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1970

THE PROFESSIONAL CAREER OF GEORGE BECKS IN THE AMERICAN
THEATRE OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

DISSERTATION

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

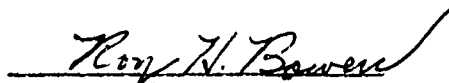
By

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* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1969

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a completed text.

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Chapter I

Introduction

The purpose of this study.--The general purpose of this study is to determine what a careful consideration of the theatrical materials collected by George Becks during his professional lifetime will reveal about the general theatrical practices employed by the American Theatre during the last half of the nineteenth century. From the information that is included within this collection which is housed in the New York Public Library, and interpretive conclusions to be sought during the course of the study, the professional career of this man will be set in perspective with regard to his life's work and the theatre of which he was a part. The materials of the collection are theatrical records that cover the active period of Becks' career, which began during the Civil War and covered the remaining forty years of the nineteenth century; therefore, this period will be presented in greater depth than is offered by present histories that include this era of

American Theatre History. Additionally, such a study leads to a clearer understanding of the duties, responsibilities and authority of the stage manager by indicating his position in the production structure of the theatrical organization.

The specific purposes of this study will center on the theatrical collection of George Becks and its relationship to the man, the role of the stage manager during his career and the Theatre in America during this period. Accordingly, the primary concern of the work is to add to the present knowledge of theatre history. This study will include a careful consideration of the actual position of Becks' job in the theatre using his collection as a basis, while supplementing this analysis with studies of theatrical personalities who were active during this time and directly connected with the duties of the stage manager. In pursuit of this knowledge, it is thus necessary to extract from his promptbooks evidences of his work that will demonstrate his staging methods. This collection contains not only promptbooks prepared by George Becks but also includes the works of some of his contemporaries; thus, it follows that the staging methods that can be attributed to Becks may be compared and contrasted with the methods of

others who were active at this time and were known to Becks as evidenced by his collection. Furthermore, the study will not only consider the men who are included in the Becks Collection but others whose work has been found in various historical sources. Finally, a biographical sketch of the professional life of George Becks, including his active roles, will be presented in order that the total work of this man can be recorded and integrated into a consideration of the life of an American stage manager during the last half of the nineteenth century. This goal of the sketch will be achieved by a close comparison of this collection with playbills of the period, theatrical records, memoirs of Becks' contemporaries and the newspapers of the day.

The significance of this study.--The years from the end of the Civil War to the turn of the century were active ones in the American Theatre. This period is marked by many changes in theatre technology, dramatic literature, and the emergence of a "show business" industry. Although the dramatic literature for the most part of this period was represented by the works of only one man, Dion Boucicault, this lack of original material did

not cause a void of theatrical productions. Relying on revivals of the works of the past and translations of contemporary French and German pieces adapted to American tastes, productions reached an increasing number and the popular theatre became a profitable business venture in America. During these last decades of the nineteenth century, the number of major theatrical houses increased as well as the number of productions presented at these theatres, and a complete and complicated managerial system emerged to suit this highly organized business operation, which often centered on a non-acting producer rather than the leading actor of the company. This new system thrived on the long run of Broadway shows, but, unlike the Broadway of today, consisted of more revivals than original works, and still maintained a company of actors. As the profit of the long run replaced the repertory company system, the companies dwindled and original productions began to become the major concern of the New York stage.

This blending of new and old techniques was also apparent in the acting styles and the theatre technology of the era. The box setting became the most popular form of stage scenery and was often interjected into productions that would have formerly employed the established

wing and groove system. Correspondingly, gas lighting reached its zenith only to become obsolete with the improvement of the electrical systems which had slowly replaced the gas lighting system by the first decades of the Twentieth Century.

Accompanying these technological changes, the acting style of the period began to undergo a steady transition from the highly presentational quality of a romantic nature to a more subtle representational manner of a realistic style. This change began to occur as greater illumination from the lighting systems allowed the actor to move behind the proscenium arch and the new three dimensional box setting created stage pictures in depth, which allowed the actor to integrate his action within the setting.

In this period of change, the American Theatre commenced to assert itself as "American" rather than a copy of the English stage. Toward the end of the century, literary men turned their talents toward the theatre, creating plays that were born out of American thinking. American playwrights. These original works soon filled the need of the new theatre structure that had abandoned the repertory system for the long run. The metamorphosis

of many small theatrical businesses, the actor-manager system, to a large centralized industry as demonstrated in its extreme form by the syndications of the 1890's, centralized the business and artistic activities of the theatre in New York City. The present organization of the New York stage, which is now being challenged by requests for a de-centralized national theatre and the re-establishment of the repertory system, was forged during the last half of the nineteenth century. It is significant that a study of this nature look closely into these years of change and formation of our American Theatre.

The George Becks Collection provides primary theatrical materials that can be used to illuminate this vital period in the development of the American Theatre. Within this collection is a record of a man's work and, consequently, the theatre of his day; therefore, an analysis of this collection may bring forth new knowledge regarding this period as well as supplement established histories. General theatre histories often concentrate on periods that offer prolific dramatic literature in addition to theatrical production; as a result, the history of the American Theatre during the nineteenth century has not been fully developed. The period is often considered as

a plateau period in theatrical history, because a clear development in dramatic literature does not exist. The major literary figure of the period, Dion Boucicault, is usually listed as an English playwright and his contribution is considered in regard to the British Theatre. Furthermore, the playwrights of the last years of the century, Herne, Fitch, Ade, Gillette, and others, are considered as forerunners to the Twentieth Century not as products of their own time. Additionally, biographies are involved primarily with the development of personalities and influential friends and associates of the subject and, often, do not consider the subject's professional output. This latter point is a very vital aspect of this study in regard to its subject, George Becks. Staging techniques and the backstage organization of the theatre is also overlooked by general history texts. In the last half of the nineteenth century, this is of vital necessity for a thorough understanding of the development of the American Theatre. In attempting to fill these gaps by an analysis of the collection, the study will ascertain the significance of George Becks in this period and the influence of the theatre upon his work. Thus, this study, which considers the professional career of George Becks, will

attempt to illuminate the theatre of his time by concentrating on the theatrical development of the period.

The collection is made up of published acting editions which are the printed copies of the plays and are usually taken from the original productions. Acting editions contain basic movement patterns, stage directions, character descriptions, setting descriptions and single word phrases to set the mood of the dialogue by means of parenthetical and editorial remarks in addition to the author's text. Becks was never the stage manager for an original production, which is not unusual in this period marked by revivals and adaptations of European drama. However, on the promptpages included with these acting editions is found the work of George Becks as he indicated the movement and technical aspects of those productions represented in his collection. From these books, the spectacle of the production may be visualized. These promptbooks indicate actors' movements by use of symbols, word descriptions and diagrams. Lighting and sound cues are also listed in these books, as well as scenic changes and ground plan diagrams. An analysis of his organization as a stage manager may pinpoint the duties and responsibilities of the stage manager within the complexity of the

producing unit. These aspects of the record he has left will help in determining why he has done the things that are indicated in the promptbooks, and how he differs or coincides with the other stage managers of his time. The realization of Becks' work and a development of sound theories regarding the reasons that he organized his materials as he did, and how he positioned his scenic devices and moved the acting company, should give indications as to when these many innovations began to become established practices in the American Theatre.

A study of George Becks and his work is a significant one, because this man worked with and exchanged ideas with a majority of the outstanding theatre figures of his time. As noted previously, the theatre in America began to polarize to New York City which became the business and artistic center of our theatre. It was here that Becks functioned and was part of the rather small theatrical community that controlled the American commercial theatre. He has not only left a record of his work as a stage manager, but his participation in the theatrical scene as an actor has also been found in various theatrical sources. He was first known as an actor, later specializing as a light comedian. The life of George Becks reveals the

theatre from the on stage viewpoint of the performer as well as the off stage viewpoint of the stage manager.


During his career, George Becks worked with such notable actors as Edwin Forrest, John McCullough, Charles Fechter, Edwin Booth, Minnie Maddern, who later became known as Mrs. Fiske, Rose Eyting, Kate Bateman, Maggie Mitchell and Lucille Western. This list is only a brief one to indicate the more outstanding names. He also worked with such managers as J. W. and Lester Wallack, A. M. Palmer, Mrs. John Wood, Laura Keane, Mrs. Jean Davenport Lander, as well as playwright-actor, Dion Boucicault and prompter, John Moore. His connection with these outstanding personalities indicates his position in the theatre.

His significance as an actor is revealed in the various theatre annals and newspapers, while his significance as a stage manager is brought out by his own collection as compared to his theatrical associates. The combination of these sources gives a full picture of a dedicated theatre man.

Problems of identification.--Since George Becks' collection of promptbooks contains scripts that were marked

by a number of persons, it is necessary to determine which are in the handwriting of George Becks. It is known that Becks used some of the scripts that were not his for various productions, but many are included that may not have been used by Becks. To avoid unwarranted errors which may derive from the use of one of these unused scripts, this study has been limited to the analysis of promptbooks that can be identified with Becks' own work. This would include scripts of others that Becks was known to have used.

In identifying Becks' work, the signature on the scripts and the handwriting within the scripts were of the first consideration. To authenticate the handwriting, this researcher is grateful to the aid received from the Columbus YMCA, whose training school features handwriting courses. Additional advice was procured from the Columbus Police Department. Their assistance made it possible to proceed with assurance in regard to handwriting identification. Once Becks' handwriting was established it was possible to distinguish which scripts were marked by him. Also, in scripts containing a number of hands, Becks' contributions could be isolated from the others. Other aspects of the promptbooks, however, help determine the origin of the prompt copy.

In order to correlate the description of cues, changes in dialogue, and actor's movements, promptbooks were marked by symbols in the script at the exact point of one of the preceding additions, while this same symbol would appear on the promptpage with a descriptive phrase indicating what was to happen at that point. These symbols were not organized into any universally accepted order, leaving each promptor or stage manager to use them as he wished. Becks' use of a dotted circle, , for music cues and his use of a scrawled picture of a pointing hand for special cues are discussed in Chapter IV. These two factors of Becks' work and the identification of his hand placed the study on rather firm ground in regard to analyzing Becks' staging practices.

After a promptbook is identified as marked by George Becks, the date and location of the production that used the promptbook needs to be ascertained. Playbills and advertisements contained within some of these books are a valuable source, but, unfortunately, are rare among Becks' collection. With the absence of this type of material, the investigation of the career of Becks supplemented with the plays in the collection has served to date productions. A further aid in determining the productions of

these plays is a consideration of the years in which the particular plays were popular enough to be a profitable asset to Becks. Thus, it was necessary to form a foundation for this study on an outline of the theatrical history of the period and a rather complete record of Becks' theatrical career.

As a representative cross-section of the promptbook collection, the following have been selected: Frou Frou,¹ Fanchon, the Cricket,² Led Astray,³ and The Road to Ruin.⁴ Commentaries regarding the application of these

¹Augustin Daly, Frou Frou (New York: Samuel French, n.d.), George Becks' promptbook based on this acting edition is located in the New York Public Library. OSU Theatre Collection, P 1323. Hereafter referred to as: Frou Frou (Becks), P 1323.

²Augustin Waldauer ? Fanchon, the Cricket (Publication information missing), George Becks' promptbook based on this acting edition is located in the New York Public Library. OSU Theatre Collection, P 871. Hereafter referred to as: Fanchon, the Cricket (Becks), P 871.

³Dion Boucicault, Led Astray (New York: Samuel French and Son, n.d.), George Becks' promptbook based on this acting edition is located in the Harvard Theatre Collection. OSU Theatre Collection, P 1691. Hereafter referred to as: Led Astray (Becks), P 1691.

⁴Thomas Holcroft, The Road to Ruin (London: G. H. Davidson, n.d.), George Becks' promptbook based on this acting edition is located in the New York Public Library. OSU Theatre Collection, P 582. Hereafter referred to as: The Road to Ruin (Becks), P 582.

promptbooks and conjectures about the use of symbols and staging practices have come from a consideration of a number of promptbook analyses, both within and outside of the collection. The four promptbooks listed above are to represent in a concise manner the results of that research.

Another problem of identification lay in the obscure terminology that was used in the nineteenth century regarding the duties and responsibilities of the production staff of a theatre or acting company. For this study, certain definitions have been required of such terms. The specific problem related to the position of the producer, director, company manager, prompter, and stage manager. Similar to today's theatre, the staff of the production unit in the nineteenth century was organized around the individual talents of the men who made up the company; thus, responsibilities were tailored to the man rather than the position he held. For this reason, the functions of the positions listed above have never been clearly established.

The owner was usually the person or persons who actually owned the property and the physical building used as a theatre. The company manager was the head of the

company of actors who made the decisions as to play selection and salaries and who leased the theatre building from the owner. The leaser could also be a person who acted as a middle man between the owner and a company manager. The leaser in such a case would hold the lease on the building and hire complete companies to perform on the stage. As a middle man in such a position the leaser was often entitled producer. As a result, the terms, producer, leasee and manager were many times interchanged. Additional confusion was created when one man or a group of men functioned in one or more of the above positions. Another term that was applied to many situations was that of director. This title appears more after the 1860's and seems to have reference to any person who was in charge of the rehearsal period. The manager or producer were often listed as a director without any distinction of varying duties. For this study, the use of the term director has been avoided except when source material has specifically indicated it. The actor-manager fulfilled all of the above positions, with the possible exception of owner because they were often leasees rather than property owners. During the 1870's and 80's, the actor-manager was replaced by the producer-manager, which indicated a change

from the actor centered production to the more integrated productions of the large acting companies of Palmer, MacKaye and Daly. The producer-manager was to evolve into the regisseur, the all powerful theatre boss who controlled as many aspects of his business as possible.

Within the companies was a staff of capable employees who performed certain lesser duties under the jurisdiction of the heads of the companies. Similar confusion exists as to the role of the prompter and the stage manager in such organizations. From the research that has been compiled for this study, basic differentiations between the two positions have been noticed, especially in the comparison of the career and professional output of George Becks with his contemporary artists. The prompter seems to be a permanent position in the company. John Moore served as prompter for Augustin Daly for several years and was a heralded member of the acting company. His duties as prompter were quite varied and connected to any number of aspects of the production. This man was present at rehearsal and was in charge of the promptscript. He followed the dialogue, checking the actor's accuracy and aiding them when cues or lines were missed. He also maintained a record of the movement of the actors. This

aspect often required that he include movement diagrams and floor plans of the different settings. Under the prompter's jurisdiction were the stage properties, and often complete prop lists and properties working sheets were included in the prompter's script. The prompter continued to "hold book" after the production was presented before an audience. Technical cues were in many scripts including scenery shifts, lighting and sound cues. The distinguishing aspect of his job was that this person was a permanent member of the company, who worked with the manager or regisseur during the rehearsal period and the run of the show. The prompter was usually connected with an original production or a unique revival of a production that required new staging techniques or a different approach to the play. Often the prompter's script was incorporated by the publishing companies that printed acting editions.⁵

The stage manager, on the other hand, was a lesser member and was often not a permanent part of the company. He dealt with plays that were already mounted and were to

⁵Andre Tsai, John Moore and His Staging Methods (Ohio State University, MA Thesis, 1961). Hereafter referred to as: Andre Tsai, Most of the preceding information has been taken from this work.

be presented or reproduced. One function of the stage manager was to take over for the prompter during the run of a show, thus freeing the prompter to work on future productions. Theoretically, the stage manager could take over as soon as the rehearsal period had been completed. This man may have used the prompter's copy or may have had a duplication of his own; in either case, his script would be as complete as the promptscript, including movement, ground plans, properties, costumes, and technical cues. Another function of a stage manager was to maintain a collection of promptscripts and to be able to reproduce this play in full on short notice. In this capacity a manager would hire a stage manager to come into his company and stage a certain play, freeing the manager for other works needing his attention. On many occasions, acting companies became large enough to support two productions simultaneously, in which case the main company remained at the home theatre under the guidance of the stage manager, who ran the theatre by presenting one or two plays that were a part of the company's repertory. Often when a play enjoyed a long run, a stage manager was hired to maintain this production while the company manager mounted another play or took a second company on the road. On the other hand,

the acting company may have maintained its regular staff at the home theatre, while a traveling troupe presented set standard productions under the direction of a stage manager. In both cases, the stage manager would have worked from an already prepared promptscript. The stage manager worked from a script that had been previously prepared either by himself for some earlier production or by another man who had served as prompter. The prompter worked on the play as the movement and the technical aspects for that particular production were being mounted and may or may not have continued in his role after the play was in production. In identifying his own position in the theatre, Becks advertised in a trade publication as a stage manager.⁶ It is certainly a fine line that separates these two positions, but in this light it is best to consider George Becks as a stage manager of the nineteenth century American theatre.

⁶Harry C. Miner, Harry C. Miner's American Dramatic Directory: Season 1884-85 (New York: Wolf and Palmer Dramatic Publishing Company, 1884), p. 18. In this book George Becks is listed as a "light comedian and stage manager," therefore, the researcher was led to investigate the meaning of this term as opposed to the term prompter.

Chapter II

A Brief History of the American Theatre

Prior to the Twentieth Century

In order to understand the significance of George Becks' professional career, it is necessary for this study to include a brief history of the American Theatre in order to outline the major events and theatrical trends of his time. Becks' professional life extends from 1860, when he, at age 26, made his debut on the New York stage, to 1896 when pressures of the new theatrical syndicate forced him out of New York. It is this forty year period of the American Theatre that is of greatest interest to this study. However, it is beneficial to usher in the consideration of this era with a survey of American stage history leading to the Civil War.

American Theatre prior to the Revolutionary War.--

The early theatre in the English colonies found a foothold in the more liberal societies of Virginia and the Carolinas. The professional companies that were formed

in this country were staffed with an overflow of unwanted English talent; thus, our early theatre was a borrowed culture from Britain lacking in native American talent that produced plays that did not reflect the American scene.

The pioneers of the Colonial theatre, including our first professional actor, Anthony Aston (fl. first half of the 18th century), as well as Thomas Kean (fl. mid 18th century), Walter Murray (fl. mid 18th century), and Lewis Hallam (1714-56), were all moved to undertake their great adventures because of an inability to get steady employment at home.¹

It is this English theatre in America that is to be characteristic of America's theatre prior to the nineteenth century.

The most productive of these first professional troupes, the Hallam troupe, was reorganized after the death of Lewis Hallam by his widow and leading actor, David Douglass. Their presentation of English theatre pieces and use of English actors did not vary from Hallam's earlier policies. This company did, however, present in 1767 the first professional performance of a drama by a Colonial author. Thomas Godfrey's melodrama,

¹John Gassner and Ralph G. Allen, Theatre and Drama in the Making (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1964), p. 862. Hereafter referred to as: Gassner and Allen.

The Prince of Parthia, was derived from the type of theatrical fare being presented at this time on the London stages and is hardly a part of native American dramatic literature. This was the only play presented by the Hallam company that was not taken directly from Drury Lane or Covent Garden.

This British culture located in the colonies met with antagonism as the anti-British sentiment grew just prior to the Revolutionary war. This antagonism turned to violence when a mob in New York reacting to the announcement of the Stamp Act, 1766, damaged the Chapel Street Theatre where the Douglass-Hallam company was appearing. This company was formerly known as The Company of London Comedians, but Douglass had changed the name to the American Company. This change in title did not, however, free Douglass' company from being considered English, which was a fate shared by all theatre in this country at that time.

American Theatre from the Revolutionary war until 1800.--During the Revolutionary war, theatrical activities were limited to amateur productions in the British army camps and in some of the American cities occupied by the British.

While the British held New York, some of their troops took over the John Street Playhouse, renamed it the Theatre Royal, and opened with Henry Fielding's comedy Tom Thumb.²

Other occupied cities in America were the sites of British entertainment presented by British troops. The Continental Congress, on the other hand, banned all personnel connected with the government of the United States from viewing or participating in theatricals because such entertainments would divert their minds from the defense of the country.³ After the Peace of 1783, professional troupes began to return to America. Lewis Hallam Jr. was presenting Shakespearian plays in Philadelphia by 1784. However, his return was not an easy one. Due to the city's strong anti-theatre sentiments, a number of the citizens equated theatricals with the British culture and the British occupation troops. Hallam Jr. presented plays in the guise of "lectures"; thus,

²Kenneth Macgowan and William Melnitz, The Living Stage: A History of the World Theatre (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1956), p. 285. Hereafter referred to as: Macgowan and Melnitz.

³William Dunlap, History of the American Theatre (New York: Burt Franklin, 1963), pp. 78-103. This text was first published by Dunlap and John Hodgkinson in 1797. Hereafter referred to as: Dunlap.

She Stoops to Conquer was entitled "Improper Education", while Richard III became "A Serious Historical Lecture, in Five Parts-On the Fate of Tyranny". In 1785, Hallam Jr. began his "lectures" in the John Street Theatre and soon began to present them openly as play presentations. His Old American Company, a direct descendant of the Douglass-Hallam American company, was successful in New York, but this company and the rival acting troupes showed little change in their theatrical fare and artistic quality from those companies prior to the Revolutionary War. A direct reliance upon the London stage for plays and talent was still apparent, as the professionals of America were those actors and managers who could not maintain constant employment in England. John Henry, Hallam's partner in the Old American Company came to America only after he had failed in England and joined with David Douglass' American company in 1767. Lewis Hallam Jr. was the only one of the leading actors of this era who could claim to be of an American style since most of his earlier training was received in this country with the Hallam troupe. However, this training was a second generation English school of acting as opposed to any newly formed American acting style. Even the homespun

Yankee humor of Thomas Wignell, the "first" low-comedian in America, was English and came to this country following a series of unsuccessful engagements at the Drury Lane, under the management of David Garrick. Furthermore, Thomas A. Cooper, who is listed in many history texts as the "first" American star, epitomizes America's reliance on the British theatre by his English birth and English theatre training coupled with the fact that he came to America after failing in his performance of Hamlet at Covent Garden in 1795. English actors and managers, seeking a second chance in the New World, dominated the American theatre after the Revolutionary war as they had prior to the war.

In 1787 the Old American Company produced a new American comedy, The Contrast, by Royall Tyler. This play was written by an American born author and set in an American city.

Tyler's play, however, is hardly an encouraging start for native drama. Although set in New York, its tone and plot devices are borrowed without much skill from Sheridan.⁴

⁴Gassner and Allen, p. 863.

It was in this 1787 production of The Contrast that Thomas Wignell was first noted as the creator of a humorous Yankee character in his portrayal of the servant, Jonathan. This farcical character is more of a part of the world of Sheridan and Goldsmith than a true observation of the American character, but in the cities of New York, Philadelphia and other centers, Jonathan as presented by Wignell was accepted as an authentic reflection of conservative people of New England.

Similarly, the most prolific American playwright of this period, William Dunlap, found his models not in his native land but in European melodramas, especially those of August von Kotzebue. One of his earlier plays, Major Andre, a tribute to an artist and a writer who had only by mischance been made a spy, is the only one of Dunlap's sixty pieces that drew its subject matter from an American historical event. His promise of being a true native dramatist was not fulfilled, but he is vitally important as the first all-around theatre man in America, writing the first history of the American theatre and being our first successful manager of a permanent theatre. William Dunlap began work with Hallam's Old American Theatre at the John Street Theatre as a playwright in

residence. Because of a fight between Lewis Hallam Jr. and John Hodgkinson, Dunlap was forced to act as an arbitrator. He borrowed money to keep the company going and after Hodgkinson's departure in 1798, he became the sole owner of the theatre and company. His adaptations of Kotzebue's melodramas kept his failing company alive. As a result of his work, his Park Theatre was the outstanding playhouse in New York in 1800 and remained as such until it failed in 1805. The Park Theatre was refinanced under the management of the above mentioned Thomas Cooper, and Dunlap remained as assistant manager.

American Theatre from 1800 until 1850. --From 1800 to 1850, the American theatre grew in two distinct directions, the Western expansion, and the growth along the Eastern seaboard. As the Western frontier opened up, theatre productions, first in the form of amateur performances and then replaced by professional touring companies, were a part of this expansion. Major cities along the trade routes were frequently visited by the traveling players. The 1849 gold strike in California led to the creation of many mining towns and the rapid growth of Sacramento and San Francisco. Theatres were soon built in these two California cities and other mining towns.

The growth of the theatre in the Eastern states parallels the population boom of the major cities of Boston, Philadelphia and New York. New York City more than tripled its population from 1800 to 1830, having over 180,000 in 1830, while Philadelphia and Boston were only slightly smaller in size. In addition to the increased populations, the popularity of theatre began to increase. In 1815, New York's Park Theatre was the only major theatre in this city of 100,000 and could stay open only four nights a week even though it was offering a daily change of bill repeating a few of the more successful plays. The old "British stigma" was still applied to theatre. However, as opposed to the antagonistic response of the American public during the era of the Revolutionary war, the theatre audience of the early 1800's expected the theatre to present British plays. Thus, being considered as primarily a British culture, the theatre was held to a minimum of popularity. On the other hand for the theatre to present untried American plays meant complete desertion by its audience. Marmion, for example, was presented in New York in 1812 as an English play by Thomas Morton, Esq., and ran for three weeks, but when it was announced that this was written by an American author, attendance fell

off and the show closed within the week.⁵ It is noteworthy that this was at a time when the United States was at war with England. As the cities swelled with a more prosperous middle-class, the popularity of theatre increased. New York opened ten new theatres from 1824, when the Chatham Garden Theatre was built, to the beginning of the Civil War. The Park Theatre burned in 1820 but was rebuilt the following season because of the increasing demand for play production. The Chatham Garden Theatre introduced gas illumination to New York at its opening in 1824. Philadelphia had gas lighting by 1816 at the Chestnut Street Theatre. In 1826, New York's Bowery Theatre also employed this new lighting system, and with these theatres the gas light era came to the United States. Boston, with the building of the Tremont, the American Amphitheatre, the Boston Museum and the Howard Atheneum, and Philadelphia, with the Arch Street, the Walnut Street and the National, were also enjoying increased theatrical activities, but New York was definitely the capital of the American theatre

⁵Arthur Hornblow, A History of the Theatre in America (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippencott Co. 1919), p. 70. Hereafter referred to as: Hornblow.

by 1850.⁶

This flourishing theatre was still operated by British managers and actors and reflected the English stage. Native drama and a distinguishable American acting style was yet to be realized. Even with the acting debut of Edwin Forrest and Charlotte Cushman, two separate events that mark an early establishment of new native acting styles, the domination of the European theatre was still the foremost characteristic of this time. Beginning with the appearance of George F. Cooke, the first English actor who had established a star status in England to come to America, a whole series of English actors made tours of the United States. These touring English stars and the many English theatre men and their descendants set the standards of the American theatre. It was these people and the London theatre they represented that served as the criteria by which the American theatre was judged.

