

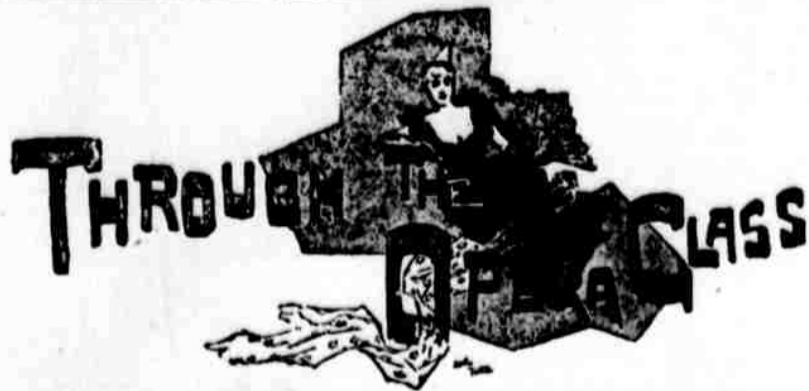
CAPITAL CITY COURIER

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THE NEW LANSING THEATRE.

LOCAL REMINISCENCES.

It is now twenty years ago since the first play was presented in Lincoln, thanks to the enterprise of Mr. Ed A. Church, then as now, a master in theatrical management. Lincoln was a little village in 1871; it had no theatre for performances, but the representative hall in the old capitol building was secured for the purpose, and a stage and scenery improvised. Mr. Chas. Lumkett's company played "Alone in London," to a packed house. There also appeared Sol Smith Russell and the Berger family, the bell ringers.

The next plays were produced in a hall called the Academy of Music in Walsh and Putnam's building on O street, under Mr. Church's management.

But the capital city was growing fast and Mr. Hallo taking his cue from the large audiences that attended Mr. Church's

furnished. Those who lived in Lincoln in the early days will remember with pleasure the Emma Leland company; they were here frequently and had become great favorites and deservedly so too, for Miss Leland with Chas. Degroet and Jack Turner were most excellent actors: indeed as a stock company, the Leland was hard to excel.

The theatre had now become the Centennial. Mr. Church frequently urged Mr. Funke to remodel and enlarge the house, and he finally consented.

The spring of 1885 the old Centennial was torn down and rebuilt on its present lines at an expense of twenty thousand dollars, and it then became "The Funke" and was opened in October 1885 with the spectacular play of the Pavements of Paris, with Mr. Church as manager.

However by this time Lincoln had become a city of importance, wealth and great refinement.

The manager of a theatre is of course expected to make money but he owes it to his patrons as well as to himself to give them satisfaction, and not impose upon



plays, decided to build an opera house, and he at once set to work. It was located at the same place where the Funke stands today, and very much on the same lines with the exception that it did not extend to the alley as it does now. It was called the Hallo Opera House, and it was opened in 1873 by Mrs. Anna Bishop in a concert. Of course Mr. Church was manager and his management proved a grand success. Lincoln was then being advertised all over the country as the new capital of Nebraska, and it proved an easy task to secure the very best companies in the land, the respective stars of which were anxious to see the magic city. Barrett, Booth, Keene, McCullough, all bowed and charmed Lincoln audiences; so also did the best dramatic companies of the land, Mary Anderson, Julia Davenport and Clara Morris among the number. To be true the Hallo was good enough for the Lincoln of 1873, so at least the people of the city thought, and so it was; but the great stars of the country after they had once been here could only be induced to return provided increased percentage of receipts were granted; and Mr. Church frequently consented to give percentages which hardly left him enough to pay his own expenses; but he was bound to give his patrons "the best in the shop." The reason why the stars were not anxious to return after they had been here once, was due to the fact that the stage accommodations were inferior, very inferior.

In 1875 the Hallo was destroyed by fire while the Two Orphans was being played; completely destroyed. The people of the city deplored the loss very much and at once raised nine thousand dollars as a bonus for Mr. Hallo to rebuild; and so he did, in company with Judge Palmer. The new building was not much of an improvement on the former; it was opened in 1876 with Richard the Third by the Kendall company, with Mr. Church as manager. This same building, poor as it was, had to answer the purposes of our people until the spring of 1885. Mr. Funke had meanwhile bought the Hallo from the original owners, and for several years with Mr. Church as manager, excellent plays were

them because he happens to be in control of a theatre in the town.

