MINDS, MINSTRELS AND MELPOMENE AT

MIDDLETOWN'S MCDONOUGH

Phyllis Bruce
History 254
Judd Kahn
May 19, 1978
In May of 1851, the McDonough House Corporation was formed as a common stock company. This group purchased what was known as the Central Hotel on the corner of Court and Main Streets in Middletown, Connecticut. Adjacent to this prominent landmark stood a smaller building which was first known as McDonough Hall. The hall was used for public assemblies of varying natures. For many years, it was the only building large enough to accommodate popular musical and theatrical events. Its seating capacity was 850.

In 1868, the McDonough Hall changed hands. A. M. Colegrove purchased it for $22,000 according to the Constitution (March 4, 1868). Colegrove was the proprietor of the hall for over a quarter of a century. Upon his death in 1895, his heirs assumed the responsibility of management. According to the city directories, McDonough Opera House was managed by A. L. Southmayd in 1898. By this time, rival halls were available in Middletown, and the new name was a glorification intended to salvage some of the immense popularity McDonough Hall had enjoyed in its earlier days. By 1907-1908 the "Opera House" was called a theater in the directory. Its last public usage was as the city's first motion picture theater. A local history buff, "Doc" Ward has a picture of it in this final stage, when it was known as the Nickel Theater (because it cost a nickel to see a movie). ¹

The original McDonough House Corporation included Thomas McDonough, son of the famed Colonel for whom so many Middletown buildings are named. Discrepancies about the building itself exist. A standard Middletown history text implies that the hotel was existing as the Central Hotel when purchased by the corporation in 1851. ² An October 29, 1935 newspaper clipping (The Middletown Press) implies that it was built by the corporation at a cost of $30,000. It could be that the Central Hotel...
was torn down in 1851. McDonough Hall and Hotel did come down in 1929 and were replaced by the Middletown Savings Bank building (now the Liberty Bank for Savings) and a parking lot.

The existence of the engagement book of McDonough Hall for the years of 1874-1881 at the Connecticut State Library enticed me into a study of the forms of entertainment which were popular in Middletown at that time. Although I have some information about the events which were scheduled at the hall in its earliest days and toward the end of the nineteenth century, it consists of isolated bookings advertised in Middletown newspapers. Because these events were not regularly and consistently publicized in this medium, and because many issues are not extant, I do not have a complete idea of the variety and scope of the entertainment offered at McDonough Hall during its long history. Therefore, I will concentrate on the time period covered in the engagement book, first giving a more general historical introduction of the styles of popular entertainment in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

This period was the heyday of live entertainment. Minstrel troupes, theatre companies, circuses and lyceum speakers toured the country. A heavy agenda of professional and amateur productions was the norm for most small and large cities. There was ample leisure time to enjoy varied entertainments and a desire for mutual improvement inspired lecturers and classical musicians to bring their work to the people.

The first American lyceum was started in 1826. Originally formed to "provide practical scientific instruction for workmen, and to have as a result a more intelligent worker as well as a better product," it gradually became modified to appeal to a larger society.
These earliest lyceums purchased instruments which assisted their studies. Among the direct aims of the lyceums were the improvement of conversation, social gatherings to discuss moral issues, the establishment of libraries, assisting public schools, compiling town histories, maps, doing agricultural and geological surveys and collecting minerals. Lyceums were wildly successful because they had a low overhead and because they excluded politics from their platforms while getting firmly established in the culture. This first stage was largely volunteer; visiting lecturers were paid only $5 or $10 plus traveling expenses. Lecture topics were educational and public-minded; Daniel Webster spoke on "History of the Constitution of the United States" and Henry Thoreau on "Student Life in New England, Its Economy." Audiences eventually demanded change and the lecture subjects branched out into travel, history, biography, foreign affairs and the art of living. In the early period, there were few other forms of entertainment except in the largest cities. Literacy was improving and the printed word became more important. In the 1850's, Bayard Taylor spoke on "Japan" and Henry Ward Beecher on "Patriotism." Carl Schurz received $30 regularly for his lectures on "The French Revolution of 1848" and Beecher $100 for "The Head and the Heart." In the decade before the Civil war, audiences demanded famous lecturers and popular topics. This "swing from practical knowledge to family entertainment was to become still more pronounced after the Civil war." One of the most important features of the success of the lyceum culture was the availability of good transportation. In the 1820's lecturers came by stagecoach. Artisans and farmers traveled to the hall by horseback, carriage or farm wagon; townspeople walked. There were only a few "corduroy roads, made of logs laid crosswise to the traffic"
most roads were narrow dirt paths. By 1840 there were 3000 miles of railroad track, improved stage transportation and the National Road (a famous interstate highway). And in 1860, there were 30,626 miles of track. McDonough Hall was "within easy reach of the steamboat landing, and all street railway lines pass its doors, leading to the railway station and different parts of the city."  

Increased leisure time combined with thought provoking lyceum lectures naturally laid the foundation for the development of library facilities. The importance of the lyceum to the library movement was surely evident in the establishment in 1875 of Russell Library in Middletown. At first, lyceum speakers were always booked at McDonough Hall. Around the late 1870's the Russell Library became a popular place for these lectures. 

There is considerable ambivalence about when the lyceum movement actually ended. Some claim that the "pure form" (a local adult education movement) ended by 1840. Most agree that the public recognized and supported the lyceum movement far longer, even indefinitely. Today it might be interpreted as adult education in the form of extension courses. Public libraries took over some of the lyceum functions. The quality of the lectures as educational deteriorated, basically because audiences were more interested in the quality of performances than the content. The professional management which became necessary for the survival and success of the speakers in the third quarter of the century added a strong element of commercialism. Lecturers had to be dynamic entertainers. Radio, television and the moving picture finally superceded the popularity of the lyceums as an entertainment form. 

The increasing stress on popular entertainment in post Civil war America diminished the seriousness of the lyceum lectures. Comedians,
literary buffoons "lectured." While the lyceum circuit closely paralleled
the entertainment routes of the roving bands of musicians, the two
were rarely combined. The floundering lyceum bureaus of the later
period came to recognize the increased popularity and drawing power of
these musical groups and began scheduling lectures with musical per-
formances.

Although Middletown did not have an organization specifically
called a lyceum bureau, there were many groups with misleading names
which served the same function. The Ancient Order of Hibernians was a
group of young Irish men who gathered together for self-improvement.
Agricultural societies, the Sarsfield club, church and civic groups
regularly sponsored lyceums.

Reform speakers actively campaigned in Middletown. As early
as July 2, 1851, a Mrs. Coe spoke on women's rights in the "bloomer
costume." In 1874, Isabella Hooker and Susan B. Anthony held a free
lecture in Middletown to discuss "The Woman Question." At that time,
the Constitution (January 28, 1874) declared that the "question of
equal rights for women, her right to the ballot and various advances
for and against the question have been so thoroughly canvassed that
most of our readers have formed an opinion one way or the other on
the subject." However, the paper encouraged a good attendance for
further possible enlightenment.

The most popular lyceum female lecturer in Middletown was Mary
A. Livermore. She was an author, suffragist and active reformer who
was reared in the Calvinist tradition and educated at the Female Seminary
in Charleston. Her first teaching job was on a Virginia plantation.
She was married for 54 years to a Universalist minister, working for
most of that time as a writer, reporter and lecturer. Mary Livermore
was the only woman who reported the convention which nominated Lincoln.
During the Civil war she worked for the U. S. Sanitary Commission.
Afterwards, she concentrated all her efforts on the woman's suffrage
movement, thoroughly convinced that it was an all encompassing goal
which would enable women to curtail the liquor traffic, improve public
education and alleviate poverty. Livermore edited The Agitator, a
suffrage newspaper, lectured publicly until at least age 83 and wrote
several books. Her major areas of influence were in the temperance
movement and women's education. She co-edited A Woman of the Century
with Frances Willard (who lectured in Middletown on October 1, 1878).
Her most popular lecture was "What shall we do with our daughters?"
In Middletown, she spoke on "The Battle of Money" on December 2, 1874
at the University Chapel and on "Superfluous Women" (or "Surreptitious
Women") at the McDonough Hall on December 14, 1875.

