later monologues of Cal Stewart and Byron Harlan, whose codgerly yeomen were frequently engaged in rural market capitalism:

There she be neighbor—not a finer critter in this whole county—sound in eye, wind and limb—not a blemish on her the size of a pin point—kind and gentle, good milker and light feeder—every word I’m telling yeh is as true as the noon-day sun—I’ll swap even for that roan heifer of yeurn if you’ll throw in a couple of plugs of store tobacco and come over next Tuesday and help break in a yoke of steers—Is it a swap?—Shake hands on it—The halter don’t go with the cow, you’d better fetch along a rope when you come to git her—Goin’ down by the cider mill? Reckon I’ll go along part ways —Tarnation dry weather, ain’t it?²⁶

Bush was quickly a fixture on the most prominent vaudeville stages; he headlined for Tony Pastor at the Fourteenth Street Theatre during the 1891–92 and 1892–93
seasons. Theatre manager H.A. Daniels called him "one of the best story tellers in vaudeville"; L.M. Eirick, manager of Keith's Theatre in Cleveland, called Bush "The Original Storyteller"; and C.E. Barns, after Bush's April 1906 shows in Philadelphia called him the "King of Storytellers." "We regard him as the best story teller in vaudeville" wrote Winnifred De Witt, manager of Chase's Theatre in Washington, D.C. 38

In his weekly report book, S.K. Hodgdon described Bush's May 1904 engagement in New York: "In Hebrew, Irish, Yankee, and negro stories, his act was a scream from start to finish, as it always is in this house." 39 Hodgdon, employing the frequent vaudeville manager's surrogation of "Yankee" for "rube," locates the figure in a vaudeville tradition that caricatures Jews, Irish immigrants, and African Americans. Bush's success on the Keith-Albee circuit in the first decade of the century is an indicator not only of the comic's own considerable gifts, but also of the popularity of the character type, which mixed blackface, rube, and immigrant ethnic solo types. 30

The influence of the blackface artists on the new rube character can be seen as well in the sketches that were most closely modeled on Denman Thompson's yeoman Uncle Josh. In the winter of 1902, the Litchfields, a husband-and-wife team, were performing "a rural sketch" throughout the east coast, successful in urban centers as well as relatively small
markets. In Springfield, Massachusetts, one manager remembered that it "[went] big here," and was indeed "one of the best." The sketch, "Down at Brook Farm," billed as "a realistic comedy sketch in one act," consisted of two discrete scenes with a character change for both Litchfields. It played "in three" (roughly the first eighteen feet upstage from the apron of the stage) and employed scenic elements and stage properties: a landscape drop, a picket fence, a house set with a table, two kitchen chairs, and a variety of practical hand properties, including a sugar bowl that becomes the center of a comic bit in the second part. In the first scene, Mr. Litchfield played "Uncle Zach Ryefield," a rube farmer just recently returned from "two whole days" in the city. Mrs. Litchfield played "Melissa," his daughter, who was excited that her "pa" has brought her back a new fiddle. Like a number of acts during the period, the Litchfields' act included trick violin playing. In the second part, after a quick change by both actors, Mrs. Litchfield appears as "the city governess," employed to educate Uncle Zach's children, Mrs. Litchfield's Melissa, now obviously no longer on stage, and "Johnny," her brother, played by Mr. Litchfield.

The depiction of Uncle Zach and his family is typical of the rube type that evolved in the 1890s. Like Denman Thompson's Uncle Josh, Neil Litchfield's "uncle" character fulfills the social role of rural uncle figure. Litchfield's
Uncle Zach, in fact, is more directly a nod to the blackface tradition from which he emerged than earlier rube uncles; Uncle Zach enters to the orchestra playing “Turkey in the Straw,” a song which was most associated at that time with “ negro delineat[or]” Billy Golden. Golden would later be known for recordings of “Uncle Josh” sketches, playing the rube character Cal Stewart made famous in the 1910s. The song was originally titled “Old Zip Coon,” a reference to the black character of minstrel stump speeches from which the rube characterizations of the 1890s emerged. “Turkey in the Straw” was recorded again, in 1900, by Arthur Collins, best known as a solo artist for “singing ‘coon’ and ‘ragtime’ songs in black dialect.” He was half of Collins & Harlan, with rube comic Byron G. Harlan. Both recordings were marketed as “coon” songs. The musical cousin of the minstrel dialogue or monologue, the “coon” song was typically performed by a white performer in blackface and purported to be a genuine musical expression of African American life in the South. The songs were pathetic or melodramatic with a strong nostalgia for the ante bellum South and the plantation. The “coon” song, originally a part of the latter portion of minstrel shows, would have even longer staying power than the minstrel form itself and some later recordings would make no distinction between “coon” songs and the new “ragtime.” The entrance music in “Down at Brook Farm” signals to the Litchfields’ audience that Uncle Zach is in
the stump speech tradition of the "Zip Coon" character. Thus introduced to the audience, and finally sure "Rube Payne's spotted heifer" had been properly restrained, Uncle Zach recounts his experiences in the city for his daughter, an accounting that could stand in for any rube-in-the-city story from the vaudeville stage.

"The streets are so crooked that the other day I started to go from the tavern down to the depot and I met myself coming back," begins Litchfield's Zach, echoing Denman Thompson's Uncle Josh. He describes being swindled at a Coney Island-type amusement, a test of skill in which Uncle Zach was to throw a baseball at "the little doll babies strung up in rows." Failing to win a prize, "a good cigar," Zach is prompted to write a letter home to Melissa's "ma" telling her "how [he] missed the children." Rube monologues frequently described being swindled. Coney Island became a particular fascination for rube comics. Indeed, Coney Island swindles became almost a discrete subset of the stories of urbanites taking advantage of rubes who traveled to the city; the Coney Island swindle rivaled the "swindles" of public transportation, the theatre, and commercial institutions (banks and department stores particularly). The punning of "how I missed the children" (Zach's tosses miss the amusements' dolls but the letter he sends home seems to

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suggest that he desires to see his children) is a common comic tactic of many of vaudeville’s single and double comedians.

The transition sequence of “Down at Brook Farm” follows. Zach sends Melissa away (and Mrs. Litchfield off-stage) to watch out for the cow as Litchfield sings “Never Had Such a Time in My Life,” a rube-in-the-city set piece:

Me and my wife came to town t’other day
Never had such a time in my life,
Had on my wagon a big load of hay,
Never had such a time in my life
Some fellers on the street hollered “Look at that jay,”

I jumped off the wagon and my team run away
I was looking for my wife the rest of the day
Never had such a time in my life.

The song recounts Zach’s failure to find his wife, wagon, or goods. While looking, he runs into a “big street lamp,” bumps his head, and falls in the road. Disoriented, he frightens a clerk in a dry goods store and, running away, becomes trapped in a runaway elevator:

Jumped in the elevator and pulled the string
Never had such a time in my life
It shot right up the gol darned thing
Never had such a time in my life
It kept on going till it got to the top

115
And when it got there it didn't stop
Till it fell in the alley on the ground kerflop
Never had such a time in my life.

The narrative was familiar to rube audiences. Zach is
robbed, made to feel foolish, and menaced by technology.
Zach's song follows the basic structure of the rube stump
speech on the subject of the city.

Zach's experiences in the elevator demonstrate the rube
act's ever-present fear of technology run amok. Rubes were
often amazed and befuddled, if not actively threatened, by
various kinds of machines from printing presses to bicycles.
Rube characters are perpetually fighting with railroad
porters and engineers. Thompson's Uncle Josh is blinded by
gaslight; Cal Stewart's later Uncle Josh, in "Uncle Josh
Weathersby on an Automobile," is terrified by the speed of
riding in his friend's automobile. The custom even included
the rube-built zeppelin of "Zeb Green's Airship," an act that
Len Spencer and Ada Jones performed at the turn of the
century. The act was recorded by the Victor company in 1909
with Spencer as "Zeb Green" and Jones as "Cynthie." "This
here airship," declares Zeb to the audience at the "great
Hokum and Pokum Show,"

was made and constructed in Hank Timkins' old
henhouse. The body of the machine is a bi-rigged
canoe. The steering wheel is the old hand-car down
to the depot. The flying gear is the wheel of Zeb
Higgins' old windmill and the engine is the inside of Jonah Webb's old thrashing machine.

The airship, loaded with heavy railroad and farm equipment, makes an unsuccessful first voyage but the "bi-rigged canoe" comes in useful as the rube and his crew crash land in a nearby lake. Litchfield's Uncle Zach is lucky to have only been trapped in an elevator. When the song ended, Litchfield's Zach exits as Mrs. Litchfield's "city governess" enters.

The second half of "Down on Brook Farm" offers a dialogue between Johnny, Zach's rube son (also played by Mr. Litchfield), and a city figure who is out of her element in the country. "Well, really," says the governess as she enters, "this is rural simplicity." "Judging from the specimen that I have just seen in the house," she continues, referring, presumably to Melissa, "I imagine they are more suited for the plow and washtub." (Uncle Zach's children are "more suited for the plow and washtub" than to musical instruction; she makes reference to her appointed job, teaching the children music.) The governess describes the Litchfield children in mock scientific language. Melissa is a "specimen" with intrinsic characteristics that "suit" her to particular activities. The governess's attitude belies the nineteenth century fascination with "scientific" explorations of race and the new science of anthropology."
The governess introduces herself to Johnny, who is every bit the rube figure that Uncle Zach is. Asked why he wears a tag with his name on it, Johnny replies, “Pa sent me down to the city on the cars with some yearling calves and they put a tag on the calves and they put one on me.” Mrs. Litchfield plays the straight role to the rube comedy of Mr. Litchfield. His Johnny is given to malapropism (“pimples” for “pupils”), physical clowning (flailing around the stage with a stinging bee in his pocket), and country wit. “If your father should give your mother a twenty-dollar bill and a ten-dollar bill what would she have?” asks the governess. “She’d have a fit,” says Johnny, “She never got so much as that.”

The Litchfields performed “Down at Brook Farm” in the winter and spring of 1902 on a circuit of major urban vaudeville theatres. The tour was produced by vaudeville impresario Tony Pastor and included the Crane Brothers and Belmont’s “Mudtown Minstrels” and the rural comedy of Cressy & Dayne. The record of those performances, from January to May of 1902, makes numerous references to rube acts “going over” throughout the east.”

At the New Gilmore Theatre, in Springfield, Massachusetts on February 10, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Young “went over very big” with a “rural comedy sketch” that involved a violin-playing finish (like the finale of the Litchfields’ act). On the same night, at the Howard Athenaeum in Boston, Charley Banks, “in monologue in Rube make-up” . . . “went
big." A week later, at the Hyde & Behman’s Theatre (either in Brooklyn, New York or Newark, New Jersey, each of which had a Hyde & Behman’s--the journal is unclear), the Youngs again performed their “rural sketch,” “A Homeapun Wedding.” This time, however, the act only received a “fair” response from the urban audience.

On February 18, 1902, Will Cressy & Blanche Dayne performed “the best sketch [they had] yet presented” at the Empire Theatre in Cleveland, Ohio. The manager of the Cleveland theatre remembered the sketch, “A Village Lawyer,” as “very good and more than pleased [the audience].” Noting the high production vaules of Cressy & Dayne’s act, he remarked on the “excellent scenery and lighting effects.” In Rochester, New York, at the Cook Opera House March 17th, Cressy & Dayne, performing another sketch, prompted “the audience laugh while in the house, but [had] not the charm to create talk outside, like “The Village Lawyer.” The duo returned to “The Village Lawyer” when they visited Providence on March 31; the act there was “fully as strong as when they were here before.” Their March 28 performance in Philadelphia, was “the hit of the show.” The New York performance of “The Village Lawyer” four weeks later is remembered as “one of the funniest things [Cressy had] ever done.”

Frank Jones and Lillian Walton had success in March of 1902 at Hurtig and Seamon’s Music Hall in New York City,
playing their rural comedy sketch, "Our Country Cousins." At the same time, at Shea's Garden Theatre in Buffalo, New York, Johnson, Davenport & Lorella "please[d] the audience" with "The Farmer and the Football Players." A week later, in nearby Rochester, Mrs. Thorndyke Boucicault's "A Proper Impropriety," a sixteen minute travesty of the dramas of Augustus Thomas, in which "a western gentleman ventures the impropriety of calling upon a young New York widow to whom he has not been introduced" was on the bill. The manager of Cleveland's Empire Theatre noted the play's "smart dialogue, well delivered."

On March 14, 1902, the "Yankee Comedy Four" performed in New York City:

Four men, two of them made up as Rubes. One as a Dutchman and one eccentric. Like nearly all of these acts the comedy is not very strongly in evidence, but they are very good singers.

The manager suggests that, "like nearly all of these acts," the Yankee Comedy Four was not especially funny. The manager is not clear what "all of these acts" means (rube acts, mixed Dutch acts, four-man comedy and singing acts), but it is clear that he is familiar with this kind of performance, as was Massachusetts theatre manager Alf Wilton. Two weeks later, at the Park Theatre in Worcester, Massachusetts, Wilton reported on the act of Dixon, Bowers, and Dixon: "The
three rubes. The same old act, not a new word or trick. Always goes well here, went about the same as usual."

In fact, Dixon, Bowers, and Dixon's "Three Rubes" act was successful on the vaudeville stage for a number of years. J.H. Finn, manager of Detroit's Temple Theatre, remembered the act's performance there three years later as having "been before the public in this same act for so long that [describing its] content is unnecessary." The act combined "Rube makeups" with an "acrobatic dancing act" and "an imitation of a ball game." (The connection between rube characters and baseball acts continued, perhaps propagated by the vaudeville careers of baseball players like Pittsburgh Pirate pitcher Rube Wadell. Frear, Bagot & Frear's "The Acme of Baseball/Baseball Idiosyncrasies" sketch, for instance, involved two of the actors in baseball uniforms, the third "as a 'Rube'--juggling baseball bats, balls, hats, etc.") In 1911, the manager of the Fifth Avenue Theatre in New York City described the act, now featuring Bowers, Walters, and Crooker, as "'The Three Rubes' with a few falls, hard knocks, some dancing and a little burlesque trapeze with a rattling good finish making a mighty good act." Earlier that season, the "Three Rubes" were still so popular that J.F. Clancy, manager of the Trent Theatre, intended to "move them down one [in the bill], closing the first half," into the more desirable headlining position (closing the first act and appearing second to last in the second act were usually
considered the headliners' positions on a vaudeville bill).³

On the same stages, during the winter and spring of 1902, comedian Artie Hall was alternating between white and black, performing his "old negro songs" with and without the mask of blackface. The white Hall made his name on the vaudeville circuits singing African American spirituals and working as a "negro impersonator." But on February 24, 1902, the manager of Chase's Theatre in Washington, D.C., recorded that Hall's performance, singing "old negro songs," which was "liked very much by our Audience," had "changed to white face." Two weeks later, in Cleveland, Ohio, Artie Hall performed the same act, but this time in blackface ("Good blackface singing and comedy act," wrote the Empire's manager). And two weeks after that, on March 17, the manager of Hurtig and Seamon's Music Hall in New York City wrote that he was "working in white face" and the act was "going big." The boundaries of such burlesques on ethnic or cultural types were unstable and permeable and remained so during the period.⁴

Like the white performer Hall, African-American monologist Charley Case did his act in both blackface and "white face" on the Loew circuit at the turn of the century. Case, often remembered as one of vaudeville's finest singles, performed urban domestic comedy that relied on first generation urbanity. Case contrasted his city sophistication with his parents' generation's rural roots, obscured by
decades of city life. In "How Mother Made the Soup," recorded for Victor in 1909, Case tells the story of his mother making "Farmer's Soup," from a recipe she found in the newspaper:

Hank, my brother, ate some of his and it made him sick. Well, Father saw it couldn't be any good from the way Hank yanked it, but he made up his mind that he'd try it and get it over with as soon as he could. So he closed his eyes and drank a big bowl full of it and he fell over on the floor in a fit. And I said to Hank, I said, "Hank, run for the doctor, quick." And Hank trotted off on a run, and after he had gone, I took Mother in the other room and I says "Mother, I guess you poisoned them." And she said, "No I haven't." She says, "That's soup." She says, "I made it just according to the directions in the newspaper." And I looked in the paper and I can't find where it says soup. And Mother says, "Well what's the matter with you? Are you blind?" She says, "There it is, right there in front of your face and mine. S-O-A-P, soup."45

The comedy of Charley Case, a black performer who performed the act in blackface but also, according to Joe Laurie, in "white face," responded to the new tensions of an urbanizing society.
Managers throughout the five-month sampling of Pastor’s touring shows made special note of blackface acts that had recently altered their performances. Of the three appearances of Evans and White in Pastor’s 1902 show journal, two (from the Cook Opera House in Rochester, New York and from the Temple Theatre in Detroit, Michigan) note a change in their act from blackface duo comedy and dancing, to a mixed act in which “one of the men now works in white face, and the other black.” Theatre managers registered performances by the Quaker City Quartet similarly. On March 24, in Boston, the manager remembered: “Put on their Barber shop act with no changes except three of the quartet now work in whiteface instead of all black as formerly. They were just as strong as ever.” At Chase’s Theatre in Washington a month later, there was only one line of description: “One in blackface.” (The Quaker City Quartet’s transformation from blackface to white coincided with the transformation of the “Barber shop” quartet acts, a form that had been associated with African Americans, from black to white effected by the new recording industry, for which “Barber shop” acts would become quite lucrative.)

By 1902, when the confused manager called the Crane Brothers’ act the “Mudtown Rubes,” the rube type had become a staple of the vaudeville stage. Henderson & Ross, playing with a “Farm Set” and “Cottage and Fence” properties had an act that included rope walking that “provok[ed] much
laughter." The "rural comedians" Meany & Anderson played rube duo comedy as headliners on the Keith-Albee-Orpheum circuit at the turn of the century. And Len Spencer, the Zeb Green of "Zeb Green's Airship," had risen to prominence both as a blackface performer and a rural comedian. Spencer got his start in the fledgling recording industry in the 1890s, with little or no vaudeville background, though by 1898, he had opened Len Spencer's Greater New York Minstrels in Orange, New Jersey, with a company that included Billy Golden and Steve Porter. A child of an upper middle class Washington, D.C. family, Spencer was not the typical vaudeville performer. Though he would eventually be well-known for "Hezekiah Hopkins Comes to Town," a rube sketch of the rural yeoman-type lost in New York City, he was before 1898 "most valued as an interpreter of what companies characterized as 'Negro' material." Indeed, Spencer's recordings for Columbia, by the time of an 1898 printing of its Spencer catalog, listed his songs and sketches under the following subject headings: "Negro Songs," "Negro Love Songs and Lullabys," "Negro Songs and Dance--with Shouts, Asides, and Clogs," "Pickaninny Songs," "Old Man Negro Songs--Interspersed with Pathetic Sayings, Very Characteristic," "Comic and Topical Songs," and "Gospel Songs." His recordings also included a scene called "Uncle Tom's Cabin--Flogging Scene" in which Spencer played both Uncle Tom and Simon Legree. But Spencer was perhaps best known for "The
Arkansaw Traveler," a sketch in which he portrayed a rural cabin-dweller who matches wits with an out-of-towner who passes by. The sketch was imitated by the rube act Byron & Harlan as "Two Rubes and the Tramp Fiddler" and adapted by Spencer himself, with Fred Van Epps, as "Hickory Bill."

"Hickory Bill," recorded for Edison in 1904, perhaps during the same sessions that produced "Uncle Tom's Cabin--Flogging Scene," deviates from the "Yankee" flavor of the Denman Thompson-influenced rubes. "Hank" meets a banjo-playing "stranger around these parts" on a country road somewhere, the text indicates, to the south of Arkansas. Hank's brother, "Hickory Bill" is, Hanks thinks, "up . . . in Arkansas," though he hasn't seen his brother "since Bill went to war." The mysterious banjo player plays "Dixie" for Hank, which Hank finds strange since "Bill was always a-playin' 'Dixie.'" Hank asks the stranger to play "Old Black Joe," a song that "but one man in the world could play" like the stranger plays it. The two men are reunited, Hank with his brother Hickory Bill.

The rube form had thus become standard fare for vaudeville audiences by 1900. Including both the monologic and dialogic one- and two-man acts of the stump speech tradition, the rube acts of the 1890s usually played "in one" with little or no scenery such as in Spencer's "Hickory Bill." But they also included longer narrative sketches, often played "in three" or "in four" with scenic elements and
stage properties. These were often short plays, usually written by the act’s headlining performer, in which a rube character was central. The narratives of the longer sketches contextualized rube material that might otherwise be performed as a monologue or dialogue. Managers tended to describe this latter variation on the rube form as "rural comedy." William Dean Howells, the influential author and Atlantic editor, called these sketches, "pastoral playlets," in a 1903 contribution to Harper’s Monthly Magazine.

"On Vaudeville," published in April of 1903, is a dialogue between a writer and the editor of a fictitious literary magazine. The two debate the merits of the popular vaudeville stage. "I am an inveterate vaudeville-goer," says the writer, detailing the performances he enjoyed the day before, and finally describing the climax of the evening’s program:

... "the next act, which consisted of 'Monologue and Songs' by a divine creature in lampblack, a shirtwaist worn outside his trousers, and an exaggerated development of stomach. What did he say, what did he sing? I don’t know; I only know that it rested my soul and brain, that it soothed the conscience, and appeased the hungerings of ambition. . . . there is no such complete purgation of care as one gets from the real Afro-American when he is unreal, and lures one
completely away from life, while professing to give his impressions of it. You, with your brute preferences for literality, will not understand this, and I suppose you would say I ought to have got a purer and higher joy out of the little passage of drama, which followed, and I don't know but I did. It was nothing but the notion of a hapless, half-grown girl, who has run away from the poorhouse for a half-holiday, and brings up in the dooryard of an old farmer of the codger type, who knew her father and mother."

The writer goes on to describe the "Pastoral Playlet" in which the girl finds a home with the codger. The urban vaudeville devotee is entranced by the "purification of care" offered by the blackface artist, at once "real" and "unreal," and the joys of the simple caricature of presumably white country life. The two images are linked in the mind of Howells' enthusiastic theatre-goer. And indeed, the tradition of the "pastoral playlet" on the vaudeville stage runs parallel to the evolution and popularity of the rube form, sharing its lineage from the minstrel show.

Various comedy teams, including the Litchfields, the Sidmonds, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Young, Harlan Knight & Company, and Milton & DeLong Sisters made rural sketches standards of the vaudeville stage (e.g. "The Village Lawyer," "A Homespun Wedding," "Twenty Minutes at Alfalfa Junction," "Rubeville,"
and “Back to Hickville”). The full-fledged rural comedy at the turn of the century typically ran for more than twenty minutes, often played on the full stage with scenic elements and stage properties, and employed casts varying from two performers to an entire theatre company. Mr. and Mrs. Gardner Crane performed on the stages of the Keith-Albee circuit in a twenty-five minute play called “A Yankee’s Love for Dixie.” The act used the full stage and was played in front of the couple’s own interior set. Tom O’Brien and Clara Havel toured in Will M. Cressy’s “Clicks and Ticks” from 1902 to 1905 (later with Effie Lawrence). Rice & Walters appeared in a “rural comedy sketch,” “Down on the Farm,” played on a full-stage. But Mr. and Mrs. Esmond’s performances in “The Soldier of Propville” were described as:

One of the daintiest rural comedy sketches seen in vaudeville for some time is “The Soldier of Propville,” which is being presented by Mr. and Mrs. Esmond. Several critics have predicted that Mr. Esmond will become a serious rival to Will M. Cressy.”

The rural comedies of Will Cressy and his wife, Blanche Dayne, would become the most successful on the vaudeville stage at the turn of the century.

The “pastoral playlet” and single and duo rube comedy had more in common than their fictional settings. In the Litchfields’ “Down at Brook Farm” (1901), “Uncle Zach” enters
to the rube version ("Turkey in the Straw") of the minstrel tune, "Old Zip Coon." When "Sal Perkins," the "Reube girl" of Frank Leary's "The Belle of Jay Town" (1899), introduces herself to "Irving Booth," the famous tragedian summering in her rural town, she says she is "Si Perkins's third oldest gal." It is a reference to one of the several famous standard rube characters. (The oft-used "Si Perkins" character was later committed to copyright in William Henry Coyle's 1910 "rural comedy in one act," "Si Perkins, The Waiter".) She is "third cousin on Aunt Maria's side to Hezekiah Tompkins," a variation on the "Hezekiah Hopkins" character of the rube stage, perhaps most popular in Len Spencer's 1911 Edison cylinder recording, "Hezekiah Hopkins Comes to Town." She further claims distant relation to "Deacon Skinner" and "Reuben Henderson," variations on names that appear in a number of rube acts. The fellow villagers that rube performers described often included a "Deacon Skinner" character type. Cal Stewart's fictional "Punkin Centre," Massachusetts, included a "Ruben 'Rube' Hendricks," a farmer and school board member, and a "Reuben Henry," who fled a rubber factory fire by wrapping himself in rubber and bouncing away: "He bounced four days, then they had to shoot the damned fool [to] keep him from starving to death."55

In Leary's sketch, the place name, "Jay Town," makes specific reference to the rube. The city dwellers in Litchfield's "Down at Brook Farm" call out "Look at that jay"
when Uncle Zach makes a spectacle of himself in the city. In *The Old Homestead*, the New York postman wonders "what's wrong with the old jay?" when Denman Thompson's Uncle Josh attacks him for "stealing" the mail. The rube acts of Byron Harlan and Frank Stanley took place in the fictional town of "Jayville Center."\footnote{56}

Apart from the scenic elements and the greater use of the stage space (rube comics, both singles and duos, tended to work in one), many "pastoral playlets" were indistinguishable from rube duo acts. The slim narrative of "A Hot Box," George F. Dittmar's 1895 "musical comedy," follows the travails of "four city girls" in Pennsylvania oil country. Divided into three "acts," each one taking up a single page in typescript, the sketch is a farce of romantic love, missed opportunities, and the folk wisdom of "Freckles," called "Uncle" by the other characters.\footnote{57}

Like the "city girls" in "A Hot Box," Leary's "The Belle of Jay Town" brings the urbanite (actor "Irving Booth") to the country, rather than its "Reube girl" to the city. But the narrative of Leary's sketch was probably familiar to audiences of the mixed gender rube duo act.\footnote{58} Booth, having settled "down here in the country," is "pestered to death with over-nearby neighbors, and stared at by the villagers" as though he "were some freak just escaped from a sideshow." Sal Perkins enters in a cart pulled by a goat, "falls off the cart," and tries to rush off-stage after
seeing the audience. Booth stops her, brings her forward, and introduces her to the "Ladies and Gentlemen" of the audience. Sal claims a rich rube family tradition (Si Perkins, Hezekiah Hopkins, and so forth) and explains at comic length the location of her family home: in "Yapville . . . at the head of goose creek, near Skunks Hollow, on the Ossawatomie Road . . . ."

Her description combines the comic nonsense place names of rube acts (Yapville, Skunks Hollow) and, perhaps, a reference to John Brown, who was known throughout the northeast in the 1850s as "Captain Ossawatomie Brown." An appellation he apparently relished, it alluded to the murders he committed on Ossawatomie Creek in Kansas during the "Bleeding Kansas" days of Free Soil and pro-slave conflict. It is a strange reference, if a reference at all, but "Ossawatomie" is the only word in a catalogue of place names that seems to have any connection to an actual place or person. At the very least, to contemporary ears, it makes a sly allusion to the urban fear of outland rural people as barbarians. Given the popularity of biographical treatments of Brown amid the new sectionalism of the Reconstruction era and the Gilded Age, it is entirely possible that the reference was intended.

The "Reube girl" and the urban actor trade banter about several topics: the odor of the goat that bore Sal, the phenomenon of "up to date" bicycle riding, the fencing that
conquered the west ("My second oldest brother Zeke used to have a wheel but he run into a barb [sic] wire fence and punctured his pneumatic seat . . ."). The sketch then becomes a Pygmalion-like scene in which Booth tries to give Sal a lesson in what she calls "electrocution." She concludes her recitation of a portion of "The Charge of the Light Brigade" with "the latest—a rag-time bow" and dances the "Itchy Scratchy" dance she learned on the "half-way" at the "World's Fair at Chicago." The sketch ends with a reference to the Cherry Sisters, the four Iowa sisters whose Chicago stage debut in 1893 was so dreadful that they became minor celebrities of the vaudeville stage as a freak act."

The "Sal" character in "The Belle of Jay Town" is atypical for mixed gender rural comedy teams. The relation between Neil Litchfield's "Johnny" and his wife's "city governess" is more common. The male performer often played the "rube" while the female performer played the straight (or urban) role. Indeed, the female performer who portrayed "Sal" had an opportunity that many of her contemporaries did not, to play the rube instead of the foil.

