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## Article Title: Fremont's Love Opera House

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Article Summary: In the early twentieth century the Love Opera House provided varied entertainments for residents of Fremont. Local people sometimes appeared there as actors or singers, and the opera house became a source of pride for the entire community.

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Nebraska Place Names: Fremont

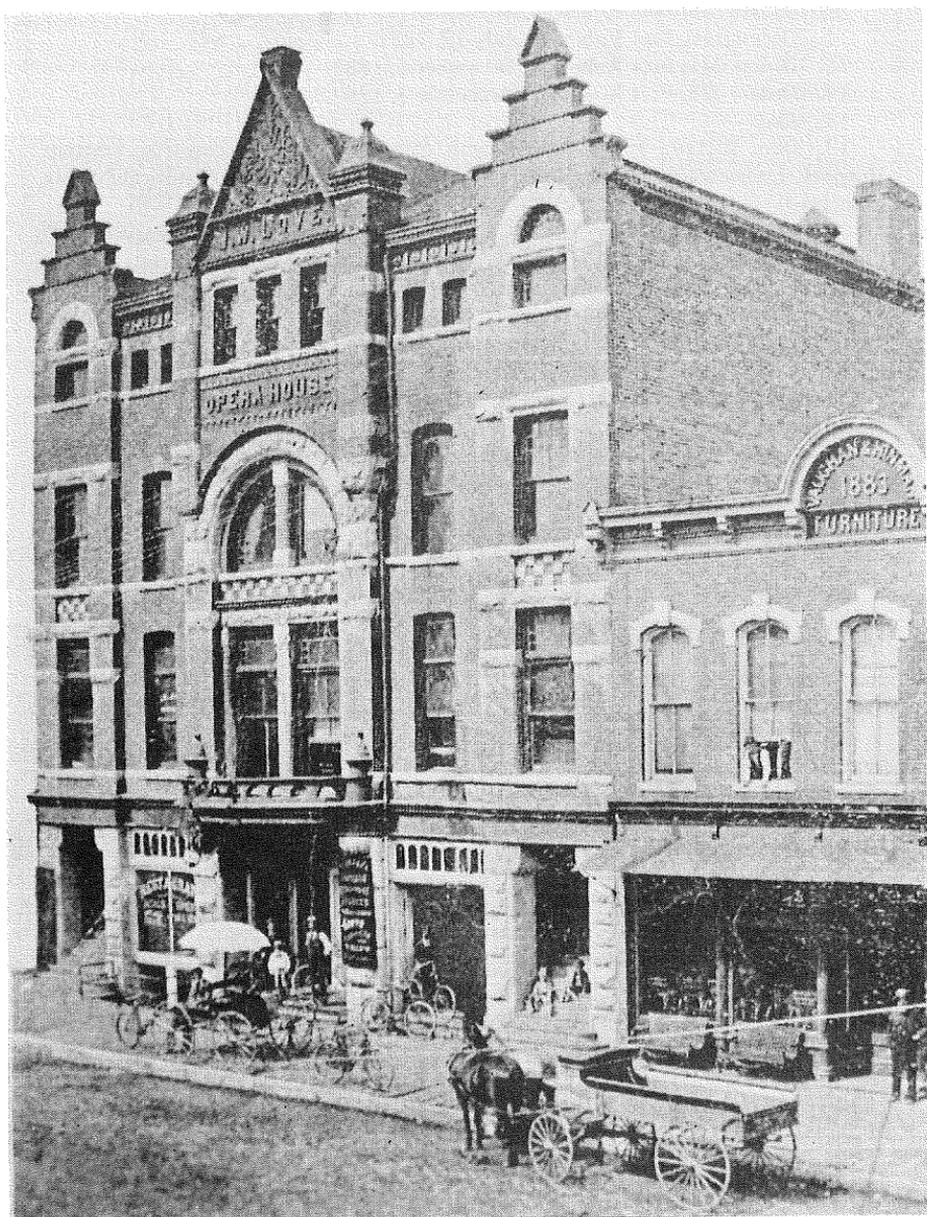
Productions Described: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The Burglar*, *Shore Acres*, *The Senator's Daughter*, *A Modern Magdalen*, *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*, *Living Whist*, *Under the Dome*, *The Fast Mail*

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Photographs / Images: exterior view of Love Opera House; domed ceiling; ornamentation showing ancient Grecian masks; Larson Opera House; advertisements for Opera House productions (*Fremont Daily Herald*, May 31, 1889); Oriole Opera Company, a local group, performing "The Chimes of Normandy"; James W Love; Louis P Larson

Appendix I: selected productions 1888-1917

Appendix II: owners and managers



*Love Opera House was built in Fremont in 1888 to replace Shed's Opera House (constructed, 1874), which burned in 1887.*

## FREMONT'S LOVE OPERA HOUSE

By ROBERT A. SCHANKE

In the afternoon of New Year's Eve, 1887, a fire destroyed Fremont's first opera house. Built in 1874 by E. O. Crosby and later sold to Zach Shed, this building boasted a seating capacity of 750 and a stage 20 feet by 40 feet.<sup>1</sup> Although the fire did not totally destroy the structure, it did mean the end of its use as an opera house. The townspeople of Fremont were disappointed, for they had been accustomed to having a thriving theater. In its last full season of operation, from September, 1886, through July, 1887, the Shed Opera House had booked nearly thirty nights of performances. These included five minstrel shows, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and *Monte Cristo*. In July, 1887, the famous Lilly Langtry played for one night and took in over \$100 in ticket sales.<sup>2</sup> Considering that ticket prices were only about twenty-five cents and the town had about 5,000 people, that was good box office. Manager Charles D. Marr had scheduled Minnie Maddern to appear the evening of December 31, 1887. The future looked prosperous. One journalist was led to write, "Fremont is entitled to a first-class opera house."<sup>3</sup>

Instrumental in replacing the destroyed theater were three men—Frank Fowler, Ray Nye, and John Thomsen. Their possible reasons were complex. A good deal of competition existed between the Broad Street and the Main Street merchants. Each group hoped its area would become "the Fifth Avenue" of Fremont. Naturally, the construction of an opera house on their street would be a sign of partial victory. The Shed Opera House had been located just off Main Street. The Broad Street merchants wanted the new opera house near them.

Equally important, perhaps, was their interest in civic

improvement. Fremonters were used to an active opera house and now had none. There was a desire for more good entertainment in town and for a building that everyone could look to with pride. An editorial in the *Fremont Weekly Tribune* explains why a new opera house was wanted:

[The new opera house] serves as a perpetual and valuable advertisement of the city abroad. . . . [it] supplies another long felt want of the city as a convention city. . . . Again, such an opera house assures a better class of entertainments for the citizens of Fremont. Theatricals have become almost an indispensable adjunct to the civilization of today and of course whatever tends to elevate their character is to that extent a public blessing.<sup>4</sup>

The erection of an attractive opera house meant not only that there would be continued theater in the city, but that outsiders would look on Fremont with respect and interest.

Fowler, Nye, and Thomsen raised \$2500 from the Broad Street merchants to purchase the ground. They turned the deed over to James Wheeler Love on the condition that he would build an opera house to cost at least \$25,000.<sup>5</sup> Looking back at that transaction some fifty years later, his daughter Para Love has written:

It was easy, I now realize, to persuade Father of his civic duty coupled with so romantic a venture, which gave added promise of his entry into a coveted field, "show business." Other citizens, bent on civic improvement at the expense of another, convinced Father he was doing a fine thing and making a good investment, at the same time. There was money in the show business, so they said.<sup>6</sup>

These three gentlemen were determined to get that opera house built and to get it on Broad Street.

It is not surprising that they turned to Love. His background made him a likely choice. Born December 10, 1850, in Mt. Vernon, Ohio, he moved to Iowa as a youth. After graduating from Iowa Wesleyan University at Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, in 1870, he remained there as an instructor for two years. In 1872 he moved to Omaha where he was principal of a school for two more years. After one year as a principal in Onawa, Iowa, he returned to Omaha and entered the real estate business for two years. His final attempt as an educator was two years spent as superintendent of schools in Plattsmouth. In 1880 he moved to Fremont.<sup>7</sup>

In a few short years Love made a fortune. When he first moved to Omaha in 1872 he was in debt \$200. By the spring of 1889 he was estimated to be worth \$200,000. While living in

Omaha, and after moving to Fremont, he made a number of valuable real estate investments. By the time the opera house was built, he owned about 6,000 acres of cultivated land in Dodge County, 200 head of cattle, and 50 head of horses. In addition he received from the citizens of Fremont the bid of \$100,000 for paving the streets.<sup>8</sup>

But education and wealth were not his only attributes. Most important, he was interested in the arts. He and his wife Thirza belonged to the Fremont Shakespeare Club. At weekly meetings they would read Shakespeare's plays in parts previously assigned to them and frequently would journey to Omaha or Lincoln to see a production. His daughter remembered, "how father loved to declaim 'to be or not to be,' 'I come to bury Caesar,' and all those so well-known passages which anyone claiming to be at all well educated, invariably knew—then."<sup>9</sup> During the summer of 1889 he and his wife toured Europe. He was most impressed with Paris and wrote back to Fremont newspapers:

This is the art city of the world. The only place where the master-pieces of the different schools hang side by side. France knows it, and is ever ready to pay the highest prices for such work from her national purse. The United States should do likewise and begin a national museum at once worthy of herself. . . . It is a great school for all beholders, and in a few generations will prove most profitable to a nation.<sup>10</sup>

It is little wonder that he wanted an opera house in Fremont.