Other lyceum lecturers spoke on varied topics. Middletown
audiences liked the supernatural and often had mind readers like J. R.
Browne (November 11, 1874), mesmerists like Prof. Carpenter (January
12, 1875), Prof. Pepper, the "ghost" lecturer (November 24, 1874) and
Prof. Tobin, a clairvoyant (November 17, 1875).

Special interest groups sponsored lectures about Ireland, one
on education by Mr. Northrup, the Secretary of the Board of Education,
and "Sherman's March to the Sea" by Gen. Kilpatrick.

There were several famous lyceum speakers who regularly
"performed" at Middletown's McDonough Hall. Carl Schurz delivered
"Centennial Thoughts" on November 2, 1875. Former minister to Spain,
Union soldier, Secretary of the Interior and Missouri senator, Schurz
began as a student reformer in his native Germany. Coming to America,
he quickly espoused the anti-Slavery cause, campaigned for Fremont and then in 1858 for Abraham Lincoln.

After an active involvement in the Civil war, Schurz worked as a journalist for several large newspapers and toured America lecturing on nationalistic topics. Although the Dictionary of American Biography cited Schurz's delivery of speeches as "always carefully memorized... marked by a lofty tone and emphasized by graceful diction and impressive delivery" the Sentinel and Witness (November 26, 1875) criticized him stating:

Mr. Schurz speaks rapidly - too rapidly, indeed, - and he has not much of the manner of graces of an orator; but he has a wonderful command of the English language, a fullness of expression and a force and facility of illustration rare even on the American platform.

The newspaper also said that a large attentive audience listened as he:

...uttered many a stinging truth, exposed many a shameful sham, and in the keenest way pointed out the evils that have accumulated in and about the American political system as well as the American social life.

On November 16, 1875, John B. Gough delivered the second in the "People's Series" lyceum lectures at McDonough Hall. His topic was either "Lights and Shadows of London Life" or "Sights and Scenes of London Life." Nineteenth century newspapers are notorious for inaccuracies and misspellings; Middletown is certainly no exception. Gough was probably the most famous temperance lecturer of his time. He came to America from his native England at twelve years of age, sent here to earn money so his family could join him. He was fairly ambitious and successful, and managed to do that, but a financial depression in 1833 cost Gough his job. His mother died, Gough began
drinking. Thus began a long period of intemperance. He tried to get jobs as a low comedy actor, lost his wife and first child during one of his drinking bouts, and then finally began trying to cope with his problem by lecturing for the temperance cause. In 1843, he gave 383 addresses, traveling 6840 miles, gaining 2218 pledges and gaining $1059 for his services. At the high point of his career, Gough received $150 per lecture. He made several England tours, he gave more than 9600 lectures to over 9 million people during his career, and died in Frankford, Pa. while still lecturing. Gough appealed to the emotions of his audience: "Both friend and foe attest to the fact that he had a fine musical voice which was under perfect control. As he willed he could make his audience respond with laughter or tears."\(^{11}\)

A group of Middletown jubilee performers, the United Singers sponsored a lecture by Frederick Douglas at McDonough Hall in March of 1876 in an effort to raise funds for a new organ for the African Methodist Church. Douglas spoke on "Our National Capital" to a small but appreciative audience. Douglas, called the "leader of his race" by historian Merle Curti wrote the powerful autobiography My Bondage and My Freedom in 1855.\(^{12}\)

In his book, The American Lyceum, Carl Bode asserts that literature and the lyceum movement became closely allied in the mid-nineteenth century. Writers discovered that they could try out their ideas in lecture form before audiences, refining their products until they were "polished enough for publication."\(^{13}\)

Several prominent authors appeared in Middletown during this period; it is conceivable that they were previewing their works. On September 23, 1872, Harriet Beecher Stowe gave a reading at McDonough Hall. John Thompson gave a dramatic reading of his own works there
also. A Middletown favorite, Thompson was presenting excerpts from his new play *The World on Wheels*. The *Daily Constitution* March 9, 1875 cited his "...facile pen (and) great achievement." It also said that the drama would suffice to draw an even greater popularity..."the public will have a chance to witness the manifold attractions that were embodied in 'On Hand', 'Dixie' and 'Zykes'." Among the other lecture-authors who spoke at McDonough were B. Ellison Warner who wrote prose and poetry for Godey's ladies Book, R. G. Hibbard and Stuart Rogers.

Isaac Hayes was booked to talk on Arctic explorations, Eli Perkins spoke on "The Perkins Family in New York and Saratoga", several other temperance people lectured and the Rev. Edward Hale gave a talk, "Civil Servant" on election eve in 1875.

Ministerstook to the lyceum platform very naturally. Lecturing became a lucrative profession; none took greater advantage than Henry Ward Beecher. Accused of avarice because he was one of the first to employ a lecture agent, Beecher really was interested in making money. But he was a "house-filler." Audiences east and west demanded his services; he enjoyed immense popularity.

Henry Ward Beecher was born in 1813, son of the prominent Congregational clergyman, Lyman Beecher. After a mediocre college career, Henry Beecher served in a number of pastorates finally gaining the prestigious one at Plymouth Church in Brooklyn. He was well known for his dramatic flamboyance in sermonizing; hence, Beecher was a natural for the lyceum circuit.

In 1869 Beecher published *Norwood* which Ann Douglas calls a "crucial document." It was thinly disguised autobiography and soon Beecher was exposed in his affair with Libby Tilton, wife
of Theodore Tilton, Beecher's close friend and affiliate. Libby Tilton was typical of the genre of nineteenth century ladies who sentimentalized their lives in florid letter writing and passionate play-acting of social roles. These women were denied activity of real social prestige. At first Beecher referred to Libby as a "mere child", but later damned her in an attempt to clear himself.\textsuperscript{15} The public was not in a mood to dismiss Beecher so easily.

The \textit{Sentinel and Witness} on February 11, 1876 included several articles and letters about the Beecher scandal. It reported on Henry C. Bowen's "Reply to the Examining Committee of Plymough Church" in which he condemned Beecher as guilty of adultery, hypocrisy and perjury. A letter from a Middletown lady protested Beecher's "entire innocence" and denounced the \textit{Sentinel and Witness}; "I think the course you pursue in this manner will tend to make your paper obnoxious to many who might otherwise enjoy it."

The paper retorted that it did not actually say Beecher was guilty, but it did say:

\ldots the attempt on the part of the Plymouth church to hide the truth, and the shilly-shallying and mean devices to keep the main question from frank investigation, are not consistent with one notion of christian (sic) character... Is Henry Ward Beecher, whose pay is $2000 a Sunday for talking, to be saved at the expense of everybody else? Beecher is no more to the \textit{Sentinel} than any other man; and we question if the world has ever known an instance in which a man, charged with such offences, continued to preach. A straightforward man would allow any kind of investigation into his character, would court it, and not by mean devices, aided by a tricky lawyer...The \textit{Sentinel} feels sorry for Beecher in his great trouble
presidential candidate cancelled her December 12, 1876 engagement at McDonough. It was The Woodhull\textsuperscript{16} who publicly announced the Beecher-Tilton affair in her revenge against Libby Tilton. Mrs. Tilton openly despised Woodhull and all that she stood for preferring to enact the languishing, melancholy stereotype than to be truly involved in the women's movement.\textsuperscript{17}

McDonough Hall hosted many lyceum speakers in its prime. The lecture subjects were typical of the preferences of the larger American audiences. Rival Middletown halls sponsored lectures too, many on scientific topics with titles like "Light," "Gas" and "Energy."

