JOYCE, Robert Suddards, 1935-
A HISTORY OF THE ARMBRUSTER SCENIC STUDIO
OF COLUMBUS, OHIO.

The Ohio State University, Ph.D., 1970
Theater

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A HISTORY OF THE ARMBRUSTER SCENIC
STUDIO OF COLUMBUS, OHIO

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

By
Robert Suddards Joyce, B.A., M.A.

The Ohio State University
1970

Approved by

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June 23, 1935

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In recent years researchers in the field of theatre history have frequently observed that in the process of recording the annals of the American stage historians have often overlooked specific examination of the contributions of scenic artists and the influence of staging practices in the development of American Theatre. Although it is true that America had no great drama prior to the twentieth century, by the mid-nineteenth century this country had developed a thriving theatre that provided a virtually unending variety of entertainment ranging from Shakespeare to Tom Thumb Weddings. It was, for the most part, a theatre of scenic spectacle, and while the story of the spectacle and its mechanics is being written in new studies, the history of the designers and scenic artists of the era leaves much to the telling.

One particular area of the scenic tradition of the American stage about which little is known or written is the operation of those scenic studios that came into existence to meet the growing demands for spectacle in the nineteenth century. During the period 1870 - 1910 these scenic studios,
creating scenic embellishments of every conceivable kind, were a most vital adjunct to the particular needs of the era of the "traveling" theatre. Despite their important contributions, however, relatively little is known about the men who operated these studios, their methods of operation, and their place in the history of the nineteenth-century theatre; although a multiplicity of studies now exists regarding many aspects of scene design from this period, there is no detailed study concerning the scenic studios. Brief mention is made of them in such sources as Garret Leverton's *The Production of Later Nineteenth-Century American Drama*, and Arthur Krow's *Play Production in America*, but no study exists which details their operation and contributions as an integral part of the American stage.

Such a detailed study of the activities and contributions of one scenic studio is now possible through acquisitions made by The Ohio State University Theatre Collection of the Armbruster Scenic Studio of Columbus, Ohio, once the largest scenic studio in America. The contents of this acquisition span the eighty-three years of the studio's existence, representing theatrical production from 1875 until 1958. During these years the Armbrusters designed scenery for both the professional and nonprofessional stage.

When Albert Armbruster, the last manager of the studio, retired in 1958 he sold the studio building. Prior to its demolition, the entire contents of the studio were
acquired by Mr. Robert Verbeck, curator of a theatre museum in Westerville, Ohio. Verbeck collected and transported to the museum not only all the extant scenery from the studio's stock rooms, but also all of the firm's business records, correspondence files, and design models, numbering in the thousands, including maquettes of complete stage settings. Verbeck then photographed the interior of the building thereby recording permanently the physical features of the studio's layout.

In 1964, as a research student in theatre at Ohio State, I discovered in the theatre collection six photographic plates of settings designed by the Armbruster Studio. Intrigued by the settings and the existence of such a studio in Columbus, I furthered my investigation until I learned of the holdings at the Verbeck Museum. I contacted Robert Verbeck and arranged to examine the Armbruster Collection; he showed me an entire room overflowing with boxes and files containing designs ranging from rough pencil drawings to completed maquettes detailed in water colors, source materials for designs, dozens of business record books, boxes of correspondence and many other materials relating to the studio's theatrical history. In another storeroom Verbeck showed me extant settings from the studio, all intact and ready to be hung on a theatre stage. When he learned that a study of the Armbruster Studio would contribute to American theatre history,
Mr. Verbeck graciously made a gift of his Armbruster materials to The Ohio State University Theatre Collection as a basis for this and future studies.

The contents of the Armbruster Studio were then moved by truck to the university and research for this study began. All of the extant settings were hung on the Mershon Auditorium stage at the campus and photographed in color. The remainder of the material was stored in the theatre collection and the task of sorting, which was to take one year to complete, was begun. As a result of this and possible later studies, the exceptional evidence found in the Armbruster Collection will provide precise details concerning the operation of nineteenth-century scenic studios which will help to illuminate the contributions made by such studios to the American stage.

The Objectives of the Study

The general aim of this study is to construct not only an historical record of the nature of the scenic work executed by the Armbruster Scenic Studio but a study including a record of the operation and methodology of the studio artists as well as a description and evaluation of their most significant professional contributions. In addition to this general overview, some specific questions to be answered by the study are the following: How did scenic studios operate as an adjunct to the theatre of their time?
What was the general nature of the work done by scenic studios? For whom did the Armbruster Scenic Studio design scenery? What was the nature of that scenery? What contributions did the Armbrusters make to professional theatre through the years of their existence?

In constructing such a history I intend to use an illustrative, iconographic presentation allowing the extant designs, photographs, and other primary materials to tell the story of the Armbrusters and their work. The findings of this study will be offered not only as the history of one specific studio but as a basis for reflecting upon the general operations and contributions of scenic studios in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The Primary Sources

The primary sources to be used for this study are the materials in the Armbruster Collection. These materials fall into nine general categories: (1) source materials that were the initial inspiration for many of the designs, (2) pencil sketches of settings in their earliest conceptions, (3) watercolor designs of a fragmentary nature, (4) complete maquettes of stage settings, (5) photographs of actual extant settings, (6) photographs of settings taken by the Armbrusters in their studio at the time of their completion, (7) designs for miscellaneous set pieces, (8) front curtain and olio drop designs, and (9) office
records of the firm including inventory lists and company correspondence. In addition to this material, two other primary sources of information for this study were: (1) interviews with Albert Armbruster, members of his immediate family, Gus Schell of Schell Scenic Studio, Columbus, Ohio, and other people who have firsthand knowledge of the Armbruster Studio when it was in operation, and (2) programs from the Hartman Theatre and the Grand Opera House in Columbus, Ohio, which were extremely helpful in identifying many of the settings constructed by the Armbrusters.

Methodology

Generally, the methodology applied in studying these materials was dictated by two major considerations: (1) how the mass of material in the Armbruster Collection could be meaningfully studied so that the result would be chronologically organized while at the same time depicting the major changes in the history of the Armbruster Studio, and (2) what materials demonstrated the most significant professional contributions of the artists and the studio. The resulting outline of methodology, which follows, includes indications of how primary sources were used.

Since the Armbruster Collection consists of thousands of miscellaneous materials, certain restrictive criteria for the selection of primary sources to be used in this study were necessary. The criteria finally arrived at
included: (1) identifiable materials, (2) materials which
reflected general trends, (3) materials which best illus-
trated pivotal factors in the historical record of the
studio, (4) materials which best documented pictorially the
story of the studio, (5) materials which had other obvious
significance. Of all the materials that met these criteria,
the major portion of sources used in this study are design
sketches and maquettes. These sketches and maquettes will
be subjected to the following general analysis as they are
presented: identification as to (1) play, (2) contracting
agent, (3) professional circuit traveled, (4) critical
reactions to the scenic work, (5) information which illus-
trates artistic techniques followed in executing designs
and actual settings, (6) importance of the design to the
studio, (7) sources used and procedures followed in arriving
at the design concepts, and (8) originality if any, in the
technical aspects of the studio's work.

Secondary Sources

While primary sources are the focal point of this
study, there are other sources which contain material essen-
tial to the understanding not only of this particular
studio's contribution, but of the nature of scenic art in
the nineteenth century. Comprehensive historical works such
as Glenn Hughes, A History of the American Theatre, Arthur
Hornblow's A History of the Theatre in America, and
Barnard Hewitt's *Theatre U.S.A.*, while featuring highlights of the theatrical periods under study, generally occupy themselves more with playwriting and acting while mentioning very little about scenic artists and staging techniques. However, the summations of theatrical movements within given periods and the estimate of the general temper of the theatrical times found in these works was helpful in establishing background for the study. The above works were also excellent sources of bibliography for nearly every aspect and period of theatrical development in America.

William Winter's *The Wallet of Time*, and *Annals of the New York Stage* by Odell contain useful details about the traveling companies of the late nineteenth century, including itineraries, cast members, and the reactions of the critics to the productions; two excellent sources for general descriptions of production techniques and the scene painter's art during the nineteenth century were Krow's *Play Production in America* published in 1916, and Hiram K. Moderwell's *The Theatre of To-day*, published in 1914. Another basic source for scene painting techniques was found in a small, practical book written for amateur playhouses entitled *Secrets of Scene Painting and Stage Effects* by Van Dyke Browne, published in 1893. Browne takes the reader through a basic course in paints, materials, construction and arrangement of scenic units, special effects, and basic inventories of stock settings essential to the times.
However, one of the most informative sources regarding the scene painter's place in the nineteenth-century theatre is a firsthand account of the theatrical milieu of this period written by John Jennings in a book entitled *Theatrical and Circus Life; or, Secrets of the Stage, Green-Room and Sawdust Arena*, published in 1882. Although naive when compared with the works of scholars, this publication, with its eyewitness accounts, contains certain specifics of the practices of the period, not included in other sources, which helped establish the circumstances within which scenic studios arose. For information pertaining to just the physical stages of the period, Garret Leverton's *The Production of Later Nineteenth Century American Drama* was also an excellent, well illustrated source which, in combination with the others mentioned, helped establish the general milieu of nineteenth-century theatre.

### Newspapers and Periodicals

For surveys of the history of scene design in America, two periodical articles proved of great value: Wesley Swanson's "Wings and Backdrops - The Story of American Stage Scenery from the Beginnings to 1875," published in four articles in *The Drama*, from October 1927 to January 1928, and Edwin Duerr's "Charles Ciceri - The Background of American Scene Design," published in *Theatre Arts*, 1932. Both articles served as major sources
for background pertinent to this study. Other specialized periodicals which contained information on scenic art for the periods of this study were *Art and Progress* and *The Magazine of Art*.

For more specific material, newspaper features and theatrical reviews from *The New York Dramatic Mirror*, *The New York Times*, *The Columbus Dispatch*, and *The Ohio Daily Journal* provide an abundant source of firsthand accounts of Armbruster scenery, and often offer details concerning the source of the design conception and descriptions of staging devices which would not otherwise be available.

**Theses and Dissertations**

Certain aspects of technical background were abundantly provided by John H. Green's *The Development of Stage Rigging in the United States - 1766 - 1893*, the University of Denver, 1954, and George Oliver's *Changing Patterns of Spectacle on the New York Stage*, Pennsylvania State University, 1956. The rise of the traveling companies in America and the impact they had on theatre practice was dealt with in William Zucchero's study of the James Neill Company, The Ohio State University, 1964. F. C. Davidson's *The Rise of the American Minstrel Show*, University of Michigan, 1952, contained data pertaining to the Field Minstrels which was of particular interest to certain aspects of this study. A dissertation of the nineteenth-century
staging of Rip Van Winkle by Harold Obee, The Ohio State University, 1961, and a masters thesis, The Great Southern Theatre of Columbus, Ohio, by Marcia Siena, The Ohio State University, 1957, were also helpful in establishing staging precedents for the periods of this study.

Analysis of all primary sources for this study indicates that the professional status of the Armbruster Studio and its significance and contributions are most advantageously and meaningfully presented when the major portions of the study are divided into the following periods: (1) 1875 to 1920, from the founding of the studio until the death of its founder, Mathias Armbruster, (2) 1920 through 1929, the first nine years of the studio under the management of Albert Armbruster when he created his most significant design work, and (3) 1930 to 1958, from the time the studio became a theatrical supply house rather than a scenic studio producing original design work, until its closing. The organization of chapters within the study also follows historical chronology.

Chapter II will provide historical background in order to establish the professional milieu of the scene painter and scenic art in general prior to the rise of scenic studios. This chapter will also present theories as to the need for these studios and the specific function they fulfilled.
Biographical material on the Armbrusters, the establishment of the Armbruster Scenic Studio, its layout and methods of operation will be presented in Chapter III. This chapter will then survey the entire scope of the studio's eighty-three year history as an introduction to the specific study of the three historical periods outlined above.

Chapter IV will cover the first period, 1875-1920. This period will be presented as the era of the studio's most significant accomplishments. During these years the Armbrusters designed for some of the most famous players of the traveling theatre in America. Under the leadership and artistic skill of Mathias Armbruster, the studio gained national prominence.

The management of Albert Armbruster from 1920 to 1958 will be covered in Chapter V. The first decade of this period, when the studio was primarily occupied with the production of minstrel scenery, will be presented as the most productive and significant period of Albert Armbruster's management. The years from 1930 to 1958 complete the history of the studio when its activities were primarily concerned with the rental of stock theatrical supplies to amateur performers.
CHAPTER II

A SURVEY OF SCENIC TRADITIONS ON THE AMERICAN STAGE IN THE EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES

This chapter provides an historical survey of the development of staging conventions in the American theatre as a background for the study of the Armbruster Studio. The essential pattern of this survey will be to trace pivotal developments in the process of the growth of stage tradition in terms of three historical periods: (1) the Colonial period from 1716 to 1777; (2) the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century; (3) the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The phenomenal growth of the traveling road theatre will be considered as a separate development during the years from 1870 to 1910.

Colonial Stage Traditions.--The establishment of theatrical traditions in the United States during the eighteenth century was, in the main, a matter of transporting already existing English traditions to the American colonies. Traveling troupes of players were more the tradition than established playhouses with stock companies. These early companies were probably equipped in a manner similar to their English counterparts:
Arriving in a town, the players usually were able to find some empty barn or store room, or occasionally a large room in the inn where they could regale the townsfolk with their extensive repertoire of the 'best plays, operas, farces and pantomimes.' They would hang a collection of green tatters across one end of the room for a curtain. A pair of paper screens, one on each side of the stage, served for tormentors. Add to this a few candles across the front of the stage for footlights and a chandelier made of a hoop perforated with a dozen or so iron spikes upon which dripping tallow candles could be stuck, and you had a theatre! A couple of drop curtains which could be carried with ease in the property trunks comprised the simple scenery. One of these was an exterior set upon which was painted such an indefinite landscape that it could be made to serve for everything from an English country scene to the Mall. The other was an interior whose locale depended largely upon the sort of furniture that was placed in front of it.

The first clear reference to the use of stage scenery in the colonies was in conjunction with the first American playhouse built in 1716 in Williamsburg, Virginia. A local merchant in Williamsburg contracted with a Mr. Charles Stagg and his wife to manage the playhouse and import actors and scenery from England.

In 1752, America received the first well-organized professional acting troupe, the Hallams, from the New Theatre in London. Although the specifics of their scenic inventory still seem to be a matter of scholarly conjecture, an announcement, concerning the arrival of the company, that appeared in the Virginia Gazette boasts of general elegance:

Mr. Hallam, from the New Theatre in Goodmansfield, London, is daily expected here with a select Company of Comedians; the Scenes, Cloaths and Decorations, are entirely new, extremely rich,
being painted by the best hands in London, are excelled by none in Beauty and Elegance. 3

Barnard Hewitt, along with other historians of the period, agrees that whatever the actual state of the Hallam scenery, it was probably the most impressive that had yet been seen in America, and may well have established a new standard for theatre to come.

While being a "prototype" in American scenic traditions, the Hallam troupe affected the stage in another way -- a Mr. David Douglass, "theatre builder," came to America from England to join the Hallam Company. After Hallam's death, Douglass took over and reorganized the company, and during the years 1763 to 1774, he became America's first great theatre builder. Among the numerous theatres to his credit are the Southwark Theatre in Philadelphia, the John Street Theatre in New York, and the Annapolis theatre in Annapolis, Maryland. In addition to his theatre building, Douglass also made contributions in scenery. For example, he imported from England, in 1771, the first scenery especially painted and constructed for an American theatre: his playhouse in Annapolis. He also introduced scenic displays in Philadelphia in 1766, and, in 1761 at the Beekman Street Theatre, New York, he is reported to have spent a thousand dollars on scenery and costumes for a sixteen night run. 4 Although his activities were curtailed when entertainment was suppressed by the Continental Congress of 1774, he is considered an important pioneer of these early decades.
The American stage during Douglass's period followed the English pattern of a raked, sloping, rear stage, grooved to hold sliding shutters for backing scenes and flat wings for the side masking. This arrangement is described by John H. Green in his thesis, The Development of Stage Rigging in the United States (1766-1893):

The rear of the stage in this era has been presented as the area in which pairs of flats, identified as shutters operated in grooves to form the back scene. These shutters, operating in pairs, slid in grooves on the stage floor and were supported at the top by overhead grooves of the same general nature as those at the bottom. The side areas on the early stages of the United States were mounted in grooves similar to those which held the back shutters, and were pulled off stage to reveal new scenes behind them in the same manner as the shutters. It was determined that the stages of this period probably were limited to two sets of wings, one either side of the stage in front of the shutters, and certainly did not contain more than three sets of these units. The overhead space on these stages did not provide for 'flies,' but were limited by the rafters and framing of the outside structure.

By the end of the Colonial period, the American stage had developed to the point of accommodating banks of wing and shutter scenery capable of changing entire settings instantly. Further innovations involving enlargement of the stage house -- the overhead spaces and below stage areas -- soon followed.

Late Eighteenth Century and Early Nineteenth Century Developments.—During the period of the Revolutionary War, further sophistication in staging technique was added to the American stage. As an example, from 1777 to
to 1783, British military officers occupying some of the theatres in America introduced drop scenes on rollers; for operating these drops, they installed winches and windlasses in the cellars which had previously been used for dressing room or green room facilities. The new fixtures were to become traditional stage machinery along with the grooves and shutters in the post-war years. As a result of the new machinery, the American stage witnessed another change in staging convention: the departure from an almost exclusive use of stock scenery.

By the end of the war, most of the better theatres constructed new scenes for each production. It was in Charleston, South Carolina, during this period that the tradition of American scene painters first began to develop. Wesley Swanson cites four of these early artists, Audin, Oliphant, Belzon, and Schultz (all Europeans), as being responsible for establishing the professional standards for the American stage. They furnished scenery not only for Charleston, but for New York City and other theatrical centers as well. As a result, this early work became the inspiration for the great period of scenic spectacle to come: Charleston had given the last decade of the eighteenth century some of its most inspired scenic displays, which, although neglected in most treatises on the American theatre, were of vital significance in the development of the visual elements of production in the early American theatre. It had contributed to the field in the work of distinguished European designers, the Audins, Schultz's and Belzon's. The popular pantomimes, dependent for a large share of their effectiveness upon the mounting, reached their
zenith in the nineteenth century upon the Charleston stage. The greatly admired transparent scenery was given some of its most noteworthy treatment by the brushes of the Charleston painters, and an attention to detail and a refinement of technique that had been unknown previously in American theatres attained its greatest perfection in the numerous and finely executed paintings of these indefatigable artists.

Audin, in particular, is credited with providing elaborate and eloquent French pantomimes beautifully colored and costumed for the Charleston stage, as well as splendidly mounted and arranged melodramas often using views of Charleston.

After the first two decades of the nineteenth century, scenic elements had reached a degree of primary importance to the American theatre. Rolled drop scenes more and more augmented the conventional back shutters, causing subsequent changes in the stage machinery of larger theatres. The most radical of these changes took place in the overhead space of the theatre which was being used for the installation of the new machinery required for the drop scenes. Green notes this as a primary innovation of the period from 1794 to 1820:

By increasing this area sufficiently to allow machinery to be placed overhead, the rigging loft was established. This was, in its day, the same essential feature as the gridiron and loft combination of modern theatres. However, the motive power which was employed, still retained the basic items of windlass and drums. The mounting of these units, however, initiated another step toward the development of modern stage rigging. These first fly galleries were placed on either side of the stage, running from front to rear, and approximately the same height as the proscenium arch. Slightly above this position, on the fly loft deck, were mounted the heavier shafts and drums which received
the lines from all scenic drops as well as the special act drop and front curtain. It is probable that in the Park Theatre, especially, the borders were also manipulated in this way before the close of this period.