Still another important quality of Love's was his desire for adventure, his love of life. Para Love wrote that her father "enjoyed life and people thoroughly, made friends easily, and enjoyed traveling to the fullest. . . . love of adventure was in his blood. Wherever he was, there was always something doing."<sup>11</sup> Love accepted the post of U.S. consul to San Salvador in 1891. It was even rumored in the press that he planned to establish a circuit of opera houses in San Salvador for the sole purpose of presenting his favorite play, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Contracting malaria the following year, he was forced to resign his post and returned to Fremont. Shortly after his return, he was asked to represent the State of Nebraska as a member of the board of the Nicaragua Canal.

Once he made a decision, he was determined to carry it through. After he failed to win the ambassadorship to Turkey in 1889, Love decided to travel to Europe anyway. Apparently he

had a friendly rivalry with Jake May, who with his brothers operated a wholesale grocery business for many years. The *Weekly Herald* wrote that Love "has a comfortable wager put up that he will be in Paris climbing the Eiffel tower on the 4th of July, and will holler to Jake May 'How is this for high?'"<sup>12</sup> A few weeks later the newspaper noted that Love had won his bet. Wanting to improve himself and to get the most out of life, Love could not sit still. In the oration at Love's funeral in December, 1893, the Reverend William H. Buss said that Love's favorite quotation was: "Count that day lost whose low, descending sun, views from thy hand no worthy action done."<sup>13</sup>

It was natural for Love to think that the opera house would be a financial success. Aside from the fact that there was no other competing auditorium, Fremont was a booming town.<sup>14</sup> This was due mainly to development of the railroad. In 1866 the Union Pacific tracks reached Fremont from Omaha. Three years later the Sioux City and Pacific connected the town to the north, extending into Minnesota. Also in 1869 the town of Fremont organized its own railroad and by 1890 had laid tracks as far as Deadwood, South Dakota. A Lincoln branch of the Fremont railroad was built in 1886. Because of these railroad lines, by 1888 Fremont had become the largest transfer station in Nebraska.

The result was a natural growth in business and population. Land value skyrocketed. Lots worth \$3.00 in 1864 were worth \$300 in 1869. From June, 1868, to April, 1869, the population increased from 1,199 to 6,747. In 1882 a total of 109 businessmen were listed for Fremont, eighty-eight of whom came after the building of the railroads. Most businesses were agriculturally oriented. One of the largest was sheep feeding. Fremonters would herd sheep from western and southwestern states and feed them near town. By 1890, 200,000 sheep were being fed near Fremont. Most of the feed was bought locally from the huge Nye and Schneider Company, which had offices in thirty-one Nebraska towns. Fremont was also a large horse market. In 1886 one company sold 1,400 horses. Other thriving businesses at this time were creameries, iron works, breweries, wood works, and medical supply houses. The amount of wholesale trade occurring at the time indicates the boom in

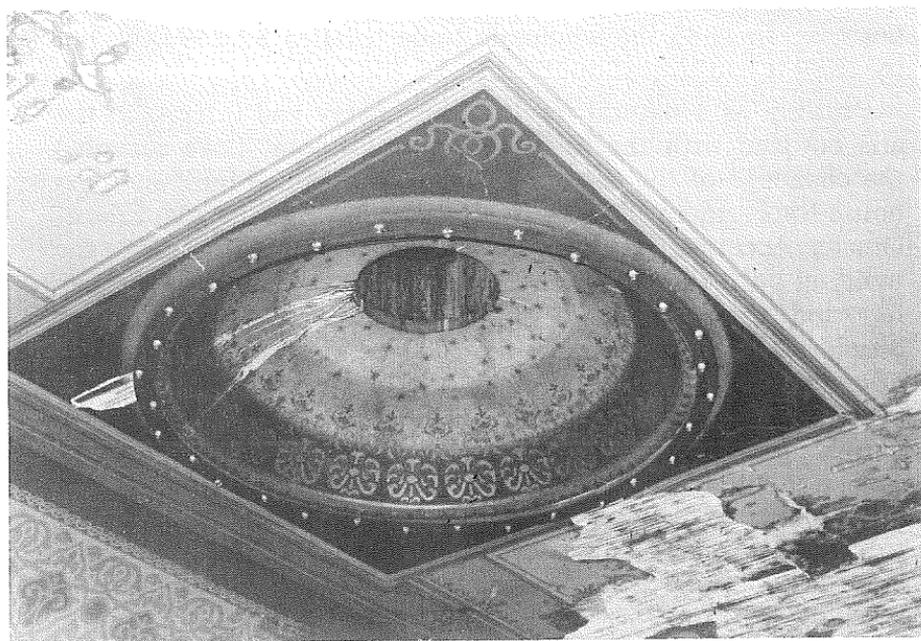
business. In 1885 the wholesale trade totalled \$2,869,000, but by 1889 it had almost doubled to \$5,768,000.

Possibly as a natural result of his energy and interest in the arts coupled with the town's economic boom, Love accepted the challenge of the Broad Street merchants and built an opera house for Fremont. For his architect he hired Francis M. Ellis of Omaha. Accounts vary as to how much he spent. Most claim the building cost \$40,000 even though the newspapers of the day reported the cost at \$90,000. Whatever is true, he spent considerably more than the \$25,000 of the initial agreement. Located in the middle of the block between Fifth and Sixth Streets on the west side of Broad, the building was 55 feet wide by 126 feet deep, with five stories including the basement.<sup>15</sup> The ground floor was divided into two large rooms that accommodated, for a long period of time, a wholesale liquor store and an opera house restaurant/saloon. At the rear of the ground floor were eight dressing rooms with stairs leading up to the stage level.

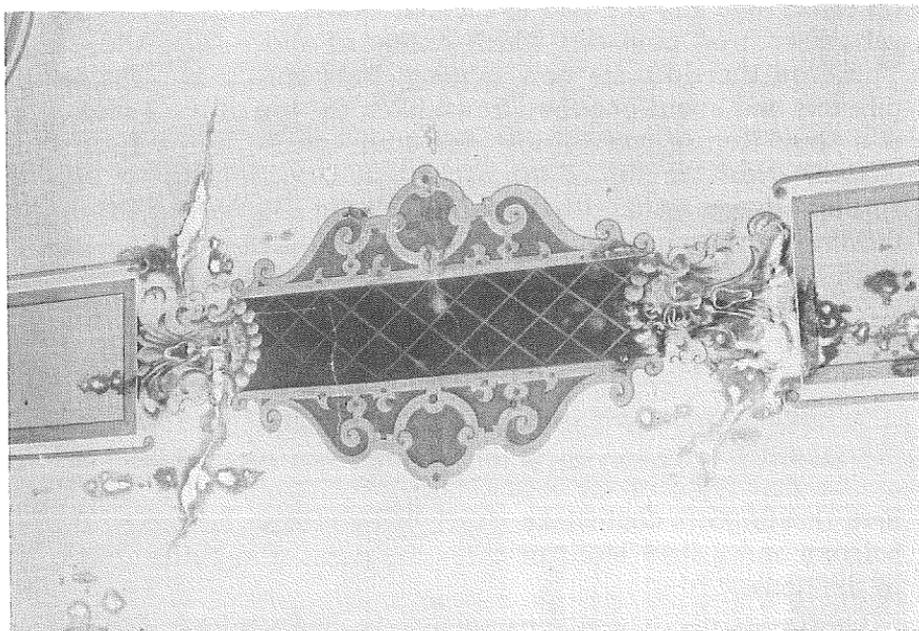
The top of the front of the opera house was trimmed with stone and galvanized iron cornices and ornaments. The pilasters on either side and the two in the center were surmounted with galvanized iron pinnacles which extended above the building. Those on the sides are now missing. Between the two middle pilasters and about one-third down from the top of the building is a large Roman arch. Above the arch are the words "Opera House." Near the top of the two pilasters on the side are two smaller Roman arches. Running through the middle of the front facade is a pattern of recessed-stone and pressed-brick checker work. Stained glass ornamented the windows of the upper stories. At the back of the building can still be seen the outline of the large loading door on the stage level, as well as a long, narrow slit used for loading tall flats.

A broad entrance on either side of the building led, through swinging doors, to the opera house from the street. At the head of the first flight of the south stairs was the box office. From here theatergoers could take either of two flights leading to the balcony and gallery levels or enter the parquet and dress circle of the house.