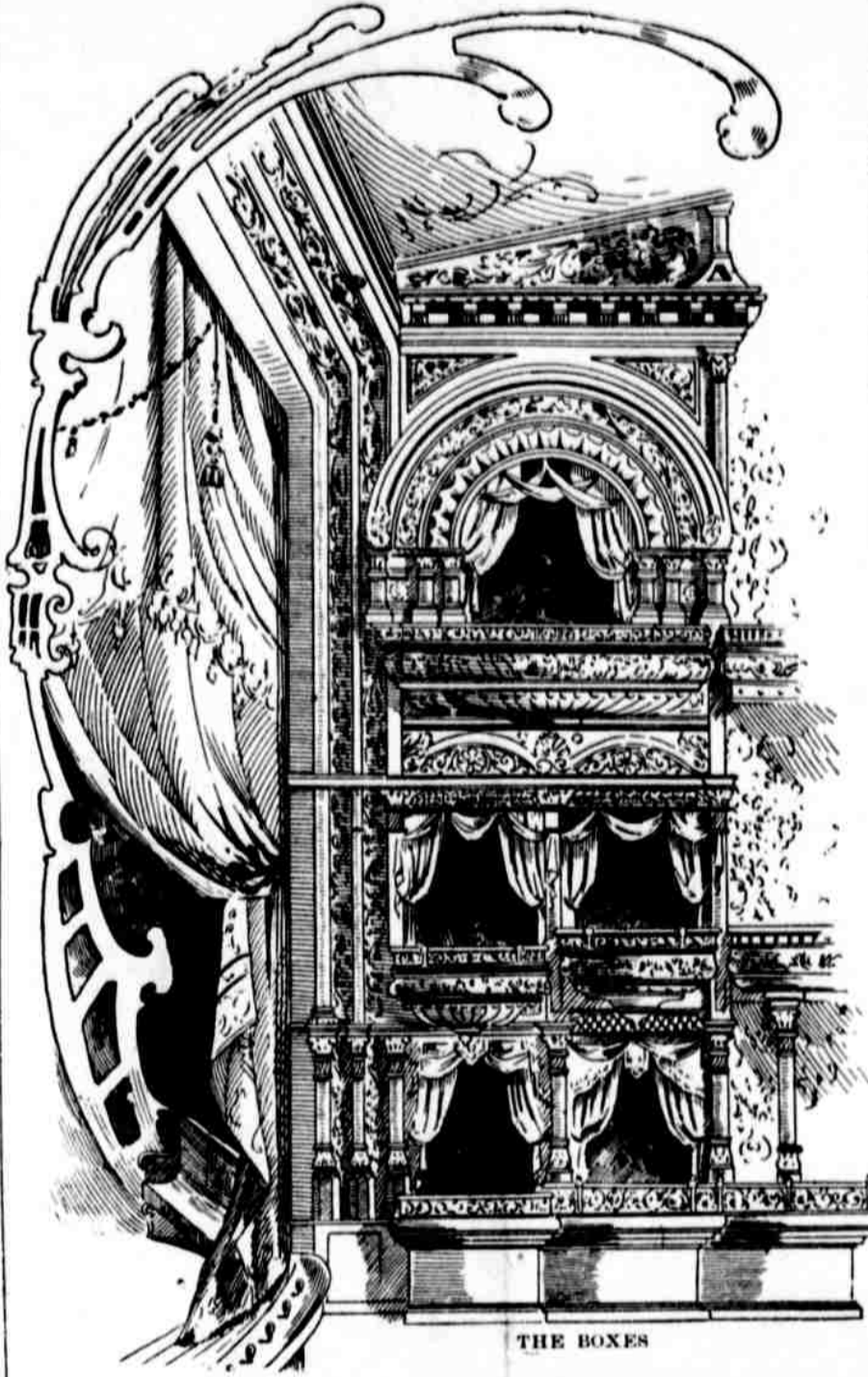
Mr. Church has the last two years been elaborating plans for a new opera house; but times were hard, and he could not bring capitalists to realize the needs of the time, until the very best elements of the city were obliged to admit that present facilities were inadequate.

All this has brought forth the Lansing, a theatre without superior in the State, and very few equals in the country; a place of amusement that will be the pride of Lincoln, and which will answer all the purposes for the next decade.

Mr. Church has brought all this forth through the enterprise of his friend, J. F. Lansing, that prince of real estate agents, who induced Mr. H. Oliver, a capitalist of Georgia, to join with him in the enterprise.

The pluck and push of the people of Lincoln is well illustrated in the theatrical history of the place. It was quite a feat for Mr. Hallo to undertake early in the Seventies, when he built his opera house. Then the theatre burned down in the midst of the grasshopper devastation and it was at once rebuilt. Then again when Mr. Funke expended several thousands in the improvement of the old house, times were far from being plethoric; finally, the splendid theatre which now is the leading house has been erected in the hardest year of Lincoln's existence, owing to the failure of crops last year and the general depression all over the country, at a cost of not less than one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in cold cash. Nothing has or will advertise the confidence of our people in their beautiful city more than this feat of Messrs. Lansing and Oliver, and our city will always have to thank Mr. Ed Church for having inspired them with the confidence necessary for the investment of such a large sum of money, in this year of our Lord, 1891. But under his management it will prove a paying investment after all.