Because of the new machinery and new techniques in staging, and because of the increased sophistication in scene design, America was beginning to rival Europe in the beauty of its theatres and the elegance of its scenery.

Perhaps the best method of understanding the changes which took place in the scenic traditions of the American stage during this era is to look briefly at one particular theatre: the Chestnut Street Theatre of Philadelphia. In a recent study of that theatre, the author, John R. Wolcott, contends that while the Chestnut, built in 1794, was essentially an English institution, its staging practices stood midway between the early efforts of the Colonial theatres and the later "freewheeling" theatrical activities of the later nineteenth century. Wolcott stresses the importance of the Chestnut Street Theatre in American history because both the theatre structure and the machinery it housed stood as a culmination of the early tentative efforts of American pioneers while serving at the same time as a touchstone to the present day.

Wolcott's study includes, among other things, an excellent account of the backstage operations at the Chestnut, taken from a series of newspaper articles written by Charles Durang for the Philadelphia Sunday Dispatch in
1854. This series is preserved in scrapbook form in the rare book library of the University of Pennsylvania and provides one with a picture of this important theatre. A portion of this firsthand description includes the following:

We will now offer a few desultory remarks on the interior regulations of the theatre in Chestnut Street, at this time, and for many years afterward, during the old (i.e., Warren and Wood) regime ... The stage was set (for rehearsal) -- that is, the flats were in their grooves agreeably to the requirement of the scene plot; ... The scene shifters were at their respective stations to answer the prompter's whistle by changing the scenes. The property-man with the tables and chairs, to place them in their appropriate situations, as the business of the scene required; ... These were the plain and gentlemanly principles upon which the rehearsals were based; in the simple comedies or tragedies, wherein no complicated set scenes were necessary. But even in the more busy or melodramatic plays, the same mechanical system of rehearsal was preserved. ... When the bustling, scenic productions of the more modern, or later drama, gradually introduced themselves, melodramatic pieces required set scenes, backed with huge platforms, and castles to stand a mock siege. Blocks and tackle were necessary, and "Travellers" running in the flies, or behind the sky-borders, were wanted to fly angels, cupids, and the spirits of the air. Traps of whalebone, to quickly sink or rise demons and choice spirits from the shades below, began to be employed. "Parallels" to bring or usher forth genii through suns, moons and stars, were needed, ... Even the Drummond light is now introduced, the other lights not being strong enough.

This account of the theatre's operations refers to the early years of the Chestnut's history. In the conclusion to his study, Wolcott notes, as did Green, that wings and flats were frequently augmented by flying drops. However, Wolcott cites a distinctly American innovation during this period: a back scene which, like modern scenery, was flown
directly into the flies in a single unrolled piece. Thus one finds a carrying on of the traditions of English theatre coupled with the innovations of the American stage.

The introduction of gas lighting in the Bowery Theatre in New York early in the nineteenth century added even newer dimensions to scenic investiture. American audiences showed signs of growing addiction to scenic spectacle now becoming more and more a possibility on the stages in larger cities equipped with this new lighting. One major entertainment outlet for this spectacle-conscious audience was panoramic exhibitions.

In his dissertation on panoramic scenery in the nineteenth century, Richard C. Wickman considers the nature of these exhibitions and their influence on staging practices in the American theatre. In describing the phenomenon of panorama, Wickman notes:

The panorama itself took many different forms and was made available to the public in a number of ways. There were huge, circular panoramas, which required special rotunda-like buildings, and were so large that the spectator felt dwarfed as he looked at the paintings. There were the moving panoramic displays, which were set up in halls, theatres, and church auditoriums and allowed the spectators to watch thousands of feet of painted canvas pass before their eyes. And, finally, there were the spectacularly scenic theatrical panoramas, which were used in a variety of ways to provide moving background scenery for dramatic actions.

Wickman contends that panoramic scenery has been largely overlooked as a pivotal factor in establishing entertainment tastes in the nineteenth century. His study brings forth
the proposition that the panorama was the outstanding example of theatrical tastes in that period and was an important causative factor in the popularity of illusionistic, spectacular staging which came later in the century. The Chestnut Street Theatre introduced the first moving panorama incorporated into a legitimate theatre performance, in 1828, for a production of *The Red Rover*. Other examples of early stage spectacle reflecting the realistic demands of American audiences was *The Flying Dutchman*, given in Albany in 1827, which used a real brig, thirty feet in length, full rigged and manned. At the Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia in 1835, a spectacle entitled *The Last Days of Pompeii* used twenty-two complete sets of scenery.

During the mid-nineteenth century European influences continued to be pivotal. At this time one particularly important innovation was introduced to the American theatre: the earliest experiments in box sets. Boucicault's production of *London Assurance* at the Park Theatre, New York City, in 1841, is held by most scholars to be the impetus for many experiments which followed in the use of box sets leading to early realistic environmental scenery; traveling European repertory was also to set historical precedents in scenery and costuming. The antiquarian scholarship exemplified by Charles Kean's *King John* produced at the Park Theatre in 1846, was noted to be the finest to be produced in America as far as scenery and costuming was concerned.
Kean's influence was certainly present in Edwin Booth's Shakespearean productions in his new Booth's Theatre opening in 1868. Not only were the scenic embellishments of his repertoire unsurpassed in quality of any yet seen in America, but his new theatre itself contained many important innovations. Swanson's description of Booth's *A Winter's Tale*, 1868, describes both the production and the new features of the theatre:

A production of *A Winter's Tale* staged by Booth cost over $40,000. The outstanding features scenically of this theatre were that scenes were worked entirely by machinery (hydraulic ramps); the old style right angled wings were abandoned for box sets; the principle of suggestiveness was employed by the artists; the wings were arranged obliquely instead of at right angles (so the illusion was not spoiled for those who sat on the sides of the auditorium); stage braces were used to support the wings and flats; and all the drop curtains were lifted up without being rolled.

A flat stage floor with no grooves, hydraulic elevators to raise set pieces from below stage and flying machinery to raise others above the stage level were among the pivotal new physical aspects of Booth's Theatre.

The Period from 1875 to 1900.--By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the larger American cities had huge theatres that were, like Booth's theatre, elaborately equipped with an immense array of complicated mechanisms for scenic spectacle. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the new mechanical sophistication of this era. Figure 1, from Albert Hopkins' *Magic*, depicts the playing level of the Metropolitan Theatre in New York. This sketch, drawn by
Figure 1. The Metropolitan Theatre in New York City from Albert Hopkins' *Magic*

a contemporary of the time, makes obvious the huge playing area, the numerous flying drops arrayed above, the completely trapped playing stage, and the possibilities of stage machinery housed below, suggested in a stage bridge shown in a raised position. Figure 2, from *Appleton's Journal*, presents an artist's sketch of a portion of the equipment used for Booth's production of *A Winter's Tale*. The author of the article entitled "Booth's Theatre - Behind the Scenes," which accompanied the sketch describes the surroundings as follows:

To the auditor, comfortably seated in the theatre, the scene rises like magic, often transporting him with its beauty; but to the visitor, thirty feet below the surface of the stage, the transformation above is sort of pandemonium below - huge pistons
move, wheels revolve, there is a rush and stir of waters and the thing is done. . . We also note, in this illustration, a series of platforms; these are under the traps on the stage, from which mounts the ghostly or other visitor, or upon which descend the disappearing genii. These platforms, called bridges, are lifted and moved by rams.  

But one must pause to remember, as historian Leverton clearly points out, that though these large metropolitan theatres were indeed wonders of their time, they were few in number as compared to the vast majority of simpler stages in the small theatres and opera houses that were using the
simple wing and drop settings. In attempting an overview of the late nineteenth-century American theatre, Leverton notes that too many historians overlook the fact that it was the opera house that was truly the national theatre: "The opera house ... occupied a prominent place in almost every community and ... dotted the country by the thousands." The majority of these theatres practiced staging conventions that reflect a general simplicity in approach:

There used to be a conventional structure for the stage from which few theatres, large or small departed. This structure was a division of the stage by lateral lines or grooves into sections which were the basis for all scene settings. Scenes were made, almost without exception by dropping painted canvas from above and by projecting painted "slides" upon the stage along the lateral lines. Nine out of ten scenes were thus constructed entirely of flapping canvas dropped from above and flapping canvas poking out from one side or the other -- all in set positions and in parallel lines. Occasionally, there came a "set scene" in which the usual canvas slides were lashed together to represent three sides of a room and a similar canvas roof, perhaps, was let down from the "flies." Around 1900, the "set scene" became common in America and within its limits, was greatly improved upon.

A general consensus of American theatre historians is that the majority of theatres did, indeed, employ either the system described above by Moderwell or flew the wings as well as the drops and borders. In many cases the use of this drop system was necessitated by a common narrowness of the stage area, but, as pointed out by Lawrence Hutton in Plays and Players, 1875, "drops are used by choice of builders in some of our modern and more pretentious houses."
The drop unit common to the period was a flat piece of canvas which retained its form by battens placed across the top and bottom horizontal edges. So rigged, these drops were suspended from gridirons in a series of lines on pulley systems and raised and lowered as required. Borders, which were abbreviated drop pieces cut off near the top to form the upper dimensions of the settings, were also flown from battens. In a house that flew all pieces, dispensing with the slide wings in the floor grooves, the wings and borders often became a single unit called a leg drop. Drops, borders, and curtains were commonly worked from a fly gallery located above the stage level but below the grid-iron. From Hopkins' Magic, comes a description of the workings of a fly gallery and gridiron. Although the narrator is describing the Metropolitan Theatre, not typical in most of its stage mechanics, these particular systems worked on common principles in large and small theatres:

Going up several flights of stone stairs, the visitor arrives at the first fly gallery. Here, as in the other parts of the house, every precaution is taken to guard against fire. The floor is of cement resting upon iron girders, and the visitor is at once struck with the solidity of everything. On each side of the fly gallery is a large iron pipe through which passes at frequent intervals a series of belaying pins to which are secured the ropes. All of the drops and borders, as well as the curtains are worked from the left fly gallery. . . The canvas is hemmed so as to permit a wooden pole, or batten being thrust through it. This bar is secured by means of clamps to the ropes which are to raise the scenes or drops. At the very top of the building, underneath the
roof, is what is called the gridiron. It is an iron framework which supports the pulleys over which the ropes run to raise the drops, borders, and the border lights. Each scene-drop is supported by five ropes, and most of the borders are also supported by five ropes, though three are sometimes used. These ropes are attached at equal intervals along the length of the scene or border. Each of the five ropes passes over a pulley on the gridiron, or rigging loft. The ropes are then assembled and pass down on the left of the stage to the first fly gallery, where the fly men are located. In raising or lowering a scene, the five ropes are pulled at the same time, and are secured to the fly rail by means of the belaying pins. . . The ropes which are not in immediate use are fastened to the belaying pins on the rail.

Figures 3 and 4 are pictorial representations of this traditional method of running flown scenery. Figure 3, from Van Dyke Browne's Secrets of Scene Painting and Stage Effects, shows a typical gridiron with three drops in position on the grid level. A close-up of the pulley-cleat mechanism appears in the lower right corner of the figure. In cases of extremely heavy drops, it was not unusual for stage hands to work the drops directly from the grid as is shown in this illustration. Figure 4, from Hopkins' Magic, illustrates the layout of a fly gallery with stage hands running the drops from the fly position.

By 1870, the larger theatres usually maintained a house staff of scenic painters and carpenters who provided all scenic units. These anonymous house artists provided the bulk of the scenery used by the larger metropolitan theatres for most of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The general procedures these men followed in
Figure 3. A typical gridiron with drops in position on the grid level from Van Dyke Browne's *Secrets of Scene Painting and Stage Effects*.

Creating scenery is vividly outlined in a firsthand account of the theatre of this era written by John Jennings in *Theatrical and Circus Life, 1882*:

The scenic artist, who is often known to the people only by his work, has some extraordinary duties to perform. When a combination or company has a date at a theatre a week or so beforehand, they send on small models of the scenery they require for their play. These models greatly resemble in their general appearance and size the toy theatres that are sold to children. The stage carpenter... takes the models and builds frames...
over which canvas or muslin is spread. Then the canvas-covered frame is taken to the scene painter's bridge when it is ready for the colors. In many theatres the bridge is a platform extending across the stage, and distant from the rear wall about a foot. It is on a level with the flies, and the opening between it and the rear wall is used for lowering and hoisting a scene which is hung on a large wooden frame while the artist is at work upon it. This frame moves up and down, being swung on pulleys. The most improved theatres East and West, in addition to having dressing rooms, engines, etc., in a building separate from the theatre, have the paint bridge also separate. The artist's palette is a long table with compartments at the back for different colors, and there is besides a profusion of paint cans, jars, etc., with huge brushes that might serve the whitewasher's wide-
spread purposes, and others thin enough to paint a lady's eye lash. . . The priming of a scene consists in laying a coat of white mixed with sizing upon the canvas. When this is dry, the artist outlines his scene in charcoal. He first gets his perspective, which he does by attaching a long piece of twine to a pin fixed at his "vanishing point." Then blackening the string and beginning at the top he snaps it so as to make a black line which is afterwards gone over with ink. This line is reproduced whenever the drawing requires, and the advantage it affords will be readily understood by all who know anything about art or appreciate the value of good perspective in drawing.24

Jennings also notes that a typical New York artist, noted for both skill and speed, could earn as much as 150 dollars for one scene. He also considered such prices as "enormous" since it was the practice to blot out old scenes and paint over new ones on the same canvas.

While the large theatres of the metropolitan areas could afford to man their own staff of scene painters and carpenters, the majority of theatres -- those in the provinces -- had to rely upon a standard inventory of stock settings. Stock sets were usually of a standard variety, varying only slightly in decor and color. Such houses kept a complete set of wings, borders, and drops for several common localities such as wooded exteriors, domestic interiors, palaces, prisons, and the like. Although most of the better traveling companies carried their own scenery, it was not unusual for even these companies to rely partially upon whatever stock sets were found in the house of the smaller towns. As Leverton points out, many times
companies carried their own drops but used standard stock wings from the opera house inventory.\textsuperscript{25} Such incongruities appear to have been accepted as standard practice.

The Road Theatre.--While the last quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed the appearance in the larger cities of huge theatres capable of fantastic mechanical wizardry, and the rise, in the provinces, of hundreds of opera houses, another equally phenomenal aspect of American theatre was born -- the traveling road show. The period from 1870 to 1910 has been described by historians as the most dynamic and interesting theatrical era in the history of the American stage, witnessing as it did the remarkable rise of traveling theatre. Every sort of stage entertainment took to the road. The American public in cities and towns across the land were, for the first time, provided with a continuing parade of legitimate stage shows. As Glenn Hughes describes it in his \textit{History of the American Theatre}:

\begin{quote}
\textit{It was} an era of great personalities in the legitimate field -- producing managers, actors, and playwrights; it was an era which turned the minstrel show into a national institution; which took variety and transformed it into a chain-store vaudeville; which created the modern burlesque show. \ldots\textit{[and]} which gave birth to the mammoth, mobile circus, Uncle Tom and all that was frankly theatrical.\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}

Every type of theatrical entertainment imaginable became available to any and all towns, providing a theatre stage was on hand.
By 1876 there were one hundred combination companies traveling with star and full company on the road; by 1886 there were two hundred and eighty-two such companies. Luxurious private railroad cars carried the international luminaries of the theatre to the hamlets of America. Bernhardt, and Duse played in the grand theatres of New York City and in tents in Texas. Henry Irving, Ellen Terry, Madame Modjeska were others of great world reputation who brought the classics in repertory to America via a road that now extended from coast to coast. By 1900, the height of the road show era, there were 1400 theatres in America and five hundred touring companies on the circuits. These touring companies created the largest and most wide-spread legitimate theatre audience this country has ever known.

During these years, English influences continued to affect America's stages. For a period of twenty-one years, from 1883 to 1904, the English actor-manager, Henry Irving, conducted eight tours of the United States. These tours brought to America the first complete European production in this country's history. The tours and their influence on American staging practices are described in a study of the stage management of Henry Irving by Byron S. Schaffer. Schaffer comments on the general impact of these tours as follows:

The Lyceum company arrived in this country fully equipped with the costumes, scenery, lighting equipment, and trained technical personnel it had
employed in the mounting of its English successes. Such attention to harmonious detail and emphasis on ensemble staging, such lavish quality in presentation had never before been revealed to American audiences. The impact of Irving's disciplined, consistent staging techniques was enormous, not only upon the select audiences of a few influential population centers, but upon the entire continent from Ontario to Louisiana, and from Massachusetts to California.\(^2^9\)

Among the conclusions of Schaffer's study is the observation that the Irving Company's disciplined, harmonious stage illusions, carefully detailed, were "infinitely superior" to American practices before 1883 and native managers and scenic artists were quick to imitate them.\(^3^0\)

The magnetism of great performers such as Irving accounted for packed houses wherever they traveled. Certainly when Modjeska played *East Lynne* or James O'Neill appeared in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, it was the star that the audiences came to see, not the play or the scenery; popular historians who review this period concentrate attention upon these players and the legendary tales of their personal lives and successes. However, it must be remembered that the greater portion of theatrical fare of this period was provided by lesser luminaries who could not and did not rely upon popularity alone to draw audiences to the theatre. The secondary traveling troupes depended much more upon theatrical effectiveness in the scenic aspects of production for their box office draw. Consequently, scenic art greatly influenced the success of much of the traveling theatre of the era. Illustrative of this point was the Lewis Morrison
Company whose productions of Faust traveled for twenty-one years of continuous success. Advance publicity and local reviews of this Faust constantly focused attention on the elaborateness with which the production was mounted. Weird and unusual scenic displays brought public acclaim as is typified by the following newspaper account of an appearance of Morrison and Faust in Columbus, Ohio:

[The production is full of scenic and electrical effects. The Brocken scene is a marvel of electrical effects with blinking dragons and electric fireflies, a shower of fire, weird scenery, etc.]

The New York Dramatic Mirror commented on the "extremely handsome and elaborate manner" with which the production's scenic effects were carried out. It is obvious that Morrison, typical of minor players, relied on more than the playwright's words and his own histrionics to draw public notice.

Native Shakespearean repertory often toured with more scenery than talent. Through the twenty-one years of Robert Mantell's Shakespearean tours, critics consistently lamented his over-extension of limited talent. However, the scenic splendor with which he surrounded himself and his company always met with public recognition. In 1905, the critic of the New York Times is typical in his reaction to Mantell's Richard III: "The entire production was staged upon a sumptuous scale." During an appearance of Mantell in Columbus, Ohio, in 1920, reviewers acclaimed the
luxurious scenic effects as "surpassing anything of this sort displayed on the American stage." While such zealous reporting may tend to overlook historical accuracy, there was certainly a heavy reliance upon the scenic artist and his theatrical displays by many of the road companies of this period.

During this period a most popular entertainment form indigenous to America, the minstrel, was born, grew to its zenith, and then underwent a transformation emerging in the late years of the nineteenth century as a mammoth vaudeville show with after-pieces, burlesque skits, and displays of scenic wonder. From 1898 to 1928, the most successful company of the new minstrel form was the Al G. Field Minstrel. The Field show toured the United States regularly, forty-six weeks every year, for thirty years, carrying a most elaborate scenic show in specially built railroad cars.