When the lyceum movement began to wane, concerned citizens tried to draw audiences by presenting a musical event before a lecture. The lecture course managers in Middletown held a concert by the Boston Philharmonic Society in November of 1875 to help meet expenses.

Although classical music was regularly enjoyed in private Middletown homes, the public halls had relatively few "cultivated" musical events. There were several big name orchestras, instrumentalists and singers performing at McDonough over the years, but they represented a small percentage of the total bookings. Special trains were always scheduled to go to Hartford or New Haven for the more frequent classical events.

Among the outstanding entertainers who did appear at McDonough Hall were Clara Louise Kellogg (whose pictures appeared as advertisement in all the storefront windows); and Emma Abbott, leading operatic singers; Camilla Urso, a famous violinist whose troupe often visited Middletown; Edouard Remenyi, the Hungarian "Liszt of the violin"; the Mendelssohn Quintet Club of Boston; Matt Arbuckle, the cornet soloist; and Emma Thurston, Signori Rosnati and Ferranti (who appeared together on November
4, 1879).

Although I could find no reviews of any of these events, I did find a rather complete announcement of an upcoming Abbott concert in the January 22, 1878 Constitution:

The great soprano singer, late of Dr. Chapin's church in N. Y. will be assisted by Signor Ferranti, the great basso singer, Mr. Arbuckle, the cornet soloist, late of Gilmore's band, Mr. Stanley, an English tenor of fine reputation, and Mr. Robyn, a first class pianist. The company has had a successful four month tour through the West and New England states and are enroute South. They have everywhere been received with the warmest praise and largest audiences. Through the enterprise of some of our leading citizens, they were induced to put one night here and we hope the patronage they receive will not make them regret the step. With one exception we have had no first class musical troupes this season and the musical excellence and reputation of these artists ought to draw a large and enthusiastic audience. The tickets have wisely been placed at low figures and we understand that arrangements will be made to run special trains from outside points.

Local groups occasionally presented sacred concerts and oratorios at McDonough Hall. Belshazzar (perhaps Belshazzar's Feast by George F. Root), was presented for three evenings in March of 1878 and H. M. S. Pinafore was performed in May of 1879. The Faust Society orchestra regularly booked McDonough Hall.

It is difficult to know what the repertory of these local groups was because such information was rarely reported in the newspapers. The Faust orchestra played for various kinds of gatherings.
but has no other path to pursue than calling continual
attention to the tricky course pursued in which is evidence
that the main question has to be dodged as long as possible.

The paper continues, calling the proceedings farcical:

It is like the play of Hamlet with Hamlet left out.
Our lady reader might not like the SENTINEL if she found
that it had no opinions; and if it differs with her in
the policy pursued by Beecher and his supporters, it is
honest in its differences and manly in its conduct.

The Sentinel editorial continues saying it will be fine if he comes out
of it "all right" but they believed from the first that Beecher was
"all wrong." It concludes:

...if our lady reader had been suspected of indiscretions
as grave as those alleged against Beecher, how would her
sisterhood have treated her?...

On March 24, 1876 the Daily Constitution printed a retort
from Susan B. Anthony re the Beecher scandal:

Now you ain't going to get me to say whether Beecher
is guilty or not. In all my journeyings for many months
past, I never talked with a man five minutes but what he
would ask me that question. I tell you these men are ten
times worse gossips than women, and are so quizzical
and curious. What worries them is to find a woman who
knows something she won't tell and one who refuses to
blab out to them all that she knows. This bothers men for
they aren't used to it. Tilton is a wonderful man. I
know of whole audiences which were quite prejudiced against
him, but when they heard him lecture, they were changed
right around in their opinion. I am determined to
keep my silence on the Beecher scandal.

Theodore Tilton spoke at McDonough Hall on January 4, 1876. His topic?
"The Problem of Life." Henry Ward Beecher made one of his Middletown
appearances there on October 5, 1876. But Victoria Woodhull, the no-
torious nineteenth century free love advocate and self-proclaimed
Theodore Thomas brought his famous orchestra to Middletown several times. In 1869 Gilmore's band appeared, in 1871 Dodworth's orchestra and in 1878 the American Band from Providence. The Colt's Armory Band came too. This musical group was made up of workers from the Hartford Colt factory.18

On April 10, 1876, the Faust orchestra joined up with the Arion Clee Club to do a minstrel show at McDonough Hall. By far the most popular form of nineteenth century American musical entertainment, minstrelsy played a big part in Middletown culture.

Individual minstrel performers began appearing in the 1820's. These white men in blackface toured the country with circuses and theatre companies, performing alleged Negro music. In the early 1840's, minstrels began banding together, creating a new form, the minstrel show. The Virginia Minstrels (Billy Whitlock, Frank Brower, Frank Pelham and Dan Emmett) tried the format out in N. Y. C. According to Robert C. Toll, they were "instant sensations."19 America became minstrel-hungry; soon blackface troupes were performing in every small town and city throughout the nation. By 1844, they were even featured at White House events. Amateur groups appeared and disappeared, professional troupes came and went in great numbers too, but several began long and dramatic careers. The quantity of touring groups increased after the Civil war; several major companies had permanent theaters in the largest cities.

Minstrelsy satisfied many needs for the American people, particularly the Northern urban whites. "As it evolved over the years, it (minstrelsy) became a major vehicle through which Northern whites conceptualized and coped with many of their problems."20 The minstrel
show had much more to it than blackface Negro stereotypes. Its folk
elements, lively, unpretentious music and lack of script/plot enabled
the performers to adapt to individual audiences spontaneously. While
some of the songs were ludicrous, portraying blacks in unflattering
and greatly exaggerated images, others were highly sentimental and
attempted to portray plantation life as serene, happy and ideal.

These early minstrels claimed to be using authentic black
music, but were careful to deny any black blood. Sheet music covers
often showed the performers with and without blackface so that the
Northern public (who had little knowledge of blacks) would not mistake
them for real blacks. After the Civil war, many blacks became minstrel
performers. A very popular entertainer could make $80 a week, hence
minstrelsy was one of the first lucrative employments available to the
black man.

The minstrel show evolved slowly from a casual entertainment
featuring four or five men who bantered back and forth between song
and dance act to a three part formalized structure with large com-
panies. The first part included both serious and humorous music, jokes,
dances and chorus numbers. The cast set in a huge semi-circle with the
two endmen, Brudder Tambo and Brudder Bones, on the ends. The inter-
locutor, who served as master of ceremonies sat in the center. It was
his job to orchestrate the whole first improvisational part according
to the "feel" of the audience. He directed the proceedings, calling
the shots. A romantic tenor was a standard performer in this section
also. The endmen contorted their bodies in exaggerated gestures and
made endless puns.

The stump speech was the most important part of the second
section of the minstrel show. Often called the olio or variety part,
it featured miscellaneous acts which usually occurred in front of the stage curtain while the scenery for the third act was being prepared behind. A one act skit was the grand finale. The original minstrel band consisted of fiddle, banjo, bones and tambourine. Later shows featured brass bands and full orchestras, a result of the vogue for giganticism and variety.