George Frederick Cooke was brought to America by Thomas Cooper, a tragedian who found success in America after failure in England and in 1810 was proprietor of the Park Theatre. Cooke had been acclaimed a star in London, but his excessive drinking had caused his success to be

⁶Hornblow, p. 48.

erratic and in 1810 he was in need of employment. His appearance in the United States was not restricted to the New York theatres, as Cooper had financed a nation-wide tour that reached through the settled portion of this land. The length and success of his tour was ended abruptly by Cooke's death in 1812.⁷

Other English stars came to this land during the first half of the nineteenth century to make a number of tours and then to return to their home. In 1821, the second English star to tour the United States was Edmund Kean. Following Kean was William Charles Macready who made a number of tours of this country. Between Macready's first tour and the disastrous riot that ended his last American tour, another English star set a pattern of many successful visits to our shore. Charles Mathews' first trip to the United States came in 1822, during a terrible epidemic of Yellow Fever. The actor fell ill during his stay here but was not hindered badly enough to discontinue his tour. He opened at the Park Theatre in New York as Falstaff in Henry IV. In addition to a number of his finer roles, he presented a humorous series of monologues

⁷Garff B. Wilson, A History of American Acting (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1966), p. 17.

he entitled "At Homes", which proved to be more popular than the full length plays he was to present. He spent nearly a full month at the Park and then continued his tour to include Boston and the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia. He visited the United States in 1834 and again in 1838. On the latter tour he was accompanied by Madame Vestris, his wife and outstanding London theatre manager and burletta star. His fourth and most successful tour was described as "a very artistic incarnation of elegance and refinement."⁸ This tour was concluded at The New Boston Theatre which had opened two seasons prior to Mathews' visit.⁹ Charles Kemble and his actress daughter Francis Ann (Fanny) toured America in 1832. Fanny remained in the States and married a Southern plantation owner. This marriage ended in divorce, but Fanny remained here and became a successful actress. Except for Charles Kean, who visited New Orleans in the mid-1840's, and the first tours of Cooke, these English actors were presented only to the audiences of the metropolitan areas of the Eastern portion of the United States. In line with the

⁸New York Tribune, September 12, 1857.

⁹Glenn Hughes, A History of the American Theatre: 1700-1950 (New York: Samuel French, 1951), pp. 107, 116, 119, 138, 186, 212.

trend of the eighteenth century, early nineteenth century stars were from the English theatre. These actors and their descendants controlled our theatre through 1850.

After a short time on the London stage, William Burton acted in Philadelphia and New York and took over the management of a theatre in each of these cities. In 1848, he opened Burton's Theatre on Chambers Street in New York, which was one of the finest houses in the city at mid-century. In that company was another Englishman who had found a new career in this country, John Broughman. He had played in both London and New York throughout the forties and was never content to remain in the United States, but repeated failures in England forced him to remain in this country, where he was received as an actor and popular playwright. His one managerial venture lasted for only two years and he sold his theatre to still another English emigrant, J. W. Wallack, who with his son, Lester, became outstanding actor-managers in this country.

Within this English dominance, there was, however, a definite beginning toward a native theatre, which was not to be fully realized until the twentieth century.

In the personages of John Howard Payne, Edwin Forrest and Charlotte Cushman, a new and vital American theatre can be seen in its embryonic stage. John Howard Payne was born in New York in 1791 and was a child actor in amateur theatricals. He began writing plays in his early teens and by twenty he was the editor of America's first theatre journal, The Thespian Mirror. In Boston, Payne is reputed to be the first American actor to play Hamlet. Payne toured the United States until 1813 when he embarked to Europe where he was to stay for the majority of his remaining years. In England, he adapted the tragedy, Brutus, for Edmund Kean in 1818, and the success of its Drury Lane opening established Payne as a popular playwright. He returned to this country after a financially disastrous managerial season at Sadler's Wells, and a brief commitment to debtor's prison. John Howard Payne was the first American theatre man to make the grade in England. His work was not necessarily representative of our native culture, and he did not create a respect for our artists' endeavors on the London stage, but his lyrics to "Home Sweet Home" which appeared in his operetta, Clari, in 1823, did incorporate an American spirit within this piece that opened at London's Covent Garden.

The first native American style of acting was that of Edwin Forrest. Similar to Payne, Forrest first made a professional name for himself in the United States and then found success in England. He made his first stage appearance in the city of his birth, Philadelphia in 1820. By 1826, he had made an outstanding reputation for himself in the circuit theatres along the Ohio and Mississippi rivers and made a highly successful debut in New York as Othello. He was soon considered America's outstanding Romantic tragedian, and extended his fame to England on his 1834 tour. He reached English acclaim on this tour when he performed as Spartacus in Robert M. Bird's The Gladiator. During a second London tour in 1845, the professional and personal rivalry between Forrest and William Macready was openly voiced when Forrest was hissed by a London audience. Forrest retaliated in a typical gesture by going to a performance by Macready in Edinburgh and personally disrupting the play. This action ended his popularity in England, and he returned to America embittered and thoroughly antagonistic toward Macready. This feud ended tragically in the Astor Place riot of 1849. Even though Forrest was heavily criticized both in the United States as well as in England for his part in these

events, he continued to be a most popular American star until his retirement in 1871.

The third American to become known both in the United States and in England in the first half of the nineteenth century was Charlotte Cushman. She was a renowned singer in the Boston area, making her professional operatic debut in this city in 1835 as Countess Almaviva in The Marriage of Figaro. Her willingness to please her audiences caused her to over-extend her vocal abilities and she destroyed her singing voice. Although unsuited for opera, her speaking voice was reported to be especially strong and pleasing. In New Orleans, she began her theatrical career as Lady Macbeth, a role which was to become her most notable achievement. She made her New York debut in this same role in 1836, just one year after her Boston opening as a professional opera star. She was hailed in New York as America's foremost actress and became noted for her handling of tragic heroines and her amazing success in masculine roles of Romeo and Hamlet. She was successful with English tours of 1845 and 1849. There, as in the United States, she was considered as one of the greats of her time. She was best known as Lady Macbeth, Meg Merrilies in Guy Mannering, and Katherine in

Henry VIII. Miss Cushman's unique dignity and intellectual achievements made her the only actress of her day to be accepted in social circles and did much to raise the standing of her profession in this country.

Despite this humble establishment of the beginnings of a native acting style, America was not freed from the European domination. Additionally, our stagecraft followed the English theatre. The gas lighting installed at the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia was in imitation of London's Olympic Theatre the preceding year. This extension of the London stage was apparent elsewhere in our theatrical development. The rebuilding of the Park Theatre in New York in 1821 gave the American manager an opportunity to remodel his new structure after current English styles. The new Park Theatre was built with a small apron and a single proscenium door on each side of the arch leading out onto the reduced acting area of the apron. This was in imitation of the British houses, Drury Lane and Covent Garden, which were at this time changing the orchestra into the better seating area and having the actors perform behind the proscenium arch. The brighter gas lighting introduced in England in 1815 allowed the actor to be seen in the scenic area behind the proscenium.

Also, the desire to create scenery that represented reality in a more literal style than was previously used called for an integration of the spectacle of actor's movement and scenic display. The scenery in New York was quite below the English standards, but more and more American managers followed the English in the use of three-dimensional pieces to supplement the traditional wings and backdrops.

In 1846, New York saw Charles Kean in Richard III, the first lavish production presented on an American stage. Hitherto, scenery had been makeshift. A woodland or palace interior served for Hamlet as well as for Richard III ...¹⁰

This 1846 production is recorded in the above passage as "lavish"; other historians point to this production as the first box set used in America.¹¹ Whether "lavish" or the first box set, it was an eye opening event in the United States, and American theatre managers began to improve their scenic display and integrate the acting with the technical aspects of production in the manner of

¹⁰Magowan and Melnitz, p. 374.

¹¹Orville K. Larson, "A Commentary on the 'Historical Development of the Box Set', Theatre Annual, 1945" The Theatre Annual (1954).

the British. The antiquarian movement, enacted by Kimble and Capon around 1800, was not felt in this country until Kean's 1846 production. The 1820 remodeling of the Park Theatre had been a blind copy of the English style without any true dramatic conception as a guide.

The dramatic literature was still mainly imported from England. William Dunlap's commercial adaptations of Kotzebue were as foreign to the native culture as was the Yankee farce characters of the "original" American pieces. The literary styles of Pixercourt and Dumas pere along with Sheridan and Goldsmith controlled these American "originals".

John Augustus Stone's celebrated Indian play Metamora (1829), owes more of its inspiration to Pixerecourt than any fresh observation of aboriginal life.¹²

Robert M. Bird's The Gladiator is similarly absent of a spark of native American drama, more so in theme than Metamora, and similar in style. Anna Cora Mowatt's comedy, Fashion, did show a degree of native spirit in its writing, but is only a small variance from the English domination. Edgar Allen Poe writing for The Broadway Journal praises this play for its originality, but objects

¹²Gassner and Allen, p. 872.

to its contrivances.

...we may say that Fashion is theatrical, but not dramatic...although bad as comedy it might be good as farce...our fault-finding is on the score of deficiency of verisimilitude --in natural art--that is to say, in art based in the natural laws of man's heart and understanding.¹³

Poe goes on to correlate the shortcomings of this play with those of all American theatre in 1845.

The destruction of the Park Theatre in 1848 marked the end of the 1800-1850 era, as other theatres soon replaced the Park as outstanding showplaces. The theatre was yet dominated by the English in literary fare and style, as well as the acting talent, style of acting and staging techniques. It is during the next fifty years that George Becks was to become an actor and stage manager in New York. In order to best relate this man to the theatre of his day, this study will concentrate in more detail on the New York stage from 1850 until 1900. More specific detail and development of the theatre during the second half of the nineteenth century will be mainly limited to the New York stage.

¹³The Broadway Journal, March 29, 1845; as reprinted in The American Theatre as Seen by Its Critics, 1752-1934 ed. Montrose J. Moses, and John Mason Brown (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1934).

The first two decades of the last half of the nineteenth century reflect the changes that were taking place in London. This country witnessed a vast improvement in stage machinery, which was used to create a greater literalistic scenic spectacle. In addition, the antiquarian truth in dress and decoration, which started in England near 1800, began to be a part of the American theatrical scene. In order to achieve this "truth" in the setting and costuming of the productions, the managers began to pay strict attention to all aspects of the technical production, which led to a greater integration of all these aspects in production. In order to satisfy this new movement in the stagecraft of our theatre, a distinct acting style developed in this country that was characteristically marked by detailed business and a casual delivery of lines even in tragedy. These aspects, introduced into the American theatre throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, began to develop during the early years of the second half, and represent the nineteenth century move toward a realism which constituted the nineteenth century concept of verisimilitude. This verisimilitude was an attempt to create a photographic reproduction of reality.

American Theatre from 1850 until 1860.--This era really begins in 1848 with two separate events. The Park Theatre, which had been the outstanding theatre in New York, had burned many times and was reconstructed; however, after the fire in 1848 it was never rebuilt and a fifty year landmark disappeared. That same year William Burton leased Palmo's Opera House on Chambers Street in New York. He opened on July 28, 1848, renaming the structure Burton's Theatre. Burton as a theatre manager represents a new trend in America that was beginning to form around the middle of the century. He and subsequent managers, who continued and improved upon his methods, were the leading theatre men who molded the American theatre for the next forty years. William Burton was an English actor-manager with very little experience on the London boards, but in the United States his Burton's Theatre held a highly prominent position in the theatre for a ten-year period. Included in his company were Caroline Chapman and John Brougham. In 1850, Burton's Theatre was one of the first-line theatres of New York and shared its high position only with Niblo's Garden.

In 1823, the location at Broadway and Prince Street was opened as Columbia Gardens. William Niblo purchased

the successful business and increased its popularity by adding theatrical productions. In 1830, he built a theatre on the site. The Niblo's Gardens that was producing plays in 1850 was built by William Mitchell in 1834 as a refinement over the earlier structure. By 1837, this theatre was the most fashionable in New York.¹⁴ In 1850, Burton's and Niblo's were the foremost theatres in the city.

Other theatres of the day were John Brougham's Theatre, which opened in 1850, and met with financial disaster within two years; the Broadway Theatre; the Bowery, which opened in 1826 and had prevailed over the thirty years through a series of fires and reconstructions; the National; and Tripler Hall, known as the Metropolitan Theatre. These were the major theatres of New York. Other locations that were often engaged by performing companies were Barnum's Museum, which gave theatricals as demonstrations to accompany lectures, allowing some persons who would never step inside a theatre building, theatrical entertainment; Fellow's Opera House, which became Christy and Wood's Minstrel Hall

¹⁴Hornblow, pp. 96-102.

during the 1860's; and Niblo's Salon, which was a small theatre located in the same building as the larger Niblo's Garden Theatre.

During the 1850's, the increased theatrical activity was marked by the many ventures into theatre management during this decade. The opening of John Brougham's Theatre and its closing after two seasons was typical of the activities of this time. Even more typical was the fact that this depleted theatrical concern could be taken over by a real theatre businessman, J. W. Wallack, and be successful. Renamed Wallack's Lyceum, this theatre soon rivaled the leading theatres, because of Wallack's promotional efforts, good play selection and well-rounded acting company. It was at the Lyceum opening that Laura Keane made her American debut, just as did E. A. Southern two years later. Franconi's Hippodrome opened in 1853 but was never completely successful and was torn down in 1858 after five rocky years of financial difficulties. Equestrian spectacles and circuses were housed at Crystal Palace, which, as its name implies, was a large structure made mostly of glass and supported by wrought iron. This short-lived edifice was torn down in 1858. The Academy of Music was constructed in 1854, bringing to

New York a home for Grand Opera that was not available since the Astor Place Opera House was turned into a library early in the 50's. This building served as a theatre as well as an opera house until 1857. The theatre building flourished in the 60's under a series of managers and became Tony Pastor's in 1875. Under his management this theatre housed some of the most popular variety of actors in American Theatre.¹⁵

Within this activity of growth, the two most important changes in American theatre management were Burton's leasing of Palm's Opera House and J. W. Wallack's takeover of John Brougham's Theatre. These two managers established resident acting companies in the face of the popular practice of the traveling star system. This struggle between the resident company and the traveling star was apparent through the 1870's.

From the beginning of the American theatre, the traveling company and the resident company intermingled and alternated in importance. The early companies of the eighteenth century had to travel because the small population of the metropolitan areas could not support an

¹⁵Hornblow, pp. 166-170.

acting company. Later as population increased in these areas, first amateur groups then permanent professional companies were maintained. However, as transportation improved, the traveling star became popular, challenging the popularity of the permanent company. This was first apparent when the English stars traveled the Eastern seaboard, using the resident companies as a supporting cast. At the same time of the traveling English stars in the East, permanent companies were starting to replace the old stock traveling companies in our frontier lands. Following the pattern, as transportation improved around the mid-1800's, traveling stars were starting to cover all the United States east of the Mississippi. It was at this time that resident companies were beginning to be formed in New York to combat the star system.

William Mitchell, after leaving Niblo's Garden, established New York's Olympic Theatre in 1839. He specialized in the presentation of light comedy, which was denied him at Niblo's with traveling stars demanding the type of theatrical presentation that best suited their individual talents. In order to create a repertory of light comedy, Mitchell had to employ a permanent company of actors. His resident company did succeed, but his determination to

produce a limited range of theatre fare closed his theatre in 1850.¹⁶

William Burton's theatre provided New York with a first-rate company of actors. John Brougham, Caroline Chapman, and Burton were the best known actors in the company but were by no means considered stars in 1848. By his use of a repertory bill of plays and a solid acting company, Burton was not only able to compete with the New York theatres, but he had, until 1857, one of the most popular theatres in America. His company was the first that demonstrated that the resident company could be financially successful in New York and could compete with the star system.

The second resident company to operate successfully in New York was started by J. W. Wallack, when in 1852 he leased the defunct John Brougham Theatre. Under his management until 1864, Wallack's Lyceum presented the most outstanding theatre in America. This company, under Wallack, soon reached an equal status with Burton's company and by 1855 was considered the best company in New

¹⁶Bernard Hewitt, Theatre USA: 1665 to 1957, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1959), p. 161. Hereafter referred to as: Hewitt.

York. With these two companies, the resident repertory company was firmly established in New York during the 1850's.

The dramatic literature of this period continued to depend on European sources. The adaptations by Dunlap of an earlier period were carried on by Irish-born actor-playwright Dion Boucicault. Most of Boucicault's 130 plays are based on French plays or Romantic novels.¹⁷ The Poor of New York, which opened at Wallack's in 1857, was taken from Les Pauvres de Paris and played in England as The Poor of Liverpool without much change. Boucicault did, however, hit a strong American note in The Octoroon, which dealt with slavery and miscegenation and was first presented one year before the outbreak of the Civil War. The theme and setting of The Octoroon and the setting for The Poor of New York, which at Wallack's was marked by an authentic reproduction of the streets of the city, indicate the strong desire for verisimilitude in the theatre of this time and a hint of the American theatre that was beginning to form.

An earlier indication of this American theatre was

¹⁷Gassner and Allen, p. 882.

the popularity of George L. Aiken's adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin. This play, first produced in 1853, became the most produced play in the history of American theatre.¹⁸

Further evidence of the forming of an American theatre was also connected to Wallack's company. Matilda Heron's performance in Camille skyrocketed her to notoriety in 1857. In an article in the New York Herald, she is given credit for a performance that was "finely acted . . . although a little too broadly colored. . . abounded in points which prove conclusively that Miss Heron is justly entitled to rank as a great tragedienne."¹⁹ The article goes on to conclude that Miss Heron had established a truly "realistic" style of acting in the American theatre. Her acting style was compared to that of the rather Romantic tragediennes of the English school, Fanny Davenport and Laura Keane, which raises questions as to how "realistic" this new trend in acting was in terms of later acting styles in this country. Nevertheless, in 1857, the same year as Boucicault's The Poor of New York,

¹⁸Hewitt, pp. 171-174.

¹⁹New York Tribune, January 23, 1857.

and at the same theatre, Wallack's, these productions mark a definite trend toward an American style of staging and acting. This new "realism" and the American style it bore led into the theatre of the next decade.

American Theatre from 1860 until 1870.--The change in the American theatre that rendered the 1860's unique had its beginnings in the preceding decade. The years during and following the Civil War were characterized by continuing activity and development in theatrical production. During this period the popular theatre expanded as new forms of entertainment were introduced to the public and became established in our American culture. In addition, the resident companies formed in the 1850's continued to fight the pressures of the traveling star with success. A new style of acting was introduced to New York as Edwin Thomas Booth became the most popular player of his day. Booth spent his early life literally in the service of his father, Junius Brutus Booth. J. B. Booth was a London actor who came to the United States in order to escape his first wife and marry Mary Ann Holmes. Booth was an extremely popular actor in America and traveled the nation. Edwin accompanied his father and often found himself in the position of "keeper" for his quite erratic father.

In 1851, J. B. Booth was appearing in New York at the National Theatre, but, because he became intoxicated just before the play began, Edwin had to appear in his place. At this time, Edwin was seventeen and played in Richard III. From this opening, he went to his true apprenticeship as an actor in the California theatre during the formulation of theatre there from 1852 to 1856. During this period in San Francisco, theatrical productions were presented at the American Theatre, the Jenny Lind, and the French theatre called the Adelphi. Soon James C. Murdock built the Metropolitan. This theatre activity was not only important because of Edwin Booth, but because of a number of American theatre men, some of whom began to wrest the theatre in this country away from our English dominance during the 1880's and 1890's.²⁰

Following a successful tour to Australia and his successes in California, in 1861 he made a tour to London. Returning to New York, he was successful in producing a series of Shakespearian productions which was highlighted in 1864 by a record setting one hundred consecutive performances of Hamlet. It was during this New York stay from

²⁰Hewitt, pp. 163-166.

1862 to 1864 that Edwin Forrest was appearing in his regular Fall seasons at Niblo's Garden. It is quite natural that these two men who represent the "old" and the "new" were to be compared one to another. The Harper's Magazine presented such a comparison with a somewhat favorable slant toward Booth.

To criticize it Forrest's performance as acting is as useless as to criticize the stories of Miss Braddon or of Mr. Ainsworth as literature. That human beings, under any conceivable circumstances, should ever talk as they are represented in the Forrest drama and the Braddon novel is beyond belief... Forrest's style is that of the muscular school...the biceps aesthetics...bovine drama... while Booth presented a believable character with an intellectual manner. This actor gave to the role a complete, but subtle nature.²¹

The article continues by comparing the noisy and boisterous audience at Niblo's, that often interrupted Forrest's performance with vocal praise and applause, to the interested but restrained audience members at Booth's performance. Due to Edwin Booth's outstanding success during the 1863-64 season and his frequent representations of Hamlet during this time, by 1864 he was strongly associated with this role and was under constant demand to perform it. It

²¹Harper's Magazine, "The Editor's Easy Chair," December, 1863, pp. 132-133.

was during this same season that the Winter Garden under Booth's management saw the famous production of Julius Caesar starring the three Booth brothers, Edwin, John Wilkes, and Junius Brutus, Jr. Before the 1864-65 season was completed, however, John Wilkes Booth's assassination of President Lincoln threatened Edwin's career at its very zenith. He retired from the stage but was brought out of retirement by public demand and an assurance of the public that he was not held responsible for his brother's actions. Edwin Booth returned to the stage January 3, 1866 as Hamlet at the Winter Garden Theatre. His contribution to this decade was not limited to his development of an American acting style. The building of his theatre, the staging practices housed within, and the scenic spectacle that was a part of the productions will be subject to further investigation.

The eruption of the Civil War quite naturally affected the theatre, but not critically, and the theatre was soon revitalized. Numerous companies found the availability of male actors lessened, but by starring ladies in outstanding feminine roles, relying on older actors and using the insurgence of English and untried American actors, the theatre continued to flourish. In New York,

the war was treated as a distant affair, especially when compared to the urgencies of the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812; therefore, the audiences did not fall in attendance. In addition, actors were allowed to cross the battle lines, and it was a common occurrence for a traveling company to entertain Union troops one night and Confederate troops the following evening. The resident companies in New York were still able to remain financially successful while competing with the traveling stars. Many companies were mixing the two forms by having stars on certain nights, alternating with the resident company productions. Such an arrangement was at Niblo's Gardens in 1860 under the management of J. M. Nixon. After Nixon's removal and a season with J. W. Wallack and E. L. Davenport, the theatre was leased to William Wheatley in 1862, and it is his take over of the Gardens that marks the beginning of a dynamic theatre, bringing him to the top of his field. Wheatley revitalized the acting company, remodeled the theatre building and developed a bill of dramatic fare that appealed to the audience of his day. His employment of an annually returning star combined with an outstanding acting company allowed him the benefit of good ensemble acting and the audience draw

of star billing. Edwin Forrest was Wheatley's annual star with a strong repertory of Shakespeare and Romantic pieces. This was complemented with popular entertainment appearing on alternate nights with Forrest. Often the popular bills would be headed by female stars; thus, Niblo's Garden would be offering the public Forrest and his Romantic tragedies on alternate nights with a star such as Matilda Heron in Camille, made famous at Wallack's. In his search for popular theatre, Wheatley brought to New York or quickly booked many female stars who were at this time most popular with New York audiences. He produced Kate Bateman in Leah, the Forsaken and The Hunchback, both of which were popular due to the sentiment of the plays and the desire to see Miss Bateman who was no longer a child-actress doing male Shakespearian leads. On January 19, 1863, Leah, the Forsaken was introduced at Niblo's Garden. This piece was already popular in Germany as Deborah by Mosenthall and at this time was adapted by Augustin Daly for the New York stage. Daly was a dramatic critic in the early 60's, and this play marks his first successful venture as a playwright. The combination of Wheatley, Bateman and Daly scored a great success even though Daly's fellow dramatic critics descended on the

opening production and were extremely hard on his work as a playwright.²² Edwin Booth was another star at Niblo's, playing at the Winter Garden and Niblo's in 1862 upon his return from his first London tour. The 1863-64 season followed the same pattern, featuring Forrest, Matilda Heron, in a repertory including Camille, Edwin Booth in his first appearance in Fool's Revenge, and a summer season that featured Lucille Western in Sea of Ice and Camille. "Crude as the critics found her, Miss Western pleased the public, and 'emotional' drama was now on the crest of the wave."²³

Wheatley's ability to alternate between "the crest of the wave" and standard entertainment made him one of the most successful managers of the period as he competed with the established J. W. Wallack and the new manager of the Winter Garden in 1863, Edwin Booth. It is no wonder that this man would be a vital part in the founding of an entertainment form that has remained a part of the American theatre up to the present day.

²²George C. D. Odell, Annals of the New York Stage (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), VII, 484-486. Hereafter referred to as: Odell.

²³Odell, VII, 563.

In the spring of 1866, Palmer and Jarrett, theatrical producers working at the Academy of Music, had booked a traveling troupe from Europe that included a number of performers, a full corps de ballet, and complete staging devices. These all made up the spectacular production of La Biche au Bois. Unfortunately for the producers, the Academy of Music was destroyed in a fire on May 22, 1866, which left them nowhere to produce the ballet. At this time, William Wheatley bought the rights to the company from Palmer and Jarrett and began to adapt a new melodrama by Charles M. Barras entitled The Black Crook to include the ballet troupe. Wheatley obligated himself to a vast financial burden in that it took him four months to prepare his stage, adapt the script and rehearse the company. In this four-month time, he had to pay the wages of the European troupe and hire a group of workmen to completely overhaul the theatre's stage. The result is described in the New York Times.

Such a stage was never seen in this country before. Every board slides on grooves and can be taken up, pushed down or slid out at will. The entire stage may be taken away; traps can be introduced at any part at any time, and the great depth of cellar below renders the sinking of

entire scenes a matter of simple
machinery.²⁴

The New York Times further reported that the pre-opening costs of the production had cost Wheatley over \$25,000, which was an exorbitant amount in 1866.

The production, which opened on September 12, 1866, featured spectacular scenes and a corps de ballet clad in very "daring" costumes.

The last scene in the play, however, will dazzle and impress to an even greater degree, by its lavish richness and barbaric splendor. All that gold, silver, and gems and lights and women's beauty can contribute to fascinate the eye and charm the senses is gathered up in this gorgeous spectacle.²⁵

This program, which lasted for five and one half hours, created a new form of entertainment, and the mixture of melodrama, dance, song and spectacle was to remain popular and to develop into a number of entertaining forms up through the twentieth century. For his efforts and great financial gamble, Wheatley enjoyed the longest run known at that time (475 performances) and a gross income of over \$1,100,000.²⁶

²⁴New York Times, September 14, 1866.

²⁵New York Tribune, September 17, 1866.

²⁶Hughes, p. 200.

During this time of expansion and development, managers were experimenting with new forms or bringing European entertainments into this country. In 1867, H. L. Bateman, who had made a living through his child-proteges, Ellen and Kate, discovered an even more lucrative commodity for the New York public. He imported a company from Paris that performed a series of Offenbach's opera bouffe, which was met quite favorably. Soon after this success, English versions followed, but these were not completely acceptable until they were made popular by Edward Rice and J. C. Goodwin, who concocted a compromise between native American drama with the spark of the opera bouffe. They opened at Niblo's Garden with Evangeline in 1874, which established a further development in America's popular theatre.