While the majority of rube acts and rube comedians were men, it was not unknown for women to perform on the same vaudeville circuits in the rube mask. Most women performing rube comedy at the turn of the century were partners in comedy duos, usually performing fixed sketches, ranging from the "pastoral playlets" of Cressy & Dayne and the Litchfields
to the much less successful Johnston Burr and Connie Ford in their sketch, "Krum Kreek." Of a week of shows in October of 1902, manager Charles Lovenberg reported that the "show as a whole is probably the most satisfactory we have had this season, with the exception of the two early acts." Burr & Ford opened that show with "a rural sketch" that Lovenberg described as "very bad" ("I think [Burr] will be heard of some day," wrote Lovenberg, "however he will be handicapped by the woman"); they were followed by another rural sketch by Phillips & Hamilton, in "a country boy and girl, talking and singing act." Lovenberg, despite his earlier note, reported that Phillips & Hamilton closed to "a good round of applause at the finish."

Edward Blondell's "Laughing Kids" typifies the "country boy and girl, talking and singing" acts. Copyrighted in 1897, "Laughing Kids" would become the basis for a number of bantering duo acts, including the Litchfields' "Down at Brook Farm," which lifted large segments of dialogue from Blondell's earlier sketch. "Laughing Kids" begins with the "Girl" awaiting her caller, "that silly country boy," whose actions are peppered with physical rube gags, malapropism, and country spectacle. He arrives with a spittoon full of flowers and no sooner does he set it down than he has stuck one of his feet inside it (followed by "bus. of trying to get the cuspidor off his foot"). The "Boy" then takes off his hat and begins another round of physical clowning: "In
taking off hat upsets castor and in assisting girl to straighten same knocks cup and saucer off table; falls backward over chair.” The Girl flirts with the Boy:

“Where’s you pa?” he asks; “Gone up to town. Won’t be back for a long time. There’s no one here but us,” she replies. He mumbles his responses and attempts, when she looks away, to steal sugar out of a jar before them. The scene continues like this, the Girl playing straight to the Boy’s physical comedy and steering their interaction toward the domestic sphere as he is propelled by his appetites for sugar, food, and, the sketch hints, sex. Grasping for sugar, he gets his hand stuck in the jar, though only because he refuses to give up the sugar in his hand (a physical gag borrowed later by Litchfield). He asks her about her pigs; shows only physical interest in her; and responds to her invitation to lunch with “Bring in all you’ve got and I’ll eat it anyway.” The boy describes a whipping he endured in the woodshed and confuses “porter-house” with “slaughter-house” while waiting for his meal. “The Laughing Kids” ends with two scenes of food-related physical comedy. The Boy, finding a steak too tough to cut, eats the plate instead. The stage directions describe the scene: the Girl

places in front of the boy a tin plate cut out in such a manner that when he bites on it a piece comes loose making it appear that he has bitten a

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piece out of the plate; upon this plate is a piece of leather to represent beef steak.

The Girl then brings him a piece of Limburger cheese (a staple of vaudeville acts). As the Boy attempts to spear the cheese with his knife, it "is pulled with a string by an assistant in the wings," which begins a series of physical gags that end the sketch: the Boy catches the cheese, loses it again, gets his hand caught in the sugarbowl, stumbles around the stage, and finally gets his foot caught in the spittoon again. The scene is punctuated by three songs, roughly dividing the dialogue into thirds. "Laughing Kids" was a fixed text rube sketch, but was actually little more than a platform for the antics of the male character's mild barbarian-type antics.

Women typically appeared on the vaudeville stage in rube acts as the straight character, with the comedy performed by the male actor; it was the most common way women participated in rube comedy, but not the only way. Unlike the minstrel practice of "wenching," which featured white (and later black) male performers playing in blackface and in drag, the female rube character was usually enacted by female performers. In the earliest recordings of rube acts, supernumerary female character voices were often the secondary responsibility a male actor playing another role in the sketch. One may presume, however, that this was more a response to the technology than an artistic choice. The
earliest recording technology required a very small space in which the recording could take place; the size of the performance area precluded all but the most essential performers in the recording space. This also accounts for the early popularity of vocal quartets; orchestras were simply impossible to record in the early era of consumer recording. Male actors also performed women’s roles in rube comedy as part of “quick-change” acts, the appeal of which was the lead performer’s ability to play a variety of roles in a short period of time. In Chic Sale’s “Country School” act, for instance, the male comedian played up to a dozen different roles, including women and a small girl.

Certainly vaudeville managers wanted to attract the female audience member. From Tony Pastor’s earliest attempts to transform variety entertainments into a “family” attraction, women were a much sought after audience. Edward Renton’s The Vaudeville Theatre: Building Operation Management, published in 1918, devotes a page and a half, for instance, to the subject of the “Ladies’ Room,” calling for “ample mirrored surfaces,” various toiletries, “a small flask of brandy” in the possession of the restroom attendant, “a special dressing table,” “furnishings . . . feminine in tone,” and “glass-tubed, nickeled automatic venders . . . for dispensing sanitary napkins.” “A suitable retiring room for women patrons,” wrote Renton, “deserve[s] careful consideration” in the profitable operation of a vaudeville
theatre. The entry for the "Gentlemen’s Room" prescribes little more than "toilet facilities" and a place to smoke: "this room will probably not be much used."62

On occasion, women performed solo rube acts on the vaudeville stage. Dialect comic Pearl Andrews headlined for Tony Pastor during the 1896 season with an act that included an imitation of Frank Bush. Lotta Gladstone’s "clever creation of a country girl" appeared on vaudeville circuits as early as 1902.63 In 1904, Ray Cox, a "singing comedienne and storyteller" made her debut on the Keith-Albee Circuit and, at different points, shared the stage with the Crane Brothers as the Mudtown Minstrels (October, 1904, in Providence) and Dixon, Bowers & Dixon as the Three Rubes (August, 1905, in New York City). Performing a solo act lasting twelve to thirteen minutes in one, she is described by Lovenberg as a "singer of southern songs and tell[er of] some very good stories."64 Keating, in Boston, remembered her as "a clever girl, with a genuine Southern dialect."65 The manager of Detroit’s Temple Theater described Cox as a "tall rather captivating woman" who "made quite a hit with our audiences."66 Her act, composed of "ccon" songs and rural stories, was remembered as "typically southern."67

Cox remained a favorite on the vaudeville stage. By 1912, appearing as "The Girl from Dixie," she was performing an act nearly half an hour long and "in three," with significant scenic elements ("really a production," wrote one
manager). When she performed at the Fifth Avenue Theater in New York City in March of 1912, her act lasted twenty-nine minutes and included a change of costume and four songs, including "Her First Trip on an Aeroplane," a variation on the theme of out-of-control technology that characterized many rube performances. Her production was the "hit of every performance." By 1912, Cox was joined on vaudeville stages by Kate Watson, a solo "Rube Character Comedienne," who worked in one with some success in the 1910s.

In other rube acts, female performers provided a special drawing card. The Youngs and the Litchfields both featured trick violin playing, as did the later stage act of Cal Stewart, whose wife, Rossini, was a well known violinist. Sutton & Sutton, a wife and husband team who sometimes performed with a third actor, toured "The Pumpkin Girl," a rube comedy which, remembered a witness in 1911, "serves to introduce some 'comedy,' rough dancing and falls upon the part of the man and contortion work as the woman's speciality [sic]."

Female rubes were not at all as common on the vaudeville stage as female musical acts that capitalized on the divide between country and city. Dozens of female performers, black and white, found fame as singers of "coon" songs on the vaudeville stage, perhaps none more famous than Marie Dressler and Sophie Tucker. The earliest pioneers of "country" music included Roba Stanley, Samantha Bumgarner,
and the multitalented Eva Davis."

Cooper & Hoey's monologue, "A Trip to the City, or At the 'phone" (1909), performed by Constance Abbott, evinces the special challenges of the female rube. The act is in many ways typical of the classic rube-in-the-city sketch. Abbott as "Susan Hubbard" begins: "You talk about the city being full of traps and snares, every word is true. Here I've been kind enough to come and pay the city a visit" and, she continues, she has immediately been cheated by the train conductor. Unfamiliar with urban public transportation, she confuses her transfer for a receipt and a series of misadventures ensues. The bustle of the crowded streetcar forces her forward and back: "I know I paid my fare," she says, "but I swear I walked all the way." It was a common set-up for rube comedy. Cal Stewart, for instance, as "Uncle Josh," is forced to move "for'ard" and back until he "got off the gosh derned old car"; "I paid him a nickel to ride," intones the old rube in "Uncle Josh on a Streetcar," "but I guess I might as well have walked, I wuz a walkin' purty much all the time I wuz in that.""

Told that winking at the conductor is the appropriate way to make the train stop, Susan winks "at about thirty motor-men, but all they did was to wink at me and say, 'I love my trolley, but oh you kid.'" Eventually, Susan is abandoned on the curb by a trolley conductor whose advances she has rebuffed. The female rube is left alone on the
street corner, stranded as a result of her country ignorance and her position as female. Much of the rest of the monologue concerns Susan’s attempts to lodge a complaint with the city by using a public telephone. Her first attempt ends as the superintendent hangs up on her lengthy description of her origin (“Great Valley, Octaraugus County, New York; that’s fourteen miles this side of Salamancas—forty miles the other side of Buffalo . . .”). Her next attempt is a wrong number. Connected with “the home of Women’s Suffrage,” she snaps “Well, I don’t want you, I’m suffering enough now.” When she finally manages to lodge her complaint, she agrees to wait for a special car, describing herself so that they will recognize her: “Well, I’m five foot one—six and a half, smooth face and no mustache, and if my father was with me you’d know him by his corduroy pants and his plug-hat . . .”

The rest of the act, perhaps twelve minutes in performance, is a catalogue of rube stories about life in Octaraugus County, New York. Waiting for the car to pick her up, she tells stories about her Aunt Mathilda, who wears garish hand-knitted stockings (“Aunt Matilda” is Uncle Josh Whitcomb’s wife in The Old Homestead); her “peculiar” mother for whom she is to bring home a toothbrush; the thrifty town undertaker who “throws in” a little casket for a young girl while her mother haggles over funeral arrangements for her grandfather; “old Zeke Flitters,” her neighbor who, though
deaf, seems to be the best conversationalist in town; a temperance show, Ten Nights in a Tavern, which has convinced Susan’s father that “he promised [her] mother he’d swear off [drinking] every time that show came to our town”; and the antics of Susan’s father himself, a pathological liar and the town dogcatcher, for whom country justice cost an arm.

O, poor ma, she was born under an unlucky star. She never had any luck; you know the day she married dad she had to go fetch him. He tried to renig [sic] at the last minute; he was getting high toned; thought he was too good for ma, just because he was made the official dog-catcher of our town, just as if ma wasn’t good enough to associate with dogs. I’ll never forget the day dad was bit on the arm by a mad dog. Why for three days they held court and couldn’t decide whether to shoot dad or the dog, but dad finally won out and they killed the dog and cut off dad’s arm. Shortly after father got the position in our church to take up collections as he was the only one-armed man in town.

When a census worker arrived at her door one day (“have you lived here all your life?” “I told him ’Not yet.’”), she tells him that he can find her father in the “pig-pen”: “I said you can pick him out easy enough; he’s got his hat on.”

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The act ends with a song, like the Litchfields' "Never Had Such a Time in My Life," in which Abbott's Susan describes the curiosities of a dime museum, sees Salome in the cinema (the rhyme scheme of the later reference to Salome indicates that she pronounces the word "Sa-lom," with a short "a" and a long "o"), takes a ride in an automobile to "Coney Isle" where "folks down there are an awful cheat," and concludes with the most overt reference to sexuality in the sketch:

There's another thing I'd let you hear
But I'm afraid it'll get to daddy's ear
I'll tell it to ma when I get home
It's all about that gal Salome
But I hear the Bell
Here comes my car
So I guess I better say ta-ta.

Constance Abbott's female rube in the city is beset with the consequences of her country sexual innocence. Though male-centered rube sketches make occasional references to the sexual mores of the city (the first lines of the Litchfields' "Down at Brook Farm," contain Melissa's worry that her "pa" has "got kidnapped by some of them houtchee-ma-couchee girls"), the narrative is very rarely focused on even the social interactions of women and men, to say nothing of sexual interactions. (Rube acts that promised sexuality were not unknown, however. By 1912, Rawson & Claire, once
described as "a very attractive boy Rube character and a
girl, who looks rather well-developed for her age," were
performing a full-stage duo act that combined singing and
suggestive dialogue."

Female writers, too, were not unknown in rube
performance shortly after the turn of the century. "Hezekiah
Hopkins Comes to Town," made famous by Len Spencer, was
written by Elizabeth Boone. It is a sketch in the rube-in-
the-city genre, in which the rube's entrance is preceded,
atypically, by the entrances of the urban characters who have
come to meet him at the station: Stephen, Hezekiah's son-in-
law, and James, Stephen's black servant. Hezekiah, "justice
of the peace and blacksmith from Spruce Corners," believes
that James and Stephen are urban "bunkwhores" (bunco artists)
who are attempting to swindle him out of his luggage. "I'm
on to you city sharp," says the old rube,

I ain't yer Pop and I ain't sayin' hello to no
bunkwhores. I've bought all the gold bricks and
lightnin' rods and . . . cow-milkers I'm a-goin'-to-
buy. I'm a slick old cuss, by gosh.

Stephen persists, but Hezekiah is waiting for his daughter,
"Clarie," and will not be fooled (this time, we are to
believe): "Don't try to sell me no patent roach catchers or
flytraps. They're all fakes. Every one of them. Can't fool
me." "How do you know they're fake?" asks Stephen. "Why,"
replies the rube, "ain't I bought every one that's been put
on the market since '72. I'm too slick for you." Indeed, Hezekiah is a rube whom the city has taken advantage of many times before. It is, it turns out, his son-in-law's spectacles that have confused Hezekiah Hopkins and eventually the old rube goes with the two men in Stephen's automobile (a device in which he is delighted to ride: "Hoh ho, how this beats ridin' behind any trotter I ever rode after," though its speed prevents him from seeing the sights). The sketch is written from an urban perspective: it begins with Stephen and James whom the audience knows are, indeed, not attempting to trick the old man and ends with Stephen making the last joke ("Say, that's the original site of the first fireproof building in New York." "Fireproof building? Why, what was that?" "The reservoir!!!"). It also implicitly recognizes the now well-known structure of the rube-in-the-city plot and slyly uses that for comic effect. Hezekiah has seen it all before; the audience laughs at the catalogue of gambits that have ensnared the vaudeville stage's rube for the preceding two decades. The sketch then culled its comedy from Hezekiah Hopkins' stubborn refusal to be swindled, when, in fact, no one is trying to fool him. It is the ultimate rube indignity, outsmarted by his own sense of self-preservation. The sketch is quite clever and, indeed, innovative. But the roles are otherwise traditional to rube sketch comedy (wealthy male white urbanite, older white rube country figure, younger black male servant) and the routine bears
little in common with the female rubes of Constance Abbott and Kate Watson.

Blanche Dayne was perhaps the most famous actress of the rube tradition, though, as in many mixed gender rube acts, she was known primarily as a capable counterpart to her husband, writer and actor Will M. Cressy. The preponderance of female performance in the genre came with the comedy duos, oftentimes husband and wife teams like Cressy & Dayne, who performed in the fixed comic sketches that Howells called "pastoral playlets." The team of Will Cressy and Blanche Dayne set the standard for these acts at the turn of the century.

"I had imagined [Will M. Cressy] to be a venerable, white-haired old gentleman, in other words, a 'Squire Tappan'" wrote "the Matinee Girl" on meeting the comedian for an interview in the 10 August 1901 Providence News ("Squire Tappan" was Cressy's character in several popular sketches). Cressy (1863-1930) was, in fact, thirty six years old when he sat for the interview. "So much for life-like characterizations," she concluded." Though he clearly relished telling "the Matinee Girl" the story of being, like his mentor, Denman Thompson, a New Hampshire farmer's son ("But for lucky, or unlucky, who shall say, turn of Fortune's wheel, I myself would now be one of them") whom "the hired man wanted to drown" at birth, and having been thrown out of five different schools before an "accident" made him an
actor, Cressy was, in fact, the son of a prosperous New Hampshire dry goods and agricultural supply merchant and a graduate of the Exeter Academy.

"The Matinee Girl" noted Cressy's "sincerity, the predominating note in the man and the actor" whose stories "are told with a convincing earnestness that makes one realize that they, like his playlets and characters, are taken from life." Cressy was perhaps the first in a long line of rube comics who promoted this assumption in the public. The public statements and publicity materials of Cressy & Dayne emphasized that the people the rube comics embodied and the stories they told were "taken from life." Indeed, this became, in the decades after, the first assumption about the rube comic. The highest compliment bestowed by journalists, theatre managers, and other performers on rube comedians was that a rube comic's act was "taken from life." And still, "with a twinkle" in his eye, the story Cressy tells about his life is self-consciously fictional:

... up to October 29th, 1865, my parents had looked forward to a life of peace and happiness, but on that day a terrible misfortune came to them, a misfortune that grew as the years rolled on. For on that fateful day, I joined the family at Bradford, N.H. The day was dark and rainy--even the heavens wept. The hired man wanted to drown
me, but grandmother said to wait, you couldn’t tell what it might develop into. She lived to regret her decision, however.

At the end of his story, he concludes with

There, I’ve told you “the story of my life.” I began with the usual “T’was on a dark and stormy night,” so I suppose I ought to end with “And they lived happily ever after,” but who knows? “Life is such a lottery.”

Even the interviewer recognizes the conflation of the rube figure with the real life of her subject (the “twinkle” in his eye, the “yarn” that is his autobiography). Cressy’s “sincerity” becomes little more than a performance for the interviewer, “sincerity” being the cardinal virtue for the rural characters like “Squire Tappan” who Cressy made famous.

Even so, Cressy provided the 1901 Providence News reader with pertinent information: he got his start with an amateur minstrel company in 1889, formed with his brother a somewhat less than successful blackface comedy act that got its first job by advertising in the New York Clipper, and, without his brother, was hired by Denman Thompson to play “Cy Prime” in The Old Homestead after being spotted performing blackface comedy at the “World’s Fair.”

By 1900, Cressy was performing in a series of his own rural comedies on the vaudeville stage with Dayne. The duo became famous for Cressy’s sketches “A Village Lawyer,” “Bill
Biffin's Baby" (the sequel to "A Village Lawyer"), "The New Depot" (sometimes called "The New Station" and itself a sequel to "Bill Biffin's Baby"), "Grasping and Opportunity," "The Key of C" (the sequel to "Grasping and Opportunity"), "Town Hall Tonight," "Clicks and Ticks," and "The Spring of Youth." By 1902, Cressy had thirty eight sketches that had played on major vaudeville stages. (Later in his career, Cressy would also go on tour as a single, describing "his experiences while entertaining soldiers in France" during the First World War. The act "held the audience closely interested and also made them laugh," closing "to a tremendous hand."5)

Cressy & Dayne's act combined the idealized country life, in the Empsonian pastoral mode, with the repartee of a rube act, omitting any trace of the darker version of the rube that Cressy had once played in The Old Homestead. The socioeconomic class of Cressy's "Squire Tappan" character in "A Village Lawyer" and "Bill Biffin's Baby" separated the character from the rube characters of most rube acts and rural comedies. Cressy's characters were usually middle class, rural townspeople; the sort of character who played straight to later famous rubes like "Si Perkins" and "Uncle Josh Weathersby," the sort of character who played whiteface to the blackface character in the mixed acts of the previous generation. Cressy & Dayne performed their "playlets" on the whole stage, with elaborate production elements (a special
set in four, its beauty often remarked on by managers and journalists). The performances usually ran between twenty and thirty minutes. They performed in dialect and Cressy was described as an "impersonator of Yankee character." H.A. Daniels, reporting on the 1903 "pronounced hit" of "A Village Lawyer" in Philadelphia, suggested that "Cressy is the only one who has been able to do the artistic rural work."8

Theatre managers often credited Cressy & Dayne not only with commercial success but critical achievement; they are often described as "artistic." Hodgdon called a production of "Bill Riffin's Baby" "the artistic hit of the bill."9 Clara M. Blaney, in Providence, reported that Charles Lovenberg, the theatre manager, had requested that Cressy & Dayne play "A Village Lawyer" instead of "Mr. Cressy's latest Idyll of New England Life, "The New Depot" and that Lovenberg's confidence in Mr. Cressy's ability was not misplaced . . . shown by the big hit that this artist made. The new sketch is full of bright lines and aroused a great deal of laughter and the artistic bit of pathos found in Mr. Cressy's acts . . . .90 The Providence News described "A Village Lawyer" as "a beautiful story that is as telling as a sermon, and interspersed with the compelling pathos of the story are flashes of wit which mingle laughter and tears."91 These
descriptions of the sketches of Cressy & Dayne echo the tone of "the Matinee Girl"'s portrait of Cressy's work as "taken from life." Blaney's description characterizes the work as blending wit, laughing comedy, and pathos. (This remained a tactic in rural comedy in acts like Harlan Knight & Company's "The Chaik Line," called "a mixture of comedy and pathos" by Larsen.)

Performing this blend of the idealized pastoral, middle class respectability, and rube comedy, Cressy & Dayne became huge favorites on the vaudeville stage just after the turn of the century. Keating, after a week of performances of "Bill Biffin's Baby" in Boston in 1902, called Cressy "by all odds the cleverest man in this line in the varieties, both as an author and an actor." "Criticism," the experienced theatre manager concluded "is practically out of the question." Daniels suggested that Cressy had no "rival, or peer in his line." The Providence News stated, unequivocally, in a 15 March 1904 article, that "Mr. Cressy is without exception the best rural character actor before the public today, and his quaint humor and quiet philosophy has given him a place in the esteem of theatregoers equal to that held by Denman Thompson." On their 1904 return to Boston, then performing "The Key of C," Keating reported:

There is no getting away from the popularity of this couple, for the applause that greeted Mr. Cressy when he made his entry upon the stage was
too general to be ignored. Almost every sentence of the dialogue was provocative of laughter, and they had triple curtain call at the finish.\textsuperscript{86}

Keating did not blindly praise Cressy & Dayne. He was unimpressed with their performances of "The New Depot," in October, 1903. "It seems to me," writes the Boston manager, "Cressy is writing himself out in one direction." "The New Depot" was the third sketch in which Cressy played the middle class "rube" figure, "Squire Tappan." Keating noted that the playlet "sags a little" and that Dayne labored to keep up with her husband's "clever acting." He conceded, however, in a report of performances a week later, that the piece "was laughed at and applauded all through."\textsuperscript{87}

The sketches of Cressy & Dayne followed the same pattern as the Litchfields, the Youngs, and other mixed gender rube duos: Cressy played the rube comic figure to Dayne's straight work. The Providence Telegram of 4 October 1902 provides a description of "Bill Biffin's Baby":

The interesting theme is woven around the receipt of a letter by Squire Tappan from a friend in Australia, Bill Biffin. Many years before Squire Tappan loaned Bill money. Now Bill is dying, and to repay the squire's (sic) kindness he writes that he will send his only treasure, his little baby, Pauline. When Bill's baby arrives she proves to be a young lady of eighteen. The embarrassment that
follows brings out much humor, with which is combined, with consummate skill of the true artist, much delightful pathos."

Theatre manager F.J. O'Connor offered a description of Cressy & Dayne's "rural comedy sketch, 'Town Hall Tonight'" in his report on their September 1905 shows: "a leading lady of a company coming to a village town hall and rehearsing before Cressy, who is janitor and jack-of-all-trades of the house." The structure that O'Connor suggested for "Town Hall Tonight" may be an example of what David Carlyon calls "the rube story": "the tale of a rustic who, mistaking stage for reality, argues with the hero or tries to save the heroine." In a recent article, "'blow your nose with your fingers': The Rube Story as Crowd Control," Carlyon posits that the story in theatrical marginalia and popular history is largely fictional and was propagated in order to control the audience. Theatre stories that tell of audience members who are confused about the reality or unreality of a stage presentation do indeed appear regularly in American theatre history. For example, the story from the colonial period of the presentation of Othello before Cherokee royalty who attempt to stop Othello from killing Desdemona is one such popular tale. Carlyon cites a similar story about working class citizens of New Orleans in the audience of an 1843 production of Othello. Though "Town Hall Tonight" may suggest this phenomenon, this kind of "rube" story is not a
means of crowd control. Rather, it is another way of casting the rube into unfamiliar, urban situations, little different than Uncle Josh Whitcomb’s mistaking a mailman for a mail thief or the confrontation between Uncle Zach Ryefield and the run-away elevator in Litchfield’s “Down on Brook Farm.” Cal Stewart’s Uncle Josh, when the curtain rises in “Uncle Josh at the Opera,” is surprised by “a lot of folks having a regular family quarrel” on stage that he “knowed . . . wasn’t any of [his] business.”92 (The publication of “Uncle Josh at the Opera” is accompanied by an illustration of Josh, his hat folded in his back pocket, rising in a theatre and waving his umbrella as the theater-goers around him point and laugh. On the distant stage appear one actor stabbing another in a pastoral setting.) In “Uncle Josh in a Museum,” Cal Stewart’s character tells a similar story of making himself “a laffin’ stock of every one in that” not five minutes after entering the museum’s theatre. Josh interrupts the action, in which a pocket-picking is taking place, only to find out that the event he has witnessed is part of the play.93 These moments are the equivalent of the same character’s first encounter with a bus, department store, or an urban mailbox. Cressy & Dayne’s “Town Hall Tonight” was an expression of the same comic formulation, moved to the country. Touring theatre productions did indeed venture into the country; busses, departments stores, and urban mail routes did not.
Cressy & Dayne's 1901 "The Spring of Youth" is their most fantastical sketch, but conforms to the basic relation between the two actors in the work that made them famous. Cressy is the older, codgerly yeoman rube, while Dayne, playing a much younger woman, does the work of the scene, playing straight to Cressy's comic figure. Dayne is "Nellie," the daughter of the proprietor of the Springs Hotel and the magical youth-reclaiming waters of the "Ponce de Leon Springs of Youth" in Arcadia, New York. Cressy is Timothy Mizzle, Sr., an elderly man recently arrived (sealed in a box) for the spring's healing properties. Their interactions are quick, the comedy coming from the back and forth repartee that characterizes Cressy's writing:

Nellie: Good morning.

Mr. Mizzle: Good nothing. Where am I?

Nellie: Why, you're here.

Mr. Mizzle: Is that so? I thought I was over there. I want to stand up.

Nellie: Well stand up.

Mr. Mizzle: I can't. I'm ausified [sic].

Nellie: You're what?

Mr. Mizzle: I'm ausified, petrified, I'm stiff. I can't stir. I'm a hard case.

Cressy's character imbibes more and more of the springs magic water, intentionally at first. A single drop cues Mr. Mizzle's transformation into a muscle man like Eugene Sandow:
property man in entrance starts bicycle pump which has a long hose connected to pump and to right leg of [Cressy], running down under ground cloth which swells the rubber sleeves in [his] arms to make him appear as a very powerful man.

A quick-change switches a glass of ice water with a glass of the “water of love,” and Mr. Mizzle “starts to make violent love to [Nellie]. Business of both . . . flirting and making violent love to each other, in a sitting and standing position.” (Cressy & Dayne were a middle class, mainstream theatre vaudeville entertainment; while the stage directions here use an antiquated connotation of the phrase “making love,” one that does not imply sexual intercourse, the scene still carries with it a greater attention to sexual interactions between men and women than had its predecessors.) Mizzle imbibes more and more of the magical waters of the spring. Finally, Dayne’s character having announced to the audience that “every drop of this water makes a man a year younger instantly,” Cressy’s Mr. Mizzle drinks a glass, and disappears, replaced by a live monkey, perhaps the first comic bit on the subject of human evolution (coming two decades before the 1925 Dayton, Tennessee trial of John Scopes that galvanized the country).

The sketch begins with Dayne’s “Nellie” left alone to run her father’s business in rural New York, a scene that follows the pattern of a number of rural comedies. Cressy’s
"Mr. Mizzle" is in the tradition of the white-haired outland codger that Cressy popularized as Squire Tappan and others. While "A Village Lawyer," "Bill Biffin's Baby," and "Town Hall Tonight" were played to huge success on vaudeville stages (Daniels, in Philadelphia, after a 1904 production of "old sketch, 'Grasping and Opportunity,'" assured his superiors that "this house would welcome [Cressy] two weeks at a time, three times a year"), "The Spring of Youth," which strayed from the rube comedy formula, was not a success.

Performance of the rube figure in the 1890s comprised the violent knockabout of Sherman & Morrissey and the middle class rural sophistication of Cressy & Dayne’s pastoral plays. Audiences of the period witnessed the rise of the rube from a curiosity derived from minstrel performances (e.g. Frank Bell, Neil Litchfield’s Uncle Zach) and a travesty of the minstrel show (e.g. the Crane Brothers’ "Mudtown Minstrels") to a wide variety of rural narratives and types. The tensions of urbanization typified rube stories as the conditions of the urban audience changed. Interactions with technology and mechanized transportation became standards of rube comedy. By the turn of the century, the programs of vaudeville theatres were rarely without a rube sketch and performers like Frank Bush and Will Cressy became vaudeville stars.
ENDNOTES

1 Gilbert, 175.
2 Ibid., 172.
3 Ibid., 172.
4 Ibid., 160. Gilbert's chronicle is a popular history; there is no citation or bibliography so it is unclear from where this quotation comes.
5 Tony Pastor Show Journal, May 1902, TPHRC.
8 The Providence News of September 20, 1901 reports on a bill at Keith's Theatre featuring blackface duo McIntyre & Heath, Irish comedians Callahan & Mack, Dutch comedian Pete Becker, and the Hawthorne Sisters:

   The Hawthorne Sisters are scoring very strongly at Keith's. After singing a delightful 'coon belad [sic] the front drop is lifted, disclosing to view a huge blue willow pattern plate, with the sisters in Japanese costumes artistically grouped before it. The song and dance, 'The Willow Pattern Plate,' is one of the daintiest bits of vaudeville imaginable, and the clever girls are obliged to appear and bow their acknowledgments of the appreciative plaudits many times over.

