OUR AMERICAN COUSIN

DRAWER 13 A

FORD'S THEATRE

→ 2009.027.03337

The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln

Our American Cousin

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the

Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

"OUR AMERICAN COUSIN."

THE PLAY WITNESSED BY LINCOLN THE NIGHT HE WAS SHOT.

Joseph Jefferson Tells How It Was First Produced Under the Management of Laura Keene—Jefferson, Couldock, and Sothern in the Cast—Sothern Disliked the Character of Dundreary—This Play Was the Turning Point in the Career of Jefferson, Sothern, and Laura Keene.

Joseph Jefferson in the *Century:* During the season of 1858-'59 Miss Keene produced Tom Taylor's play of "Our American Cousin," and, as its success was remarkable and some noteworthy occurrences took place in connection with it, a record of its career will perhaps be interesting. The play had been submitted by Mr. Taylor's agent to another theater, but the management failing to see anything striking in it an adverse judgment was passed and the comedy rejected. It was next offered to Laura Keene, who also thought but little of the play, which remained neglected upon her desk for some time; but it so chanced that the business manager of the theater, Mr. John Lutz, in turning over the leaves fancied that he detected something in the play of a novel character. Here was a rough man, having no dramatic experience, but gifted with keen, practical sense, who discovered at a glance an effective play, the merits of which had escaped the vigilance of older and, one would have supposed, better judges. He gave me the play to read. While it possessed but little literary merit, there was a fresh, breezy atmosphere about the characters and the story that attracted me very much. I saw, too, the chance of making a strong character of the leading part, and so I was quite selfish enough to recommend the play for production.

The reading took place in the green-room, at which the ladies and gentlemen of the company were assembled, and many furtive glances were cast at Mr. Couldock and myself as the strength of Abel Murcott and Asa Trenchard were revealed. Poor Sothern sat in the corner, looking quite disconsolate, fearing that there was nothing in the play that would suit him; and as the dismal lines of Dundreary were read he glanced over at me with a forlorn expression, as much as to say, "I am cast for that dreadful part," little dreaming that the character of the imbecile Lord would turn out to be the stepping-stone of his fortune. The success of the play proved the turning-point in the career of three persons—Laura Keene, Sothern, and myself.

As the treasury began to fill Miss Keene began to twinkle with little brilliants; gradually her splendor increased, until at the end of three months she was ablaze with diamonds. Whether these were new additions to her impoverished stock of jewelry, or the return of old friends that had been parted with in adversity—old friends generally leave us under these circumstances—I cannot say, but possibly the latter.

The dramatic situation that struck me as the most important one in this play was the love scene in the opening of the last act. It was altogether fresh, original, and perfectly natural, and I notice that in this important phase of dramatic composition authors are conspicuously weak.

The love scenes in most all of our modern plays are badly constructed. In the English dramas they are sentimental and insipid, being filled with either flowery nonsense or an

LAURA KEENE.

extravagance bordering upon burlesque, while the love scenes in the French plays are coarse and disgusting. Sardou has written but few female characters for whom one can feel the slightest respect. For instance, which one would a man select to be his mother were he compelled to make a choice? I think it would puzzle him. The love scenes between Alfred Evelyn and Clara Douglas, in Bulwer's play of "Money," are stilted, unnatural, and cold. The passages intended to display affection in the "Lady of Lyons" are still further from "imitating humanity," and the speech of Claude to Pauline, beginning with

A deep vale shut out by alpine hills,

is so glaringly absurd that the audience invariable smile at the delivery of this soft extravagance. The greatest love scene that ever was or ever will be written is known as the balcony scene in "Romeo and Juliet." This is a perfect model, being full of the most exquisite humor.

Natural love off the stage is almost invariably humorous, even comic—not to the lovers' minds; O, no! 'Tis serious business to them, and that is just what makes it so delightful to look at. The third party, when there is one, enjoys it highly. The principals do the most foolish things; the gentleman cannot make up his mind what to do with his hat or with his hands, the lady is awkward and shy, and the more they love each other the more comical they are. They say stupid things and agree with each other before they are half done expressing an opinion.