The inside decor was apparently very handsome, in various shades of brown with chocolate hue predominating. An



*The impressive domed ceiling of Love Opera House awed Fremont theatergoers.*



*Elaborate decoration was found throughout the structure. This section of ornamentation contains the ancient Grecian masks.*

extensive amount of frescoing was done by Lindman and McIvor of Minneapolis. Although some of it may have been added at various times of remodeling, portions are probably original. Some of the frescoing on the ceiling represented theater designs. For instance, still in recognizable condition on the northern part of the ceiling are painted masks of comedy and tragedy. The frescoing that remains was done in maroons and blues with some accents of gold trim and scroll. A three-foot-wide fresco motif acted as the proscenium arch and was carried around the top of the other three walls of the house. The first balcony railing was topped with brass rods, from which hung a brown tapestry. On each side of the stage, raised only two or three steps from the main house level and no more than ten feet from the stage, was a shallow private box ornamented with carved wood, sliding tapestry, and rich carpets.<sup>16</sup> A definite focal point was the impressive dome in the center. About ten feet in diameter, it carried out the color and design motifs of the rest of the building. Suspended from the dome originally was a sun burner. The rest of the house was illuminated by 250 gas fixtures. The total seating capacity of the house totalled 1,075, with 465 handsome opera chairs in the parquet and dress circle, 337 in the balcony, 253 in the gallery, and four balcony boxes of five chairs each.

Designed by S. L. Graham of Chicago, the stage and machinery were elaborate. Being 52 feet wide by 32 feet deep, the stage was supplied with foot and border lights, drops, a fly gallery, and a scenery loft.<sup>17</sup> The scenery consisted of eleven sets, composed of eighty-three pieces. The front curtain which was 52 feet wide and 26 feet high cost approximately \$900. It must have vied with the dome for the audience's attention. Para Love has recalled how it looked:

That curtain!... Painted velvet side curtains, fringed and draped back too realistically, showed a most foreign and formal balustraded garden, with meticulously placed and clipped trees standing in lined array about a fountain. The piece d'resistance of this was a statue "Aphrodite" (without any nighty) taking her daily shower, and of which two unembarrassed, strolling lovers took no notice, their amours obviously occupying them.<sup>18</sup>

Nothing was spared to make Fremont's opera house one of distinction.

By December 14, 1888, the Love Opera House was a reality. The night was filled with excitement as Fremonters crowded

the building for the first time. Tickets were expensive. For many years to come a top price for a major show was \$1.00, but for this grand opening night, tickets were \$3.00 for the parquet, dress circle, and first three rows of the balcony, \$2.00 for the rear five balcony rows, and \$1.00 for the gallery.<sup>19</sup> Formal invitations were sent to public officials throughout the state. All were undoubtedly dressed in their finest garments. Para Love can remember wearing a red velvet cape with white fur collar. Her younger sister Romá wore a black satin cloak lined with yellow and a matching bonnet.<sup>20</sup>

A highlight of the evening was the dedicatory address given by the Reverend John Hewitt, pastor of St. James Episcopal Church. He proclaimed that as a minister of the gospel he recognized the place of drama in society. The theater is an educator, and it has always flourished best in the highest civilization. He explained that this new opera house would bring higher class entertainments to Fremont that would surely be lessons in life. He ended his oration by saying:

It was the work of Love, and for Love and the public. Love is a true, manly attribute but in this particular case it was the man himself. Many people conceive grand plans, but they do not always put them into execution. It was an easy thing to build a castle in the air, but it was quite another thing to build an opera house on the ground.<sup>21</sup>

Love had built an opera house that drew praise from the entire community.

He was clever to book Minnie Maddern for the opening night performance. She was to have played in *Caprice* the night the Shed Opera House burned, and so Love booked her for a return engagement. Although little has been written about her performance in Fremont, Para Love remembered:

The 'Grand Opening' was an event. Minnie Maddern, then young and just beginning to be known, played in some comedy, I don't remember its name. The one thing I do remember about the play was the stage swing, in which, when the curtain went up, the heroine was swinging. A picture hat hung down her back, from under her chin ribbons, curls framed her smiling face, and her white muslin dress, much ruffled, blew back to show her slippered feet and ankles.<sup>22</sup>

A Fremont reviewer said that the performance revealed Minnie Maddern's scope and versatility, and "she heartily enlists the supreme sympathy of her audience. . . . The denouement is one filled with happiness and tears."<sup>23</sup>

When the new Love Opera House opened in December, 1888, all looked well for its growth and development, and for the first

seven years the business succeeded. During that time the local manager booked from thirty to forty performances per season. The bill of fare was varied and included Shakespeare, operas, and concert groups. The strength seemed to center around Love. His daughter insists that he "was actually particular about the plays and companies he 'booked,' trying that age-old game of 'raising the public standards,' with the usual results."<sup>24</sup> Whether he really booked the shows himself is doubtful, especially when considering that he went to Europe for many weeks the first summer after the opera house opened and was in San Salvador for another year. Nevertheless, as owner, he undoubtedly wielded much influence.

Love attempted to hire good managers who would run the business for him. For the first two years Robert McReynolds of Lincoln was the lessee and manager. He apparently controlled a circuit that included Grand Island, York, and Beatrice. The local Fremont newspaper quoted him as saying, "I am going to do a great thing for Fremont. They will have a class of attractions there that they could not have touched if they had not made arrangements to come in our circuit."<sup>25</sup> Replacing McReynolds in 1891 was Love's good friend Colonel Ezra C. Usher. One of Fremont's pioneers, Usher had been an employee of the Shed Opera House for a number of years, working as janitor and getting paid \$20 per month.<sup>26</sup> Although he lost the management during the 1892-1893 season, Usher was again the manager for two more years after Love died of malaria on December 21, 1893.

Only four months after his death, on April 10, 1894, Mrs. Love died. Being a strait-laced Maine Baptist, she had never been very interested in the opera house. She wore no makeup, played no cards, and frowned on dancing. Had she lived, the development of the opera house may not have been the same! Since Mrs. Love left no will, all of the property went to the two daughters: Para, 17, and Roma, 11. Since Para soon left for college in Oberlin, Ohio, and Roma was too young to become actively involved, the influence of the Loves on the opera house ended for about seven years.

During this period everything continued as usual while Usher was manager. After he retired in the summer of 1895, only one show was booked in a fourteen-month period. After another year with George Coddington, a Fremont musician, as manager,

a Beatrice man by the name of C. A. Osborne rented the Love. The *Fremont Tri-Weekly Tribune* reported:

Mr. Osborne is an old theatrical manager having been in the business for eighteen years. He was manager of the Paddock Opera House in Beatrice, where he met with good success. When he was seen this afternoon Mr. Osborne said that if the people of Fremont showed that they would support an opera house in proper manner, he would give them the best class of shows that came into the west. He will book attractions for his house along with Managers Crawford of Omaha and Zehrung of Lincoln and will endeavor to make Love's opera house headquarters for first class plays only.<sup>27</sup>

Hopes seemed high for this new manager.

Even though Osborne was partially instrumental in booking many shows for the 1898-1899 season, his stay in Fremont was short-lived. On October 18, 1898, he reportedly was part of a saloon brawl after a concert in the opera house.<sup>28</sup> About two weeks later a warrant was made for his arrest "in order that attachments may be served on him and he could give his creditors a chance to do their best with him." Also it was reported that there was "a charge of adultery." In true dramatic style he was apprehended in Valley, Nebraska, while in the process of switching trains. To make matters worse, his partner Mrs. May Willard was arrested, broke out of jail, and recaptured while trying to get out of town.<sup>29</sup> Although there is no record of any conviction, Osborne saw fit to leave Fremont.

Replacing him as sole manager of the Love was M. M. Irwin. Soon after arriving Irwin cancelled all Sunday performances and apologized publicly to the Fremonters for the low quality shows that his predecessor had booked. He promised to upgrade the quality of selections. By the end of his first year the *Fremont Tri-Weekly Tribune* reported:

The opera house management is semi-officially reported to have sworn off on the importation of cheap-guy shows for the edification of Fremont theatergoers. The public positively refused to invest in permits to hear the whang-bangers and has finally succeeded in demonstrating its willingness to patronize a limited number of first class shows. Wherefore the opera house management has taken a tumble to itself and has quite delectable thespian menu for the new year.<sup>30</sup>

It appears that Irwin reduced the number of attractions but tried to improve the quality by eliminating the minstrel and vaudeville shows. By the end of the 1899-1900 season he could report, "This season has been a very much better one financially than usual. . . . More money was handled this year in six shows than during the entire season last year."<sup>31</sup>



*The "New Larson Opera House" was renovated in 1905 but showed little outward change. The name L. P. Larson, however, replaced L. W. Love on the gable.*

That the opera house had gone through a slump should not be blamed solely on the management. Fremont had other problems. Although the Panic of 1893 did not hit as hard as in some cities, it did take its toll. In the state of Nebraska, bank deposits dropped from \$54,000,000 in 1892 to \$27,000,000 in 1896. In Fremont the bank deposits in 1894 were \$931,000 and in 1897 were \$577,000. In 1893, 375 firms were listed in the business directory, but by 1894 there were only 354. Many large businesses were forced to close and filed bankruptcy. Others just closed out of fear. All creditors were wanting their money. Where there had been 300 factory employees listed in 1892, the figure was cut to 124 in 1894. As the economy deteriorated, it was more difficult financially to run the opera house and fewer people could afford to buy tickets. The management was forced to book shows that would sell.