   The act by the Hawthornes combines the other of the "coon" ballad with the song and costume of Asian figures on the vaudeville stage.
9 Tony Pastor Show Journal, February 1902, TPHRC.
10 The Times (Pawtucket, RI), 1-5-04 and The Providence News, 1-5-04.
24 M.J. Konking, report of week of 17 August 1903, Boston. Report Books collection, KAI.

25 J. Keating, report of presumably 11 January 1904 (there is no date on the report but it is included with reports from other theatres of that second week in January), Boston. Report Books collection, KAI.


28 Gilbert, 81.

29 Ibid., 70-1.

31 Anonymous, report of the week of 1 February 1904, New York. Report books collection, KAI. The report goes on to note that he had "several bright bits in his work, and, at the salary which I am paying him and from the fact that he works in one, I consider it a good act."

32 Anonymous, report of week of 8 February 1904, Keith's New Theatre, Philadelphia, KAI.


35 Gilbert, 288.

36 Kpt. in Gilbert, 289.


36 Bush's inability to go over in certain urban areas reveals the diversity of the American vaudeville audience at the beginning of the twentieth century. Charles Lovenberg, the vaudevillian playwright and manager of Keith's Theatre in Providence, recorded that Bush had come to Providence in January of 1905 "with a lot of new material again" and was "a big hit" with Rhode Island audiences (Lovenberg, report of week of 2 January 1905, Keith's Theatre, Providence. Report Books collection, KAI). But, only a week later, J. Keating, in Boston, showed little of the same confidence in Bush:

I purposely gave this man a comparatively easy place in the bill, as he has not gone tremendously strong on the occasion of his last two engagements. They laughed heartily at some of his stories and some of them fell flat, and at the finish he went off with practically no applause whatever.

Keating placed Bush midway in the program, though not in the headlining spot that preceded the intermission, between Emmett Devoe's full-stage, half-hour short play "The Saintly Mr. Billings" and Burke, LaRue & the Inky Boys, a "comedy singing and dancing specialty" (J. Keating, report of week of 9 January 1905, Keith's Theatre, Boston; report books collection, KAI). And, again, just another week later, H.A. Daniels, in Philadelphia, noted that Bush "kept them laughing continuously" and was "very good." Hodgdon, in New York, later in the year, wrote that "everything" in Bush's act "went with a howl" (H.A. Daniels, report of week of 16 January 1905, Philadelphia; S.K. Hodgdon, report of week of 31 July 1905; report books collection, KAI). In 1905, while Bush's mixture of blackface and whiteface comedy was the hit of the show in Philadelphia, New York, and Providence, he was a consistent failure with Boston audiences.

37 Tony Pastor Show Journal, February 1902, TPHRC.

38 Neil Litchfield, "Down at Brook Farm." Unpublished, 1900, LC.

39 Tim Gracyk with Frank Hoffman, Popular American Recording Pioneers, 1895-1925 (New York: The Hawthorn Press, 2000), 144. Golden's "biggest success" was "Turkey in the Straw." The song, writes Gracyk, is associated with Golden (1858-1926); more than any other recording pioneer. The Columbia cylinder catalog of 1898 describes Golden's "negro delineations" as "always interesting--inimitable, and sidesplitting" (144). Golden's success as a "negro delineator" and singer of "coon songs" led to his subsequent successes as a blackface comic, "working with partners in the exchange of minstrel-derived, or blackface, comic dialogue" (145). Golden himself would go on to record at least one "Uncle Josh" zune monologue, "Uncle Josh's Birthday," for Emerson in 1922. See Appendix C, "Turkey in the Straw."

40 Ibid., 66.

41 Ibid., 79. "As late as 1912," writes Gracyk, "some in the industry still spoke of ragtime and 'coon songs as the same."

The governess's language is well-suited to the students of Franz Boas, whose work on the "primitive" was just beginning to influence American culture. Before the Civil War, American biological research was particularly invested in the "scientific" justification of slavery. After the Civil War, popular racism kept in scholarly vogue the study of race as a determinant of superiority or inferiority. By the 1880s, cultural geographer Franz Boas had brought the new field of anthropology to the United States. A prominent role in the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago led to positions with Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History, the American Museum of Natural History, and Columbia University. Boas's ideas about the scientific study of human communities brought to American intellectual culture a new fascination with the "primitive."

Tony Pastor Show Journal, May 1902, TEHRC.


Anonymous, report of week of 10 June 1919, Bijou Theatre, Woonsocket, RI. Report books collection, KAI.


J.F. Clancy, report of week of 11 December 1911, Trent Theatre. Report books collection, KAI.

H.A. Daniels' report of the week of 7 May 1906, in Cleveland, for instance, noted that Billy Van "The Minstrel Man" "worked white-face today, so as not to conflict with Tenney" of Waterbury Bros. & Tenney. John P. Harris, describing Van's act the week before at the Grand Opera House in Pittsburgh, called it a "blackface monologue" (Daniels, report of week of 7 May 1906, Cleveland; John P. Harris, report of week of 30 April 1906, Grand Opera House, Pittsburgh. Report books collection, KAI).


John J. Keirans, report of week of 15 September 1902, Philadelphia. Report books collection, KAI.

The Pawtucket Times, 18 September 1905.


Ibid., 315-6.
See Appendix A for the full text of both sketches. Transcribed by the author from cylinder recordings.

Howells, "On Vaudeville," rpt. in Stein, 70 and 73.

"Down on the Farm" did not play with unilateral success: F.J. O'Connor called them "pretty poor, even for an opener," registering "not a hand at the close" (report of week of 18 December 1905, Boston, report books collection, KAI).

The Providence Sunday Telegram, 22 January 1905.

Frank Leary, "The Belle of Jay Town." Unpublished, 1899, LC.


Like the uniquely American word "rube," the adjective "jay" is American slang for "unsophisticated or countrified in character." Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1981) suggests "backward, unskilled," and "rustic" as synonyms. The noun form of the word denotes "an impertinent character," a "dandy," or "a person lacking experience (as in city ways) or polish; an unsophisticated, countrified, or gullible person." "Greenhorn" and "rube" are suggested synonyms. The slang use of the word comes from its primary definition, denoting a family of birds common to Europe and North America (from the Middle French "jai," probably from the Latin proper name "Galus"). Webster's Third New International Dictionary notes that birds in the "jay" family are characterized by "roving habits, pugnacious ways, and harsh voices, and are often destructive" (1212).

George F. Dittmar, "A Hot Box." Unpublished, 1895, LC.

Leary, "The Belle of Jay Town," LC.

Slide, in The Vaudevillians, quotes Robert Grau's description of the Cherry Sisters in The Business Man in the Amusement World (1910): They were just a quartet of incompetents, and they were so indifferent to their reception by the public, that they were in demand for many years . . . There was, though, something approaching cruelty in the spectacle which these poor females presented, night after night, in exhibiting their crudities to howling, insulting audiences (Slide, 25).

Charles A. Lovenberg, report of week of 27 October 1902, Keith's Theatre, Providence. Report books collection, KAI.
“Litchfield, “Down at Brook Farm” and Edward Blondell, “The Laughing Kids.” Unpublished, 1997, LC. Litchfield’s borrowing from Blondell is not at all uncommon in the vaudeville era. This is a noteworthy case for the historian because Litchfield went to the trouble of copyrighting the sketch he plagiarized from Blondell and both plays are now in the collection of the Library of Congress. The Blondell dialogue between the Girl and the Boy that begins with a question about “quarreling”:

“My father used to say when he punished me that it hurt him just as much as it did me.”
“That’s what my father says.”
“Don’t you think it does?”
“I might but I bet it don’t hurt him in the same way” (2).

Then it becomes, in Litchfield’s “Down at Brook Farm,” a conversation between “the city governess” and young “Johnny Ryefield”:

“Do you know, Johnny, when I was a child and my father had to punish me he said that it hurt him just as bad as it did me.”
“That’s what my father says, but it don’t hurt him in the same place” (11).

The Blondell sketch includes an elaborate bit of clowning in which the Boy gets his hand caught in the sugar bowl, though, we find, it is only caught because he refuses to let go of the sugar. In Litchfield’s sketch, the same bit and dialogue are used. Blondell (2):

“Mercy! I believe he has a spasm. Shall I get a doctor?”
“No, get a corkscrew.”
“What’s the matter? . . . Have you any sugar in your hand?”
“Yes.”
“Well, let go of the sugar.”

Litchfield (12-13):

“Why, what is the matter with him! He is having a fit. Johnny, what can I do? Shall I go for the doctor?”
“No; go for a corkscrew.” . . .
“Take [your hand] out of there.”
“I can’t.”
“Why can’t you?”
“Cause I’ve got some sugar in it.”
“Straighten your hand out like this.”
“Then I’ll drop the sugar.”

(A testament to the lasting appeal of American vaudeville comedy, this comedy bit was mined by the producers of the FOX television animated sitcom “The Simpsons” in the early 1990s in an episode in which the fire department is called in to free the oafish father, “Homer Simpson,” from the vending machines in which both of his hands are caught, though, we find, only because he refuses to let go of the soda and chocolate bar that he has snared. The incident appears in the episode “Marge on the Lam,” written by Bill Canterbury, directed by Mark Kirkland, and produced by David Mirkin. “Marge on the Lam” (#1F03) originally aired 5 November 1993. Homer, it should be noted, is a first generation suburbanite. Several episodes of the program return the characters to the abandoned Simpson homestead in the nearby farm country.)
Anonymous, report of week of 3 November 1902, Chicago Opera House. Report books collection, KAI.

Charles A. Lovenberg, report of week of 17 October 1904, Keith’s Theatre, Providence. Report books collection, KAI.

J. Keating, report of week of 10 October 1904, Boston. Report books collection, KAI.

Anonymous, report of week of 1 August 1904, Temple Theatre, Detroit. Report books collection, KAI.


W.W. Prosser, report of week of 8 January 1912, Columbus. Report books collection, KAI. Prosser noted that Watson “went very well throughout, scoring many laughs and plenty of applause. Very good.” The following week, at B.F. Keith’s Theatre in Boston, R.G. Larsen reported that her “Garden set” “had them laughing at both shows.” (Report of week of 19 February 1912, B.F. Keith’s Theatre, Boston.)

Jean Kernan, report of week of 27 November 1911, Hudson Theatre, Union Hill, New Jersey. Report books collection, KAI.

Gracyk, 375.

Cal Stewart, “Uncle Josh on a Streetcar,” Uncle Josh’s Punkin Centre Stories (Chicago: Thompson & Thomas, 1905), 59.


“MR. CRESSY TALKS WITH THE MATINEE GIRL ABOUT HIS CAREER,” The Providence News, 8 October 1901. See Appendix D for the full text of the article.

Cressy presumably makes reference to the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. It is an event referenced in many vaudeville sketches of the period, such as “Sal”’s having learned the “Itchy Scratchy” dance on Chicago’s “half-way” in Leary’s “The Belle of Jay Town.” Chicago was generally what was meant simply by “World’s Fair” until President McKinley’s 1901 assassination at the World’s Fair in Buffalo, but Cressy could have conceivably performed at Atlanta in 1895, Nashville in 1897, or Omaha in 1898, each of which had smaller versions of Chicago’s Midway Plaisance entertainment strip. He did not take over the role of “Cy Prime” in the theatre production of The Old Homestead in New York until 1898, though Cressy may have toured in one of the play’s earlier versions.
Anonymous, report of week of 16 June 1918, B.F. Keith’s Theatre, Philadelphia. Report books collection, KAI. Cressy was also well received in Boston doing the same “act” in October of 1918.


H.A. Daniels, report of week of 27 April 1903, Keith’s Theatre, Philadelphia. Report books collection, KAI.


Clara M. Blaney, reporting for Lovenberg, report of November 1903, Keith’s Theatre, Providence. Report books collection, KAI.

The Providence News, 15 March 1904.

R.G. Larsen, report of week of 2 October 1911, B.F. Keith’s Theatre, Boston. Report books collection, KAI.

J. Keating, report of week of 13 October 1902, Boston. Report books collection, KAI.

H.A. Daniels, report of week of 12 October 1903, Philadelphia. Report books collection, KAI.

The Providence News, 15 March 1904.

J. Keating, report of week of 7 March 1904, Boston. Report books collection, KAI.

J. Keating, reports of weeks of 19 October and 26 October 1903, Boston. Report books collection, KAI.

The Providence Telegram, 4 October 1902.


Carloyon, 1-22. Carloyon’s thesis regarding the dominant culture’s impulse toward crowd control certainly impacts the central focus of this dissertation, the social and cultural reverberations of the “rube” figure on the American stage, though Carloyon and I use the word “rube” in very different manners. I would argue that my usage, to describe the rural comic type on the vaudeville stage, accounts for more than nine out of ten uses of the word in the theatre archive.

Cal Stewart, Uncle Josh's Punktin Centre Stories (Chicago: Thompson & Thomas, 1905), 76-77.

Ibid., 31.

H.A. Daniels, report of week of 4 April 1904, Keith’s New Theatre, Philadelphia. Report books collection, KAI.

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The influence of Cressy & Dayne is apparent in the acts that populated vaudeville's stages in the following two decades. "The Skin Game," "Hensfoot Corners," and "The Rube" all featured the rube comedian Jimmie Barry. They were performed throughout the east, traveling with a special drop "in one" that lifted to reveal another interior set drop "in two." R.G. Larsen, manager of B.F. Keith's Theatre in Boston, called the "Rube sketch" by Walsh, Lynch and Co., "Huckins' Run," "a very good success" in 1912 (report of week of 15 April 1912, B.F. Keith's Theatre, Boston; report books, KAI). And the Chadwick Trio, performing in sketches like "Hank Hoover's Holiday" and "For Sale: Wiggs Farm," were successful for a decade on the Keith Albee circuit, beginning in 1905. The bill of the Hudson Theatre in Union Hill, New Jersey for the week of 27 February 1911, featured both "Don Ramsay's Harmonists in 'Kancelled'" and Mr. and Mrs. Thornton Friel in "At Economy Junction." The Friel's' act, played on a full stage with a special drop, was "a pleasing rural comedy sketch" which "landed in good shape" despite cobbling together "old gags." Played in two, "Kancelled" followed two vaudeville performers on the verge of having their performance at a small town theatre canceled because they have lost their partner. The manager has threatened to fire them because they attempted to trick him into believing that their trunk comprised a third performer. Leaving town and on "their way to depot," remembered manager John C. Peebles, "they run across a young 'rube' who turns out to be the baritone in the village choir." "Twenty Minutes at Alfalfa Junction," performed by Milton and the DeLong Sisters, followed a similar arc. Two "chorus girls" are stranded in a remote western town during a snowstorm. The two women are then entertained by the station manager, Milton's "Adam Sowerguy," who is seeking a wife while juggling his numerous rube town responsibilities: band leader and church organist, county sheriff, proprietor of the only inn in town, and one man train station operator. Sowerguy is in charge of the news, the telegraph, even the baggage (report of week of 27 February 1911, Hudson Theatre, Union Hill, NJ; report books, KAI). Winnifred DeMitt reported that Milton and the DeLong Sisters played to "good applause" at Chase's Theatre in Washington during the spring of 1911 (report of week of 24 April 1911, Chase's Theatre, Washington, D.C.; report books, KAI). Cressy & Dayne's influence might be seen in dozens of similar acts during the period.
CHAPTER 4

YEOMEN AND BARBARIANS, 1905-1925

"I'a got the tune here that beats that old holler," says Byron Harlan as the title character in "The Dixie Rube," recorded with the Edison Military Band in March of 1906, "just play this." "Why, what are you talking about?" asks the conductor, "We can't; it's all mixed up." Harlan, as "Silas Lapscales," replies,

Yes you kin. I wrote it myself. The band up at Jayville Center played it right off the first day.

Play "Yankee Doodle" all you trombone players and the rest of you play "Dixie." Now let it go.

The music plays as Silas directed, mixing the strains of the two songs. "Darn good, ain't it?" concludes the rube. The bit conflates the northern "Yankee" with the southern mountaineer, a musical analog to the enfolding that produced the rube of the early twentieth century vaudeville stage.

The perceived conditions of rurality embody both country paradigms at once. The band in Silas' native Jayville Center could play "Yankee Doodle" and "Dixie" simultaneously "right off the first day." Jayville Center, the fictional seat of

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the rube performances of Harlan (1861-1936) and his partner Frank Stanley (1868-1910), is the epitome of that relationship between northern and southern rurality.

Harlan, a Kansas-native who began his career touring in the farthest western reaches of the east coast vaudeville circuits, and Stanley, a banjoist with no background in vaudeville (he was a native of Orange, New Jersey, home of Edison’s recording studios), produced dozens of rube sketches during their partnership. They were paired, as Harlan & Stanley, for a series of Edison recordings between 1901 and 1909. Their sketches exploited the “uncle” relationship that Harlan had perfected as a “black dialect” comedian and “coon” song singer.

The use of the “uncle” relationship was a tradition that was established in rube caricature by the time Harlan & Stanley first took the stage as rube comedians. The main character of Neil Litchfield’s rube sketch, “Down at Brook Farm,” is “Uncle Zach Ryefield,” despite the fact that he is the father of the other two characters and no one’s uncle. Henry Horton & Co., a trio of rube comics, were “well known” for “Uncle Lem’s Dilemma.” The “Uncle Josh” characters of Denman Thompson and Cal Stewart (1856-1919) were perhaps the most famous of all the rubes of the vaudeville stage. Harlan & Stanley’s Jayville Center sketches feature characters like
“Uncle Dave” and “Old Uncle Jerry” who, apart from their skin color, are indistinguishable from Uncle Remus or Uncle Julius.

Earlier in Harlan’s career he had teamed with vaudevillian Arthur Collins, performing “coon” songs like “Nigger Loves His Possum” (1905) by Paul Dresser and “Bake Dat Chicken Pie” (1907) by Frank Dumont, the minstrel producer who succeeded John Carncross in Philadelphia. “Bake Dat Chicken Pie” was later recorded by “Uncle” Dave Macon. Collins & Harlan recorded a number of rube bits written by Harlan’s later partner, Frank Stanley. And Stanley himself had previously worked independently with the “coon” singer Collins, playing banjo on “I’ve Got a White Man Working for Me” and “Negro Recollections.”

Harlan & Stanley’s work mixed the traditions of minstrel burlesque with the popularity of rube sketches on the vaudeville stage and in the new recording industry. In “An Evening Call in Jayville Center,” the jowly Harlan plays “Uncle Dave,” apparently no relation to the the slender Stanley’s character, whom Uncle Dave calls “Squire,” identifying him as a landowner in the mold of Will Cressy’s “Squire Tappan.” “An Evening Call” has Uncle Dave and Stanley’s character (unnamed in this sketch, though the “Jayville” sketches are linked by common characters) reflecting on fishing (“But most all the folks go feeshin,’” says Uncle Dave. “Fishin’ must be con-tagious up thar.”

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"Gosh, yes. Contagious, but not ketchin.'"), and the death of another "uncle" character ("Uncle Dudley"). They sing "Old Joe," presumably the popular song "Old Black Joe," while Stanley's character's wife, "Cynthie," accompanies them on the piano. The dialect of Harlan's "uncle" character is thicker and harsher than Stanley's; it is punctuated by a raspy, slow laugh. Stanley's "Squire" has the rhythm and cadence of the small town New Engander in the stereotypical regionalism, "ya can't get they-a from he-a." The squire is a yeoman farmer, prosperous enough to own a piano, a sign of middle class status and leisure. His property adjoins the town and the new turnpike, serviced by electric coaches from the city ("I kin 'member whin the turnpike was nothing but a cowpath," says Uncle Dave, "and now they've got ee-lec-tric cars runnin' on it."). The Jayville Center of Harlan & Stanley's sketches reflects the late nineteenth century practice of developers and rail lines colonizing rural spaces in order to create the phenomenon of suburbs beyond the boundaries of Boston, Chicago, and later, the rest of America's cities. (On a small scale, the suburbs of Boston and Chicago grew from the land speculation of local rail lines. On a grand scale, the west was colonized in part by federal cessions of land to the railroads.)

The relationship between the old rube and the squire character is characterized both by their similarities (the young squire greets Uncle Dave warmly; they sing together an
old song from their common cultural memory) and their geographical differences (they meet as Uncle Dave passes by, returning on foot "up [his] way," presumably deeper into the country beyond Jayville Center’s electric rail depot; the young landowner, presumably a frequent visitor to the town down the road, is unsurprised by Uncle Dave’s recounting of the "great changes" there). The rural simpleton from "up" the way, where the biggest news involves the "new coat of paint on Zeb Billings’s barn" and the good "feeshin’," is "Uncle" Dave to the younger man, who aspires to middle class pleasures and is connected to the city at the other end of the rail line.

"Rube and the Country Doctor," recorded for Edison in 1909, a sketch as much about the physician’s "auto" as about medicine, makes another connection between the construction of fictionalized black characters and the rube. Harlan, as "Silas" (it is the voice of Jayville’s "Uncle Dave"), comes upon Stanley’s "Doctor" with his automobile stopped on the side of the road. "What’s the matta with your auto?" asks Silas, "Broke down?" No, is the doctor’s reply, he has merely been making a call on "Old Uncle Jerry" who has "been troubled with gnawing pains ever since he swallowed his false teeth." The two discuss the medical histories of Jayville Center, dividing the male townspeople into comic or pitiful "uncle" figures ("Old Uncle Jerry" "swallowed his false teeth"; "Uncle Peter is drinking pretty hard") and less
comic, lower middle class characters, coping with the new modernity (the wife of one Jayville Center citizen, for instance, was asphyxiated by a gas leak in their gas-equipped home). It is, of course, Harlan’s Silas who is the true rube of the sketch. He has recently returned from a sojourn in New York City, where he “see’d a fellow . . . that didn’t have no arms, was only twelve years old, and played [the piano] with his feet.” While there, he bought a “$600” diamond ring for “Mandy,” perhaps the most common name for rube wives and also the name of the black female character Harlan played during his career as cross-dressing (and - voicing) minstrel artist. The “comic patter” of Collins & Harlan’s “coon” and “minstrel” recordings, writes Gracyk, involved “Collins often addressed as ‘Henry’ or ‘Sam’ and Harlan called ‘Mandy,’” in the role of “what Victor catalogs call ‘a darky wench.’” The character, “Mandy Slocumb,” is mentioned in “An Evening Call at Jayville Center”:

Squire: Hey, I see Mandy Slocumb has saved her husband from a drunkard’s grave.
Uncle Dave: You don’t tell me.
Squire: Yah, she did.
Uncle Dave: How’d she do it?
Squire: She had him cremated.

Harlan’s Silas character appears again in “The First Rehearsal for the Huskin’ Bee,” recorded for Edison in 1904. Another of the “Jayville Center” sketches, “The First
Rehearsal for the Huskin' Bee" eliminates the normative "Squire" or "Doctor" figure and concentrates wholly on the rubes, "Si" and "Zeb." It is in this sketch that Harlan's "Si" is identified as "Si Perkins," the old standard of the rube stage ("Lucy, I'm expecting Si Perkins here tonight and I want to look right smart") and whose "Mandy" is intimidated to be his wife ("Well, do you reckon he'll bring Mandy with him?"). Si and Zeb greet one another, practice their songs for the "Huskin' Bee" ("Wait for the Wagon" and others), and tease one another about their relative lack of success in subsistence agriculture:

Zeb: Hey Si, have you got your taters thrashed and your pun'kins tossed?
Si: Well, Zeb, you're quite a joker.
Zeb: Well, Si, how did your taters turn out?
Si: By gosh, didn't turn out't'all. Dug'm out!
Zeb: Well, your corn looks pretty yelller.
Si: By gosh, I planted the yelller kind! I gotcha again.6

In "Two Rubes and the Tramp Fiddler," recorded for Edison in 1905, Harlan & Stanley play "Hiram" and "Ezekiel," two fixtures in Jayville Center, and a mysterious wandering fiddle player (voiced by Stanley in a dialect with long, nasal vowels and fewer elisions than his Hiram).7 Stanley's Hiram has the measured New England brogue of the "Squire" in
"An Evening Call" and Harlan’s Ezekiel speaks in the high-pitched cackle of "An Evening Call"’s "Uncle Dave":

Hiram: I hear your brother Bill has struck money.

Ezekiel: Yes, he has been gettin' a back pension.

Hiram: What in thunder does he git a back pension fer? I thought he run home when the first shot was fired.

Ezekiel: Yes, that’s it. He got shot in the back.

The interchange betrays a common narrative strain that carries the rube type outside of contemporary politics. When rube characters made reference to politics, it was usually to the American Civil War and the sectionalism of an earlier age. The reference here is unclear. The sketch was recorded in 1905, seven years after the August 1898 end of the Spanish-American War and a decade before the beginning of the First World War. Cal Stewart’s "Uncle Josh" makes a reference to the Spanish-American War in "A Baptizin’ at the Hickory Corners Church," confusing "Philistines" for "Phillipines" and the names of the commanders at "Santiague." The deacon scolds his Sunday school students for "readin’ too much about them war doin’s in the papers." "Now what little boy can tell me what is the first commandment?" asks the deacon. "‘Remember the main [sic]'" suggests one pupil. The Harlan & Stanley reference may indeed be to the Civil War, forty years in the past.
When the tramp approaches, playing "The Bear Went over the Mountain," he greets Ezekiel with "Hello, uncle, how's crops?" Ezekiel and Hiram, on equivalent social footing, do not use the appellation "uncle" with one another, though they respond to it freely when the tramp approaches. Si and Zeb, in "The First Rehearsal for the Huskin' Bee," also share class status, and though they behave as the "uncle" figures of "Jayville Center" they also do not use the term with one another."

In the 1920s, Byron Harlan made recordings as "Uncle Josh," in sketches that had been made famous by his contemporary, Cal Stewart. Harlan recorded "Uncle Josh Buys an Automobile," "Uncle Josh at the Circus," "Uncle Josh on the Radio," "Uncle Josh Patents a Rat Trap," "Uncle Josh Playing Golf," and "Uncle Josh on the Aeroplane." After Stewart's death in 1919, Harlan was the preeminent interpreter of the Uncle Josh sketches. Though "Josh" stories were also recorded by others (including "coon singer" Billy Golden and Harlan's old partner, Arthur Collins), it is apt that Harlan's "Dixie Rube" was the custodian of Stewart's rube comedy, a hybrid of the Stewart's southern roots and Denman Thompson's New Hampshire Yankee.

The career of Cal Stewart, a success on stage and in the new recording business, was grounded in dual roles as poor, white, and Southern, foregrounding his poor Virginia mountain heritage in popular biography, and also working class and
Northern, playing a New England "Yankee" rube comedian of the Denman Thompson school (and, indeed, Stewart had understudied Thompson in The Old Homestead) while making his permanent home in Tipton, Indiana. Rube comedian Cal Stewart begins his Uncle Josh's Punkin Centre Stories, the 1905 publication of many of his best "Uncle Josh Weathersby" monologues, with a similar rhetorical union. In "Life Sketch of the Author," Stewart writes,

The author was born in Virginia on a little patch of land, so poor we had to fertilize it to make brick. Our family, while having cast their fortunes with the South, was not a family ruined by the war; we did not have anything when the war commenced, and so we held our own."

Stewart establishes this pedigree as a poor, white Southerner in the opening of the collection of the New England rube stories that made him famous as "Uncle Josh Weathersby." A "Dixie Rube" of his own construction, Stewart portrayed his emergence from a poor Southern family, but identified simultaneously with poor, white Northerners, as in his elegy to brave Northern soldiers in the Civil War, performed on Memorial Day, 1903 in New York City:

I've jist been down at the corner, mother,
To see the boys in line,
Dressed up in their bran' new uniforms,
I tell you they looked fine.
And as they marched past whar I stood,
To the rattle of the drum,
It made me think of those other boys
Who marched in sixty-one.

The elegy is performed from the point of view of a veteran of the Union Army ("The old flag wuz proudly wavin', mother, / Jist as it did one day / When you stood thar to say good-bye, / And watched me march away.") but reconciles the speaker with the soldiers of the South. The final stanza reads:

I heered the band play Dixie,
And my old heart swelled with pride,
A-thinkin' of the boys in gray
Who marched on the other side.
And when my time it comes, mother,
The Lord's will it be done,
I hope he'll take me to the boys
Who marched in sixty-one.  