It was the opportunity of developing this attitude of early love, particularly love at first sight, that attracted me to the "Cousin." Simple and trifling as it looks, Mr. Tom Taylor never drew a finer dramatic picture. The relation between the two characters was perfectly original. A shrewd, keen Yankee boy of 25 falls in love at first sight with a simple, loving English dairymaid of 18. She innocently sits on the bench, close beside him; he is fascinated and draws closer to her; she raises her eyes in innocent wonder at this, and he glides gently to the farthest end of the bench. He never tells her of his love nor does she in the faintest manner suggest her affection for him; and though they persistently talk of other things you see plainly how deeply they are in love. He relates the story of his uncle's death in America, and during this recital asks her permission to smoke a cigar. With apparent carelessness he takes out a paper, a will made in his favor by the old man, which document disinherits the girl; with this he lights his cigar, thereby destroying his rights and resigning them to her. The situation is strained, certainly, but it is very effective, and an audience will always pardon a slight extravagance if it charms while it surprises them. The cast was an exceedingly strong one—Laura Keene as the refined, rural belle, and Sara Stevens as the modest, loving, English dairymaid. Both looked and acted the parts perfectly. The Abel Murcott of Mr. Couldock was a gem, and the extravagant force and humor of Mr. Sothern's Dundreary, the fame of which afterwards resound[illegible] over the English-speaking world, is too well known to need any comment, except perhaps to mention one or two matters connected with it of a curious nature.

As I have before said, Sothern was much dejected at being compelled to play the part. He said he could do nothing with it, and certainly for the first two weeks it was a dull effort, and produced but little effect. So in despair he began

SOTHERN AS "DUNDREARY."

to introduce extravagant business into his character, skipping about the stage, stammering and sneezing, and, in short, doing all he could to attract and distract the attention of the audience. To the surprise of every one, himself included, these antics, intended by him to injure the character, were received by the audience with delight. He was a shrewd man as well as an effective actor, and he saw at a glance that accident had revealed to him a golden opportunity. He took advantage of it, and with cautious steps increased his speed, feeling the ground well under him as he proceeded. Before the first month was over he stood side by side with any other character in the play; and at the end of the run he was, in my opinion, considerably in advance of us all. And his success in London, in the same character, fully attests, whatever may be said to the contrary, that as an extravagant, eccentric comedian in the modern range of comedy he was quite without a rival. His performance of Sam which I saw at the Haymarket Theater in London was a still finer piece of acting than his Dundreary. It was equally strong, and had the advantage of the other in not being overdrawn or extravagant.

TELLS OF LINCOLN'S MURDER.

Retired Actress Played in Ford Theater Night of Assassination.

Chicago, Feb. 10.—Mrs. Katherine Evans, 77, living in retirement here, was a member of the "Our American Cousin" Company, playing at Ford's theater, Washington, the night Abraham Lincoln was shot.

The aged actress, whose fifty-seven years on the American stage were filled with illustrious experience, told today of the incidents of that night.

Mrs. Evans is not the only member of the company still living. W. J. Ferguson, still on the stage and playing in prominent productions and with leading motion picture companies, also was a member of the cast.

Comedy Lincoln Watched When Slain to Be Revived

'Our Country Cousin' to Be Presented by Historical Society on Tuesday—Blood-Stained Sheets and Pillowcases on Display.

CHICAGO, Feb. 9 (AP).—The droll comedy that climaxed in impromptu tragedy—the assassination of Abraham Lincoln—will be revived here in observance of the martyred President's birthday, February 12.

The Chicago Historical Society announced today that "Our American Cousin," the play which Lincoln watched the night of April 14, 1865, will be presented in its auditorium Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

While players take their cues in the comedy at which Lincoln smiled in Ford's Theater, the lights of the auditorium will dim at the very lines where the shots of the mad actor, Booth, rang out to plunge the North into mourning 70 years ago.

In another room of the society's quarters here, the idolizers of Illinois' most illustrious adopted son will find a copy of the Petersen bedroom in Washington, in which Lincoln died. There will be the actual bed on which the great emancipator lay, with the same blood-stained sheets and the pillow cases.

'Honest Abe' Never Cast a Ballot for Himself

By Associated Press

SPRINGFIELD, Ill., Feb. 9.—Abraham Lincoln, like the politicians of his day, didn't vote for himself.

Dr. Benjamin P. Thomas, executive secretary of the Abraham Lincoln Association, today summarized a study of the Sangamon county poll books from 1831 to 1849.