At the turn of the century, Para Love began to play a more effective role in the plans of the opera house. Sometimes her name was even listed as manager. One of her closest friends, Mrs. Lida Richards, has many fond memories of Para, called by some "the glamour girl of Fremont." Mrs. Richards says Para "could sing and dance and do everything. She was a very warm person who attracted people to her like a magnet."<sup>32</sup> More of an adventurous and creative spirit like her father rather than an efficient business woman, she hired Albert A. Nehrbas to be manager during her last two years of ownership. He brought experience to his position. Soon after the Love Opera House had been built, he and a man named White began to put on performances in the Shed Opera House consisting of song-and-dance routines that were changed daily.<sup>33</sup> As a promotional teaser they turned a part of the building into a museum of farm machinery and buggies.<sup>34</sup> Whatever his real talent, Nehrbas did give Love's reputation a big boost. Over fifty shows were booked. Although a good number were of the minstrel and variety type, at least two were by Shakespeare, two by Herne, and one by Pinero. A healthy number of productions received big houses.

By the spring of 1903, it was announced that negotiations were under way for the sale of the opera house. It was reported that Louis P. Larson, who had run a wholesale liquor store on the ground floor of the building for many years, had offered a purchase price somewhere between \$9,000 and \$10,000.<sup>35</sup>

After he purchased the building and renamed it the Larson Opera House, he announced he would make \$4,000 in improvements. These included extending the stage, painting the ceiling and walls, and installing a steam heating plant. The private boxes were torn out, as were the three front rows of the parquet and some of the seats in the balcony, thus lowering the seating capacity by about 100.<sup>36</sup> The remodeling was done so as to "attract the best companies to Fremont and permit the use of their paraphernalia."<sup>39</sup>

For the next thirteen years Larson, with William Lowry as his manager, owned the opera house. In spite of their attempts to keep the opera house going, the end was in sight. Over twenty shows had performed in Fremont each of the last two years of Para Love's ownership. The *Fremont Tribune* mentions no more than fifteen for any season after 1903, and usually lists only about six per season. As early as 1908, financial problems began to emerge. Appearing in the local newspaper was the following article:

The management of the Larson has announced that it is not making money this season and that a better patronage must be given the first class plays, else they will not be brought here. There has been talk of closing the house for the season.<sup>38</sup>

To add to their problems, Omaha managers were becoming more reluctant to send troupes to Fremont. They did not want the responsibility of sending companies to a weak theater.

The death knell had been sounded. A 1913 newspaper article described an important Omaha manager's return from New York. The manager, C. W. Turner, said:

Theater business is poor in New York and Chicago. People aren't supporting the \$2.00 plays but are going to the variety and cheaper shows. Any number of shows which started out with bright prospects are failing right along. This will effect Omaha in that we will not have quite so many good shows this season.<sup>39</sup>

If there were problems in larger cities like Omaha, they must have been even greater in towns like Fremont.

Perhaps the major problem, however, came with the introduction of the motion picture houses. In 1911 the Wall Theatre was built, accommodating both movies and theater. The Best Theater opened in 1912. In 1915 the Empress was completed at an estimated cost of \$75,000. It could accommodate movies and also theatrical productions.<sup>40</sup> In January of the following year Larson decided to sell the opera house to Herman Diers, a

well-known Crowell, Nebraska, business man. Closing the transaction in March, Larson traded the opera house at \$25,000 toward a 300-acre farm near Crowell.<sup>41</sup> Even though Lowry was said to be continuing as manager, the *Tribune* mentions no productions for the year of 1916. In February, 1917, it was reported that "the footlights will glow soon again at the Larson théâtre." Robert D. Wall, one of the owners of the Wall Theatre, arranged to become manager of the opera house. Announcing that he planned to book touring shows, Wall commented that he had "a plan in view for making the Larson a thoroughly modern and up-to-date theater. I believe Fremont will support good shows. I am working for something worthwhile."<sup>42</sup> The first booking was the motion picture, *The Birth of a Nation*. Even though the next few years may have witnessed occasional theatrical productions, the glory days of the Love Opera House had come to an end.

Although the building has not sat idle the last fifty years, it has not been used for theater. In the early 1920's major renovations took place. Apartments—which were finally closed about ten years ago—were built toward the front of the building on the second floor. At the same time, the stage and the auditorium were divided by another floor built about ten feet above the original stage floor. This was used for a few years by the National Guard for drills. In more recent years, space was allocated to the Jehovah's Witnesses for use as a meeting hall and to the Armstrong Furniture Company. Since 1930 the main floor of the building has been occupied by a grocery store, managed until recently by Virgil A. Petersen.

During its first thirty years of activity, the opera house achieved an unusual amount of popularity. Literally dozens of times the newspapers reported full and capacity crowds of nearly 1,100 people. Mrs. Lida Richards can remember that she often sat on her father's lap in the balcony because all the seats were sold out.<sup>43</sup> Even the numerous mentions of slim houses must be considered with some scepticism. In a 1914 review the writer complained of a small house, citing between 300 and 400 empty seats. With a capacity of over 1,000 this was still a sizeable crowd for Fremont!<sup>44</sup>

Beginning with its first opening night, attending the opera house became a major social event in the community. Even



when audiences were slim, reviewers would note that at least they were of a refined, first-rate quality. It was necessary to dress for the occasion! Clothing stores advertised the latest styles in opera house capes and opera glasses. Ladies in "the dress circle" wore hat and gloves to almost all performances. When asked if she could remember people dressing up, a long-time teacher in the Fremont public schools and daughter of Charles D. Marr, Helen Marr replied:

Oh, very much! Even in the old opera house I had my mother's opera bonnet. It was a little pale blue silk with little white and little pale blue ostrich plumes in it. I remember wearing long white gloves. It was a very social occasion.<sup>45</sup>

The opera house was fulfilling its role of trying to make Broad Street the Fifth Avenue of Fremont.

Where a person sat in the theater was of utmost importance. The favored seats were in the dress circle. The daughter of one of Fremont's early pioneers, Mrs. Margherite Spear, stated, "In the East, the choice seats were the first few rows right down by the stage, not here. I remember Etta's first Eastern beaux, they bought tickets down in front and were they looked down on for going down there. They should have been back here [in the dress circle.]"<sup>46</sup>

The theater's popularity was not limited to those who could afford the best seats—everyone could afford the gallery, the least expensive of which was called "nigger heaven." Miss Grace Bridge, a Fremont girl, describes this section in a letter she sent to her family while attending Yale University during the 1898-1899 school year:

I went to hear Jo Jefferson last week in "The Rivals." He is an old man of 70 or more and yet plays the part of a young green country squire capitally. We sat in the peanut gallery which happens to be a very respectable place here. Lots of nice people sit there. It is called "Family Circle" not "nigger heaven." We had very good reserved seats for 75¢. All below were \$2.00 and \$1.50. The play was fine, excellent support throughout. . . . I never heard such applause in all my life.<sup>47</sup>

Fremont's "nigger heaven" was often more heavily sold than the dress circle. Recalling the last years of the opera house, Mrs. Evelyn Lewis, a long-time resident of Fremont, refers to this class division in the seating, "Those of a lower class snuck up to the balcony and snuck out fast when the show was over."<sup>48</sup> Although attending the opera house was popular for all classes, it definitely conveyed the distinction of an important social event.

The success of the opera house was due mainly to its variety and novelty. During most seasons the broad range of productions had something of appeal to everyone. A typical season might include minstrel shows, Irish comedies, some musicals, Shakespeare, and productions using local talent. As the only large auditorium in town, the opera house also hosted occasional political speakers, athletic events, and high school commencements. Although repertory companies were frequently booked for one-week engagements, most of the presentations were for one-night stands. The city's proximity to Omaha attracted companies that normally may not have played in such a small town. As Helen Marr points out:

The reason Fremont got such good shows was because it was a one night stand. The companies that were going to Omaha and then were going on to Denver, they'd have a free night, so they'd stop in Fremont because we had a big theater.<sup>49</sup>

One of the most popular presentations of the touring companies was the sentimental drama. One Fremont journalist wrote, "The power of a play to stir the natural emotions of the human heart is the true test of its worth."<sup>50</sup> Those natural emotions were then such things as love, honor, patriotism, and above all, innocence. One of these dramas was *The Burglar*:

It is a positive fact that more ladies and children have been entertained and delighted with *The Burglar* than with any other play of recent years. . . . [It is] of a decidedly healthy tone . . . [and] combines all the sentimental qualities which never fail to win an audience. The character of little Editha is so beautifully and charmingly conceived that even men feel as if they would like to stand upon the stage for a moment just to hug her. [The fine moment of sentiment occurs when Editha tells the burglar he can have anything, just don't hurt anyone.] The moment Editha declares her fearlessness the burglar is in her power. . . . Her innocent appeal [is sentimental.]<sup>51</sup>

Audiences simply idolized people like Editha. If she had fought the burglar or even yelled at him, it would have lessened her appeal.