The Black Crook was not a burlesque in itself, nor can it be considered a forerunner; however, the production with its "frank" display of feminine legs clad in tights paved the way for America's acceptance of Lydia Thomas and the British Blondes. The first evidence of this acceptance was Ada Isaacs Menkin's portrayal of Mazeppa, when she was displayed on stage in tights while strapped to a living horse. This "display" later elaborated by the corps de

ballet in The Black Crook stimulated thousands of playgoers and many managers to consider the potential of the feminine form revealed on the stage. A combination of witty satire and an emphasis on the female form was offered by the English burlesque. Miss Thompson's program was placed in a framework of Greek mythology that paid little attention to the Greeks with an updated look at Mt. Olympus. This program was highly successful and the form as well as the musical-melodrama such as The Black Crook was to remain in the American Theatre.

Another form of entertainment that appeared at this time was really a revitalization of an old form, with a contemporary addition. George L. Fox was the originator of the character Phineas Fletcher, the kindly Yankee in the National Theatre's production of Uncle Tom's Cabin in 1853, and was a popular actor throughout the 50's and 60's. In 1868, he surprised the New York audiences with his revival and revision of the pantomime Humpty Dumpty, in which he used all of the wit and spectacle of the burlesque, plus the music and dance in the music of The Black Crook. The form had been a part of American theatre from the earliest English acting troupes but had come to be used as afterpieces only. In the 40's and 50's when

afterpieces began to be discontinued, the pantomime became unknown on the stages of America. In Humpty Dumpty, Fox restored the broad comedy to the pantomime that was a part of its commedia dell'arte heritage and extended it to a full-length presentation. His role of the clown was taken from the English stage and added to some of the known Italian plots and scenarios. Furthermore, he incorporated the gymnastics of the French players, seen here in the 50's and 60's performed by the Ravels, and he Americanized the piece by making the clown a Yankee character. The pantomime opened at the Olympic on March 11, 1868 and enjoyed over 1,200 performances in New York through the years.²⁷ The height of Fox's fame came when he presented a parody production of Hamlet in which he successfully satirized the play and the performances of Edwin Booth and Charles Fecther in the title role. Since burlesque and pantomime of this nature is a parasite of the serious drama of its time, this short-lived flourish of the art indicates that the American theatre was beginning to reach a strong theatrical period and that the theatre was a most popular form of entertainment at this time.

²⁷Hewitt, p. 208.

In order to obtain a full picture of the theatrical fare of the period, it is necessary to discuss another development in our native acting style that first reached popularity at this time. The comparison of Booth and Forrest demonstrates the nature of the serious theatrical productions and, perhaps, Forrest and The Black Crook represents the popular theatre, but "they were both won by Joe Jefferson III and Rip Van Winkle."²⁸ Joe Jefferson was a direct descendant of a line of actors who had been in America since 1795. His first notice in the East was under William Burton at Philadelphia. He, as was George Fox, was first noted in Yankee roles such as Asa Trenchard in Our American Cousin. It was during the late 50's that he began to develop his "Yankee" characteristics into his famous Rip Van Winkle. On his return from England, where Dion Boucicault had given him the revision of the play he was to use, Jefferson opened at the Olympic Theatre on September 6, 1866. Joe Jefferson's acting ability, plus a strong favorable personality that showed through the character, made this one of the most popular plays in this era. It was not the play, however, for others had tried

²⁸Hewitt, p. 198.

Rip Van Winkle without success, but it was the combination of the actor and the dramatic vehicle.

From the moment of Rip's entrance upon the scene--for it is Rip Van Winkle, and not Mr. Jefferson,--the audience has assurance that a worthy descendant of the noblest of old players is before them... Jefferson's art all combine to produce an effect which is rare in its simplicity and excellence, and altogether satisfying.²⁹

He presented this play 170 times during this season of 1866-67 and was to perform the role on numerous occasions until his retirement in 1904. Nearly thirty years of this Yankee character even with its Dutch accent marked a simplicity in acting style that became a part of our theatre.

As characterized in Mazeppa, with a live horse on stage; The Black Crook utilizing a full corps de ballet and the need for Wheatley to completely remodel his stage; Fox's pantomime Humpty Dumpty that incorporated magical stage tricks and fairy-land fantasy and the popularity of burlesque; the American audience was demanding a greater use of spectacle and scenic technology in order to produce the required effect. Also, the acting style as typified by Booth and Jefferson was best suited for scenic wonder that closely duplicated nature on the stage. For the

²⁹Harper's Magazine, June, 1867.

stage to have its verisimilitude as understood by the audiences of the nineteenth century, it was necessary for advancement of stage machinery to be employed. Correspondingly, many critics feared that the popular theatre was replacing serious fare, and there were no remaining theatre houses where "good" drama was presented. The opening of Booth's Theatre in 1868 was to create a home of this theatre and was a showcase of scenic splendor made possible by the most advanced stage machinery of the day. William Winter, one of those who feared the passing of "good" drama from the American theatre, found this opening to be the hope of the future.

Booth's Theatre is the stateliest, the handsomest, and the best appointed structure of its class that can now be found on the American continent...At the two leading representative theatres of the city--at Wallack's the realm of comedy and at Booth's the realm of tragedy--we now find Shakespeare. It is an auspicious conjunction. It is a happy omen. Let us cease to grieve for "the good old days." Let us look forward to a bright future for the American Stage.

"Angels are bright still,
through the brightest fell."³⁰

It was the opening of the Booth's Theatre and the

³⁰William Winter, New York Tribune, February 4, 1868.

completion of the transcontinental railroad that was to usher in the 1870's. The Booth's Theatre was a milepost in the development of our staging techniques and stage structure. The stage was not raked and was built without an apron, thus eliminating proscenium doors. The production was completely enclosed within the frame of the proscenium arch. In order to accomodate the actors on the stage area behind the proscenium, the stage floor did not contain grooves. Wings that were still in use were no longer in a symmetrical pattern and were supported by stage braces. The lower levels of the stage were completely equipped with hydraulic rams powered by an intricate water system that operated large elevator traps, thus allowing heavy pieces of scenery to be quickly lowered and new pieces raised for scenic shifts. It is evident that his productions used settings that completely enclosed the acting area. In addition, the Booth's Theatre is one of the first to have a complete fly area above the stage, requiring a tall stage house. This fly area was over 70 feet in height above the stage floor, a space that was not needed in the days of the wing and groove settings. The back shutters that closed and opened horizontally across the stage floor were replaced by canvas drops suspended

above the stage. Starting with this theatre, three dimensional settings and the use of drops and brace-supported wings became the basic means of the scenic spectacle in America.

The opening of the transcontinental railroad linked East with West, and the pendulum began to swing from resident companies as traveling theatre companies began to go to those communities that could support them for a short run. Consequently, the next two decades mark the development of the road. In New York, this time is characterized by powerful theatre managers and the long run.

American Theatre from 1870 until 1890.--During this period stars began to travel throughout the countryside. As transportation improved, full companies began to use the rails of our expanding nation. Resident companies in the smaller communities began to collapse, while only a few permanent companies in the larger metropolitan areas of the East existed without the star system, and these companies were succumbing to the long run in order to stay alive. This era of outstanding actors and playwrights was dominated by these theatre managers who built strong acting companies without the aid of stars or who were

building their own stars from within their companies. A study of the development of the companies of Lester Wallack, Augustin Daly, A. M. Palmer and Steele MacKaye and the theatres they created and rebuilt to house the needs of their companies outlines this era quite fully. These men were preceded by such men as William Mitchell, William Burton and J. W. Wallack, already mentioned in this chapter and followed by super-regisseurs the likes of Daniel and Charles Frohman and David Belasco of the 1890's and early twentieth century.

Lester Wallack had already made a name for himself when he took over Wallack's Theatre in 1873 at the death of his father, James W. Wallack. Similar to his father, his main interest was the production of well-timed and highly accurate comedy, including both the highly theatrical pieces such as School for Scandal and the sentimental types as written by Boucicault. Wallack continued to take the lead in a number of his own productions until his retirement in 1887, a year before his death. During the years of his management, a long list of distinguished actors was a part of the company. Many of these actors went on to establish themselves as stars, but this was not their purpose while a part of Wallack's company. John

Gilbert, who excelled in aged roles, and Madame Ponisi, an English actress, were two of the mainstays of the company. Others, who were with Wallack at one time or another, include E. L. Davenport, Maurice Barrymore, John Brougham, Dion Boucicault, Rose Eyting and Steele MacKaye. The popularity of this man was witnessed to when he was given a benefit at his retirement. This benefit was sponsored by Augustin Daly (who had eliminated the practice of benefits in his company) and A. M. Palmer, who were Wallack's major competition. On May 21, 1888, Hamlet was presented at the Metropolitan Opera House with a cast that included Edwin Booth, Modjeska, Lawrence Barrett, Joseph Jefferson, W. J. Florence, Frank Mayo, John Gilbert, Rose Coghlan and many others who did not have major parts, but made walk-on appearances. This one production grossed \$21,000, but Wallack refused the sum.³¹

From Lester Wallack to Augustin Daly is a clear step of the development in the managerial system. Wallack is somewhat of a transitional manager in that he was a member of the acting company and was not instrumental in establishing a definite style of production. Augustin Daly was

³¹Hughes, p. 230.

concerned with creating casts to fit the requirements of the play; thus, he broke down the established line of business. His careful casting of plays and his pride in modeling his company to suit the production created a definite style connected to Daly's theatres. In order to accomplish this, he felt he had to cut through the star system and create his own company of actors molded to his needs as a producer. It is under Daly that the long run production became established in the New York theatre. This manner of operation had been successful for a number of scattered productions of the past such as Booth's Hamlet, The Black Crook or Jefferson's Rip Van Winkle. In 1865, Dion Boucicault petitioned for copyright laws regarding plays and the rights of the authors to obtain royalties. With the passage of this legislation, playwrights were afforded the opportunity to have their plays bring in substantial funds, thus encouraging men of literary talent to begin to consider dramatic literature. This also encouraged managers such as Daly, who wrote or adapted many of the plays they produced, to initiate the long run. It was Daly who had discovered a young journalist named Bronson Howard, who submitted to Daly a farce comedy, Saratoga. Through Daly's encouragement, Howard

became one of the outstanding playwrights of his time. He was the first American to amass a fortune for his work.³² In addition, the new "realism" in acting styles and the concept of creating a specific setting for each play as opposed to relying on stock pieces made the long run the most profitable means of play production. These long runs, alternated with some repertory productions, gave Daly time to rehearse his intricate productions. Two other factors that must be included are that New York in 1870 had a population of over one and a half million and could support this manner of production, and the development of the inland transportation made it possible for entire productions to tour on the road. Augustin Daly took advantage of all these conditions and built an outstanding acting company over a thirty-year period.³³

Daly began his theatrical career as a dramatic critic. He then began to write plays and translate French and German pieces that were popular at the time. Daly began his managerial career with his opening of the first

³²Lloyd Morris, Curtain Time: The Story of the American Theatre (New York: Random House, 1953), p. 221. Hereafter referred to as: Morris.

³³Hewitt, p. 218.

Fifth Avenue Theatre in 1869, but in the first ten years, Daly's success was constantly threatened. His first theatre burned in 1873, but in a short time he had leased a defunct theatre and opened what he called The Broadway Theatre; in addition, he added the Grand Opera House to his managerial realm. By December of the year, he had built a new theatre, his Fifth Avenue Theatre, which opened December 3, 1873. In an eleven-month period, Daly had operated his company in four different theatre buildings. This dynamic pace was typical for the man. The financial depression of 1873 was to overtake his ventures and was to close his company in 1874. A number of setbacks culminating in 1877 forced Daly to take his company on the road. He returned to New York two years later, leased Wood's Museum, remodeled it and opened it as Daly's Theatre. This location was to be the home of his company for the following twenty years.

Augustin Daly's work was based on a strict discipline that he required of himself and his whole cast. He set the plays, cast them, dictated actors' salaries, assessed fines for misconduct, and operated complete control over the scenic aspects of productions. He did not allow a star system within his company, insisting that his most

talented actors subordinate themselves to the production. This was the strength of the company but created a disharmony between Daly and some of the members of his company; therefore, many left him after a few seasons. Fanny Davenport, Agnes Ethel and Clara Morris were unable to remain under his directorship. His regulars, however, included John Drew and Ada Rhen who held the stage during the 1880's as one of the most famous romantic-comedy teams in American theatre. It was during the 80's that Daly began to tour Europe, marking the first time that a complete American company toured the continent. Daly visited London a number of times and established a theatre there in 1893. This opening in London marks the zenith in the man's career as a theatre manager.³⁴

One of the most noted playhouses in the last quarter of the 19th century was the Union Square Theatre, which had evolved from a variety house in 1871 to a first class house of legitimate drama with the opening of Agnes in 1872. Sheridan Shook controlled the lease on the building and favored the variety hall bill under the management of Robert Butler. However, a year of small audience

³⁴Joseph F. Daly, The Life of Augustin Daly (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1917).

attendance induced Shook to release Butler and hire an Englishman, Albert M. Palmer, as manager. Palmer was not a man of a theatrical background and was faced with the stiff competition of the established Wallack's and upsurging popularity of Augustin Daly. Palmer, a well educated man with a sound sense of business, used a weakness of Daly's system of management to make the debut of the Union Square one of the most successful openings in New York. Agnes Ethel was currently Daly's leading lady, but was unhappy in Daly's company because of his insistence of subordinating his casts to the production. Also, a bitter rivalry was building between Ethel and Fanny Davenport as to who was the leading actress. To make the situation even more complicated, Victorien Sardou was writing a play, Andrea, solely for Miss Ethel. Palmer was able to use the disharmony at Daly's to spirit Agnes Ethel away, and to open his first season with Agnes Ethel in Victorien Sardou's original play written for the actress, re-titled Agnes. This successful beginning was typical of the successes that Palmer was to amass in his manager-ship at Union Square from 1872 to 1883.³⁵

³⁵Hornblow, pp. 262-273.

Outstanding successes at this theatre included the debut of Dion Boucicault's adaptation of Octave Feuillet's drama, Temptation, which Boucicault renamed, Led Astray. The play which Boucicault predicted would change the fashion of drama was able to run for nearly one year and a half. Rose Eyting, formerly of Daly's, was a major contribution to the success of the show. The reviews panned Boucicault's claim that he had presented a new domestic drama, insisting that he was presenting the same French and German adaptations that were so common in the New York theatre. The cast is said to have read their lines in a stilted manner, with the exception of Miss Rose Eyting. Her performance was exceptional in its grace and forthright presentation of the role.³⁶ The critical acclaim of the piece was more in favor of Miss Eyting than the production or playwright. Another Daly star accounted for the next big production at the Union Square in Palmer's revival of Camille with Clara Morris. Thus,

³⁶Dion Boucicault, Led Astray (New York: Samuel French, n.d.) John Moore's promptbook based on this acting edition is located in the Folger Library. OSU Theatre Collection, P 155. Hereafter referred to as: Led Astray, (Moore), P 155. This promptbook contains an unidentified newspaper clipping. Judging from its commentary, it was a New York paper.

Ethel Eyting and Morris, all formerly of Daly's, made Palmer one of the strongest managers in New York. The greatest success for Palmer was an adaptation of the French melodrama, Les Deux Orphelines. This piece was not adapted in a true sense of the word but poorly and artificially translated from the French. The highly emotional nature of the play projected and connected with the popular appeal of the audience and from that time, December 21, 1874, the Union Square Theatre, Albert M. Palmer and Kate Claxton, the leading actress, were all associated with The Two Orphans. Kate Claxton purchased the rights of the play from Palmer and played the piece for nearly twenty years.³⁷

It was under Palmer's management that Richard Southern was given his first role in the American theatre, opening in A Parisian Romance, on January 12, 1883, the same year that Palmer retired from the Union Square Theatre and traveled throughout Europe. Upon his return to New York in 1884, Palmer took over the Madison Square Theatre. It was here that Steele MacKaye had built his double elevator stage five years previously.

³⁷Morris, pp. 166, 174, 231.

The erratic nature of Steele MacKaye's work as a manager made it impossible for him to build a substantial acting company or to challenge the success of Wallack, Daly or Palmer, but the inventive genius that he gave to the theatre makes him a most important contributing factor to the development of American drama. He served the theatre as an actor, manager, playwright, teacher and inventor, displaying an all-around theatrical knowledge. While studying in Paris, he met Francois Delsarte, the founder of the famed Delsarte system of acting, and brought the theories of this man to the United States. As the manager of the St. John's Theatre in New York from 1872-73, MacKaye applied Delsartian principles to his productions but did not have a proper amount of time to establish a lasting trend in New York's theatre. After a financial failure during this season, which was not uncommon during the Panic of 1873, Daly returned to Paris to study under Rignier, who had taken up the Delsartian school upon the death of Francois Delsarte. MacKaye returned in 1874 to the United States to work as a lecturer, and adapted Rose Michel from the French for A. M. Palmer at the Union Square. In 1879, MacKaye took control of the Madison Square Theatre and remodeled it according to his advanced

theories of staging practices.

The renovated theatre opened on February 12, 1880, with MacKaye's own work Hazel Kirk. The play is of a realistic nature and required two complete representational settings, the kitchen of Blackburn Mill and the boudoir at Fairy Grove. With the elevator stage, the Madison Square Theatre could make the change from one full set to the other in a two-minute period.³⁸ The system of scene change consisted of "two theatrical stages, one above another, to be moved up and down...so that either one of them can be easily and quickly be at any time brought to the proper level..."³⁹ This stage and MacKaye's use of the elevated orchestra, located above the playing area similar to the player's gallery of the Elizabethan stage, and a cooling system are but a few of his inventions for the American theatre.

The Madison Square Theatre opened eleven years after the Booth's Theatre and shows a definite evolution in staging practices. MacKaye could shift full box sets including the actors on stage in under forty seconds. A

³⁸The Spirit of the Times, February 7, 1880.

³⁹Scientific American, April 5, 1884.

further development in this theatre was a smaller seating capacity creating greater intimacy and an even closer arrangement of audience to the stage with the elevated orchestra placing the front row right at the stage's edge. There was no apron or proscenium doors in his theatre and his productions were lighted by electric lighting, allegedly installed by Thomas Edison personally.⁴⁰

Even though Hazel Kirk had numerous productions, MacKaye did not receive revenues from it because of a contract he had made with the owners of the Madison Square Theatre. This and other disagreements led MacKaye to leave this theatre and tour the nation until 1885, when he returned and formed a company with Daniel and Gustave Frohman at the Lyceum Theatre. The realistic production of romantic drama had required the large theatres and the giant machines to change the settings, but the advent of the domestic drama which was to develop in the 90's and early twentieth century did not have such requirements nor a need to continue the full-blown acting style that accompanied such Romantic pieces. At the Lyceum, Steele MacKaye with Daniel Frohman and Franklin Sargent opened

⁴⁰Hughes, p. 236.

the Lyceum School of Acting. This school along with the small intimate theatre, housing sixty-one and lighted by electricity, brought forth a new acting style to America. However, due to personal quarrels and especially the failure of his play, Dakolar, MacKaye withdrew from the company within a year. Gustave and Daniel Frohman maintained the theatre, while Franklin Sargent opened his own New York School of Acting based on MacKaye's teachings, which became the American Academy of Domestic Arts.⁴¹

The end of MacKaye's career was a tragic one in which he attempted to correlate all of his writing talent with his staging knowledge to create The World Finder for the Columbian World Fair at Chicago first scheduled for 1892. The Fair was postponed for a year, and new financing made MacKaye's dream impossible. He was able to make a large-scale model of his Scenitorium which was to house this wonder, but this failure seemed beyond his strength, and he died three weeks after the model's completion.

The development of the strong acting styles along with the advance trends in staging machines characterized the 1870's and 80's in American theatre. Further

⁴¹Hewitt, p. 253.

development of this mechanical excellence was stymied only by the financial cut at the World's Fair and his untimely death. Also, included in these years was the formation of realistic trends in acting and the popularity of domestic drama. In short, the American theatre had reached a maturity but, as MacKaye's erratic career attests, the theatre was ripe for sound business practices. In the age of giant trusts and large business enterprises, it is not surprising that big business would soon revolutionize the theatre in America. The big business boom was to characterize the development of the theatre in the 1890's.

American Theatre from 1890 until 1900.--By 1890, a fine representation of playwrights had brought their talents to the American stage. Bronson Howard, who had his start under Augustin Daly, reached commercial heights with Shenandoah in 1889; a play that was dropped by Palmer, and picked up on a gamble by Charles Frohman and Al Hayman. The play opened at the Star Theatre on September 9th. This play represents the height of the type of theatre of the past twenty years and its financial success shows its great popularity. Other playwrights were still writing this type of drama, but men like James A. Herne and William Gillette were experimenting with new themes and

playwriting styles. James A. Herne reached his most commercial success with his Shore Acres, a sentimental melodrama that was of the standard mold, but he is remembered today for his play, Margaret Fleming. This play was mild in comparison to the naturalistic styles of Europe but was rejected flatly in this country for the "unhealthy forms of every day life" that it represented. Edward A. Dithmar, biographer of Augustin Daly, reacted strongly to the New York opening of this play.

Margaret Fleming is, indeed, the quintessence of the commonplace...The life it portrays is sordid and mean, and its effect upon a sensitive mind is depressing...Yet there is merit to be found in the piece, if we take the playwright's view...We are human beings as they really are.⁴²

This play was ahead of its time and never met with public approval. Henrik Ibsen's plays were also found to be immoral and did not receive artistic praise or commercial success until the twentieth century. A similar development in playwriting was that of William Gillette. His portrayal of Sherlock Holmes was accepted in much the same way as Jefferson's Rip Van Winkle, Frank Mayo's Davy Crockett, and James O'Neill's Count of Monte Cristo. He

⁴²Edward A. Dithmar, New York Times, December 10, 1891.

was unable to break the mold and his artistic life was stifled by the strong identification with the role in the public eye. Prior to this stamp that was put on the actor's talent, he demonstrated much the same foresightedness of Herne with his Secret Service. In this play, Gillette took the leading role of a Union spy in Richmond, Virginia. His characterization was presented in an extremely low-keyed manner which was to become known as the "natural school" of acting. These two plays, Margaret Fleming and Secret Service, foretold of the American drama to come, but was never realized until the post war era of the 1920's and 30's.

Since the advent of royalties and long-run policies, America could boast for the first time a group of playwrights writing for the professional theatre. In addition to Howard, Herne and Gillette, there were Clyde Fitch, George Ade, Augustus Thomas, Charles Hoyt, Edward Harrigan, as well as MacKaye and Daly, which is only to list the leading names of this era. There were two developments in playwrighting, one toward a spectacular realistic representation of romantic drama, the other toward a domestic realism creating on stage characters to show men as they "really" are. The height of the former was reached in the

spectacle of Ben Hur, adapted from Lew Wallace's novel, which opened in New York at the beginning of the twentieth century. This production was to tour the country with full spectacle rigging including mechanized tread mills and live horses. The other trend was held back by the Syndicate's rejection of plays that did not realize an immediate commercial return and America's rejection of the European plays of this nature.

It was the Syndicate that was formed in 1896 that brings the spirit of the nineteenth century to a close, beginning a highly commercial theatre based in New York which is twentieth century in its nature. The death knell to the nineteenth-century theatre was first sounded, paradoxically, with the opening of Shenandoah. The success of this play placed Charles Frohman in a position to begin his career as a producer, star maker, theatre builder and businessman of the theatre. By 1890, most towns of any size had some form of theatre that filled its bills with touring companies, as the resident companies outside of New York had failed in all but a few large cities. The traveling companies originated in New York and a yearly trip into the city for each theatre manager was required to book his upcoming season. This system proved to be

unsatisfactory to both the traveling companies, which could not be sure of a full season or travel schedule of any convenience, and the managers, who were fighting a no-holds-barred battle with each other. To ease this situation, managers and agencies made co-operative agreements and formed small combinations. Booking agencies began to grow, which, based on a strict commercial criteria, acted as traffic managers and go-betweens for companies and managers realizing large profits. In this era of trust formation throughout the land, it is quite natural that something similar would develop in the theatre. The Syndicate, as it was to be known, was formed when Sam Nixon and Fred Zimmerman, owners of a chain of theatres based in Philadelphia, Charles Frohman and Al Hayman, New York theatre producers, and Marc Klaw and Abraham Erlanger, the largest booking agency in New York, pooled their interests. These men controlled a considerable number of theatres, a large producing agency, and a booking agency which supplied attractions all over the nation. The enterprise snowballed into a monopoly of theatre interests and commercial theatre fell into the strong grip of the Syndicate. Theatre owners who joined were assured of full seasons with many stars, while theatre talent could be

assured of steady work for their co-operation with the organization. Certain individual theatre persons, who were at first large enough to oppose the organization, stood out against the Syndicate. James A. Herne, Mrs. Fiske, Richard Mansfield, James O'Neill and David Belasco, Frohman's former partner, were not to join with the rest of the profession, but to little avail.⁴³

During the nineteenth century, America saw the development of a theatre from a crude duplication of the London stage to a maturity of a unique American style. Once this theatre reached an artistic potential, outstanding actors, followed by strict manager-directors, developed a theatre to a degree of great theatrical activity. Financial gains lured literary talent to the theatre and an artistic development was fulfilled. However, this opportunity for financial reward also brought sound business practices to the New York stage, often to the detriment of an experimental and advancing theatrical spirit. It was this theatre industry that moved into and reached its height in the twentieth century American theatre.

⁴³Hewitt, pp. 256-257.

Chapter III
Biographical Sketch of
George Becks' Professional Career

George Becks worked in the American theatre for nearly a forty year period; however, his career never reached a high pinnacle of success, and he was mainly employed as a supporting actor and stage manager in various companies. His work as a stage manager is revealed in his collection of promptbooks located in the New York Public Library; however, most of the information compiled in order to furnish this biographical sketch comes from Thomas Allston Brown's History of the New York Stage, George C. D. Odell's Annals of the New York Stage, and newspaper references. With the exception of the promptbooks, these records emphasize his acting career, and it is through his achievements as an actor that George Becks' professional career may best be followed.

Niblo's Garden; 1860-1866.--George Becks' first

credit as a professional is found both in Brown¹ and Ode11² as having been at Niblo's Garden during the 1860-61 season. During this first year of the Civil War, manpower, including the available acting talent, was reduced; therefore, a number of positions in established acting companies were filled by relatively unknown personnel. Becks also seems to have come into New York with an amateur background from a theatre in Montreal, Canada. There is a promptbook of Soldier's Daughter³ dated 1860 in Montreal, Canada, indicating that Becks had prepared a career in theatre prior to his arrival in New York.

The 1860-61 season at Niblo's Garden was its first and only season under J. M. Nixon, whose circus held the boards of Niblo's during the summer of 1860. Nixon, not wishing to follow the failures of his predecessors, attempted to create a season aimed at a general audience. His opening on September 17, 1860, featured the return of

¹Thomas Allston Brown, A History of the New York Stage (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1903), I, 189. Hereafter referred to as: Brown.

²Ode11, VIII, 323.

³A. Cherry, Soldier's Daughter (New York: Samuel French, n.d.). George Becks' promptbook based on this acting edition is located at the New York Public Library. OSU Theatre Collection, P 468.