The stage is the one great educator for the masses; the best and worst of passions are put before the people, in such a way as to lead them to admire the good, and despise the bad. At the same time it is a



THE BOXES

place of amusement. But to be so it is required that the manager be acquainted with the companies that he engages, and the plays that are to be produced; for if a good play is a good educator, so far as moral and patriotism are concerned, there are other plays quite demoralizing in their tendencies, and there are too many like this.

Under the management of Mr. Church the Lansing will become an atheneum where a husband can take his wife and daughter, the brother his sister, without fear of bringing a blush upon the cheeks of those whose modesty is of priceless value to them and to the community of which they are the ornaments and the pride.

THE LANSING.

The Lansing is of style Romanesque: It is a structure one hundred and three by one hundred and forty-two feet in size and four stories high. It is situated in the central part of the city and accessible to all the means of locomotion in the place, the very tracks of which are at its very doors. It has a double frontage; has two grand entrances besides a special entrance for the gallery. Each of the main entrances is situated under the cupolas which send their spires some twenty feet above the roof, and is reached through *portes cocheres* extending over a flagged sidewalk up to the very curb line, thus enabling the patrons to enter the building from their carriages without being exposed to the inclemencies of the weather.

The building is constructed of the very best of brick with partly projecting colonades composite in design and material, yet harmonious in all their parts, with reliefs and blocks of Lake Superior stones; all of which in a general appearance is best adapted for the use to which the building is devoted.

From the rough granite below up to the iron and terra cotta work to the roof above, the interior in the strength, elegance, and dignity of its beauty, is only as small index to the grandeur of the theatre proper after having entered its portals.

The foundation upon which the outer and inner walls of this building rest are unequalled for strength and durability; they are from eighteen inches to two feet in thickness, resting upon beds of Portland cement varying from one foot to two feet in depth, while the auditorium itself, that is to say the parquet and dress circle, are laid on cement upon the ground itself.

THE AUDITORIUM.

The dimensions are seventy-two feet by seventy-four, and seventy feet in height. Immediately next to the footlights is the orchestra; then the parquet, and in the rear and flanks the dress circle. The stage is flanked with three tiers of boxes on each

side, with five boxes in each, and they in turn are flanked with six loges, one on each tier. The seating capacity of this part of the theatre is 606, exclusive of the boxes and loges. Above this dress circle is the balcony which promises to be the fashionable part of the theatre; it is a complete counterpart of the dress circle below, with a capacity of 400 seats, exclusive of the boxes and loges; and yet above this balcony is a gallery that will seat some eight hundred people and which with the standing room in the rear, and the aisles on the flanks, can if necessary hold one thousand people. The two boxes, one on each side of the gallery are very large and have cinder tops. In most theatres there are places in the auditorium at the flanks from whence the stage can only partly be seen; but the Lansing is so constructed that from each and every seat in the auditorium, the stage can be seen entire and as well as if one was sitting direct in front. There is not a poor place in the house. The chairs for parquet, dress circle and balcony are automatic folding chairs, richly upholstered, with arm rests, hat racks and coat rods; special care has also been taken to avoid overcrowding so as to assure ease and comfort. The acoustics of the auditorium are perfect in every respect; every note or every syllable pronounced upon the stage can distinctly be heard in every part of the house. It is safe to say that with the standing room, fully twenty-five hundred people can be accommodated. This should be ample accommodation for any occasion.

THE PROSCENIUM.

This part of the theatre is of a most happy design and makes a grand frame to the stage. Its columns extend from the very bottom to the sounding board above. They are richly carved and covered with heavy relief work. Adding to this, the elegance of the boxes with their rich draperies and magnificent furniture, the proscenium is surely a thing of beauty that the eye will not tire to look upon; indeed, when the one thousand electric jets of the auditorium will shed their mellow light all over the place, the proscenium will dazzle with splendor. Right over the orchestra, and from one side to the other of the ceiling connecting the right with the left proscenium, is the sounding board, sixty feet long and fifteen feet wide. The painting upon it represents Thalia, the Muse of Comedy and idyllic poetry, holding a mask in one hand and a wreath of ivy in the other, while Cupids are looking upon her in dismay and with undisguised reverence. This painting, as well as all others upon the ceiling and walls, are in perfect harmony with the whole of the decorations, the tone of which in the professional lexicon is called "ashes of roses" and blends most agreeably with the color and paint-

ing of the curtain, which is thirty-six feet square and upon which is a court scene of the time of Louis XV, at the castle of Marly.

The theatre, exclusive of the stage, has nine exits, measuring eighty feet, and will permit the theatre at its fullest capacity to be emptied in the space of two minutes or less. Certainly with such excellent protection there is absolute safety.

THE FOYER.