In April of 1868, Pettengill's troupe of Negro minstrels gave two consecutive performances at McDonough Hall. The Middletown paper, the Constitution (April 29, 1868) quoted a review from the New Haven Register which ranked the troupe as #1 among professional touring companies. The article raved about Campbell, the alto, Rochefeller, the tenor, and M. Ainsley Scott, the "magnificent baritone." It lauded Pettengill's portrayal of "Nicodemus Johnson" and stated that the encore "I Feel So Happy" was "the best song and dance act... ever done here."

Although the majority of Northerners were abolitionists, they had little direct contact with blacks and very ambivalent ideas about their "proper place." Minstrelsy provided a nonthreatening form, an emotional outlet, which helped audiences of urban whites to cope with these confused feelings. The interrelationship of the racial stereotypes in minstrelsy and the evolution of volatile social issues is a better indicator of shifting public opinion than any other source.

In the 1840's there was great diversity in the minstrel portrayals of blacks. Besides the grotesque caricatures, there were "representations" of common people, lovers, frontiersmen, riverboatmen, etc. There were "both positive images of happy plantation blacks and negative condemnations of the cruelty and inhumanity of slavery in the same shows," 21 revealing the insecurity and ambivalent feelings of the Northern audiences.
Toll states unequivocally that in the early 1850's, "minstrel's objections to slavery and their diverse black character types virtually disappeared, leaving only contrasting caricatures of contented slaves and unhappy free Negroes." I feel that the evolution of minstrelsy from eclecticism to outright racism took place much more gradually. Several minstrel songs published during the prelude and duration of the Civil war express ambivalence. Many are strongly pro-abolition. And some used dialect texts to express Northern white fears about a host of social problems entirely unrelated to the black issue. The chaos of city life, the impact of immigration, economic successes and failures were all popular topics.

Many people assume that the minstrel show was strictly a platform for derogatory portrayal of black people. In reality, songs were written by blacks and whites, derived from Afro-American and Anglo-Saxon sources. Performances were given by white men in blackface imitating blacks and by black men in blackface imitating white men imitating black men. The mirror images and masks were very complicated. Consider also that the songs could be sung from several different stances. Black minstrels could sing of their desire for freedom or of desire to return to the plantation. So could whites. And they both did both.

Early in minstrelsy, performers did female impersonations, but there were no real women in the shows on a regular basis until the 1870's. Then promoters formed all women troupes; the most popular of these were black groups. In Middletown, eleven black troupes were scheduled to perform at McDonough between January 1875 and February, 1881. During the same period there were twenty-four male minstrel troupes listed, nine jubilee singers concerts, four minstrel plays, four family group performances and several combination groups which should probably be
included in the minstrel category (Ideal Golde [sic] Musical Com-
bination, Soldier's Trash Combination, Ofty Cofty Combination).

Generalizations about the minstrel repertory and audience
composition of this period are dangerous. Neither was adequately
reported in the papers. While Toll's claim that black troupes often
advertised as "former slaves" can be verified by the ads in Middletown
newspapers, his statement that black troupes performed primarily for
black audiences seems highly unlikely in Middletown. The black
population in Middletown was stabilized at about 170 people in the
1870's. McDonough Hall seated 850 people and reports of minstrel
performances often mentioned large audiences. The newspapers strongly
urged citizens to attend jubilee and minstrel presentations:

We take pleasure in calling attention to the advertise-
ment of the (Myers Sisters) concert of these "wonderful
singers." This quartet of remarkable voices started in
California. In the throng of entertainments passing and
repassing, whose storm center seems at a certain season
to be over Middletown this rather quiet band of colored
songsters were hardly noted. The few who did attend were
inexpressively delighted; so much so that persons in the
audience arose and requested the singers to come again
with the assurance of a crowded hall. The persons making
the request cannot be wrong in their judgement, since the
Opera House in Hartford with a 2000 capacity was crowded
to hear them.

-Daily Constitution, January 15, 1874

Among the female minstrel troupes to appear at McDonough Hall
were the Christie's Female Minstrels, the Viola Clifton Minstrels,
Victoria Lofters Mastodon Minstrels and the famous Madame Rentze Min-
strels. The Rentze troupe was formed in 1870 by W. B. Leavitt, a
theatrical manager who had entered minstrelsy as a stagestruck youth.
Leavitt's all female troupe adhered to the regular minstrel format, but their main attraction was the scantily clad costumes and burlesque type acts. Toll feels that the majority of the female troupes were really just the immediate forerunners of the "girlie show." Albeit, they were very popular in Middletown. Typical of the straightforward advertisements used by promoters is the following:

**TWELVE SYMMETRICAL FEMALE FORMS**

A bevy of beauty, the octroon  
the blonde, the quadroon  
the brunette, the mulatto  
and the BEAUTIFUL CREOLES

*From Blacking Up*, Robert Toll, page 138

On March 22, 1876, a popular play "The Octoroon" by Boucicault was performed at McDonough Hall under the auspices of the Alarm Hose Co. A N. Y. company had been engaged for the performance. However, they reneged and the Middletown sponsors then engaged the New Britain His-trionic Society, which "creditably personated" it. (Daily Constitution, March 23, 1876). The Faust Society provided the musical accompaniment.

While local newspapers printed promotional plugs for coming black troupes and asked for good audience participation in their editorial comments, they simultaneously used fillers and "boiler plates" that were extremely racist. Typical of the fillers is this one from the Constitution, November 11, 1874:

A negro (sic) insisted that his name was mentioned in the Bible. He said he heard the preacher read about how "Nigger Demus" wanted to be born again.
And from the *Sentinel and Witness*, March 24, 1876:

De Reason ob de Scent

Concerning the foul air that pervades the House of Representatives, a Washington correspondent says:

One of the greatest causes for the smell in the House, the committee do not refer to, and that is the crowd of lazy Negroes, who infest the galleries all day long, bringing their dinners with them, and after eating it, sleeping for several hours. These negroes (sic) flock into the galleries in large numbers, crowding out all respectable persons, and the purpose seems to be to encourage instead of preventing them from doing so. The seats in the galleries are filled with vermin of all kinds, and many an innocent visitor takes away with him some of its occupants. But the supply is much larger than the demand so that all who apply can be accommodated.

While nineteenth century journalism tended to exaggerate and sensationalize most issues, the Middletown papers delighted in news releases concerning incidents in their black community. The report of a murder in Durham of a former Middletown man known as "Big Dave" by a "colored" man, James Mattison told of a drunken row, Mattison used a butcher knife to stab his victim and then cut off a piece of his nose. (*Sentinel and Witness*, December 3, 1875).

Another article on April 21, 1876 deplored the existence in Middletown of a "colored trickster" who had swindled many people by asking for donations for his "church."

Some of our leading citizens, with their accustomed liberality donated $5 each, and when the colored brother had collected what he could, he departed for parts unknown.

It is clear from the above incidents related in the press that Middletown whites were interested in blacks and took pleasure in reporting
news of their community. However, it is clear that the incidents chosen to report and the manner of the reporting served to reinforce stereotypes in much the same way as the minstrel show reinforced stereotypes.

The newspapers upheld the notion of subservience by a pretense of concern and support for their black neighbors. This patronizing attitude was reflected in the *Sentinel and Witness* on February 25, 1876 in the following item:

On Friday night, the United Singers, composed of colored persons, give a concert at McDonough Hall, and have also, tableaux and refreshments. This must not be confused with the one at Eagle Hall, for that takes place on Thursday evening. All the parties belong to the same church and there is some little disagreement, but the SENTINEL can only advise the people to go in and help both sides.