To meet the demands of growing numbers of theatres and their stock scenic needs, and to furnish an extensive traveling theatre depending heavily upon scenic embellishments, there arose, in the 1860's and 70's, independent firms whose function was to supply these needs. These firms became known as "scenic studios." Historians record that these studios became an integral part of the American theatre scene in the last three decades of the nineteenth century -- an important adjunct to the provincial theatres and the traveling companies. Scenic studios grew with the expanding
theatrical scene to become the chief source of theatrical scenery for the American theatre from 1870 to 1910, the height of the road show era. By 1884, the American Dramatic Directory listed numerous studios in New York City; Cleveland, Ohio; Kansas City, Missouri; Chicago, Illinois; and St. Louis, Missouri. The studio of Mathias Armbruster was not listed in that directory in 1884, but by 1904 Armbruster's studio had become the second largest in the country, as well as the only art studio whose work was exclusively theatrical. In the chapters that follow, the history of this studio, the Armbruster Scenic Studio of Columbus, Ohio, is presented.
FOOTNOTES

1Wesley Swanson, "Wings and Backdrops," The Drama, XVIII (October, 1927), p. 5.

2Ibid.


4Swanson, (November, 1927), p. 79.


6Ibid., p. 57.

7Swanson, (November, 1927), p. 41.

8Green, p. 132.


10Ibid., p. 97.

11Ibid., II, p. 434.


13Ibid., p. 90.

14Swanson, (November, 1927), p. 79.

15Ibid., p. 80.

"Booth's Theatre -- Behind the Scenes," reprinted from Appleton's Journal, 1869, The Ohio State University Theatre Collection Film No. 8.


Hopkins, pp. 259-260.


Hopkins, p. 260.


Leverton, p. 12.


Ibid., p. 230.


Ibid., p. 1.

Ibid., p. 156.

The Columbus Dispatch (Columbus, Ohio), March 14, 1892, p. 21.


The Columbus Dispatch (Columbus, Ohio), December 10, 1920, p. 25.
CHAPTER III

THE STUDIO - ITS ARTISTS AND ARTISTIC PRACTICES

This chapter is intended as an introduction to the Armbruster Scenic Studio in terms of its physical features, the methods employed by its artists, and the nature of its work over a period of eighty-three years. Whenever possible, the work of the Armbrusters will be compared to the practices of scenic studios generally described in other studies of nineteenth-century American theatre. Much of the information pertaining to the studio and its practices was obtained by the author in interviews with Albert Armbruster, the eldest son, prior to his death in 1965.

The Armbruster Scenic Studio was founded by Mathias Armbruster, a native of Wurttemburg, Germany, (Figure 5). Armbruster, born on February 24, 1839, spent his student years studying portrait painting in German schools and spent one year of specialized study in Paris prior to his arrival in the United States. In 1859, at the age of twenty, Armbruster came to this country and settled in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he worked as an art-glass painter. While in Cincinnati, he was first engaged as a designer of theatrical scenery by a local firm. At the outbreak of the Civil War,
Armbruster enlisted in the Twenty-eighth Ohio Infantry; as an infantryman he participated in the battles of Bull Run and Antietam. During the later years of his enlistment, he came to Columbus, Ohio, as a recruiting officer for the Army. Here he met and married a local girl, Katherine Wahlenmaier. After his discharge from the Army, Armbruster resettled in Columbus where he worked as a portrait painter and where, in 1875, he founded the Armbruster Scenic Studio.

The first commercial venture in the theatre world for Armbruster was a series of scenic drops for Al G. Field,
who was doing a featured minstrel act for the Sells Circus, which had headquarters in Columbus. In 1884, Field organized a circus of his own and then, in 1886, left this and began his career as the head of a minstrel show which soon became the largest traveling minstrel company in America. Armbruster received contracts for all of Field's scenery during its many years of national reputation. This early affiliation with Field firmly established the studio within its theatrical milieu; Armbruster devoted the remainder of his life to designing and building stage scenery.

For some years, practically all of the studio's work was done by Mathias, but as his sons came of age, three of them joined their father in his work. Albert Armbruster, (Figure 6), recalls that he first began working with his father at the age of ten in 1878 when "my father broke me in cleaning brushes - gradually I learned the art of scene painting." Two younger brothers, Emil and Otto, soon joined their brother at the studio. Emil became a specialist in the painting of interior settings, while Albert concentrated on exteriors, landscapes, and the drapery work for front curtains, for which the Armbrusters were noted. At the age of twenty, Otto Armbruster left his father's studio and established himself as a scene painter at the Broadway Theatre in New York City; he was also noted as an illustrator for decorator magazines. Examples of his work appear in Appendix A. While Otto went to New York, both Albert and
Emil remained at the studio. Emil died in 1916 and, with the death of Mathias in 1920, the management of the studio passed on to Albert, who remained active in the work of the studio until his retirement in 1958, when the business was closed and the buildings demolished. Albert, the last of the members of the family actively engaged in the studio, died in August of 1965.
Figure 7. The Armbruster Scenic Studio, Columbus, Ohio, 1958.

Details of the Physical Plant and its Operation

The original site of the Armbruster Scenic Studio was 247 South Front Street in Columbus. The building underwent four major expansions during its history with the fourth, in 1902, being the final and most extensive enlargement of the original facilities. Figure 7 is a photograph of the exterior of the studio as it appeared in 1958, its location then being 247-253 South Front Street. The upper level of the main building housed the studio proper, the lower level contained the carpenter's shop, sewing room, and store rooms. The brick addition to the right of the
main building, constructed in 1902, housed the offices and a small, property storage room. The wooden sheds jutting from the left provided additional storage areas for larger scenic pieces. A feature writer for the Columbus Sunday Dispatch toured the interior of the studio in 1904 and from his description published in that newspaper the following information about the interior layout is provided:

On the first floor of the establishment is the carpenter shop and storerooms. Here the frames for the various scenes are made, as well as all sorts of stage furniture. There is also located on this floor the paper mache workroom. This is used for making such articles as mantels, statuary, ornaments of various description and even kinds of food used in dining-room scenes. From this room, one climbs a flight of stairs to the studio proper, a large room, $6 \frac{1}{2}$ feet long, 62 feet wide and 54 feet high, lighted almost entirely from above. The canvas is stretched on frames, the largest of which there are two in number, extends almost the entire length of the room. These frames are hung over openings in the floor so as to permit of their being lowered, to accommodate the artist. The palette, for use in mixing the paints, is a table about ten feet long that can be pushed wherever needed. It has a separate compartment for brushes and for a number of pails of paint. The colors are taken from the cans and mixed on the flat surface of the palette or table. In the center of the room are two large stationary frames, close together, between which is a platform which may be elevated or lowered as desired. A feature of the movable frames is that they are set out from the wall a sufficient distance to permit of working behind. This is necessary in painting stained glass windows, where the colors must not be seen until thrown through the canvas by lights from behind. The frames for painting the large drops were approximately forty by fifty feet. The palettes used in painting these large surfaces were shallow boxes six feet long, set on wheels, to be rolled wherever needed.
Prior to the demolition of the studio building, photographs were taken of the interior, (Figures 8, 9, 10). Some of these record portions of the machinery described above. In order to obtain accurate interpretations of these materials, interviews were held with Gustav Schell, owner and manager of the Schell Scenic Studio of Columbus, Ohio. Schell's father was employed by the Armbrusters as a studio painter from 1890 until 1903, when he founded his own studio. The younger Schell also worked for the Armbrusters and is thoroughly familiar with the layout of
the studio. His firsthand knowledge accounts for many of the following descriptions.

Through the talks with Schell and individual research, one is able to come up with a fairly accurate picture of the studio's physical properties as well as its functions. The following descriptions of the Armbruster Studio indicates that much of their equipment as well as many of their practices were not only typical of the nineteenth century, but are still reflected in contemporary scenic studios and staging practices.

Figure 8 is a portion of the studio proper on the second floor of the building. The upper left hand section of the photograph shows the gridiron which housed the bull-
wheel and a system of pulleys which raised and lowered paint frames. A paint frame in the hanging position is shown in the lower left portion of the picture. Once canvas was attached, the frame, ready for design and painting, could be raised and lowered from the basement shop area, through slots in the floor, to the upper studio level. The artists engaged in the design and painting could then stand in relatively fixed positions, with paint trays and supplies, on the studio level while moving the frames up or down as various sections of the canvas were completed. Figure 9 is
a closeup view of the gridiron with a more detailed view of the bullwheel and pulley systems. The studio's gridiron was not unlike the fly loft systems of many of the theatres of the same period, around the 1900's.

Figure 10 shows the work area of the upper studio with a paint frame in place on the gridiron and a number of stencils hanging on the frame. Paint stencils were used by the artists when working with interiors or finished design patterns. The work of applying pattern designs to large areas of canvas was generally of a mechanical nature. Scrollwork, patterned walls, and cornices were usually accomplished by the use of stencils or by "pouncing." Pouncing consisted of pricking a design upon a paper, pressing it to the canvas, and smearing it with charcoal leaving a trace of the desired outlines. Gustav Schell, in discussing this practice, lamented the fact that the Armbruster stencils, such as those seen in Figure 10, were destroyed with the studio. He noted that the stencils designed by Mathias were used throughout the entire history of the studio and were of unusual artistic quality.

The standard frame used by the Armbrusters was thirty by fifty feet. The gridiron in the studio could accommodate two frames lashed together to give a length of sixty feet to a painted canvas when necessary. For the traveling repertory companies, the Armbruster Studio featured such canvas panoramas and they became an important, often highly praised,
aspect of their designs. Paint frames and winches of the variety used by the Armbrusters were common practice, but other methods were employed from time to time. These included hanging the canvas full length in a studio while employing a movable bridge supporting the artist and his materials (referred to as the "English" method), and laying the canvas flat on a floor and painting with long-handled brushes while walking over its surface. This latter method was most common to France and Italy.6

Figure 11 is a photograph of one corner of the carpenter shop located on the lower level of the studio. Of particular interest in this cluttered area of the work
shop are three maquettes which are located on the right rear wall. Maquettes are set models which resemble toy theatres in their general appearance and size. The artists used these models to test the effectiveness and practicality of complete settings before actually executing the designs.

To begin the job of painting a large scenic drop, the canvas was first attached to the paint frames in the lower level or carpenter's shop. Once joined to the frames, the canvas was raised into position on the upper studio level through the slot in the floor. In the studio, the canvas was given the first paint treatment of "priming." The priming solution was commonly a mixture of whiting and size in water. After the canvas was positioned and primed, the design to be painted was drawn. Two common methods of applying design to canvas were in practice during the Armbruster era. The first method was charcoal outlining applied directly to the canvas in a freehand fashion; a preliminary pencil sketch was usually worked out beforehand. The second method was by oxyhydrogen light. Leverton describes this in his treatise on nineteenth-century production:

Scenic artists are now availing themselves of photography and the magic lantern in the production of scenery. The artist instead of drawing on his imagination for a group of houses or a castle, for example, procures a large photograph of the actual locality. By means of oxyhydrogen light, he throws upon the canvas the image, being suitably enlarged in size. Then he follows the outline and has an accurate picture.
Evidence in the Armbruster Collection testifies to two methods most frequently used by the studio to transpose designs to canvas. In the first instance, designs were worked out on paper, then sketched on canvas in a manner similar to the charcoal method mentioned before. Figure 12 is a pencil sketched preliminary design made by Mathias Armbruster during the early nineteen hundreds. This design is typical of many found in the collection of design sketches transferred to canvas by this freehand method. Figure 13 illustrates the second common means, employed by the Armbrusters, of working design onto canvas. This method, "proportional enlarging," consists of placing a grid of horizontal and vertical lines, spaced by scale, over the preliminary design. A similar grid, at full scale, is
Figure 13. Working Design for Proportional Enlarging.

drawn on the primed surface of the canvas. The spaces are lettered or numbered to facilitate the location of each square in the sketch. The artist then proceeds, square by square, to transpose the small scale drawing into a full scale canvas. The design shown as Figure 13 was not created by Armbruster or his artists but is a commercially printed page from an unidentified magazine. It was not uncommon for the Armbrusters to use such magazine illustrations, reproductions of classic art works, or even calendar art for sources of design inspiration. Notations on the back of Figure 13 indicate that this scene was labeled "Bohemian Subject," and was painted on a front drop curtain.
Figures 14 and 15 are photographs taken in the Armbruster Studio, in the 1900's, depicting studio painters applying finishing touches to canvas drops still attached to their frames. Figure 14 is a large vaudeville drop of the kind contracted frequently by the Field Minstrels. The painter in the photograph standing by a paint tray is a Mr. McCleason, a young apprentice to the Armbrusters during this period. Figure 15 displays another finished drop hanging in a fully raised position. Applying finishing touches to this canvas, a Spanish streetscene, is August Lundberg. Lundberg, a native of Denmark and held in high regard for his technical artistry, worked closely with Mathias during the earlier, highly successful years of the studio's work.
Figure 15. A Spanish Streetscene, Circa 1900, Hanging on a Paint Frame in the Studio.

Painting Methods and Styles

In July of 1965, a number of extant scenic drops from the Armbruster Studio were studied and photographed by Professor Allan S. Jackson. The results of his study were published in The Ohio State University Theatre Collection Bulletin. The writer is indebted to Professor Jackson for much of the critical analysis contained in the following appraisal of the painting practices of the Armbruster artists. A selection from this photographed collection appears in Appendix B.
During the eighty-three years of the studio's history the painting styles varied. This variation is accounted for by three major considerations. First, a number of painters, in addition to the Armbrusters themselves, worked for the company. Secondly, some of these artists, including Mathias Armbruster and August Lundberg, received formal technical training in the mechanics of design and style in European art schools, while others, such as Albert and Emil Armbruster, apprenticed at the studio and lacked such professional expertise. A third explanation for variation in painting and design practice is accounted for by the type and intended use of the scenery. As Mathias Armbruster often pointed out in newspaper accounts of his work, designs for the minstrel stage were simple and frequently turned out in a matter of days, while Shakespearean repertoire, such as work for Hanford and Mantell, was more complicated, exacting, expensive, and sometimes took months to build.

However, in spite of the varied painting styles, Jackson's analysis indicates that the Armbrusters generally employed the commonly used paints as well as the generally accepted techniques for their use.

There were two basic types of paint used on the drops: aniline dye drops were painted on medium weight muslin; opaque distemper drops were painted on heavy-weight muslin or very heavy linen.\(^9\)

Albert Armbruster recalled that aniline dyes were often used when a smaller company required scenery that had to be transported in trunks. This type of dye coloring would not
crack or peel and therefore could be folded and stored in trunks; this scenery could stand up under frequent folding and unfolding. Scenery painted with aniline dyes, because of its ease in packing and because it could be tacked onto the frames of the regular scenery owned by the theatres, was usually used in minstrel and vaudeville acts. As a result, this type of scenery became a specialty of the studio and the Armbrusters probably produced more aniline dye drops than any other artists of their time in this country.

The other type of paint commonly used were combinations of opaque and dyes which were employed for special effects.

A type of drop which combined dye and opaque pigments had translucent sections intended to be lighted from behind. These sections were painted with dye on the front face. Sometimes the back of the drop had another dye scene on it which would alter the design on the front when properly lighted. The areas of these drops which were not supposed to be translucent were either painted with opaque distemper on the front face or black paint on the back. This type of drop was constructed of thin, white muslin in order to allow as much light as possible to pass through the cloth. Moonlight or sunset skies, reflections across lakes and rivers, erupting volcanoes, fountains, reflecting pools, chandeliers and magic transformation scenes were made by this method. In some opaque drops a similar effect was achieved by cutting out the windows in distant buildings.\textsuperscript{10}

During the zenith of the Armbruster's design history, 1890-1920, the scenery which was produced exhibited a high quality of craftsmanship and beauty -- "Primarily the
scenes were romantic lush floral exteriors and fancy interiors of public buildings." During this period, when Mathias was active as the company's leading artist and designer, the studio was nationally recognized for the quality of its work. Jackson compares the technique of Mathias with the works of earlier impressionists:

"... scenes were decorated with pure, clean colors which can best be compared to the hues and their tints found in a box of artists' pastel chalks. ... The overall effect of the painting technique was romantic with theatrical sparkle and texture which was pleasing to the eye."  

The palette of Mathias had definite characteristics. The basic hues were dark strawberry, prussian, urban and peacock blues, aniline yellow, plum, and olive green. Colors such as yellow, orange peach, bright pink and blue resulted in vivid sunsets and bodies of shimmering water as well as lush garden settings. Figures 16 through 21 are photographs of extant scenic drops that represent the work of Mathias during the period of his most recognized success. They are included here to exemplify the painting techniques and the quality of work presently under discussion.

As Jackson concludes in his study, the basic artistic styles of the studio were eclectic and were governed by the nature of the design work. For instance, various water scenes had "definite echoes of J. M. W. Turner's brilliant colors, soft outlines, and subject matter," while landscapes were reminiscent of Victorian book illustrations. Vistas were given a soft impressionistic treat-
ment; wood scenes were often similar to the work of Monet and Renoir, with sharpness of definition being a point of departure from these painters. Overall, the major works done during the time of Mathias and his assistant Lundberg created an ultimate in romantic mood combined with theatrical splendor.

Later work, after the death of Mathias, was dominated by harsh vibrant colors and the designs appear to be two-dimensional with little or no depth and solidity. Figures 22 through 27 are photographs of watercolor designs and extant scenic drops of this later period when Albert Armbruster was the studio's leading designer and painter. The weaknesses in these works are mainly the result of Albert's lack of formal training in design skills. A comparison of these designs with the work of Mathias shown in Figures 16 through 21 illustrate the contrasting styles and artistry of the two men and their respective periods of management -- 1875 to 1920, and 1920 to 1958. However, Albert Armbruster did produce work of theatrical significance, especially in scenery designed for minstrel and vaudeville theatre. This work will be discussed in detail in Chapter V.

**Types of Scenery and Scenic Construction**

The majority of the scenic units designed and constructed by the Armbruster Studio over the entire range of
its history consisted mainly of leg and back drop units. A completed setting was usually comprised of two legs, a border, a cut-drop and a back drop. Figure 28 is a maquette for a minstrel specialty act entitled "Levee Depot." Designed for the Al G. Field Minstrels, around 1920, it consists of two leg drops, one cut-drop and a back drop. Figure 29 is a photograph of a completed setting hung in the studio. A section of the painter's scaffolding appears in the foreground. This setting was most likely a "first-part" minstrel unit, done around 1900, and contains the same number and type of scenic units as Figure 28. While such pieces were most typical of the scenic units designed by the studio, occasionally three-dimensional scenic pieces were added, with, in some cases, "pin-on" pieces. Even box
set arrangements, while not frequently constructed were, however, among some of the studio's outstanding designs.

Set pieces of a unique nature were often designed by the studio for minstrel and vaudeville companies. Figures 30 through 32 are various stage positions of a design model for a "book-wing." This unit is a changeable, self-supporting folding wing piece constructed to stand without bracing. This unique wing unit brings together two separate wing flats to form a three-fold, single unit which is hinged at the back to enable it to fold out in a manner similar to the pages of a book. Figure 30 shows the wing in a neutral setting with all three folds in view. Figure
Figure 30 shows the wing folded completely to the left to represent a tree. Figure 32 is the same wing folded completely to the right to represent a portion of an interior wall. Such economical use of scenery was obviously an advantage to a traveling company carrying a number of settings on the road and having to adapt to the smaller stage houses of the provinces.