The verse combines the northern and southern types that characterized Stewart's act (just as Stewart's sometime partner, Len Spencer had done in "Hickory Bill" in which the two brothers are reunited after "the war" by the songs "Dixie" and "Old Black Joe"). Stewart's elegy exemplifies vaudeville's contribution to the post-Reconstruction literature of reconciliation that connected northern and southern whites at the expense of African Americans. It embraces a perception of the Civil War as a nonsectarian
heroic struggle and cultivates the myths of the ante bellum agrarian south (as in Winston Churchill’s *The Crisis*, the novels of Thomas E. Dixon, popular magazine fiction, and the values that would produce the conservatism of mid-century New Criticism). Plantation nostalgia, propagated by the minstrel show that gave rise to the various comedies of the marginalized on the vaudeville stage, was fueled at this time by forces that mirrored the rhetorical construction of the agro-pastoral rube character: equal parts South and North, and, in the end, white.

Cal Stewart achieved considerable fame on the vaudeville stage after the turn of the century with his portrayal of “Uncle Josh Weathersby.” Stewart’s rube “uncle” figure told stories about his native small New England town, “Pun’kin Center,” and his misadventures in New York City.” Uncle Josh is limited by language and prone to malapropism; he is suspicious of technology and unfamiliar with urban culture; and, indeed, Uncle Josh is no one’s uncle. Stewart’s character frequently refers to himself as “your uncle,” speaking in direct address to the vaudeville audience, as in the phrase, “Well by that time your uncle wuz a laffin’ right out” from “Uncle Josh on a Street Car.” The characters with whom Josh shares class status, like his old friend Ezra Hoskins, do not refer to the character as “uncle” but as “Joshua” or “Josh.”
Like the "Jayville Center" of Harlan & Stanley, Stewart's "Punkin Centre" had a stable of recurring characters including two deacons, a number of neighboring farmers, "grossery" store owner Ezra Hoskins, two wives for Uncle Josh (Samantha Ann and Aunt Nancy Smith), and at least three "Rubes" (Reuben Henry, killed in a fire; Ruben "Rube" Hendricks, a farmer and school board member; and Ruben Hoskins, son of Ezra, a college student who, when he "bro't one of them new fangled bisickle masheens hum with him" from college infected the town with "the bisickle fever"). Connected to all points east and south by the "Paw Paw Valley Railroad," Uncle Josh's "Punkin Centre" is on the cusp of becoming "right smart cityfied." Indeed, it is not just Ezra Hoskins' son's college attendance that suggests Punkin Centre's aspiration to middle class, urban status. A sketch such as "Uncle Josh Plays Golf" not only refers to the burgeoning popularity of the sport as a middle class pastime but places it in Punkin Centre rather than in New York or Boston. References to driving hogs to Concord and Manchester and to visiting Nantucket place the fictional "Punkin Centre" in central Massachusetts.

"Uncle Josh Weathersby" himself is, like Thompson's "Uncle Josh Whitcomb," a yeoman farmer and an "old codger" (Josh describes himself and his friends as "old codgers" in multiple sketches). He is a former Justice of the Peace in Punkin Centre, a member of the school board, and a
Republican. (In "Uncle Josh Weathersby Gets A Letter from Home," recorded for Edison in 1909, Josh describes an election in Punkin Centre:

Whole doggone town went Republican. Had nine majority. That's pretty good; there's only ten votes in the town. Woulda been unanimous, but Ezry Hoskins was cross-eyed and couldn't see whar to mark. And he marked in the wrong column and his vote went Democratic."

In "Uncle Josh Invites the City Folks to Visit Him," published in 1905, Stewart describes Josh's farm, on which his city friends, "if [they] hain't got nuthin' else to do," could hunt or fish for the summer. He invites his audience to come "down thar" to his farm and visit his "unyun" and "pertater" fields, perhaps during the harvest, so that they could enjoy fresh "apple-butter" from his orchard. (The direction evokes the New England patois evinced in the phrase "down east," where the non-cardinal direction "down" is non-specific and, oftentimes, denotes anywhere that is removed from the speaker. It too suggests the rural South that was part of Stewart's persona, as the fictional Punkin Centre was north of New York City.) Josh's farm also includes a sizable chicken operation; he describes the sixty hens on his farm, each of which is constantly scheming to murder the farm's roosters. In "Uncle Josh and the Lightning Rod Agent," Stewart suggests to his audience that Uncle Josh's homestead
included a house and at least six out buildings, including a working smokehouse. Stewart’s “It Is Fall” describes a pastoral ideal of landowning, prosperous rural types:

“There’s a satisfactory feeling of enough and some to spare; / For there’s still some poor and needy who for our helf do call.”

Many of the “Uncle Josh” routines are preserved on wax cylinder and phonograph recordings produced between 1899 and 1919. The vaudevillian also published three volumes of “Uncle Josh” monologues during his lifetime and another, Uncle Josh Stories, was published by Walter H. Bake in 1924. 1905’s Uncle Josh’s Punkin Centre Stories includes not only thirty eight sketches and songs, but also, under the running title “Punkin Centre Philosophy,” a series of aphorisms of the sort popular in publications marketed to farmers, like the Farmer’s Almanac (referenced in “My Old Yaller Almanac Hangin’ on the Kitchen Wall”) and promotional materials, like “Farm Maxims and Bits of Wisdom” from the Bradley’s Farmers’ Memorandum Book, produced by Bradley’s Standard Fertilizers of Cleveland, Ohio in 1903.

The son of Scots immigrants, Stewart was indeed a native Virginian, born in Charlotte Court House, a village less than thirty miles south of Appamattox, where Robert E. Lee signaled the end of the Civil War by surrendering the Army of Northern Virginia when Stewart was nine years old. Three years later, according to the vaudevillian’s “Life Sketch of the Author”
in Uncle Josh's Funkin Centre Stories, Stewart left home, working "as a slush cook on an Ohio River Packet" and then a "check clerk in a stave and heading camp in the knobs of Tennessee, Virginia and Georgia." Stewart goes on to describe his variety of rural, working class employments, both before and after his "first appearance on the stage at the National Theatre in Cincinnati, Ohio": laying railroad track, working as a "chambermaid in a livery stable," acting in Cincinnati, chopping wood, mining for coal, making cross ties ("and I walked them," wrote Stewart, evoking the image of the vaudeville tramp figure), working on a farm, teaching "district school" (where he "made love to the big girls"), running a threshing machine, working on the railroad ("have been a freight and passenger brakeman, fired and ran a locomotive; also a freight train conductor and check clerk"), traveling as a salesman, and riding shotgun for Wells-Fargo. As a performer, Stewart claimed,

[I h]ave been with a circus, minstrels, farce comedy, burlesque and dramatic productions; [I] have been with good shows, bad shows, medicine shows, and worse, and some shows where we had landlords singing in the chorus. [I h]ave played variety houses and vaudeville houses; [I] have slept in a box car one night, and a swell hotel the next . .. 25
It is an imaginative history, one that emphasizes his rural background and working class experiences. Though it serves the readership of the "Uncle Josh" stories, it is presumably only partly true. In an interview with the Portland (Maine) Daily in 1904, Stewart declared that he made his stage debut at the age of seven, playing an African American in The Hidden Hand in Baltimore. In the interview, he claimed to have left Virginia in 1872 (at the age of sixteen, rather than twelve) and begun work as an actor three years later as the understudy to B.F. McCauley as "Uncle Daniel" in The Messenger from Jarvis Section. In the 1880s, Stewart understudied Denman Thompson, as "Uncle Josh Whitcomb," in the cast of The Old Homestead with Will M. Cressy.

Though his career as an actor was probably more extensive that his "Life Sketch" portrays, Stewart did indeed devote portions of his career to recollections of his career on the railroads. For instance, in "A Reminiscence of My Railroad Days," dedicated to "Engineer John Hoolihan, Pittsburg and Lake Erie Railroad," and published in Uncle Josh's Punkin Centre Stories, Stewart recalls "days gone by, / When I wuz one of you [engineer] fellers, too, / What used to run an old machine, / And go tootin' the country through." In the verse monologue, Stewart even provides a fictional narrative of how he came to be a rural comedian and no longer a railroad engineer. "Just why," he says, "I quit the rail":

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I wuz goin' along one night, John,
At a purty lively rate,
The old machine a-doin' her best,
And me forty minutes late,
Whan all at once there came a crash,
I felt the old track yield,
And fireman, machine and I
Went into the farmer's field.
There's little more to say, John,
They laid me up for repairs,
But my fireman, poor fellow,
Hadn't time to say his prayers."

Stewart concludes "Life Sketch of the Artist" by reminding the reader that for "the past four years [I] have made the Uncle Josh stories for the talking machine." Though his career as a vaudevillian brought him to the major stages of the east, he began establishing his reputation as a marketable recording artist as early as 1899. Even during the height of his on-stage vaudeville career, Stewart was known as "The Talking Machine Story Teller," as he is described on the cover page of Uncle Josh's Punkin Centre Stories." The playbill from Keith's Theatre in Providence, Rhode Island, for the week of 21 March 1904, for instance, billed Stewart as "the 'Uncle Josh' of Phonograph Fame.'"
than the cause for, his recording career. The Times of Pawtucket, Rhode Island described his act as "the well-known Yankee story teller" giving "some of his Uncle Josh stories which have made him famous everywhere phonographs are sold." Though he admits that the "Yankee monologue comedian . . . did fairly well with" the New York audience, theatre manager S.K. Hodgdon doubted that Stewart had "the animation necessary to make a good act." "His dialogue and makeup are all right," reported Hodgdon, "and considered from a three-a-day standpoint the act itself is O.K., but I should hardly consider it much later than 2 and 8 o'clock at night." A 1905 performance had "many bright lines" and "scattered laughs" but received "little applause on finish" because, wrote another New York manager, the act did not live up to its potential: "Big possibilities for the material." Later managers' records suggest that Stewart's fame as a recording artist affected his behavior and salary in live vaudeville, where he shared the most prestigious routes and stages with Houdini and Will Rogers. H.A. Daniels noted that Stewart's "Rube monologue" was "all right." "However," the Philadelphia manager continued, "he's not half as good as he imagines." Charles Lovenberg wrote of Mr. and Mrs. Cal Stewart's 1905 act in Providence, it "went first rate this afternoon, although I hardly think it worth the salary." On stage, Stewart toured as a single as well as with his wife, Rossini, a good violinist but only a fair comedienne.
C.E. Barns, after a 1906 performance of "Uncle Josh on the Bowery," reported that the "Woman's work is poor in spite of some bright lines." Mrs. Stewart was eventually replaced by Ada Jones, best known for her rube sketches with Len Spencer. For "Uncle Josh on the Bowery," the Stewarts worked "in one" in front of a special drop that depicted Chinatown in New York. Stewart worked in "'Rube' makeup" and augmented his storytelling with songs. Despite some managers' reports that all but suggested Stewart should give up live performance, his appearances as "Uncle Josh" were usually well received. Charles Lowenberg noted Stewart's "pleasant method" that "was very well accepted by the audience." He called a March, 1904 appearance in Providence "quite good."

H.A. Daniels noted the "fair amount of applause" Stewart received in Philadelphia a week later. Stewart's performances of "The Corner Grocery Store Teller" at B.F. Keith's Theatre in Cincinnati in 1912 were remembered as producing "lots of laughs." And John P. Harris, manager of the Grand Opera House in Pittsburgh, called Stewart's act "far above the average three show act." It should be noted, though, that rube comedy was usually a crowd pleaser in Pittsburgh--Stewart, for instance, preceded that week on the bill the headlining Crane Brothers, as the "Mudtown Minstrels," who were "just as big a hit as ever," keeping "the audience going from the opening to the close of their act."
Like Will Cressy, his former castmate in *The Old Homestead*, Stewart sought to convince his audiences that his characterizations were "true to life." In the Preface to *Uncle Josh’s Punkin Centre Stories*, Stewart writes, in "Uncle Josh Weathersby you have a purely imaginary character, yet one true to life." He is "a character chuck full . . . rural simplicity." Stewart’s efforts conformed to the expectations of his audience. The performance in Philadelphia that inspired Barons to condemn Rossini Stewart’s performance, for instance, was "save[d]," according to the manager, by Stewart’s performance as the rube: "The Rube part is all right and thoroughly natural . . . with just enough pathos to win with a popular audience."*

Even as Stewart’s Uncle Josh is tricked, made a fool of, cheated, and attacked in the city, the character retains an innocent, and perhaps naive, affection for the newness of the city. "Now I’ll jist bet," begins "Uncle Josh on a Street Car," "I had more fun to the squar inch while I wuz in New York, than any old feller what ever broke out of a New England smoke house." And indeed, the travails of this rube in the city are characterized by his patience and good nature. Strangely, in fact, it is only when he is "buncode" in Punkin Centre that Uncle Josh seems to resent his being victimized by sharps from the city, as in "Uncle Josh and the Lightning Rod Agent," in which the trusting Josh is convinced by the salesman’s grim warnings ("Don’t you know that

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lightning may strike at any time . . . ?” “Don’t you know you are criminally negligent?”) and scientific demonstration (a “little masheen” administers an electric shock to Josh) to authorize him to outfit his homestead with lightning rods.” When Josh returns home, there are more than twenty rods on his property and the salesman “had the old muley cow cornered up a-tryin’ to put a lighting rod on her.” In the end, Josh pays the man for his labors, as though they had been done honestly, and ends the sketch with a bitter “Bunco code agin, by chowder!”

Until his death in 1919, Stewart recorded “Uncle Josh” monologues and sketches for Edison, Columbia, Victor, Berliner, and Emerson. Though the preponderance of his recorded material is “Uncle Josh” work, Stewart also recorded “coon” dialect sketches like “A Possum Supper at the Darktown Church,” described by the Edison Phonograph Monthly as a “descriptive coon sketch, written by Cal Stewart” that “demonstrates that his ability is not confined to writing Yankee drollery.” “The story on this Record,” continues the trade publication, “is very realistic of darkey life in the South.” “It is not the only such connection in Stewart’s career. He refers to minstrelsy in “My Old Yaller Almanac Hangin’ on the Kitchen Wall”:

And once thar wuz a minstrel troop, they showed at our Town Hall,
A jolly lot of fellers, ’bout twenty of ’em all.
Wall I went down to see ‘em, but their jokes, I knewed ‘em all.
Read ‘em in My Old Yaller Almanac,
Hangin’ on the Kitchen Wall."
(The sketch concludes with the comedian imploring his audience to “read about your city” in the almanac, making English-language literacy the point of entry into American urban life.) He also reveals the ready influence of the fictionalized representation of blackness on his rube character in “Uncle Josh at the Opera” and “Uncle Josh at Delmonico’s."

In “Uncle Josh at the Opera,” Josh describes the Punkin Centre “Opery House”—unusable during the summer months because then it “wuz full of hay”—and a production of Uncle Tom’s Cabin that had visited Punkin Centre:

thar wuz a troop cum along that wuz somethin’ about Uncle Tom’s home; they left a good many of their things behind ‘em when they went away. Ezra Hoskins he got one of the mules, and he tried to hitch it up one day; Doctor says he thinks Ezra will be around in about six weeks. I traded one of the dogs to Ruben Hendricks fer a shot gun; Rube cum over t’other day, borrowed the gun and shot the dog."

The people of Punkin Centre use and trade the properties from a stage play, transporting them from the world of
fictionalized blackness to the world of a "real" rural, presumably white community. When Josh becomes inebriated on "a bottle of cider pop" in "Uncle Josh at Delmonico's," he "got to singin' and danced Old Dan Tucker right thar in the dinin' room" before attacking the maître d'hotel ("Mr. bon-sour mon-sour") and being carted away by "a lot of constables." 9 "Old Dan Tucker" was a blackface character, dance, and song popularized by ante bellum minstrel performer Dan Emmett. In the 1840s, "Dan Tucker" and "Jim Crow," the figure popularized by minstrel performer T.D. Rice, were nearly interchangeable. They were clear signals of minstrel performance and minstrel character. 9 Drunk and "never fe[eling] so durn good in all [his] life," Uncle Josh performs a minstrel dance, turns his aggression toward the nearest "furrin [foreign]" person, and spends a night in jail.

Though Stewart's rube performance was related to theatrical fictions of rural African Americans, it, like Harrigan & Hart's "Mulligan Guard" routines and so many other "white" comic characterizations, did indeed exploit the white skin privilege of its characters. In "Yosemite Jim, or Tale of the Great White Death," Stewart, as an unnamed narrator, describes the "greaser from down Monterey" that he is charged with keeping an eye on:

The galoot that wuz punchin' the broncos fer me

Wuz a greaser from down Monterey;

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And Jim used to say, "Keep your eye on him, pard,
I don't think he's cum fer to stay;
His eyes are too shifty and yellar,
And his face is sullen and hard;
And 'tain't that so much as a feelin' I have;
Anyhow, leep your eye on him, pard." 51

And later, as the weather phenomenon he calls "the Great
White Death" descends on their Wells-Fargo coach, "the
greaser from down Monterey / Tried to sneak off with the
specie box." The speaker's friend, Yosemite Jim, saves the
day, shooting the villain, the Mexican American with "shifty
and yellar" eyes. 52 "Uncle Josh at the Chinese Laundry"
begins,

I s'pose I got tangled up the other day with the
dogonest lookin' critter I calculate I ever seen
in all my born days, and I've bin around purty
considerable. I'd seen all sorts of cooriosities
and monstrosities in cirkuses and meenagerys, but
that wuz the fust time I'd ever seen a critter with
his head and tail on the same end. . . . that was
one of them pig tailed heathen Chineez . . . 53

Uncle Josh takes the Chinese man whom he meets in the laundry
for a "critter" and "monstrosity," mistaking his queue for a
tail. The sketch is unreservedly racist. Convinced by a
bystander that the ticket he has received in exchange for his
"washing" is a lottery stub, Josh, because he "didn't want to

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get tangled up in any lottery gamblin’ bizness with that
saucer faced scamp,” sells the “chance” to the grifter who
had convinced him it was a lottery ticket. The man promptly
claims the Punkin Centre native’s clothing. Returning to the
shop, without his ticket, Uncle Josh attacks the proprietor:

Wall that critter he commenced hoppin around and a
talkin’ faster ‘n a buzz saw could turn, and all I
could make out wuz—mee song lay tang moo me oo lay
ung yong wo say mee tickee. Wall I seen jist as
plain as could be that he wuz a tryin’ to swindle
me outen my clothes, so I made a grab for him, and
in less ‘n a minnit we wuz a rollin’ round on the
floor . . .

By the time the fight is over, Josh is running down the
street with

somebody’s washin’ in one hand and about five yards
of that pig tail in tother, and Mr. Hop Soon, he
wuz standin’ thar yellin’—ung wa moo ye song ki le
yung noy song oowe pelecee, pelecee, pelecee.”

Even though it is another, presumably white, New Yorker who
has, in fact, swindled the rube, a fact that is known to the
audience, the laughing finale of the sketch has Josh
justifiably attacking the innocent laundry store owner (he
had “swindled” Josh and was a “scamp” who ran a “lotery
gamblin’ bizness”), stealing someone else’s laundry, and
ripping out the proprietor’s queue. As he describes the

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wronged immigrant businessman shouting for the police, Uncle Josh intones playfully, “I had quite a time with that heathen critter.”

Stewart’s “Uncle Josh” routines center on the differences between life in New York City (or Boston, in “Uncle Josh Weathersby’s Trip to Boston”) and life in fictional Punkin Centre, exploring the tensions of new technology and the new economy. “Uncle Josh at the Camp Meeting,” for instance, parodies corporate capitalism.

“My deeeeeeard beloved brothers and sisters,” Stewart’s “Uncle Josh” intones, lampooning the pro-capital sermon of a revival preacher (Stewart, for instance, puns “profit” and “prophet”), “we should not be too severe upon the monopolists”:

Yeah, ver-i-ly we read the scriptures closely, we observe our forefathers were all monopolists.
Yeah, ver-i-ly, Adam and Eve had a mone-o-pol-e on the Garden of Eden. Yeah, ver-i-ly, and would’ve had it unto this day, no doubt, yeah, ver-i-ly, had not Mother Eve got squeezed in the apple market, yeah, ver-i-ly. The scriptures do not teach us that Pharaoh’s daughter was in the milk business, yeah, ver-i-ly, but yet we observe, my dear beloved brothers and sisters, yeah, ver-i-ly, she took a great prophet out of the water, yeah,
ver-i-ly." Well, sir, I b'lieve that sermon busted up the camp meetin' for that day. Yeah, verily.\textsuperscript{55} The old rube is amazed to see that not only has Wall Street no actual bulls or bears, it has no livestock at all, in "Uncle Josh in Wall Street." While there, he is ushered into "some public institushun" which "near as [Josh] could make out . . . was a loonytick asylum." He describes the commodities exchange:

a room about two akers and a half squar, and thar wuz about two thousand of the crazyest men in thar I ever seen in all my life. The minnit I sot eyes on them I knowed they wuz all crazy, and I'd have to umer them if I got out of thar alive.

Josh watches "one feller" who "wuz standin' on the top of a table with a lot of papers in his hand, and a yellin' like a Comanche injin, and all the rest of them wuz tryin' to git at him." He finally gets an explanation of the scene from one of the men: "Wall, he's got five thousand bushels of wheat and we are trying to git it away from him." "Wall, jist the minnit he sed that," concludes Uncle Josh, "I knowed fer certain they wuz all crazy, cos nobody but a crazy man would ever think he had five thousand bushels of wheat in his coat and pants pockits."\textsuperscript{56} Josh's "camp exhorter" criticizes monopoly capitalists and his trip to Wall Street reduces commodity speculation to the ravings of "loonytick[s]." Stewart's Uncle Josh displays the misgivings of labor and
working class culture as corporations grew to dominate American commerce.\textsuperscript{57} Uncle Josh’s suspicion of the new economy conforms to the structure of the Empsonian pastoral in which the hero as “fool sees true.”\textsuperscript{58}

The “Uncle Josh” monologues contrast the simple market capitalism of Punkin Centre with the consumer culture of the city. “Si Pettengill’s Brooms” concerns the attempts of Si Pettengill to sell five dozen brooms to grocer Ezra Hoskins, who is so thrifty he “could hear a dollar bill rattle in a bag of feathers a mile off.” Pettengill, a farmer and school board member who appears in a number of “Uncle Josh” sketches (including one in which he sues neighbor Elijah “Lige” Willett over the matter of the ownership of a cow), is unsatisfied with Hoskins’ offer to trade for the brooms. “Brooms is sort of article of commerce, Ezra,” says Si, “and I want cash fer ‘em.”\textsuperscript{59} Hoskins, however, will only accept “half cash and the other half trade” (his store rooms are full of mass produced consumer goods, “things comin’ in from Boston and New York”) and, agreeing to this, Si takes his cash and, “if it’s all the same to you, Ezra,” he says, “I’ll take brooms.”\textsuperscript{60}

“Uncle Josh in a Department Store” follows Josh, on a quest to purchase some “muzlin’ and some caliker,” to a department store, itself a relatively new phenomenon. In the 1900 novel, Sister Carrie, novelist Theodore Dreiser (brother of “coon” songwriter Paul Dresser) posits that “the nature of
these vast retail combinations, should they ever permanently disappear, will form an interesting chapter in the commercial history of our nation." "Such a flowering out of modest trade principle," writes Dreiser, "the world had never witnessed up to that time." The department store in Chicago that Dreiser's heroine visits contained "nothing there which she could not have used--nothing which she did not want to own." The new consumer phenomenon "touched her with individual desire." For Stewart's Uncle Josh, the department store does not pique his desire, but is the site of endless confusion in which he is taunted by clerks, threatened with ejection from the store, and finally falls victim to the pre-pneumatic tube cashier system, chasing his ten dollar bill throughout the store as it traveled in "a little baskit . . . on a wire." He emerges into the New York street in the end without his "muzlin'" or "caliker," confused and bewildered.

While Dreiser's Carrie is indelibly drawn to the consumer goods that beckon to her in the Chicago department store, Stewart's Uncle Josh is swallowed by the beast of the this center of technology and commerce. On the way to the store, rushing down a New York street, Josh slips on a "bananer peelin'" and arrives at the store seeing stars. His confusion and fear are not assuaged by the opportunities of the shopping center but are exacerbated, as he is tortured by the chaos of new technology at every turn. The tensions of
the industrial age, which produced the plantation nostalgia of the popular arts that marginalized African-American characters, also generated the most prominent tension of rube performances, as the poor, rural character is menaced by the new.

"I wuz always sor of fond of ridin'" begins Stewart, in "Uncle Josh on a Fifth Ave. 'Bus." "So I guess while I wuz down in New York I rode on about everything they've got to ride on thar." Having ridden "hoss cars and hot air cars, and them sky elevated roads," Josh is surprised by what he sees lumbering up "Avenco Five":

[it was] the durndest lookin' contraption I calculate I ever seen in my life. It wuz a sort of wagon, kind of a cross between a band wagon and a hay rack, and it had a pair of stairs what commenced at the hind end and rambled around all over the wagon.

Intrigued, Josh boards the horse-drawn "Fifth Avenco 'bus" and watches the passengers come and go, taking particular interest, and glee, in watching a woman try to make exact change. The sketch ends with his own tussle with the bus driver over the five dollar bill with which Josh attempts to pay the five cent charge.

Though as fond as he is of "ridin'," when Josh encounters an automobile, his experience is entirely different. In "Uncle Josh Weathersby on an Automobile"
(performed with Steve Porter both as Henry, the car's owner, and as an Irish constable), Uncle Josh's reticent first ride in an automobile (which is called, at different points, a "gall-durned benzine buggy," a "gall-durned old kerosene wagon," and an "auto-mo-bubble-wagon") ends in a crash and an arrest at which point Josh makes a joke about needing an "ought-to-go-home" instead of an "au-to-mobile." When the car is in motion, the sketch is punctuated by Josh's yelps and whining, fearing the speed of the automobile. It is the sort of act, centered on the new technology of gasoline-powered automobiles, that was not at all uncommon after the turn of the century." The "Uncle Josh" sketch includes the urban Henry casually running over a rural Pennsylvania man in the road:

Uncle Josh: Say, Henry, I think we run over a man back thar.

Henry: Oh that's alright. Here's a courthouse. We'll stop and pay a fine.

Thus, the sketch ends, as Josh had fearfully suspected, with a traffic accident.

In "Uncle Josh Weathersby's Arrival in New York City," the rube "uncle" figure is confused by the city's public transportation:

Well, when I got off the ferryboat down here they was a lot of fellers down there with buggies and
carriages waitin’ to meet me and I commenced to think I was about the best lookin’ old feller that ever’d come to New York. Just the minute they seen me, they all commenced to holler “Handsome” “Handsome” “Handsome.” Gosh, I didn’t know I wast so good lookin’, well I said to one of ’m, “Can you haul me up to the hotel?”

And in “Uncle Josh in Society,” he is flummoxed by a “new fangled door bell.” Uncle Josh reports his being snared in a revolving door (perhaps the first reference to this favorite of country and city comedies in the twentieth century) in “Uncle Josh Weathersby Gets a Letter from Home”:

Well, I went up to the post office to see if they had any mail for me and where all the door oughtta be, they got a merry-go-round. When you want to get in the post office you gotta git in that durn thing and play circus a while. I got into it and it started a-goin’ around and I got into the post office before I git out of it I was back on the sidewalk agin and before I git out on the sidewalk I was back in the post office agin. I went around there so durn fast I could see the back of my neck goin’ in and out of the post office. Well, I got in finally ...

The tension between the premodern rube and the modern world is not limited to automobiles and revolving doors. In
1909, Stewart and Len Spencer recorded "Uncle Josh at the Dentist's." "Howdy! Be you the tooth carpenter?" asks Uncle Josh. Spencer's dentist gently corrects the rube, "dentist," and offers his services. The sketch that follows is no more complicated than a tooth-pulling with comic asides. After drilling, the dentist thinks he has "struck some foreign substance." "I think you struck a nail in my boot," quips Stewart. Uncle Josh is confused by the "laughing gas" the dentist offers; "if it's all the same to you," says Josh, "you can give me kerosene." In the end, both of them giggling from the gas, Uncle Josh admits slyly that he has "got a mighty good joke on" the dentist. "Why? What is it?" asks Spencer. "You pulled the wrong tooth." They laugh and the sketch ends.

This sketch is a rube adaptation of Dan Quinlan & Keller Mack's "The Traveling Dentist," a mixed blackface sketch. Quinlan and Mack delighted audiences on the Keith-Albee circuit with their version of the simple country type in comic conflict with the dentist from the city. For example, during the week of 26 March 1906, on the same bill as rube comedian Frank Bell, Quinlan & Mack performed the act "with irresistibly humorous effect" for the Philadelphia audience. Theatre manager C.E. Barns noted that the act was "strong enough to go anywhere on the bill," describing an act in which Mack worked "as a coon," ignorant of the science of dentistry, in the care of Quinlan as the traveling dentist."
Quinlan & Mack's "Traveling Dentist," the continuation of Monroe & Mack's original act, remained a favorite on the vaudeville stage even after the comedian Keller Mack left the act to perform with Bert Swor (the manager of Baltimore's Maryland Theatre noted that the act, with Vic Richards as the "blackface comedian," "score[d] heavily" in April, 1911"). The whiteface version played on these same stages, replacing the rural black character with the rural white figure of Uncle Josh.