Edwin Forrest to New York after a four-year absence. Forrest played a repertory of Shakespearian tragedies and romantic pieces that was typical of his career, opening with Hamlet, and followed by Othello, Macbeth, The Gladiator, Metamora, etc. He played on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, leaving Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday as off nights that were filled with a great variety of entertainments. Nixon was constantly concerned with what to do on the off night and at first attempted opera. After a series of failures, he was forced to use the acting company he had assembled to support Forrest's repertory. Becks, who was a member of this company, gained his first New York recognition as an actor in the October 25th production of Watts Phillip's The Dead Heart⁴, the American debut of the play. The acting company continued to fill the off nights through February and Becks began to receive recognition in these shows as well as to get more demanding roles with the Forrest repertory. Becks is not mentioned after March of 1861 at Niblo's, but, again turning to his collection of plays, there is a promptbook based on an acting edition

⁴Ode11, VII, 322.

of The Dumb of Genoa⁵, dated 1861 in Albany, New York. Interestingly, this book is also signed by manager William Burton. It seems that Becks was able to procure one of Burton's books during this New York lay-off from March 1861 until January 7, 1862. Another promptbook in the Becks' collection, The Mysterious Stranger⁶, is dated 1861. There is no record of this being presented in the New York area during that year. This play may have served as the main bill following the very short, The Dumb of Genoa. Both of these plays were popular in the theatre of William Burton, and since Burton did appear at Niblo's during the 1860-61 season, Becks had access to his play repertory. Although the 1860-61 season was only a mild success for Niblo's Garden and marked the end of Nixon's managerial career, it was a most advantageous beginning for a young actor, because it put him in contact with a number of rising theatre personalities and with the New York audiences.

⁵B. J. Farrell, The Dumb of Genoa (Boston: William V. Spenser, n.d.) George Becks' promptbook based on this acting edition is located at New York Public Library. OSU Theatre Collection, P 531.

⁶Charles Selby, The Mysterious Stranger (London: National Acting Dramatic Office, 1844) George Becks' promptbook based on this acting edition is located at New York Public Library. OSU Theatre Collection, P 474.

Niblo's Garden reopened to dramatic fare when the management under Henry C. Jarrett booked the J. W. Wallack, Jr.-D. L. Davenport acting company for January and February of 1862. George Becks was included in the small Niblo's staff that was used to support the Wallack-Davenport company. When this company left Niblo's, the acting company with John Collins, Mrs. John Wood and L. R. Shewell, produced The Colleen Bawn on February 17 which ran until March 29th. At this time the Wallack-Davenport company returned without J. W. Wallack and was managed by Wheatley, Jarrett and Davenport. During the summer, William Wheatley remained at Niblo's Garden as the sole manager. George Becks had remained at Niblo's during this brief season from January until June and stayed through the summer, serving with Wheatley. He was associated with Davenport and Wallack during the two Wallack-Davenport series at Niblo's and Mrs. John Wood during the interim. This season saw the debut of Caroline Richings, the first New York recognition of Fanny Davenport, and the impressive casts of the Wallack-Davenport company including John Gilbert, Julia Irving and Mark Smith. For Becks the season introduced him to these theatrical personalities and two productions of The Colleen Bawn, one under the management of Mrs. John Wood,

February 17, 1862⁷, and one under William Wheatley on July 21st.⁸

The following season at Niblo's was Wheatley's first full season and was a highly successful one. He employed Edwin Forrest for the Fall season as Nixon had done two years previously. Forrest's run went until December, appearing on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, thus reducing the off nights to two. Wheatley was more successful with his off nights, allowing his company to perform with visiting stars such as J. H. Hackett and Matilda Heron in two of her better shows, Camille and East Lynne.

George Becks was very active in both the repertory of Edwin Forrest and the off night performances and is mentioned quite regularly in the supporting casts. Forrest and Heron both left in December, and the remainder of the season saw a variety of dramatic fare. Faust and Marguerite with scenery by Selwyn played the Christmas season, followed by Kate Bateman in Augustin Daly's adaptation Leah, the Foresaken. This premiere performance of Daly's work was a success and was repeated throughout this

⁷Brown, I, 191.

⁸Brown, I, 192.

season. In addition, Matilda Heron was brought back in East Lynne and Camille with a newcomer in the cast, John McCullough, who was soon to be a star and later Becks' employer. Becks was not included in the summer casts at Niblo's Gardens and was not to return the following season.

During the 1863-64 season, George Becks moved from being a minor supporting actor and backstage assistant at Niblo's Garden to a more important position at the newly formed company of Mrs. John Wood, who had moved into the Olympic Theatre. Laura Keane had given up on her New York managership at the Olympic the preceding year after a rather poor season. Mrs. Wood who had been in New York for some seasons was able to gather a young group of actors seeking greater opportunities in a new company. A number of them with high potential appeared at the Olympic during this season. Members who were to become outstanding in the theatre were J. H. Stoddart, Charles Wyndham, William Davidge and George Clarke. Becks was never to reach the heights of any of these, but during this season, he was considered the featured actor "borrowed from Niblo's."⁹ Only Stoddart shared Becks' featured spot.

⁹New York Times, September 6, 1863.

The New York Herald, however, found Becks to be featured before he was ready. In its commentary regarding Pocahontas, in which Becks played Captain John Smith, the Herald critic found "George Becks lacking in experience and far too youthful for a proper essay of Smith."¹⁰

The season at the Olympic was not a financial success for Mrs. Wood and except for the debut of Augustin Daly's adaptation of Papillon, rechristened Taming a Butterfly, which ran nearly a month from February 25, 1864 until March 21st, Mrs. Wood had to change her bill frequently and during some months, nightly. Taming a Butterfly marked Daly's second attempt to put one of his adaptations on the stage, and on both occasions George Becks was in the producing company. Butterfly was given better reviews than Leah, the Foresaken, but the former was not as successful. This poor season and the reviews that were given to Becks may be the reasons he returned to Niblo's in the fall of 1864.

William Wheatley had established a successful practice of having Edwin Forrest present his repertory of Shakespearian and Romantic plays during the season and filling

¹⁰New York Herald, October 19, 1863.

the off nights and interim periods with light pieces, usually headed by one of the popular female leads of the day. From 1864 until 1866, this was the system that was employed at Niblo's Garden. George Becks returned to Niblo's in September of 1864 and was a member of the regular season company until the spring of 1866. He was featured in a number of the Forrest offerings and was involved in most of the off night pieces. During these two seasons, he worked with Maggie Mitchell, William Wheatley, Mr. and Mrs. Barney Williams, and Mrs. Jean Davenport Lander, whose company he was later to join.

The main events in Becks' career during this two-season stay was his first appearance as Didier (figure 1) on October 24, 1864 with Maggie Mitchell in the lead role of Fanchon;¹¹ Maggie Mitchell's New York debut in Little Barefoot on June 20, 1865;¹² the appearance of Mrs. Jean Davenport Lander;¹³ the New York debut of Arrah Na Pogue on July 12, 1865, in which Becks served as assistant stage

¹¹Ode11, VII, 644.

¹²Ode11, VII, 644.

¹³Ode11, VII, 645.

Figure 1. George Becks as Didier. An engraving found in Becks' promptbook of Fanchon, the Cricket. Courtesy of The Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. OSU Theatre Collection P 871.

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UNIVERSITY MICROFILMS.

manager;¹⁴ the general betterment of the roles assigned to Becks; and his increased activities as a stage manager.

The Olympic Theatre; Fechter; The Fourteenth Street Theatre; 1866-1872.--Becks' importance to Wheatley and to Niblo's ended when Wheatley closed Niblo's Garden in the spring of 1866 in order to prepare the theatre for The Black Crook. The complete renovation of the stage and successful long run of The Black Crook ended any need for an acting company. From 1866 until his return to Niblo's in 1870, George Becks was associated with the Olympic Theatre under a series of managers. There are many breaks in Becks' stay at this theatre, and he was to appear in many additional theatres during this time.

On October 30, 1866, The Long Strike¹⁵ played at the Olympic Theatre. George Becks' promptbook of the production demonstrates his work as a stage manager in this company under Charles Wheatleigh. During this season, Becks stage-managed Wheatleigh's production of Daly's

¹⁴Ode11, VII, 647.

¹⁵Dion Boucicault, The Long Strike (New York: Samuel French, n.d.) George Becks' promptbook based on this acting edition is located at the New York Public Library. OSU Theatre Collection, P 248.

Under the Gaslight.¹⁶ Becks was to adapt this script and include it in his own repertory of promptbooks. The following season Becks was able to use this script again, thus furthering his career. Becks was also to appear away from the Olympic at Wood's Theatre Comique in March and April of 1867, under the managership of F. M. Bates. He was also at Seaver's Opera House in Brooklyn in August of 1867. The longest break away from the Olympic during this time was from March 1868 until September 1869, during which time G. L. Fox held the boards with his two famous pantomimes, Humpty Dumpty and Hiccory Diccory Dock. During this time, which is roughly equivalent to the 1868-69 season, Becks appeared at the New Broadway Theatre, under the lease of Becks' colleague from the 1864-65 season at Niblo's Garden, Barney Williams. The stage manager at this theatre was Mr. John Moore. George Becks and John Moore worked together during this full season,¹⁷ which included two long stays by Mrs. Jean Davenport Lander,

¹⁶Augustin Daly, Under the Gaslight (New York: Printed for the Author, n.d.). George Becks' promptbook based on this acting edition is located at the New York Public Library. OSU Theatre Collection, P 508. Hereafter referred to as: Under the Gaslight (Becks), P 508.

¹⁷Andre Tsai, p. 15.

Figure 2. Becks' note crediting the promptbook of Under the Gaslight to Charles Wheatleigh.

The note reads:

Charles Wheatleigh's

Marks by himself

George Becks

June, 1896

Courtesy of The Theatre Collection, The
New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and
Tilden Foundations. OSU Theatre
Collection P 508.

another former colleague of Becks from Niblo's. In September through November, William J. Florence presented No Thoroughfare, Thrice Married and, on November 2, 1868, The Ticket of Leave Man. The season continued with a variety of plays and visiting stars until April 28, 1869, which marked the last performance in this theatre that was razed later that spring.

During the following September, Fox's Hicory Diccory Dock closed at his Olympic. This second of Fox's pantomimes did not meet with as much public favor as Humpty Dumpty; therefore, Fox was caught without a prepared season. He quickly gathered together many of the old Olympic company that his Humpty Dumpty had replaced and opened with Uncle Tom's Cabin on September 4, 1869. Becks was included in the new company and played St. Clair in the production. Following Uncle Tom's Cabin, the company, stage managed by George Becks, presented The Poor of New York (entitled The Streets of New York)¹⁸ and Under the

¹⁸Dion Boucicault, The Poor of New York (New York: Samuel French, n.d.) George Becks' promptbook based on this acting edition entitled The Streets of New York is located at the New York Public Library. OSU Theatre Collection, P 508.

Gaslight.¹⁹ This production was based on the same prompt-book that Becks had used under the management of Charles Wheatleigh in 1866. When his acting did keep him employed, he was able to use this collection as a source of revenue, and when the long run, the road and the productions of original plays closed Becks out of New York, his collection served to be his means of employment.

G. L. Fox returned to his theatre with The Writing on the Wall which featured a model farm as a setting. Becks appeared as Sir Phillip Elton, a somewhat commanding role, but no evidence supports his working as a stage manager for this somewhat outlandish spectacle. As Fox prepared for his parody production of Hamlet, in which he burlesqued Edwin Booth and later Charles Fechter in the leading roles, Becks returned to Niblo's Garden to portray Osric in Fechter's production of Hamlet.

Barry Williams, having closed the Broadway Theatre, was at Niblo's Garden and was searching for a company that could support the visiting French stars, Charles Fechter and Carlotta Leclercq. Fechter's appearance at Niblo's was extremely successful, and the public was interested in

¹⁹Under the Gaslight (Becks), P 508.

seeing the star in the role of Hamlet that had stirred the London audiences. Fechter was a factor in the antiquarian movement in England and France. In England, he had represented the character of Hamlet in a flowing blonde wig and placed emphasis on the melodramatic action of the play, as opposed to a poetic reading of the lines.²⁰ Williams had worked with Becks at the Broadway and hired him away from Fox's company. Becks remained at Niblo's after Hamlet, shunning Fox's offer to return to the Olympic for his parody of Macbeth. This stay at Niblo's was a short one because Williams, in much the same way as William Wheatley had done four years previously, forsook his acting company and his stars by bringing in Lydia Thompson and her British Blondes. Most of the Niblo's company, including Becks, formed a new company with Fechter and opened at the French Theatre for the remainder of the 1869-70 season.

In 1870, Charles Fechter left New York and the French Theatre and appeared in Boston at the Globe Theatre. He planned to establish himself as a star with Carlotta Leclercq and form a company in Boston under his management. Becks appeared with Fechter at the Globe but did not

²⁰Earnest Bradlee Watson, From Sheridan to Robertson (London: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1926), pp. 235-40.

remain in the Fechter acting company. Becks returned to New York to join Lawrence Barrett at Niblo's Garden during the Fall season. This company included such standouts as F. C. Bangs, Charles Thorne Jr., and old favorite of the New York stage, Madame Ponisi. Following Barrett was "Lotta" Crabtree, whose successes of earlier years were dwindling. The attendance at Niblo's fell and the management hired an opera company, replacing the acting troupe. Becks went back to the French Theatre, rechristened the Fourteenth Street Theatre under the management of Mrs. Jean Davenport Lander. Becks was called in to act as stage manager of his own prompt copy of Frou Frou,²¹ which was based on Daly's original productions. After this production at the Fourteenth Street Theatre, Becks was called upon by J. W. Wallack to be stage manager for Wallack's company performing at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. This company presented The Poor Gentleman²² and Heir at

²¹Ode11, IX, 39, and Frou Frou (Becks), P 1323.

²²Ode11, IX, 106, and George Coleman, the younger, The Poor Gentleman (New York: Samuel French, n.d.). George Becks' promptbook based on this acting edition is located at the New York Public Library. OSU Theatre Collection, P 404.

Law²³ under Becks' management, probably employing his promptbooks of these pieces. Becks then went with Laura Keene's company appearing at the Lina Edwin Theatre. This theatre at 720 Broadway was under many titles after its opening as Hope Chapel and became the Lina Edwin in 1870. In this company, which presented Hunted Down, was Minnie Maddern. This was the third time that this child actress was to appear in the same company as Becks.²⁴

During the remainder of the season, Becks was a part of two events that marked the twilight of an era. Edwin Forrest appeared for three weeks at the Fourteenth Street Theatre. On his closing with Richelieu on February 6, 1871, "after twenty nights the curtain fell for the last time between Edwin Forrest and a New York audience."²⁵ In April of that same year, also at the Fourteenth Street Theatre, Laura Keene's Company presented William Creswick

²³Ode11, IX, 106, and George Coleman, the younger, Heir at Law (London: G. H. Davidson, n.d.). George Becks' promptbook based on this acting edition is located at the New York Public Library. OSU Theatre Collection, P 485.

²⁴Ode11, (Maddern's debut, Niblo's) VIII, 603; (Maddern's second appearance, Brooklyn Academy of Music) IX, 106; (Maddern's third appearance, Lina Edwin's) IX, 53.

²⁵Lawrence Barrett, Life of Forrest as cited in Ode11, IX, 41.

and Laura Keene in Nobody's Child. This was to follow her earlier success of Hunted Down at the Lina Edwin but failed to arouse the public. She returned to Hunted Down, but its popularity had been expended by its earlier run. Becks was in the cast of both of these ill-fated productions, as he was present the following season at Wood's Museum that marked the final presentation of Laura Keene. It was this disastrous failure of Nobody's Child and Hunted Down, however, that truly sounded the death knell of her career.²⁶

The end of Laura Keene's career in April of 1872 marked only one sad event during this season for George Becks. In the fall of 1871, Charles Fechter returned from the Globe Theatre in Boston. Feeling that his managerial failure in Boston was only due to the theatrical climate of the Boston area, Fechter raised money to completely renovate the Fourteenth Street Theatre. Becks was a member of Fechter's staff and invested in the project. Before the renovation was complete Fechter had spent more than he had raised and the theatre fell into the hands of his creditors. This failure hurt Becks, who had invested

²⁶Ode11, IV, 160.

a great deal of time and money in the effort. For the remainder of the season, Becks' theatrical activities were limited to the Laura Keane production of Sea of Ice at Wood's and a series of Sunday concerts at the New York Grand Opera House. The latter, a scenic spectacle entitled Lalla Rookh, featured Becks in the cast; however, there is no evidence as to his backstage activities regarding this production.

Wallack; Lander; Palmer; McCullough; 1872-1879.--

J. W. Wallack usually played other theatres in New York. He often sent his company out under the management of others, as was the case in 1871 when Becks was hired to manage the Wallack Company in Brooklyn. In 1872, which was to be Wallack's last season, he opened at Booth's Theatre with Eichmann-Chatrian's The Bells. Becks was included in the supporting company at Booth's. It is not clear if he was hired by the management at Booth's or by Wallack, but he remained at the Booth's Theatre when Wallack left, acting with Dion Boucicault and Agnes Robertson in their return to New York after a ten-year absence. Later this same season, Edwin Booth presented his last production, Brutus, at his own theatre. Becks played Claudius in this production and Buckingham in

Richard III, which Booth had opened in December of 1872. Following Booth's departure in February, William J. Florence ran at Booth's Theatre until Boucicault returned in March with Daddy O'Dowd. Becks was to remain with Boucicault and appear with this company during the summer at Wallack's Theatre, under the management of Lester Wallack, following the death of J. W. Wallack on May 24, 1873.

The Fourteenth Street Theatre was renamed the Lyceum Theatre in the fall of 1873 under the managership of W. L. Mansell. The company included Thomas C. King, Charles Wheatleigh, Sol Smith and Miss Jeffereys Lewis. Becks served as stage manager for Mansell during the season.²⁷ In December, Charles Fechter played this theatre with Lady of Lyons and other plays of his repertory. In March, Clara Morris, under a special release from A. M. Palmer, played Camille. It was Palmer's revival of this play with this star that had made Palmer's 1872-73 season an outstanding success, as was discussed in Chapter II. However, the poor location of this theatre was too much for Fechter or Clara Morris to overcome, and the season closed early

²⁷Ode11, IX, 417.

in spring after the latter's production. Wallack's at Thirteenth and Broadway commanded this area, while the newer theatres were being located to the north following the direction of the city's growth. For Becks, however, the season was to introduce him to A. M. Palmer, leading to further opportunities in later seasons.

During the next two seasons George Becks worked with the traveling acting company of Mrs. Jean Davenport Lander. For these two seasons, neither Becks' collection nor the New York stage records give much information as to Becks' stage appearances. The Lander company toured the Eastern seaboard appearing in Baltimore, Washington, Philadelphia and Boston. Several New York and Brooklyn performances included Becks with the company. Becks left this company in 1876--under contract to Shook and Palmer to manage the Brooklyn Theatre as a second theatre for the Union Square Theatre Company. George Becks' earlier contract with A. M. Palmer had brought him to the attention of this growing acting company. Becks had served as stage manager, using Palmer's promptbooks, and was employed on this occasion to do this same job in Brooklyn. Becks managed this theatre during the fall of 1876. The theatre's existence was cut short by one of the most

tragic theatre fires during this period. A fire broke out during the sell-out performance of Kate Claxton in The Two Orphans. Over one hundred patrons were killed, and actors Claude Burroughs and Harry S. Murdock, Frank Murdock's nephew, died in the flames.²⁸ Becks, cleared of any responsibility of the disaster, joined John McCullough's company at Booth's Theatre in April of 1877. Becks, who had worked with McCullough at Niblo's fifteen years before, remained with this company during the summer at the New York Academy of Music. The relationship of Becks to the company was similar to the one he had had with the Forrest company. McCullough had served an apprenticeship under Forrest, and his style of acting and selections of plays were nearly identical. Becks acted with McCullough in Othello, Damon and Pythias, Virginus and other Romantic pieces.

Becks' career, which had to this point altered between seasons of great activity and unfortunate lay-offs, was extremely active during the next season. His 1877-78 season was spent at Daly's Fifth Avenue Theatre, but not under the patronage of Augustin Daly. Daly had

²⁸New York Times, December 6, 1876 and New York Herald, December 6, 1876.

been forced into a touring season due to outstanding debts in New York, and the owner of the Fifth Avenue Theatre, Mr. Stephen Fisk, reopened after Daly's departure in October of 1877. George Becks was a member of this acting company and shared in stage managerial duties.²⁹ The Fifth Avenue Theatre featured the debut of Mary Anderson during this season. The opening of this young star on November 12, 1877 in Lady of Lyons was a memorable event in New York. Mary Anderson was unique in that she was never a supporting actress, starting as a star, sponsored by Fisk. After her most successful debut, she attempted Charlotte Cushman's role of Meg in Guy Mannering, in which she was acclaimed by the New York public as a new star.³⁰ On December 22nd, Anderson ended her run in Ingomar at a matinee performance. That evening Helena Modjeska made her New York debut in Andrienne Lecouvreur by Eugene Scribe. This production was under the direction of Dion Boucicault and was stage managed by Becks.³¹ Modjeska's great popularity in New York did not begin until her

²⁹Ode11, X, 370-74.

³⁰New York Times, November 14, 1877.

³¹Ode11, X, 376.

performance in Camille in January of 1878. From this point she was to become, along with Anderson, one of the most popular stars of the New York stage. Becks finished out the season with the McCullough company at the Park Theatre in Brooklyn and the New York Grand Opera House during the summer. Becks was to remain with McCullough until the 1879-80 season.

This contract between Becks and McCullough began when Becks took leave from the Fifth Avenue to appear as Didier in a benefit for John Brougham. Brougham, a favorite actor and playwright in England and America, was in financial trouble; thus, a great number of New York actors put on one of the most notable benefits in American theatrical history. This benefit, which was presented on January 17, 1878, was on such a scale that it played in the afternoon and evening without any repetition. Included on the afternoon bill was E. A. Southern and company in A Regular Fix; Maggie Mitchell in Fanchon, the Cricket with George Becks as Didier; the trial scene from The Merchant of Venice with Edwin and Agnes Booth (their only appearance together) John Gilbert, James O'Neill and Jeffereys Lewis; Charles Fechter in The Count of Monte Cristo, and the balcony scene from Romeo and Juliet, featuring Helena

Modjeska and W. F. Burroughs. That evening included Eben Plympton, Ada Dyas, Madame Ponisi in Wolf in Sheep's Clothing; Clara Morris in Jane Eyre; John McCullough in Othello (Becks as Roderigo); Frank Mayo, J. W. Colling, John T. Raymond and many other celebrities. Brougham appeared on both occasions to deliver speeches and sing songs.³² It is interesting to note that Becks, included as Didier in this host of outstanding theatre performers, was also a part of McCullough's presentation. This was Becks' eighteenth year as an actor in New York and even though he had never reached the level of a star or even a regular featured performer, he was known in the theatrical circles of the day as an actor and stage manager.

In the following season, 1878-79, Becks remained with John McCullough, appearing around the New York area in a number of one night stands, benefits and short runs. Records show this company at The Fifth Avenue, New York Grand Opera, New Bowery Theatre, The Park in Brooklyn and many other houses. It is after this season that Becks' name is seldom linked to any acting roles, and he seems to have submerged himself into a backstage endeavor.

³²New York Times, January 19, 1878.

Wallack's New Theatre; Brooklyn; 1879-1890.--George

Becks' career made a major change after his tour with John McCullough. Since there are very few evidences of Becks activities in the theatre after 1878, his promptbook collection is of great value in order to fill in the remaining active years of his career. These scripts were probably used for any number of productions and each one could represent a number of years in the man's life. Unfortunately, only a few scripts can be accurately traced to a specific performance; thus, a great deal of the man's work is lost to history. It can be seen that the promptbooks are more numerous during periods when Becks is not as active as a performing artist.

The collection contains three promptscripts that can be traced to Wallack's acting company from 1878-1884. It would seem that Becks worked with this company occasionally as a stage manager during these seasons. A script of The Jealous Wife is dated 1878, and, from newspaper clippings from the book, can be traced to Wallack's production on October 31, 1878.³³ At this time, Becks was working

³³George Coleman, the elder, The Jealous Wife (New York: Samuel French, n.d.); George Becks' promptbook based on this acting edition is located in the New York Public Library. OSU Theatre Collection, P 490.

with McCullough, but these activities were centered in New York and Becks could have held down both positions. Tom Robertson's School is the subject of one of Becks' scripts that is indicated to be at Wallack's in 1880.³⁴ This may represent the first time this promptbook was used by Becks; however, this is impossible to determine. The writing on the promptbook, however, does link with the Wallack production of 1880. The 1880-81 season marked Wallack's last at his Thirteenth Street location and consisted mostly of Wallack revivals, requiring little or no alterations from past productions. School had not yet been adapted into Wallack's repertory and it is quite natural that he would call upon a stage manager to come into the company to stage the production.

A brief look at the seasons of 1880-1881, 1881-1882 indicates the trends in theatre of that time, which influenced Becks' career. In the season of 1880-81, Wallack offered the same repertory which had established his name and that of his father, employing no new staging methods or presentational aspects. The following season

³⁴Thomas W. Robertson, School (New York: Robert M. Dewitt n.d.). George Becks' promptbook based on this acting edition is located at the New York Public Library. OSU Theatre Collection, P 490.

marks Wallack's move from Thirteenth Street to a theatre of relatively the same size further uptown. The theatre district had continually followed the northerly growth of the city and Wallack felt the need to join the progression. Before the move, a person such as Becks was an asset to such a company so large that it operated out of one theatre and could fill a series of other theatres in and around the city. When Wallack was away from his theatre he needed a man to manage the home theatre and to put on plays in an acceptable traditional manner. Any innovation in the productions was under the leadership of the company's manager or imported in the form of a traveling show. Furthermore, on occasions when Wallack remained at his theatre, usually during a "long run" situation, he could send out members of his company to other theatres under the management of an assistant. A man such as Becks with nearly twenty years of experience and with a collection of his own scripts was ideal for this assignment. During the opening of this new theatre, however, there was no occasion in which to use such a person. The season opened late on January 4, 1882, and Wallack remained with his company. There were only four plays presented during the entire season. The production of School for Scandal, which

opened the theatre, was not in need of any outside assistance, being one of the major pieces associated with Wallack's. The American debut of Arthur Wing Pinero's The Money Spinner did not call for a man with a collection of established works, since all of the creation of this production was under the direct surveillance of Lester Wallack. In February, Wallack imported a spectacular melodrama, entitled The World. Actors, settings, costumes and properties were brought in from England, again a "closed shop" for a free lance worker such as Becks. The season ended with La Belle Russe which was also imported nearly intact, requiring little of the management.

Under these conditions, George Becks worked as a stage manager-at-large, using his promptbooks to put on benefits, filling off nights for companies, or filling in managerial vacancies. From 1879 until his death, he was to be connected with only one professional company for a full season 1890-91. His promptbook of Married Life,³⁵ shows that he was to work with Wallack in 1883, but he was not a member of the company. Lester Wallack's Company

³⁵John B. Buckstone, Married Life (London: Chapman and Hill, n.d.) George Becks' promptbook based on this acting edition is located at the New York Public Library. OSU Theatre Collection, P 323.

and Theatre was starting to slide as Palmer at the Union Square and Daly back in New York took to the forefront as the leading managers. In an attempt to please the public, Lester Wallack began giving many more short revivals, including those comedies which had made him famous, contrasting the long run seasons at Palmer's and Daly's. Married Life, not a part of the Wallack repertory, was brought in with George Becks as stage manager. The following season, on December 2, 1884, Becks was again at Wallack's for a single run, this time with London Assurance.³⁶

In addition during this time, Becks appeared at other theatres in New York. His production of The Elder Brother³⁷ at the Broadway Theatre in 1883 is recorded in his own collection. However, the nature of his work as a stage manager limited his use to the three established companies

³⁶Dion Boucicault, London Assurance (London: J. Andrews, 1841) George Becks promptbook based on this acting edition is located at the New York Public Library. OSU Theatre Collection, P 114.