"The evidence shows that Lincoln was a party regular," he said.

"On one or two occasions in his earlier career, when party lines were still indefinite, he either voted for friends who were running on the rival ticket or refrained from voting against them.

"But after the solidification of party lines his vote was strictly partisan. With the exception of his refusal to vote in 1843, he violated party regularity only in the case of his own candidacies, when, in conformity with the custom of that day, he cast a courtesy vote for the opposition instead of voting for himself."

There was no secret balloting in Illinois a century ago and the election clerks marked down the vote, announced publicly by each man, on large sheets of paper. Most of the poll sheets have been preserved.

Bkl Rev 2-10-35

LINCOLN DEATH PLAY REVIVED

"Our American Cousin," the celebrated eccentric-comedy play which President Lincoln liked so much that he went twice to see it—meeting his death at the hands of John Wilkes Booth on the second occasion—will be presented tomorrow and Wednesday nights by the Chicago Historical Society at its auditorium, Clark st. and North av.

R. Lyle Hagan will play the American cousin from Vermont who, on inheriting a fortune of half a million dollars, went across the seas to visit his English relatives —lords and ladies all, but poor as church mice. Miss Flora McGillicuddy will play opposite Mr. Hagan in the scene which, according to most versions, was taking place when the fatal shot rang out.

Booth, after shooting the President, cried out "Sic Semper Tyrannis." He leaped from the box and fled across the stage, but fell near the wings and broke his ankle. He got up, stumbled through the stage door and reached his horse.

The curtain tomorrow night will go up at 7:45, as it did on the night of April 14, 1865.

THE army under General Lee having surrendered to General Grant a few days previously, Secretary Stanton, on the 13th of April, 1865, telegraphed to Governor John A. Dix to stop the draft, as it was considered that the war was virtually over. At Ford's Theater, in the City of Washington, on the next evening.—April 14, 1865, the time that Lincoln was assassinated,—the play of "Our American Cousin" was being enacted. In the scene, just before the fatal shot of the assassin, a garden settee was standing on the stage opposite the president's box. Mary Meredith, (one of the characters of the play,) followed by Lord Dundreary, (with her shawl thrown over his arm,) came upon the stage, and the lady took a seat upon the settee. Glancing over first one shoulder, then the other, she exclaimed —

"My lord, will you please be so kind as to throw that shawl over my shoulders? There appears to be such a draft here."

Lord Dundreary immediately replied "You are mistaken, Miss Mary,—there is no draft. The draft is all over."

The President instantly saw the point and laughed very heartily, as did the entire audience, who arose and cheered. In a few moments more the assassin had done his work, and the nation was in tears.

'Our American Cousin' 2-9-41

Next Wednesday marks the one hundred thirty-second anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth.

It is, therefore, appropriate that Wednesday evening should mark the Fort Wayne Civic Theater's presentation of "Our American Cousin" — the famous play which President Lincoln found so delightful that he attended three performances.

Lincoln was a good judge of humor. So were Joseph Jefferson and Laura Keene.