Stewart's act employed new technology in transportation, communication, and medicine as a locus for his audience's anxieties about modernity. His Uncle Josh monologues critique market capitalism and the new power of corporations as another locus of those anxieties. Stewart's work, like the acts of Walter C. Kelly and "Rube" Dickinson, also focused on the institutions of justice in modern America as a source of rube comedy.

Walter C. Kelly (1973-1939), whom Joe Laurie, Jr. called "the greatest dialectician of all time," appeared solo, playing multiple variations on the rube type, in the various dialects of the small-town judge, jury, and defendants in a fictional town in western Virginia." Though a native Philadelphian, Kelly would be known as an Appalachian Virginian. Sime Silverman, in the Variety review of Kelly's first film (The Virginia Judge, Paramount 1913), wrote that "as a single-handed character storyteller, [Kelly] is without
peer." His act centered on the educated figure of a country judge who takes advantage of the broken language of good-natured, though not law-abiding rural buffoons in western Virginia. The Providence Journal described Kelly’s act as a most meritorious sketch in which he impersonates the various white and colored individuals who make their appearance at a morning session of a police court in the South. His dialect is excellent and the humor introduced into a dialogue is of an unusually high grade."

When Kelly’s solo act debuted in 1905, the popular press hailed the former member of Marie Dressler’s company as a new star. The Providence News reported on his innovative “artistic contribution”:

Walter Kelly, a newcomer, captured a generous share of the evening’s honors. Mr. Kelley is by far the best dialect comedian in vaudeville today, and he kept the audience in a state of hilarity from the minute he appeared until he left, even though they were exhausted from laughing at a number of funny things that preceded him. He has gotten away from the talk about “mother-in-laws” and “henpecked husbands” and other threadbare topics usually used by monologuists, and instead he gave a very humorous scene in a southern courthouse, which was particularly well done because of his ability
as a dialectician. His act was well constructed and was stamped with an originality which was delightfully pleasing."

Cal Stewart’s “Uncle Josh in Police Court,” published the same year, explores similar territory, as the New England rube finds himself in an urban police court full of ethnic types common to the vaudeville stage (“Norweegans, Germans, Sweeds, Hebrews, and Skandynavians, Irish, and colored folks”). The sketch describes the course of urban “jestice” before explaining a Punkin Centre “law soot” over the ownership of a cow in detail.” The course of rural justice was Kelly’s subject as well.

“Among the leading monologuists of vaudeville,” continued a subsequent 1905 Providence News description of Walter Kelly’s debut in that city, Kelly is a dialectician of exceptional ability [who] has framed his act in a manner entirely different from anything used by other monologue comedians. He gives a morning session in a Southern court room, and so excellently is this done and so full of rich humor is the novel scene, that the audience are loth to let Mr. Kelly finish. It is not only a laughing success, but a decidedly artistic contribution, and Mr. Kelley’s modest manner of not waiting for applause after each of his characters
does not prevent the audience from demonstrating its appreciation with a storm of applause.”

Kelly is lauded for moving solo comedy from the domestic, private sphere to the public sphere of the courtroom. Indeed, Kelly would remain nearly unique in that regard, structuring his act around the authority of the Virginia judge and the vulnerability of the poor, rural characters, both black and white, whom he impersonates in his “courtroom.”

Much of Walter Kelly’s appeal probably rested in the turn-of-the-century vogue for quick-change artists of various sorts, but his act was propelled by the same sorts of verbal wit as the best of the rube and ethnic double acts. Laurie includes a portion of a typical Kelly “dialogue”:

“You here again, Lem? What did you do this time,” asks the judge character. “Ah din’t do nothin’, Jedge. The railroad run over my mule and killed him and they won’t pay me. The won’t even give me back my rope,” replies Lem. “What rope?” asks the judge. “Why, Jedge, de rope ah done tied de mule on the track wif.” Laurie notes that that particular bit ended with Kelly impersonating an African American child who encourages the judge to adjourn court for the day and go fishing because “they’re bitin’ pretty good.” The judge takes the boy’s advice and Kelly exits the stage, presumably to go fishing.” John P. Harris, manager of the Grand Opera House in Pittsburgh, described Kelly’s act, after its
February 13, 1905 Pittsburgh debut, as a "monologue with Irish and coon stories." Harris does not recognize the artistic innovation with which others credited Kelly, reducing the act to its basic elements. Most theatre managers, however, shared the early enthusiasm of the Providence media, praising Kelly's "ability" and his skill "from an artistic standpoint." Charles Lovenberg noted Kelly's "new idea in monologue" and called the young comedian "exceptionally good." Keating, in describing Kelly's debut in Boston in 1905, reported that he "got the most sincere applause of the afternoon, the audience evidently appreciating his ability." L.M. Eirick, in Cleveland, wrote: "This is one of the best monologues, from an artistic standpoint, that we've ever had in this house. He's a credit to the vaudeville business." And O'Connor commemorated only his second appearance in Boston, by declaring Kelly, "certainly the best entertainer in this line in the business." Kelly's law-and-order act reinforced the stereotype of the inherent criminality of working class Appalachians, a pattern which gained currency in the theatre and film of this era.

Even a cursory examination of the performance records attests to Kelly's enduring popularity on the vaudeville stage. In 1911, Kelly was "easily the applause and laughing hit of the show" at Manhattan's Fifth Avenue Theatre, a "most effective hit" with "new stories" and "new characters" at
Chase’s Theatre in Washington, and, after getting a “big advance hand” from the audience, “caught the crowd immensely.” And though the manager of Keith’s in Boston moved Kelly from the headlining, second-to-last spot on the bill to a position at the midpoint, he “scored his usual big hit” and “finished to a big hand” the last week of September, 1918.

“My folks asked me did I think there was enough going on in New York to amuse me?” began one of the rube-in-the-city sketches of Walter S. “Rube” Dickinson. “I told ‘em,” he continued, “I wasn’t taking any chances; I’m taking my checkerboard with me.”

On the same stages as Cal Stewart and Walter Kelly, in the 1910s, Rube Dickinson toured as the “Ex-Justice of the Peace,” effectively playing Kelly’s “judge” character as the rube instead of the mediating figure of authority. Stewart had made a similar comic inversion in “My Old Yaller Almanac Hangin’ on the Kitchen Wall,” in which the comedian claimed to have learned all “them tricks that lawyers have,” which he used during his tenure as “Justice of the Peace,” from his Farmers’ Almanac. Stewart repeats this structure in the sketches surrounding Punkin Centre’s former Justice of the Peace, Jim Lawson, a one-eyed, one-legged school board member, newspaper editor, notorious drunk, and part-time hog farmer. The character is featured prominently in “Jim Lawson’s Hogs” and “Jim Lawson’s Hoss Trade.”

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Between 1911 and 1912 Dickinson made the improbable jump to the Keith Albee Orpheum circuit from the Gus Sun circuit. The least prestigious of the eastern vaudeville circuits, performers for Gus Sun, headquartered in Springfield, Ohio, performed in a wide variety of auditoriums, oftentimes small store front theatres. Dickinson’s act was highly successful (Daniels, manager of the Hippodrome in Cleveland, called him “the hit of the show” and “the best monolog[ist] in one” that the theatre had hosted “in months” after Dickinson’s performance in 1912). It inverted the relationship that Kelly employed by turning the rube form inside out.98

Dickinson’s “Ex-Justice of the Peace” “dressed in a Palm Beach suit and a clean Panama hat, with a short neat white beard and carr[ied] and umbrella.” “His monologue,” wrote Joe Laurie, Jr., “turned the tables on the [city] ‘slickers.’”99 Dickinson played on the same structure as Kelly, but without portraying the secondary characters for which Kelly became famous (and from which Kelly’s routine derived its comedy). Laurie cites a portion of Dickinson’s monologue on urban society, a bit that contrasted the rural and urban fashion: “What interested me most was the necks of the women. Why, some of the necks I saw last night reached from the ears down almost to where the mermaids become fish!”100 Dickinson’s “Ex-Justice of the Peace” combined the clever “Yankee” of an earlier stage tradition with the comic interplay of rube comedy.
Byron Harlan’s “Dixie Rube” and Cal Stewart’s “Uncle Josh” conflated American regional cultures as well as regional variations on rube caricature. In the 1910s, rube comedy most often reflected either the literal sectionalism of Harlan’s “Dixie Rube” or the figurative sectionalism of city and country that had characterized the rise of the rube in American vaudeville. The comedy of William Coyle, Murray K. Hill, and Lew Sully exemplifies the conflict between the premodern country and the swiftly modernizing city. But the popularity of the McGheeys, Frank Crumit, and Chic Sale stemmed from their acts’ specific regional associations."

Murray K. Hill, who recorded his most famous sketch, “Grandma’s Mustard Plaster,” for Edison in 1908, had an act that combined the rube sensibility with the tension of first-generation city life.  He introduces “Grandma’s Mustard Plaster” as “a little talk on goats”:

Speaking about goats, I have a little boy. Of course, he’s not a goat. He’s only a kid. But he’ll grow. But he wanted a goat. So I bought him a goat and took him home and introduced him to the family. It’s funny how I bought this goat; I bought it from a pawnbroker. He was a kind of unredeemed, hand-me-down goat. Kind of a second-handed goat, that’s what he was. I don’t know from whom the pawnbroker got the goat, but a pawnbroker can get anybody’s goat.

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The sketch begins with the collision of rural desires and urban working class life. When the goat is found to be “full of fleas,” the speaker’s son “discovered a scheme” to rid the goat of the insects: he covers the goat with bread and milk, waits for the fleas to grow fat and fall off, then “we drove away and left the fleas on the sidewalk.” The rest of the sketch concerns the collision of the speaker’s grandmother’s home remedy with urban life. The “plaster” “drew so hard it tore open my vest / And drew my lung right outta my chest.” Thereafter, the loosed “mustard plaster” wreaks havoc in the city. It “drew so hard” on an actor that it “drew his salary.” It “attacked the house” at a production of Faust. It “drew so hard” that it pulled a trolley forty miles and attacked a policeman and a “Chinaman.” Finally,

The coppers fought with might and mane
And got this plaster on a train.
And just as soon as that was done
It drew the train to Washington.

“That settled the mustard plaster,” says Hill, “it got stuck on politics.” The monologue embraces the frequent rube theme of technology that is beyond the control of its human conductor or occupant:

The motor man did loudly swear
And while he did he teared his hair.
The car had gone away too far,
He tried but couldn’t stop the car.

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Later, the plaster "drew the train" on its trip to Washington. The sketch is, however, focused on the folk construction (the mustard plaster itself) as an out of control force in the city. Hill comments on the urban police force ("it stuck on a cop / It drew so hard it woke him up") and refers to the anti-Chinese sentiments of the early twentieth century city ("It struck a Chinaman on his feet / It drew his boot off at that point / and pulled his leg at the opium joint"), making specific reference to the perceived criminality of Chinese immigrants. But the "mustard plaster" itself is the force to be feared in Hill's monologue. Following the tension between the rural and the urban that begins the monologue, the journey of the mustard plaster is perhaps another expression of the anxiety of an urban workforce competing with the "green hands" of rural unskilled labor.

William Henry Coyle's "rural comedy," "Si Perkins, The Waiter," is a dramatized version of the rube in the city single act. But, as in many rube acts, the sketch presents the inverse of the city-country relation, bringing the urban "Mandy" to the rural "Si Perkins. Mandy offers Si a chance to work for her "large restaurant in the big city" if the rube can survive an impromptu audition. "If you want a city position," she says, "here's your chance." "Si Perkins" was, by this point, already well-known on the vaudeville stage. Byron Harlan played the character in several of the "Jayville
Center” sketches. In Frank Leary’s “The Belle of Jay Town,”
Sal claims to be his daughter. And “Cy Perkins” was the pen-
name of songwriter Carrie Bruggerman Stark, known for such
rube songs as “They Gotta Quit Kickin’ My Dawg Aroun.’”
Coyle employs the figure of Si Perkins in a comedy suspicious
of managers and fearful of unskilled labor.

The sketch placates the urban nativist fear of the
“green hands” of displaced rural labor with Si’s rube
ignorance just as it reflects the deep well of ambivalence
and fear that the urban audience had for such laborers. The
first few moments typify the sketch’s verbal exchanges, as
Mandy auditions Si:

Mandy: Do you serve A-la-carte?
Si: No I don’t serve out of a cart; I serve
out of my hands.
Mandy: Oh, I see, you serve “Table D’Hote.”
Si: Yes, I think we dew; but I doan think
it’s cooked yet.
Mandy: What isn’t cooked yet?
Si: The tallow of a goat.
Mandy: I said nothing about a goat, where is
your menu?
Si: My wot?
Mandy: Your menu; your bill-of-fare.
Si: Oh, it’s in the wash.
Mandy: Do you know what a bill-of-fare is?

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Si: Yes; it’s one of them things you tuck under your chin when you’re eatin.

Mandy: Waiter, have you got “frogs legs”?

Si: No, rheumatism makes me walk this way.”

By the end, their roles reversed, Mandy takes Si’s ignorance for country wisdom. Thus, in her confusion, she answers the fears of the urban audience: she, a member of the new managerial class and clearly unfamiliar with the skills necessary for the position she supervises, hires the “green hand” incompetent. “I’ll take you to my restaurant and start you to work at twelve dollars per week and board,” she offers. In 1909, the average wage for labor in manufacturing was slightly more than nineteen cents per hour for workers working slightly less than, on average, forty hours per week, a total of less than eight dollars per week.95

“All right,” says Si, “I’ll go with you and leave the dear old farm, fer I certainly am tired of country life.”

Lew Sully’s “A Limb of the Law,” subtitled “a character ‘rube’ comedy skit,” is a dialogue that focuses on a rural policeman’s reaction to the steadily encroaching city on his little town.96 Sully, the sketch’s writer and star, had been among the generation that followed the path from blackface to rube comedy. In 1902, he was “working in blackface” on the Pastor circuit.97 But by 1911, he had made his name as one third of Rice, Sully & Scott, an eccentric tumbling act in which he portrayed a “Rube” to the “Dutchman” and “Chinaman”
of Rice and Scott. And with "A Limb of the Law," Sully had a rube act for which vaudeville audiences would clamor for nearly a decade. Copyrighted in 1916, the sketch was performed by Sully for years after.

"A Limb of the Law" is a dialogue between "Lem Hubbard," a rural policeman, the "limb of the law" of the title, and "Mehitable Parsons, the village gossip." The comedy stems from Lem's inability to manage urbane social graces and the new technological menace of traffic. The sketch begins with Lem calling after a speeding automobile, "You dirn speeders!" and ruined his swiftly urbanizing town's lack of respect for the town's "speed laws."

Lem explains that he is learning to be a detective from a book he ordered from an ad in the back of an issue of the Ladies Home Journal, a book produced by the same man who runs the "Matrimonial Department," a company that "begs to offer [an] attractive list of single persons, male and female, at the following reduced rates." The list offers an opportunity for the characters to expound on contemporary affairs. One "Suffragetty" costs $500. "Gosh! Them Suffragettys come high!" exclaims Lem. Mehitable makes a sarcastic reference to a local politician who opposes women's suffrage (the line calls for a "local name" to be inserted). The reference is perhaps the first rube comment in favor of women's voting rights, though the political intent is somewhat ambiguous given the intended malleability of the lines. "One highly
educated college youth, good dresser, expert foot ball player, but has no desire to work," begins another. Neither Lem nor Mehitable "think[s] much of that." The woman's reference to "connubial Felicity" prompts Lem to admit that he's been secretly married and recently honeymooned:

Mehitable: Tell me Constable, where did you spend your honeymoon?

Lem: At Shelbyville.

Mehitable: Shelbyville? Why, I haven't been there since I was a girl.

Lem: You'd never recognize the old place; it's built up right smart now.

Mehitable: Did you stop with friends?

Lem: No sirree! We stopped at the best hotel in the town, they called it the--what was the name?--just a moment I got the bill here. "The Traveler's Rest" a very imposing institution.

Mehitable: Imposing?

Lem: Very imposing, specially on the guests, they should have called it "The Robber's Roost."

Mehitable: What did it charge?

Lem: They didn't CHARGE anything, you paid for it or you didn't get it!
Mehitable: Was it run the European plan?
Lem: No, it was more on the Cafeteria plan . . .
Mehitable: Did the Hotel have a Southern exposure?
Lem: No, but the Landlord had, that’s why he left Kentucky!

Lem goes on to describe the urbanization of Shelbyville:
“everything going up, new buildings, taxes, real estate, two banks and an ammunition plant went up while we were there!” He also notes the new street car service in formerly sleepy Shelbyville. Sully’s “Limb of the Law” sketch incorporates the most typical rube themes: the conflict between the rural and urbanization, the menace of new technology, the conflation of rurality with fictionalized Southerness, ambiguous attitudes toward women, a deep suspicion of the new managerial class, and, finally, the plantation fantasy of the infantilized rural working class.

But during the same period, acts like Sully’s shared the stage with rube comedians who were increasingly sought after for their “true” representations of versions of life in American regions. The McGreevys, a married duo who occasionally shared the bill with Will Rogers during the young Oklahoman cowboy comic’s first season on the Keith Albee circuit, were known for their midwestern origin and the “realism” of their work as “delineators of rural types” in
sketches like "The Village Fiddler and the Country Maid" in the 1910s." Called a "screaming 'rube' act" by H.A. Daniels after their 1911 performances at Keith's Hippodrome in Cleveland, the McGreevys were best known for "the very realism of their portrayals." Winnifred DeWitt described their act at Chase's Theatre in Washington as an "exaggerated interpretation of village types." And the Pawtucket Times described their 1911 sketch as

an amusing number, in which the woman is attired in an exaggerated costume and acts accordingly, while the man, in a good makeup of a countryman, plays the fiddle. Their conversation is interesting from an urban point of view . . .

Their work, more than many of their contemporaries, was reported on as the near true representation of rural people in the west. The Providence Tribune called them "a pair of newcomers from the West."

Comedian and singer Frank Crumit (1888-1943) was linked to his southern Ohio home. "I am one of the few Broadwayites who can tell you," Willard Holcomb wrote in Shadowland in 1922, that "there are four Jacksons in the U.S.A.—Jackson, Miss.; Jackson, Mich.; Jackson, Tenn.; and last and least, Jackson, O." "The cipher after it," Holcomb concluded, "indicates its desirability as a place of residence."

Introducing Crumit, the magazine writer makes a sly reference to an old joke from blackface comedy duo acts ("How do you
spell Ohio?” “Dat’s easy.” “Well if it’s so easy come on and spell it. Spell Ohio.” “O-H-ten--Ohio”). Crumit was a “coon” song singer and dialect comic of the vaudeville stage. His later phonograph recordings were Columbia’s second-best-sellers to those of the great African Caribbean performer Bert Williams. But he was probably best known for performances with his wife, Julia Sanderson, in the 1920s.

Before he met Sanderson, however, Crumit was a well known “coon” song singer and rural comedian, often telling the stories of minstrel, rube, and tramp acts to complement his songs (his Columbia recordings included a remake of Nat M. Wills’ “No News, or What Killed the Dog”). Theatre managers recorded his skill for both singing and storytelling. The manager of B.F. Keith’s Theatre in Philadelphia noted, for instance, that Crumit got “everything possible out of” the stories in his solo act during the week of 26 May 1918. Later, from 1926 to 1933, Crumit employed his facility for rural storytelling as the star of the Blackstone Plantation on CBS radio. When Holcomb wrote his sketch of the comedian’s life, however, it was nearly entirely focused on Crumit’s small town Ohio roots and the fiction of African-American life that seemed to explain the white performer’s rural influences.

To write about Frank Crumit, Holcomb suggests, is to write about the mill town of Jackson, Ohio, in southern Ohio coal country. (Jackson is also, notably, the hometown of
novelist Ben Ames Williams, who wrote the scenario for the 1919 Will Rogers film, Jubilo, a rural melodrama and "the finest story it was ever my privilege to work in," remembered Rogers.\(^9\) Crumit’s upbring in Jackson, suggested Holcomb, was a product of the hellish fires of the Appalachian Ohio coal industry and the mammy figure who raised the young performer.

The article describes the Jackson, Ohio embodied in Crumit’s performance:

`Industrially, [Jackson] is of some convenience, because there are coal mines right under town, iron ore in every hill, and blast furnaces all around. When these are all in full blast, letting loose sulphurous flares of fiercely flaming gas, it looks like an inferior edition of the Inferno--a lower-case hell!` 

"Main Street," on which Crumit was born. "is paved with cinders," writes Holcomb, "rutted by heavy ore wagons and sowed inches deep in coal dust--hotter than the hinges of an overheated Hereafter in summer."\(^9\)

The sketch of Crumit’s hometown is much like F. Scott Fitzgerald’s description of the midwestern Mississippi River town at the beginning of *A Diamond As Big As The Ritz* (1922), his fanciful story of regional and class differences published the same year as Holcomb’s sketch of Frank Crumit. Fitzgerald’s story describes its narrator’s home, a hellish
town called "Hades," the "inhabitants" of which were "entirely out of the world." In drawing his imaginative portrait of hellish Jackson, Ohio, Holcomb neglects to inform his readers that Crumit was from the new generation of college-educated, middle-class vaudevillians. (Crumit attended the Ohio State University, for which he wrote the fight song, "The Buckeye Battle Cry.")

But perhaps most telling is Holcomb's impulse to portray Crumit's white Ohio step-mother, "Aunt Patsy," as a "mammy" figure in the narrative of the vaudevillian's life and rise to fame:

The death of his mother caused Frank to inherit his Aunt Patsy as substitute mother. From her he acquired a sense of humor. She had a lazy, nasal drawl, something like that of Mark Twain, which heightened the humorous effect of any story she told, and she knew how to tell a story as well as Uncle Remus. She could chat darky songs in style to discount the darkies themselves, and imitate the camp-meeting "exhorters" in a manner that the colored cook called "scandalously funny." When I listen to Frank Crumit crooning a coon song . . . I can recall her very intonations. . . .

Holcomb's construction of "Aunt Patsy" as a surrogate mammy links the whiteness of Crumit's skin to the blackness of Crumit's act. The vaudevillian "inherit[ed]" his aunt, like
a piece of property. Her voice is "lazy," like the
descriptions of minstrel types on the variety stage. Her
"drawl . . . heightens the humorous effect" of the stories
which she could tell "as well as Uncle Remus," a reference to
the popular stories of Joel Chandler Harris that centered on
"Uncle Remus," an aging former slave and sharecropper, the
prototypical "uncle" figure in the post-Reconstruction
plantation fiction of white writers like Harris and Thomas
Nelson Page ("Uncle Gabe" in In Ole Virginia, 1887) and black
writers like Charles W. Chesnutt (most of his "Uncle Julius"
stories were published together as The Conjure Woman in
1899). Indeed, Holcomb allows Crumit's aunt to surrogate the
storytelling blackface "uncle" figure itself, for she "could
chat darky songs in style to discount the darkies
themselves." Crumit's rural material, his audience was to
understand, was a distillation of the union between the
culture of the Ohio coal mine and the storytelling of
blackface's mammy figure.

While Lew Sully was performing with Rice, Sully & Scott
in 1911, he often shared the stage with a young Illinois rube
comedian performing in his first season on the Keith-Albee
circuit. The young comic, Charles "Chic" Sale, would be, by
the mid-1920s, among the highest paid performers in
vaudeville.

"There seems to be little need to introduce Chic Sale,"
remembers an anonymous 1916 article in The Green Book

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Magazine. "It is Urbana, Illinois, that attracts immediate attention. For Urbana (vaudeville-ized) constitutes Chic Sale's stage offering." Sale (1885-1936) was often identified with the rural Illinois life that he portrayed. The comedian, whom Joe Laurie credited with coining the word "wisecrack," culled his most famous cast of characters from the teacher and pupils in a country school in Urbana, Illinois, where Sale, a native South Dakotan, had grown up."

In his first season on the Keith-Albee circuit, in 1911, Sale's worked "in one" and did his roughly twelve minute "Country School" act to some acclaim. In February, C.E. Barns, in Philadelphia, noted that

this man certainly made a hit this afternoon as an impersonator of country school children and School Board types. A very unique act. The quick changes were very clever and each one of the characters were strongly individual. Good applause and close particularly well.

(Sale shared the bill that week with Rice, Sully & Scott, featuring Lew Sully as the rube.) In Providence two weeks later, Charles A. Lovenberg reported that the "novelty" of Sale's act "create[d] comment" and the act "scored a success." The Providence Tribune, reviewing his engagement, called him "one of the big laughing hits." The review described
an amusing protean oddity, in which he portrayed the different characters seen at a village school concert. Mr. Sale made up with startling rapidity and thoroughness for each of his characters, and both the make-ups and the impersonations were artistic as well as funny."

By the time Sale’s act came to B.F. Keith’s Hippodrome in Cleveland, the first week of April, 1911, he was performing his act with his own special scenic drop “in 2 1/2” (using as much of the stage as a depth of fifteen feet). H.A. Daniels calls Sale’s act, “A Country School of Entertainment,” “rustic impressions” with “plenty of energy and hustle and a fair amount of talent.” Later in the year, in Columbus, Ohio, W.W. Prosser praised Sale: “This player is an artist of the first water. He made an unusually strong hit and the house would hardly let him go. His offering is a genuine success from beginning to end.”

By 1912, Sale’s act lasted nearly twenty minutes, as much as twice the duration of many single acts. John F. Adams, manager of the Colonial Theatre, noted Sale’s “impersonations of six different characters” and called his changes “very quick work.” Sale “got the audience from the start and made a hit.” Upon Sale’s return to Philadelphia, Barns’ praise shed some light on the act’s content:

Chick Sale . . . made a big hit this afternoon with his Rube character stuff, all of which go big
hands. During the Professor's recital, the laughter stopped the show and the close after the school director's final speech was very strong. By the time Sale performed at the Fifth Avenue Theatre in New York City two weeks later, his twenty minute act was "holding [the audience] in good shape . . . each of his different characters receiving big applause," though he performed the act "in one." 

Sale was a solo artist, known for quick performed costume changes from behind an organ, his signature stage property. In his early days, he performed in "old clothes" and "bought women's 'rats' and turned them into wigs and whiskers." "With this equipment and a repertory of six or eight Urbana characterizations," the Green Book article continues, "he essayed vaudeville in 'The Country School.'" During his debut season on the Keith-Albee circuit in 1911, the Keith News ran a promotional article and photograph of the young comedian. Together, they are entitled "CHICK SALE and some of his Make-ups." The photograph is a composite of nine photos of Sale's face in various make-ups: a codger with white beard and unkempt hair, a woman in a bonnet, a young man in a coonskin cap, and others. "Chick Sale," it continues is the name of a young man who has given vaudeville an odd and very entertaining hit this season, a protean comedy . . . With appropriate and rapid
changes of make-ups he reproduces a visit to a country school, he alone impersonating the eight or nine different characters involved, from the overworked "school-marm" to the blustering "constabule," all so cleverly done that they are genuinely artistic studies as well as very funny. Laurie recalls a version of Sale's signature act in which a little girl character sings and dances: "Would I fly East?" sang the little girl character as she (Sale presumably) bounded to the right. As she sang "Would I fly West?" Sale bounded to the left. "No," the character concludes as she moves upstage, "I would fly back South for I love it best--back, back, back, to the land of charm, back, back, back, back, where things are warm." Sale's little girl finally runs into a radiator. The comedy is physical as the man in little girl drag throws himself into a hot, metal radiator (in fact, Sale's organ) but the bit also implies a nostalgia for a past in the character's return ("back South") and disastrous consequences when she arrives.

Sale took his act in later years to the legitimate stage and the cinema. The Encyclopedia of the New York Stage, 1920-1930 lists Sale as "among the most applauded acts" in the 1926 edition of the Schuberts' Gay Paree revue, which opened at the Winter Garden Theatre in November 1926: the "Yankee character spoofs" of "homespun comedian Chic Sale . . . were offbeat and rib tickling--a piece called 'He Knew"
Lincoln' mingled comedy and pathos to good effect." Though Sale's act was specifically midwestern (here, even performing in the Illinois-specific sketch about Lincoln), the editors still call him a "Yankee" comedian. His most prominent Broadway appearances were in the rube mold, such as in Hello, Paris, which opened at the Schubert Theatre in November 1930, in which the comedian "played a homespun Oklahoman who takes his family and his newfound oil money to France, where they run into various amusing and romantic circumstances." Samuel Leiter describes the play as "more like a series of vaudeville turns than a musical comedy," in which Sale's signature act was incorporated into the narrative. "Sale's best number," writes Leiter, "had him employ various makeup... [and] found room for his well-known disquisition on outhouses, 'The Specialist,' which some found tasteless." Sale appeared in twenty four films, beginning with 1920's The Smart Aleck, often playing wizened rube types, and is probably best known for his "Ben Gunn" in the 1934 film adaptation of Treasure Island, directed by Victor Fleming and featuring Jackie Cooper, Wallace Beery, and Lionel Barrymore.

Primarily, though, Chic Sale's act was Urbana, Illinois "vaudeville-ized." "Whenever Chic Sale feels that he needs a new character," the Green Book profile continues, "he hies himself to Urbana and attends a few Friday night meetings at the little outskirts schoolhouse. ..." There is "little need to introduce Chic Sale," all The Green Book Magazine's
readers need know is that he is an impersonator of the
citizens of a little college town in the midwest. The town
"constitutes" his act. The author of the article suggests
that the sketch's characters are not even representative of
Urbana, but of its "outskirts."