They particularly appreciated honest and wholesome plays like those written by James Herne. For instance, in *Shore Acres*, which appeared at the Love twice, there is an emphasis on simple home life. As one Fremont critic wrote, "The story is full of heart interest and makes a strong appeal to all lovers of the beautiful in art or nature. The characters are all such people as one will find in real life. There are no villains, no fallen women and no soubrettes."<sup>52</sup> The same critic quoted a local clergyman who said, "If there were more such wholesome plays

as *Shore Acres* the wholesale denunciation of the stage by the pulpit could not long survive."

This kind of "honesty" and "reality" appealed to Fremont audiences. By the turn of the century, however, complaints began about a different wave of realism. As early as 1901 the Fremont press started its attack. Of the specialty entertainment used between the acts of *The Senator's Daughter*, it maintained there were "indecencies which are coming to be more and more permitted upon the American stage through the indulgence of its patrons."<sup>53</sup> The majority of the audience, however, seemed to approve for ticket sales remained heavy.

In 1902 a play entitled *A Modern Magdalen* was booked for a one-night stand. It was about a poor girl who "goes wrong" and thereby accumulates considerable wealth, luxuries, and friends. The *Fremont Tribune* critic complained: "It is sad enough commentary on American life to admit that such scenes do occur in our midst in real life. The necessity or expediency of parading them on the American stage is a matter of considerable doubt."<sup>54</sup> Perhaps the same critic clarified his position even more the following year when writing of a production of Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. The play concerns a woman with a shady past and her efforts to adjust to respectable English society. The critic wrote:

There is a class of plays which are written to depict what is termed under a sweeping classification "social problem." If the object of these playwrights were really what they pretend it to be, there would be some logic in their position. . . . There is not so much intention to serve a moral purpose as to construct a plot that will attract by reason of its very morbidity.<sup>55</sup>

The heroine was disliked because she did not uphold traditional sentimental values. In spite of the harsh criticism, these "modern" shows added to the diversity of the bookings and were very popular.

In addition to the touring companies that played at the Love were productions by local people. Active for a number of years was the Fremont Choral Union. Among its members were Jeanie Boyd, Mrs. Carrie Nye, Para Love, and Albert A. Nehrbas. When they performed *H.M.S. Pinafore* in 1899, the opera house was filled to capacity. Other local groups that produced plays in the building were the Fremont Dramatic Company organized in 1891, the St. James Guild of the

Episcopal Church, the Congregational Church, the Fireman's Association, the Ladies' Charity Club, and The Knights of Pythias. In the Charity Club's production of *The Fairies' Carnival* in 1894, over 200 local people appeared, including Alma Benton, Helen and Jennie Marr, and Carrie Munger.<sup>56</sup> Often the local people presented "living pictures." When the curtain was raised the audience witnessed tableaux, often of historical scenes. According to Mrs. Spear, a large, ornate picture frame enclosed each scene.<sup>57</sup>

Perhaps the most unusual local production was that of the *Living Whist* in 1893. Advertised as being very popular on both coasts, the production was described in detail in the *Fremont Tri-Weekly Tribune*:

It was about 8:30 o'clock when the director, Miss Harris, of Boston, took her place on the box in the center of the orchestra. Then appeared the four players, Mr. and Mrs. Ross L. Hammond, and they took their places at the four corners of the stage. The orchestra played a march and the deck of cards, fifty-two in number came trooping upon the stage in single file—first the hearts, which were trumps, second the diamonds, third the clubs and last the spades, with distinguishing colors for each suit, which were shown by the ladies in their dresses and the gentlemen in their sashes. The kings marched first in each suit, followed by queen and knave and ace and lower cards in their order. The kings wore crowns and large white gowns with quaint jackets over them with the colors down to the hem. The queens wore dresses en traine, and the knaves were distinguished by their rakish suits and devil-may-care air, and their reckless abandon while dancing. After marching in single file they detoured in fours, aces, kings, etc., together.

Then they had a shuffle which was a free and easy dance, each swinging whom he choose, then taking a spin alone, then swinging some other lady. Then came the cut, which was executed by Mrs. Hammond. Then the deal, which Mrs. Smith accomplished, personally conducting each card to the players, and the card tripped the light fantastic on the way. The cards now stood thirteen on each corner, and the game commenced. Mr. Smith led the deuce of hearts, Mr. Hammond played the king, Mrs. Hammond the ace, and Mrs. Smith the five of hearts. Each player handed the card out into the center of the stage, and the four, formed a trick dance, there being a different kind of a dance for each trick, and at the conclusion the four took their places in a line at the rear of the stage, and the next four took their stand in front of them. Some of the dances, particularly the lively ones, were very clever, and they took immensely as shown by hearty applause.

The game was won by Mr. Hammond and Mrs. Smith as partners, they taking the odd trick with the king of diamonds, while the orchestra played 'Hail to the Chief.'<sup>58</sup>

The production's popularity led a Fremont reviewer to comment, "It was a very attractive, pretty, and novel entertainment, unique and picturesque. . . . Socially and artistically it was a great and shining success."<sup>59</sup>

Although some of the local productions could not be



*A Fremont local-talent theater group called the Oriole Opera Company performed "The Chimes of Normandy" at Love Opera House on June 11, 1895.*

classified as great art, they did involve the citizens with the theater and provided more variety to the season. Para Love fondly remembers such activities:

Our Amateur Productions were as varied and pretentious as was then the style. . . . We were drafted by our over-insistent friends and learned our lines and practiced and had as many temperamental quarrels as any well regulated town always does when in the throes of histrionic propagation. There was always at least one performer who froze, rooted to his silent spot with stage fright, and generally some near genius who saved the situation, despite the audible giggles of the unfortunate forgetter's small brother.<sup>60</sup>

Without the opera house, it is unlikely that the citizens of Fremont would have participated in such theatrical endeavors.

The variety of productions was matched by the uniqueness of the technical aspects aimed at audience appeal. Always very popular was the opera house orchestra. Until 1902 most of the touring companies brought their own musicians. At that time, however, it was decided to engage a permanent orchestra for the opera house and have only the musical director travel with the company. Helen Marr recalls that "it was usually just the director [that toured], and he would call a meeting of those [local] musicians probably an hour and a half before the show's to start." When asked how such little rehearsal affected the performance, Mrs. Spear commented, "What difference did it make. They carried a tune, that's the main thing, and [they] got the thing across."<sup>61</sup> The manager knew his audience. Using a community group may not have resulted in as artistic a performance, but it held more local appeal.

Also impressive to theater patrons were the scenic effects. Nearly everyone interviewed could remember the effects in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, produced at the Love a total of eleven times. Most memorable was the simulated ice used in the big escape scene. Mrs. Spear remembers sitting far up in the gallery during one performance so she could see how the ice technique was handled. She thinks the pieces were "probably boxes with cotton glued on and were pulled across the stage on a rope or wire."<sup>62</sup> This was an attempt at stage realism. Many others were tried. The 1899 production of *Under the Dome* had five different sets, including a hurricane scene off a coral reef, the view of a storm on shore late at night, the struggle of a ferry boat against the storm, a journey of the ferry boat from Jersey City to New York, and an illuminated view of Washington,

D. C. Prolonged applause was given this "fine piece of stage realism."<sup>63</sup>

The most detailed account of scenic realism occurred with *The Fast Mail* in 1892:

A freight train with 14 cars and a lighted caboose, with full sized locomotive, and with engineer and fire man crosses the stage. Later in the play a Mississippi River steam boat with bells ringing, and engines, moves in and explodes with terrific force. A great scene is also given of Niagara with real tumbling waters.<sup>64</sup>

The audience seemed more impressed with realistic effects than with realistic drama.