Figure 33, a cardboard model of a blimp, illustrates still another example of the special scenery the studio was often called upon to create. The novel flying unit actually constructed from this model measured twenty-one feet in height and twenty-six feet in length with a practical cabin area for a number of performers. The "Red Line Special" was featured in the Field Minstrels for many seasons.
In Figures 34 and 35 we see represented two views of an Armbruster novelty drop, another featured specialty for Al G. Field. As in Figure 33, we are looking at a watercolor cardboard design model. These models depict a watermelon field with trees in the background and a six-foot watermelon in the central foreground bordered on either side by a fence. In the fence area are large holes cut through the model. This drop was designed for the prologue portion of the minstrel, when the chorus, with heads and arms appearing through the holes, sang the opening number. As the song ended, the central portion of the drop, the giant watermelon exterior, was pulled away to reveal the interior as shown in
Figure 34. Armbruster Novelty Drop for Al G. Field, Circa 1920.

Figure 35. Armbruster Novelty Drop for Al G. Field, Circa 1920.
Figure 35. The chorus then entered the stage proper from the "inside" of the watermelon and finished the prologue in front of the drop.

Yet another example of this type of work, this time featuring a painting technique dependent upon special lighting effects, is represented in Figures 36 and 37. Designed for the Field Minstrels of 1921, the drop is of a type called a "transformation drop" for an act entitled "All Halloween or Lish Murn's Dream - The Burning Woods and Flying Witches - A Transformation." Figure 36 is the side of the drop in view of the audience at the beginning of the act. It is a wooded area with jack-o-lanterns placed in the trees and about the bottom foreground. At a specified moment in the act, light changes are employed causing a transformation which changes the audience's view from the front area of the drop to the rear area, (Figure 37), thus transforming the woods into tongues of flames and the jack-o-lanterns into hideous, drifting faces. The painting technique employed for such transformations was discussed previously under "Painting Methods and Styles."

Front curtains and olios were also specialties of the Armbruster Studio. Figure 38 is a fully detailed rendering of a typical front curtain design. Depicting a German village, it is reminiscent of many photographs of actual German countrysides kept by the studio as source materials for design inspiration. Sources for such designs were also
Figure 36. "Lish Murn" Transformation - Front Design.

Figure 37. "Lish Murn" Transformation - Rear Design.
found in German art publications such as *Moderne Kunst*. Such front curtains designed by the Armbrusters frequently featured European village scenes and wooded landscapes, and were inevitably bordered with lush drapery treatments. The curtain designs are among the most technically polished and artistically pleasing of the extant designs in the Armbruster Collection. Figure 38 was executed by Mathias and his years of formal training are especially evident in the perspective details of the landscape.

**The Design Process**

The artists of the studio did not follow any one particular methodology in working out scenic designs. However, from materials in the Collection and from interviews
with Albert Armbruster, evidence indicates that designs were generally arrived at by one of three processes. First, orders were sometimes received for which the planning and execution of the scenes was left entirely to the studio; the only ideas furnished the artists were those found in the play script. Mathias Armbruster described this situation in an interview with the Columbus Dispatch in 1911:

When we get an order for the settings for a play we first read the play carefully, and if the author has given any directions we try to follow them, but sometimes we find them impractical. My sons and I draw all the plans according to our own ideas, unless they are classical plays like Shakespeare. Then we go to history for our ideas. We study continually and try to keep up with all new inventions which may help in making stage scenery better. Having read a play we draw designs, often making complete models for every act, showing the smallest detail. Then measurements are given to the carpenters downstairs for the frames which are to be put together to form the setting. When these are completed they are brought up into the big room where the painting is done. There every idea to best convey the surroundings is worked out.\(^\text{16}\)

In such cases as described above, the design was left entirely to the imagination of the studio artists, with perhaps relatively small changes incorporated by the contracting company before the scenery was finished.

The second and most commonly employed method was for the stage manager or the producer of the contracting company to send the studio a rough sketch of each act with suggestions and explanations accompanying the drawings. Within the framework of such designs, the studio was usually free to create all the specific details. The business records of the Armbrusters reveal that many contracts for
scenic design and construction were made and carried out entirely through the mail with design concepts exchanged in correspondence from the initial idea to the actual settings. This procedure appears to have been especially common in the work done for Al G. Field and other minstrel and vaudeville companies. Since such companies were on the road approximately forty-six weeks out of a year, exchange of design ideas for the coming season was feasible only through correspondence.

The development of design ideas by mail is illustrated by the following instance. In 1927, Lasses White Minstrels ordered a steamship wharf setting to be used in a song and dance act. The initial design was sketched out on hotel stationery from the Hotel Grant in Charleston, West
Virginia. Figure 39 from the Armbruster Collection is the stationery with the rough design sketch sent to the Armbrusters by White. On the reverse side of the design are notes which describe the set and possible stage arrangements of its units. The setting consisted of a steamship wharf with a view of a city in the background, and a ship, The Colorado, tied up at the pier. The following notes accompanied the design:

2 legs-cut drop-background. Song and dance act. Town across [sic] river to be opaked [sic] to show lights in buildings. Make a small boat with transparent port holes. Make a water row to be about height of deck of large boat to stand between cut drop and backdrop. This will be a flat piece of scenery. Big boat on cut drop. Make a wharf flat piece to go across [sic] stage about 24 inches high.

From this sketch and the notes accompanying it, the studio
created the maquette design model shown as Figure 40. The outer dimensions of this model measure \(18\frac{1}{2}\) by 11 inches. The setting consisted of three leg drops, one cut-drop, and one back drop. This differs from White's original suggestion in that it contains one additional leg drop. A comparison of Figures 39 and 40 shows how closely the studio maquette follows the directions sent by White.

Because of the Armbrusters' practice of keeping a fairly complete inventory of scenery on hand in their shop, we are able to see the process of development for the White drop. This inventory consisted of a series of three by five filing cards, one for each scenic unit. Recorded on one side of each card was a written description; on the other a sketch of the unit. These cards provide one source of evidence to show that the details of design work, such as maquettes, were carried through in detail in the actual scenery that ultimately appeared on the stage. Figures 41, 42, and 43 are inventory cards for the leg drops of the White setting under discussion. Figure 41 indicates that the first leg drop measured twenty-two by thirty-nine and one-half feet, was painted with a dye base, and contained a border measuring five feet four inches in width. The actual drop was constructed in two parts which met at a central point on the border. Figure 42, the second leg, measured twenty-one and one-half by thirty-nine feet with a five foot border; Figure 43, the third leg, measured twenty-one
Figure 41. Inventory Card from the Armbruster Scenic Studio.

Figure 42. Inventory Card from the Armbruster Scenic Studio.
by thirty-six feet with a similar border. For the particular designs under discussion, extant pieces of the actual settings are still available. Figure 44 is a photograph of the third leg drop constructed from the maquette shown as Figure 40 and described in the inventory card shown as Figure 43. This drop indicates the detail with which both the sketches of Lasses White, and the maquette designed by the Armbrusters was carried out in the actual scenery that was constructed.

Throughout the design and construction phases of this setting, the Armbrusters were in continuous correspondence with White, sending him the maquette for his examination, and then the photographs of the setting as it hung in the studio. This enabled White to pick up the finished
product on his first visit to the studio at the close of his 1927 season when he immediately began rehearsal for the forthcoming year. This service, offered by the Armbrusters to the traveling companies, was an attractive feature of their work and accounted for much of the volume of their business during the road era.

The third process of design creation involved conferences between the studio artists and the company managers, or as was true in some cases, the leading actors. In this situation, the company representative would visit the studio and describe the scenery desired while the Armbrusters would sketch rough designs on the spot. A series of conferences with progressively more polished designs ensued until
the final concept was agreed upon. Albert Armbruster told of a number of trips he personally made to the home of Robert Mantell in Atlantic Heights, New Jersey, at the turn of the century. He went to Mantell's home with sketches for the actor's forthcoming season of Shakespearean repertoire. In 1901, when Mantell and Marie Booth Russel portrayed Romeo and Juliet, the visits of Armbruster to the Mantell home culminated in a visit to the Armbruster Studio by the actors who rehearsed the balcony scene on the unfinished setting as it stood in the studio. During these rehearsals, final adjustments were made on the scenery.

During another season, Otto Armbruster traveled with Alexander Salvini on his tour from Ohio to the West Coast. During the long train rides, Salvini would describe settings needed for his new season and Otto would sketch them. When Salvini reached California, Otto returned to the studio with complete designs to be constructed for the coming year. As one can see, the Armbrusters provided highly tailored services for the great stars of the road, another consideration contributing to their successful affiliation with the road theatre.

Sources for Design Work

To inspire design ideas, the Armbruster Studio maintained an extensive file of source materials. These files contained hundreds of clippings from a wide range of pub-
lications including home furnishing catalogues, popular weekly magazines, art brochures and even illustrated vacation brochures. This source library was catalogued according to the locales depicted by the sources. Typical categories were "Wooded Landscapes," "Seacoasts," "Formal Gardens." A great many of these materials from German publications and German art magazines were collected in great volumes. The latter influence probably comes from the fact that Mathias spent his youth in Germany and received his early art training in schools there. Figure 45 will exemplify how these source materials were often incorporated into initial design concepts.

The design in Figure 45, a street scene, is a magazine illustration to which the designer has appended his own pencil sketches. The portion of the design bordered by the figure of the young girl, left of center, and the right edge of the doorway to the laundry is a printed magazine illustration taken directly from its original source, probably a women's weekly, as suggested by advertising on the back of the design. The portions of the design on the periphery of this area were hand sketched by the designer on thin drawing tissue and glued to the magazine illustration. The word "laundry," bottom right of center, and the inscription of "Ah Sing Laundry," above the doorway on the right, were also sketched by the designer. This design was obviously inspired by the magazine illustration
and the Armbrusters simply elaborated directly upon it for their stage conception of the scene. Figure 45 also contains many specific notations for transferring the design to the actual setting. Among these are: "colored glass transom" above left doorway, "narrow street with buildings in perspective on a turn" for the center section of the setting, and stage dimensions for both the doorways shown in the design.

The next step in creating this design was a water-color rendering (Figure 46). Although there are some obvious differences between the two, the water-color rendering is a further development of the design as shown in Figure 45, and is probably an accurate version of the actual
Figure 46. Watercolor Rendering of Initial Design Shown as Figure 45.

set constructed from both of these designs. Inventory cards indicate that this drop eventually became a scene depicting the Chinatown area of San Francisco, probably for a vaudeville act. The setting was painted with aniline dyes and consisted of leg drops with a backing.

Although slick popular art was often used in working up designs, the Armbrusters also spent much time researching historical precedents for settings used in the classic repertoires of large road companies. They were concerned that their own artistic endeavors should meet the standards of other leading designers and design houses of their era. To insure high standards, trips to view other scenic studio's
works were made. Such a trip was the trip, in the spring of 1901, when Mathias Armbruster visited England to view the settings used by Henry Irving and Beerbohm Tree. The trip was made by Mathias in preparation for Productions of *King John* and *Coriolanus* that the studio was to create for the MacLean-Tyler Company the following fall. While in England, Mathias corresponded with a friend in Columbus and described his reactions to the scenery of the British Companies:

I saw Sir Henry Irving in *Coriolanus*. The scenery was good but nothing great. Positive we can do much better. It was advertised that Alma Tadema designed the scenery, but judging from results, I would say it's not the work of Tadema. I paid $2.50 to see Irving. Made an effort to interview him after the play but it was impossible. Was fortunate to see Beerbohm Tree in *Twelfth Night*. The scenery was very good.17

Mathias returned from Europe to create settings for the MacLean Company that later brought much critical acclaim to the studio. Although Armbruster's comments on the Irving scenery may appear less than modest, the studio, at least at the turn of the century, was designing with a firsthand knowledge of the styles and standards of the international theatre of its period.

The Scope of the Work of the Studio from 1875-1958

Although the detailed business records of the company were not available before 1927, an overview of the studio's work from 1875 until 1927 is possible because of original sources including interviews with Albert Armbruster.
Mathias Armbruster, first involved in painting scenery during his brief stay in Cincinnati in the 1860's, established the studio in Columbus after what appears to have been encouraging contracts with Al G. Field and other theatrical figures of the times. From 1875 to 1888, the work of the studio consisted mainly of furnishing custom scenery for individual specialty acts of lesser known traveling performers and providing stock scenery for theatre houses in Ohio.

The first major contract, involving a company of some public prominence, appears to have been the work done for Lewis Morrison's traveling company of Faust in 1884. Morrison traveled Faust through the major cities of the Midwest and the East, including New York City, and thus Armbruster's work was seen beyond the Ohio area. The second major studio contract came in 1888, when Al G. Field organized and toured the first of his mammoth minstrel shows. The Armbruster Studio contracted for all of the scenery for the Field Minstrels of 1888 and continued this contract until 1928 when the show played its final season.

The "golden era" of the studio, when the Armbrusters created their most significant designs and when the studio gained its greatest national recognition, are the years from 1890 through 1905. During the nineties, Mathias and his sons designed for the touring companies of Alexander Salvini, Sarah Bernhardt, Madame Modjeska, and James O'Neill. With the Salvini contracts the studio began to build a reputation
in scenery for classical repertoire.

For the theatrical seasons of 1890-1893, the studio designed Elmer Vance's *The Limited Mail*, a spectacular melodrama that toured the country and set a precedent for a new rash of sensational drama featuring roaring locomotives and flashing electric signals on stage. *The Limited Mail* scenery, with its ultra-realistic detail, was a new venture for the Armbrusters.

For a seven year period from 1898 to 1905, the studio was engaged extensively in design work for a number of Shakespearean companies including Robert Mantell, Odette Tyler and R. D. MacLean, and Charles Hanford. Although some companies continued to tour classical repertoire after this period, the expenses involved in mounting these heavy shows far exceeded the income from a dwindling box office.

From 1905 to 1920 the major contracts held by the studio were almost exclusively those from traveling minstrels and vaudeville shows. This era, dominated by work done for Al G. Field and Lasses White, includes the most productive and significant period of Albert Armbruster's management of the studio. Both Field and White were highly successful showmen; their minstrels were noted for the spectacular nature of the visual effects and for the beauty of the first-part settings. The scenery provided by the Armbruster Studio most certainly can be considered a major contribution toward the lengthy success of both of these traveling shows.
By 1930 the studio no longer designed scenery of any significant professional calibre. From this time until Albert Armbruster's retirement in 1958 the studio functioned primarily as a scenic supply house.

Throughout its history, the artistic practices of the Armbruster Scenic Studio generally reflected the traditions of the times and were not in themselves unusual. However, the studio did become specialized in providing scenery especially suited to the needs of traveling companies, and many of its methods of operation reflect this specialty. From 1884 to 1905, Armbruster scenery was viewed throughout the country, carried by companies large and small. The studio gained national recognition because of its affiliation with the more renowned of these companies. In the chapter that follows detailed examination will be made of the work of those years.
FOOTNOTES


2 Interview with Albert Armbruster at his home in Columbus, Ohio, in May of 1964.

3 The Columbus Sunday Dispatch (Columbus, Ohio), February 14, 1904, p. 31.

4 Ibid.


7 Ibid.


9 Ibid., p. 23.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., p. 24.

12 Ibid., p. 25.

13 Ibid., p. 27.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 The Columbus Dispatch (Columbus, Ohio), November 5, 1911, p. 10.

17 The Columbus Press Post (Columbus, Ohio), May 19, 1901, p. 13.
CHAPTER IV

THE STUDIO UNDER THE MANAGEMENT OF MATHIAS ARMBRUSTER
1875 TO 1920

The years from 1875 to 1920 are the era of the management of Mathias Armbruster who founded the studio and witnessed its rise to national prominence. In this chapter extant evidence from the Armbruster Collection will be examined with the intent of providing a selected overview of the major works of the studio during these forty-five years. The primary evidence to be examined consists of (1) designs representing significant works, (2) photographs of scenery from the era, and (3) critical reactions found in newspapers reviewing productions carrying Armbruster's scenery. While these materials do not provide a complete history of the studio's work, they do indicate definite periods of development according to the nature of the work accomplished and the professional calibre of the stars and theatre companies for whom the studio created stage scenery.

This chapter will present the development of the Armbruster Studio as it grew into a major scenic studio of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century under the management of Mathias. The materials of the chapter will
be presented in chronological order within the framework of four definite periods of development: 1875 to 1884, when the studio produced mainly stock scenery; 1884 to 1896, a period when the first professionally significant work was created and when the Armbruster Studio began to specialize in the scenic needs of traveling companies; 1898 to 1908, when the studio was extensively involved in work for traveling classical repertory and when they gained their most prestigious professional recognition; and 1908 to 1920, a transitional period between the management of Mathias and that of his son Albert.

In addition to providing an historical survey of the major contributions of the studio during the periods mentioned, this chapter will, wherever possible, describe salient features of design styles and construction methods of Armbruster and his studio artists. Mention will be made of styles and methods which are common to the period as well as those that are unusual in any respect.

The Period from 1875 to 1884

Although Armbruster began his scenic studio by designing vaudeville trunk scenery for Al G. Field, this first decade was occupied primarily with the construction of stock scenery and front curtains for theatres and opera houses throughout Ohio. Figures 47 through 49 are photographs of such stock settings taken in the studio for advertising
purposes and are representative of the work produced during this period. Figure 47, despite its rather elaborate décor and architectural features, is a stock "interior chamber" used for scenes calling for common interiors. Gus Schell Jr. of Schell Scenic Studios of Columbus, Ohio, informed me that Mathias Armbruster became noted for the type of intricate stencil design work seen on the walls of this setting.

Still further examples of the "typical" scenery produced during this time are shown in Figures 48 and 49. Figure 48 is a stock backdrop for a "formal garden" exterior setting. The austere, rather majestic locale suggests this drop would be suitable for scenes from classical drama. Figure 49 is a front curtain drop with a Rome locale which obviously exhibits those features described as typical of the Armbrusters in Chapter III. Both these examples exhibit
Figure 48. A Formal Garden Drop.

Figure 49. A Front Curtain Drop.
the skilled perspective detail typical of the landscape paintings of the elder Armbruster, while all three settings typify the stock scenery of the period and the nature of the work of the studio during its first decade. However, they do go beyond the ordinary because of their special artistic qualities resulting from Armbruster's skill and talent. The only custom scenery known to have been designed during this period are the act drops created for the acts of Al G. Field. However, by the end of this decade, Armbruster front curtains and stock settings were located in opera houses throughout the Midwest; Mathias Armbruster had firmly established himself in the business of scenic design. (Additional designs for stock settings and drops from this early period appear in Appendix C.)

The Period from 1884 to 1896

It was during the years from 1884 to 1896 that the studio created scenery for traveling productions that would result in professional recognition of Armbruster's work and would establish his studio as one of America's leading scenic houses. Mathias Armbruster's first major contract with Lewis Morrison in 1884 to design and execute all scenery for a traveling production of Faust marked the beginning of the rise of the studio. This contract resulted in introducing Armbruster's artistic skills to a much larger audience over a greater cross section of the country then had been possible
in the past. Because the *Faust* settings proved to be so important, and because they represent the most complete record of the early settings of the Armbruster Studio while exhibiting the entire range of types of construction employed by them, these settings will be examined in detail.

There are at least forty English versions of Goethe's *Faust*. The acting version used by Morrison was translated and adapted by George Lipsher. A program for the 1892 season at the Grand Theatre in Columbus, Ohio, contains a breakdown of the settings Morrison carried in his production:

- Act I, scene 1 - Faust's lab overlooking Grand Plaza
- scene ii - Grand Plaza of Nuremburg
- Act II - Cottage and Garden of Marguerite
- Act III - Square of the Fountain and Shrine of the Virgin of Nuremburg
- Act IV - Revels of the demons on Walpurgiss Night on the Summit of Brocken
- Act V, scene i - Nuremburg Prison
- scene ii - The Apotheosis

Photographs of the actual settings executed for *Faust* as they hung in the studio are shown in Figures 50 through 62.