Sale's work is, moreover, remembered as a comparatively
truthful representation of Urbana, Illinois life. The Green
Book article continues, quoting Sale,

The original of his old "cornetikist" lives with
his father and mother. "Why," said Chic Sale
recently, "I couldn't fail to do just exactly as he
does. Every one of his rheumatic movements, every
squeak of his voice, his tobacco spitting--I simply
can't help doing them when I am playing his part."

Like the advertisements for Haverly's Colored Minstrels in
the 1880s that invited prospective audiences to come see "THE
DARKY AS HE IS AT HOME, DARKY LIFE IN THE CORNFIELD,
CANE BRAKE, BARNYARD, AND ON THE LEVEE AND FLATBOAT," the
rube figure was purported to be a realistic portrayal of
simple, provincial people, living at the "outskirts" of the
world.

"I took the Mid-West as my study ground," said Sale, in
the 1927 Collier's magazine interview, "We're All Hicks."
"And I never burlesqued--no need." John B. Kennedy, the
Collier's interviewer, called Sale "a one-man mirror of what
lies beyond Main Street." The frontispiece of Sale's 1929
publication of his most famous monologue, "The Specialist," offers an explanation of the sketch's character, "Lem Putt":

Lem Putt--that wasn't his real name--really lived. He was just as sincere in his work as a great painter whose heart is in his canvas; and in this little sketch I have simply tried to bring to you recollections of a man I once knew, who was so rich in odd and likable traits of character as to make a most lasting impression on my memory.\(^{129}\)

Sale emphasized that "Lem Putt" "really lived" in the introduction to the published version of his most famous monologue.

Throughout the mid-1920s, at the height of his popularity, Chic Sale performed a series of monologues in the character of "Lem Putt," a skilled craftsman whose skill was exclusive to building outhouses. Sale performed his Lem Putt monologues on the vaudeville stage and for a wide variety of private engagements (he was particularly popular with men's clubs and fraternal organizations). The monologue was later published (comprising only nineteen pages in the slim, pamphlet-like volume) under the title, The Specialist, in 1929.\(^{130}\)

Sale's gentle "aw-shucks" yeoman does not satirize skilled labor, for indeed, in the Fordist economy of the mid-1920s skilled labor was in precipitous decline in the blue collar workforce. In fact, Lem Putt's privy-building
business is a part of the new age of specialized business entities. "Mr. President and Gentlemen," Putt begins, you've heard a lot of pratin' and prattlin' about this bein' the age of specialization. I'm a carpenter by trade. At one time I could of built a house, barn, church or chicken coop. But I seen the need of a specialist in my line, so I studied her. I got her; she's mine. Gentlemen, you are face to face with the champion privy builder of Sangamon County (11).

(Sale's earlier work was set in Urbana, Illinois. Lem Putt, however, is the "champion privy builder of Sangamon County," Illinois, home of Sale's contemporary, poet and vaudevillian Vachel Lindsay, and, famously, of President Lincoln. What Carl Sandburg called the "folk-lore Lincoln" is quietly evoked in Sale's monologues, though the connection to Lincoln is more apparent in Sale's "He Knew Lincoln," from the Schuberts' 1926 Gay Paree revue, and in the serious phonograph recordings of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address for which rube comedian Len Spencer was known. Lincoln, it would seem, was our most prominent rube president.)

Putt describes the job that set him on the course of specialization, using mock scientific language and method to solve Luke Harkins' "privy trouble" (12). Harkins' outhouse, it seems, had been Putt's first big job, and the specialist had built for him "just the average eight family, three
holer." The job had made Putt's "reputation" and, recalls Putt, "since then I have devoted all my time and thought to that special line" (11). Putt hides a discrete distance away and observes Harkins' three holer:

It was right in the middle of hayin' time, and them hired hands was goin' in there and stayin' anywheres from forty minutes to an hour. Think of that! I sez: "Luke, you sure have privy trouble." So I takes out my kit of tools and goes in to examine the structure (12).

Sall's Putt examines the catalogue (left there, it later becomes clear, for post-use hygiene) but decides it is no more interesting than the average toilet paper, before concluding that he's built seats that are "too durned comfortable" (13). After refashioning the seats "square with hard edges," Putt returns to his hiding place to observe:

And I watched them hired hands goin' in and out for nearly two hours; and not one of them was stayin' more than four minutes. "Luke," I sez, "I solved her." That's what comes of bein' a specialist, gentlemen (13).

Luke Harkins' "privy trouble" is a case study for Lem's oratory; the subsequent travails of the Springfield, Illinois outhouse builder follow the model of observation, hypothesis, experiment, and thesis that Putt utilized to solve Harkins' dilemma. Putt uses phrases like "regulation job" (27) and

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dictates precise degree measurements of door openings to
insure the best balance of ventilation and privacy:

Place yourself in there. The door openin' in, say
forty-five degree. This gives you air and lets the
sun beat in. Now, if you hear anybody comin', you
can give it a quick shove with your foot and there
you are. But if she swings out, where are you
(24)?

When Elmer Ridgway wants his new facilities built along
a winding path and under a tree, Putt relies on his special
expertise to talk his client out of the location:

In the first place, her bein' near a tree is bad. There ain't no sound in nature so disconcerting as
the sound of apples droppin' on th' roof. Then
another thing, there's a crooked path runnin' by
that tree and the soil there ain't adapted to
absorbin' moisture. Durin' the rainy season she's
likely to be slippery (14-15).

Putt explains that the "crooked path" and slippery surface
will inevitably produce Elmer Ridgway's grandpappy . . .
prone in the mud, or maybe skidded off one of them curves and
wound up in the corn crib" (15). Putt goes on to suggest
that a straight line between the house and the privy is the
most efficient arrangement and, if possible, the line should
pass the woodpile. The average woman, Putt suggests, will
gather twenty sticks of wood per day, making four or five
trips to the woodpile. But a “timid woman,” observes the scientific privy builder,

if she sees any men folks around, she’s too bashful to go direct out so she’ll go to the woodpile, pick up the wood, go back to the house and watch her chance. The average timid woman--especially a new hired girl--I’ve knowed to make as many as ten trips to the woodpile before she goes in, regardless. On a good day you’ll have your wood box filled by noon . . . (17)

The malapropisms and unschooled interactions with new technologies and urban culture of an earlier age of rube performance became, for Sale’s Lem Putt, a burlesque of scientific method and business language. Country wisdom is distilled into a satire of business acumen. The “twin job” for the schoolhouse,” “an eight-holer,” was Putt’s “biggest plant up to date” (13). “It’s a might sight better to have a little privy over a big hole than a big privy over a little hole,” is Putt’s golden rule (17). The work is “no job for an amachoor” (26). “Put on [the door] the hook and eye of the best quality,” explains Putt, “‘cause there ain’t nothin’ that’ll rack a man’s nerves more than to be sittin’ there ponderin’, without a good, strong, substantial latch on the door” (22). Putt favors multiple colors for the exterior of his outhouses; solid colors are “too durn hard to see at night.” “You need contrast,” explains Putt, “just like they
use on them railroad crossin' bars" (25). It is Lem Putt's increasingly specific technical knowledge of rustic outhouses brought to bear on an untechnical construction; running water and indoor plumbing were available in the 1920s in towns and cities. By the 1920s, the yeoman of the Denman Thompson school had become, in the act of Chic Sale, a rural entrepreneur with a small outhouse construction empire.

The 1929 publication of The Specialist contained a verse, "Doc Sale's Boy," by John D. Wells that had previously been published in the Buffalo Courier-Express. Wells describes Sale's act as "ape-in' fokes-- / Hometown fokes--their speech of whim." "We kin take-off you or me," continues the verse, "Right down to a tee-y-tee / 'Till our kinfokes say:
Blamedom, / That's like you' or "Jist like John!'" The verse, like Sale's claims of authenticity, stresses that the rube comedian was less an actor than an impersonator who mediates between the rural characters and the urban audience:

Not like play-act fellers do--
Others of 'em--who proclaim
Somethin' kin to mortal shame
'Cause a feller's country-bred--
Ignorance, I've always said!
Chic, though, he jist ripples on,
Smiles and swears a soft "Doggone!"
Then he speckylates on who
God made first, us fokes or you
City fokes; and by an' by
He'll declare the vote a tie--
Says he thinks we both are good
If we're only understood--
That's Chic Sale.\textsuperscript{134}

Wells' tribute to Sale concludes with a couplet that echoes the scene in Thompson's \textit{The Old Homestead} in which the present Uncle Josh is grouped with Mrs. Hopkins' "old recollections": Sale "brings to mind / Things I've loved an' left behind!"\textsuperscript{137} The rube monologue functions for the urban audience as an instrument of nostalgia, even as it purports to exhibit, without artifice, contemporary rural people and manners.

Cal Stewart's Punkin Centre mediated between the city and the country. Though his Uncle Josh combined the simple wisdom of the yeoman and the quick violence of the barbarian, the relationship between Josh's world and his audience's was a close one. They were linked by culture, commerce, and, literally, by a busy railroad. Sale's country schoolhouse displayed the barbarism of provincial education while his specialist embraced modern, urban ideas to perfect a particularly rural business enterprise. The rise of the rube had reflected the distinctions between city and country that became particularly sharp after the Civil War. But as
modernity crept beyond the city limits in the 1920s, the fiction of the yeoman and the barbarian still had a place, even as the rube adapted to the changing landscape.
ENDNOTES

1 W.W. Prosser, report of week of 6 March 1911, Columbus. Report books collection, KAI.

2 Gracyk, 74. Gracyk writes
the first time Arthur Collins was paired with Byron G. Harlan for a Victor recording session was on October 31, 1902, which happened to be Harlan's first Victor session. Collins and Harlan recorded five titles, including "The First Rehearsal of the Huskin' Bee" (1732) [Harlan & Stanley recorded same bit in 1904 for Edison], a 'rube' skit. Many of their early recordings are rube sketches with songs, such as "Closing Time in a Country Grocery" (Victor 1728) and "Two Rubes in a Tavern" (1727), and they continued recording rural comedy for years, Harlan performing in into the 1920s. Harlan recorded these same three titles with Frank C. Stanley, who wrote the sketches.


5 Gracyk, 76.


8 Cal Stewart, Uncle Josh's Punkin Centre Stories (Chicago: Thompson & Thomas, 1905), 139-140.

9 The "Two Rubes and the Tramp Fiddler" sketch also includes an odd exchange between Ezekiel and the tramp that might have suggested the blackface comic mask to the cylinder recording's listening audience. The rube asks the wandering fiddler "what makes your face so dirty?" and the tramp replies, "I ain't feelin' well and the doctor ordered me to take mud baths." While the joke has a punchline--"He said they were dirt cheap," explains the tramp--it is an otherwise unrelated tag sequence at the end of the sketch, following the narrative of the meeting.
Graceyk notes that writing credit for "Uncle Josh on the Radio," recorded by Harlan for Okeh in 1922, was given jointly to Cal Stewart, dead since 1919, and Fred Hager. Graceyk surmises that Hager "revised an old Uncle Josh skit" (166). Graceyk also notes that sole writing credit for "Uncle Josh Patents a Rat Trap" went to Jack Baxley.

Stewart, 7.

Ibid., 169-70.

See Appendix A for "Uncle Josh Weathersby on an Automobile" (Columbia, 1904), "Uncle Josh Weathersby Gets a Letter from Home" (Edison, 1909), "Uncle Josh at the Dentist's" (Edison, 1909), and "Train Time at Punkin Center" (Victor, 1919). Transcribed by the author.

Stewart, 60.

Ibid., 135.

Ibid., 131.

Ibid., 91.


Stewart, 153-5.

Ibid., 101-2.

Ibid., 85.

Cal Stewart, Uncle Josh Weatherby's [sic] 'Punkin Centre' Stories (Chicago: Regan Printing House, 1903); Uncle Josh Weathersby's Punkin Centre Stories (Chicago: Stanton and Van Vliet Co., 1905); Uncle Josh's Punkin Centre Stories (Chicago: Thompson & Thomas, 1905); and, Uncle Josh Stories (Boston: Walter H. Bake, 1924). Page numbers, hereafter, refer to the 1905 Thompson & Thomas Uncle Josh's Punkin Centre Stories.

Stewart, 11 and "Farm Maxims and Bits of Wisdom," Appendix E.

Stewart, 7.

Ibid., 7-8.

The Portland Daily, 5 April 1904. Cited by Graceyk, 332-3. Graceyk reprints a portion of the interview in which Stewart recalls that he was "a village boy" in The Messenger from Jarvis Sacket "but understudied Mr. McCauley for several years." "I have since devoted my time to old age characters," Stewart informs the Maine reader, "and like them the best" (333).

Stewart, 143-46.
20 Stewart also makes reference to his brief career as an agent of the Wells Fargo Company. "Yosemite Jim, or Tale of the Great White Death," is punctuated by an explanatory note, the only one of its kind in Stewart's published monologues, that describes the "almost indescribable . . . frozen fog," the "Great White Death" of the Rocky Mountains, from the point of view of "CAL. STEWART, formerly Overland Messenger for the Wells-Fargo Express Company" (161).

21 Ibid., 1.

20 Playbill for 21 March 1904, Keith's Theatre, Providence, RI, KAI.

31 The Times (Pawtucket, RI), 19 March 1904.


33 Anonymous, report of week of 6 November 1905, New York. Report books collection, KAI.

34 H.A. Daniels, report of week of 9 January 1906, Philadelphia. Report books collection, KAI.

35 Charles A. Lovenberg, report of week of 12 March 1906, Keith's Theatre, Providence. Report books collection, KAI.


37 Keating's report of the week of 28 February 1904 in Boston makes reference to Stewart's "'Rube' makeup" and a number of reports noted his storytelling and singing act. Report books collection, KAI.

38 Charles Lovenberg, report of week of 21 March 1904, Keith's, Providence. Report books collection, KAI.


40 C.L. Doran, report of week of 11 March 1912, Keith's Theatre, Cincinnati. Report books collection, KAI.

41 J.F. Harris, report of week of 7 November 1904, Grand Opera House, Pittsburgh. Report books collection, KAI.

42 Stewart, 3.


44 Stewart, 57.


47 Stewart, 12.
Stewart, 75.

Ibid., 61.

Eric Lott, for instance, quotes an 1845 article in Knickerbocker by James Kennard, Jr. on the perceived transgressive sexuality of minstrel performance, in which "the ubiquitous minstrel music" is "personified as 'Dan Tucker'" (38). The song, "Dan Tucker," is perhaps best known to contemporary audiences from its frequent use in the NBC television drama, Little House on the Prairie (1974-1982). A midwestern pastoral based on the novels of Laura Ingalls Wilder, the series featured "Isaiah Edwards," a white comic character, in many ways culled from the rube tradition, raised in "the hills of Tennessee." The character's theme song, evinced both in instrumental underscoring and in the character's singing and whistling was "Dan Tucker":

Old Dan Tucker was a fine old man,
Washed his face with a frying pan.
Combed his hair with a wagon wheel,
Died with a toothache in his heel.
Got out the way for Old Dan Tucker,
It's too late to get his supper.
Supper's over and dinner's cooking,
Old Dan Tucker just stands there looking.

Stewart, 158-59.

Ibid., 160-161.

Ibid., 25 and 27.

Ibid., 28-29.

Cal Stewart, "Uncle Josh at a Camp Meeting," Edison, 1902. Transcribed by the author. The text of the monologue also appears, in a version that differs slightly, having more local color references to the denizens of Punkin Centre, in Uncle Josh's Punkin Centre Stories, 121.

Stewart, 36.

"Firms and corporations," begins an 1875 official statement in support of a minimum wage from the Massachusetts Bureau of Labor Statistics, when threatened with loss, reduce expenses, stop manufacturing and, if necessary, pay half the amount of their bills and begin afresh. The workingman suffers by the suspension of work, can not reduce his expenses materially, gets in debt, had no royal way of beginning again, but must keep on with his load of debt still hanging to him.


Stewart, 9-10.

Ibid., 87 and 89.

Ibid., 89.

Stewart, 45.

Cal Stewart & Steve Porter, "Uncle Josh Weathersby on an Automobile," Columbia, 1904. Transcribed by the author, Appendix A.

During the winter of 1911, for instance, a company featuring Sidney Drew and Lionel Barrymore (who would later star in the 1934, Victor Fleming-directed film, *Treasure Island*, as Billy Bones, with rube comic Chic Sale as old Ben Gunn) presented, on the vaudeville stage at the Fifth Avenue Theatre in New York City, a short "comedy entitled 'Stalled'" which followed "the trials of groom and best man on an important engagement":

They start in an automobile, which breaks down; finally they abandon all hope of getting the machine in shape when a searching party with the bride arrives, and in a wild auto ride a Justice of the Peace announces the necessary words. The comedy has a number of good laughs although scattered . . . it seemed to please however and . . . scored genuine curtain calls.

The piece was played full stage with a "special set." (Report of week of 25 December 1911, Fifth Avenue Theatre, New York. Report books collection, KAI).

Stewart, 15.

Ibid., 21.


Cal Stewart and Len Spencer, "Uncle Josh at the Dentist's," Ediscon, 1909. Transcribed by the author, Appendix A.

C.E. Barnes, report of week of 26 March 1906, Philadelphia. Report books collection, KAI.

Anonymous, report of week of 10 April 1911, Maryland Theatre, Baltimore. Report books collection, KAI.

Laurie, 193.


*The Providence Journal*, 10 January 1905.

*The Providence News*, 10 January 1905.

Stewart, 69.


Laurie, 194.
John F. Harris, report of week of 13 February 1905, Grand Opera House, Pittsburgh. Report books collection, KAI.

Charles A. Lovenberg, report of week of 7 January 1905, Providence. Report books collection, KAI.

J. Keating, report of week of 16 January 1905, Boston. Report books collection, KAI.

L.M. Eirick, undated report, spring 1905, Cleveland. Report books collection, KAI.

F.J. O’Connor, report of week of 26 June 1905, Boston. Report books collection, KAI.

E.F. Rogers, report of week of 20 November 1911, Fifth Avenue Theatre, New York; Winnifred De Witt, report of week of 9 October 1911, Chase’s Theatre, Washington; and, C.E. Barns, report of week of 18 December 1911, Keith’s New Theatre, Philadelphia. Report books collection, KAI.

Anonymous, report of week of 29 September 1918, Boston. Report books collection, KAI.

Records of Rube Dickinson’s life are scarce. In the late 1910s, he was killed when a "hotel porch in Kansas City, under which he was standing, weighed down with ice and snow, collapsed [sic], causing his death" ("Tragedies," Cass County (NE) Historical Society Magazine 1:1, p. 96). Dickinson was at that time a very well known vaudeville star and the Cass County Historical Magazine notes that the performer’s body was “brought to Murray (Nebraska, his hometown) and through deep drifts of snow, taken to the Eight Mile Grove cemetery and laid to rest.”

Laurie, 178.

Stewart, 13, 95, and 107.

R.A. Daniels, report of week of 18 March 1912, B.F. Keith’s Hippodrome, Cleveland. Report books collection, KAI.

Laurie, 178.

Ibid., 178.
Indeed, regional focus became a means for marketing rube acts. During the period, Englishman Harry Tate brought an entirely different dialect to the standard rube character in his popular sketches "Motoring" and "Fishing," playing "Thomas Tweedlang, the [English] 'village idiot.'" Sime Silverman, in Variety, wrote, describing a 1906 production of "Fishing":

The humor of a man going fishing with nine bottles of whiskey and a shotgun cannot be mistaken. The setting is pretty and realistic . . . There is continual laughter during the twenty minutes occupied in showing the audience how an 'amateur' can catch a solitary fish by stealing it from another's hook.

Tate's act was a success on the vaudeville stage, though Silverman thought that the "English colloquialism scattered throughout" might be improved if "translated into the American vernacular" (Sime Silverman, Variety (13 Oct. 1906): 8. Rpt. in Slide, Selected Vaudeville Criticism), 182.


9 Si Perkins' "rheumantic" is also referenced in Harlan & Stanley's 1904 Edison recording, "The First Rehearsal for the Huskin' Bee" as well. The "Mandy" of Harlan & Stanley's "Jayville Center" sketches, is, however, not the business-owning urbantie of Coyle's dialogue.


97 Anonymous, report of week of 17 February 1902, Shea's Garden Theatre, Buffalo. Show journal, THFRC. The description of Rice, Sully & Scott comes from C.E. Berne's report of the week of 27 February 1911 from the report books collection of the KAI.


99 The Tribune, 19 March 1911.

100 H.A. Daniels, report of week of 24 April 1911, B.F. Keith's Hippodrome, Cleveland (report books collection, KAI) and The Tribune, 19 March 1911.


102 The Pawtucket Times, 21 March 1911.

103 The Providence Tribune, 19 March 1911.


105 Laurie, 462-3.

Will Rogers, The Autobiography of Will Rogers, sel. and ed. by Donald Day (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1949), 63. "Jubilo" follows Rogers as a tramp hero who saves a farmer’s daughter. The title comes from “In the Land of Jubilo,” a spiritual that Rogers called “an old-time Negro Camp Meeting song” (62). About the screen scenario, Rogers wrote:

In “Jubilo” Ben Ames Williams wrote the finest story it was ever my privilege to work in. It was the only story ever made out here where there was no Scenario made. We just shot the scenes from the various paragraphs in the Story in the Saturday Evening Post. When we took a Scene we just marked it off and went on to the next. I think, and Mr. Williams verified it, that it was the only story ever made that was absolutely filmed as it was written... We didn’t [sic] change his main Title either (63).

F. Scott Fitzgerald, “A Diamond As Big As The Kitz,” “Babylon Revisited” and Other Stories (New York: Scribner, 1926), 80. The story raises the conditions of the worship of urban wealth (though not necessarily capital) to levels unparalleled in Fitzgerald’s contemporaries. At issue is the “simple piety” (80) of the middle and working class Midwesterner, piety toward a God “made in man’s image” (109). The story, even in being a grotesque anti-wealth fairy tale only tenuously rooted in reality (or realism), does not seem necessarily to indict capital or the interests of urban capitalists. The description of the Washington family’s period of accumulation is unconcerned with business practices and labor, but reveals the necessity of slavery and murder in the fortune’s management. Fitzgerald connects avarice bordering on commodity-worship in the age of urban accumulation and the deification/vilification of the urban wealthy seeking pastoral escape.


Laurie claims that “about 1966 Chic came into the Palace with a new act in which he introduced a new character, a small town ‘smarty’ who was always called the ‘wise guy.’ He said, ‘I’ll just tell you a couple of riddles and make a ‘wise crack’ before I beat it back to the poolroom’” (181).

Charles A. Lovenberg, report of week of 13 March 1911, Providence. Report books collection, KAI.

The Providence Tribune, 14 March 1911.

H.A. Daniels, report of week of 3 April 1911, B.F. Keith’s Hippodrome, Cleveland. Report books collection, KAI.
126 W.W. Presser, report of week of 3 April 1911, Columbus. Report books collection, KAI.

127 John F. Adams, report of week of 15 February 1912. Report books collection, KAI.


130 “CHICK SALE and some of his Make-ups,” The Keith News 6.96 (6 March 1911): 2.

131 Laurie, 181-2.


134 Ibid., 320-1.

135 Slide, Selected Vaudeville Criticism, 165.

136 Ibid.

137 Toli, from American Popular Entertainment, 30.

138 John B. Kennedy, “We’re All Hicks,” Collier’s 19 March 1927: 16.


140 All subsequent parenthetical notes that refer to The Specialist, refer to the Specialist Publishing Company’s original 1929 edition.

141 Ibid., 6.

142 Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The performing career of vaudeville manager and producer Tony Pastor began on the variety stages that he would later transform. He appeared in circuses, dime museums, and music halls as a comedian and singer, with blackface and without, performing hundreds of songs he had committed to memory. Often called the "Father of Vaudeville," Pastor's theatres revolutionized variety entertainment in the United States, booking family-friendly acts and attracting a gender-integrated, middle class audience as Pastor himself shepherded dozens of acts from obscurity to vaudeville stardom. It was on these stages that blackface comedy spawned the ethnic acts that distorted and burlesqued immigrant life for "native" audiences. Here, too, emerged the rube acts that burlesqued the rural condition for urban audiences.

During his performing days, the young Pastor performed a song called "The Contraband's Adventures," described by Robert Snyder, in The Voice of the City, as the narrative of a freed slave taken in by a group of abolitionists who
“unsuccesfully try to scrub, paint, and sand off his blackness.” Snyder quotes the concluding lines of the song:

. . . de nigger will be nigger
till the day of jubilee
for he never was intended for a white man.
Den just skedaddle home—leave de colored man alone;
For you’re only making trouble for de nation;
You may fight and you may fuss,
But you never will make tings right
Until you agree
For to let de nigger be,
For you’ll neber, neber, neber wash him white!"

The fundamentally racist song belies an underlying corrosive anti-abolition conservatism (in a song performed well after the Civil War): it relies on the assumption of fundamental differences between white and black Americans and blames the abolitionist movement for the Civil War and “trouble for [the] nation.” It also presages a transformation that did occur in the popular theatre that Pastor helped to create, as vaudeville’s white blackface artists “wash[ed themselves] white.” Recasting blackface traditions into a whiteface entertainment provided associations with blackface representations a means to infect vaudeville’s new cultural caricatures, as Irish and German immigrants gave way to the rubes of the vaudeville stage. The desire of ante bellum white audiences to seek self-definition in minstrelsy’s
distortion of rural black culture became the desire of urban audiences in the 1890s to define themselves against the ethnic comic's distortion of immigrant bodies. The nativist's inclination to identify himself against the immigrant in turn became the desire of middle class urban audiences to define themselves against popular entertainment's distortion of working class rural culture. The pattern is, ultimately, the reinscription of post-Civil War minstrelsy's plantation nostalgia, still mediated by a history of stereotypes of the African American slave, but with a new kind of slave figure, one without the cultural and symbolic weight of American chattel slavery's despicable history. The new plantation types, American vaudeville's rubes, were "never vulgar, never immoral, but rather rough and primitive, with an unconventionality" that spent "itself in loud guffaws, slaps on the back, and naps in the corner," as DuBois observed.²

Vaudeville would never again be so popular in the United States as it was at the height of Chic Sale's career in the 1920s. Anthony Slide estimates that "in the early twenties, vaudeville was seen by 1,600,000 men, women, and children daily."³ By the end of the decade, the middle class pastime that the producers of Tony Pastor's generation had fashioned from music hall sketches and saloon comedy had begun its precipitous decline. New transportation and entertainment technologies offered the urban audience a broad spectrum of
opportunities for leisure. Film, which had been a part of many of vaudeville’s programs, offered a more profitable product for vaudeville producers. Vaudeville theatres were converted to cinemas. The Great Depression, as Robert Snyder writes, “struck the final blow” and the diminished audience was divided among radio, film, other entertainments.\footnote{5}

The rube, however, like many of vaudeville’s characters, survived the decline of the form. Rube comedy became a favorite of radio, film, and, later, television. The yeomen and barbarians of the rube stage transferred readily to film and television throughout the twentieth century. One may see this, for instance, in the popularity of the characters and story of Frank Capra’s award-winning film, Mr. Deeds Goes to Town (1936).

Capra’s Mr. Deeds Goes to Town is an assemblage of set pieces and bits from the rube comedy of the ages of Frank Bell, Harlan & Stanley, and Cal Stewart.\footnote{5} Longfellow Deeds, a postcard poet and the sole tuba player in the Mandrake Falls, Vermont town band, unexpectedly inherits twenty million dollars from a distant, New York uncle. A practical yeoman, Deeds initially seems to refuse the bequest. “I wonder why he left it to me?” he asks, “I don’t need it.” The country figure is convinced to return to New York City with his uncle’s lawyer and publicity agent, but Deeds’
overriding concern, as the train pulls away from his tiny New England home, is "who . . . they'll get to play the tuba" in the town band.

The narrative follows the rube to the city, where he assumes the position of the "Henry Hopkins" millionaire characters of the "Uncie Josh" sketches of Thompson and Stewart. Deeds maneuvers, inexpertly, through society and city life, falls for the deception of a reporter assigned to cover the "Cinderella Man" (falling in love with her as well), and ultimately decides to give away his vast fortune to fund "a huge farming district."

Deeds is manifestly a yeoman rube. Described as a "cornfed Bohunk," he has never left Mandrake Falls, never married, and never, as he later harumphs, "worn a monkey suit." Though Deeds wishes he hadn't received the inheritance, he is profoundly frugal. His Yankee thrift and wisdom prevent his uncle's lawyers from gaining his power of attorney and controlling his fortune. His country wisdom prompts him to observe "people here [in the city] are funny; they work so hard at living, they forget how to live."