Another attempt at attracting audiences was in the area of costuming. Companies often advertised that their costumes were historically accurate. Shakespearean actor Charles B. Hanford appeared in Fremont on a number of occasions. The advertisements usually mentioned that he had purchased his realistic costumes from the estate of actor Lawrence Barrett.<sup>65</sup> The reviewers were quick to notice. Costumes for *Father and Son* were praised for "being historically correct and dealing with the days of George the Third of England. Eva Vincent's robes and jewels are superb and cost a small fortune in themselves."<sup>66</sup>

Whether for purposes of realism or for pure novelty, many of the productions featured animals. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* always played with a number of real bloodhounds. On one occasion, besides a cast of thirty-seven actors and two bands, an *Uncle Tom* show had a carload of dogs, donkeys, and a Shetland pony.<sup>67</sup> The performance of *Uncle's Darling* included a team of reindeer that weighed about seven hundred pounds each.<sup>68</sup> A Fremont reviewer praised the use of horses in *Sporting Life* when he observed that "horses and stable as a stage feature was something new and was quite generally appreciated" by the big audience.<sup>69</sup> Combining the appeal of animals with the mechanical effects of a treadmill, *The County Fair* boasted having "thoroughbred race horses running three quarters of a mile in full and continuous view of the audience."<sup>70</sup>

Realizing that all of these effects helped to interest audiences, the managers began advertising the amount of scenery and machinery they were touring. Hoyt's Madison Square Theatre appeared in 1897 and boasted a cast of sixty with two

sixty-foot boxcars to transport the scenery.<sup>71</sup> The ultimate was reached in 1914 when seven twenty-ton truck loads of scenery were placed on the stage for *The Pink Lady*.<sup>72</sup>

Traveling with so much equipment must have caused many problems, especially when the companies were dependent on rail transportation rather than their own trucks. On one occasion when a company left Fremont for an engagement in Sioux City, Iowa, they were forced to play without their scenery because the baggage man of the railroad failed to load it.<sup>73</sup> On another occasion the manager was told the train was leaving at 1:00 a.m. and that all the scenery had to be loaded by the company. The manager reportedly begged to delay the train's departure for thirty minutes, hurried through the performance at the opera house, and requested everyone to help pack up and carry things to the depot. Due to the mud, there were several delays of big loads while a team of horses pulled them out. The train finally departed at 2:30 a.m.<sup>74</sup> The managers would endure the problems rather than eliminate the scenery—they knew its importance in attracting audiences.

Little is written about the acting. This in itself is indicative of what was stressed in the productions, and what was of most interest to the audiences. This is not to say, however, that the audiences were not perceptive of good acting. Indeed, the shows were often advertised with New York critics' comments on the stars. For instance, a local newspaper quoted the *New York Tribune* on Madame Janauschek's acting in *Meg Merriles*: "Madame Janauschek's *Meg Merriles* is a companion picture in dramatic art to Booth's *Hamlet* and Salvini's *Othello*."<sup>75</sup>

As with the kinds of plays and the technical effects, the acting provided ample variety and novelty. Perhaps the most amusing is the account of Carroll Johnson's performance in *The Gossoon*. The reviewer was overwhelmed that he had the "practical and also possible Irish quality of being able to fight four or five men at once . . . and then get up and put his foot on the neck of the vanquished and clasp his sweetheart to his breast and sing a song."<sup>76</sup> Also thrilling was the appearance of prizefighter John L. Sullivan, not in the ring but in a play. After a short run on Broadway, he toured the country in *Honest Hearts and Willing Hands*. A Fremonter wrote of the production:

One of the largest audiences ever gathered at the Love. . . Sullivan furnished the audience and his company did the rest. The champion is practically a wall flower all through the play except in the last act when his histrionic ability culminates in a lively sparring match . . . and sets the gallery gods wild with excitement.<sup>77</sup>

Local theatergoers were quick to see that he was a box office attraction and not a real actor.

Some of the touring companies did make attempts at a more natural style of acting. In the two productions of Herne's *Shore Acres*, in *Hearts of Oak* managed by Herne's widow, and in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, the actors attempted more realism. The Frohman production of *Lady Windermere's Fan* seemed realistic to audiences of the day. Claiming that it was one of the best performances ever brought to Fremont, the reviewer was pleased that it contained "no tiresome rant." Instead, "the acting was realistic; the members performed as men and women would act."<sup>78</sup> These examples, added to the multitude of minstrel shows and vaudeville acts, reveal the diverse performance styles. The opera house managers provided plenty of choices to attract an audience.

If the townspeople were fascinated by the performances of the actors on stage, they were as quick to reject them from their daily life. There was no association. If a party was ever given for a cast, it quickly became the talk of the town. More than once the local press reported an actor had gotten drunk, sometimes necessitating a delay in the performance and sometimes resulting in a light fine.

The appearance of Oscar Wilde in Fremont is a case in point. He had apparently visited town on one of his lecture tours and had enjoyed great popularity. After he had gone and Fremonters learned of his wild ways, the *Tribune* called him "a most hideous creature."<sup>79</sup> A few days later the newspaper printed the following:

[When Oscar Wilde visited the creamery] he drank a deep libation of buttermilk with a gusto that nearly established it as a beverage fashion above all other beverages. The next time he comes, if he comes again, he will be given whey mixed with gall and wormwood.<sup>80</sup>

He may have been a popular artist, but his personal life made him of little value to the townspeople. They would have agreed with the views of Mrs. Kendal, an English actress, whose article appeared in the *Tribune*: "The stage has more often than not a

demoralizing effect. [There is a] degeneracy into meretriciousness of dress, speech and manner, an apparent want of self-respect. [Actors seem to] fling off every convention and every restraint."<sup>81</sup> It was not gentlemanly or ladylike to be an actor or even to associate with one. The appeal of the theatergoers to see actors ended when the curtain closed.

One of the ways used to appease these critics of theater morality was through advertising and promotion. There frequently appeared such comments as "a refined entertainment without any offensive features." In the newspaper advertisement for *Is Marriage a Failure?* appears the statement that "it is without the slightest taint of vulgarity."<sup>82</sup> To advertise the 1892 production of *April Fool*, a noted surgeon was quoted: "If doctors would prescribe theatres instead of pills and plasters, there would be fewer hypochondriacs. Healthful laughter is as good as healthful sea air, and easier and cheaper for the money to obtain."<sup>83</sup>

Many display ads were placed in the local newspapers. Although these were usually one column wide by about three inches long, sometimes they filled up to one-fourth of a page. Written to appeal to the potential patron, the typical ad besides mentioning the star and title could include a short comment from a New York critic, the size of the cast, the extensive scenery, and even the accuracy of the costumes. Very clearly the advertising was trying to reach everyone's special interest and concern. Sometimes the comments went too far with their abundant enthusiasm. A newspaper reporter noticed, for example, that the press agent for the 1903 production of *Othello* had called the company the Warde Company, leading people to believe they were seeing the popular actor Frederick Warde instead of Arthur F. Warde. This press-agent gimmick helped to sell tickets, at least until people wised up.<sup>84</sup> As late as 1913 the managers were printing 8-3 sheets, 50-1 sheets, 50-½ sheets, 100 cards, and 1,500 heralds to advertise the attractions.<sup>85</sup>

Enticing the audience did not stop with regular advertising. Very important were all the different kinds of promotions. During the morning prior to a performance a company often would conduct a street parade. This usually consisted of a band, the cast members, and maybe even a clown or two who would

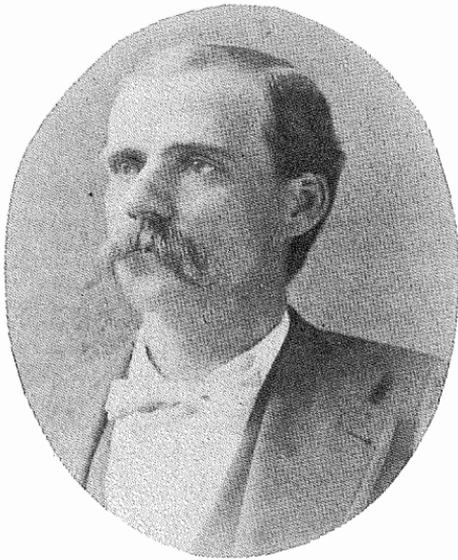
walk through the streets of town. Occasionally the parade stopped and one of the actors engaged in a cakewalk, a kind of impromptu dance step contest.