The United Singers were members of the African Methodist church in Middletown. The *Constitution* stated that "they were said to be singers of ability and experience" and that because they were local, "a large number of tickets had been sold." (February 25, 1876). The United Singers were scheduled to appear five times during the time period covered in the McDonough engagement book. They were invariably listed as "Cold church" in sloppy handwriting.

Other local groups blossomed too. The Middletown Plantation Minstrels were popular in 1878. The March 16 *Middlesex Monitor* announced that the group performed a 2 P. M. matinee every Saturday at Davis's barn on Ferry Street near the railroad. The Monitor was curious about one of the performers because "both of his ears contained more burnt cork the last two Saturdays than would start a lamp black factory."

Because of the word "plantation: in their title, it is likely that this troupe was black. Other Middletown minstrel troupes came from different ethnic groups. McAllister's Minstrels made a few appearances here and a
Irish band, Murphy, McDonald and Cantwell Minstrel troupe gave an entertainment at McDonough Hall on March 2, 1876. The performance was well attended and the Constitution called it "...first class...in every respect. The "First Course of Lectures" by Con Murphy was exceedingly good and showed an aptness on the part of the performer which is possessed only by the best showmen." (March 3, 1876).

The practice of hiding behind the blackface mask to espouse antielitist views was extremely popular minstrel fare. Besides lampooning opera, melodrama, ballet and the black community, white minstrels also "used black characters to lambast professional men who considered themselves better than common people." Popular targets were doctors, lawyers and "edjumukated gentmens." (Malapropism and twisted words were part of every minstrel act).

While the post-Civil war white minstrels expanded their repertory to include ethnic material (one troupe booked at McDonough Hall were named the "Emerald Minstrels") and to move toward the variety show format which predated vaudeville, black minstrels were expected to use "Black" subject material and to confirm the racial stereotypes presented in the early minstrelsy. They did this and even began to capitalize on it in a grand manner by reconstructing huge plantation scenes in unusual places. But they also began moving in new directions. Jubilee singing troupes allied with black troupes and performed the wonderful black spirituals which are still a part of our national folk music.

The most popular of these groups came to Middletown several times. The Fisk Jubilee Singers, a refined and serious group, were refused housing in Connecticut, New Jersey, Illinois and Ohio. A Newark, N. J. hotelkeeper had booked them thinking that they were
"nigger minstrels" (a term which meant whites in blackface).\textsuperscript{27}

Prior to the March 4, 1875 appearance of the Fisk singers at McDonough Hall, the Constitution reminded its readers that the troupe had "many cultivated and pleasant voices" and that they were the "original public interpreters of the new popular slave songs..." Other "boiler plate" articles about the New Haven and Philadelphia performances of the group appeared in the same issue. One credited a new song to Frederick Douglas who had taught it to the singers. Douglas said it was a favorite song which "nerved his heart to strike for the North." In Philadelphia, the singers appeared at an event with John Gough, the lyceum speaker mentioned earlier in this paper. Though they had never met before, they had both toured similar routes in England and America.

The Fisk Singers had added the word "Jubilee" to their name early in their career to try to differentiate themselves from the blackface troupes who used traditional minstrel material and format. The Fisks did not use blackface and they were considered to be "cultivated" musicians. Many new troupes appeared in imitation of this popular troupe. Several of the imitators toured Middletown. One, from a black college, the Hampton Institute, performed at the Methodist Church on October 8, 1874. These twelve "slave-born youth" promised to sing cabin and plantation melodies in their original style. Toll claims that the Hampton group was "dignified and serious" but that other groups merely attempted to capitalize on the pretensions of the "Jubilee" connotation while actually presenting typical minstrel fare, sometimes not very well. The Sheppard's Colored Jubilee Singers and the Virginia Glee Club are examples of this sort.\textsuperscript{28}

Although Toll places the Sheppard's group into the "lousy imitator" category, Middletown evidently felt differently. After appearing
on August 2, 1875 at McDonough Hall, the singers were invited to return on November 8. The Daily Constitution on November 3, 1875 promoted the coming performance by quoting a Providence Journal review:

—the singers, formerly slaves, who gave a pleasing concert composed of that class of peculiar religious songs common among the negroes (sic) of the South...The singers were seven in number and frequently when singing the old slave songs such as O Jesus Swing low chariot, Gwine to get ahom byem bye, Roll Jordan Roll etc. as though catching up the spirit of the words, they would accompany their singing with a peculiar swaying of the body, seemingly involuntarily. The voices of the singers were all good and blended very harmoniously. The leader of the troupe, Andrew Sheppard has been a slave for thirty years.

It was very difficult for the black entertainers to overcome the white-created stereotypes of early minstrelsy. At first they conceded by claiming to be "authentic", "genuine" or "real nigs." After establishing themselves, blacks attempted to modify and change the stereotypes in their struggle for upward mobility.

All nineteenth century traveling performers encountered hazardous forces. As mentioned in the lyceum section of this paper, traveling was a major consideration. For the blacks, the problems were greatly multiplied. Although the surface life of the minstrels appeared glamorous with the advantages of salaries, nice clothes and public acclaim, the reality was an exhausting schedule of one-nighters, sleeping/eating in segregated railroad cars which were sometimes the targets of bullets, false arrests, mistreatment by corrupt managers, frequent violence and constant racial discrimination. Still minstrelsy offered black performers a chance, and it was the first concrete American venture into the
culture which was based on African roots.

In the winter of 1877, a depression forced minstrels to cancel most appearances. All the major troupes postponed their Middletown engagements. The bad time was short-lived however and by March 16, 1878, the Middlesex Monitor seemed to have forgotten the effects of the depression:

Middletown, this season, has had a large number of entertainments. Showmen, all over the country, complain that business is dull.

During 1878 and 1879, Middletown had more minstrelsy than ever before, but the major troupes had always included this small city on their touring circuits.

Buckley’s Serenaders performed at McDonough Hall on October 29, 1874. The paper reported a good attendance and an enthusiastic reception. The October 30, 1874 Constitution gave an unusually complete review:

The performance of Buckley’s Serenaders minstrel company at Music Hall (which McDonough was sometimes called) was well attended and the program gave the greatest satisfaction. The instrumental and vocal music was excellent, Messrs. Sydney and Prothingham sang several ballads in a pleasing manner, while Mr. Buckley’s song of “What Will Mamma Say” was heartily encored. The cornet solo by Mr. Stacy was far above the average of cornet players, also essay solo parts. Harry Blanchard, the double voice singer, presented a very happy combination of a lady and gentleman at the same time, both in voice and dress. Jake Budd, as the “Dutch Duelist” made lots of fun by his unique performance.