Though Deeds possesses the yeoman's Yankee wisdom, he is also grossly comic and out of place. An inebriated Deeds holds up morning traffic by feeding doughnuts to a horse. When asked why, he explains that he wanted to know how many the horse would eat before asking for coffee. Elected chairman of the opera board by a committee hoping for a hefty
donation, Deeds refuses to "invest" unless the opera becomes
a money-making operation, lowering its prices and adopting
musical fare that will appeal to a wider audience; he is
accused of trying to run it "like a grocery store." He
interrupts his first meeting with the board by running to the
window to watch a passing fire engine, its sirens blaring.
And, in the first act of the film, Gary Cooper's Deeds
reprises the Uncle Josh role from Cal Stewart's "Uncle Josh
at Delmonico's," assaulting a restaurant full of cultural
elites in retribution for mocking him.

Deeds is not wholly a yeoman rube from the Denman
Thompson school. It is his propensity for violence, his
barbarian potential, that characterizes Deeds. Shortly after
his arrival in New York, Deeds is approached by a lawyer who
claims to represent the interests of his uncle's common-law
wife. Initially, the fair-minded Deeds offers to give the
woman whatever she wants, but when he suspects that the man's
claims are less than honorable, he seizes the much smaller
man by the lapels of his coat, shakes him, and violently
throws him out the door. Cobb, Deeds' press agent and
handler, describes the incident as "lamb bites wolf."
Taunted by a table of well-known poets in a fancy restaurant,
Deeds snaps, "there's just one thing more . . . if it weren't
for Miss Dawson being here with me, I'd probably bump your
heads together." The words are barely off his tongue when
she interjects, "Oh, I don't mind." "Well then maybe I
will,” replies Deeds as he attacks the men. Fueled by alcohol, he rampages through the city, his exploits recounted in detail in the morning newspapers. Enraged again, Deeds plots to get even, as his handler, Cobb, tries to calm him:

Deeds: I think I’ll go down there and punch this editor in the nose.

Cobb: No you don’t. Get this clear, punching people in the nose is no solution for anything.

Deeds: Sometimes it the only solution.

Cobb concludes that his employer will “do swell,” if he would “only curb his homicidal instincts.” Overhearing two women talk about him on a city bus, Deeds growls, “if they were men, I’d knock their heads together.” The film is, indeed, characterized by Deeds’ duality: he is at once the yeoman and the barbarian.

Vaudevillians Weber & Fields once gauged their success as comedians by the “results that will be told by the cashier at the bank.” Mr. Deeds Goes to Town was both a box office and a critical success. Capra won an Academy Award for his direction; the film was also nominated for awards for acting, sound, and its screenplay, as well as for the best film of the year, an award it received from the National Board of Review and the New York Film Critics Circle. Jean Arthur’s performance as “Babe Bennett”/“Mary Dawson” propelled her to
leading woman status. Prints of the film were among Columbia’s top theatrical rentals throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

In the late 1960s, the property was developed by producer Harry Ackerman and Columbia’s television division as Mr. Deeds Goes to Town (1969-1970) for ABC television. Fashioned to compete with the rube comedy of CBS television’s The Beverly Hillbillies, the television Mr. Deeds lasted only seventeen episodes, but the rube had already conquered television. During that decade, The Beverly Hillbillies, perhaps the most successful dramatic entertainment in rube comedy’s history, was the most watched program on television. The situation comedy about a “poor mountaineer” who struck oil and relocated his family to Beverly Hills, California, was watched by over sixty million viewers each week during its heyday. A reflection of simple, premodern values and southern mountain culture, the series was the top-rated program on television for its first several seasons (it ran from 1962 to 1971). In an era that spanned widespread societal unrest in the United States, Europe, and Asia, it offered a nostalgic version of a simpler time to American audiences. During The Beverly Hillbillies run on CBS, the network paired it with Petticoat Junction (1963-1970) and Green Acres (1965-1971), the latter based on the 1940s radio series, Granby’s Green Acres. The Beverly Hillbillies conformed loosely to the rube in the city plot, as in Denman
Thompson’s *The Old Homestead*, Cooper & Hoey’s “A Trip to the City, or At the ‘phone,” performed by Constance Abbott, Len Spencer’s “Hezekiah Hopkins Comes to Town,” and numerous others. *Petticoat Junction* located the action entirely within a rube community similar to the “Jayville Center” of Harlan & Stanley and the “Punkin Centre” of Cal Stewart’s sketches. And *Green Acres* played on the reverse of the rube in the city plot, transporting urban types to the country, as in the Litchfields’ “Down at Brook Farm” and Frank Leary’s “The Belle of Jay Town.” All four television series were off the air by 1971—*Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* and *Petticoat Junction* in 1970, *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *Green Acres* the following year.

Though the television *Mr. Deeds* had failed, the original film was revisited and remade thirty years after the television series had failed as *Mr. Deeds (2002)*. The new *Mr. Deeds*, though roundly panned by critics, has easily matched its predecessor’s success with audiences (in its first week of American release, the film grossed nearly $40,000,000).

An update of the original film, *Mr. Deeds* follows its own Longfellow Deeds from tiny Mandrake Falls, Vermont to New York City after the greeting card writer inherits a fortune from his distant uncle. Deeds is again tricked by the reporter Babe Bennett, with whom he will fall in love, and is beset with the problems of the rube in the city.
In "Full Pockets, Big City," the New York Times review of Mr. Deeds, critic Elvis Mitchell singles out the film's "sloppy violent-slapstick" comedy, calling it the only new "wrinkle" in an otherwise faithful remake of Capra's Mr. Deeds Goes to Town:

This nouveau Deeds has one different wrinkle: rather than being a laid-back sharpie who's constantly reading others, he has a pathological compulsion to throw a punch at anybody who's being rude. Instead of Capra-corn, this is Capra-cuffs.¹⁰

This violent streak is, however, nothing new. It is a major element of the original film and a hallmark of the rube character.

The performance of the rube on the vaudeville stage had always been a balancing act between the innocuous comedy of the yeoman and the dark potential of the barbarian. The rube character both served as an instrument of nostalgia in an American entertainment marketplace straining under the tensions of the twentieth century and satisfied the urban audience's desire to define itself against the premodern outland of rural America. The rube figure responded to the changing cultural geography of the United States, the modern ascent of the city center, and the conditions and elements of modernity in America (new technology, transportation and communication revolutions, the incorporation of American business, the tensions of the constantly changing
demographics of American cities) because the character could exist simultaneously in an agrarian past and a backward present.

In "Americanism and Localism," a 1920 Dial essay on the "Americanization" of immigrants to the United States, American philosopher John Dewey noted that while one may think of the United States "in terms of national integers," one need only peruse a newspaper from a place smaller than New York ("and sometimes Chicago," he writes) to receive "a momentary shock":

One is brought back to earth. And the earth is just what it used to be. It is a loose collection of houses, of streets, of neighborhoods, villages, farms, towns. Each of these has an intense consciousness of what is going on within itself . . . and a languid drooping interest in the rest of this spacious land."

Though Dewey dismisses the idea that the U.S. might be a provincial culture ("Very provincial? No, not at all."), he equates the world outside of New York ("and sometimes Chicago") with a nostalgic past: it is, glimpsed from his urban present, "just what it used to be." Dewey's 1920 was on the precipice of America's Jazz Age, an era of the prosperity and excess of modernity in full sway, heights from which one might be "brought back to Earth." His present was fueled by the economic benefits of the war in Europe; it
comprised the age of jazz music in the clubs of eastern cities, the beginning of men and women voting in local and national elections, and a time of new opportunity for African American writers and politicians. American business was flourishing. The trying times of the 1910s were fading from memory and the Great Depression hadn’t yet sobered the promise of the post-war years. But when Dewey looked to the towns and cities beyond New York and Chicago, he saw a culture that remained “just what it used to be.” The “loose collection of houses, of streets, of neighborhoods, villages, farms, [and] towns” seemed timeless; its now provided a past, recoverable in physical distance and cultural geography.

Dewey’s world was awash in the progress of the 1920s; but it was also gripped by tremendous change. Immigration to the United States from Europe had abated only because of restrictive laws.\textsuperscript{12} In rural areas, the increased agricultural production of the war years evaporated and American farmers began a series of economic downturns that preceded the Great Depression by nearly a decade.\textsuperscript{13} The influenza epidemics of the late 1910s killed nearly half a million people in the U.S., largely those for whom clean water and healthcare were unavailable. Membership in the Ku Klux Klan increased to between three and five million by the early 1920s.\textsuperscript{14}

Onto Dewey’s world stage, the rube character had long since emerged. The “old recollection” that was Denman
Thompson’s Uncle Josh in New York City was imitated by the generation of rube performers that followed. The rube’s burlesque of rural life became a powerful mechanism for the same kinds of nostalgia that had been the hallmark of the post-war minstrel audience. In the years between pre-Emancipation westward expansion and the rise of multiethnic modern urban centers, the muddle of images and associations with exurban spaces and figures were reformulated in and for an audience which had progressively less investment in political sectional division but more in a popular nostalgia for a fictional past. In these new contexts, the racist depictions of rural African Americans and the figures of American rurality slipped the boundaries of their historical situations. The rube emerged, part Yankee and part Zip Coon.

The yeoman rube exhibited his practical, rural wisdom in narratives of ignorance. He was gentle, oftentimes generous, and thoroughly innocuous. The yeoman, in fact, was such a harmless figure that even when victimized in the city, he delighted in its wonders, rewarding the urban audience with his forgiving spirit and generosity. (Cal Stewart’s Uncle Josh even invites his audience back to Punkin Centre in “Uncle Josh Invites the City Folks to Visit Him.”) But the yeoman is incomplete without his counterpart, the barbarian. Gary Cooper’s Longfellow Deeds was a “lamb” that could bite a “wolf.” Urban audiences who sought their own reflection in the negative image of the rube show were not attracted to the
rube's fundamentally sweet nature, but to his restraint of the barbarian impulse. For the yeoman is a rural figure, as capable of fits of violence as he is of avuncular antics. He is the barbarian rube without teeth. The yeoman rube is a theatrical analog to the "Uncle Tom" figures of the nineteenth century stage. The yeoman made the rural figure palatable for an urban audience no longer living in the America that had produced the Yankee. It mediated between urban audiences and their fear of the extremity of its negative, barbarian potential in the way that Uncle Tom mediated between white audiences and their fear of African Americans in the nineteenth-century United States.

By the end of the 1920s, the popular presentation of the rube character had absorbed both poles of rube burlesque, the yeoman and the barbarian. Cal Stewart's Uncle Josh, for instance, combined the gentle yeoman of Thompson's Josh with the extraordinary violence of Sherman & Morrisey's barbarian act. The rubes of the early twentieth century were at once wise and sensible yeomen and barbarian parodies of the self-sufficient rural ideal. Yeomen and barbarians, the rubes responded to the impulse that Dewey describes, no less than did the continued popularity of the coon song, the plantation spectacular, and the blackface comedian. The rube's popularity on the vaudeville stage during the fifty years covered by this study responds to and reflects the massive changes that took place in American culture and the urban,
progressive impulse to find the primitive past in the rural present. The rube's appeal throughout the twentieth century reflects an ongoing tension between the powerful myth of an American rural ideal and the realities of modernity.


4 Snyder, 159.

5 Mr. Deeds Goes to Town was adapted from the Clarence Budington Kellard story “Opera Hat” and scripted by Robert Riskin. It was produced and distributed by Columbia Pictures in 1936.

6 The screenplay here conflates the rube with vaudeville’s caricature of eastern European immigrants. “Bohunk” is turn of the century slang for the barbarian variety of eastern European laborers, from “Bohemian” and “Hungarian.”


8 The television series Mr. Deeds Goes to Town was created by Harry Ackerman and Bernie Slade and produced by Ackerman and Bob Sweeney.

9 Mr. Deeds (2002) was directed by Stephen Brill and adapted from the Robert Riskin Mr. Deeds Goes to Town screenplay by Tim Herlihy. It was produced as a vehicle for comic actor Adam Sandler and distributed by Columbia.


12 Roughly 5.7 million people came to the U.S. in the 1910s, more than 4 million in the 1920s. The numbers only declined after the federal government responded to worker anxieties with legislation that further controlled immigration. In 1917, acts were passed requiring some measure of literacy of immigrants to the United States, making it more difficult for unskilled laborers to enter the U.S.; the first so-called “Quota Law” was passed in 1921, limiting the numbers of immigrants by nation and followed shortly thereafter in 1924 by the second, which reduced those numbers by half. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the U.S., 1789-1945. Rpt. in The Encyclopedia of American History, 446.
One may trace the agricultural crises of the period through the federal legislation passed in response, beginning with the Farm Loan Act of 1916 and continuing through the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933.

One might point to the case of the early twentieth century Ku Klux Klan as a prime example of the further transformation of the rural image and ideal in the twentieth century. A product of the nativist, racist fears of some Americans as well as the images in popular entertainment, the new Ku Klux Klan was "unlike its predecessor...mainly an urban phenomenon" (Arthur W. Trelease, "Ku Klux Klan," from The Reader's Companion to American History, Eric Foner and John A. Garraty, eds. [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991], 625). Trelease writes that the new Klan "was greatly stimulated by Thomas Dixon's 1905 novel, The Clansman, and D.W. Griffith's 1915 motion picture based on it, Birth of a Nation" (625). Headquartered in urban Atlanta, the Ku Klux Klan drew the preponderance of its membership from the urban working and middle classes. A Klan initiation in Tulsa, Oklahoma incited a newsworthy traffic jam: the Tulsa Tribune reported "more than 30,000 motorists from Tulsa and surrounding towns tried to reach the scene of the spectacle, but only a few thousand succeeded. The huge crowd was 10,000 automobiles" (Rpt. by Mark Sullivan, Our Times: The Twenties [New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1935], 573-4). Drawing from various social strata, the new Ku Klux Klan attracted urban white men who shared the fear and hatred directed toward African Americans, Jews, immigrants, Catholics, and communists.

But though the second Klan movement was widespread and urban, it maintained a connection to the rural movement that had preceded it. This was a fiction that suited the Klan itself (drawing on the mythohistorical connection between Americans and the land, the same environmentalist philosophy that produced the Yankee character) and the educated, urban forces that opposed it (recognizing the new Klan's popularity not as a middle class, urban movement, but as part of that other in small towns in the south and west, America "as it used to be," in Dewey's words). Writing in 1935, historian Mark Sullivan concludes his brief description of the organization's "executive offices" in a "downtown [Atlanta] office building," complete with "large black letters on the door 'Ku Klux Klan' [sic]" and "a big force of clerks, stenographers, and assistants," with the fiction that new Ku Klux Klan was a rural movement: "once again, after a hiatus of fifty years, white-robed, masked figures assembled in midnight conclaves under flaming crosses on lonely mountain tops and in deep woodlands" (544-7). Sullivan's history seems to describe the Reconstruction-era rural Klan that Griffith depicted in Birth of a Nation. It was an image that would brand the rural working class of the 1920s, in a film that would be successful in American cinemas through re-releases throughout the 1920s and early 1930s.

In the mid-1920s, after a series of highly publicized crimes ranging from voter fraud to murder, the public image of the Ku Klux Klan changed again, and membership in the organization had dwindled to less than 10,000 by the mid-1930s. But the popular imagination in 1925 saw the rural Klan of Griffith's film.

APPENDICES


Appendix B contains the lyrics to traditional versions of "Old Zip Coon" and "Turkey in the Straw." The tune for both comes from an Irish ballad, "The Old Rose Tree," and a
later American folk instrumental, "Natchez under the Hill."
"Turkey in the Straw" is an alternate version of "Old Zip
Coon," first published in 1834.

Referenced in Chapter Three, Appendix C provides the
complete text of the 1901 Providence News interview with
vaudevillian Will M. Cressy. "MR. CRESSY TALKS WITH THE
MATINEE GIRL ABOUT HIS CAREER" was published in the 8 October
1901 issue.

Appendix D contains the text of "Farm Maxims and Bits of
Wisdom," a collection of rural aphorisms that was part of the
Bradley's Standard Fertilizers' promotional materials at the
turn of the century. The list is similar to the "Punkin
Centre Philosophy" of Cal Stewart, published in 1905. The
text included here is taken from a promotional memorandum
book distributed in 1903 by J.E. Weis of New Washington, Ohio
for the Bradley's Standard Fertilizers company, based in
Cleveland, Ohio.
APPENDIX A


"An Evening Call in Jayville Center."
Performed by Byron G. Harlan & Frank C. Stanley.
Edison, 1904 (#8585).

[A piano plays scales]

[First Voice]: Why, Cynthie, here comes Uncle Dave.

Uncle Dave: Good evening, Squire.

[First Voice]: Hello, Uncle Dave. Come in. Set right down. How be ya?

Uncle Dave: Don't stop playin' on my account, Cynthie.

[First Voice]: Oh, she's just practicing. Where was you going this morning when you hollered?

Uncle Dave: Over to town. I tell ya, they've made great changes over thar.

[First Voice]: Yes, I dare say.

Uncle Dave: Yes, I kin 'member when the turnpike was nothing but a cowpath, and now they've got ee-lec-tric cars runnin' on it.
[First Voice]: Yes, it do beat all. What’s going on up your way?

Uncle Dave: Well, there’s a new coat of paint goin’ on Zeb Billings’s barn. But most all the folks go feeshin’.

[First Voice]: Fishin’ must be con-tagious up thar.

Uncle Dave: Gosh, yes. Con-tagious, but not ketching. [They both laugh] Hey, I see they buried old Uncle Dudley down in the old holla cemetery.

[First Voice]: Is that so? Thunder, I wouldn’t want to be buried down there.

Uncle Dave: Why not?

[First Voice]: Why the gosh-blamed place is chock full of malaria. [They laugh]

Uncle Dave: Hey, Squire, can Cynthia play “Old Joe”?

[First Voice]: Why, to be sure. Cynthia play “Old Joe.”

[Piano music begins]

Uncle Dave: That’s it. That’s it.

[They sing together “Old Joe”]

[First Voice]: Good, Uncle Dave.

Uncle Dave: Hey, I see Mandy Slocumb has saved her husband from a drunkard’s grave.

[First Voice]: You don’t tell me.

Uncle Dave: Yah, she did.
[First Voice]: How'd she do it?

Uncle Dave: By gosh, she had him cremated.

"The First Rehearsal for the Huskin' Bee."
Performed by Byron G. Harlan and Frank C. Stanley.
Edison, 1904 (#8096).

Zeb: Lucy, I'm 'spectin' Si Perkins here tonight and I want you to look right smart.

Lucy: Well, do you reckon he'll bring Mandy with him?

Zeb: Oh nevermind Mandy, him and me has got to practice for that there Huskin' Bee doin'. [There's a knock at the door] There he is. Let him in, Lucy.

Si: Hello, Zeb. How be ya?

Zeb: Right smart. How be you?

Si: Oh, pretty good, 'cept got touch'a rheumatick.

Zeb: Shah, it ain't gonna keep you from the huskin', be it?

Si: No sirree. Come over on purpose to practice.

Zeb: Well, let's start out.

Si: Let her go.

[Music begins; the two sing in harmony]

Every Sunday morning
With Dinah by my side
We step into the wagon
We all take a ride.
    Wait for the wagon,
    Wait for the wagon,
Oh, we'll wait for the wagon,
And we'll all take a ride.

[They laugh]

Zeb: Hey Si, have you got your taters thrashed and your punkins tossed?

[They laugh]

Si: Well, Zeb, you're quite a joker.

Zeb: Well, Si, how did your taters turn out?

Si: By gosh, didn't turn out 't' all ... dug'm out.

[They laugh]

Zeb: Well, your corn looks pretty yellor.

Si: By gosh, I planted the yellor kind. [They laugh] I gotcha again. Say, here's a new song. See if you ever heard tell on it.

[The piano music begins again]

All bundl'd 'round with a woolen string,
All bundl'd 'round with a woolen string,
All bundl'd 'round with a woolen string,
All bundl'd 'round with a woolen string.

Zeb: Hey, Si, why don't you sing the rest of that there song?
Si: By gosh, ain't no rest to it.

[They laugh]

Zeb: Well, let's practice some more.

Si: Let her go.

[The music begins again; they sing in harmony]

There was a bullfrog
And he lived in a spring
Sing-song folly,
Won't you fi me-o.
He had such a cold,
He could not sing,
Sing-song folly,
Won't you fi me-o.
I pulled him out
And I chocked him on the ground
Sing-song folly,
Won't you fi me-o.
The old frog winked
And he looked all around
Sing-song folly,
Won't you fi me-o.

[The chorus is all nonsense words, like "fi me-o"; they laugh]

Si: Hey, Zeb, did'ja have your eye on me?
"Hickory Bill."
Performed by Len Spencer & Fred Van Epps. Edison, 1904 (#8500).

Hank: Stranger around these parts, ain't ya?

Hickory Bill: Kinda.

Hank: [unintelligible], ain't ya?

Hickory Bill: Naw, not exactly.

Hank: Well, I see you've got a banjo. Can't you play the damn thing?

Hickory Bill: Well, I reckon.

Hank: Well, I wish you would.

Hickory Bill: Well, I will.

[He plays a tune on the banjo]

Hank: Well, you play pretty good but you can't beat my brother Bill, up big in Arkansas.

Hickory Bill: No?

Hank: No. Ain't been nothin' like it 'round here since Bill went to the war.

Hickory Bill: That so?

Hank: That so. Play somethin' there; I wish you would.

Hickory Bill: Well, I will.

[He plays "Dixie"]
Hank: Well, that's strange; Bill was always a-playin' "Dixie."

Hickory Bill: Yah?

Hank: Yah, just give Bill an old rockin' chair and a banjo and it just suited him.

Hickory Bill: Well, I reckon it'd just suit me too.

Hank: Well, I beg your pardon, stranger, never thought to ask you to sit down. Come to think of it, you look a heap like Bill. 'Cept that Bill was a handsome fella.

Hickory Bill: You ain't a-willin' to make no allowances, be ya?

Hank: Not when it comes to pickin' the banjo. Why Bill could make the ornery thing sing and when he'd play "Old Black Joe," oh he'd make you cry. Say, son, kin you play "Old Black Joe"?

Hickory Bill: Well, I reckon.

Hank: I wish you would.

Hickory Bill: Well, I will.

(He plays a dolefule tune on the banjo)

Hank: Why, there never was but one man in the world could play "Old Black Joe" like that.

Hickory Bill: Who was he?

Hank: Why my long-lost brother, Hickory Bill, and you . . .

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Hickory Bill: That’s me, Hank.

Hank: Hickory, home it be.

Hickory Bill: Brother.

“Uncle Josh Weathersby on an Automobile.”
Performed by Cal Stewart & Steve Porter.
Columbia, 1904 (#32240).

Uncle Josh: Say, Henry, who’s that fellow with the coal bucket and blinders on?

Henry: Uncle, that’s the chauffeur.

Uncle Josh: Well, now, you just tell Mr. Show-fear, to lead her a mite slow; I ain’t usedta ridin’ one-a-these gall-durned benzine buggies.

Henry: Oh, that’s alright, Uncle. Get in.

Uncle Josh: Well, you tell him to get thar today, I don’t want to ketch up to yesterday.

Henry: Well, Uncle, here we go.

[Sound of the motor and a horn]

Uncle Josh: Starts up nice, Henry. Darned if it don’t. Say, Henry, there’s a wagon in the road.

Henry: Well, let him see us; we don’t have to see them.

Uncle Josh: Well, I’ll be darned. Say, Henry, I think we run over a man back thar.
Henry: Oh that's alright. Here's a courthouse. We'll stop and pay a fine.

Uncle Josh: Naw, I ain't so darn anxious to get in a courthouse. T'ain't anxious to pay a fine neither. Say, Henry, what town was that we went by?

Henry: That was New Haven.

Uncle Josh: Well, by chowder, I didn't see no haven, just a little bit of a town. Say, Henry, what was that we jumped over back thar?

Henry: Uncle, that was the Hudson River.

Uncle Josh: Well I'll be gall-durned. Pull a little ... a mite slow, Henry, darn it all, I'ma losing my hair. Say, Henry, what state are we in now?

Henry: I think we're in Pennsylvania.

[The sound of the automobile crashing]

Uncle Josh: Yah, yah. Get this gall-durned old kerosene wagon off of me. I'da had better sense that to ride on it in the first place. Say, Henry, ain't that there my eye on the old dashboard?

Henry: No, that's one of my ears.

Uncle Josh: Say, Henry, what's become of Mr. Show-fear?

Henry: There he is, up in a tree.

[The sound of an automobile]
Uncle Josh: Say, Henry, what was that went by?

Henry: Why that's our shadow, just caught up to us.

[Voice of Irish police officer:] Here now. Here's a run in without running the speed limit. Come along now. I'll learn yas to come out here with your auto-mo-bubble-wagons. Come along now with me.

Uncle Josh: Hey Henry, what we want now is an ought-o-go-home.

"Two Rubes and the Tramp Fiddler."
Performed by Byron G. Harlan & Frank C. Stanley.
Edison, 1905 (#8988).

Ezekiel: Hello, Hiram.

Hiram: Good afternoon, 'Zekiel. How's all the folks?

Ezekiel: Oh, fair to middlin'.

Hiram: I hear your brother Bill has struck money.

Ezekiel: Yes, he has been gittin' a back pension.

Hiram: What in thunder does he git a back pension fer? I thought he run home when the first shot was fired.
Ezekiel: Yes, that's it. He got shot in the back. [They laugh; a fiddle begins to play "The Bear Went Over the Mountain"] Hark, what's this?

Hiram: Why here comes a feller with a fiddle.

Ezekiel: Hello there you!

Tramp: Hello, uncle, how's crops?

Ezekiel: Well, they didn't turn out as well as I had thought they would and I didn't think they would neither.

[They laugh]

Ezekiel: Where ya goin'?

Tramp: Nowhere and anywhere.

Ezekiel: Oh, you're a tramp, eh? Don't you never get tired, walking?

Tramp: No. Why I walked fifteen miles through a snowstorm one night to thrash a man.

Ezekiel: That's a long walk and did you walk back?

Tramp: No. Came back in an ambulance.

[They laugh]

Ezekiel: Gosh, you're a smart fella.

Hiram: Well, let's hear that fiddle.

[The fiddle plays]

Ezekiel: You're all right!
Hiram: Say, play "Handsome Julia" and we’ll sing it fer ya.

[The fiddle plays; they sing]

Oh, Julia is a handsome girl
Her heart’s so young and tender
Her eyes are dark and rather small
Her form’s gentile and slender.
Oh, Julia is a beauty
She blossoms like the
[unintelligible]
Oh, yes she is the prettiest girl
That lives in old Carolina.

Ezekiel: Hey there old fiddler, what makes your face so dirty?

Tramp: Well, you see, I ain’t feelin’ well
and my doctor ordered me to take mud baths. He said they were dirt cheap.

Ezekiel: Well, if I were as smart as you be,
I’d commit suicide.

Tramp: Why I tried to once, but I couldn’t
do it to save my life.

Ezekiel: Hey, you go it to thunder.

"The Dixie Rube."
Performed by the Edison Military Band with Byron G. Harlan.
Edison, 1906 (#9241).

Conductor: Give us your "A," Bill. One minute, boys, I expect old Silas Lapscales here this evening with one of his new compositions. I suppose we’ll have to play it over for him. Ahh, here he is now. Good evening, Silas.
Silas: Howdy, howdy, boys. Don’t mind me. Have you got anything new?

Conductor: Well, I should say we have. How do you like this?

[The band plays a variant of “Dixie.” Harlan, as “Silas Lapscales, calls out amid the music, “Pretty good!” and “Yes, that’s alright!”]

Silas: Hold on there! Hold on there! [the music stops] I’a got the tune here that beats that old holler. Just play this.

Conductor: Why, what are you talking about? We can’t; it’s all mixed up. [He names several famous songs] All going on at the same time.

Silas: Yes you kin. I wrote it myself. The band up at Jayville Center played it right off the first day. Play “Yankee Doodle” all you trombone players and the rest of you play “Dixie”. Now let it go.

[The music plays as he directed].

Silas: Darn good, ain’t it?

“Grandma’s Mustard Plaster.”
Performed by Murray K. Hill.
Edison, 1908 (#1969).

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. And you too professor. I’m gonna try and butt in with a little talk on goats. Speaking about goats, I have a little boy. Of course, he’s not a goat. He’s only a kid. But he’ll grow. But he wanted a goat. So I bought him a goat and took him home and
introduced him to the family. It’s funny how I bought this goat; I bought it from a pawnbroker. He was a kind of an unredeemed, hand-me-down goat. Kind of a second-handed goat, that’s what he was. I don’t know from whom the pawnbroker got the goat, but a pawnbroker can get anybody’s goat. But this goat is full of fleas. But my little boy discovered a scheme to get rid of the fleas. He covered the goat with bread and milk. The fleas ate the bread and milk. They got so fat, they fell off the goat. And my little boy says, “Get up,” and we drove away and left the fleas on the sidewalk. And eat? You shouldn’t seen this goat eat. He’d eat any old thing. He took a my mother-in-law right away. But, professor, I was gonna sing you a little song entitled “My Grandma’s Mustard Plaster.” But I left my music ta home. Ah, I see you have a piano. Now I tell you what we’ll do. You tinkle the piano and I’ll see if I can spread the plaster. [Piano music begins] That’s the idear. [He sings:]  

I had a pain, it went down to my vest  
In fact this pain, it was in my chest  
I asked my grandma what I’d take  
And a mustard plaster she did make.