An extensive variety of gimmicks were tried to attract an audience. Door prizes were very common. Typical prizes included a gold ring, a dress pattern, or a ticket to the World's Fair. Women were especially encouraged to attend. For many years a lady could receive a free ticket if her escort bought one of the most expensive seats. Helen Marr remembers that "year after year they'd [opera house officials] come to the schools and hand out coupons. If you took these coupons to the matinee you could get in for something like fifteen cents."<sup>86</sup>

The best kind of promotion, however, was getting other businesses to do the work. The opera house managed this in a number of instances. In 1900 a local railroad offered a cheap rate to towns around Fremont with the view of selling tickets to theatergoers.<sup>87</sup> In the fall of 1894, Manager Usher convinced the merchants of the opera house block to give 5 cent theater tickets to anyone who bought \$1.00 worth of merchandise and a 75 cent ticket to anyone who bought \$2.00 worth.<sup>88</sup> The same year Knowles Brothers Shoe Store offered free tickets to a person who bought a new pair of shoes. The offer was good for two days.<sup>89</sup> Nearly eleven years later the *Fremont Tribune* offered free tickets to every person who brought in ten copies of their display advertisement which announced the offer.<sup>90</sup>

With the major exception of the original opening night, the ticket prices were usually of two ranges. For the less expensive shows they went for 10, 20, and 30 cents, thus receiving the label of "ten, twen, thirt shows." For the better companies the prices usually were 25 cents for the gallery, 50 cents for the balcony, 75 cents for the parquet, and \$1.00 for the dress circle. There are no records that reveal how much was taken in at the Love. If the sales listed in the ledger of the last two years of the Shed Opera House are of any similarity, some approximations can be drawn. For example, with companies that later appeared at the Love, the following ticket sales were recorded:

May 8, 1886	Patti Rosa Co.	\$33.00
July 24, 1886	Bunch of Keys	20.00
Oct. 26, 1886	John Dillon	19.25
Dec. 14, 1886	Beach and Bower Minstrels	20.00
Jan. 4, 1887	Vincent Co.	14.00
Oct. [?], 1887	John Dillon	55.75 <sup>91</sup>



*James W. Love (left, 1877) built his opera house in 1888. Louis P. Larson (right, 1875) bought the building in 1903, remodeled it, and renamed it after himself.*

It is easy to see what led actor John Dillon to claim that he could make more in a twelve-night stand in Deadwood, South Dakota, than in a three-month stand in Nebraska.<sup>9 2</sup>

Due to the inexpensive tickets, box office receipts may have been low, but enthusiasm was high. The variety and novelty of productions, technical effects, acting and advertising made the opera house not only successful, but a source of pride for all Fremonters.

Over fifty years have passed since the Love Opera House was in its prime. Many of the people most active in its development are gone. A large percentage of Fremont's 25,000 inhabitants are probably unaware that there ever was such a place in town or that the building is still standing.

To the Fremonters of the early twentieth century, however, it definitely left its mark. With travel difficulties limiting the competition from larger cities, the opera house became the focal point for theatrical activity. Frequent programs of music and readings were presented elsewhere in town by local churches, the WCTU, Fremont Normal College, and the summer Chautauqua series, yet they produced no theater. Not until the advent of motion pictures was there rivalry for the audience's dollar.

But the opera house did more than merely provide the people with entertainment. It exposed them to minstrel shows,

vaudeville, and melodramas; it presented Shakespeare, opera, Gilbert and Sullivan, and some of the best dramas of the period. The community of less than 8,000 also became highly involved with the opera house, not only as observers but as participants. A local opera house orchestra was formed. Knowing there was a comfortable and attractive theater for their use, many community organizations began presenting plays. The Fremont Dramatic Company was organized. Besides conducting frequent play readings, it occasionally produced shows at the opera house. Sometimes managers from other opera houses saw their work and booked them to perform in their communities. Some of the local performers, namely Ed L. Weston, Claudia Myers, and Gertrude Hilliker, joined professional touring companies.

Undoubtedly due to reader interest, the *Fremont Tribune* began a regular column called "Stage Glints" in 1896. In this column and elsewhere in the paper were frequent mentions of what was happening in the theatrical world. Such personalities as Richard Mansfield, Sarah Bernhardt, and Eleonora Duse were often mentioned. When Edwin Booth died in 1893 the newspaper featured a major story with a picture on the front page. Perhaps due to their involvement with the opera house, Fremonters had become interested in theater.

The opera house exposed and involved the people. It encouraged theater interest in the community. But most important, it became a source of pride. In the 1880's the town was growing and fast becoming an important agricultural and business center. The people needed something to unify and integrate them. The opera house did just that. With its aura of dignity, it became a symbol of the hopes, ambitions, and dreams of the people.

## APPENDIX I

## SELECTED SAMPLING OF PRODUCTIONS

December 14, 1888	<i>Caprice</i> with Minnie Maddern
January 14, 1889	Boston Symphony
February 8, 1889	<i>The Gladiator</i> with Robert Downing
March 14, 1889	<i>Meg Merrilies</i> with Madame Janauschek
May 9, 1889	<i>Virginus</i> with Frederick Warde
May 31, 1889	<i>Mixed Pickles</i> with J. B. Polk
July 4, 1889	<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> with M'le. Rhea
October 8, 1889	<i>Richard III</i> with Thomas W. Keene
October 28, 1889	<i>The Stowaway</i> , "masterpiece of stage realism"
February 4, 1890	<i>Our Irish Visitors</i> with Murray and Murphy
February 6, 1890	Mendelssohn Quintet of Boston
March 3, 1890	<i>Il Trovatore</i> with New York Star Comedy Company starring Pat Rooney
April 2-3, 1890	<i>Pearl of Savoy</i> presented by local dramatic club
June 19, 1890	John P. St. John, ex-governor of Kansas, gave a speech for prohibition
September 25, 1891	<i>The Fast Mail</i> , a RR melodrama
October 30-31, 1891	<i>Neta</i> , an opera presented by local people as a benefit for the GAR. Starred Mrs. Harry Hammond and Miss Mabel Shreve.
January 20, 1892	<i>Dot, the Miner's Daughter</i> presented by locals of Fremont Dramatic Company and given for a convention of state firemen
February 20, 1892	<i>Honest Hearts and Willing Hands</i> with John L. Sullivan
April 11, 1892	Isaac Payton Comedy Company for a one-week stand. Company of twenty people with a band and orchestra. "Monday night ladies free if accompanied by a 30 cent paid ticket."
April 22-23, 1892	<i>Above the Clouds</i> with the Fremont Dramatic Company. Mrs. Fred Nye sang, Miss Luella Allen played violin. Stars of the production were D. B. Carey, Mr. and Mrs. Coddington, Prof. Smith, and Myrtle and Norman Shreve.
July 9, 1892	Sparring match with four boxers from Omaha
August 20, 1892	Gorton's Famous New Orleans Minstrels. In its twenty-fifth season with twenty-five artists.
October 26, 1892	<i>Esther, the Beautiful Queen</i> , a cantata by local people and directed by Prof. Parsons
November 28, 1892	<i>Hobo</i> , a musical comedy with-Swedish dialect
December 9-10, 1892	<i>Eques-Curriculum</i> , a horse show by Bristol's Company with thirty horses
December 17, 1892	<i>The Midnight Alarm</i> presented by Fremont Fire Department
March 4, 1893	<i>Cleopatra</i> , a burlesque with twenty girls
March 15, 1893	<i>Julius Caesar</i> with Charles B. Hanford
April 1, 1893	North Nebraska Oratorical Contest
May 29, 1893	Memorial Day Service
May 30-June 1, 1893	<i>Living Whist</i> presented by Fremont Rebekah Lodge

- June 7, 1893 Athletic entertainment  
November 9, 1893 *Si Perkins* with Sam J. Burton and a twelve piece orchestra. Included a realistic threshing machine scene and a saw mill.
- November 22, 1893 *Richelieu* with Walker Whiteside, "the probable successor to Booth"
- November 23, 1893 *Damon and Pythias* presented by local Knights of Pythias. Had a sixteen page program with information about the play, title page in six colors and a total of twelve colors used in program. 100 seats were reserved in the first hour of sales. Photos of many of the leads were in store windows. F. I. Ellick, former manager of the opera house, starred.
- December 3, 1893 Prof. Norris dog show with twenty dogs  
May 12, 1894 *Faust*  
May 17, 1894 *Ruy Blas* with Alexander Salvini  
June 2, 1894 *Lady Windermere's Fan* with Frohman Company  
September 27-29, 1894 *Fairies' Carnival* presented by local people with 150 Fremont youth. Written and directed by J. Edgar Owens.
- November 19, 1894 *The County Fair* with Neil Burgess featured "thoroughbred race horses running three quarters of mile in full and continuous view of the audience."
- December 21, 1894 *Romeo and Juliet* with Jane Coombs, "as played by her over 1,000 nights"
- December 24, 1894 A dance  
January 7, 1895 *Charley's Aunt*  
June 12, 1895 *Chimes of Normandy* with Oriole Opera Company  
March 1-6, 1897 Fremont Manufacturing Exhibit  
March 15, 1897 *Shore Acres* by James Herne  
February 3, 1899 *Ole Olson*, Swedish dialect comedy  
February 15, 1899 *H.M.S. Pinafore* presented by Fremont Choral Union
- March 4, 1899 *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with a parade, Negro band, white band, five bloodhounds, and a Negro doing the cakewalk
- April 21-22, 1899 *Brownies in Fairyland* presented by St. James Guild of Episcopal Church in Fremont. Directed by Malcolm Douglas.
- November 28, 1900 Innis Band of 75 artists  
January 27, 1902 *Taming of the Shrew* with Charles B. Hanford "packed almost from top to bottom"
- November 1, 1902 Grandest Minstrel Show with parade and "colored ladies drum corps"
- November 22, 1902 *The Evil Eye*, "crowded to the limit . . . the stairs and halls of the building were congested with nearly suffocating humanity."
- February 13, 1904 *The Merchant of Venice* with Charles B. Hanford  
April 18, 1904 *Scenes from Fairyland*, moving pictures by Ireland Brothers Entertainment Company
- May 9, 1908 *The Taming of the Shrew* with Sanford Dodge  
May 27, 1909 High School Commencement

May 26, 1911  
 March 23, 1914  
 April 7, 1914  
 February 21, 1917

High School Senior Class Play  
*The Pink Lady* with Olga De Baugh  
 Saint Paul Orchestra  
*The Birth of a Nation*, a movie

## APPENDIX II

### OWNERS AND MANAGERS

#### *Owners*

Love bought 22½ feet of lot 1 and 2, block 141, on October 8, 1887, for \$15,000 from James G. Smith.