³⁷Beaumont and Fletcher, The Elder Brother (New York: Douglas Printer, 1848) George Becks promptbook based on this acting edition is located at the New York Public Library. OSU Theatre Collection, P 558.

of Daly, Palmer and Wallack, all having their own prompters. The other theatres were being operated by a great number of managers that were not able to establish a lasting company. The New York stage being closed for the most part to George Becks, he was forced out of the inner circle of theatrical activities during the early 1880's. This departure from Manhattan was not the end of his career but indicates a major change. Becks was to continue his profession as an actor but mainly relied on his work as a stage manager across the East River in Brooklyn.

George C. D. Odell alludes to Brooklyn as the "city of amateurs" on many occasions in his Annals of the New York Stage and indicates that many of these amateur productions equaled the professional stage. In the 1870's one dramatic organization called Amaranth was formed in Brooklyn for the purpose of dramatic study and production. This group functioned and grew until 1880, at which time an internal struggle broke the organization into two groups, Amaranth and the Kemble Society. The latter, formed on December 21, 1880, resolved to hire professionals to aid them in their productions, and, by 1885, over fifteen of these amateur groups were presenting plays and

operas, "directed" by professionals.³⁸ The Amaranth was also hiring professional help by 1882.³⁹

Throughout the 1880's, Becks' name appears with amateur groups in Brooklyn: In November, 1882, Becks staged a production of Othello for the Kemble Society, and is given credit as "director".⁴⁰ During that season Becks also produced The Wedding March by W. S. Gilbert and Masks and Faces. The following year Becks "directed" Frou Frou as "originally staged at Daly's Fifth Avenue Theatre."⁴¹ Becks, as this study has indicated, used this same prompt-book when he worked with Mrs. Lander in 1870. Having a promptbook based on Daly's original was a strong advertisement for the production and for Becks. Becks is listed in Harry C. Miner's American Dramatic Directory⁴² as living on Fulton Street in New York, but his greatest

³⁸Ode11, XI, 43.

³⁹Ode11, XII, 173.

⁴⁰Ode11, XII, 173.

⁴¹Ode11, XII, 322, and Frou Frou (Becks), P 1323.

⁴²Harry C. Miner, American Dramatic Directory: Season of 1884-5 (New York: Wolf and Palmer Dramatic Publishing Company, 1884), p. 18.

activity during the 1880's was in Brooklyn.

Becks was not to forsake his acting or association with professional companies. He appeared regularly during the 1883-84 season with W. J. Florence at The New York Grand Opera House, and Union Square Theatre. Both of these theatres were under the control of Becks' old employer, Shook, and his new partner, Collier. That same season at Haverly's Brooklyn Theatre, Becks worked with the Arcadian Theatre Group on two occasions. Throughout the remainder of the 80's Becks continued to work with these groups. On October 30, 1886, Becks adapted Road to Ruin⁴³ for Harry C. Miner and the Kemble Society. A playbill from that evening demonstrates Becks' position with the performance (figure 3). Later that same year, in December, Becks "directed" Richelieu for the St. Paul's Lyceum, another amateur group in Brooklyn. The following December, he was back with the Arcadian Theatre Group. In conjunction with J. D. Billings, he "directed" Othello with J. J. Crowley taking the title role. The Brooklyn theatre scene had certainly taken on a semi-professional tone by this date.

⁴³Road to Ruin (Becks), P 582.

Figure 3. Advertisement for The Road to Ruin. Courtesy of The Theatre Collection, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. OSU Theatre Collection P 582.

The Garden Theatre; Boston; 1890-1904.--Ironically, when George Becks had finally procured a stable career in Brooklyn, he broke from it and appeared for a full season, as an actor in New York. It is apparent that he was often thought of by managers for special benefits or as a featured attraction for debuts and openings. Becks was present at the debut of Minnie Maddern, John McCullough, Mary Anderson, Helena Modjeska, Fanny Davenport, in her first major role, as well as Caroline Richings. Becks was in the acting companies that first gave Daly's Leah, the Foresaken and Taming a Butterfly, and Mrs. John Wood's first season. G. L. Fox turned to Becks when he needed a production immediately following the foreshortened run of Hicory Diccory Dock, as did Wallack in the declining years of his company. John Brougham's benefit is another example of Becks' popularity among theatre persons, who needed to raise strong supporting companies for such programs. Becks is included in a number of benefits, often playing his best known role of Didier. Becks' return to the New York stage for the 1890-91 season was at the request of Samuel French who was opening the Garden Theatre. On September 27, 1890, Becks played Horton in an original farce, Dr. Bill. Later a short piece, Sunset, was added as a curtain raiser which

also included Becks. This bill ran 101 nights, and when French was able to replace it at The Garden, the entire company moved the program to the New York Grand Opera, finishing the season there. The closing of Sunset and Dr. Bill at the Grand Opera House marks Becks' last New York credit. His collection of promptbooks had been built by this time and his continued use of them was not recorded in his collection. There are only a few that can be traced to performances during the 1890's. It can be assumed that Becks continued his career as stage manager outside of the New York stage, but no record exists to verify this claim.

As early as 1890, Becks was working in Boston. In his promptbook of Fanchon, the Cricket,⁴⁴ which includes Becks' best known role of Didier, Becks has included a playbill that locates him in Boston on May 29, 1890 (figure 4). The Brooklyn amateur movement did not hold Becks' interest. He abandoned it for Boston in 1890, and returned to the New York stage during the following season. The remainder of references concerning Becks' career come from his collection, and they are all centered in Boston.

⁴⁴Fanchon, the Cricket, P 871.

Figure 4. Playbill for Fanchon, the Cricket. Courtesy of The Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. OSU Theatre Collection P 871.

In one of his promptbooks of Led Astray,⁴⁵ the script is prepared for a Boston production in 1902, with Nance O'Neil as one of the supporting cast. In this script he refers to an earlier production of Far Away Lands which was produced throughout the United States in the late 90's (figure 5). In addition, a script of She Stoops to Conquer⁴⁶ places him again in Boston the following year.

The changing times on the New York stage in the early 1880's first caused Becks to be limited to benefits and part-time employment in New York. He compensated for this by going to the Brooklyn amateur productions as a stage manager. After a successful season in New York in 1890-91, Becks was not able to continue to be employed in New York. The formation of the Syndicate in 1896, logically meant a "closed shop" in New York for Becks. He was not a member of any outstanding company and his reserve of old shows was not in demand in a theatre system that was centered around long runs on Broadway and touring companies of original plays. Becks' acting and stage managerial

⁴⁵Led Astray (Becks), P 1691.

⁴⁶Oliver Goldsmith, She Stoops to Conquer (Boston: Walter H. Baker, 1897), George Becks' promptbook based on this acting edition is located at the New York Public Library. OSU Theatre Collection, P 576.

Figure 5. Becks' dedication of the promptbook of Led Astray to Nance O'Neil. The dedication reads:

To my good Friend
Miss Nance O'Neil
With every good wish, and pleasant
memories of happy hours in Far
Away Lands.

George Becks

New York

Oct. 8th, 1902

Courtesy of The Harvard Theatre Collection.
OSU Theatre Collection P 1691.

abilities were not a marketable commodity; therefore, there was no place for him in the Syndicate which controlled the city. The productions of Far Away Lands, Led Astray and She Stoops to Conquer which Becks was associated with during the 1890's were not a part of the Syndicate and may have been amateur productions.

George Becks was slowly phased out of the professional theatre in New York as the nature of the theatre structure changed. His collection of promptbooks enabled him to gain employment in Brooklyn with the many amateur dramatic societies. In the last years of his career, Becks moved away from the New York area becoming involved in the Boston theatre. His use of this collection of promptbooks became his source of income. On the fly page of his promptbook of Led Astray (figure 6), which Becks presented to Nance O'Neil in 1904, appears the following warning: "This book is for Miss O'Neil's own Library and use. Not for every ? prompter to--take a copy--therefore have a copy made-- ? for stage use."⁴⁷ This demonstrates the value of these books to Becks. It is this record of his work that will be the subject of the remainder of this study.

⁴⁷Led Astray (Becks), P 1691.

Figure 6. Becks' warning regarding the re-use of his promptbook of Led Astray. The note reads:
This book is for Miss O'Neil's own
library and use. Not for every
? prompter to -- take a copy --
therefore have a copy made -- ?
for stage use.

Courtesy of The Harvard Theatre Collection.
OSU Theatre Collection P 1691.

Chapter IV

Frou Frou and Fanchon, the Cricket

As an introduction to the work of George Becks as a stage manager, two representative promptbooks may serve as guidelines in disclosing the significance of the full collection. A general overview may be achieved by brief analysis of his promptbooks of Frou Frou¹ adapted by Augustin Daly from a French drama of the same name by Henri Meilhac and Ludovia Halevy, and Fanchon, the Cricket² adapted from a short play by George Sand.

Frou Frou is a good representative of the many translations of the continental drama that were popular in American Theatre during this time. It was one of Daly's earlier works which preceded a long line of such translations. Many of these plays that he introduced at his own theatre were quickly adopted or directly duplicated by the many theatres in New York. Becks was to include this work

¹Frou Frou (Becks), P 1323.

²Fanchon, the Cricket (Becks), P 871.

in his collection in the early 1870's when the box setting was becoming the mode of stage technique in this country. This early use of this script was to influence Becks' later work and was to help shape Becks' artistic achievements in the later years of his career.

Similarly, Fanchon, the Cricket is an earlier adaptation of continental theatre. The role of Didier was Becks' most successful as an actor, and marks the high point of his public acclaim. The play, however, was also important to Becks as a substantial part of his collection of promptbooks that he used a number of times for revivals of the piece. In these books are located the majority of the identifying marks that characterize Becks' work, including ground plans and random technical cues. A brief look at the scenes from these plays as they were presented by Becks offers insight into the man's endeavors as a stage manager.

Production data for Frou Frou.--The first production of Frou Frou was presented at Daly's Fifth Avenue Theatre on February 15, 1870, under the auspices of Daly, who was known up to this time as a dramatic critic, adapter of Leah, the Forsaken and Taming a Butterfly, and the author of his original, Under the Gaslight. The 1869-70 season

was Daly's first as a theatre manager. After John Brougham's failure as a manager, Daly went to James Fiske, Jr., the owner of the theatre building, and leased the theatre for the season. Engaged in an enterprise that would have surely failed under the management of many, Daly somehow managed to pay high rentals, remodel the theatre, and manage a full company of actors. He presented a number of new plays, including Tom Robertson's Play, along with his adaptations and some standard pieces. The outstanding feature of the early part of the season was his great variety and outstanding acting company. Unfortunately he was not able to present anything that commanded a successful financial venture during the fall season; however, when he abandoned his desire to present a variety of outstanding works and presented his somewhat common adaptation of Frou Frou, he achieved financial success.

Daly's production featured Agnes Ethel as the heroine, Gilberte. Ironically, her subsequent fame derived from this success led to her departure from Daly's company. Included in the cast were Fanny Davenport in a minor role, which also led to a major split between Daly and this actress, Kate Newton, making her first appearance with

Daly, and George Clarke and William Davidge, who were mainstays of the company. The play ran from February through the remainder of the season. Nearly every benefit that was presented that following spring was a performance of Frou Frou. This series of benefits included George Holland's benefit on May 16, 1870, which marked his last appearance on the stage. In the seasons following this successful run at Daly's, Frou Frou was one of the most popular plays in the American Theatre. Scores of playhouses filled their auditoriums with revivals and adaptations of the original.³


Becks' association with Frou Frou.--The popular leading ladies of this era were very quick to add the role of Gilberte to their repertory. Mrs. Jean Davenport Lander, who was a bit beyond the role in years, was no exception to the trend, presenting the play at the Fourteenth Street Theatre the season following its debut. On November 23, 1870, she played the role in a version of Frou Frou that she advertised was adapted especially for her. She came to the theatre one month earlier, presenting Mary Stuart as well as other plays from her


³Ode11, VIII, 571-80.

repertoire, thus giving her time to prepare Frou Frou.⁴ George Becks was in the Lander Company and had been at the Fourteenth Street Theatre the previous season. He was cast in the earlier Lander productions at this time but did not appear in Frou Frou. It is not unlikely to surmise that he was involved in the production aspects of this play and judging from his earlier career; he would have been a natural choice in assisting Mrs. Lander with her adaptation. Becks' promptbook of this play is based on the Daly original as published by Samuel French to which Becks has added certain technical and staging aspects as well as some alterations in movement and dialogue. It is likely that Mrs. Lander's adapted script would call for no more alteration than is included in this promptscript. George Becks was to procure a popular play with complete staging notation to enrich his growing collection.

Analysis of the promptbook of Frou Frou.--The promptbook includes the cast list of the Daly production as well as a dedication of the play to its original leading lady, Agnes Ethel. As was customary, Daly's technical notes and

⁴Ode11, IX, 39.

staging description were included in the printed edition. These were carefully underlined by Becks and followed rather closely, and Becks' ground plans were generally true to the scenic descriptions. The alterations are scattered throughout the script but never constitute a major deviation from the original. The book lends itself to a study of Becks' manner of organizing a script for production. His use of the symbols that were commonly used to correlate technical descriptions of movement or alter dialogue to the point in the script where they were to occur followed a standard pattern employed by most. A great many different geometric shapes and symbols were employed; but there was hardly any consistency as to a symbol always representing one specific aspect of the production. However, George Becks was consistent in his use of  to indicate music cues. This symbol was often used in earlier promptbooks but for a somewhat different reason.

The earliest symbol for "Whistle", dating from Restoration times, was a circle with a dot in it, thus;  During the eighteenth century several variants appeared, including undotted circles, double dotted circles, and pairs of circles connected with horizontal lines. No constant patterns of meaning for these different circle

symbols can be established.⁵

Becks was by no means the only man to have a consistency in the use of a prompt mark, but this specific usage is one characteristic of his work. In the promptbook of Frou Frou, the opening of Act I is organized under Becks' signature. He indicated that he planned to follow the acting edition by his careful underlining of setting descriptions and actor's positions. He further indicated property lists, music cues, a diagram of the ground plan (figure 7), technical notes, and warning cues for the actors. The music cue is marked with a circle with a dot in it, while a sound cue is marked by a symbol representing the sign of a sharp in musical notation. This symbol appears later in Act II for a lighting cue. No consistency in its use can be established. The former symbol remains solely for music cues throughout (figure 8). This consistency is true in the other promptbooks of George Becks, while the "sharp" and the many other symbols seem to have no meaningful organization.

Another characteristic of a Becks promptbook is his use of a hurriedly scribbled pointing hand to mark

⁵Charles H. Shattuck, The Shakespeare Promptbooks (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), p. 19.

Figure 7. Becks' plan for Act I, Frou Frou. Courtesy of The Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. OSU Theatre Collection P 1323.

important cues that required any combination of changes or seemingly required Becks to perpetrate the action. In preparing for the opening of Act II, no setting change is required, but stage properties must be varied. This type of change involved Becks directly; thus, he used this ultra-warn device, the hand (figure 8). As was the case of the dotted circle, Becks is not the only stage manager to use the hand, but his consistent use of it and its haphazard scribbled appearance is quite unique to Becks. In this promptbook, Becks uses the hand quite readily to indicate cues that need his attention. For example, in the first act, there is no need for this usage, but the second act requires it frequently. Early in the act, the hand appears with "ready Knock R.", which is a cue that will involve Becks, who will probably be the one to make the actual sound. At the moment when the knock should occur, Becks has placed another hand pointing to the line in the script. This sound effect is not indicated in the acting edition and has been added by Becks. The knock which soon follows is in the edited script. Here the warning hand appears with "Ready Knock R1E", a more specific location as the character has supposedly moved from an outside door through the house to the door leading into

Figure 8. Becks' stage directions for Act III,
Frou Frou. Courtesy of The Theatre Collection,
The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and
Tilden Foundations. OSU Theatre Collection
P 1323.

the room represented by the setting. The point in the script for the second knock is indicated parenthetically by the printed edition, and Becks found no reason to emphasize this by a hand; perhaps the actor playing the role assumed the responsibility to knock prior to his own entrance. Midway into II, the hand appears again to warn an upcoming sound effect, this time the use of a bell. This is not the warning bell system employed to indicate scene changes, but a stage property that was incorporated into the play's action. According to the means by which Becks marked his cue, he must have created the bell sound off stage while the actor synchronized his action of ringing the bell on stage. The interim action between II and III is indicated by a hand warning as seen in figure 8. This figure also depicts the dotted circle indicating that the music had swelled to a forte behind the closing action of Act II. Just before Becks' final cue in the act, "Ring Quick Drop", Becks indicated that the music be brought in softly on the preceding page by his use of this music mark in the script and correspondingly on the promptpage with "music pp."

George Becks followed a highly consistent method of warning actors for their forthcoming entrances. Each

point in the script where an entrance was to be made was numbered. Each act began with warn cue number one, and the numbers ran consecutively throughout the act. The number was clearly marked by double lines above and below it, and the same number with identical marking would be placed on the promptpages approximately two pages prior to the entrances with names of the character listed at the side of the number. The number one appears in figures 7, 8 and 9 but varies from the standard warn because it is at the beginning of the act and is not placed prior to the entrance point in the script. This warning system was quite common, but Becks' thoroughness in employing the system again marks the nature of his work. In the opening pages of the promptbook, Becks has warned anyone using this script that the "anticipated calls in this book are too short" (figure 7). Becks was indicating that a future warn system should be reorganized to allow more time between the warn and the actor's entrance. This text only allows about one page warning prior to entrances, while most of Becks' other scripts double this allotment of warning time. This is also interesting evidence as to the re-use and loaning of these scripts for many different productions.

The remaining evidences to be considered in the promptscript are Becks' drawings of the ground plans and other indications of scenery. Unlike many prompters and stage managers, Becks did not keep detailed property lists and working sheets, but his ground plan and drawing within the scripts were sufficient to compensate for this omission.

His ground plan for I (figure 7) is quite complete and follows the script's description.

Brigand's house at Charmareilles. Parlor of the chateau opening on the terrace by three arches which cross the stage at back from R2E to L4E. A table between each arch occupied with bronzes, flowers, etc. A pedestal with a vase of flowers, a table and a sofa on the L.⁶

Becks followed this description with the angled back wall and its three openings but indicated that two of these were to be bay windows, while the arch led to an interior room. The bay windows were backed by a balcony and garden unit which was comparable to the terrace called for in the script. The actual statement in Becks' hand called for a "garden with landscape, balcony" to be located beyond the windows. A fireplace was indicated down right and

⁶Frou Frou, (Becks) P 1323, p. 3.

Figure 9. Becks' plan for Act II, Frou Frou. Courtesy of The Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. OSU Theatre Collection P 1323.

interestingly he indicated 1E (R1E) below the extremity of the stage right wall. Essential furnishings were specifically located within the setting, including a note concerning "carpet and rugs" to be used.

The Act II setting (figure 9) employed by Becks incorporated the scenic description of the script; however, with the exception of the fireplace, the printed script does not indicate any directions in regard to the actual architectural aspects of the setting.

The house of Sartorys, in Paris. Sofa R., front to audience. Piano behind sofa, up and down stage. Round table and pedestals about room. Marble bust on stand C. Picture of Frou Frou on easel above L. table. Chairs R. and L. Walls covered with pictures. Armchair L. of table,⁷

Becks' ground plan incorporated all of these features in the above description and housed them in a rather complete setting. In addition to the exact location of the sofa and the piano, Becks placed appropriate furnishings throughout the room. He altered the setting from the description by placing the armchair in relationship to the fireplace unit, rather the down left, round table. Behind the piano was a balustrade backed by the conservatory,

⁷Frou Frou, (Becks) P 1323, p. 16.

which was probably a two dimensional dropcloth. The central location of the marble bust was further emphasized by its placement at the on stage edge of the balustrade unit and was backed by a solid interior. This setting is characteristic of Becks in that he constantly designed his ground plans in such a manner that there was as large an acting area as practicable unlike the slanted back wall of the Act I setting. The vague indication of the fireplace and the somewhat humorous manner of drawing the R. sofa is seen in a number of his scripts. This ground plan is cluttered somewhat by Becks' insistence on placing the first actor's warning in the up left corner of the setting, which should not be confused with the marks on the setting indicating character locations at the curtain. Pitou, for example, is listed in the actor's warning while she is also indicated as being seated in the chair that is right of the round table.

Act III was presented in the same setting as was II; therefore, no major setting change was required. Act IV probably utilized a wing and drop setting, because Becks did not indicate a complete ground plan (figure 10). The acting edition calls for:

The palace of Barberini at Venice. An

ancient interior. The arched balcony and columned entrance is seen at L., occupying the stage to 3rd grooves. The entrance from the canal is through the arch L.C. The entrance and exit for interior is L1E. The canal, and view of Venice under a full sunset light, is seen upon the R. upstage, and through the balcony off L. Stage down right for 2 entrances. Garden R.H. Garden sofa L.H. 1 rustic chair L. of table, and 1 upstage.⁸

It is highly unlikely that Becks filled the requirements of this description by the use of a complete setting. He probably employed a backcloth with the set pieces seen in figure 10 before the drop. A "formal interior" was unusually available at most first-rate theatres throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. Before the drop he placed the combination of furniture which included a round table, two chairs, and a stool. This, he placed in the down right area of the stage. To the left he located the sofa indicated in the script. It becomes apparent that the rough irregular lines that represented the sofa in II (figure 9) were an attempt to distinguish texture and style to be used. The garden sofa for Act IV is represented by a rather simple rectangle, in comparison

⁸Frou Frou (Becks), P 1323, p. 46.

Figure 10. Becks' stage directions for Act IV, Frou
Frou. Courtesy of The Theatre Collection,
The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox
and Tilden Foundations. OSU Theatre
Collection P 1323.

to the "textured" sofa of II.

Act IV is a rather short scene, and the drop used by Becks was probably located "in one". Act V returns to the house of Sartory's which also served as the two preceding settings. With the use of the drop, the play was presented with two box settings and the single wing and drop scene. This would then require only one major scene change between the first and second act. Act II and III remain the same, while for Act IV the drop would be lowered, masking the upstage setting. For Act V, the removal of the drop would again reveal the setting. The script indicates that the room in Act V is the same but seems to lack care and is in a state of disorder. This alteration could easily be made during the progress of Act IV, because the upstage setting was not removed during the use of the wing and drop set. The lower extremities of the side walls of the box setting were decorated with pedestals, located downstage of the wall units, and additional space is indicated below these stage pieces. They were probably removed at the end of Act III making room for the Act IV drop.

In total, this promptbook is a schematic design of a tightly organized production. The production did not

utilize the complete settings called for by the Daly original but afforded a full scenic background for the action of the play. A further insight into Becks' work can be realized by a similar analysis of his promptbook of Fanchon, the Cricket.

Production data for Fanchon, the Cricket.--On August 22, 1855, a French company headed by Mille. Zoe presented a benefit performance of Sand's La Petite Fadette at Wallack's Theatre. Groups of German and French companies presenting plays and theatricals in their native tongue had always been active in New York, and, in the latter part of the 1854-55 season, Wallack's Theatre was dominated by a flood of these various groups. La Petite Fadette is only mentioned in passing in Brown and Odell and received little notice in New York at the time. However, in Europe, this play, which was written by George Sand, a nom de plume for Lucille Aurore Dupin, marked this popular novelist's first successful dramatic piece. This play, written in 1848, was the second in a series of three romances by the author. Its widespread acceptance from the time of its writing may explain why Augustin Waldauer's adaptation is from the German. Certainly there could have been many English adaptations, including Charlotte

Birch-Pfeiffer's which was revised by Maggie Mitchell. Miss Mitchell was a popular actress but had not yet reached a star status. Her portrayal of Fanchon and subsequent performances of this role were to make her a "household word in American homes."⁹ The Laura Keane Theatre was not in use during the season's break between spring and summer, and on June 9, 1862, during this slack time, Miss Mitchell leased the theatre for her production of Fanchon, the Cricket. The fame that she achieved in this role rivaled Jefferson's Rip Van Winkle and Kate Claxton's Louise from The Two Orphans.

Becks' association with Fanchon, the Cricket.--The George Becks' promptbook is based on an acting edition, but the publication information is missing. In comparing the text to that of a Waldauer adaptation which was used by J. R. Pitman¹⁰ in Chicago in 1903, they both appear to have been translated identically. The printing form is very different in each script, suggesting different

⁹Ode11, VII, 362.

¹⁰Augustin Waldauer, Fanchon, the Cricket (Chicago: The Dramatic Publishing Company, 1903), Pitman's promptbook based on the acting edition (OSU Theatre Collection P 870). Hereafter referred to as: Fanchon, the Cricket (Pitman) P 870.

publishers, but perhaps both were taken from the same source. Although Becks was involved with this play as early as 1862, the staging from this promptbook is of a later era. More than likely the Becks promptbook is based on a Waldauer translation rather than any earlier edition. In this book is a playbill from an 1890 production at the Boston Theatre (figure 4) indicating that Maggie Mitchell was still acting in her original role of Fanchon that she had created nearly thirty years before. In Williamsburg in November of 1891, she was presented in a number of her outstanding roles, which included Fanchon. It is interesting to note that her popularity in this role allowed Miss Mitchell to play the part of a seventeen-year old girl for a thirty year period. During this period she appeared as Fanchon in an untold number of revivals, special events and benefits.

Just as Maggie Mitchell became identified with Fanchon, George Becks, on a smaller scale, became identified with the role of Didier from the same play. As noted in Chapter III, Becks was cast in this role on many occasions playing opposite Miss Mitchell. The scene between Didier and Fanchon in Act I, scene ii, was quite popular, and often at benefits where many short scenes were presented,

Mitchell and Becks acted out this short sequence. Just four years after his arrival in New York, Becks was cast as Didier opposite Miss Mitchell.¹¹ Becks returned to Niblo's Garden in the fall of 1864 after a short season at the Olympic and was cast to play Didier while Miss Mitchell played the season in a number of her known roles. From this season, Becks' career is constantly marked by presentations of this character, representing his greatest popularity as an actor.

Analysis of the promptbook of Fanchon, the Cricket.--

The script represents a series of entries, each adding action and dialogue. The staging was most simple with two interior box settings and two exterior sets backed by landscape drops. The two box settings are not detailed but are simply three walls bordering a group of furniture. Scenic descriptions are underlined rather than altered, and in the case of Act I, scene 2, the scenic description has been edited down to the single word, "landscape". For Act II, the engraving located at the beginning of the script was sufficient and was probably represented by a wing and drop setting.

¹¹Ode11, VII, 644.