The first setting, Figure 50, is a box set for "Faust's Laboratory." The Grand Theatre program contains the following synopsis of the action in this scene:

... Easter Eve. Faust in his study. Appearance of Mephisto, the spirit of Evil. The Fiend offers to become his servant; to restore his youth, and undertake to satisfy his cravings for knowledge and his impatience of limitations with which that knowledge is bound. Faust defies him to fulfill his promise. Mephisto, showing Faust the vision of Marguerite, accepts the challenge, and gives Faust the draught of youth.
Figure 50. Faust's Laboratory

The setting for this scene consisted of flat, framed units with a three-dimensional fireplace, a cutout window unit, and a drop cloth providing the exterior background for the window. The furnishings along the walls are painted on the canvas in perspective. The center wall, below the shelf, contains an area where a rectangular opening has been cut in the canvas. A gauze, painted to match the rest of the wall, has been used to conceal this opening. During the scene, when Mephisto shows Faust the vision of Marguerite, this gauze becomes transparent to allow a revelation of the vision. Although such transformation scenes were not unique, the inclusion of such special effects in a realistic setting does indicate that the studio was incorporating the latest theatrical techniques of this period in their settings. The fireplace is attached to a recessed wall which conceals a special entry way for the appearance of Mephisto. The
Figure 51. Act I, Scene 11, "The Grand Plaza of Nuremburg," Morrison's *Faust*, 1884.

stylistic approach to this setting is a mixture of real and painted dimension, a convention readily accepted by the audiences of the nineteenth century.

Figure 51 is the setting for Act I, scene 11, depicting a public square in Nuremburg where Marguerite is first accosted by Faust. While the stylistic approach to realism is the same mixture as in Figure 50, the extensive use of three-dimensional detail is most unusual for the period, but was a common feature of Armbruster scenery. Although the wing arrangements with plugs to complete the enclosures on the sides of the stage were a common convention, the free standing cathedral unit, center stage, is uncommonly elaborate and adds even more unusual detail and
Figure 52. A closeup of the cathedral unit from Figure 51.

depth to the setting.

In Figures 53 and 54 outline schemes of the arrangements of wing and profile pieces are as they appear stage right and left in Figure 51. These schematic drawings clearly delineate the series of "L" shaped wings and numerous cutout profile pieces that form the three-dimensional box units surrounding the central cathedral structure. Figure 55 is a conjectural groundplan for the entire setting.
Figure 53. A schematic drawing of the stage right set arrangement of Figure 51.

Figure 54. A schematic drawing of the stage left set arrangement of Figure 51.

Figure 55. A conjectural groundplan for the setting shown as Figure 51.
The meticulous architectural embellishments evident in all the units, as well as in the cathedral piece, is still another feature of the studio's fine and sometimes unique work. Not only, however, is the elaborateness of the detail or the uniqueness of the free standing unit all that makes this particular set unusual; it is also a surprisingly "heavy" set when one considers the amount of traveling done by the Morrison Company. Histories of this era do not suggest such complex scenery for traveling shows as Armbruster constructed for this company.

The setting for Act II is Marguerite's garden where Faust and Mephisto enact the enticement of Marguerite. Figure 56 is the completed setting for this act as arranged

Figure 56. Setting for Act II, "Marguerite's Garden." Morrison's Faust, 1884.
in the studio painting loft. This setting contains practically every kind of scenic unit common to both the period and the studio's practice -- backdrop, cut drop, "L" shaped flat wings, profile cut-pieces, and three dimensional standing units. Usually, an Armbruster setting was composed entirely of flat units or entirely of drop pieces with free standing units added to both. However, the setting shown as Figure 56 combined drops with flats; the cut drop mid-stage being an unusual addition to the architectural flat units surrounding it. The foliage from this tree cut drop forms the border for most of the setting. In Figure 57, a schematic drawing outlining the units and their stage arrangements, one can note that this setting does not have the

Figure 57. A schematic drawing of the scenic units shown in Figure 56.
Figure 58. "The Square of the Fountains and the Shrine of the Virgin, Nuremburg," setting for Act III, Faust, Lewis Morrison, 1884.

symmetry so common to the period (note the setting in Figure 58) and consequently it creates a more natural or realistic stage picture.

Act II is set in "The Square of the Fountains and the Shrine of the Virgin, Nuremburg." The Grand Theatre program describes the scene as follows:

Faust coming by night through the square of the fountains on his way to Marguerite's house, encounters Valentine, her brother, who has just returned from the wars and, tempted by Mephisto, kills him in a duel. Mephisto is triumphant.3

Figure 58 is a studio photograph of this setting arranged for the stage. Compared to the exterior settings for Acts I and II, this scene is much simpler in both construction and arrangement, consisting of symmetrically arranged "L"
wings with plugs on the sides and backed by a landscape drop and groundrow. The actions required in the duel between Mephisto and Valentine most likely dictated a need for this type of arrangement leaving a clean working area stage center.

A particular aspect of the Armbruster settings that was a constant source for praise in critical responses to this production can be seen exhibited in this setting: the accuracy with which the German locales were rendered on painted canvas. Mathias Armbruster was quite naturally familiar with the German countryside and readily captured its flavor with pictorial accuracy on his scenery. Figure 59 is a photograph of the countryside of Berncastel,
Germany, ca. 1880. It was taken from a scrapbook of German landscapes kept by the studio for design references. A comparison of Figure 59 with a closeup photograph of the backdrop for this scene, Figure 60, will indicate the degree to which Armbruster's work did indeed capture the German scene.

Act IV, the witches' carnival on Brocken, was obviously one of the highlights of Morrison's production and Armbruster's scenery. A synopsis of the scene describes its dramatic purpose:

The witches' carnival on the Brocken, inaugurates the career of dissipation on which Faust is launched by Mephisto in order to make him forget the past, and by the appearance of Marguerite's grief prepares for catastrophe which ensues.

This scene (Figure 61) was the locale for the revels of
Walpurgiss Night. Reviews of the production both in Columbus, Ohio, and New York City praised the beauty of this setting and generally noted that it was impossible to describe accurately the weird and uncanny fiendishness which the Brocken scene created. Although a colored rendering of its weird expressionistic nature might more effectively illustrate this visual impact, two newspaper accounts do give one an idea of its overall scenic impact. The Columbus Dispatch contained lengthy comments on this scene in a review of the appearance of the play in 1892. Included were the following comments:

It is full of scenic and electric effects . . .

The scenic and electric effects of the play are
very fine especially in the famous Brocken scene. . . . It is a marvel of electrical effects with whining and blinking dragons, electric fireflies, showers of fire, thunder's roar, lightning flashes, and its weird scenery, ghostly wails and cries.  

In The Ohio State Journal one also finds the reviewer marveling over the theatrics of this scene:

Imps and goblins hold carnival on Walpurgiss Night on the summit of Brocken in the Hartz Mountains. . . Mephisto in his fiery red cloak accompanied by Faust stands on the tip of the mountain in the full glare of calcium light. . . Bats and broom riding witches flit across the stage, frogs croak, and from the nooks crawl half-human shapes.  

Because of the nature of the setting and the quality of the photography, it is difficult to determine with any accuracy the individual units that comprise this setting. However, one can speculate that the major units are structurally simple, consisting of flat wing, a backdrop, groundrows, and a series of free-standing cutouts. That the design, with trees and stumps taking the shapes of fiendish monsters, relied heavily upon special lighting effects to create the impressions mentioned in the reviews above is indicated by program notes. Electrical effects for the production were designed by the Eline Electric Company with a Mr. J. Frank Eline creating the calcium effects. Other special effects not evident in Figure 61 included figures designed by Armbruster to "fly" through the setting during the height of these electrical effects. The concept for this setting combined with its expressionistic design features and its special effects constitutes one of the most imaginative works of the studio for this or any other period.
The fifth and last act of the play contains one other theatrical highlight of the production: "The Apotheosis." A program synopsis of the scene described the following:

Nuremberg Prison, scene ii - The Apotheosis. The scene in the dungeon ends the tragedy, with Marguerite's death and her final salvation. Closing with "The Apotheosis" the most beautiful stage picture ever seen.

The Armbruster materials do not contain evidence of the dungeon setting, however there is a photograph (Figure 62) of the apotheosis drop. Because of the juxtaposition of the dungeon scene and the apotheosis, one may conjecture how this scene worked. Because the dungeon backdrop was capable of becoming transparent with special lighting effects, the apotheosis drop, Figure 62, was placed directly behind the
dungeon. With the transformation, the apotheosis drop came into full view of the audience who then saw a host of angels in a clouded heaven. The lower center area of this drop also became transparent to bring into view the ascension of Marguerite into heaven. Thus a double transformation occurred. While transformation scenes were not unusual in this period, the double effects accomplished in this setting are unique and justify the program note cited above describing the scene as exceptionally beautiful. The effects of this setting certainly indicate that the Armbruster Studio was more than capable in using special effect conventions of the nineteenth century.

The Morrison contract, which lasted for twenty-one years, was an early and most important association for the studio in terms of its growing professional status. Because Morrison toured nationally, critical praise for the Armbruster's settings from throughout the country no doubt accounts in part for the increasing professional involvement of the studio in traveling theatre during the eighties and nineties.

The next important contract for the studio involved a spectacular melodrama, The Limited Mail, written by a native of Columbus, Ohio, Elmer Vance. While the Armbruster scenery for Vance's play is a particularly interesting example of the studio as a reflection of nineteenth-century American theatre, there are in these sets, as in Faust,
examples of the unique effects and fine artistry that helped their reputation grow. The Limited Mail, like Boucicault's The Streets of New York, and Daly's Under the Gaslight, successfully exploited spectacular visual gimmickry, and Vance, as was the case with Boucicault and Daly, reaped fame and fortune, albeit fleeting, from this theatre effort. The Armbruster Studio's share in the success of The Limited Mail was a growing reputation for successful scenic design.

The play was a stage adaptation of Vance's novel Nellie Harland, A Romance of Rail and Wire, published in 1888. Vance was a telegrapher for the Columbus office of The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, and his close association with the railroad and telegraphy inspired him to write both novel and play. On August 28, 1890, The Limited Mail premiered at the Metropolitan Opera House in Columbus.

The essential storyline of the play followed a rather basic formula for nineteenth-century melodrama. The scene is the American West on the Union Pacific Railroad. The following is a synopsis of the story and action of the play as taken from a standard program insert:


Act II. The traveling public waiting for the train. A tie pass. Tombstone Jake's idea. "Let me play them bells." Jim and his signal song. A poor girl's ruined reputation. A night operator is wanted at

Act III. Floodwood Cut. Music of the wires. A villain's plot. The Irish local wrecked instead of the Limited Mail, which is not yet due. "The wires must be cut." THE WONDERFUL TELEGRAPH SCENE. "Hold the Limited Mail." The villains remove the danger signal, but the torpedo gives timely warning. The greatest and most startling railroad scene ever staged. THE FLIGHT OF THE LIMITED MAIL.

Act IV. Zeke Harland's house. Jameson, the detective. The missing papers. "My God, if she should learn the awful truth." The warning. "Now for Australia."

Scene ii - the flight.
Scene iii - On the section. A desperate game. The realistic saw-mill scene. "If it costs me my life." Run to earth. THE THRILLING WRECK SCENE. All O.K.

The Limited Mail toured for three years as a most successful melodrama. Odell, in his chronicles, notes that packed houses thrilled to the spectacle on its frequent visits to New York theatres. Typical of the popular theatre of its time, the play's success came not from the story, but rather pivoted about four spectacular scenes: a train -- The Limited Mail, one hundred feet long -- which rushed across the stage in full view of the audience, a telegraph message flashed in electrical letters over wires strung on the stage, a sawmill in operation with a fight scene played before a whirling circular saw, and a wreck involving a railroad handcar. Reporters from Columbus and Cincinnati papers covered the premier performance and filled their reviews with vivid descriptions of the play's scenic excitement:
The arrival and departure of the Limited Mail in this act is simply great. The train is heard approaching, the puffing of the locomotive (a wonderfully perfect imitation) at first faint, then growing louder: the clanging of the bell, the slowing down of the train, its final dead stop, which is followed immediately by the long drawn sigh from the air brakes, are all actually perfect reproductions, and together made an act which simply drove the audience crazy. In the third act "the flight of the Limited Mail" and the wonderful "telegraphic scene," simply beggarded description. The words of the message, "For Your Life, Hold The Limited Mail," flash out upon the wires in jagged letters, the message itself being sent by Jim Harland, who has discovered the plot to wreck the train and who climbs to the top of a telegraphpole, cuts the wire and sends the morning dispatch. The dispatch is received by Nellie Harland, the heroine, who is acting as operator at the Floodwood Cut, being in disguise of a boy in order to escape the persecution of the villain. Although overpowered by the would-be train wreckers she succeeds in placing a torpedo upon the track and thus gives the alarm. The Limited Mail, a perfect representation of a vestibuled train, flies across the stage, stops, and comes backing down, slows up and stops, and once more there is a sigh of triumph from the air brakes.10

A great deal of publicity heralded the opening of the production weeks in advance. From an article in The Ohio State Journal on August 17, 1890, comes a description of the mechanical apparatus that produced some of the most startling effects:

The train effect is nine feet in height and one-hundred feet in length and crosses the stage at a rate of speed almost equal to that of a real train. Friction and an endless cable are the mechanical principles involved in its movement. The train feeds on and off the cables, unfolding and folding again automatically while in rapid motion, thus enabling the train to run at this high rate of speed on stages of any width. . . The third act of Mr. Vance's play is an elaborate setting, arranged in such a manner that two distant actions are shown taking place at the same time in two different localities, each action dependent on the other and working in unison, connected by the electric telegraph.
Figure 63. The setting for "Floodwood Cut," Act II, *The Limited Mail*, 1890.

At the most exciting climax where the interest and suspense are intense, the audience reads the message in mid-air as it is flashed over the wires in zig-zag electric letters. A dynamo and entire electric plant are carried for the purpose of producing this telegraphic effect. For the saw-mill scene a real circular saw, four feet in diameter, is used.

The Armbruster Collection contains two photographs of settings designed and constructed for *The Limited Mail*. Figure 63, the first of these photographs, is the setting for Act III, "Floodwood Cut," the locale for the "wonderful telegraph scene," and "the flight of the Limited Mail," two of the highly spectacular scenes in the play. The setting is contained within two drops, a landscape backdrop and a cut leg drop downstage. Within these drops are found three-dimensional units consisting of a depot building, a pile of rail ties, a telegraph pole, and a water tower. Two sets of
converging railway tracks are laid on the stage floor; a cutout boxcar stage left completes the setting. The downstage portions of the railway tracks accommodated the effects for "the flight of the Limited Mail," as described in newspaper accounts above.

A search for materials that could assist in pictorially illustrating this particular effect has uncovered but one rather incidental clue, a second photograph that adds somewhat to an understanding of this stage mechanism.
Figure 64 captures a moment from Act II as Nellie, the play's heroine, disguised as a boy, leaves Redwood Station aboard the Limited Mail. This photograph shows a portion of the train effect in question. From the details in Figure 64 it is obvious that this train unit contained a practical platform on the last car to create the appearance of boarding passengers who no doubt entered the train through practical doors, shown above the steps, and exited immediately from behind the train unit, described as being nine feet in height. Just below the right foot of Nellie and half hidden in grass is a small wheel and part of the cable unit employed in unfolding the 100 foot train. This illustration and the newspaper descriptions are the extent of the available evidence for this effect. It should be noted that this scenic device was not unique with Vance's play as Daly's Under the Gaslight, produced years earlier, employed a similar effect.

During a portion of the act containing the flight of the Limited Mail another spectacular display was produced. Redwood Station, located fifteen miles away, appeared on the stage simultaneously with Floodwood Cut. It is also in this scene that the message "Hold the Limited Mail" is flashed across the stage in an electrical display. The only available evidence to assist in describing the scenic rearrangement that allows the two locales to appear together is a newspaper artist's rendering (Figure 65) used
as promotional material. Drawn to show what is taking place and not to show how it happens, this illustration is, however, helpful in arriving at the conjectural explanation that follows. The central and left hand portions of the illustration correspond to the setting as depicted in Figure 63. The Redwood Station is shown as appearing to the right of the illustration while the events at Floodwood Cut take place inside the station house located on the left in both Figures 63 and 65. Referring now to Figure 63, it is possible that the stage left leg drop and the boxcar unit were both removed during the scene to reveal the Redwood Station house in a simultaneous setting. Jim, the hero who saves the train from destruction, is shown in Figure 65 atop the telegraph pole sending the spectacular message. Unable to use the Redwood station house because
Figure 66. "The Realistic Saw Mill Scene," and "The Thrilling Train Wreck," as drawn by a staff artist of The Ohio State Journal, August 28, 1890.

villains have cut the wires there, he climbs the water tower, shown in Figure 63, reaches the intact wires, and flashes his message to Floodwood Cut. After this has been accomplished, the Redwood Station setting is again concealed behind the leg drop and boxcar cutout and Floodwood Cut again appears as shown in Figure 63 to allow the Limited Mail to make its thrilling run across the stage.

The only other visual evidence for The Limited Mail scenery is another newspaper artist's sketch, Figure 66. This drawing depicts the setting for Act IV, scene iii, the scene of "the realistic saw mill" and the "thrilling train wreck." Perhaps the scenic thrill of the wreck was a bit overstated since it seems, according to Figure 66, to involve only a handcar. The damsel tied before the
swirling saw blade in the background of this same illustration is certainly a familiar scene from the nineteenth-century stage and the twentieth-century film. The Armbruster settings executed for The Limited Mail together with certain scenes from Morrison's Faust represent the heights of realism in the history of the studio's design work.

Just as the publicity from the Faust production led, in part, to The Limited Mail contract, so Vance's play, with the settings designed by Armbruster, furthered the reputation of the studio and provided impetus for the studio's professional growth. Indicative of this fact was the studio's next major contract, which was with Alexander Salvini.

In 1896 the studio was on the threshold of its greatest opportunity for national, if not international, recognition. In that year Mathias Armbruster was contracted by Alexander Salvini to design and construct scenery for Salvini's forthcoming tour of the United States and Europe. Salvini was the son of the world famous Italian actor Tommaso Salvini and had capitalized on his father's great fame to become a noted matinee idol. On or about June 1, 1896, Salvini contracted with Armbruster to furnish and paint new scenery for productions of Othello, Romeo and Juliet, and The Three Guardsmen. The studio was also to refurbish already existing scenery for Hamlet, Ruy Bias, The Student of Salamanca, L'Ami Fritz, Don Ceasar, and Ruticana. The work was to be completed by September 1, 1896. The work was completed, but, late in the summer of
that year, Salvini, vacationing in Italy, died. The studio held the scenery in storage until the Salvini estate was finally settled in January, 1900, when the entire inventory was transferred to the ownership of Mathias Armbruster. Prior to this final settlement, during March of 1899, an agreement was reached between the studio and Salvini's widow to allow the Valentine Stock Company of Columbus, Ohio, to use the scenery for The Three Guardsmen for a production of that play at the Grand Opera House in Columbus.

No photographs or design models for the Salvini scenery are now extant. However, among the legal papers detailing the events of the litigation between the studio and Salvini's lawyers are detailed inventories of all scenery and properties involved in the contract. These descriptive lists are included as Appendix D. The inventory included forty-nine scenic drops, fourteen trunks of properties and costumes, and innumerable pieces of flat scenery and prop furniture. The business records of the studio indicate that portions of the Salvini scenery remained with the Armbrusters as rental stock until 1958.

Although Salvini never produced the repertoire for which the Armbruster Studio either designed or refurbished nine plays, the association with Salvini was certainly one of the most prestigious in the studio's history and indicates the status of their professional standing at the end of the period under discussion. For many years the
studio stationery carried a letterhead featuring a banner that proclaimed: "Scenery Furnished for the Classical Repertoire of Alexander Salvini."