John Thomsen, et. al. bought 33 feet of lot 1 and 2, block 141, on April 23, 1888 for \$2500 from Charles P. Treat.

Thomsen et al. gave deed to the 33 feet to Love on December 14, 1888.

Para Love sold the property on May 20, 1903, to Louis P. Larson for \$9,000.

L. P. Larson sold the property on March 1, 1916, to Herman Diers for \$25,000.

Herman Diers sold the property on September 26, 1918, to O. D. Harms for \$14,000.

#### *Managers*

Fall, 1888—Spring, 1891	Robert McReynolds
Fall, 1891—Spring, 1892	E. C. Usher
Fall, 1892—end of year	Frank Ellick and Miller
Jan., 1893—May, 1893	J. W. Love
Fall, 1893—January, 1894	E. I. Martling
Jan., 1894—December, 1896	E. C. Usher
Jan., 1897—April, 1897	M. Z. Repass & Co. with George Coddington
May, 1897—December, 1897	George Coddington
Jan., 1898—October, 1898	C. A. Osborne
Nov., 1898—May, 1900	M. M. Irwin
Fall, 1900—Spring, 1903	A. A. Nehrbas and Para Love
Fall, 1903-1917	William Lowry

## NOTES

1. Letterhead of Zach Shed stationery.
2. C. D. Marr Journal of Shed Opera House.
3. *Fremont Daily Herald*, January 1, 1888.
4. *Fremont Weekly Tribune*, December 20, 1888.
5. *Ibid.*, December 20, 1888. This article states that the amount was \$3500, but the registry of deeds in Dodge County Court House lists the amount at \$2500. The registry also revealed that Love already owned about half of the property as of October 8, 1887. The three men led the Broad Street merchants in buying the other half so Love could build the opera house.
6. Para Love, *I Too Lived on Main Street*, 237-238.
7. *Fremont Tri-Weekly Tribune*, December 21, 1893.
8. *Fremont Weekly Herald*, May 23, 1889.
9. Para Love, 98.
10. *Fremont Weekly Herald*, August 8, 1889.

11. Para Love, 86-87.
12. *Fremont Weekly Herald*, June 20, 1889.
13. *Fremont Tri-Weekly Tribune*, December 28, 1893.
14. Information on Fremont's enomic history is found in William David Zimmerman's "Factors in the Development of Fremont, Nebraska." (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Nebraska, 1956).
15. A detailed description of the opera house can be found in the *Fremont Weekly Tribune*, December 20, 1888.
16. An article in the *Omaha Daily Herald*, December 15, 1888, describes the proscenium boxes as "capped with symmetrical canopies, ornamented with pendant spindle arch work. The background is frescoed in blue and old gold, floors carpeted with moquette, and rail and drapery of brass and gold cloth." The same article states the auditorium aisles were carpeted with velvet and the stage carpeted with green baize!
17. The most clear account of specific stage dimensions is found in Julius Cahn's *Official Theatrical Guide*, Volume 3 (New York: Empire Theatre Building, 1895), 463. It states: "Width prosc. opening, 26 ft. Height, 20 ft. Depth footlights to back wall, 26 ft. Dist. bet. side walls, 52 ft. Dist. bet. fly girders, 40 ft. Height grooves from stage, 18 ft. Stage to rigging loft, 18 ft. 4 sets grooves. Depth under stage, 12 ft. 1 trap, located center stage."
19. *Fremont Tribune*, December 13, 1888.
20. Para Love, 242.
21. *Fremont Weekly Tribune*, December 20, 1888.
22. Para Love, 240.
23. *Fremont Weekly Tribune*, December 20, 1888.
24. Para Love, 240.
25. *Fremont Weekly Tribune*, December 20, 1888.
26. C. D. Marr Journal
27. *Fremont Tri-Weekly Tribune*, January 18, 1898.
28. *Ibid.*, October 21, 1898.
29. *Ibid.*, November 1, 1898.
30. *Ibid.*, January 9, 1900.
31. *Ibid.*, May 7, 1900.
32. Mrs. Lida Richards, Interview, December 10, 1973.
33. *Fremont Weekly Herald*, April 4, 1889.
34. *Ibid.*, June 20, 1889.
35. *Fremont Tri-Weekly Tribune*, May 19, 1903. The court house records reveal that it was sold for \$9,000.
36. The most clear account of changes made in the theater is found in Cahn and Leighton's *Official Theatrical Guide*, Volume 16 (New York: New Amsterdam Theatre Building, 1913), 361. It states: "Stage-P.O., 26 x 22 ft.; F. to B. w., 35 ft.; B.S. w., 55 ft.; B.F. g., 40 ft.; to R. l., 32 ft.; to F.g., 22 ft. (5 D.R.)."
37. *Fremont Tri-Weekly Tribune*, June 11, 1903.
38. *Ibid.*, October 20, 1908.
39. *Ibid.*, October 23, 1913.
40. *Ibid.*, March 18, 1915.
41. *Ibid.*, January 27, 1916.
42. *Ibid.*, February 17, 1917.
43. Mrs. Lida Richards, Interview, December 10, 1973.

44. *Fremont Tri-Weekly Tribune*, March 25, 1914.
45. Helen Marr, Interview, November 27, 1973.
46. Mrs. Margherite Spear, Interview, November 27, 1973.
47. Letter from Grace Bridge to her brother, October 11, 1898. Located at Nebraska State Historical Society Archives, MS506, S1, F2.
48. Mrs. Evelyn Lewis, Interview, November 28, 1973.
49. Helen Marr, Interview, November 27, 1973.
50. *Fremont Tri-Weekly Tribune*, November 8, 1902.
51. *Fremont Semi-Weekly Herald*, January 12, 1892.
52. *Fremont Tri-Weekly Tribune*, October 12, 1901.
53. *Ibid.*, October 24, 1901.
54. *Ibid.*, October 30, 1902.
55. *Ibid.*, March 10, 1903.
56. *The Fairies' Carnival*, Program.
57. Mrs. Margherite Spear, Interview, November 27, 1973.
58. *Fremont Tri-Weekly Tribune*, June 3, 1893.
59. *Ibid.*
60. Para Love, 33.
61. Helen Marr and Mrs. Margherite Spear, Interview, November 27, 1973.
62. Mrs. Margherite Spear, Interview, November 27, 1973.
63. *Fremont Tri-Weekly Tribune*, October 31, 1899.
64. *Ibid.*, August 31, 1892.
65. *Ibid.*, March 2, 1893.
66. *Fremont Semi-Weekly Tribune*, February 27, 1892.
67. *Fremont Weekly Tribune*, December 27, 1888.
68. *Fremont Tri-Weekly Tribune*, July 30, 1892.
69. *Ibid.*, November 29, 1901.
70. *Ibid.*, November 19, 1894.
71. *Ibid.*, September 29, 1897.
72. *Ibid.*, March 24, 1914.
73. *Ibid.*, February 7, 1899.
74. *Ibid.*, April 21, 1900.
75. *Fremont Weekly Tribune*, March 14, 1889.
76. *Fremont Semi-Weekly Tribune*, April 28, 1892.
77. *Ibid.*, February 23, 1892.
78. *Fremont Tri-Weekly Tribune*, June 5, 1894.
79. *Ibid.*, April 13, 1895.
80. *Ibid.*, April 20, 1895.
81. *Ibid.*, October 12, 1901.
82. *Fremont Semi-Weekly Tribune*, February 28, 1893.
83. *Fremont Tri-Weekly Tribune*, November 12, 1892.
84. *Ibid.*, April 21, 1903.
85. Cahn and Leighton's *Official Theatrical Guide*, 361.
86. Helen Marr, Interview, November 27, 1973.
87. *Fremont Tri-Weekly Tribune*, November 13, 1900.
88. *Ibid.*, November 6, 1894.
89. *Ibid.*, November 6, 1894.
90. *Ibid.*, April 7, 1905.
91. C. D. Marr Journal.
92. *Fremont Semi-Weekly Tribune*, May 12, 1891.