An even more famous group, the Bryant’s Minstrels came annually
between 1877 and 1880. The troupe originated in 1857 and consisted of three brothers, Dan, Jerry and Neil plus a regular cast of about twelve performers. They were the resident troupe at Mechanic's Hall from 1857-1866. During that time, they were meticulous craftsmen, presenting a finely-honed show which drew tremendous praise and crowded audiences. They premiered many famous songs including the new "walk-around" of 1859, "Dixie" by Dan Emmett. Emmett wrote the tune especially for the Bryant's and also performed as a singer and instrumentalist with the troupe for most of their resident period. In the late 1870's, the Bryants were at the end of their prominence, phased out by the changes in minstrelsy itself. This troupe had specialized in Negro impersonations, also using their impressive musical and theatrical skills. 31

Minstrel impresarios took great pains to create distinctive names for their troupes. M. B. Leavitt coined the word "gigantean" and Duprez and Benedict called their troupe the New Gigantic Minstrels. 32 Daley Paskman refers to Charles Duprez as a "genius in advertising." 33 Teamed up with Lew Benedict (Famous endman and stump speaker) for eleven of his twenty year touring career, Duprez was a master promoter. He led minstrel parades on the day of performances through the main streets of the host towns. (Minstrel parades were a joyful tradition). At the head of the parade were his prize Dalmation dogs, a rare breed then. An interesting shift in social commentary occurred after the Civil war. Minstrel troupes began to present anti-Indian skits. This reflected the bloody resistances white men faced as they pushed Westward. In 1865, "The Live Injin", a minstrel farce by the Bryant's Minstrels featured a black servant who masqueraded as an Indian. 34 In 1870, Duprez and Benedict presented a traveling skit which ended with a
violent Indian attack. The "Noble Savage" skit which Duprez and Benedict premiered at Providence in 1874 "lampooned a tenderfoot writer's romanticized image of Indians." All of these anti-Indian sequences ended in mad scalping scenes. Minstrelsy was expressing a tangible fear, while it had worked to portray blacks as "happy darkies" the same oppressive tactics had no effect on the Indians. They refused to be subordinates.

The white men who created blackface minstrelsy only to be challenged by black stars were eventually followed by white managers who developed all black troupes. Charles Callender, a white tavern-keeper, was one of the first and most successful of these enterprisers. In 1872, he purchased Hague's minstrel troupe and "began turning black minstrelsy into big business." These Georgia Minstrels performed at McDonough Hall on June 18, 1874, September 25, 1874, in June of 1875 and again on April 19, 1881. Callender's original troupe included the most famous black minstrel performer of all time, Billy Kersands.

A great dancer, Kersands originated the buck and wing style and likely did the precursor of the old soft-shoe. But his tremendous fame was mostly for his caricatures of blacks with huge lips and mouths. He could put a whole cup and saucer in his mouth and "danced with a mouthful of billiard balls." Such characterization by a black seems self-defeating and turncoat. Kersands also sang some of the most anti-black songs. "Mary's Gone With a Coon" was one of his most popular numbers. At first glance, the text appears to be extremely racist:

He's as black, as black can be
Now I wouldn't care if he was only yaller,
But he's black all o'er, he's a porter in a store,
My heart it is tore, when I think the matter o'er,
De chile dat I bore, should tink ob me no more
Den to run away wid a big black coon.
Yet one must recognize that this song was sung by a black man. A black was verifying the whites' dislike of blacks by saying he understood, he didn't like them either. But Kersands was not a lily-white black; he was extremely popular with black audiences as well as white. Toll suggests that blacks accepted such portrayals partly because they didn't really care what whites thought of them and also because "theirs was the in-group laughter of recognition...laughing at the familiar...the affirmation of group belonging." Kersands was certainly not as subservient in real life as the characters he played. In fact, he left the Georgia Minstrels for a period of time, forming a new troupe, when Gallender tried to take financial advantage of his black stars. Black minstrels bounced back and forth between companies in their constant struggle to overcome white supremacy. But white domination persisted and black entertainers were forced to be content with fame, and salaries, but otherwise powerless.

While the performers are now remembered only in history books and biographies, some of the black composers still live through their compositions. Sprague's Original Minstrels, who played at McDonough Hall on December 12, 1879, included Kersands and the composers, James Bland and Sam Lucas. Lucas presented diverse images of blacks in his songs, but Bland stuck to the "approved white formula." Lucas' life was one of constant struggle to leave minstrelsy for a more dignified occupation. Born a free Black, he began as a barber, acted in comedy and serious dramas such as Out of Bondage, a musical drama about the education of freedmen and The Underground Railroad. But after the close of each run, Lucas was forced back to minstrelsy for support.

"Carry Me Back To Old Virginny" and "Oh Dem Golden Slippers" are two minstrel songs still popular in American musical culture.

They were written by James Bland, a remarkable man who was bitten by
the minstrel bug as a young boy. Bland was the star of the Sprague troupe in the late 1870's. In 1880 he joined the Haverly Colored Minstrels and toured England and Germany, earning the fantastic salary of $10,000 a year. W. C. Handy recalls meeting Bland in 1897 in Louisville. Handy called it a "thrilling moment." Many years later, Handy found that James Bland had sunk into pauperism, died and been forgotten by the Americans who sang his songs. Yet Bland, as a minstrel composer is today as famous as Dan Emmett, and second only to Stephen Foster.

W. C. Handy, nicknamed "the father of the blues" because of his famed "sorrow songs" was traveling with the Alice Oates Comic Opera Company when they performed at McDonough Hall on January 15, 1880. Several of the other troupes listed in the engagement book are transitional organizations. They included a little bit of everything in their programs; minstrelsy, comedy, burlesque, etc. The Alice Oates company leaned toward burlesque.

Harry Bloodgood's Comic Alliance appeared here in February of 1878 and 1879. Bloodgood probably toured this area earlier. In 1873 he was scouting for talent in Hartford and discovered Lew Dockstader in an amateur show. Dockstader went on to become one of minstrelsy's most famous names. Bloodgood's troupe consisted of 23 star artists, including five comedians, a cornet band and an orchestra. The November 16, 1877 Sentinel and Witness promised that Bloodgood's group was a "genuine musical organization" and "first rate."

"Combination" and "Family" often appeared in the titles of some of these marginal groups. The Jane Shore Combination was booked on May 6, 1879 and the Soldier's Trash Combination on May 28, 1879. The Guy Family appeared at McDonough on September 11, 1878 and the
Berger Family made Middletown a regular tour stop. The Bergers had bell ringers, singers, humorists and instrumentalists. Sol Smith Russell, their comedian, was a "gentleman in all he does... (and) the finest comic delineator on the boards." (Sentinel and Witness, March 9, 1877). He also sang a "Goose Song" using facial contortions. The Berger ladies were accomplished instrumentalists; Annie played the cornet and Etta Morgan, the saxophone.

The Guy Family had a juvenile brass band, "Little Arthur" a three year old singer billed as the "World's Wonder", a father and son song and dance team who specialized in Ethiopian sketches playing bones, cornet and banjo. This troupe also included Still Delesparre, an astonishing gymnast, the Guy women as pianists and vocalists and Charles Washington Guy, a "silver toned tenor" and comedian. (Constitution, May 22, 1877).

The old minstrel form of a group of four or five blackfaced singer-instrumentalists improvising an evening's entertainment had become an object of nostalgia. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century giganticism was in order, minstrel companies often had thirty performers plus orchestras. It became difficult to distinguish minstrelsy from burlesque or comin theater or variety shows.

The blackface clown, nineteenth century America's most beloved fool was a creation of Northern urban whites racial fantasies. In a nation which holds the goal of democracy to be paramount, the ruling majority accepts or rejects artistic creations. Minstrelsy was the most popular art form of this time. The minstrel show was just a formalized step away from folk entertainment. Hence, audiences felt a strong communication with the performers and indeed often participated
by singing the songs as well as by influencing the programming. This "creation by the people" was also true from the other end. Since minstrelsy involved song, dance, plays, farces and comedies, many people were needed to prepare material. Thus "minstrelsy tended to be an art produced by committee rather than by individual endeavor." 48

The spirit of anarchy pervaded minstrel humor and provided an outlet for the masses of Americans who were frustrated by the promises of mobility. The common man needed affirmation of his worth and was comforted and entertained by the put-downs of "high-brow" institutions and traditions. 49 Besides its travesties on cultural achievers, minstrelsy also exhibited an anti-European chauvinism. It burlesqued Shakespeare, English, Irish and Scottish song, the commedia dell'arte and other European popular theatre.