The Salvini contract marked a turning point in the studio's production history. Up to this time the work of Mathias Armbruster had developed from providing only stock settings for provincial opera houses to the design and construction of custom scenery for featured players and companies of the American stage. Armbruster's affiliation with Salvini ushers in an unparalleled decade of design work for many of the prominent companies of classical repertoire touring America.

Classical Repertory - 1898 to 1907

The period from 1898 to 1907 was the most productive era of continuous significant work in the entire history of the Armbruster Studio. During this period, Mathias and his sons designed for the repertoires of many notable actors and actresses including Robert Mantell, Madame Modjeska, and James O'Neill. The designs included complete settings for seventeen productions of Shakespeare in addition to such classics as Richelieu, Mary Stuart, School for Scandal, and Virginius. The settings by the Armbrusters for these classic works were seen by audiences across the country and served to establish the studio firmly on a national level. This period began for the Armbrusters when the husband and
wife team of R. D. MacLean and Odette Tyler in association with Charles Hanford toured Shakespeare during the season 1898-99.

The Company of Hanford, Tyler, and MacLean was made up of three relatively well-known actors. R. D. MacLean was known in the New York City theatre as a "robustious" actor who appeared for a number of years in standard legitimate roles. Charles Hanford began a notable career as a Shakespearean and classical actor in 1882. He became a minor celebrity early in his career playing supporting roles opposite Edwin Booth, Helena Modjeska, Julia Marlowe, and Thomas Keene. Odette Tyler, a member of one of the foremost families of the South and a native of Savannah, Georgia, played leading roles on the New York stage from 1884 to 1897. A long term association with Charles Frohman brought her major roles in such popular successes as Shenandoah (1889), The Lost Paradise (1891), The Girl I Left Behind Me (1892), and The Younger Son (1893). Her most famous role was that of Caroline Mitford in Secret Service (1896) in which she played opposite William Gillette. In 1898 these three actors formed the Hanford, Tyler, and MacLean Company of Shakespearean Repertoire, touring in Othello, Romeo and Juliet, The Merchant of Venice, and Julius Caesar. The tour began in October of 1898 and visited a circuit of major cities in the South and on the eastern seaboard. The high point of the tour was the
engagement at the Herald Square Theatre in New York City in April of 1899.

The Armbruster Studio executed the scenery for all four plays produced by this company. When the Hanford Company appeared in New York City, the studio received extensive recognition and praise from the New York press. In 1899, the studio printed and distributed excerpts from these press reviews in a pamphlet entitled "Opinions of the New York Press on the Scenic Features of the Productions given by the Hanford, Tyler, and MacLean Company at the Herald Square Theatre in New York, designed, built, and painted by M. Armbruster and Sons, Columbus, Ohio." The pamphlet contained critical comments from leading newspapers including The New York Times and The Dramatic News. Generally, the settings for all the productions were described as extremely elaborate, handsomely executed, and beautifully painted with every attention paid to detailed scenic beauty. For example, the critic for the New York Dramatic Mirror indicated that the settings for the Hanford Company were the first he had seen by M. Armbruster and Sons and concluded that "they evoked many compliments." In The New York Clipper it was observed of the entire repertoire:

There has been every indication throughout the entire engagement of a desire on the part of those concerned to give every attention to the mountings and pictorial beauty of the work, and the efforts in that direction were well carried out in "The Merchant of Venice," which was not only scenically interesting, but also very beautiful.
And in both The New York World and The New York Daily Mirror were comments that all the scenery used by the Hanford Company was "Lavish," and that "Money was lavished unsparingly on scenery and costumes making the productions most pleasing to the eye."\(^{16}\)

Among the materials in the Armbruster Collection are sketches and models in varying stages of design for two of the plays performed by the Hanford Company: Romeo and Juliet and The Merchant of Venice. An examination of these designs will illustrate not only some of the aspects of Armbruster's work that so pleased the critics, but will reveal that this scenery, unlike previous productions discussed, consisted almost entirely of painted drops.

The design materials from Romeo and Juliet include two pencil sketches and a portion of a complete watercolor maquette. Figure 67 is a rough sketch of the setting for a hall in Capulet's house, the scene of the masked ball in Act I. This design is the first rendering of a cut drop placed between the last leg unit and the backdrop in the setting. Figure 68 is the final rendering of this same scenic unit, part of a complete maquette from which the actual stage scenery was modeled. These pieces display the sets rich ornamentation done in a Moorish-Venetian motif.

Figure 69 is a first rendering for Juliet's bed chamber used in Acts III and IV. This particular design shows the exterior of the chamber with the drapes drawn shut about the bed.
Figure 67. A rough pencil sketch of the setting for Capulet's House, Act I, Romeo and Juliet, Hanford, Tyler and MacLean, 1898.

Figure 68. A final rendering of the cut drop for Capulet's House, Act I, Romeo and Juliet, Hanford, Tyler and MacLean, 1898.
Figure 69. First rendering of Juliet's bedchamber, Acts III and IV, Romeo and Juliet, Hanford, Tyler, and MacLean, 1898.

Evidence of the settings for The Merchant of Venice consists of one complete maquette and a portion of another. Figure 70 is the maquette made up of two leg drops, a cut drop, and a backdrop. This model carries an inscription identifying it as "The Senate Chamber from Act I of The Merchant of Venice." The first two leg drops of the maquette are sketched in pencil, the cutdrop and backdrop are completely detailed in watercolor. Figure 71 is the third unit of this maquette, the cutdrop. It graphically illustrates the flavor of fifteenth century Venetian Gothic used throughout the setting.
Figure 70. A maquette of "The Senate Chamber," from The Merchant of Venice, Hanford, Tyler, and MacLean, 1898.

Figure 71. A cut-drop from "The Senate Chamber," The Merchant of Venice, Hanford, Tyler, and MacLean, 1898.
Figure 72. A street scene from *The Merchant of Venice*, Hanford, Tyler and MacLean, 1893.

Figure 72, a cut-drop design, is the second extant design from *The Merchant of Venice*. This unit was built to front a canal with the leg portions of the drop depicting public buildings indicating a square. The canal boat was most likely practical in the actual stage setting. This particular set could have been used for all of the many street scenes in the play.

The features of the Armbruster scenery that captured the attention of the critics were the architectural and painted detailing. The six design models discussed above evidence such features in varying aspects. Outstanding among them in this respect are Figures 71 and 72. Figure 71 illustrates elaborate detailing of ornamentation in the
architectural features of the railings and archway. The panels on either side of the arch opening and the gargoyles and stencil design work above the arch are the outstanding pictorial aspects of this set. The precisely executed ornamentation of the left leg portion of the design shown as Figure 72 including the statuary and architectural features of the archway, when executed in a full scale stage rendering, must have created the "pictorial beauty" mentioned so often in reviews. The painting skills of Mathias and the artists in his employ, discussed and illustrated in Chapter III, no doubt added to the beauty of these settings in a manner that cannot be illustrated by these design models.

Although the appearance of the Hanford Company was not the first time Armbruster scenery appeared in New York City, it was the first time the studio's work had received extensive public praise from such prestigious press representatives. This no doubt enhanced their reputation and was a factor influencing the many important repertory contracts that came to the Armbrusters after the initial success of the Hanford tour.

During the season of 1900 - 1901, Tyler and MacLean joined with Madame Modjeska in a classical repertory that included King John, Mary Stuart, and Macbeth. Newspaper interviews published in the Columbus press, ca. 1900, frequently mention design work by Mathias Armbruster for the tours of Modjeska. In the Columbus Dispatch of
November 5, 1911, Mathias is quoted as observing that "When Modjeska used to make her famous tours we furnished the scenery in all her important plays." 17 Albert Armbruster also mentioned design work for Modjeska in interviews with me. Although no evidence can be found in the Collection for the Modjeska, Tyler, and MacLean tour, it is certain, because of these two facts, that the studio designed and built this company's scenery. Newspaper accounts of the tour have furnished general descriptions of the settings used even though the studio is never specifically mentioned in them. The Cleveland Plain Dealer's reaction to King John was typical of the press comments on the company:

From a scenic point of view the tragedy was the best our stage has witnessed in many a long year. It is not likely that King John has ever been produced here with any special reference to a scenic investiture. 18

Billed as a "Farewell Tour" for Madame Modjeska, the company opened in New York City and toured extensively in the Midwest, the South, and Canada.

The combination of Tyler and MacLean again contracted with the Armbruster Studio in 1901, this time for a new repertory that consisted of King John, Coriolanus, and School for Scandal. The tour was to open in Columbus, Ohio, and the local press gave much enthusiastic coverage to the mounting of the productions at the Great Southern Theatre. The fact that local scenic artists were working with the famous actors in producing a national tour premiering in
Columbus added excitement for the theatregoers of that city. The Columbus press carried many stories of the scenic preparations at both the Armbruster Studio and the Great Southern Theatre. Typical is the following from the Columbus Press Post:

Busy as a beehive is the Armbruster Studio these May days with an undercurrent of expectancy for the senior painter is abroad 'taking notes,' and so fascinated is he with this first trip to the Old World after forty years absence, that it will be the month of roses, before he turns homeward - but then what wonders he has seen and with what vim he will go to work to embody the designs for King John and Coriolanus, which Mr. R. D. MacLean and Miss Odette Tyler will produce in Columbus, September third! In water color dummies are now filed away in his study the Court of King John, the Walls of Angiers, the French King's Tent, King John's Tent, the Crypt of the Castle, the Orchard Sminstead and all that goes to the scenic splendor of Coriolanus... Debarling the "Crypt Set," painted for Salvini's Othello, the work now in hand is probably the most important our home artists have undertaken. Welcome novelty is the coming in August of such capable actors and cultured gentle folk as Mr. and Mrs. MacLean. They have leased the Great Southern for three weeks rehearsal and will open at that theatre... No expense is being spared in mounting the plays they have chosen for their stellar debut.19

The Armbruster Collection contains extant design sketches, models, and one photograph for scenes from Tyler and MacLean's King John. Because these sets, in the preparation and stylistic approach taken by Mathias in their production, are representative of the studio's involvement in another typical scenic approach of the century -- the antiquarian movement -- it is worthwhile to study these sets closely.
Figure 73. A design model for *King John*, Act 1, Tyler and MacLean, 1901.

Although a standard edition of Shakespeare's plays is helpful in sorting out the settings for this production, there is no conclusive evidence as to the particular edition or cutting used by Tyler and MacLean in 1901. The entire first act of the play takes place in the English King's palace. Figure 73 is a design model from the studio files labeled "King John - McLean [sic]" and is identified as "Act 1st, King John." Notes on the back of the model indicate that the setting consists of seven flat units which enclosed the stage in a box set fashion. The throne in the center was a three-dimensional unit; the length of the set was thirty-eight feet, the height, eighteen feet. Folds in the model indicate that the setting formed an "L"
shaped configuration on stage in the manner shown in Figure 73. While the construction and arrangement of the setting is standard for its period, an outstanding feature of the design is the painted detail given the flat canvas. The walls are finished with mural work in precise perspective creating a miniature landscape of striking beauty, even though this is only a "rough" working model. As was the case for previous classical scenery, one can imagine the pictorial beauty of this design when fully rendered in a stage setting.

The play's second act takes place on a field in France, before Angiers. Figure 74 is also from the MacLean/ King John file and is identified by a notation reading "2nd Act, Angiers." An additional note on the back of the design indicates that cuts were made in the castle buildings to create an effect of illuminated windows. This single drop could have sufficed for the entire act since the locale is only generally suggested and the action requires no other scenery. This landscape rendering is typical of Mathias as is the striking authenticity of his European vistas.

For the third act of the play, the Armbrusters designed two tent settings. The first of these, "The French King's Tent," appears in the photograph shown as Figure 75. This photograph shows the set as it was arranged on the stage of The Great Southern Theatre in Columbus; it was most likely taken during the play's premiere in September of 1901.
Figure 74. A design model for *King John*, Act II, "Angiers," Tyler and MacLean, 1901.

Included among the assembled players are Odette Tyler as "Constance," seated stage right, and R. D. MacLean as "King John," seated on the stage left throne.

The stage mechanics and design aspects of this setting were simply executed. The set pieces consist of a canopied curtain with a backing scene. Embellishments to the basic design consist of heraldic emblems on the side curtains and a *fleur-de-lis* patterned border attached to the ceiling cover. The overall stylistic approach to the settings and costumes is typical of classical repertory of the period in that it reflects an attempt at historical accuracy indicative of the antiquarian movement of the nineteenth century.
In addition to the photograph of Act III, there is a design model for "The English King's Tent," shown as Figure 76. The model is a charcoal sketch of the tent including the coat-of-arms of the King of England as the central motif. Although they represent two different settings, Figures 75 and 76 are very similar in design and illustrate graphically the final stages in the design process -- from working model to actual setting.

The last of the designs for this play is the maquette shown in Figure 77. The model contains a front groundrow, a leg drop, a cut drop, and a backing drop. The three front units all depict the top of a castle wall with the castle itself in the background. Although the design bears no specific inscriptions, the setting was probably used for scene 11 of Act IV, "before the castle of King John." Measuring nine by seven inches, this maquette is one of the most detailed and finished design models in the Armbruster Collection and exhibits the two outstanding facets of Armbruster's work for this repertory: the precise detailing of architectural construction, and the accuracy of depicting geographic locale and historical period.

There are no materials in the Armbruster Collection of work for Coriolanus or School for Scandal. Newspaper accounts of all three productions contained mention of impressive scenic embellishments, in glowing, but only general, terms. Tyler and MacLean toured this repertory from September 1, 1901, until March 3, 1902; their itinerary
Figure 75. A photograph of "The French King's Tent," a setting for Act III of King John. Photographed on the stage of The Great Southern Theatre, Columbus, Ohio, Tyler and MacLean, 1901.

Figure 76. A design model for "The English King's Tent," the second setting for Act III of King John, Tyler and MacLean, 1901.
took them through the major cities of the South. After this
tour, MacLean and Tyler established a stock company in
Washington, D. C., and the season of 1901-02 appears to
have been their last professional contact with the Armbruster
studio.

From 1901 through 1904 Charles Hanford, previously
associated with Tyler and MacLean, headed his own company
of Shakespearean repertory touring extensively throughout
the southern and western states. During these years his
productions included The Taming of the Shrew, Much Ado About
Nothing, Richard III, and The Merchant of Venice, with
scenery created by Armbruster. In the extant renderings
for this repertory, a style is evident that has not appeared
in previous Armbruster designs with the exception of certain
aspects of front-curtain motifs. As contrasted with the architectural antiquarian detail of past productions, renderings for Hanford’s *The Merchant of Venice* suggest a complete "romantic" freedom of design.

Figures 78 and 79 are sketches for Portia’s house in Act II. Figure 78 is a columned archway to be used as the front leg; Figure 79 was the backing for the set. In both renderings harsh architectural features typical of early works are softened by drapery and floral boughs reminiscent in their romantic flow of the front curtains discussed and illustrated in Chapter III. There are two possible explanations that may be offered for this change in stylistic approach to classical repertory. Mathias may have been influenced by scenic styles he viewed while on his European theatre tour a few months prior to executing
these designs, or Charles Hanford, in the role of producer for the first time, may have dictated a romantic approach to the designs for his repertory. I am inclined to accept the first explanation for two reasons: (1) the evidence in the early works of Mathias, mentioned in Chapter III, of a similar romantic approach to design, and (2) the designs for the classical repertory of O'Neill, discussed later in this chapter, exhibit romantic stylization similar to Figures 78 and 79.

The designs for Hanford's *The Merchant of Venice* are significant in indicating this trend toward a highly romantic stylization which seems to come into the studio's designs after the turn of the century. In the same year that the Armbrusters began their affiliation with Hanford
they also began a long association with Robert Mantell and his Shakespearean repertory. Unfortunately, there are no extant materials of real value in ascertaining the studio's stylistic approach to Mantell's productions, thus it is best to study the work done for O'Neill in order to better grasp this new romantic trend.

In 1907 the Armbrusters designed and mounted a revival of Sheridan Knowles' *Virginius* produced by James O'Neill. From that year on, O'Neill would include this play in repertoire with his famous *The Count of Monte Cristo* and, occasionally, *Julius Caesar*. The production of *Virginius* opened in New York City on September 16, 1907, and was enthusiastically received. The Armbruster scenery received favorable reactions in the press, many reviewers noting in particular the rich and lavish effects created on the painted drops.

A design shown below, Figure 30, was created as a backdrop for three scenes of the play, a garden before the home of Virginius. The outstanding feature of this particular design is the romantic softening of the harsh classic lines of the stone architecture of the landscape with lush foliage painted profusely about the landscape. This design is comparable to the works for the Hanford repertory discussed earlier and is further evidence of a trend toward the atmosphere and moods of pictorial romanticism. Certainly the adjectives "rich" and "lavish" so frequently used in press reviews of *Virginius* are appropriate for this landscape.
Among the designs for **Virginius** are sketches that indicate the studio not only created scenery, but, in some cases provided all original properties needed for production as well. Figure 31 contains rough sketches for prop furniture created by the studio for this play. Although the design is faded and the delicate pencil lines are difficult for the camera to capture, enough is evident to suggest the ornate, rather Victorian opulence of these pieces, particularly the love seat and throne chair in the upper left hand corner of the Figure. It is also evident that the lavish qualities of the painted scenery were carried over to all aspects of the production.

In 1911, in an interview with the Columbus press, Mathias mentioned designing scenery for O'Neill's
Figure 81. Sketches of prop furniture used in James O'Neill's *Virginius*, 1907.

Shakespearean production. It is possible that he was referring to *Julius Caesar*, but there is no evidence in the Collection to verify this. Albert Armbruster did recall, in an interview with me, that the studio refurbished and repainted scenery for O'Neill's *The Count of Monte Cristo*, but the original design was not theirs. This may also have been true of the scenery for *Julius Caesar*. While the studio continued to refurbish O'Neill's entire scenic inventory in the years that followed the opening of *Virginius*, this contract appears to have been the last in a series of notable repertory companies for whom the studio created scenery.

The years from 1908 to 1920 appear to be a transitional era for the Armbruster Studio. Although the studio
continued to furnish scenery for O'Neill, Mantell, and others of lesser note, Armbruster's design work was more and more occupied with minstrel and vaudeville companies and with fewer designs of classical scenery for notable companies. During this decade the nature of the studio's work was most likely influenced by two factors: (1) the decline of road theatre, which had been the mainstay of the studio's output and which was followed by a decline in both the quantity of prestigious design work and in the caliber of the players and companies for whom these designs were created, and (2) Mathias, the only professionally trained painter and skilled draftsman in the Armbruster family, was 69 years old in 1908 and his sons, who were taking over the major design work, had neither his professional training nor his artistic skills. However, the studio, under the management of Albert, the oldest son, who inherited the scenic studio upon the death of Mathias in 1920, continued to thrive, supplying the scenic needs of the Al G. Field Minstrels and others of prominence on the minstrel and vaudeville circuit. But with the death of Mathias an era had ended. The Armbruster Studio had passed the zenith of its theatrical prominence.

Summary

Beginning in 1875 with a vaudeville drop for the circus act of a young Al G. Field, the Armbruster Studio,
under the management of Mathias, grew to become one of the largest scenic studios in America. From 1875 to 1884, the senior Armbruster developed his theatrical knowledge while supplying local Ohio opera houses with stock scenery and beautiful painted curtains. By 1884, with the Morrison contract and a growing reputation, the studio was firmly established in the professional theatre. The success of the scenic spectacle for The Limited Mail in 1890 and the prestigious Salvini contract in 1896 were professional landmarks leading to the apex of significant theatrical design work in the decade of classical repertory from 1898 to 1907.