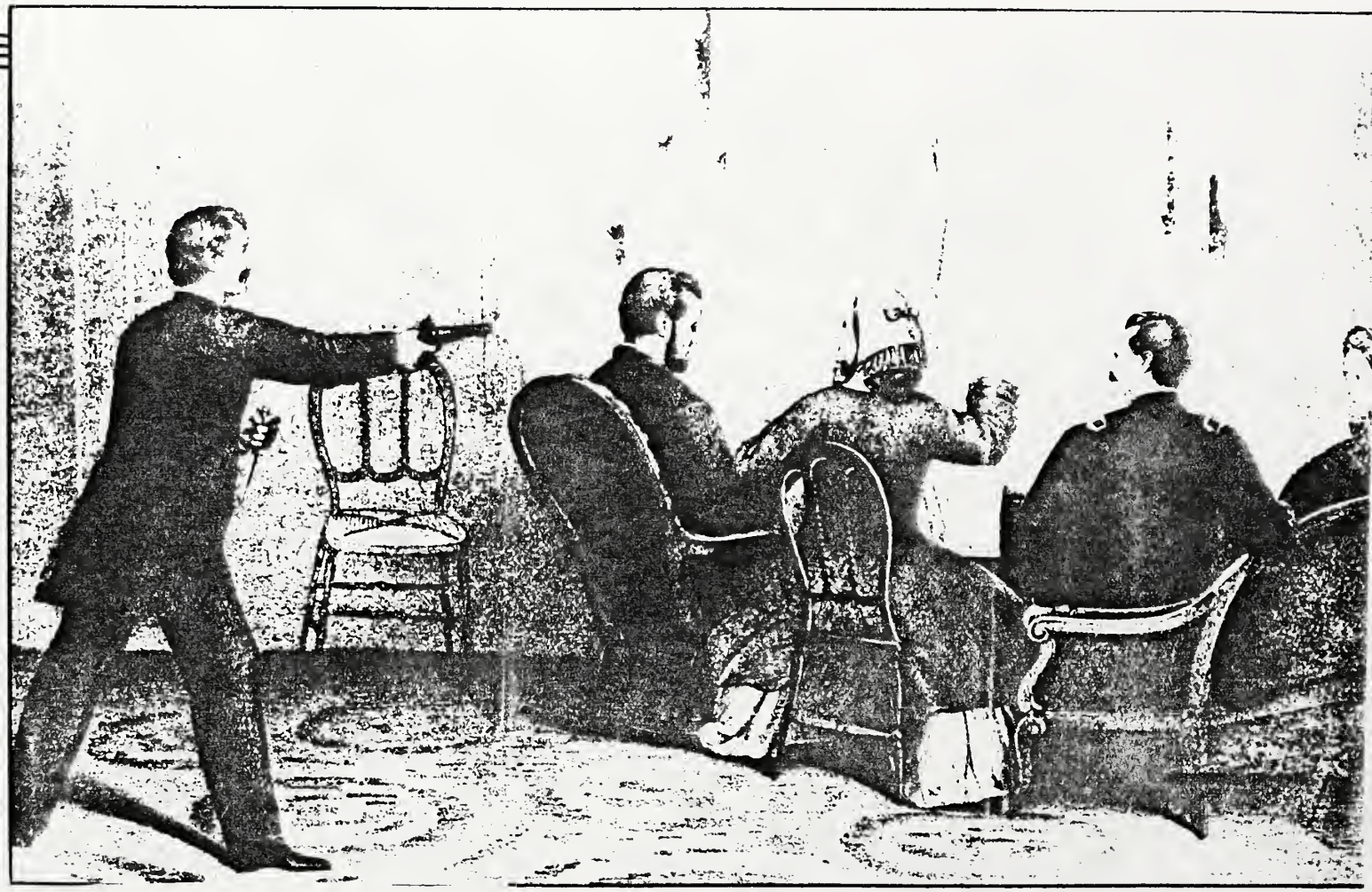
The current revival of the play these famous Americans enjoyed will not only bring pleasure to modern theater-lovers, but also cause them to understand more clearly what it was that qualified critics found rollicking in bygone times.

The Fort Wayne Civic Theater has expended even more than its customary amount of time and talent, in an effort to make "Our American Cousin" a source of sheer delight to Fort Wayne men and women.

It is to be hoped that all persons who like legitimate drama will take advantage of the Civic Theater's production.

Opening on Wednesday, the play will be shown on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights.

In tribute to Abraham Lincoln, the Fort Wayne Civic Theatre will open on Lincoln's birthday, February 12, a four-day presentation of "Our American Cousin," a performance of which play Lincoln was attending when assassinated by John Wilkes Booth. Pictures herewith are reproduced through the courtesy of the Lincoln National Life Foundation.



Assassination of President Lincoln at Ford's Theatre, Washington, D. C., the night of April 14, 1865, from a colored lithograph by Kellogg, of Hartford, Conn. Left to right: Booth, President Lincoln, Mrs. Lincoln, Major Rathbun and Miss Harris.

"American Cousin" To Open Tonight At Civic Theatre

News - 2-12-41

"Our American Cousin," a comedy play of the 1860s, will open tonight for a special anniversary run at thc Fort Wayne Civic Theatre. The play is the one Abraham Lincoln was watching the night he was assassinated and is being presented at this time in honor of his birthday anniversary today. The play will continue through Saturday.

The Civic Theatre has brought back this play as an authentic production of its time and will be played in a straight manner, not as a burlesque. Much research was spent on costumes and a black and white setting has been designed for the presentation.