American theater, which was directly derived from the European form, was also a target of minstrelsy's buffoonery. Pioneering theatre troupes often presented only scenes from great plays because of the difficulties inherent in such a transient life. Serious plays were often improvised on the spot when a bill collector would rush onstage in pursuit of an actor or an audience would demand the repetition of a favorite song or scene. Violent events were commonplace in the audiences during performances; usually the plays proceeded with nary a break. Black romantic plays and Shakespearian tragedies were popular in the first half of the nineteenth century. Indian plays like "Metamora, the Last of the Wampanoags" and "Wept of the Wish Ton Wish" appealed to the people's sentiments. A proliferation of patriotic plays appeared after the revolution. Comic figures invaded some of those pieces; the frontiersman, the Yankee and the Negro minstrel became stock characters.
The precarious existence and experiences which beset most actors and actresses often carried over into performances. People often played two roles because the companies were so small and sometimes a dying character would assume an unintentional comedic stance:

When the hero of a tragedy fell in death with part of his body extended offstage so that he might play his own death music on the fiddle, some of the audience was bound to see the double accomplishment.

from *American Humor*, by Constance Rourke, p. 100.

The resultant spirit of burlesque was welcomed in the nineteenth century. People wanted to see exaggerations of the familiar, of themselves. Reality was too hard. Emotion was more important than literacy. A few Shakespearian and other heavy plays were presented in Middletown, but the bulk of theater which began to proliferate the popular culture in the 1870's was drawn from a much lighter theatrical variety.

During the years 1874-1881, theatre troupes were booked at McDonough Hall almost weekly. Touring companies had an October-May season. Popular plays like Washburn's "Last Sensation", Mayo's "Davy Crockett" and Beecher's "Uncle Tom's Cabin" were performed frequently. Middletown was a regular tour stop for the best companies; productions which premiered in New York, Boston or London were often performed at McDonough the same season.

On October 28, 1874 the Constitution warned Middletown residents that a "ludicrous personage known as the "Black Fiend" was coming to town. Posters were tacked to fences and billboards everywhere announcing the performance by Edmund Cole's troupe. Billed as a spec-
tacle, the "Black Fiend" was based on a legend about the water-nymphs who guarded buried treasure in the Rhine.

"Lucretia Borgia" (which was parodied as Lucretia Boards—Here in minstrel afterpieces) was scheduled at McDonough Hall on May 5, 1875. This version was a Madame Ristori edition of Hugo's tragedy. The leading actress was to be Bessie Darling, but Miss Darling had to postpone because of illness. It is not clear from the engagement book when or if the play was presented.

However, 1875 was a busy year for Middletown theatricals. The Union Square Theatre of New York City presented the "Two Orphans" on May 17. This play about a blind girl was first produced at the Boston Theatre on December 13, 1875 and ran for seven weeks. Kate Claxton had one of the leading roles in the original production. Lillie Eldridge starred as Louise in the Middletown debut and was so well received that a second performance was scheduled. Miss Claxton appeared at McDonough on October 28, 1878. She and Madame Janauschek, the famous German actress, were still presenting the "Two Orphans" in the 1893-4 theatre season.

On May 27, 1874, Lawrence Barret appeared as Cardinal Richelieu at the McDonough Hall production of Bulwer's "Richelieu." Barret was considered to be one of the finest actors in the country. Beginning his career as L. P. Barret in the late 1850's, he starred in Irish plays quickly moving on to Shakespearean drama. Experienced as he became with Shakespeare, he was still best known for his role of Jamie Harebell in "The Man o' Airlie." Later in his career, Barret managed Edwin Booth the famous tragedian. He and Booth made many joint appearances in the
1880's. They were both highly successful; at a May 1888 benefit for the Actor's Fund in Boston, the two actors doted about $2400. 52

In November of 1874, a special train was scheduled so that Middletown citizens could go to Hartford for the production of "Jane Eyre" starring Maggie Mitchell. The people must have been impressed for they booked Miss Mitchell for the next year's tour. Maggie Mitchell starred in "Lorle, or The Artist's Dream" at McDonough Hall on September 16, 1875 supported by William Harris. Prior to this appearance, little news releases told about her huge successes. On September 8, the Constitution reported that Miss Mitchell had opened the season in Danbury to a $772 house. She was engaged at the Boston Theatre for a lengthy engagement every year between 1863 and 1878, appearing infrequently thereafter. In these annual appearances, Maggie Mitchell repeated her standard repertory of plays.

John Murray was booked at McDonough in November of 1875 for a three play run. He starred in "Rip Van Winkle." The Meriden Recorder gave him an outstanding review, calling his plays "praiseworthy and deserving of liberal patronage." (November 16, 1875). The company was so popular that it was reengaged in December when Murray presented "Estranged", "Ticket of Leave Man" and "A Man Without A Country." Thereafter, Murray and company were regulars at McDonough.

A February 1, 1876 newspaper article reported a "large and appreciative audience" at the previous evening's presentation of "Estranged", which was again given at McDonough. In the organization of this paper, I noticed that there was a conflicting entry in the engagement book. Several other entries were confusing or non-existent. While newspapers usually confirmed the journal bookings, there were strange gaps.

A Harrigan and Hart performance on October 6, 1875 was not
previewed in an existing paper. This pioneering twosome were part of the Josh Hart Theatre Comique company at the time. This was the heyday of Irish-Americans in theatre and the team were probably a great Middletown hit. They returned again in March of 1879.

The Wallace Sisters also played at Middletown's most popular theater in 1875. Supported by a cast and orchestra totalling 33 people, Jennie, Minnie and Maud presented "Minnie's Luck", a Brougham play which was a social commentary on the evils of city life.

In March of 1875, the Katie Putnam troupe brought their current hits to McDonough. A well known entertainer in the South and the West, Miss Putnam drew only a fair audience the first night for "Little Nell", but she had a full house for "Old Curiosity Shop" and "The Child of the Regiment." Katie Putnam had opened the Boston Theatre season on August 2, 1875 with a two week run featuring her five most popular plays. She was managed by J. J. Sullivan (her husband), a former member of the Boston Theatre stock company. In October of 1875 she made another appearance at McDonough with Sler Calhoun listed as her agent. The troupe received one-third of the ticket receipts (one of the few entries that indicates monies charged or received). On May 19, 1876 Miss Putnam shared the spotlight at McDonough with her actor-husband in "Lina, or The Missing Bride."

The "Black Crook" was presented at McDonough Hall several times during its long popularity. The play opened on September 12, 1866 at Niblo's Gardens in New York. The "Black Crook" was an extravaganza of sheer fantasy. The premiere performance ran for six hours while hundred of actors, actresses, singers and scantily-clad ballerinas flowed through the lavish and sensual stage settings. This theatrical extreme was
the natural outcome of the direction in which minstrel burlesque and
theatre had been moving. The "Black Crook" was also important as the
forerunner of American musical comedy.53 A November 29, 1875 Middle-
town performance drew only a fair audience. By this time the play had
been revived many many times and "it failed to produce the enthusiasm
as in days gone by, the piece evidently having had its best days."
(Daily Constitution, November 30, 1875).

The Union Square Theatre brought "Led Astray" to the hall in
January of 1876 and "Caste" in February. Both plays had enjoyed New
York and Boston runs. Kit Carson appeared in "The Texan", a grand
military melodrama, on January 8 with a cast of 19 artists. A roaring
farce called "Dodging for a Wife" preceded the play and the admission
was 25¢. Joe Jefferson Brewer appeared in another "Rip Van Winkle",
Frank Mayo in "Davy Crockett" and Fanny Herring in "Tigress of the
West." Miss Herring portrayed an Indian girl in "Tigress."