You should have seen that plaster draw  
The hottest one I ever saw  
It drew so hard it tore open my vest  
And drew my lung right outta my chest.

I had to throw the thing away  
When an actor picked it up a-jay  
On him it drew so hard you see  
It drew the actor’s salary.

Of course that made the actor sore  
He stuck it on the theatre door  
The company were playing Faust  
The plaster drew and attacked the house.

The car conductor saw it there  
And from the door it he did tear
He stuck it on his car awhile
It drew his car for forty miles.

The motor man did loudly swear
And while he did he teared his hair
The car had gone away too far
He tried but couldn't stop the car.

Well at last the plaster fell in the street
It struck a Chinaman on his feet
It drew his boot off at that point
And pulled his leg at the opium joint.

But he would not stand that abuse
And so he tore the plaster loose
He threw it and it stuck on a cop
It drew so hard it woke him up.

It drew his hat down over his eyes
And loud for help the cop he cried
And then the wagon it came down
The plaster drew it all over town.

The coppers fought with might and mane
And got this plaster on a train
And just as soon as that was done
It drew the train to Washington.

That settled the mustard plaster: it got stuck on politics. Now, professor, I have to thank you, you're alright.

“Uncle Josh Weathersby Gets A Letter from Home.”
Performed by Cal Stewart.
Edison, 1909 (#10111).

Well sir, I just got a letter from home, first one
I've got since I've been down here in New York.
Well, I went up to the post office to see if they
had any mail for me and where all the door oughtta be, they got a merry-go-round. When you want to
get in the post office you gotta git in that durn
thing and play circus a while. I got into it and it started a-goin' around and I got into the post office before I git out of it I was back on the sidewalk agin and before I git out on the sidewalk I was back in the post office agin. I went around there so durn fast I could see the back of my neck goin' in and out of the post office. Well, I got in finally and got my letter and I guess I kin read it over now. They’ve had right smart goin’-ons at home since I’ve left home. Yup. They’ve had election. Whole doggone town went Republican. Had nine majority. That’s pretty good; there’s only ten votes in the town. Woulda been unanimous, but Ezry Hoskins was cross-eyed and couldn’t see whar to mark. And he marked in the wrong column and his vote went Democratic. Well, they’ve had a fire and the rubber factory burned down. Reuben Henry lost his life at the fire. He was up on the top floor and that went any ladder to get down on. He wrapped a lot of rubber around hisself and jumped out the winda. He hit the ground, went to bouncing. He bounced four days, then they had to shoot the darned fool [to] keep him from starving to death. We got out our chemical distinguisher to put out the fire and the doggone thing wouldn’t work. Then we held a meetin’ down at the town hall, see what we’d do about it. Jim Lawson got up and made a motion that hereafter, the chemical distinguisher should be examined ten days before every fire.

"Uncle Josh at the Dentist’s."
Performed by Cal Stewart & Len Spencer.
Edison, 1909 (#10131).

[There is a knock at the door]

Dentist: Come in. Ah, good morning.

Uncle Josh: Howdy. Be you the tooth carpenter?
Dentist: I am the dentist. And I can see that you're in need of dental services.

Uncle Josh: No, I don't want that. Just wanted to get a tooth pulled out.

Dentist: Oh, I understand. Well, be seated. Now let me look at that tooth.

Uncle Josh: It's a whooper, Doc.

Dentist: Hold your mouth open a little wider. Wider, please.

Uncle Josh: Gosh, Doc, I'm a-feared you'll unhinge my head.

Dentist: Why you have quite a cavity in the left, lower mol-ar.

Uncle Josh: Well, now I knowed one of them was hollered, didn't know I had [unintelligible--"savages"? "seven teeth"?].

Dentist: Now be perfectly still while I prepare this tooth for filling.

[The sound of a drill]


Dentist: I think the drill struck some foreign substance.

Uncle Josh: I think you struck a nail in my boot in the left side. Ya know, Doc, you ain't boring for [unintelligible].

Dentist: I am trying to save your teeth. There are only 32 in the human head.
Uncle Josh: That so? How many you got?

Dentist: I have 28.

Uncle Josh: Gosh, you’re pretty near human ain’tcha?

Dentist: I see that I have to give you gas.

Uncle Josh: Well, I don’t know much about gas, Doc. We don’t have it down our way. If it’s all the same to you, you can give me kerosene.

Dentist: Oh, but this is laughing gas.

Uncle Josh: Well, this tooth-pulling ain’t no laughing matter.

Dentist: Now once more.

[The creaking sound of tooth-pulling]

Uncle Josh: Oh, gosh all to hemlocks.

Dentist: That was nothing. Only a small nerve.

Uncle Josh: I wish I had your nerve. Felt like you bored a hole clar into my conscience that time.

Dentist: I see you’ll have to lose this tooth and I’ll have to give you gas. Now, breathe naturally. Now, for that tooth. Ah. Ah, there it is.

[They both laugh]

Uncle Josh: Gosh, Doc, I guess you got some of that laughing gas too. But I’ve got a mighty good joke on you.

Dentist: Why? What is it?
Uncle Josh: You pulled the wrong tooth.

[They both laugh]

"Rube and the Country Doctor."
Performed by Byron G. Harlan and Frank C. Stanley.
Edison, 1909 (#1875).

Doctor: Hello, Silas.

Silas: Why, hello, Doctor. What's the matter with your auto? Broke down?

Doctor: No. Just been in here making a call.

Silas: Who's sick?

Doctor: Old Uncle Jerry.

Silas: What's the matta?

Doctor: Why, he's been troubled with gnawing pains ever since he swallowed his false teeth.

Silas: 'Shaw, I want to know. Say, what sort of power have you got in that there machine?

Doctor: Gasoline power.

Silas: Hmm. Thought it might be hypodermic power.

[They laugh]

Doctor: Say, Silas, where you goin' with that there "valene"?
Silas: Going home. Why I just came from New York.

Doctor: Well, what the most wonderful thing you see'd down the city?

Silas: Everything, b'gosh. Mandy told me to keep my eyes open and, by thunder, I couldn’t get’m shut. [They laugh] Look-a-here. I bought this here diamond ring for Mandy. It cost $600 b'gosh.

Doctor: Well, what made you get such a big one?

Silas: Why, you see, she’s nervous. And everything little thing upsets her. [They laugh] Say, Doctor, I can’t get no sleep nights. My eyes won’t stay shut.

Doctor: Well, before you go to bed tonight, you soak your feet in hot water.

Silas: Darn it, t’ain’t my feet, it’s my head.

Doctor: Well, then soak your head. [They laugh] When you can’t sleep, be glad you ain’t got nightmares.

Silas: Hey, Doc, why don’t you hatch out a new joke?

Doctor: By crackee, I would. But I can’t get my mind set on it. [They laugh] It looks like rain.

Silas: Yah. It’s gettin’ awful black over yonder. Looks like one of them 'ere hurricanes.
Doctor: I see Uncle Peter is drinking pretty hard.

Silas: Yes.

Doctor: Well, he ain't the man he used to be.

Silas: Garsh, no. And never was.

Doctor: Dan Slocum lost his wife the other day.

Silas: No!

Doctor: Yes. Suffocated with gas.

Silas: Well, he'll have a nice gas bill to pay. When did that happen?

Doctor: Last Friday.

Silas: I always watch [unintelligible] on Friday.

Doctor: Shaw, Washington was born on Friday. And so was Napoleon. And Tennyson and Gladstone.

Silas: Yes, and every gall-durned one of 'em is dead.

Doctor: Well, I hadn't thought of that.

Silas: Say, Doctor, are you treating Bill Spriggs's boy?

Doctor: I did 'til he died.

[They laugh]
Silas: Talk about yer piano-playin'. I see'd a fellow down to New York t'other day that didn't have no arms, was only twelve years old, and played with his feet.

Doctor: Why, Zeb Throckmorton's got a boy ten-months-old, got no teeth, and plays with his toes. [They laugh; sound effect of thunder and wind] By George, Silas, here comes the rain.

Silas: And and plenty of it.

Doctor: Well, jump in here and I'll start the machine. We'll run down the tavern, get under the shed.

Silas: Good idee.

[Sound of an automobile]

Doctor: Well, here we are. Come on in, Silas. Hello boys. Gosh, we near got soaked that time. Shut the door and keep the weather out. Well, we need this rain.

Silas: Yes, one hour of this we'll do more good in 5 minutes than a month of it would in a week at any other time.

[They laugh]

Doctor: Hey, boys, strike up a tune. Play "Sally Come Up."

["Sally Come Up" is played and sung. Silas calls to the doctor periodically.]

Silas: Ah, you're all right, Doctor, you're all right. Say, I hear Jim Crawford's dead.
Doctor: Yes.

Silas: What was the matter?

Doctor: Well, he bet the boys down the river, he could stay under water two minutes.

Silas: Did he do it?

Doctor: I should say he did. He's under there yet.

[They laugh]

"Zeb Green's Airship."
Performed by Ada Jones and Len Spencer with orchestra.
Victor, 1909 (#16342-B).

Barker: Ladies and Gentlemen, as an added attraction to the great Hokum and Pokum Show, we have engaged Mr. Zeb Green to take his first trip in his airship.

Zeb Green: Ladies and Gentlemen, this here airship was made and constructed in Hank Timkins' old henhouse. The body of the machine is a bi-rigged canoe. The steering wheel is the old hand-car down to the depot. The flying gear is the wheel of Zeb Higgins' old windmill and the engine is the inside of Jonah Webb's old thrashing machine.

Barker: Hey, Zeb, is it a zep-pel-een?

Zeb Green: No, gail-darn ya, it's a Zeb Green.
Barker: Our Mr. Green today makes two initial trips. One in this airship and one into matrimony. The airship will carry him to the clouds. Matrimony is sure to bring him to earth. Where’s the bride? [Sound of a galloping horse] Here comes the parson and the bride.

Cynthie: Hey, Zeb Green. Where be you goin’? Here I been waitin’ at the church more than an hour.

Zeb Green: Cynthie, I clean forgot ya.

Barker: One hundred dollars more if you get married in the balloon?

Zeb Green: What do you say, Cynthie?

Cynthie: Oh, Zeb, just take me. [She sings:] Up up up with you, dearie Away up to the sky. Sail around the moon For a quiet swoon Just the parson, you, and I Let us float, float, float through the clouds And just have a lot of fun We’ll go up up up as two And then come down as one.

Barker: Well, then, where’s the parson?

Parson: I’m here.

Zeb Green: Come get in parson. Now, hold tight, Cynthie. Are you all ready? Let her go, cut her away.

Barker: How is it up there, Zeb?
Zeb Green:  [From far away] Great, gall-darn ya, great!

Barker: Oh, they’re heading for the river. Look! My god, the bailoon has popped; they’re coming down into the water.

Zeb Green: Parson? Parson? Take your hand at that wheel. Cynthie, take one of them fliers, and we’ll paddle to shore. I didn’t use bi-rigged canoe for nothing.

"Hezekiah Hopkins Comes to Town."
Performed by Len Spencer.
Edison, 1911 (#3793).

[A train horn blows; the first speaker is the voice of an upscale New Yorker, the second is his driver, James--a "negro" impersonation]

Stephen: Ah, here we are. James, leave the car right here.

James: Yassuh.

Stephen: We’ll meet the old gentleman at the train.

James: Awright, suh.

[Voice 1]: Pawtucket, Nantucket, Nassau, ...

Stephen: Excuse me, is the train in from Spruce Corners yet?

[Voice 2]: It’s just pulling in. Track 10.

Stephen: Good. C’mon, James. That’s his train and there he comes.
Hezekiah: No, goll-durn ya. I'm just as strong as you be, now git out.

Stephen: Take his grip, James.

James: Grip, suh?

Hezekiah: No, it tain't the grip. It's just a cold. More like influenza.

James: No, take your bag, suh. Take your bag.

Hezekiah: No you can't take my bag, nor anything else I got. I'm on to you city sharp.

Stephen: I'll see if he knows me. Hello, Pop.

Hezekiah: I ain't yer Pop and I ain't sayin' hello to no bunkwhores. I've bought all the gold bricks and lighnin' rods and [unintelligible] cow-milkers I'm a-goin'-ta-buy. I'm a slick old cuss, by gosh. Why, I've been so reckless, I could drink a glass of hard cider if anybody was to give it ta me. I'm a sport I am.

Stephen: Say, Pop, aren't you waiting for someone?

Hezekiah: I'm waiting for my gal, Clarie.

Stephen: Well, your girl is waiting for you.

Hezekiah: Yas, and a gal will be waiting for you if you get too pert. A dark gal. Black Mariah. You can't fool Hezekiah Hopkins justice of the peace and blacksmith from Spruce Corners.
Stephen: But Pop ...

Hezekiah: Don’t try to sell me no patent roach catchers or flytraps. They’re all fakes. Every one of them. Can’t fool me. I’m flip. I’m flop.

Stephen: Hah. How do you know they’re fake?

Hezekiah: Why, ain’t I bought every one that’s been put on the market since ’72. I’m too slick for you.

Stephen: Look here, Pop. Don’t you know me?

Hezekiah: Well, now, there is something familiar about the jawbone. Let me see. Now I know. You remind me of our old mare Nance. Hah hah, you can’t fool Hezekiah. Why, you’re my son-in-law. By jiminy if you ain’t. Why Stephen, them glasses yer wearing makes you look so intelligent I didn’t know ya.

Stephen: C’mon Pop. Let’s get in the car and go home.

Hezekiah: Streetcar? Why, don’t ya keep a harse? Isn’t this better? [A horn sounds] Well, I’ll be hornswoggled if he ain’t got an automobile.

Stephen: Home, James.

[Sound of an automobile]

Hezekiah: Hoh ho, whew this beats ridin’ behind any trotter I ever rode after.

Stephen: Pop, this is Fifth Avenue.
Hezekiah: Fifth Avenue? Do tell. Say, son, what’s that big building?

Stephen: Why, that’s the library. Can’t you read?

Hezekiah: Read? Why, this darn thing is goin’ so fast I can’t even see.

Stephen: Say, that’s the original site of the first fireproof building in New York.

Hezekiah: Fireproof building? Why, what was that?

Stephen: The reservoir!!!

"Two Rubes Swapping Horses."
Performed by Steve Porter and Ed Meeker.
Edison, 1913 (Special F).

[Sound of whistling, the tune of "Bringing Home a Baby Bumblebee"]

Sally Ann: Hiram, Hiram, where be you?

Hiram: Here I be, Sally Ann.

Sally Ann: What be you doing out?

Hiram: Oh, nothing p’ticalar.

Sally Ann: Better do your chores.

Hiram: Chores is all done and I’m a-waiting for Si Skinner. Said he’d be down this morning and, uh, someone’s coming down the road now. Looks like Si, too. By gosh, ‘tis. [A dog barks] Stay down, Shep. Stay down. That’s Si, he’s a comin’ up.
Sally Ann: I’m goin’ in.

Hiram: Here he comes. Gosh, never seen that horse afore.

Si: Whoah. How’d you, Hiram?


[Unintelligible; Hiram says something about Shep “eating” Si’s dog instead of the other way around.]

Si: Don’t know about that.


Si: Hey, Hiram, I hear you weren’t quite satisfied with that ‘ere horse I sold ya.

Hiram: Well, can’t say I be, Si. Say, didn’t you tell me that ‘ere horse didn’t have a fault.

Si: Course I did.

Hiram: Well, the durned horse has got a [unintelligible, “stabbin’”?].

Si: That ain’t the horse’s fault, Hiram. That’s his misfortune.
Hiram: Well, maybe it 'tis, but anyway you told me the horse was alright only it didn't look well. Didn't'ye?

Si: That's what I did.

Hiram: Well, the durned horse is blind in two eyes.

Si: I told ye he didn't look well. [Si laughs]

Hiram: That's right, laugh. Laugh.

Si: Can't help it, Hiram.

Hiram: Say, how'd you swap for that 'ere critter you brung with ye?

Si: What, this mare? Well, I'll swap you Hiram, but it'll cost you quite a heap of money to boot.

Hiram: Well, I'll just take a look at the mare and maybe I'll dicker with ye. Got a funny lookin' tail ain't she? Never noticed her tail before.

Si: While, it's never been before. It's always been behind.

Hiram: There ya go again, got the joke ain't'ye? Does she kick?

Si: Nooo. She ain't got no cause to kick. She gets everything she wants.

Hiram: Is she a speeder?

Si: Not yet, but she's gonna be a darn fast mare.

Hiram: Do tell.
Si: Yessiree. She’s one of my whallops with forty two cents in her.

Hiram: What’s that got to do with it?

Si: Why, don’t you see, she’s got it in her? You know, money makes the mare go.

Hiram: By chowder, that’s a good’un. Say, Si, I’ll swap ye, if you don’t want too much money to boot.

Si: It’s gonna cost you something, Hiram.

Hiram: Well, speak out. What’s the proposition?

Si: Well, I’ll tell ya. I’ll take the other horse, you take the mare and you give me in money four dollars and thirty two cents.

Hiram: That’s steep money, Si.

Si: I know it ‘tis. But the mare’s worth it. I tell ya she’s got it in her.

Hiram: Yah, some of it. By gosh, I’ll swap it. Gimme yer hand on it.

Si: There ya be. [Sound of a melodion] Who’s playin’ the melodion?

Hiram: That’s my daughter, Tildy.

Si: Open the window, Hiram, so we can hear it. That’s “The Old Grey Mare” song, ain’t it Hiram.
Hiram: That's what it 'tis. Come on.
Let's sing it. Then we'll go in the
house and have a sipper of cider.

Si: Alright. Here I go.

[They sing the comic song together.]

"Train Time at Pun'kin Centre."
Performed by Cal Stewart and others (uncredited).
Victor, 1919 (#18595-B, take 2).

Lem: Well, Josh, I see number 6 is late
as usual.

Uncle Josh: Yah, that train never was on time
but and then it was seven minutes
late.

Lem: I see number 1 don't stop here
anymore, I wonder what's the matter?

Uncle Josh: I don't know exactly but I did hear
the engineer is mad at the agent.
Hank Williams is havin' quite a time
gettin' that barrell of salt in his
wagon.

Lem: Hank ain't the man he usedta be, is
he Josh?

Uncle Josh: No, he never was. Mike Willis come
by after losing his automobile
yesterday.

Lem: I . . . whatta ya know, someone try
to steal it?
Uncle Josh: No, it run away and went down a gopher hole and he had to carry water all afternoon to drown it out. [A train whistle] Here she comes.

[A train approaches; several overlapping voices are heard, one calling, "Hoskins' Tavern?"]

Lem: There's a fella in the car talkin' to ya, Josh.

Uncle Josh: Hey, you talkin' to me, Mister?

Passenger: I was talking right at you.

Uncle Josh: You're a bad shot; you missed me a mile.

Passenger: What's the population of this town?

[Josh answers with the name of an agricultural product, something like "prin-civillest root"]

Passenger: Well, I don't mean "what do you raise?" but "how many people live here?"

Uncle Josh: We doesn't count'm: they're all here at train time.

Lem: Ah-hah, Josh told it to'm that time.

A Third Rube: Yah, I'll say he did.

Passenger: Have you lived here all your life?

Uncle Josh: No, not yet.

Lem: He'll do well joshing Josh.

Third Rube: Yes. He don't know he talking to the feller what put the "Josh" in joshing.

Passenger: Anything going on here?
Uncle Josh: No, nothing ever happens here. Only sundowns, sunup, and change of the moon. [Singing, "down in the meadow"; Lem whistles] Now, Lem, you stop that, let the boys sing.

Passenger: Who is that singing?

Uncle Josh: The Pun'kin Center Sympathy Quartet.

Passenger: You mean "symphony," don't you?

Uncle Josh: No, "sympathy," they have the sympathy of the whole village when they sing.

Passenger: Local quartet?

Uncle Josh: No, barbershop. What business be you in?

Passenger: Chiropractor.

Uncle Josh: I don't mean your politics, what be your doin'.

Passenger: Chiropractor.

Uncle Josh: Oh, yes. [A distant voice calls "All aboard"; the train moves away] What did he say he was doing, Lem?

Lem: Ki-ree-o-prac-ta.

Uncle Josh: Smart feller. I bet he sells a lot of it.
APPENDIX B

"Old Zip Coon" and "Turkey in the Straw."

"Old Zip Coon"

There once was a man with a double chin
Who performed with skill on the violin,
And he played in time and he played in tune,
But he wouldn't play anything but "Old Zip Coon."

"Turkey in the Straw"

As I was a-gwine down the road,
With a tired team and a heavy load,
I crack'd my whip and the leader sprung,
I says day-day to the wagon tongue.
Turkey in the straw, turkey in the hay,
Roll 'em up and twist 'em up a high tuckahaw
And twist 'em up a tune called Turkey in the Straw.

Went out to milk, and I didn't know how,
I milked the goat instead of the cow.
A monkey sittin' on a pile of straw,
A-winkin' at his mother-in-law.
Turkey in the straw, turkey in the hay,
Roll 'em up and twist 'em up a high tuckahaw
And twist 'em up a tune called Turkey in the Straw.

Met Mr. Catfish comin' down stream.
Says Mr. Catfish, "What does you mean?"
Caught Mr. Catfish by the snout,
And turned Mr. Catfish wrong side out.
Turkey in the straw, turkey in the hay,
Roll 'em up and twist 'em up a high tuckahaw
And twist 'em up a tune called Turkey in the Straw.

Came to a river and I couldn't get across,
Paid five dollars for a blind old hoss;
Wouldn't go ahead, nor he wouldn't stand still,
So he went up and down like an old saw mill.
Turkey in the straw, turkey in the hay,
Roll 'em up and twist 'em up a high tuckahaw
And twist 'em up a tune called Turkey in the Straw.

As I came down the new cut road,
Met Mr. Bullfrog, met Miss Toad
And every time Miss Toad would sing,
Old Bullfrog cut a pigeon wing.
Turkey in the straw, turkey in the hay,
Roll 'em up and twist 'em up a high tuckahaw
And twist 'em up a tune called Turkey in the Straw.

Oh I jumped in the seat and I gave a little yell
The horses ran away, broke the wagon all to hell
Sugar in the gourd and honey in the horn
I never been so happy since the day I was born.
Turkey in the straw, turkey in the hay,
Roll 'em up and twist 'em up a high tuckahaw
And twist 'em up a tune called Turkey in the Straw.
APPENDIX C

"MR. CRESSY TALKS WITH THE MATINEE GIRL ABOUT HIS CAREER,"
The Providence News, 8 October 1901.

When I returned from Keith's theatre yesterday afternoon, I drew up my chair to my desk, settled myself comfortably, and gave myself up to the luxury of pleasant thoughts. Whose thoughts would not be pleasant after such a half hour? I had met Will M. Cressy, and had, how I don't know, persuaded him to talk a little about himself. What a complete revolution my fancies about him had undergone since meeting him. I had imagined him to be a venerable, white-haired old gentleman, in other words, a 'Squire Tappan.' So much for his life-like characterizations.

Imagine my amazement when I beheld a comparatively young man, certainly under forty. He is by no means good looking, but there is a magnetism about his personality which compels and holds admiration. He welcomed me with a strong, firm handshake, which, although it did not make me wince, impressed me with its sincerity, the predominating note in the man and the actor. I felt his keen, alert eyes searching mine for the motive of my request for the introduction, and at once realized that it would be useless to attempt to hide my business from such a gaze. I was about to confess, when with a twinkle, he started to tell me one of his inexhaustible fund of funny yarns. It is said that Mr. Cressy has a story to fit everything and everybody.

I never met anyone with such a keen appreciation of the fun in life. His stories do not smack of 'Jim Jones' Joke Book,' but are told with a convincing earnestness that makes one realize that they, like his playlets and characters, are taken from life. And they never fail to have, besides a good quantity of hearty laughs, an underlying moral. In less than five minutes I was enjoying myself immensely, but, suddenly remembering my errand I remarked, 'When did you ever get an opportunity to sandwich in your study of the New Hampshire farmer between all your playwriting, acting and other duties?' 'But for lucky, or unlucky, who shall say, turn of
Fortune’s wheel, I myself would now be one of them. As it is I become one every May, and remain one until September. You see my home is in New Hampshire, but with a deepening of the twinkle in his ‘twinkly’ eyes, there was too much excitement there for me, and, --

‘Excitement?’ I interrupted incredulously. ‘Ye-es. You see, up to October 29th, 1865, my parents had looked forward to a life of peace and happiness, but on that day a terrible misfortune came to them, a misfortune that grew as the years rolled on. For on that fateful day, I joined the family at Bradford, N.H. The day was dark and rainy—even the heavens wept. The hired man wanted to drown me, but grandmother said to wait, you couldn’t tell what it might develop into. She lived to regret her decision, however. At the age of six I went to school. At the age of six years and forty-five minutes I got my first licking, from another boy. At the age of six years and and forty-seven minutes I got my second licking, from the teacher.

At six years and three hours father gave me my third. Three lickings the first day wasn’t bad. The teacher said she guessed I aimed to do right, but I was awfully near sighted (I wear glasses yet you know). I graduated at the ages of 11, 13, 14, 16 and twice during my seventeenth year (from different schools). At the age of seventeen, I left Exeter Academy, and from that time until I was twenty-five I started on several paths to fame but lost my way on each. At twenty-five I “debuted” on the stage at Greenville, Connecticut. How did I come to do it? Well, it was an accident in the first place, and a tragedy in the second place I guess the desire to be “an actor” is born in every human being, and I suppose I was no exception to the rule. I had the desire, but that was about all I did have towards it.

In 1889, I think it was, the people of Concord, N.H. where we were living, got up a local minstrel show. We had lawyers, doctors, and even a minister in the “chorus.” My brother and I were natural musicians, and we were billed as a “musical team.” I knew that my mother, sister and other unexacting female relations thought we were “good,” but there seemed to be a carefully concealed doubting expression in father’s face that at times led me to doubt our greatness. But we appeared, and the next day the local paper said “The Cressy boys were real good.” We read that one line “The Cressy boys were real good” over and over again. We got some cards printed, “The Cressys, Harry and Will, musical artists
and comedians," and conscientiously answered every "want ad" in the Clipper for three weeks. Then "IT" came. An offer! An offer from a real manager to be real actors. Before our immediate answer, accepting, had reached the manager, we had bought a trunk, hired two alto horns, and gone into training. At last the joyful time arrived, and we started to "act." Mother was in tears. Father wasn’t. (His time hadn’t come yet.) Here Mr. Cressy came, to a significant pause and asked, "Well, how did your first venture turn out?" "It didn’t turn out," he said laconically. "It ‘busted’ at Troy thirty-two weeks later, and we found by pooling our finances the sum total was exactly—nothing. There was but one thing to do. I telegraphed to father for two tickets from Troy to Concord. This was his cue to weep, you see. We were greeted with a kind of subdued kindness, father more subdued than the others, twenty-two dollars more.

Harry decided he had had enough and went to work in a store, but I was just getting worked up. In a week I had another position. Father cheerfully furnished the money for me to go with (almost too cheerfully I thought.) The company opened in Roundout, N.Y. on Monday and closed in Amsterdam the following Friday. Father to the rescue again, and when I arrived home I found a position awaiting me, to unload carloads of grain down at father’s store at a dollar a day. After three long weary weeks lugging bags of wheat and corn. I struck a new style of manager, one who paid real salaries.

I stayed with him at $8 a week for eight months, and from that time I’ve been blessed with continual advancement. After the World’s Fair, I joined Denman Thompson in “The Old Homestead,” playing “Cy Prime.” The rest you know. But I don’t think father ever gets a telegram even now that he doesn’t expect it to read: “Please send fares from here to Concord. Will.” There, I’ve told you “the story of my life.” I began with the usual “T’was on a dark and stormy night,” so I suppose I ought to end with “And they lived happily ever after,” but who knows? “Life is such a lottery.”"
APPENDIX D

“Farm Maxims and Bits of Wisdom”

from
Bradley’s Farmers’ Memorandum Book,
presented by
J.E. Weis, New Washington, O.
Bradley’s Standard Fertilizers,
Cleveland, Ohio, 1903.

1. Like seed, like crop.
   Thrift is better than a bequest from your old uncle.

2. Every couple is not a pair.

3. He that cannot obey cannot command.

4. The milking stool is a poor curry comb.

5. Honey and praise should be spread thin.


7. Look out whom you hire or take into the family.

8. Weeds are the farmers’ faithful overseers;
   they make him stir the soil.

9. “The farmers are the founders of civilization.”
   --Webster.

10. Steady going secures success before spasms of speed.
11. The cow, the hen and the garden are three prime money makers.

12. High thinking goes well with high farming.

13. Prevention is better than cure, example better than precept.

14. A man whose luck is all good grows into a spoiled child of fortune.

15. Let the whole family pull together,—that is the best kind of socialism.

16. No prop for good old age like a good farm all paid for.

17. Failure sighs, while success hustles.

18. An old field may produce new grain. Use the Brands named in this book and prove it.

19. It is a wise man who knows when he has enough and enjoys it, letting fools hunt for more.
ARCHIVES

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Tony Pastor Collection of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, the University of Texas at Austin.
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