Programs will be printed in old-fashioned type and will include an authentic copy of the program at the Ford Theatre on the night Lincoln was shot.

Our American Cousin

By RICHARD ROBERTS

ABRAHAM LINCOLN liked "Our American Cousin."

The Civic theater's production Wednesday night of this last century "eccentric comedy" by Tom Taylor, or with more formality, Thomas Proclus Taylor, was interesting from its historical point of view as well as from the artful manner in which it was produced.

It is an old, old play now, but it still brings laughs. A scholar might point out the roots of modern W. C. Fields type slapstick as he watched the familiar stock characters walk across the stage boards.

Director Walter Russell, who designed the settings, and Mildred Barlow, who did the costumes, have carried out the color scheme totally in black and white, producing a startling and unique effect. The walls are decorated with silhouettes. The flounces, the lace, the hoops and assorted knick-knackery are all reminiscent of the Victorian age.

The American cousin, gruff and unpolished, who comes to England to claim an inheritance, is played by R. Lyle Hagan, regular director of the Civic theater, Old Abe Lincoln used to laugh at him. Maybe Abe saw something of himself in Asa Trenchard, the backwoods Vermonter who crashed into an English drawing room and upset the rather ludicrous decorum.

Beneath the Vermonter's crude exterior there was a heart of pure gold, and he gave the inheritance, and his own hand along with it, to milkmaid Mary Meredith, played by Hortense Holmes. And then Asa foiled a very complicated and intricate web of underhand play intended to make everything come out all wrong, and when he did this everything came out all right.

History is history, and does not belong in a drama review.

Spritely, able performances were given by Mary Ruth Hayes taking the role of Florence Trenchard, the English cousin who loved a sailor without a ship, the twitching, sneezing Lord Dundreary, played by Larry Cockrell, and the puffball butler whose role was handled by William N. Ballou.

Others in the cast were Rose Cockrell, Lawrence Erne, Frank Tooke, Sr., Elta Mae Ebert, Louise Corcoran, George Aker, Robert Little, Charles Downie, John Devine and Leroy Smith.

Performances will be given tonight, Friday night and Saturday night.

One must remember that "Our American Cousin" was written almost a century ago, by an extremely versatile, gifted but not very careful, author who had several important books to his credit along with over one hundred other plays. No work of genius, the play does have life.

It has been jazzed up, but there are still Victorian cobwebs on the numerous asides and soliloquies.