Mathias Armbruster lived to see his studio in Columbus rise from modest beginnings to become a contributor of significance to the American theatrical scene. During his forty-five years as a theatrical designer, Mathias' artistic talents spanned an unusually broad range of styles: meticulous architectural detail as in the Faust settings (which included a unique, early expressionistic setting for "Walpurgiss Night"), melodramatic realism seen in The Limited Mail, and, finally, lush romantic beauty exhibited in his later classical motifs. During his years, Armbruster scenery embellished the productions of many notables of the American stage, was seen by audiences across the country, and received plaudits from critics of New York City and other major theatrical centers.

The studio's growth was vitally linked to the growth of the road theatre; the Armbrusters became specialists in
the needs of traveling productions. By the 1900's, when
the studio was producing its most important work and gaining
national reputation, there were 500 traveling companies in
America. As the road declined, so did the studio's profes­
sional significance. By 1917, when there were but eighty-
nine traveling companies, the Armbruster Studio was no
longer primarily engaged in designs for the legitimate
theatre. Instead, its work began to focus upon the traveling
minstrel and small acts on the vaudeville circuits. Thus,
the studio that passed on to Albert Armbruster was chiefly
occupied with minstrel work. A survey of the era of
Albert's management is the subject of the following chapter.
FOOTNOTES

1. The Grand Theatre Program for Lewis Morrison's Faust, Columbus, Ohio, March 13, 1892.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. The Columbus Dispatch, March 14, 1892, p. 8.

6. The Ohio State Journal, March 13, 1892, p. 16.


8. The Metropolitan Opera House Program for The Limited Mail, August 28, 1890.


10. The Ohio State Journal, August 29, 1890, p. 21.

11. Ibid., August 17, 1890, p. 16.


13. Ibid., p. 211.

14. The New York Dramatic Mirror, April 22, 1899, p. 34.

15. The New York Clipper, April 22, 1899, p. 41.


18. The Cleveland Plain Dealer, October 31, 1900, p. 23.


20. The Columbus Dispatch, November 5, 1911, p. 4.
CHAPTER V

THE STUDIO UNDER THE MANAGEMENT OF ALBERT ARMBRUSTER
1920 - 1958

The history of the studio under the management of Albert Armbruster will be surveyed in this chapter. The thirty-eight years of Albert's management, a time when the studio no longer produced scenery of professional prominence, will be divided into two periods: (1) the first nine years of Albert's management when he created his most significant design work, and (2) the years from 1929 to 1958 when the activities of the studio involved mainly the rental of stock equipment and scenery to amateur producers.

The Minstrel Era, 1920 - 1929

The first nine years of Albert Armbruster's management are the last years during which the Armbruster Scenic Studio produced custom designed scenery of any significant professional calibre. During this period the studio was primarily occupied with the production of vaudeville scenery for the mammoth traveling minstrels that had become one of the most successful forms of popular theatrical entertainment in America. By the 1920's the form of the minstrel, which
had begun with an exclusively musical format, had changed to a form preoccupied with scenic spectacle:

In the late period of the American minstrel show came elaborate, expensive settings, such as shipboard scenes, college campuses, and Broadway roof gardens. The late days of Field's minstrels display scenes from the Paris Exposition and of a roof garden in New York, complete with electrical effects of rain and thunder.¹

Most prominent among the producers of these spectacular minstrel shows was Al G. Field, whose friendship with Mathias was the major influence in the establishment of the Armbruster Scenic Studio in 1875. Field had, by 1920, the largest and most popular minstrel show traveling in America; his minstrels remained on the road for forty-two years, from 1886 to 1928, the longest record ever made by a traveling minstrel. Field was an innovator in minstrelsy and was not only the first to take entire minstrel settings on tour, but was the first to build and operate special railroad cars to transport his elaborate spectacles.² Providing the scenic requirements for Field, as well as other minstrel companies, was the mainstay of the studio's activities throughout the 1920-29 era.

The years from 1920 to 1929 are the most completely documented in the history of the studio and not only provide a history of Albert Armbruster's design work, but also constitute a pictorial history of the American Minstrel of this decade since the studio designed for the largest and most popular minstrel companies on the road at that time: the
Al G. Field Minstrels and the Lasses White Minstrels. The settings created for these minstrels represent Albert Armbruster's most creative and significant period as a theatrical designer. This chapter will use only a select number of materials chosen because they best illustrate Albert's artistic work -- his strengths as well as his limitations as an artist. Other material from the period is compiled in Appendix E.

The basic pattern of acts in a minstrel presentation and the nature of scenic units required within its format had been conventionalized prior to 1920; therefore, types of scenery created by a designer had to conform to established conventions. The pattern and types of acts in the Field Minstrel were typical of minstrels in general and varied only slightly from year to year. A minstrel opened with a first-part spectacle involving the entire cast and featuring choral and solo performances. For this opening a first-part setting was used that was highly ornate, usually depicting a Southern setting, and generally consisting of three leg drops, a cut drop, and a backing. Figure 82 is a typical first-part photographed on the stage of the Hartman Theatre, Columbus, Ohio, about 1920.

The first-part was followed by a second-part consisting of a series of olios featuring the specialty performers of the company. Scenery for this segment of the show was comprised of a series of drops designed with visual
motifs appropriate to the act being performed, i.e. jazz, romantic ballads, dance acts and the like. It was common practice to merely insert such drops at the back of the first-part setting, retaining the first-part legs and borders. Figure 83 is a typical example of second-part drops and was designed by Armbruster for an act featuring Bert Swor, an entertainer in the Field Minstrel, whose act was entitled "Alabama Bound, A Musical Medley Backed By A Saxophone Quartet." The design is a simple geometric pattern with a central motif which depicts the featured instrumentation of the act; second-part designs were generally of such a simplified pattern.

The third and final part of the minstrel was usually a burlesque satirizing popular opera, drama, or the latest movies. Novelty scenery with as many scenic gimmicks as
possible, while still maintaining fairly standard wing and drop units, was common to this third-part and it was for this portion of the minstrel that the scenic designer could display the most imagination and theatricality in his design concepts. Consequently, the third-part designs, particularly for the Field Minstrels, constitute the highlight of Armbruster's designs for this era. The format of the third-part burlesque called for more scenic display than any other portion of the minstrel and allowed him the greatest freedom to express what design talents he possessed. The series of third-part designs which follow best exemplify Albert's creative efforts during these years dominated by minstrel scenery.

Figure 83. A drop designed for Bert Swor's specialty act, Al G. Field Minstrel, 1921.
Figure 84. A maquette for the third-part burlesque, Al G. Field Minstrels, 1921-22.

The first of these satirical designs for which there is evidence in the Collection was created for Field in 1921. In that year, the Field Minstrel featured a third-part burlesque that was a travesty of a Jules Verne classic and was billed as "Around the World in Thirty Minutes - A Transitory Travesty in Eight Minutes." The opening episode was set in the terminal of a futuristic space station carrying the musical title "All Aboard." The maquette for this setting appears as Figure 84. This setting consisted of three units: a platform in front of a cut drop with a backing drop designed in the shape of a spacecraft which had practical doors and windows. It is obvious from this design and those that follow in this chapter as well as in the Appendix, that Albert's work lacked the precise detailing of line and the fine quality of finished painting so prominent in the creations of his father Mathias. However, Albert did succeed in creating a highly colorful, theatrical
stylization that succeeded for him in minstrel settings. Although somewhat crude in their design, newspaper and magazine accounts of public reactions to his sets indicate that they were visually spectacular and that they received popular acclaim.\(^\text{3}\)

Because of the faded and delicate nature of the original designs used in this chapter, photographic reproduction is not always true to the actual colors and details of the original materials. Such is the case in Figure 84. The predominant colors used in this design are pastel greens, pinks, blues, and yellows with shades of brown and gray. These color combinations succeed in enhancing the effect of fantasy in the setting. The passenger station is a curved, open dome lined with electric bulbs; lighting effects almost always accompanied the scenery in third-part settings and added much to the visual spectacle. The spacecraft itself is an airborne ocean liner with four huge wings in layers above the passenger compartment. Propeller engines are mounted on the rear of the wings, quite possibly practical in their actual stage versions. The total effect is at once fantastic, futuristic, and very theatrical.

For the 1922-23 season the Field Minstrel carried more than its normal amount of specialty scenery. The third-part burlesque was a science fiction scenic extravaganza entitled "A Messenger to Mars." The entire company was involved in this act which was divided into six fantasy
Figure 85. "Land of the Green Martians," a drop designed for Al G. Field Minstrels, 1922-23.

settings as follows:

- Fantasy I. . . . A Space Ship Atop a Mountain in Chile
- Fantasy II. . . . The Trip to Mars
- Fantasy III . . . Land of the Green Martians
- Fantasy IV . . . Court of the Jeddak of Thark
- Fantasy V. . . . Temple of the Holy Thern
- Fantasy VI . . . The Valley of Dor

For the first scene on Mars, "Land of the Green Martians," Armbruster designed the drop shown as Figure 85. Notations on the design model indicate that this drop, as were others in this set, was accompanied by two leg units. Although this is a simple, flat drop, Armbruster has executed the fantasy design in vivid color combinations with transparent lighting effects that create an exciting visual concept. The center sky area is transparent in order to allow special "eerie" lighting effects to occur from time to time throughout the scene. Of primary design interest, however, are the series of erupting volcanoes in the foreground. The
fires in these volcanoes are painted in burnt orange, yellow, and red on transparent gauze to allow additional lighting effects to create flickering flames in the volcano openings. Use of green and purple dyes on the landscape add still further to the bizarre nature of the scene.

A combination of opaque and dye paints on a transparent scrim contributed to the fantastic nature of the setting for the next scene, "The Court of the Jeddak of Thark" (Figure 86). Painted on transparent scrim to allow lighting effects on the entire drop, the design suggests a futuristic fantasyland with domed castles, waterfalls, winding bridges, and giant foliage all painted in pastel shades of green, pink, blue, and yellow. Of the extant works of Armbruster from this period, this design is outstanding in exhibiting the best of his design works and the
method he used to achieve it -- simple but exciting combinations of color, line, and lighting effects all serving to create a childlike fairyland of the future reminiscent of The Wizard of Oz.

The next drop in this series is in sharp contrast to the romantic flow of the preceding designs since it exhibits precise architectural detailing and successful use of perspective comparable in broad outline to the work of Mathias. However, as is true of all of Albert's designs, it lacks the attention to minute detail and expert finished quality that carried the work of Mathias beyond the ordinary. Depicting the interior of a Martian temple, this drop, Figure 87, creates, in its color and line, a stark, forbidding mood especially in the grotesquely carved pillars and gaping curved columns encircling the throne. The predominant colors in this design are blue, orange, and
shades of green. Since opaque paints were used on linen, special transparent lighting did not accompany the scene.

The final setting and finale to the act was the design shown in Figure 88, a maquette consisting of a cut drop and a backing. Entitled "The Valley of the Dor," the motif is again fantasy achieved through color and form. This setting is dominated by liquid shapes in the form of giant bulbous mushrooms, unusually shaped trees, and flying fish, all intermingled throughout the scene. Again an outstanding feature of the design is the bright mixtures of pastel colors -- yellow, purple, pink, blue, and orange.

The third-part burlesque for the 1923-24 season of the Field Minstrel featured a more realistic approach as seen in a design maquette for an act entitled "Lost in Luray." The Hartman Theatre program billed this setting as a replica.
Figure 89. "Lost in Luray," a set designed for the Al G. Field Minstrels, 1923-24.

of the famous Luray Caverns of Virginia. This scene (Figure 89) is more realistic than most fantasy designs by Albert Armbruster, perhaps as the result of an attempt at pictorial accuracy in creating a stage replica of an actual locale.

Figures 90 through 92 are extant drops, created for minstrel or vaudeville shows by Albert Armbruster, but not specifically identified as to the company for which they were created or the date of the design (although all were most likely executed during the decade from 1920 to 1930). These drops are a portion of the extant scenery acquired from the Verbeck Museum which give further evidence of
Albert's design work. Earlier observations concerning his design imagination are reinforced by these completed scenic units.

Figure 90 appears to be a complete setting for an underwater fantasy. The backdrop depicts a sunken ship in the foreground of an underwater castle -- the pastel blues, purples, and greens of the drop are reminiscent of the fantasy designs discussed earlier. The drop is surrounded by three leg units depicting an underwater cave painted in browns and greys in contrast to the scene they frame.

The next drop (Figure 91) is a polar setting which vividly captures through the icy forms painted in shades of blue, black, and white against a pale yellow sky, the feeling of a frozen arctic landscape. This drop would be particularly
startling when accompanied by special lighting effects.

Figure 92 appears to be a battle scene, perhaps from World War I. Of particular design interest is the realistic moment of frozen action created by the bursting shells painted on the drop.

The 1927-28 season witnessed the last tours of both the Field and White Minstrels, the last remaining minstrel companies in America. By this time, both shows were
requesting no new designs from Armbruster, only repainted drops and refurbished platforms. While the Lasses White Company was able to complete a full touring year, the following season White's show was reduced to a single vaudeville act. The business files of the studio contain an interesting series of letters exchanged between White and Armbruster during this time detailing the financial problems of road theatre in America that caused the final demise of traveling scenic shows. These letters are contained in Appendix E. The Field Minstrels closed in the early spring of 1928 in Cincinnati, Ohio, signaling not only the end of the minstrel era but the most lasting and profitable theatrical partnership in the history of the Armbruster Studio.

The significant scenic work carried on by the studio under the management of Albert Armbruster from 1920 to 1929 was the mounting of traveling minstrel theatre; with the end of the minstrel show that work was over. It was during this period that Albert created, in his work for Field's burlesque sequences, his most creative and successful design work. In these designs he created simple yet exciting visual effects in fantasy settings. Perhaps had he had the opportunity to design for a greater variety of types of theatrical productions, as his father Mathias had, he may have produced a history of design work more varied than the work of this era represents.

The Armbruster Scenic Studio had thrived when there was a great demand for the work that was their
specialty: portable scenery. With the disappearance of
the last vestige of the great road theatre -- the traveling
minstrel shows -- this demand ceased to exist to any profit­
able degree. The studio, in order to survive, had to change
the nature of its work from that of designing custom scenery
to that of supplying stock rental properties in the manner
of a theatrical supply house.

The Studio as a Theatrical Supply House, 1929 - 1958

When the primary nature of the studio's work changed
from that of custom design to that of rental supplies, their
clientele changed from that of professional to amateur.
Only a most insignificant amount of original design work
was accomplished in these last twenty-nine years with rental
of a huge inventory of scenery being the chief mainstay. By
the late twenties, the studio owned an extensive inventory
of scenery since it had been common practice for the
Armbrusters to purchase their scenery from companies who no
longer used it in their shows; the studio's inventory records
often contain notations indicating that rental stock was
often originally designed as custom scenery for professional
companies such as Salvini and Field. It was these holdings
that constituted the bulk of the scenery used as rental
stock which carried the studio through this latter period
of its history.

This transition in the nature of the activities of
the Armbruster Studio, which occurred with the demise of the
minstrel, is most graphically illustrated in the letterhead of the studio's business correspondence. Figure 93 is the studio letterhead as carried in the mid-twenties; Figure 94, as it appeared in the mid-thirties. During the twenties the studio still emphasized the professional status and creativity of its work, prominently featuring Field, Mantell and other recognized companies. In the thirties, the letterhead indicated that vaudeville drops, drapery, cycloramas, and school stage equipment for purchase or rental was the studio's specialty.

The major source accounting for the activities of the studio during these years are extant cash receipt books from 1935 to 1949 which provide an overview of the studio's work for this period. The entries in these books record a relatively unvaried pattern of rentals, mostly to amateur groups. A section from one of these receipt books illustrates typical transactions. From May through June of 1935, twenty-five receipts from rentals were recorded and they break down as follows: high schools and grammar schools, 13; colleges, 5; miscellaneous including church groups and dancing schools, 7. This pattern of business affiliations is typical of the entire period from 1930 through the fifties.

Departures from rentals or installations of stock draperies and curtains were rare. However, one such departure proved to be one of the most lucrative contracts received by the studio in this era -- designs for the ritualistic
Figure 93. Armbruster Scenic Studio letterhead as carried on stationery in the mid-twenties.

Figure 94. Armbruster Scenic Studio letterhead as carried on stationery in the mid-thirties.
rooms and the vaudeville shows of the Order of the Shriners in Columbus, Ohio. Custom scenery was annually (at least through the forties) built by Armbruster for the Shriners. The nature of this scenery is illustrated in the two Figures that follow. Figure 95 is a rough pencil sketch

Figure 95. A design sketch for a ritualistic room for the Shriner's Temple in Columbus, Ohio. By Albert Armbruster.

for a ritualistic setting designed by Albert Armbruster for the "Throne Room" of the Shriner's Aladdin Temple in Columbus. Figure 96, from the cover of a magazine supplement of the Columbus Dispatch, shows a portion of a setting for the public Shrine Show of 1951. The elaborately painted drop settings and accompanying ornately carved figures shown in this photograph are reminiscent of the classical setting designed by Mathias Armbruster earlier in the century. Unfortunately, however, not enough evidence of the scenery
for this temple and for the vaudeville shows is extant to allow detailed study of them. Yet these two examples provide evidence of the small but lucrative original work in which the studio engaged.

Still another departure from the dealings in rentals and stock curtains is one of the very few extant original designs to examine: the last original design by Albert Armbruster found in the Collection, dated March 1954. This design, shown as Figure 97, was a setting executed for an operatic version of *Street Scene* presented by the Columbus Lyric Theatre, an amateur community theatre in Columbus. This naturalistic design is a fairly close copy of Jo Mielziner's Broadway setting for Elmer Rice's *Street Scene* produced in 1929. Since only this rough sketch is available
it is not possible to comment further on the design work. However, this sketch does indicate that although custom design work was rare at this time, the facilities of the studio could still be used to execute full stage settings, even to the last years of its existence.

Financial records provide further evidence that the Armbruster Studio barely paid for itself from the mid-thirties on, with some years operating at a loss; it is obvious that Albert Armbruster was not depending on the profits from the studio for his livelihood. In July of 1953, at the age of ninety, Albert retired from a lifetime as a scenic painter and designer; he lived for seven more years in retirement in Columbus and died, at the age of ninety-seven in August of 1965. With his retirement, the studio officially closed after eighty-three years of operation.
Before the studio building was demolished in the fall of 1958, scenery, design files, and business records were donated to Ohio museums, colleges, and universities. The most complete record of the Armbruster Scenic Studio is now catalogued as "The Armbruster Collection," and is housed in The Theatre Collection of The Ohio State University.
FOOTNOTES


2Ibid., p. 125.

3Reviews from newspapers in Columbus, Ohio and magazines covering the area, such as The Ohio Magazine, from 1920 through 1927.

4The Hartman Theatre Programs, Volume IV, p. 98.