The use of the hand and the dotted circle for music cues appears throughout this script, and due to the number of different men who have worked with the text an unusual number of markings and various symbols appear on its pages. A unique factor of this book is the number of line changes for the character of Didier. Since this was Becks' most noteworthy role, it is not surprising that he has freely altered the lines of that character to his own liking.

In Act I, scene ii, Didier's first entrance, the promptpage is filled with bits of business and dialogue alterations. Prior to this scene there were only minor movement indications, but a marked increase in movement and business notes occurs during Didier's first scene. There are no technical cues during the scene and most interestingly, incidental music has been added in Becks' handwriting just prior to the entrance of Didier! Seemingly, he has given himself a rather distinctive entrance. Secondly, at the point of his entrance is the single word "change", which may indicate a change in managerial personnel to allow Becks' entrance. It is a very brief scene, but over half of the lines contain some form of business or movement cue or an alteration in dialogue. On the page following Didier's exit, technical cues are

again listed and are more frequent than line alterations.

In Act II, scene ii, during Didier's second appearance, there is an even more striking example. During the first part of the scene, there are, as to be expected, more business and movement cues for Didier than the other characters on the stage. Later in this scene, Didier becomes a secondary character, remaining on stage as a member of a large crowd, having no dialogue. The promptpage is completely filled with movement notes, which revolve the crowd reactions around this character. He is positioned just enough away from the crowd to receive separate emphasis, and, as the scene progresses, he is to be the one to attempt to quiet the crowd when they mock Fanchon. At this point, music is played and they are all to dance. The dance is used by the playwright to contrast Fanchon's rural character with that of the town's social ladies. During this dance which must focus on Fanchon and her partner, Landry, the promptscript indicates an added exit for Didier. It is his return that triggers the dialogue that breaks up the dance and ends the dramatic sequence. The exit and added grand entrance give emphasis to a character that under other circumstances may be lost in the crowd of dancers and onlookers. These additions and

alterations exist throughout the promptscript. Becks certainly was capable of handling stage movement to suit his own well being. It is no wonder that, in a production containing such stage action, Didier would be considered a featured role.

These promptbooks are representative of Becks' collection. Frou Frou, based on a printed acting edition, has only additions made by George Becks. Contained within the script is Becks' note to others who might be using this book at a later performance, demonstrating the acceptance of loaning and re-use of these scripts. Throughout the promptbooks are markings, notes, and drawings that characterize Becks' work. Fanchon, the Cricket serves as a proper foil to Frou Frou, because it is a promptbook that was probably begun by another prompter and that received later additions by Becks. For this reason, the book contains a great deal of markings, but its organization is somewhat askew. For this study, it is vital to see to what extent Becks accepted the works of others in staging aspects. This promptbook is also noteworthy because of Becks' connection to the role of Didier. Although these two scripts cannot cover the full scope of the collection, they are true representations of the general contents.

A third category may be derived in organizing the collection, that of those scripts that contain only Becks' signature and have no markings or only markings of others. About 30% of the collection is made up of these books. It is impossible to discern from the information in these texts if Becks ever put them to use or if he used them without any deviations from the copy. Certainly it is possible that they may have been a part of a play library common to theatre men of any era and were never used by Becks in production. It hardly suffices to attempt any detailed analysis of these scripts for this study.

These three categories generally classify the scripts contained in Becks' collection. Those that were in use were probably recopied and interchanged a number of times during the man's career. Second copies were probably made, and replacements of worn scripts must have been necessitated. As stage technology began to change, so did the nature of these scripts. The following chapters will discuss Becks' staging practices in more detail.

Chapter V

Led Astray

Production data of Led Astray.--During the second season of his management at the Union Square Theatre, A. M. Palmer presented the debut of Dion Boucicault's Led Astray, an adaptation of Octave Feuillet's drama, Temptation. The play was performed 161 times at this theatre following its opening on December 6, 1873.¹ Newspaper criticism was harsh in its review of the production and gave credit to the leading actress, Rose Eyting, for any success enjoyed by the play.² For the next two decades, Miss Eyting was presented in the role of Armande in many revivals on the New York stage and with

¹Ode11, IX, 401.

²Dion Boucicault, Led Astray (New York: Samuel French, n.d.). John Moore's promptbook based on this acting edition is located at Folger Library. OSU Theatre Collection P 155. Hereafter referred to as: Led Astray (Moore), P 155. This promptbook contains an unidentified newspaper clipping which refers to the New York opening of the play.

a number of traveling companies, including her own.³

Palmer was to revive the play on occasions during his management of the Union Square Theatre and included Miss Eyting in the cast whenever possible.

Becks' association with Led Astray.--At the time of the debut of Led Astray, George Becks was employed at the Fourteenth Street Theatre, which was called the Lyceum under the 1873-74 management of W. L. Mansell. In March of that season, Palmer brought a production of Camille to the Lyceum. This was made possible because of the long run of Led Astray, and Palmer was able to devise a second company with Clara Morris as the star. This production used the resident company at the Lyceum and marks the first time that Becks was employed by A. M. Palmer. Later in 1876, Becks was hired by Palmer to manage the Brooklyn Theatre which served as a second theatre for the growing Palmer-Shook acting company at the Union Square.

From September of 1876 until the fire that destroyed the Brooklyn Theatre in December of that year, Becks was stage manager. During this season, the outstanding plays of Palmer's repertory were presented, including Agnes,

³Andre Tsai, p. 82.

The Two Orphans, Camille, and Led Astray with original scenery and stage movements.⁴ The promptbooks were in the care of George Becks, who, as stage manager, probably had his own copies which could well be the promptbook of this play contained in the George Becks Collection in the New York Public Library.⁵ The acting edition by Samuel French is based on the Palmer original production; therefore, Becks' notations are elaborations on the scenery and movement notes found in the French edition. The hand-drawn ground plan by Becks approximates the scenes depicted in The Dramatic Annals of New York. However, a second Becks' promptbook of Led Astray is located in the Harvard Theatre Collection.⁶ This script was a gift from Becks presented to the actress, Nance O'Neil, in New York on October 8, 1902. Miss O'Neil in turn presented this script to the Harvard Library in 1933, as part of a foundation left by her late husband, Alfred Devereux-Hickman. This later promptbook is based on the Union Square Theatre's

⁴Ode11, IX, 417.

⁵Dion Boucicault, Led Astray (New York: Samuel French, n.d.). George Becks' promptbook based on this acting edition is located at the New York Public Library. OSU Theatre Collection, P 241.

⁶Led Astray (Becks), P 1691.

production but contains more of Becks' own alterations; therefore, it is the basic book to be considered. Other promptbooks outside of Becks' collection serve to create the comparative nature of this study. The stage manager who was connected with the Union Square Theatre, J. M. Berrell, has left a copy of Led Astray.⁷ This is not an original manuscript, but is based on an acting edition by M. J. McGrath and Company, dated 1873, the year of the original production. This is an extremely clear and complete promptbook of the play and is probably very close to Palmer's production. The original is housed at the New York Public Library. Another promptbook of Led Astray⁸ was prepared by J. R. Pitman, which was based on the same Samuel French version as were both of George Becks' books. This promptbook contains a playbill for a production of Led Astray at the Castle Square Theatre under the

⁷Dion Boucicault, Led Astray (Chicago: McGrath and Co., 1873). J. M. Berrell's promptbook based on this acting edition is located at the New York Public Library. OSU Theatre Collection, P 243. Hereafter referred to as: Led Astray (Berrell), P 243.

⁸Dion Boucicault, Led Astray (New York: Samuel French, n.d.). J. R. Pitman's promptbook based on this acting edition is located at the New York Public Library. OSU Theatre Collection, P 242. Hereafter referred to as: Led Astray (Pitman), P 242.

direction of J. R. Pitman, on September 5, 1898. John Moore's promptbook of the play is a rather complete work, also based on the Samuel French Acting Edition. This book includes newspaper clippings, engravings from the Dramatic Annals of New York, extensive property lists, ground plans, and character movement notations. These promptbooks prove helpful in evaluating the work of George Becks. The majority of the research material for this section is taken from these promptbooks. References to these books occur throughout the following pages; however, footnotes are used sparingly and only to call the reader's attention to specific information.

As indicated in Chapter III, Becks maintained a large collection of promptscripts which were valuable to him in producing revivals. Since the movement and scenic aspects of the production were marked in the play scripts, he was able to mount these plays in a short period of time. It was most likely that Becks obtained his first promptscript of Led Astray in 1876, when he was employed as a stage manager by A. M. Palmer. He then added the script to his collection for later productions. As he used this script, he adapted it to suit his purposes as a free-lance stage manager. A metamorphosis from the Palmer inspired script

to his own work slowly developed until the latter is apparent in Becks' later script prepared in the early twentieth century. It is interesting to compare this script to the Berrell promptbook of 1873, John Moore's book, prepared for a traveling company, and the 1898 script of J. R. Pitman.

By 1873, the year of the first production of Led Astray, the box setting was popular. This staging practice had seen earlier acceptance in England, but following Booth's Theatre, which was built in 1869, American Theatre adapted the box setting.⁹ The analysis of Becks' work will concentrate on his ground plans and descriptions of the settings as compared to the Samuel French edition and the aforementioned promptbooks.

Comparative ground plans for Act I.--The acting edition describes the Act I setting as:

A park. R. and L. in front are shrubberies. Under a summerhouse, R., is a table. On the L. a seat under a tree. Sea-shore in the distance.¹⁰

This exterior setting would call for a wing and drop setting with the "sea-shore in the distance" being

⁹Hewitt, pp. 213-18.

¹⁰Led Astray (Becks), P 1691, p. 4.

represented by a backcloth painted in perspective to create the illusion of a far horizon. The off stage areas were masked by a standard series of wings. These wings represented the wooded area of the park and the summerhouse that is mentioned in the script. This simple setting served the minimum needs of the script and coincided with accepted staging practices during this era. Becks' ground plan for Act I (figure 11) was a symmetrical wing and drop setting that represented the formal park or lawn of an elegant summerhouse, listed as a "chateau" by Becks. Its elegance is implied by the formal setting and his indication of eight statues arranged in two lines of four. Becks' use of slanted wings points to the fact that he probably was not concerned with a grooved stage, which would require wings placed parallel to the proscenium opening. The equal displacement of these wings was not dictated by the stage mechanics but served to increase the formality of the setting. Upstage of this arrangement, Becks indicated a "cut wood" and a "landscape-view of chateau." The "cut wood" was a drop that was one drop extending across the stage but was not solid in construction, allowing the audience to "see through" the trees. The center stage area was open; therefore, only the

Figure 11. Becks' plan for Act I, Led Astray. Courtesy
of The Harvard Theatre Collection. OSU
Theatre Collection P 1691.

extreme edges of this drop came down to the stage floor. The backcloth is marked by Becks as a landscape with a view of the chateau. Becks did not choose to represent a sea shore for his production, probably because a landscape backcloth would be more available to him in the different theatres. Becks was quite specific in his indication of the location of the various aspects of this setting, while on the other hand, John Moore, who created his promptbook for a traveling company, did not deem it necessary to include a ground plan for this setting. He indicated only the needed set pieces for Act I within his property lists. Surely, Moore was assuming that the drop and wing arrangement required would be furnished by each theatre visited on his tour.

Becks indicated that a view of the chateau was to accompany the backcloth landscape. This same indication was called for in both the promptbooks of Pitman and Berrell, but in a somewhat different manner. These promptbooks indicated an additional wing unit upstage left that represented a "chateau exterior," while a platform filled the upstage area, decorated with a balustrade on the stage right edge, and containing steps positioned at up center stage. This unit containing a platform,

balustrade, and steps, and a two dimensional view of a chateau was backed by a landscape giving the scene the illusion that the chateau was immediately behind the acting area. Becks did not indicate any platform unit, but probably meant to have the chateau exterior as a separate unit because, in this manner, he could have employed available drops, rather than demanding the use of a special backdrop. This landscape was used again in Act V. This act is set in a room of the chateau; therefore, Becks must not have desired that the landscape have a view of the chateau painted on it, thus, eliminating its re-use as backing for this scene. Even though Becks was more precise in his setting for Act I than Moore, his omission of the platform unit would suggest that he was considering a more flexible staging procedure than Pitman or Berrell.

Within the formal shell of the drop and wing, Becks created a rather informal acting area. He divided his stage by a foliage unit upstage of the second wing stage right. The general movement as indicated by Becks' promptbook occurred downstage of this unit. In the downstage area, Becks placed a round table down right, balanced by a large additional vase and stand stage left, and completed the setting with two chairs. His properties

list calls for an embroidered handkerchief in a work basket on the table. Also indicated was that the "green beige" be down along with grass mats. A technical note simply states that there was to be "plenty of light on [the] scene."

Comparative ground plans for Act II.--Act II and the remaining settings may be compared to engravings of the original production of Led Astray. These engravings from The Dramatic Annals of New York are a part of John Moore's promptscript and depict scenes taken from Palmer's production, including detailed backgrounds--presumably accurate reproductions of the original settings. The Samuel French acting edition describes the setting for Act II of Led Astray as:

An elegant boudoir in the Hotel Chandoce in Paris. Fireplace, R.C., Doors. Door, L.H. Window in the angle, L.H. Lamps on the mantelpiece alight, with shades.¹¹

Figure 12 shows that Becks' ground plan for Act II was a large box setting consisting of a back wall with a large center archway, two side walls perpendicular to the proscenium opening, returns at the downstage edge of these

¹¹Led Astray (Becks), P 1691, p. 20.

Figure 12. Becks' plan for Act II, Led Astray. Courtesy of The Harvard Theatre Collection. OSU Theatre Collection P 1691.

walls, and narrow angled walls joining the side walls to the back. These narrow walls were approximately 4 1/2' to 5' wide, judging from the doorway indicated upstage right. Considering this unit to be 5', the setting allowed an acting area of about 15' deep by 30' wide. The central archway was about 10' wide revealing an interior backing. Judging from the returns at each side of this backing it was made of standing flats rather than a drop. In addition, a flat wall could house a three dimensional fireplace unit whereas a drop could not, and the large arch opening revealed more details of this backing unit. The setting had a second fireplace in the stage right wall and a curtained window opposite the fireplace in the stage left wall. The furnishings that completed this unit consisted of a round table, right, and square topped table, two small tables at the sides of the arch, a piano and assorted chairs. Two sofas are indicated in their proper playing positions because they are out of sight lines in Becks' diagram. This ground plan includes many of the items called for in the original but was certainly no duplicate.

Figure 13 is a reproduction of the engraving taken from Act II of Led Astray which depicts the climactic

Figure 13. Engraving of Act II, Led Astray. Taken from The Dramatic Annals of New York and located in Moore's promptbook. Courtesy of The Folger Library. OSU Theatre Collection P 155.

action of the act. The husband has received a bouquet sent by another woman. The bouquet represents the other woman's agreement to meet the husband at a clandestine, nocturnal rendezvous. However, the wife, Armande, is aware of the signal, as is the family friend, Hector, and they observe the husband's actions. This engraving, that must certainly represent only a part of the full stage setting, shows the basic requirements of the scene. The fireplace and mantel stage right with Armande seated by a round table were in relatively the same positions as in Becks' staging of this act. A curtained door was contained in a wall unit which, judging by the manner in which the cornice at the height of the wall is depicted, was set at an angle between the side wall and the back wall. The cornice at the upstage edge of the section housing the fireplace ends in a rounded concave, indicating an angle or corner at that point. The upstage edge of the section containing the door is depicted in the same manner. Beyond the archway, which is shown as a much smaller opening than the one indicated by Becks, was a fireplace and chair. The actor playing Hector stands, in the engraving, at the stage right side of a square-topped table and below a piano. A small portion of a curtained

window can be seen on the extreme stage left edge of the setting. All of the essential items shown in this engraving appeared on Becks' ground plan of Act II.

As was the case in Act I, George Becks' ground plan lies between John Moore's simplicity and the complete settings called for by Berrell and Pitman. John Moore's setting for Act II consisted of three walls in which the two side walls met the back wall at a greater angle. The back wall contained a central archway as did Becks' diagram, but no smaller angled walls were indicated. The stage right wall had a fireplace and mantel unit while a curtained window dressed the left wall. Moore indicated the use of an "interior handsome backing" for the archway. His only specific location of furnishings were two tables, a piano, and five chairs, but he indicated that the setting should include "other furniture to suit the scene." Moore eliminated the door that is seen in the engraving and was included in Becks' ground plan.

Berrell's ground plan included a three-sided bay window stage left with a window seat. These windows were to be transparent and required a wood wing as a backing unit. The door unit in the upstage right corner of the setting also had an interior backing. The fireplace was

a more detailed unit which was drawn as an independent unit that completed the downstage section of the right wall. More detailed furniture arrangements were drawn into the ground plan, including foot stools, fire screens and a number of assorted chairs. Pitman's ground plan followed Berrell's but had the fireplace as a part of the right wall, and the window unit was not as completely sketched. He did, however, indicate the need for a wood wing unit. Becks' ground plan was more simplified than these and his was the only one that used the narrow-angled wall units to join the side walls to the rear wall. Also, his is the only setting that placed the side walls at a perpendicular angle to the proscenium opening.

According to the stage directions, the upstage central arch served as the main entry to this room. The stage right door, not seen in Moore's ground plan, was secondary, and while called for in the acting edition, could have been eliminated. Its use, however, was advantageous to the production because with the omission of the doorway, Armande, the leading character, would have to leave the stage by the same exit as her husband. Since she knows of his plan to meet another woman, her departure might imply that she was planning to follow him, which is

opposite to the plot development of the play. The door is called for by the author to give her a separate exit in order to point her decision not to follow. John Moore chose to eliminate this door, risking this confusion, in order to simplify his setting. George Becks maintained this doorway in his setting, but since its use was limited, did not find it necessary to include any backing unit. This is the only essential unit that did not appear in all of the settings discussed above. All other aspects of the setting were included in the engraving from the Annals, and the promptbooks of Moore, Berrell, Pitman, and Becks.

Comparative ground plans for Act III.--The setting for Act III is described by the Samuel French Acting Edition simply as:

A ballroom--one of a suite. Handsome furniture. On the L.H. a card table.¹²

From this short description, the settings of the promptbooks considered in this study varied from one another to quite an extent. Figure 14 shows Becks' ground plan for Act III consisting of an open setting, with the same side walls perpendicular to the proscenium arch. The proportions of this setting roughly coincided with that of

¹²Led Astray (Becks), P 1691, p. 33.

Figure 14. Becks' plan for Act III, Led Astray.
Courtesy of The Harvard Theatre Collection.
OSU Theatre Collection P 1691.

Becks' drawing for Act II. Therefore, the same dimensions are applicable to both settings. Two narrow, angled wall units joined the side walls to the back wall which contains a large central arch. This arch was backed by a dropcloth which Becks called a "conservatory". Judging from the single straight line that represented this backing, he was calling for a drop rather than a wall of flat construction. Between the arch and the drop, Becks indicated an elevated platform, which would have given more emphasis to entrances through the central arch. The series of circles in a sequences order located on this platform, probably represented formal potted palms or statue stands, in order to create a three dimensional depth to this back area of the setting. Two side arches were located in the side walls. Furnishings included the table to the left that is called for in the script, plus certain assorted tables and chairs throughout the room.

The engraving from The Dramatic Annals of New York included in the Moore promptbook (figure 15) depicts the closing moments of Act III. Rodolph discovers that George DeLesparre is in love with his wife, Armande. He will not ruin his name by publicly challenging George to a duel on those grounds; therefore, these gentlemen decide to

Figure 15. Engraving of Act III, Led Astray. Taken from The Dramatic Annals of New York and located in Moore's Promptbook. Courtesy of The Folger Library. OSU Theatre Collection P 155.

fabricate an argument over the ecarte game in progress.

Rodolph: 'Tis useless; the cards are marked; this man is a blackleg. (he throws the cards in George's face) (A general exclamation amongst the party. The ladies retreat. The Baroness and Armande enter. The gentlemen appear to interfere and expostulate.)

Hector: Rodolph, are you out of your senses!

George: Major O'Hara--Colonel--a word with you.

Rodolph: Hector--Baron--

(Enter Armande. Hector tries to prevent her approaching)

Armande: Rodolph, what have you done? (She falls upon her knees) Oh! for my sake--no-- (She faints)

Mathilde: What is the matter, Armande? O papa! what has happened? Water there! She has fainted.

Rodolph: (Aside to Hector and Mount Gosline) Gentlemen, I entreat you not a word before my child.

Quick drop
End of Act III¹³

The engraving shows Armande, who has fainted, being assisted by Hector as Rodolph with arm around his daughter gestures to the men and speaks the final lines of the act, "not a word before my child."

The setting depicted in this engraving includes the card table and an arch revealing a decorative background. Chandeliers are prevalent at either side of this highly

¹³Led Astray (Becks), P 1691, p. 43.

decorative arch. It would seem that this is a partial representation of a symmetrical setting, which was dominated by this central opening. Becks was quite close to this engraving with his symmetrical setting with the large central arch and card table down stage left. The script, however, does have a number of references to entrances through the windows, meaning french windows. These were not included in Becks' ground plan, but were made the main characteristics of the Act III setting in the promptbooks of Moore, Pitman, and Berrell.

John Moore's Act III setting was more complicated than I and II. The Act III setting was in a triangular shape with the angled side walls meeting upstage center. The stage right wall contained two double door units while the stage left wall contained two sets of French windows. The card table was located down left as indicated in the script and engraving, but only two armchairs are indicated in addition to the card table and its two companion chairs. Moore's comments written on this ground plan describe a chandelier to be lighted and in full view. The complexity of the setting is not found in its excessive requirements but in its odd shape. The wide expanse of double doors and French windows omitted any strong focal

point. The double doors served as the link to the interior of the building, and the French windows presumably opened out onto a terrace. Becks used the central arch and the stage right arch as an indirect exit to the terrace. These two settings vary considerably, with Becks' plan being closer to the engraving but having obviously omitted the French windows called for in the script.

Berrell indicated that the stage right wall of this setting was perpendicular to the proscenium opening and contained a double door. The stage left wall was an elongated, slanted structure that contained two French windows, similar to the Moore setting. The back wall was not parallel to the proscenium opening but slanted upstage from stage right to left. It contained a large double door unit which was comparable to the central arch indicated in the engraving and the Becks ground plan. The dominant aspect of this setting would be the French windows that opened onto a terrace visible beyond. This terrace was defined by a balustrade running along the stage left edge, garden wings to enclose the terrace, a backcloth with a garden scene, and a calcium back light, lighting the backcloth to create a "moonlight" effect.

This was certainly the outstanding feature of this setting. Berrell also indicated a chandelier to be placed over the central acting area and located the card table down left, following the arrangement suggested by the script and engraving.. His furniture arrangement was precise, placing stands at either side of the central double door and calling specifically for a tete-a-tete seat rather than a non-descript sofa.

Pitman employed elements similar to both Moore and Berrell and, like both, differed from Becks. The Pitman ground plan for Act III depicted a triangular shaped setting; however, the side walls did not meet in a point upstage at center but were joined by a narrow back wall of approximately 3', which was too narrow to contain any door or window unit. The stage right wall followed the same pattern as the Moore setting, with a jog in the wall unit separating two entrances. However, the upstage right opening (R2E) was an arch, whereas Moore called for two double door units. The stage right wall is very similar to Berrell's setting with two French windows with the same elaborate terrace setting beyond. Pitman also indicated a calcium lamp to create a "moonlight" effect on the back-drop. Within this shell, Pitman has also placed the card

table in the left area and completed the setting with appropriate furnishings. He decorated the room with a number of chairs and stands, having only one other table in the room other than the card table. He did not include a sofa, tete-a-tete seat or lounge chair as the other promptbooks indicated. This setting seems to have incorporated aspects similar to the settings of Moore and Berrell, but his concoctions resulted in a poor setting. The arch was located in a weak position, creating a poor entrance, while the upstage portion of this setting ended abruptly in a narrow wall that served no particular function, poorly emphasized by a stand. He incorporated Berrell's French windows and terrace unit which were the major features of this setting.

According to the acting editions, the main entrance into the setting was represented by an archway which was incorporated in the promptbooks of Pitman and Becks, as depicted in the engraving. Even though this engraving was included in Moore's promptbook, he did not indicate an arch but relied on two double door units, as did Berrell. The French windows are not shown on the engraving, but were indicated in the script and were employed by all of these men except Becks, who also failed to mention any lighted

chandelier which was very clearly marked by the others. The one unit that was included in all of these examples was the use and location of the card table, down left. This arrangement of furnishings was the only item that was constant in all of these settings.

Comparative ground plans for Act IV, scene i.--

According to the Samuel French acting edition, Act IV, scene i of Led Astray takes place in:

A bedroom. Alcove R. C. Windows R. Fireplace R. in front. Door L. Armande is lying on a sofa L.H.¹⁴

The Becks ground plan for Act IV (figure 16) incorporated the use of an alcove in the upright area of the back wall. The door left appeared in the left central portion of this wall, while the windows were reduced to one located up right corner. The sofa is represented by a pillowed lounge, probably the same lounge indicated in Act III. This setting did contain a fireplace. The essential items requested by the acting edition were incorporated, although altered to some degree. The basic unit of this setting consisted of the same three wall units of Acts II and III. The back wall was altered, no longer housing a large central arch, but had two openings in it. The stage right

¹⁴Led Astray (Becks), P 1691, p. 44.

Figure 16. Becks' plan for Act IV, scene i, Led Astray.
Courtesy of The Harvard Theatre Collection.
OSU Theatre Collection P 1691.

opening of about 5' to 6' led into an alcove. The stage left opening was the main entrance door. The alcove was a boxed-in unit which, as drawn by Becks, was independent of the major setting. Included in this alcove was an armchair and a toilette. The larger acting area contained a double backed sofa, a lounge and assorted tables and chairs. These things were the elements of a very basic setting which maintained only the essential pieces for the action of the scene.

The engraving from The Dramatic Annals of New York (figure 17) presents a small problem. It is captioned "The Parting--Act Fifth" which is erroneous. The parting between the husband, Rodolph, and his wife, Armande, which is the only separation in the play's plot development that is worthy of such a title as "The Parting", occurs in Act IV; therefore, the setting in the background of this engraving is that of this act. The partial setting that is revealed views the curtained arch leading into the alcove. Armande is kneeling at the side of an armchair as Rodolph begins his exit through the stage left door.

Moore's simplified setting for Act IV consisted of a standard, three walled, box setting with a single angled wall up left that joined the left wall to the back wall.

Figure 17. Engraving of Act IV, scene i, Led Astray.
Taken from The Dramatic Annals of New York
and located in Moore's Promptbook. The
engraving was mistitled as being from Act V
of the play. Courtesy of The Folger Library.
OSU Theatre Collection P 155.

Here was the location of the only entrance into the room. Its stage left location approximates Becks' positioning of the entrance and coincides with the script requirement. The alcove was not a main feature in Moore's setting and was quite barren in comparison to Becks'. Moore represented the alcove with a stage right opening in the back wall which was backed by a drop rather than a three dimensional unit such as the one included in Becks' ground plan. In addition, Moore did not indicate the presence of any furnishings in the alcove portion of the setting. The major section of the setting was also rather lacking in furnishings, but Moore did characteristically mark on his play "other furnishings to suit [the] scene." The only other decor indicated was curtained windows in the stage right wall.