1877 brought a long run of "Pilgrim's Progress" to McDonough
Hall. The Broadway Theatre Combination was booked on April 4 and the
Chapman 5th Avenue Theatre came in May. William Gillette also appeared
at McDonough in May. His advertisements emphasized his comic character
sketches and "stunning" impersonations of Booth, Barret, Owens, Marlowe
and Mark Twain. After the usual summer break, McDonough Hall was very
busy again, featuring yet another "Davy Crockett" on October 21, two
days after the famous actress Louise Pomeroy starred there in "Romeo
and Juliet." Married to a notorious journalist "Brick" Pomeroy, the
actress also played in "The Lady of Lyons", "As You Like It" and
"Macbeth" that season. November brought "Aunt Polly Basset" and her
big boy "Jedediah" in "Ye Yanky Singen Skewl", an obvious German-
Yankee parody.
The Agnes Wallace and Villa companies presented three plays at McDonough in mid-November. The first evening's drama was followed by a fairy burlesque, "Cinderella," the next featured "Miss Multon" plus a different burlesque and the final evening had "Frou-Frou" by Robertson as its highlight with "The Two Off-Funs" as an afterplay. Admissions were 35¢ and 50¢.

Theatre troupes appear to have been more successful than minstrel troupes during the 1877 depression. There was also an increase of interest in amateur theatrical and musical entertainments at that time. Rev. Father O'Keef rented McDonough for the first time. He began sponsoring operettas. The South Church held a centennial exhibition. A new troupe, the Wilkinsons performed "Uncle Tom's Cabin" on September 28.

By far the busiest season ever, 1878 was chock full of popular theatre offerings for Middletown audiences. Shakespeare's "Henry V" starring George Rignold was presented on February 20. Madame Janauschek who often played Lady Macbeth to Edwin Booth's Macbeth brought "Mary Stuart" to McDonough Hall on May 18, 1878. She was supported by James Taylor, Ellsler and Canning in this performance.

Favorite shows of previous seasons appeared again with new leading stars. Robert McWade did "Rip Van Winkle". Amy Stone appeared in "Pearl of Savoy" and yet another troupe presented "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in August. "Robin Hood" by the great Folly troupe was a tremendous success at McDonough on March 8, 1878.

The famous Apollo Club of New York presented the "Bohemian Girl" in the spring of 1878. Washburn's "Last Sensation" was repeated in January and "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was presented in August and November. Maude Granger appeared in one of the longest lasting plays of the time, "Camille", on November 4, 1878. Middletown demanded her return and she obliged in the following January starring in "Almost a Life."
Several light-hearted dramas also received a good response in Middletown during 1878. Among them were "Texas Jack", "Our Boarding House", "The Tramp" of "The Stolen Child", "Little Emily" and "Our Boys."

Local groups presented a "Mother Goose" production by the African Methodist church assisted by the Faust Musical Society and a three night run of "Belshazzar" was presented in early March. The Heywood Comic Opera Company performed "Albert and Rosetto" or "The King's Favorite" at McDonough on November 30.

The new year 1879 opened with a burst. Miss Dickey Lingard starred in "Our Wives" and the Perley Comedy Company brought "Divorce" to Middletown. A local production of "H. M. S. Pinafore" was given on March 10, 11 and 12 while a professional troupe presented it again in August. Several other productions of Pinafore occurred in a short span. This is remarkable because the piece premiered in England in 1878, hence Middletown was very current in its tastes. The engagement book notes other 1879 bookings by the Standard Theatre Company, Maggie Mitchell, the Criterion Comedy Company and the Remije E Tourjee. These events are presently unconfirmed.

"Our Photo Party," "The Strategist," "An Arabian Night" and "Our School" were typical 1880 fare. Few serious dramas were scheduled; "The Danites" was presented on May 20. Fanny Davenport, Maude Granger and John Thompson made return engagements.

A few new faces appeared at McDonough Hall. Patt Rooney came in January of 1880 and the Buffalo Bill Combination performed in December. The Hynes Sisters and the Ideal "Uncle Tom's Cabin" played on April 16, 1880. Sam Lucas starred in the title role of "Uncle Tom's Cabin at this time with the Hyer Sisters. It is possible that this may have been that company. One of the great difficulties in deci-
phering and transcribing the engagement book has been the frequent misspelling and illegible longhand.

"The Banker's Wife" or "The Safe Robbery" was given on February 27 and the Juvenile Opera company gave "Pinafore" in October. "Abby's Humpty Dumpty" appeared in November. An 1872 performance of "Humpty Dumpty" was given by George Fox's pantomine troupe.

The 1881 records, though incomplete, list several new plays: "Only a Farmer's Daughter," "All The Rage," "Our Gobbings," "Aleuette," "Deacon Cranket" and "Chaufrau." The History of the Boston Theatre by Tompkins and Kilby makes extensive references to a husband and wife acting team, Francis and Henrietta Chaufrau. Mr. Chaufrau was most famous for a play called "Kit" which may have been performed in Middletown.

In categorizing the types of entertainment most prevalent in the Middletown of 1874-1881, I quickly determined three forms: the lyceum lecture, minstrelsy and theater. The latter two were nearly tied in frequency of performance. Unfortunately, the most familiar performers got the least newspaper coverage because their popularity insured good audience attendance. Word of mouth still superceded the printed word.

To adequately present the variety exhibited at Middletown's favorite entertainment hall requires even further listing. It is difficult to place ventriloquists on the lyceum lecture list, burlesque under minstrelsy and Washburn's "Last Sensation" under the umbrella term theatre. But where should one place the Bohemian glass blowers, walking matches, sparring matches, singing schools and gift entertainments?
It is easy to say that McDonough Hall was rented out for wedding receptions, town meetings, agricultural fairs, prohibition conventions and masquerade balls. But how does one explain the Tom Thumb receptions and the Spelling matches for "colored folk" to which Middletown citizens came paying admission? How does one justify that the citizens got their jollies by viewing midgets or watching black people "massacre the King's English." (Constitution, May 19, 1975).

McDonough Hall has been gone for 49 years. Its history is an important gauge of democracy in action as it applies to the arts. The freedom exercised by Middletown citizens in their choice of popular entertainment provided a highly diverse artistic culture. While the universal friction between elitist and populistic art seems unsolvable, late nineteenth century Middletown clearly indicated that it believed in the ideal.
FOOTNOTES


5. Ibid., p. 191.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., p. 192.


11. Ibid., Volume VII, pp. 445, 446.


15. Ibid., p. 241.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. In previous research, I discovered that the existence of factory orchestras and bands was a common nineteenth century phenomenon. The owner-president of the Colt factory was particularly concerned with musical standards and endeavored to provide instruments for his factory musicians in the hopes of building a really fine musical organization.

20. Ibid., p. 33.
21. Ibid., p. 66.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., p. 226.
24. Ibid., p. 33.
25. Ibid., p. 139.
26. Ibid., p. 70.
27. Ibid., p. 220
28. Ibid., p. 236.
29. Ibid., p. 200.
30. Ibid., p. 219.
31. Ibid., p. 230.
33. Ibid., p. 163.
35. Ibid., p. 168.
36. Ibid., p. 203.
37. Ibid., p. 254.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., p. 256.
40. Ibid., p. 258.
41. Ibid., p. 203.
42. Ibid., p. 251.
43. Ibid., p. 217.
44. Ibid.

46. Ibid., p. 41.


48. Ibid., p. xxii.

49. Ibid., p. xxvii.


51. Ibid., p. 214.

52. Ibid., p. 355.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