5Ibid.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

In concluding this study of the Armbruster Scenic Studio, it is appropriate to bring into focus those aspects of the history of the American theatre reflected in the studio and the work of the Armbrusters. When the Armbruster Studio was founded in 1875, theatre activity in America flourished in two types of theatrical environments: the huge, elaborately equipped metropolitan theatres and the simple stages of the provincial playhouses. While the metropolitan theatres, located for the most part on the eastern seaboard, maintained fully equipped scene shops within their stage houses, the vast majority of theatre activity took place on the stages of the provincial theatres. It was these theatres, as well as the traveling companies that took to the road to provide them with a constant supply of entertainment, which depended upon scenic studios to provide them with scenery. The growth and success of the Armbruster Studio was vitally linked to the demands of this road theatre; the studio became one of the largest scenic studios in America because its artists became specialists in catering to the needs of traveling productions.
While the Armbruster Studio developed as a necessary adjunct to the phenomenal growth of road theatre in America, much of its success resulted from the talents of its founder and most successful designer, Mathias Armbruster. Mathias combined a high quality of craftsmanship and beauty with highly portable materials (aniline dye paints on linen drops for example) to produce an essential staple of the theatre of this period -- trunk scenery. One feature of the studio's service that was tailored to road productions was the ability of a contracting producer to complete the entire process of design and construction of custom scenery through correspondence. This methodology was most convenient for companies constantly traveling yet at the same time having to plan future productions with all their scenic needs.

The majority of the scenic units designed and constructed by the Armbruster Studio over the entire range of its history consisted mainly of leg and back drop units easily adapted to any theatre stage. A completed setting was usually comprised of two legs, a border, a cut-drop, and a back drop. While such pieces were most typical of the scenic units designed by the studio, occasionally three-dimensional scenic pieces were added, with, in some cases "pin-on" pieces. Even box set arrangements, while not frequently constructed, were, however, among some of the studio's outstanding designs.

In working out the scenic designs, the artists of the studio did not follow any one particular methodology.
However, evidence indicates that designs were generally arrived at by one of three processes. First, orders were sometimes received for which the planning and execution of the scenes were left entirely to the studio; the only ideas furnished the artists were those found in the play script. Thus, the design was left entirely to the imagination of the studio artists with, perhaps, relatively small changes made by the contracting company.

The second and most commonly employed method was for the stage manager or the producer of the contracting company to send the studio a rough sketch of each act with suggestions and explanations accompanying the drawings. Within the framework of such designs, the studio was usually free to create all the specific details. This procedure was especially common in the work done for Al G. Field and other minstrel and vaudeville companies. Since such companies were on the road approximately forty-six weeks out of a year, exchange of design ideas for the coming season was only feasible through correspondence. During the design and construction phases of this method, the Armbrusters were in continuous correspondence with the contracting company, sending maquettes for examination and photographs of settings as they hung in the studio. This enabled a company to pick up the finished product on the first visit to the studio. This service was an attractive feature of the studio and accounted for much of the volume of their business during the road era.
The third process of design creation involved conferences between the studio artists and the company managers, or, as was true in some cases, the leading actors. In this situation, the company representative would visit the studio and describe the scenery desired while the Armbrusters would sketch rough designs on the spot. A series of conferences with progressively more polished designs ensued until the final concept was agreed upon.

To inspire some of these design ideas, the Armbruster Studio maintained an extensive file of source materials. These files contained hundreds of clippings from a wide range of publications which included home furnishing catalogues, popular weekly magazines, art brochures, and even illustrated vacation brochures. This source library was catalogued according to the locales depicted by the sources. Typical categories were: "Wooded Landscapes," "Seacoasts," "Formal Gardens." A great many of these materials from German publications and German art magazines were collected in great volumes. The latter influence probably comes from the fact that Mathias spent his youth in Germany and received his early art training in schools there.

Although slick popular art was often used in working up designs, the Armbrusters also spent much time researching historical precedents for settings used in the classic repertoires of large road companies. In addition to their research, trips in America as well as in Europe were made
in order to view other scenic studio's works; the Armbrusters were concerned that their own artistic endeavors should meet the standards of other leading designers and design houses of their era.

One more aspect of scene design that contributed to the high standards insisted upon by the Armbrusters was in the painting of the scenery. During the eighty-three years of the studio's history, the painting styles varied. This variation is accounted for by three major considerations. First, a number of studio painters, in addition to the Armbrusters themselves, worked for the company. Secondly, some of these artists, including Mathias Armbruster and August Lundberg, received formal technical training in the mechanics of design and style in European art schools, while others, such as Albert and Emil Armbruster, apprenticed at the studio and lacked such professional expertise. A third explanation for variation in painting and design practice is accounted for by the type and intended use of the scenery. Designs for the minstrel stage were simple and frequently turned out in a matter of days while Shakespearean repertoire was more complicated, exacting, expensive, and sometimes took months to build.

However, in spite of the varied painting styles, the Armbrusters generally employed the commonly used paints as well as the generally accepted techniques for their use. The two basic types of paint used were aniline dye and opaque
distemper. Scenery painted with aniline dye, because of its ease in packing and because it could be tacked onto the frames of the regular scenery owned by the theatres, was usually used in minstrel and vaudeville acts. This type of scenery became a specialty of the studio and the Armbrusters probably produced more aniline dye drops than any other artists of their time in this country.

As far as color is concerned, the palette of Mathias had definite characteristics. The basic hues were dark strawberry, prussian, urban and peacock blues, aniline yellow, plum, and olive green. Colors such as yellow, orange peach, bright pink, and blue resulted in vivid sunsets and bodies of shimmering water as well as lush garden settings; the major works done during the time of Mathias and his assistant Lundberg resulted in romantic moods combined with theatrical splendor. After the death of Mathias, the scenery was dominated by harsh vibrant colors and the designs appear to be two-dimensional with little or no depth and solidity. The noted weaknesses in these works are mainly the result of Albert Armbruster's lack of formal training in design skills.

As one can see, the Armbruster Studio was certainly more than just a scenic factory capable of producing only practical stock scenery -- a view of scenic studios held by many historians. Mathias Armbruster's first significant professional contract for which he designed and executed
all scenery, Lewis Morrison's *Faust* in 1884, proved just this. It was these settings that showed the studio capable of incorporating special scenic effects, such as double transformations, extravagant lighting displays, and other visual embellishments (usually associated only with the metropolitan theatres with complicated scenic machinery), in scenery designed to travel. Another unusual feature of the *Faust* scenery, lifting it above the ordinary and bringing much critical praise, was the accuracy with which Armbruster rendered European landscapes, in this case German countrysides, within complex architectural stage units.

Other highly successful settings were those done for *The Limited Mail*. They proved the studio capable of producing melodramatic spectacle, usually considered the exclusive domain of stationary productions in the larger city theatres. For this play, Mathias produced realistic scenic units which not only incorporated electrical mechanisms and provided spectacular effects, but which could still be transported around the country. This and the *Faust* production are examples of how the scenic studio went beyond the mundane reproductions of stock designs that has too often been considered the only function of such studios.

Further evidence of the studio's artistic accomplishments is found in the scenery created for classical repertory from 1890 to 1907. During these years the Armbruster name became associated with many of the most popular touring
companies of classical theatre in America: Modjeska, Mantell, Odette Tyler, R. D. MacLean. For these productions the studio produced not only scenery, but all the properties as well creating an artistic ensemble in the mise-en-scene. Combined with historical accuracy reflecting the antiquarian movement that had begun earlier with European producers, the artistic integrity of such work goes well beyond a factory assembly-line approach. The study of these Armbruster settings more accurately acknowledges the place of certain of the studio artists in the American theatre of this period than general histories of the theatre heretofore reveal.

During the decade immediately following the period when the classical settings had elevated the Armbruster Studio to the zenith of its professional recognition and acclaim, the studio began a slow decline in productivity. This decline paralleled the decline of road theatre, the mainstay of its work. With the death of Mathias in 1920 the studio passed from the period of its greatest artistic contributions and professional prominence. Although for the next ten years the demands of the traveling minstrel shows kept the studio active and allowed Albert Armbruster to produce highly imaginative and theatrical minstrel scenery, by 1930 the minstrel companies also disappeared from the road and the Armbruster Studio survived the remainder of its twenty-eight years by changing the nature of its work. After creating original custom-tailored scenery
for fifty-four years, the studio became a supply house dealing almost exclusively in stock rental properties.

During the entire history of the Armbruster Studio the two men who managed its operation and created the designs for scenery were Mathias Armbruster and his son, Albert. As stated before, the most creative and significant work was accomplished by Mathias whose training in European art schools no doubt accounted for his skilled artistry. Perhaps his son Albert would have achieved more in his own artistic endeavors had he had the same opportunities to design the kinds of settings produced by his father. However, by the time Albert took over as manager and became the studio's chief designer, the only continuous work of professional calibre available to him were the settings for Al G. Field and other minstrel companies. Because the minstrel called for highly conventionalized settings and, for the most part, standard stock scenery, Albert could not fully realize his talents even though his potential is obvious in the highly stylized, fantasy designs he created for the Field burlesque sequences. However, both Albert and Mathias were the directing forces of the studio and were responsible for the high artistic calibre evident in the work produced.

This history of the Armbruster Scenic Studio, while detailing the operation and contributions of only one scenic studio, indicates that such studios played a much more vital and creative role in American theatre than present histories
record. During the years from 1870 to 1910, when this country experienced the greatest single era of popular legitimate theatre in its history, studios such as the one founded by Mathias provided the majority of theatre's scenic needs. Such needs included much that can be classified as stock settings of a most conventional construction and design, but the work of the Armbrusters also proves that in many instances studio artists created unusual, exciting scenery which exhibited the latest scenic innovations and stylistic approaches in painting and construction.
APPENDIX A

DESIGNS BY OTTO ARMBRUSTER

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Figure 98. An Unidentified Design By Otto Armbruster.

Figure 99. An Unidentified Design By Otto Armbruster.
Figure 100. An Unidentified Design by Otto Armbruster.

Figure 101. An Unidentified Design By Otto Armbruster.
Figure 102. A Modern Apartment in Japanese Style, Otto Armbruster. The Decorator and Furnisher, Circa 1910.

Figure 103. A Study in the French Renaissance, Otto Armbruster. The Decorator and Furnisher, Circa 1910.
Figure 104. A Parlor In The Rococo Style, Otto Armbruster. The Decorator And Furnisher, Circa 1910.
APPENDIX B

PHOTOGRAPHS OF EXTANT SETTINGS

BY MATHIAS ARMBRUSTER
APPENDIX C

STOCK SETTINGS -- 1875 - 1890
Figure 113.

Figure 114.
Figure 119.

Figure 120.
Figure 121.

Figure 122.
Figure 123.

Figure 124.
APPENDIX D

THE SALVINI INVENTORY
HAMLET SCENERY (SALVINI'S)

1 Back Drop—1 Drop 20x37 with Arched Opening.
3 Borders—1 Cut Drop 20x37.
4 Wings—1 Arch with Backing.
1 Window with Backing—1 Floor Piece.
1 Pair Tapestry Curtains—1 Throne, 2 Chairs.
1 Parallel with Platform—Steps 12 Feet Long.

1st PLATFORM SCENE
1 Back Drop with Two Visions—2 Wings with Flippers.

2d PLATFORM SCENE
1 Back Drop 21x30—2 Wings with Flippers.
2 Leg Drop 21x30—2 Large Set Pieces.
1 Table—1 Run—1 Truck with Windlass.

CLOSED SCENE
1 Leg Drop 20x28—1 Leg Drop 23x25.
1 Leg Drop 23x30—1 Pair Tapestry Curtains.
R 1 Set Door with Thickness Piece—1 Fireplace.
R 1 Illuminated Window.
C 1 Vision Piece—1 Wing—1 Portal with Backing.
L 2 Plain Wings—Polonais Arch.
L 1 Table—2 Chairs—1 Hanging Lamp.

GRAVEYARD SCENE
1 Back Drop 21x30—2 Leg Drop 27x30.
1 Profile Tree—2 Set Mounds.
L 1 Set Church in 3 Pieces, and Backing.

1 Drop 21x38 Polonais House—2 Wings.
1 Corridor Drop 21x30
1 Chappel Scene 24x36.

Property Boxes with Furniture, Spades, Lamp, Torches, Bier, Stools, Arms, Cups, Tray, Etc.
6 Lances—8 Helmets—3 Foils—4 Swords—4 Halberds—3 Playerflutes.
2 Sculls, Bower, 1 Padded Figure.
3 Trunks, 3 Boxes, 1 Black Cover, 1 Table Cover.

COSTUMES
1 King's Suit, 1 Players King, 4 Players.
1 Player Queen, 6 Court Ladies, 2 Pages.
2 Officers, 10 Soldiers, 1 Knight.
1 Ghost, 1 Priest, 4 Nuns.
6 Lords, 1 Orrie, 2 Grave Diggers.
4 Courtiers, 4 Torchbearers.
1 Polonais Suit.

Figure 125.
OTHELLO SCENERY, (SALVINI's)

1 Venetian street drop 24x32—2 wings with flippers.
L 1 Set house with double wind. Balcony, return and platform.

CYPRUS SET.

1 Back drop 24x36—1 gauzed out drop 25 x 40.
R 1 Set tower 11 x 18—1 Set arch 12 x 18.
R 1 Arch 11 x 18 with platform, padded run, side masking pieces.
L 1 Inn set in 3 pieces—1 Floor piece.
C 2 Battlement pieces, with steps, side masking pieces.
   1 Platform 3 x 2 x 16.

PROPERTIES.

2 Tapestry Curtains—6 Poles.
1 Cantelaber—6 Banners.
6 Shields—4 Swords.
4 Spears—2 Trunks.
2 Boxes.

COSTUMES.

10 Velvet Senators suits—1 Ermin cape.
4 Pages—5 Courtiers.
4 Satin pillow—1 Quilt.
2 White sheets—1 Heavy Cape.
2 Turbans—1 Silk gown.
1 Othello hat.

Figure 126.
Scenery for 3 GUARDSMEN (SALVINI'S)

ACT I
1 Landscape Back Drop.
C 2 Small Arches—2 Large Arches.
R 1 Double Wing—1 Set House in 3 Pieces.
L Inn in 4 Pieces—1 Wall Piece.

ACT II QUEEN'S CHAMBER
1 Back Drop.
R 1 Return P.—1 Wing—1 Set Door.
C 1 Wing—Double Arch 3 Pieces—1 Wing.
L Sliding Panel—1 Wing—1 Return.
2 Tapestry Curtains—1 Table

SCENE 2d GUARDROOM
1 Drop 24x30—1 Wing with Door.
1 Double Window.

SCENE 3d
Fort St. Leon Drop.

ACT III SCENE 1st
1 Kitchen Drop—2 Wings—1 Cupboard.
2 Doors—2 Return Pieces.

SCENE 2d
1 Back Drop, Harbor of Calais—2 Horizon Wings.
2 Working Set Waters—Set Parapet.
R 1 Set House, 2 Frames with Return Piece, Steps, Platform.
L 1 Set House with Return P.—1 Wing.
1 Lamp Post—1 Boat with Truck.

ACT IV CABIN SCENE
1 Sail Border—1 Set Mast.
R 2 Frames with Flippers—1 Return P.
L 2 Frames with Flippers (1 with door) 1 Return.
C 4 Frames (1 with window) 2 Chests.

ACT V SCENE 1st
1 Kitchen Drop
SCENE 2d.
1 Street drop.

SCENE 3d LADY DE WINTER
1 Arched Cut Drop.
1 Garden Backing—1 Set Window.
3 Wings—2 Return Pieces.

SCENE 4
1 Chamber Drop.

PALACE SCENE 5th
1 Floor Cloth
1 Back Drop 20x24—1 Cut Drop 24x30.
4 Wings with Flippers—2 Double Arches.
2 Backings—4 Borders.
2 Set Balustrades—2 Statues.
1 Platform in 2 Sections—Steps and Newel Posts.

PROPERTIES
1 Throne—2 Chairs—2 Stools
1 Settee—1 Table—2 Common Chairs, Cups, Bottles, Tray, Jewel Box.
2 Guns—8 Swords—2 Foils.
4 Breastplates—4 Lances—1 Staff.
3 Trunks—3 Boxes.

COSTUMES
1 Captain's Suit—10 Guardsmen.
8 Courtiers—4 Court Ladies.
1 Pages—1 Courier.
15 Peasants—10 Women.
2 Girls—1 Sailor—1 Capt. Seadrift.
1 Innkeeper—1 Waiter.

Figure 127.
Scenery for DON CAESAR (SALVINI'S)

ACT I
1 Street Drop 24x36.
R 1 Street Wing with Flippers—1 House 3 Frames.
R 1 House with Flipper and Return—Balcony and Platform.
L 1 Street Wing with Flipper—1 Set Church with 5 Frames, Backing, Waterbasin, Parallèl and Platform.

ACT II
1 Prison Back Drop—1 Arched Drop.
R 2 Wings—1 Door—1 Return.
L 2 Wings—1 Door—1 Return.

ACT III PALACE
1 Back Drop 20x24—1 Cut Drop 24x36.
4 Wings with Flippers—2 Double Arches.
2 Backings—4 Borders.
2 Set Balustrades—2 Statues.
1 Platform in 2 Sections—Steps and Newel Posts.
1 Floor Cloth.

ACT IV QUEEN'S CHAMBER.
Large Bay Window—2 Returns.
R 1 Return Piece—1 Wing—1 Set Door.
C 1 Wing—1 Double Arch 3 Pieces—1 Wing.
L Sliding Panel—1 Wing—1 Return.
2 Tapestry Curtains—1 Table.

PROPERTIES
1 Bier—1 Set Clock.
1 Table—2 Dishes with Fruit, Dishes, Bottles, Cups, Saucers, Candlesticks.
4 Guns, 3 Swords, 1 Revolver.
2 Lances, 2 Tamburins

COSTUMES
8 Courtier Suits—6 Court Ladies.
4 Gypsy Men—4 Gypsy Girls.
3 Gypsy Women—4 Pages.
15 Peasants—4 P. Women.
4 Torredors—2 Citizens.
2 Boys—2 Officers.
5 Soldiers—3 Priests.
2 Brigands—3 Guards.
1 Cobbler—1 Beggar.
2 Trunks—2 Boxes.

Figure 128.
APPENDIX E

MINSTREL SCENERY -- 1910 - 1920
Figure 137.

Figure 138.
Figure 143.

Figure 144.
APPENDIX F

LETTERS FROM LASSES WHITE TO
ALBERT ARMBRUSTER -- 1928
Dear Friend Arbuckle,

Yours to hand and contents noted. I note your price of $3 000.00 this is ok. As to platforms, steps, and seating pieces, I will use the same as we used last season, only, I want you to re-paint same and also all in pretty fair shape. You may have to patch them up a little but.

I want to hold down expenses every place I can until otherwise.

Is this all right. What will be the extra cost of repainting these pieces? I want a complete repainting job on them, not just a dab of paint. I enclosed plans for the new. As to first part, I hope if it is similar to other concerns. They don't remember these things much any way. Have you any idea for a first part, that would make platforms, steps and seating pieces as new. I want the costing on first camera. Advise me about details of this letter as soon as possible. I'll get ready I have asked for, where I will have a chance to make a selection. I will positively take the show out for the one eligible. I will try to sell it to Vaudville or The Public Picture people.

Yours truly,

[Signature]

This of June 9th. Majestic Theatre, Pl. North, Tex.

16th. Dallas, Tex.
Mr. A. C. Commercial.
Columbus, Ohio.

My dear Commercial,

I wrote to you a short time ago, but you failed to reply. I am disappointed, as I understood that you were interested in the matter.

If you have received this letter, please write me at once.

Yours truly,

C. W. M.

# 1120 S. St. Elizabets, Dallas, Tex.

Figure 150.
APPENDIX G

STOCK SETTINGS BY ALBERT ARMBRUSTER

1920 - 1930
Figure 152.

Figure 153.
Figure 154.

Figure 155.
Figure 156.
APPENDIX H

FRONT CURTAIN DESIGNS BY MATHIAS ARMBRUSTER
Figure 157.

Figure 158.
Figure 159.

Figure 160.
Figure 161.

Figure 162.
Figure 163.

Figure 164.
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