As a strong contrast, both Berrell and Pitman filled the stage with full settings, and both entitled this setting as "Elegant Apartment". Pitman's plan contained a box window right, a central opening for the alcove, and the entrance door located in an angled wall up left, similar to Moore. The alcove was backed by an "interior 1/2 flat" and contained a single table. He located an armchair in such a position that he has duplicated the scene depicted

in the engraving and his movement diagrams placed Armande at the chair with Rodolph standing stage left of her; thus, the two characters would "frame" the opening of the alcove in the manner depicted. Pitman indicated proper backing units for the windows and the door.

Berrell's setting was even more complete. His plan was similar to Pitman's, except that he placed the alcove to the right of center. The alcove was a larger area which housed a chair and dressing table. The major difference, however, was in his use of a prayer table, somewhat ostentatiously located in the central stage area. Berrell has drawn in the unit on the ground plan showing a kneeling platform before a table with a large cross afixed to the table. He positioned Armande at this location for the parting sequence. In addition, Berrell indicated a greater display of furniture than the others, including a sofa, two tables and assorted chairs.

George Becks employed a larger acting area, which was somewhat uncluttered by furniture, and separated the stage into three major acting areas by placing the lounge down left, the sofa and table to the far right, and having the alcove dominating the upstage area. He tied these units together by placing the only entrance into the room at the

left of the back wall, rather than the up left corner, as in the case of the other ground plans. His use of the same ground plan for the basic units of Acts II, III and IV is of some importance when considering the set changes during performance.

Comparative ground plans for Act IV, scene ii.--

Tableau II, Act IV, which was listed as Act IV, scene ii by Becks, is described in the French edition as:

A woodpart of the Bois de Boulogne.
The trees are covered with snow.¹⁵

Neither of George Becks' promptbooks contained a ground plan for this setting, but in one of his blocking diagrams (figure 18) he indicated the actors' positions in relation to two swords placed on the stage, at the climax of a highly melodramatic scene characteristic of many of Boucicault's works. Rodolph and George meet in a duel and the swords mark the furthest advance that the men can make toward each other while they aim their guns at one another. O'Hara, one of the characters in the play, explains the terms to the duelers and the audience.

¹⁵Led Astray (Becks), P 1691, p. 47.

Figure 18. Becks' blocking diagram for Act IV, scene ii,
Led Astray. Courtesy of The Harvard Theatre
Collection. OSU Theatre Collection P 1691.

We set our men, if you please, at twenty-four paces apart. At the signal, they will advance to these limits (Places two swords on the ground) As they approach, they will fire when they like. The one that fires first stops at the spot where he delivers his shot; the other may then walk up and pot him if he can!¹⁶

The Becks diagram showed the position of the sword on the stage and the actors' positions around them. At the moment depicted, Rodolph, Hector and Mount Gosline stood stage right of the swords. O'Hara was upstage at the position he commanded when he laid the swords into their position. To O'Hara's left was an unnamed second to George DeLesparre. DeLesparre stood below the swords which was the approximate position for this character in the engraving from The Dramatic Annals of New York (figure 19). In the engraving, DeLesparre faces Rodolph across the swords. O'Hara is giving the signal to begin, the second stands beside him with his arms crossed. Hector is positioned next to Rodolph as Mount Gosline bends over the box that contained the brace of pistols. The positioning is a very logical arrangement since the oblique angle creates an exciting line of action as the figures approach. George is the only one to shoot and would be firing away from the

¹⁶Led Astray (Becks) P 1691, p. 49.

Figure 19. Engraving of Act IV, scene ii, Led Astray.
Taken from The Dramatic Annals of New York
and located in Moore's promptbook. Courtesy
of The Folger Library. OSU Theatre Collection
P 155.

audience. Such scenes of tension dealing in life and death situations, often used by Boucicault, usually employed some theatrical device such as the swords to mark the limits of approach.

Similarly, John Moore did not include a ground plan for the scene, including the necessary set pieces for the scene in his property lists. He carefully marked the script at the point of the sword sequence that was described above. Both Becks and Moore concentrated their efforts on the movement of the actors at this vital point in the scene. On the other hand, Pitman and Berrell included ground plans for this setting. Berrell's settings for this scene was an extremely simple outline of a wing and drop setting made up of four sets of wood wings, a back drop, and a stump of a tree represented down right. Later in the scene, he included a diagram of the sword placement similar to Becks and Moore. Pitman's ground plan was the most complicated for this scene, which he entitled Act V, making his production a six-act structure. The setting he called for was similar to Berrell's, but to this Pitman added two "cut wood trees". One was down right, immediately above the tree stump, while the second was up left. Below this second tree, Pitman indicated a "fallen tree trunk". None

of these items were essential to the needs of the play but were incorporated into Pitman's movement of the actors on the stage. His movement diagram of the sword sequence demanded the same general movement as the others only mapped out more specifically.

Judging from the movement diagrams, references to L3E and R3E for exits and entrances indicated in the prompt-books, and especially the two diagrams of this setting in Berrell's and Pitman's promptbooks, it would seem that this was a full setting rather than an "in one" scene, used to cover most of the back stage area, while a major scene shift was in progress. The nature of the scene marked it an important one and none of these men were to minimize its scenic needs. Pitman even considered it as a full act. Within this scene, the climax of the melodramatic action occurs when Rodolph, wounded by George DeLesparre, approaches his adversary with a loaded gun, being allotted by the rules of the duel a shot at any range. In the last moment, Rodolph "gives" George his life with the knowledge that this blight on his honor will be far more "damning" than death. The concluding act serves as the denouement in which the Baroness and Countess become friends, Hector is accepted by Mathilde in

marriage, and Rodolph and Armande are reunited as husband and wife.

Comparative ground plans for Act V.--The setting for this act is described at some length by the French acting edition.

A library in Count Rodolph's chateau. Armande is seated L., at a work-table, sewing. Rodolph seated R., reading a newspaper. The Countess, near him is knitting, Mathilde is painting at a small desk, R.C., up-The Baroness, L.C. before a piano, is looking over the music. The Baron is leaning over Mathilde.¹⁷

George Becks' setting for this scene (figure 20) followed this description to a great extent. His only variations were to place the Countess beyond the central arch, quite removed from Rodolph, and to place Mathilde at a small table in the central area of the setting with the described desk located up right as suggested in the script. The main entrance to this room was by the central archway, which was supplemented by a standard door located in the stage left wall. The setting was made up of three walls in a standard box setting position with a back wall and two side walls, slightly angled, to open the setting. The

¹⁷Led Astray (Becks), P 1691, p. 51.

stage right wall contained a fireplace unit while the back wall was pierced by a large archway revealing another portion of the room. Beyond this arch was an armchair and bookcases. The stage right wall housed a window. The "library backing" called for by Becks was a two walled unit that incorporated a window which opened onto a terrace and revealed a backing listed as the same one as the one used in Act I. Since Act I took place outside of this chateau, it would be quite reasonable to have the same background appear outside the windows of this interior of the chateau.

Within the major portion of the setting, Becks duplicated the basic requirements of the setting while the fireplace, archway, and window with a view of the landscape and balustraded porch can be seen clearly in the engraving from The Dramatic Annals of New York (figure 21). This engraving depicts the moment when Mathilde is accepting Hector's proposal of marriage as Armande looks on. It reveals the fireplace stage right, the location of Rodolph's chair, the piano, small desk, archway, and the view beyond the arch. The table that Becks has placed center stage, an alteration from this engraving, can be seen behind Armande. Other furnishings that are called

Figure 20. Becks' plan for Act V, Led Astray. Courtesy
of The Harvard Theatre Collection. OSU
Theatre Collection P 1691.

Figure 21. Engraving of Act V, Led Astray. Taken from The Dramatic Annals of New York and located in Moore's promptbook. Courtesy of The Folger Library. OSU Theatre Collection P 155.

for by the script were omitted or are out of the frame of this engraving. The similarity of his Act V setting and this engraving would indicate that he was familiar either with these engravings or their source, which was the A. M. Palmer production at the Union Square Theatre.

John Moore, conversely, did not follow the lines suggested in the engravings. His ground plan depicted a setting of five slanted walls. The two extreme walls were perpendicular to the proscenium opening and contained the two doorways leading to the room. The back wall consisted of a large bookcase unit which was connected to the side walls by rather wide slanted wall units, completing the basic shell. In the stage right wall was a fireplace, while the piano was placed against the stage left wall section. Moore furnished the room with the essentials mentioned in the scene description. He placed the Baroness at the piano with the Countess in a chair to the immediate right. Armande was located at a work-table down left, counter-balanced by Rodolph in an armchair right. Mathilde worked at a small round table center. Moore notes that the scene should also have "other furniture and ornaments to suit [the] scene".

The ground plan in Berrell's promptbook incorporated

features that were used by both Becks and Moore. Berrell joined the perpendicular side walls to a back wall with a slanted wall section, as did Moore. Berrell also located the fireplace and piano stage right and left respectively at these slanted walls. He called for door units in the perpendicular walls, but differed from Moore by employing an archway and backing similar to the ground plan by Becks. The essential furnishings were placed in the major acting area similar to Moore's plan, but, as to be expected, Berrell specifically requested more furnishings than were essential.

The Pitman ground plan varied the greatest from these other plans. The stage right wall was set at a near right angle to the proscenium opening and was architecturally varied by a 90° jog located in the center of the wall which jutted on stage about 4'. The wall then continued upstage at a greater angle than the downstage portion. In this upstage wall was the fireplace unit, leading to the back wall, which contained a central arch. The stage left wall was similar to John Moore's ground plan, which indicated a doorway down left. A booked unit backed the central arch and, as indicated in the engraving, the stage right wall of this backing unit contained a window which

disclosed a distant landscape. Bookcases decorated the other backing wall behind the arch. The furnishings marked by Pitman were quite simple and only those units called for in the script were included. Pitman did include a request for an "over-warm red carpet" in order to complete this scene.

By means of this comparison, the craftsmanship of George Becks can be specifically studied. In order to further appreciate the work of Becks, it is advantageous to follow the progress of this show as it was presented by him.

Becks' staging of Led Astray.--George Becks' production of Led Astray was presented in five acts with Act IV containing two scenes. Act I and Act IV, scene ii were wing and drop exterior scenes, while the remaining four interior scenes were presented by means of box settings. Act I, as previously described, employed a series of wood wings and a landscape backcloth with certain wings and set pieces added to individualize a stock set to the requirements of this piece. Becks' unique staging method was in his handling of Act II; III; and IV, scene i. From the drop and wing setting, Becks shifted into a basic flat wall shell that seems to have served the next three

settings (figure 22). Judging from the ground plans, a staging system that required the replacement of only certain aspects of each setting for scene shifts is implied. Each wall of the five wall units remains stationary and central openings in each of the units could have been rapidly changed, thus avoiding a complete reconstruction of box settings between each act. Using figure 12 and table 1 as a guide, it is possible to see how the shifting of scenery could have been managed in a relatively simple manner.

After the Act I set pieces were taken off stage, the scenic shell described above could have been set up within the wood wings. In Act II, the opening in the down right (opening A) wall would be filled with a fireplace unit, while a doorway was placed in the up right angled wall (opening B). The large opening in the back wall (opening C) could have been decorated with ornate facing boards, beautifying the large entrance archway. The down left wall opening (opening E) would then be filled with a curtained window, which would not allow the audience to see beyond the window, thus eliminating the need for a backing unit. Proper furnishings would be put in place as a large backing unit replaced the Act I landscape. This would

Figure 22. Diagram of the common setting for Acts II, III, IV of George Becks' production of Led Astray.

Table 1
 Placement of set units in Acts II, III and IV of Les Astray

	Act II	Act III	Act IV
opening 1	fireplace unit	arched doorway	plugged
opening 2	doorway	plugged	window
opening 3	open archway	open archway	doorway and archway
opening 4	plugged	plugged	plugged
opening 5	curtained window	arched doorway	plugged

require some time to accomplish and a full intermission would be needed for this shift. The time required for this shift would be lessened by the fact that the wood wing units could remain, thus eliminating one shifting action.

The shift from Act II into Act III would not be such an undertaking. Becks has indicated the same floor plan for this setting as in Act II with the Act II fireplace replaced by an arched door unit, while a similar door unit was placed stage left, replacing the curtained window. Becks' ground plans show these arched doors at the precise location of the fireplace and window of Act II. The back-wall would undergo little change since it displays a large arch in both acts. The ornate facing might have been altered to a degree. The up right wall would require a plug unit to fill the opening left by the removal of the door unit used in the preceding act. The introduction of an elevated platform and a different backing unit would have completed this shift. In this manner, Becks was able to change from one box setting to another without a complete disassemblage of one setting and the setting up of a different setting.

The shift from III to IV would be a similar task.

The openings in the down left and down right wall units would be plugged as was the up right wall in the previous act. This up right wall unit would be completed with a curtained window, perhaps the same unit used in Act II with different decor. The large opening would be divided into two smaller openings, the left housing a door unit, while the stage right opening would become a smaller arch leading to an alcove. The backdrop used in Act III would be replaced by a smaller three-sided unit which formed the alcove and completed the setting. Thus, by the use of a standard shell, Becks presented three separate scenes, while avoiding lengthy and complicated act changes.

From Act IV, scene i to the second scene, a major shift was required. If Becks had placed the shell within the series of wood wings as suggested above, he would have had to strike the box setting and lower a backcloth only. Since the striking of the box setting is a much simpler matter than constructing it, this shift would not be long or as complicated as the shift from I into II. Becks gives no ground plans for IV ii lending credence to the theory that the setting might have remained from the first act and served both scenes. Certainly a different backcloth would be used than that of Act I.

The setting for the last act of the production does not duplicate the ground plans of Act II, III or IV.

Since the break from interior to exterior within Act IV rendered the continued use of the standard shell useless, Becks introduced a setting which was more nearly patterned after the engraving and the other examples considered in this study. His upstage area duplicates the engraving based on the original production. It seems as if Becks was forced to set up a box setting; therefore, he took his inspiration from the original owing to the fact that he need not rely on a staging method to simplify his shifting from one setting to another.

By this staging system, George Becks presented a full production of the play but simplified his staging problems. His use of this promptbook was to reproduce this piece under his number of varying theatres in the New York area. He was not creating a road show, as was John Moore, nor was he depending upon one long run as was Berrell and Pitman. He wanted to be able to present this production in a number of theatres on short notice when necessary, but in such a manner that a continued showing would be possible. The ground plans indicate that Becks had a production scheme that could be put into a season's bill

quickly without the appearance of a cut-down traveling production.

Chapter VI

The Road to Ruin

George Becks' promptbook based on the G. H. Davidson acting edition of The Road to Ruin¹ is located in the New York Public Library and was available to this researcher on microfilm, P 582, in the Ohio State University Theatre Collection. The acting edition used by Becks as a basis for the promptbook has had blank sheets for prompt notes inserted between its pages, which was a common practice. The printed edition includes the full text with act and scene divisions used by the 1824-26 production of the Theatres Royal in London, some remarks concerning the history of the play and its author up to the 1820's, a title page that states that this edition was taken from the above mentioned performances, and cast lists from those productions. Added to this edition is a partial playbill including Becks' credit and a flyer (figure 3) that gives

¹The Road to Ruin (Becks), P 582.

the name of the Kemble Dramatic Association as the producing agent of "A Grand Benefit" with Harry Miner as the producer, a cast list, a short announcement, and a statement proclaiming that the play has been arranged and adapted by George Becks. All other inked additions are in Becks' handwriting which includes two signatures, a prop list, three ground plans for the box settings used in the production, script changes, movement notation, and technical cues. The manner in which the symbols are used, the writing, and notations point to the work of George Becks. Additional information about the Becks' adaptation of the play is available from another promptbook of The Road to Ruin² in his collection. This book is based on the Samuel French acting edition. Judging from the remarks in this text, it is based on the G. H. Davidson edition but was revised to include the New York Park Theatre production in 1846. The French edition contains a somewhat altered text with different Act divisions, remarks concerning the history of the play and author, and cast lists of the 1824 Drury Lane production, Covent Garden's

²Thomas Holcroft, The Road to Ruin (New York: Samuel French, n.d.) George Becks' promptbook based on this acting edition is located at the New York Public Library. OSU Theatre Collection P 581.

production in 1823, and the above mentioned 1846 production.

Production data, 1792-1846.--The remarks in the two acting editions state that The Road to Ruin was first produced in London at Covent Garden in 1792. It represents Thomas Holcroft's finest playwriting effort from his thirty or more works. Two years after the opening of this piece, Holcroft became notorious in England when he voluntarily submitted himself to a charge of high treason resulting from pamphlets he had written. He and ten others were charged; however, three were tried and acquitted and the remaining eight, including Holcroft, were released without trials. Volunteering to be tried, and having the courage of his convictions was characteristic of this man who personally persuaded the Covent Garden company to present his play after the manager, Harris, had rejected it. Quick, Munden and Lewis, three outstanding members of the company had also rejected the piece, but Holcroft was persistent and the play was placed into rehearsal.³ However, the rehearsal period was not a congenial time. Mr. Quick was to play Old Dornton, while Munden played

³The Road to Ruin (Becks), P 581,

Silky, the villain, but after observing Munden's work in his role, Quick demanded the roles be reversed. Since Quick was the more influential actor in the company, this change was made. Although Munden regretted this switch at first, Old Dornton was to become one of the first of a long line of successes for this actor who was later considered one of the most popular performers of his time.⁴

The first production of The Road to Ruin in the United States was at the John Street Theatre in New York on February 8, 1793.⁵ John Hodgkinson, then on the rise and soon to be the outstanding actor-manager in New York, played Harry Dornton. It was during this season that Hodgkinson was beginning to take over the company from Lewis Hallam Jr. and John Henry. In 1793, Hallam appeared as Goldfinch and Henry as Old Dornton, but as Hodgkinson became more powerful in the company, he played the roles of his choosing and in two seasons took over the role of Old Dornton in Henry's absence.

The Road to Ruin enjoyed continual revivals through the first half of the 19th century both in the United

⁴The Road to Ruin (Becks), P 581, iii-iv.

⁵Ode11, I, 320.

States and in England. Nearly every theatrical season in both countries contains at least one production of the play. The 1846 production⁶ at the Park Theatre was presented on February 12, during a time when the popularity of the piece was beginning to wane. The show was fast becoming an "old chestnut" to be revived when the season began to slack or when, because of a previous failure, something had to be quickly interjected into the season. During the 1845-46 season, the manager at the Park presented Charles Kean in Colly Cibber's version of Richard III⁷ with lavish settings imported from the Princess's Theatre. This milestone in staging technique was met with great success; however, the remainder of the season was plagued with no worthy follow-up to this outstanding production. Consequently, the management began changing the bill two or three times per week. The Road to Ruin was one of the plays that the management fell back upon during this unstable time.

Included in this promptbook is an article from Our Playbox, dated February, 1880, that refers to the rivalry

⁶Ode11, V, 178.

⁷Ode11, V, 173-177.

that occurred between Drury Lane and Covent Garden when the former opened The Road to Ruin on October 8, 1825, in direct competition with the latter's production of the same piece which had opened two days previously.

The Davidson promptbook that Becks used when he adapted this play for the Kemble Dramatic Association in 1886 states that this text was based on the performances of the play given at the Drury Lane in 1824, Covent Garden in 1825 and Haymarket during the same season.⁸ Therefore, Becks had access to a record of the popular English staging of the play through the Davidson edition and a popular American production by means of the Samuel French version. It was from the commentary found in the two editions, an 1880 magazine article on earlier English versions, and his knowledge of the theatre that George Becks made his 1886 adaptation of The Road to Ruin.

Becks' association with The Road to Ruin.--As the amateur dramatic societies began to expand during the 1880's, they began to employ professionals from the New York stage to produce the shows. The actors were usually members of upper society levels who belonged to these

⁸The Road to Ruin (Becks), P 582, i.

amateur dramatic associations. Their annual dues made them eligible to participate in the productions. As these productions became more sophisticated, it was necessary for these groups to seek aid from professional theatre personnel to handle the production aspects. George Becks became active in Brooklyn amateur productions throughout the 1880's. Many other professionals were in Brooklyn during this and the preceding decade, usually with touring companies and second units connected with major acting companies. With the formation of the dramatic societies and their subsequent practice of hiring professionals, George Becks was able to use his promptbooks as a financial asset. On October 30, 1886, he adapted, for Harry C. Miner and The Kemble Dramatic Association, The Road to Ruin which was presented as a benefit for the Homeopathic Hospital of Brooklyn.⁹

Harry C. Miner was a very successful theatre manager, who was beginning to rapidly expand his operations in the mid-80's. He based his theatre endeavors on profit taking criteria, and was one of the few outstanding business men of the theatre. He was the owner-manager of two theatres

⁹The Road to Ruin (Becks), P 582, and Ode11, XIII, 359.

in New York: The Eighth Avenue and The Peoples's Theatre. He managed the professional career of Mrs. James Brown Potter, a well known amateur performer for many years before her professional debut in the 1880's. In addition, he was the editor of Miner's American Dramatic Directory. In 1885, he took over as the manager of the Brooklyn Theatre which represented a further expansion of his theatrical empire. It was here, the following season, that Becks' production of The Road to Ruin was performed. Judging from the advertisement contained in the Becks promptbook (figure 3), Miner assembled this production in a very short time. He was forced to ask J. K. Emmett to give up a Saturday night performance in order to allow the presentation of The Road to Ruin on October 30. Emmett's musical review, Fritz in Ireland, was extremely popular and Miner must have been positive that The Road to Ruin would be a success if he allowed it to replace such popular fare as Emmett's review. Regardless of his reasons, the replacement of a program on short notice was not unfamiliar to George Becks. This was a similar situation to that of George Fox's production of Hicory Diccory Dock which did not run as long as he expected. Fox had to call in a new cast and form a

season on short notice using George Becks' talents as an actor and stage manager. Becks relied on his promptbook collection to mount a series of productions.¹⁰ J. W. Wallack and A. M. Palmer both employed Becks in much the same manner. Becks managed the Wallack Company in Brooklyn in 1871 and this same company at Wallack's Theatre throughout the years from 1878-1884. Harry Miner called upon Becks and his collection for the production of The Road to Ruin in 1886 and, under his auspices, Becks adapted the script. The major changes made for this adaptation were involved with altering the text and staging methods from the wing and groove system of the London Theatres of 1792 to the three dimensional box settings and two dimensional wing and drop system of the 1880's. These changes from the Holcroft script and the staging employed by Becks are the consideration of this chapter.

London theatres at the time of early productions.--

The Covent Garden Theatre in 1792, the time of the first production of Holcroft's play, was in the same building that had housed the theatre since its inception in 1732. The relationship of the performers to their audience did

¹⁰Ode11, IX, 417.

not vary greatly during this period. The actor was generally confined to the apron of the stage with the painted two dimensional scenery forming pictures behind the proscenium arch. As the century progressed the actors began to slowly retreat behind the arch, managers expanded the seating capacity, lighting improved, and a trend toward integrating the action of the actors and pictorial scenery developed. A series of wings set in grooves on the stage floor and held upright by corresponding grooves running parallel and above the stage floor were painted to represent both interior and exterior scenes. These wings and grooves were set on the stage in groups of two or more in such a manner that quick changes in settings could be made by switching set pieces to form seemingly three dimensional scenes. This earlier pattern of English staging had been established in the Restoration period and was still in use when Covent Garden was built. In order to complete the scene, a back wall or landscape was represented on shutters that met at center stage. These units were wide enough so that while they were in their on stage position they would completely enclose the setting. Lower and upper grooves were used for these in the same manner as wings. This system was established in England during the time of the

masques of the early 1600's. Backcloths, a latter addition to the English staging practices, could be used in lieu of shutters or a combination of these devices could be employed.

Both interior and exterior scenes employed wings to complete the setting and varied the shutters with an occasional scene "in relief", made up of wings, cutouts and a backcloth. The use of backcloths, however, was governed by the lack of flying space above the stage, a feature inherited from the tennis-court theatres of the early Restoration period.¹¹

This system was designed to change the settings before the eyes of the audience in a matter of seconds, as the wings and shutters slid back and forth in their grooves.

During the eighteenth century, both Covent Garden and Drury Lane were altered a number of times as different managers took over the reigns of these companies. Each manager altered his theatre to suit the changes in production style and theatre technology. Several refinements were added to the established system of staging. The advent of sunken footlights, oil lamps in the wings, and the use of color media gave more visibility to the inner stage area and greater lighting control. The scenic artist, DeLoutherbouurg, working for Garrick at Drury Lane, used

¹¹George Rowell, The Victorian Theatre (London: The Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 14.

levels and cut-out profiles along with detailed back-cloths. William Capon at the end of the 1880's furthered this scenic advancement with his detailed setting for Shakespearian productions, both at Drury Lane and Covent Garden. In a slow but natural progression the theatres began to be altered.

When Drury Lane and Covent Garden were rebuilt after 1790, the great "apron" was much reduced. The part behind the proscenium was used correspondingly more, and the "apron" less, in the acting. Garrick had already abolished the practice of having "gentlemen" sit on the stage. With the reduction of the front stage, the use of the stage doors became less necessary to the action.¹²

These were the general staging methods in practice in 1792. It was from this theatre that the script of The Road to Ruin was adapted. Since Becks had possession of acting editions of a later period, the first transition from 1792 to 1825 was already made for him. Covent Garden was destroyed in 1808 and rebuilt the following year. The new building by the architect, Smirke, included a stage that was 82'6" wide and 56'0" deep with an apron of 12'3" thrusting into the auditorium. The proscenium arch opening

¹²Watson, p. 90.

was 38'8" wide by 36'9" in height.¹³ These were the dimensions of the stage at the time of the Davidson acting edition of The Road to Ruin. The Drury Lane had also undergone changes. The building that was constructed in 1812 by architect Wyatt housed the Drury Lane from that time through the twenties, and its dimensions are similar to those of Covent Garden. The stage was 77'5" wide and 90'3" deep with a 46'6" wide by 43'0" high proscenium opening. The apron jutted out into the auditorium 12'9".¹⁴ In 1822, manager Elliston removed the proscenium arch doors from this theatre.¹⁵

In order to clarify the requirements of this adaptation, a diagram of a typical English stage in the 1820's may prove useful (figure 23). This diagram is not taken from one stage plan but represents aspects from theatres in operation at this time. The stage is 90' deep with a proscenium arch opening of 40' and a 12' apron thrusting out into the auditorium. This stage contains seven sets

¹³Phillip Alan Macomber, The Iconography of London Theatre Auditorium Architecture, 1660-1900 (The Ohio State University, Ph.D. Dissertation, 1959), p. 80. Hereafter referred to as: Macomber.

¹⁴Macomber, p. 123.

¹⁵Watson, p. 91.

of grooves with four stage left and right grooves in the three downstage sets. The four upstage sets contain three stage left and right grooves. The sets are placed along two diagonal lines drawn from the edges of the proscenium arch opening to the back shutter, decreasing the upstage area. The wings are indicated in their "home" or off stage position. When they are in view of the audience the wings slide to an on stage position.