This attractive room has its main entrance at the very center, back of the dress circle, and immediately opposite to the center of the stage; it affords a spacious and inviting promenade. The walls are covered with mirrors; the floor with the richest of carpets; and tropical as well as domestic plants lend enchantment to the place. The foyer has two large doors on the street and in itself offers a better exit from the lower auditorium than most theatres do. Settees and divans are found here and there for the weary. The draperies about it and around are heavy and of rich fabrics arranged in graceful folds and removable at a moment's notice.

THE STAGE.

The Lansing has a perfect stage, eighty feet wide and forty-five feet deep; from the floor to the gridiron above the distance is seventy feet, and can furnish the very amplest accommodations for any play or spectacle extant. Mr. Nicholas Lawrence, of New York, whose reputation as a stage carpenter is without equal, was here himself during four weeks, and he has guaranteed this stage as complete in its intricate details and mysteries as any in the land. A herd of elephants can parade over the floor without danger of breaking a joist or cracking a board.

It has two doors opening immediately on the alley; a small one and a very large one through which a team can enter with any imaginable load, the floor of the stage being almost on a level with the street. It has a third exit through the dressing rooms, which are situated outside the theatre proper, but in immediate connection with the right of the stage. Like everything else about the theatre these dressing rooms are first class and furnished with all modern appliances; they are on a level with the stage floor and are twelve in number, two of them being extra large for the stars.

Among the mysteries of the stage is the "electric table" situated on the right and front of the stage near the curtain; it will be in charge of a first class electrician and he will in reality be the sovereign ruling over the place since by the simple touch of the keys on his table he can manipu-

late all the illumination of stage and auditorium.

celling, as well as the bevelled and bejewelled ornamental and colored glass partitions which enclose the box office and managers room. The vestibules, two spacious entrances are at right angles and sixteen feet wide; at the apex of it, is the main entrance to the parquet, dress circle and balcony. This entrance is sixteen feet wide. In design and decoration the vestibules of the lobby are suggestive of Moorish style, most admirable in design as well as in the blending of its multitudinous colors. On the west side of the north vestibule is the foyer.

The gallery entrance is located at the northwest corner of the building; steps lead direct from there to the upper part of the theatre and the box office, for that part of the house is at the foot of this stairway, which is large, solid and commodious.

THE SCENERY.

There are thirty six complete sets or shifts for the scenery of the Lansing, with a complete assortment of the very finest furniture; and the stage has one Hamlet trap and two vampire traps or bridges; there are also three set of adjustable grooves, so that in the matter of scenery as well as in all other particulars, nothing is wanting to answer the requirements of a first class theatre. The height of the first fly gallery is 25 feet; the second, 50; and from the latter to the rigging loft the distance is 18 feet; this rigging loft is a regular forest of ropes and reminds one very much of a good old fashioned sailing vessel ready to be put under full sail.

FIRE PROTECTION.

If more attention has been given to any one department, which is hardly possible, the fire department of the Lansing has received it. Mr. Church very wisely placed this under the special supervision of Mr. Newbery, the well known chief of Lincoln's fire department, an expert in such matters whose reputation as a fireman and chief is national. So far as the theatre proper is concerned there is not the least bit of danger for fire since there is no fire at all and cannot be any within its walls; but to make assurance doubly sure, there where the plaster is not directly over brick walls, it is placed over wire netting and the plaster used in such case is as near fire proof as stone itself. Moreover there are thirteen lines of hose in the building; that is to say, thirteen different stations where hose with nozzles are in readiness for action; these thirteen lines carry an aggregate of five hundred feet of hose and are ample for all emergencies. In addition there are also six Babcock fire extinguishers on hand.

The one great thing for the patrons of a



THE DROP CURTAIN

late all the illumination of stage and auditorium.

THE LOBBY.

Commencing at the curb stone of the street, the entrances are shielded with *portes cocheres* resting upon massive iron pillars surmounted with cornices of ornamental corrugated iron and covered with bevelled glass on the top. Under these one passes through solid oaken doors and enters into the lobby. It can be said without hesitation, that the lobby of the Lansing has no equal for convenience or beauty. A coach and four can easily enter on the east side and turn out on the north.

At a glance the eye takes in the superbly tessellated pavement of Bohemian tile and the richly frescoed walls and arch-

theatre is to know that they are safe from the terrible dangers of fire; and very few theatres offer such a security as the Lansing does.

HEATING AND VENTILATION.

Much thought has been given to the subjects of heating and ventilation. The latter is made perfect by the aid of a large power fan by means of which the air, drawn from the outside at the top of the building where it is pure, passes over steam coils, and after becoming heated, is driven into the theatre through nearly two hundred concealed apertures, and at the same time the foul air is drawn out through other ducts into a ventilating shaft provided for that purpose. In the same manner by passing the air over cooling coils or

Continued on page six.