In showing how a production of The Road to Ruin would have been presented on this hypothetical stage, both backcloths and shutters will be employed to demonstrate the use of both techniques. The backcloth was a large canvas that was painted to complete the view created by the visible stage left and right wings. It was housed above the playing area when not in use, but due to the limited fly area in these playhouses, it was often on rollers. Later in this century, stage houses began to appear and drops could be flown above the stage without being rolled or folded. The shutters served the same purpose as the backcloth. They were extended wings that met in the center of the stage forming a background that completely closed in the stage from that point down to the audience. These shutters were not always solid and could be in the form

of "see through" tree settings or arches leading to upstage areas. With these in the background and a series of wings on either side, the stage was set with two dimensional scenery that gave a three dimensional illusion. Scene changes were made by replacing a set of on stage wings with those of the next setting, housed in a different groove, but in the same relative position as not to destroy the pictorial aspect of the scene thus the need for sets of grooves, housed closely together. During the act breaks, wings that were not to be used again for that performance were struck from the grooves and replaced with wings to be used in following scenes. This made four grooves in a set a sufficient number. In addition by placing wings in a proper order within the grooves, the scene could be changed by extracting one wing from in front of a second, thereby eliminating a two-fold move of exchanging wings. Only a single action of striking one setting to reveal the following setting was needed. The following list shows the probable location of the wings within the grooves of a production of The Road to Ruin in a London theatre during the mid-1820's.

First set of grooves

first groove:	Widow Warren's
second groove:	Tennis (II), Sheriff's (III), Park (V)
third groove:	Dornton's
fourth groove:	Street (I), Silky's (II,III)

First drop position:	Street drop
Second drop position:	Wood (Hyde Park)

Second set of grooves

first groove:	Widow Warren's
second groove:	Tennis (II), Sheriff's (IV)
third groove:	Dornton's
fourth groove:	Silky's

Third drop position:	Rustic interior drop (may have served for Silky's in II and III Sheriff's in IV)
Fourth drop position:	second interior for Sheriff's if needed

Third set of grooves

first groove:	Widow Warren's
second groove:	Tennis
third groove:	Dornton's
fourth groove:	not in use

Fourth set of grooves

first groove:	Tennis (shutter)
second groove:	Widow Warren's (Shutter with arch)
third groove:	Dornton's (Shutter with windows)

Fifth set of grooves

first groove:	Interior backing (Warren's)
second groove:	Landscape (Dornton's)
third groove:	not in use

Sixth and Seventh sets of grooves: not in use

Figure 24 is an isometric view of the stage described above. This figure does not include the drops in order to show clearly the positions of the wings in the grooves.

The Road to Ruin on stage in London; 1820's.--In Act I, scene i, Old Dornton's house would be represented by the painted flats located in the third grooves of the three downstage wings. The street wings for scene ii would also be on stage, but masked from the audience by the Dornton wings. The Dornton shutter in the fourth set of grooves would close in the stage, meeting at center stage, forming the back wall of the room. For purpose of illustration, it is assumed that the shutter contains window openings, requiring a landscape in the form of either a shutter located in the fifth set of grooves or a backcloth immediately upstage of the fourth set of grooves, in order to complete the setting. The playing area for this scene would be about 40' deep plus the 12' apron area by 40' at the proscenium area decreasing to about 36' at the back shutter.

The shift into the street scene as seen in figure 25 is made by unrolling the street drop positioned upstage of the first grooves and sliding the Dornton wings in the first grooves off stage. The wings for the street scene would already be in position behind the Dornton setting; thus, a quick and complete shift could be made in a few seconds. The acting area would be placed on the apron having only about 8' of depth on the main stage. The third scene of this act returns to Dornton's home, which would constitute a reversal of the preceding process. The Dornton wings would be thrust on stage and the drop cloth rolled up above the stage floor. The larger portion of the setting would not have been disturbed and would be available for property changes and positioning of actors for the third scene while scene ii was enacted downstage of the street drop. The Dornton home then would complete Act I.

During the act break, the Dornton home wings and shutter would be put in their off stage positions, while the street scene wings would be taken out of the grooves and replaced with wings representing Mr. Silky's home. The wings in the three downstage grooves that represent Widow Warren's home, the tennis court and Mr. Silky's

home would be placed in their on stage position. Only those for Warren's home would be seen by the audience for Warren's home located in the fourth set of grooves represented an interior wall with a large arch center for purposes of illustration; therefore, the tennis court shutter must not have been closed. To complete this backing, a shutter was housed in the fifth grooves as an interior backing behind the arch just described. This would allow upstage center entrances. In addition, this setting required an interior entrance with stairs indicated off stage, behind this arch. The change from Widow Warren's to the tennis court would be handled similarly to the simple changes of Act I. As shown in figure 27, the Warren wings, all located in the downstage grooves of the first three sets of grooves form the stage picture. In figure 28, these wings are in the process of being withdrawn revealing the tennis court wings. The shutter in the fourth groove was located in the central groove with the tennis court shutter downstage; therefore, it constituted a single action change with the tennis court back wall being slid on stage masking Warren's back wall. In this manner a major setting change could be completed in a very short time. Both settings would have

approximately the same playing area as Act I, scene i.

The change from the tennis court to Mr. Silky's home was a repeat of the Act I change. A backcloth, located upstage of the second grooves, would be unrolled and the tennis court wings in the first two grooves would provide an acting area of about 20' behind the proscenium opening as well as the 12' apron area.

This system of changing the settings would continue for the remaining six scenes. There would be no need to change wings during the act break from II to III, as the scenes in this act began with Widow Warren's then changed to Old Dornton's, while the third scene was Silky's. The order in which these wings have been set in the grooves need not be altered as the Warren wings mask Dornton's and Silky's when all three were in the on stage position. As the production progressed, the Sheriff's office would replace the tennis court wings prior to the fourth Act and would be, in turn, replaced by wings representing Hyde Park. This latter change would occur between Act IV and V. Thus, any changes that might require extended time periods could be managed during act breaks. Furthermore, if the break between Act IV and V were to be shortened, the Hyde Park wings could replace the Silky wings prior to Act IV,

making no changes necessary between Act IV and V.

This example staging of The Road to Ruin used back-cloths for the Sheriff's office and Hyde Park as well as Silky's home and street scene. The rustic interior setting of both the Sheriff's office and Mr. Silky's home could be accomplished by one drop for both scenes. Such a rustic interior was often a part of the holdings of these theatres. The other two drops, a street and a wood, were commonplace in the inventory of a theatre of this period. Thus, these drops that are called for in this production would be readily available along with corresponding wings.

The preceding example is only one plausible way in which this play may have been presented in the Theatres Royal during the 1820's. Other workable deployments of this system may be devised. For example, all settings could have been enclosed by shutters rather than drops or vice versa. Perhaps the tennis court scene would have been extended to the back shutter, 88' from the proscenium opening, in order to interject a display of scenic spectacle. This same scenic display might be employed for the final setting in Hyde Park using a series of cut drops for a vast expanse of wooded scenery. Certainly any of these changes might have been used within this standard staging

method of the period.

New York theatre at the time of Becks' production.--In the American Theatre of 1886, staging methods had varied. The general system of staging was a combination of wing and drop settings with that of the box setting. Usually wings with a drop at the upstage extremity of the acting area were used for exterior settings while interior settings were represented by enclosed box settings. As noted before, English staging methods were seen in this country with greater frequency during the 1840's and 50's. Charles Kean's Richard III, produced in New York in the fall of 1846, brought to this country a "lavish" display of scenery especially created for this production imported from England. This production was one of the first imports to initiate a change in the stage technology. It was during the 1846-47 season following this spectacle that The Road to Ruin was revised at the Park Theatre. After the building of Booth's Theatre, tall scene houses above the stage floor were incorporated in theatre buildings, and the use of box settings became the standard. In 1884, two years before Becks' production of The Road to Ruin, Steele MacKaye's double stage, designed in order to allow quick changes from one box setting to another, was

built into the Madison Square Theatre. In order for Becks to adapt this play successfully, he was compelled to use this type of scenic background.

Becks' The Road to Ruin on stage.--The major problem facing Becks was the nature of the box setting with regard to changing of scenery. He was not working in one of the theatres that was designed to shift a large three dimensional setting by mechanical means; therefore, the settings had to be assembled and disassembled between scenes. Rapid shifting from one full setting to another was impossible. Table 2 indicates Becks' first step in avoiding delayed set changes. In Act I, he cut the second scene, allowing scenes i and iii to be handled as a continuation of Act I. In this manner, the first full setting of Old Dornton's home could be used throughout Act I without any changes. The omission of scene ii of Act I does not hurt the plot development of the play, but does limit expository dialogue concerning Old Dornton and his son Harry.

The shift from the full setting in Act I to Widow Warren's, the other full setting in Becks' production, took place during the act break. As indicated in figure 29

Table 2

Comparative list and scene divisions of The Road to Ruin

Act	Scene	Location	Scene Divisions	George Cooks
Act I	Scene 1	Old New York's Home		Act I: Scene 1
	Scene 2	Church before demolition		Scene 2: 1-100
	Scene 3	Old Cemetery No. 2		Scene 3: 100-150
Act II	Scene 1	Madon's Home		Act II: Scene 1
	Scene 2	Madon's Home		Scene 2: 150-200
	Scene 3	Madon's Home		Scene 3: 200-250
Act III	Scene 1	Madon's Home		Act III: Scene 1
	Scene 2	Madon's Home		Scene 2: 250-300
	Scene 3	Madon's Home		Scene 3: 300-350
Act IV	Scene 1	Madon's Home		Act IV: Scene 1
	Scene 2	Madon's Home		Scene 2: 350-400
	Scene 3	Madon's Home		Scene 3: 400-450
Act V	Scene 1	Madon's Home		Act V: Scene 1
	Scene 2	Madon's Home		Scene 2: 450-500
	Scene 3	Madon's Home		Scene 3: 500-550
Act VI	Scene 1	Madon's Home		Act VI: Scene 1
	Scene 2	Madon's Home		Scene 2: 550-600
	Scene 3	Madon's Home		Scene 3: 600-650
Act VII	Scene 1	Madon's Home		Act VII: Scene 1
	Scene 2	Madon's Home		Scene 2: 650-700
	Scene 3	Madon's Home		Scene 3: 700-750
Act VIII	Scene 1	Madon's Home		Act VIII: Scene 1
	Scene 2	Madon's Home		Scene 2: 750-800
	Scene 3	Madon's Home		Scene 3: 800-850
Act IX	Scene 1	Madon's Home		Act IX: Scene 1
	Scene 2	Madon's Home		Scene 2: 850-900
	Scene 3	Madon's Home		Scene 3: 900-950
Act X	Scene 1	Madon's Home		Act X: Scene 1
	Scene 2	Madon's Home		Scene 2: 950-1000
	Scene 3	Madon's Home		Scene 3: 1000-1050

Figure 29. Becks' plan for the Dornton setting,
The Road to Ruin. Courtesy of The Theatre
Collection, The New York Public Library,
Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.
OSU Theatre Collection P 582.

the ground plan in Becks' promptbook,¹⁶ depicts Old Dornton's home as a symmetrical setting made up of three walls, with a central arch in the back wall. The side walls both contained a small angled section at the upstage junction with the back wall, and a fireplace stage right countered by a door in the upstage angle of the stage left wall were the only set pieces that disturbed a perfect symmetry. Doors were located at the extreme downstage areas of the side walls. Set furnishing which included two rugs, a screen, tables, chairs, a sideboard and a sofa completed this setting. The walls were decorated with a clock and a mirror over the sideboard. Further decor can only be imagined but probable resembled the highly detailed settings of this period as revealed in many photographs and engravings.

The other full setting that was employed by Becks was the home of Widow Warren. This setting still employed a standard three-wall structure but was not symmetrical as was the first setting.¹⁷ Judging from the ground plan shown in figure 30, the back wall was characterized by a

¹⁶The Road to Ruin (Becks), P 582, p. 9.

¹⁷The Road to Ruin (Becks), P 582, p. 21.

Figure 30. Becks' plan for the Warren setting, The Road to Ruin. Courtesy of The Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. OSU Theatre Collection P 582.

large protruding structure left of center that housed a closet. This closet is a vital focal point in the development of the plot in the last act. Although they are not indicated on the ground plan, Becks called for entrances from R1E and L1E, that could only be placed downstage of the shown side walls. L1E was in fact the main entrance into the room. Guests coming in the outside door and up to this room entered at L1E. Exits made to interior rooms were constantly made at R1E which was indicated as a door upstage of the stage right wall. Specific examples from Becks' promptbook indicate the use of these entrances. At the beginning of Act II, the first time that Warren's home is used, Jenny, the maid, and Mrs. Ledger, a woman asking for a loan, enter the room. Becks marked in the script that they enter L1E. The nature of their conversation indicates that they are coming into the home from without.¹⁸ Shortly thereafter, Sophia, Widow Warren's daughter, enters from R2E, sometimes indicated as RUE. This character talks of viewing a scene in an interior room of the house.¹⁹ These entrances and exits are used throughout. In Act V

¹⁸The Road to Ruin (Becks), P 582, p. 21.

¹⁹The Road to Ruin (Becks), P 582, p. 21.

the upstage entrance is used as a closet as was R1E.²⁰ This is a high point in the action as two characters must overhear the misdeeds of three villains, thus ending the show with all the loose ends tied. It will be of particular interest to note at this time that the ground plan clearly indicates that the stage right wall did not connect to the back wall. The door in figure 30 is indicated but in a different manner as the door at the same location in the stage left wall of the Dornton setting (figure 29). Becks' plan shows a separation at this point. In addition, the use of entrances downstage of the setting are marked in a different manner as the doors in corresponding positions in the first setting, which would seem to indicate that these walls ended at this point and entrances and exits were made below them rather than through doorways as in the first setting. This setting could have been placed entirely upstage of the first set of downstage drop lines--corresponding to the first set of grooves in older theatres. The setting represented a handsomely furnished drawing room of a well-to-do widow. Becks noted that "handsome furnishings and hangings" were

²⁰The Road to Ruin (Becks), P 582, p. 74.

to adorn the room. In his ground plan, he specifically called for two tables, an assortment of chairs, a sofa, a piano and decorative stands. From the script, it would be necessary that this be a setting containing much detail. Probably, the L1E and R1E entrances did not contain doors, but off stage doors were implied. These two major settings were the locations of nine of the thirteen scenes in Becks' adapted version of The Road to Ruin.

With the omission of the street and tennis court scenes, the Becks' production used three other settings: Mr. Silky's home, the Sheriff's office and Hyde Park. Mr. Silky's home was the setting for the second scene in both Act II and Act III in Becks' organization of the script. In Act II, the scene was preceded and followed by the Widow Warren's home, and in Act III it was preceded by Dornton's and followed by Warren's. The Sheriff's office appeared as the first scene in Act IV and was followed by Dornton's home. The scene at Hyde Park occurred in the last act, sandwiched between scenes at the Widow Warren's as was Mr. Silky's in Act II. Traditionally, the two interior settings would be represented by box settings, and the exterior, Hyde Park, would be represented by a drop and wing setting. George Becks did not follow this

general rule making a definite selection as to which system he would employ. The reasoning behind Becks' selection will be revealed by a continuation of the staging of the play commencing with Act II.

As noted above, the Widow Warren's setting was positioned upstage of the "in one" area. Becks indicated that the Silky home, "a place of business", was represented by a drop and wing setting "in one".²¹ This selection allowed the sequence of scenes to be changed in a minimum of time. The change required the lowering of the backcloth, which represented the back wall of Silky's, and masked the Warren setting which was upstage of this drop. The wings that border the drop and masked off backstage areas were put into place as the drop was lowered. The setting required only the barest essentials of furniture. Furnishings that were not actually used by the actors may have been painted on this backdrop. In addition, a rustic interior backdrop was still a common item in the inventory of a theatre in 1886. As in Act I, Becks decided to cut a scene from the play. The tennis court scene did provide some interesting action in that it depicted Goldfinch's

²¹The Road to Ruin (Becks), P 582, p. 35.

arrest, but, as Becks must have been aware, all of the action of this scene was related in subsequent scenes of the play. Therefore, with the elimination of this scene and Becks' decision to make the Silky scene a drop and wing setting, both Act I and Act II had almost continuous action with little delay between scenes.

As shown in table 2, Act III of the Becks' adaptation of The Road to Ruin is presented in three scenes, Old Dornton's, Mr. Silky's and the Widow Warren's. This act required more of the staging aspects than the preceding act, although it did not introduce any new settings. In this manipulation of the act divisions, Becks demonstrated his preference for a tight sequence of changes, rather than a situation in which he would have been forced to shift from one of his major settings directly to the other. By this division of the acts, he had the act break to shift from Warren's to Dornton's, and during the second scene he has Silky's home which is played "in one". As indicated in Becks' ground plan for Dornton's home, two angled pieces appear at the upstage corners. If the larger portion of the side walls were swung open to form straight lines with the small angled pieces, the "in one" area would be open, allowing space for the Silky setting.

Thus, at the end of III i, these walls were opened, the following set was flown in, and during the running of scene ii, the Dornton home was removed and the Warren house set up. As noted earlier, the stage wall of the Warren setting was an independent unit. The other walls could be set up without this right wall, thus allowing maximum access to the setting while being set up behind the Silky setting. Then, as a last move, the right wall was set into place. This shift was certainly not as quick as those of II or V, but all that was required of the first change was pivoting the walls, removing the down-stage set pieces and lowering the Silky drop. The time-consuming task of shifting from Dornton's to Warren's was made during the running of scene ii. The shift from scene ii to scene iii was exactly the same as the simple shift from II, ii to II, iii. Being a practitioner in the theatre, Becks reverted to old established staging methods to avoid problems in shifting from one full box setting to another. The use of a drop to represent Silky's home allowed for extremely smooth and quick changes between the six scenes that comprise Act II and III.

Act IV, as revised by Becks, contained two scenes, the Sheriff's office and Old Dornton's. Becks indicated

that the small Sheriff's office was on the second level.²² The ground plan provided by Becks which is depicted in figure 31 is a simple symmetrical setting consisting of three walls, with one door in each of the side walls. A table, center, with two chairs provide all of the furnishings needed for this scene. During the time between Acts III and IV, the Widow Warren's home was struck and both the Sheriff's office and Old Dornton's home were set on the stage simultaneously in the manner indicated in figure 32. The Sheriff's office was housed within Dornton's. At the end of Act IV, scene i, the office setting would be unleashed and the three sections run out downstage of the opened side walls of the Dornton setting. The furnishings for Dornton's, which were pre-set in the upstage areas of the setting, would be brought down into position as the walls were swung on stage to their playing positions. Behind the mask of the Act curtain, the stage would be changed from one box setting to another during a short interval, presenting to Brooklyn audiences a miniature example of the staging techniques of New York.

Act V was presented in three scenes, Warren's, Hyde

²²The Road to Ruin (Becks), P 582, p. 60.

Figure 31. Becks' plan for the Sheriff's Office setting The Road to Ruin. Courtesy of The Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor Lenox and Tilden Foundations. OSU Theatre Collection P 582.

Park and back to Warren's. The second scene was marked simply as "Wood(1)"²³ by Becks. This was a standard notation indicating the use of a wood drop in the first drop position which approximates the first grooves of the older theatres. During this era, such drops were common as were rustic interiors such as those Becks used for the Silky scene. Becks' selection of its use and position was dictated by the same staging problem that faced him in the second act. Since the Widow Warren's setting was completely upstage of the first drop position, the interjection of this scene was done in a quick and simple manner. The wood scene was lowered as masking wings were brought to their on stage position. The Warren setting upstage was not disturbed and was in position without change for Act V, scene iii. Thus, Act V was, as Act II, a series of three scenes that had very little interruption in the flow of action from scene to scene.

Certain other aspects of this script were altered by Becks. He attempted to interject a number of the lines from the omitted scenes into later scenes. Also, a number of alterations were made to update the script and to give

²³The Road to Ruin (Becks), P 582, p. 72.

it a more American appeal. A number of these are not original with Becks, but are taken from the Samuel French edition that was in his collection. The importance of his adaptation is found, however, in the staging methods that he employed. Table 2 demonstrates the major alteration of the script that was made by Becks in order to present the play in the way he desired. This alteration was the first step in mastering the staging problems of the script. His selection of staging techniques of old and new practices completed his adaptation. It was this use of staging techniques that reveals George Becks' mastery of stage production.

Chapter VII

Conclusions

George Becks' name occurs frequently in historical research studies that are related to the theatre of the nineteenth century. His influence is such that both American and British theatrical sources refer to his collection of promptbooks and individual scripts that have been discovered in several locations. This investigation discloses pertinent details about Becks' career and his usage of his collection of promptbooks. The ample volumes of materials provided a great deal of valuable information, which had to be distilled and presented in an acceptable organization in order to identify the nature of Becks, the collection and, from a consideration of these, his position in the American Theatre of the nineteenth century. The investigation of Becks' professional life pointed to his association with the several acting companies and a number of outstanding theatre personalities in the American Theatre. His first associations with Niblo's

Garden and the Olympic Theatre introduced him to the top talents of his time and, in Forrest, a talent of a previous time. During this first ten years, Becks established himself as a suitable actor, but never reached the heights of featured actor, except in the role of Didier. Already he had begun to compile his collection of plays, and was called upon to assist in the production aspects of the performances. His opportunity to establish himself as a permanent member of any theatre was constantly thwarted by changes in management or theatre failures. Thus, a pattern of constant change from one situation to another was begun and was never to be abandoned.

In the next twenty years, Becks was seen on the stage less as his backstage activities increased. His appearances with Edwin Booth, Wallack, G. L. Fox, and those under Daly and Palmer speak well for the popularity of his work, but by the 1880's he was rarely seen in productions. The promptscripts of his collection hold the answer to his diminishing appearances on the stage. His work as manager for Wallack and Palmer, as well as his extensive production work among the Brooklyn dramatic associations, dominated his career. As the stage of New York became more of a "closed shop" in the nineties due to the Syndicate,

Becks' activity took him from New York. From the overall investigation of playbills from the 1890's, it can be assumed that Becks completed the last fourteen years of his life in much the same manner, working as a stage manager by relying on the collection of scripts and appearing occasionally on stage.

As was discussed in this study, George Becks collected a wealth of material over the years of his career. In an attempt to classify these materials, the collection of promptbooks were divided into three sections: 1) promptbooks that are unmarked or do not include any prompt markings made by George Becks; 2) promptbooks that have more than one handwriting which includes George Becks' work; 3) promptbooks that are marked only by George Becks. From this simple means of classification, the knowledge gained from working with the promptbooks, and a consideration of the nature of Becks' professional career, a distinction was made as to the manner in which Becks functioned as a stage manager.

Further clarification was needed to complete the study. The duties and responsibilities of a stage manager were to be defined. From the professional career of George Becks and the manner in which he functioned both as an actor

and a stage manager, a further insight to this definition was gained. The stage manager was a lesser position in an acting company than that of the prompter and often alternated between companies. Becks was constantly returning to the stage as an actor, supplementing his stage managerial duties. As a stage manager--actor, he proved valuable to small companies or traveling stars with partial troupes. This led to his work under Lander, McCullough, Florence, Mitchell and others discussed in this study.

Considering the nature of the role of the stage manager during this era, Becks' use of the promptbooks he had collected became apparent and further disclosed the nature of the theatre in which he was employed. Prior to the emphasis on long-run productions of original works on the New York stage, certain plays were a part of a standing repertory. These standards were presented season after season, and audiences paid to see repeated productions. A company that was without an established repertory or that needed quick replacements for unforeseen gaps in their bills of fare could use such a man as Becks either to produce personally one of his pre-planned productions or to use one of his scripts. As New York companies relied less on multiple bills and short-run programs turned into

long-run shows, Becks was forced into different locations. The trends leading to the formation of the new economy structure, and eventually the Syndicate, are paralleled in Becks' career and his departure from New York. Hopefully, from this example, a general knowledge may be gained as to the nature of the stage manager in the nineteenth century.

Furthermore, this same investigation attempted to evaluate the extent to which the staging methods shown in these promptbooks were to be accredited to George Becks. In order to evaluate this aspect of the study, the general history of the era and the specific materials indicating Becks' professional career become an essential foundation for the study. From this basis, a more detailed consideration of Becks' work as a stage manager was explored by the analysis of four representative promptscripts. The four promptbooks selected for this study not only represent the work of George Becks, but may serve as representative works of the American theatre prior to the establishment of a market for original plays and the formation of the Syndicate.

Frou Frou and Fanchon, the Cricket, were both highly popular adaptations from the continent. Fanchon, the Cricket, a highly romanticised tale of love, from

La Petite Fadette by George Sand, characterized a whole mode of popular pieces. The role of Didier, with its light comedy depicting a highly sensitive, frail, rustic, was extremely popular. Boucicault's The Colleen Bawn, employed a similar role in Myles, which Boucicault created in the original. This sympathetic "second character" was a featured aspect of these Romances.

Frou Frou was Augustin Daly's first success after forming his own company. This play is a somewhat transitional piece caught between romantic melodrama and the domestic dramas that were being introduced into this country. Dion Boucicault, quick to follow popular trends, wrote what he considered was the play to set all new trends, Led Astray. These three plays, Fanchon, the Cricket, Frou Frou, and Led Astray demonstrate a clear development from the highly romantic pastoral love story to a dramatic domestic situation. Led Astray would probably be thought of as quite romantic with its duel, vows of undying faith, and somewhat contrived happy ending, but it was quite a change from the ilk of Fanchon, the Cricket.

The Road to Ruin stood out as an example of the revival of "old chestnuts" that dotted the performance schedules of active theatres. It was especially important

because of its scenic requirements. Becks' adaptation of such plays revealed his mastery of this stage art.

The analysis of Frou Frou and Fanchon, the Cricket served to demonstrate the organization of Becks' work as seen in a promptbook that he alone had marked and a promptbook that had a number of contributors. The technical aspects of these promptbooks were brought under a careful consideration, in order to display this aspect of Becks' craftsmanship. Fanchon, the Cricket offered additional insight into the career of Becks due to his long association with the role of Didier.

In the analysis of Led Astray, Becks was compared to other artists of his time and his relationship to his craft and the theatre was shown. From this comparison, the study was able to assess the importance of practical application of staging technology demonstrated by Becks' methods. In addition, this chapter related specific events in his career to his usage of these staging practices that he employed.

In the consideration of The Road to Ruin, an imaginative application of Becks' staging methods demonstrated how he was able to adapt a script of another era to stage technology of his own day. As the box setting became the

accepted mode, Becks incorporated this staging method into his productions. Such changes were rapidly occurring in all aspects of the theatre of his day and The Road to Ruin marks one of Becks' contributions to this rapidly moving era. In this play, he was faced with the problems of renovating a dramatic piece written for an audience of one hundred years before his production that employed staging methods of the past. Becks adapted this piece to suit the contemporary tastes and display the scenic spectacle that was expected.

Hopefully, this study has clarified the contents of the many promptbooks signed by George Becks. From this overall consideration of his career and use of these texts perhaps further investigation into his work will be encouraged. Furthermore, it is hoped that when other research becomes involved with any aspect of this man, this study will help in evaluating the material. This study does not intend to be a definitive analysis of Becks' career or his collection of promptscripts, it will, however, serve as an accurate guide and outline to those researchers who would wish to deal in other aspects of this large collection of theatrical materials.

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