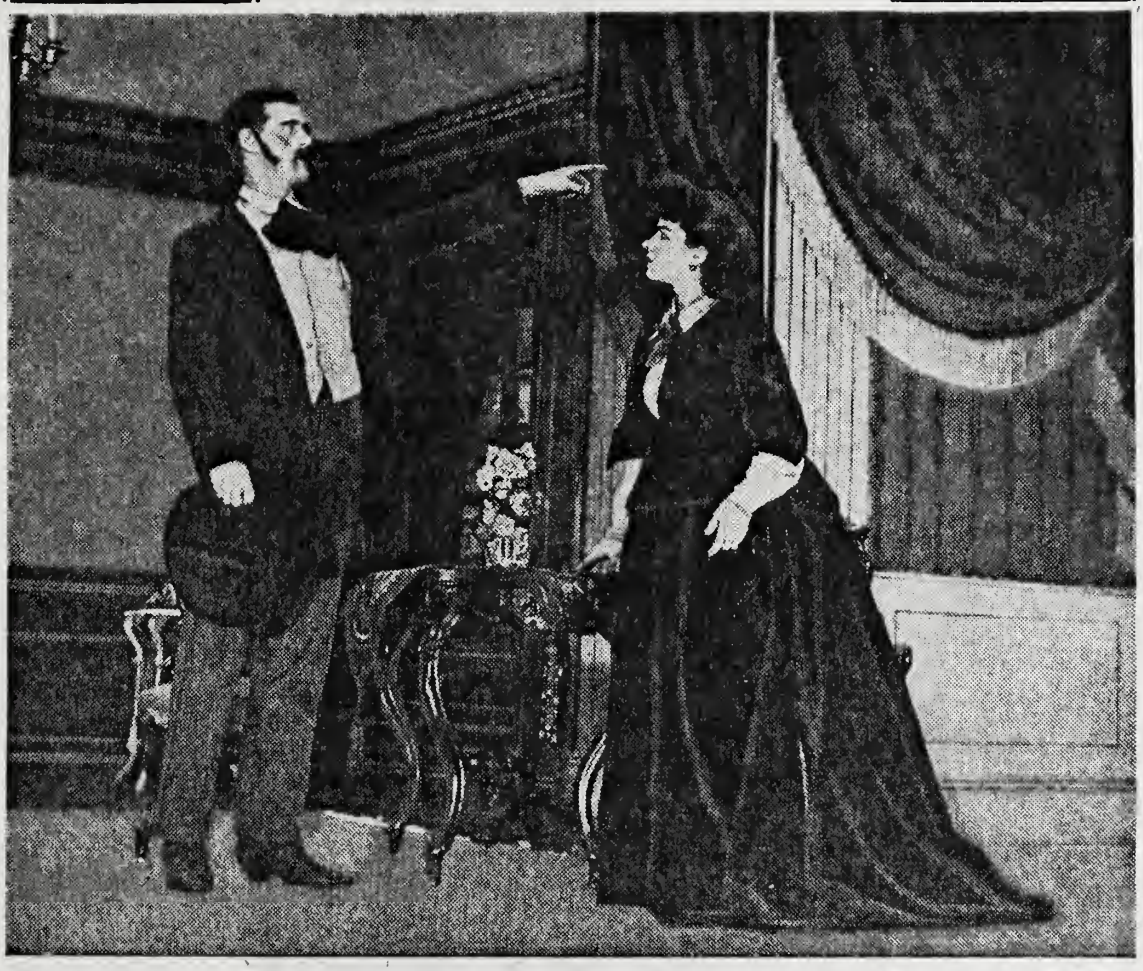
The theater arose to the historical significance of the occasion by presenting a Lincoln memorial at the precise point of action at which Old Abe fell before an assassin's bullet. But there was no John Wilkes Booth to leap from a balcony and shout the famous phrase. The play went on Lincoln liked it.

CHICAGO HERALD AND EXAMINER-

LINCOLN'S FAVORITE PLAY

As the Shot Rang Out!

MARTYR'S LAST SCENE



TRAGIC COMEDY—*R. Lyle Hagan and Nora McGillicuddy rehearsing an exact reproduction of "Our American Cousin" at the point it had reached at the precise instant Lincoln was shot.*

LINCOLN'S LAST PLAY.

"Our American Cousin," the play President Lincoln was watching on the night of his assassination, was a comedy of English authorship which offered certain opportunities for eccentric character acting. Other than that, it was without value and contemporary theatergoers would find it only fit for burlesque acting on a showboat.

* * *

The author was Tom Taylor, an English writer of some prominence in the London of Charles Dickens' period. His highest point, we think, was the editorship of Punch. After two years as a professor of English literature at University college, London, he became a barrister and then, like Thackeray's Pendennis, he started to write for the newspapers and the stage. He contributed editorials to the Chronicle and the Daily News. More than 100 of his plays were staged; the best known were "Our American Cousin," "Still Waters Run Deep," "Victims," and "The Ticket of Leave Man."

* * *

Laura Keene, star of "Our American Cousin," was an English actress who began life as Mary Moss. After successes in London, she took her company on a tour overseas, visiting New York, crossing the United States, and voyaging to Australia. Her return journey halted at New York, where she became established in a theater bearing her name. She remained in this country and died at Montclair, N. J., in 1873. See her biography by John Creahan, published in 1891.

* * *

Miss Keene's popularity in "Our American Cousin" was equaled, perhaps surpassed, by that of Edward Askew Sothern, who appeared as Lord Dundreary, a character still remembered as a prototype of vacant-minded English noblemen. The whiskers that Sothern wore in this rôle became known as "dundrearies."

* * *

Sothern was an English actor who migrated to New York in his youth. His first American appearances were under the name of Douglas Stewart. Lord Dundreary made him a star. He died in London in 1881, leaving a son, Edward Hugh Sothern, easily remembered by this generation from his long association in Shakespearean productions with Julia Marlowe.

* * *

E. H. Sothern revived his father's famous character in the spirit of filial piety in the season of 1907-'08, calling the play "Lord Dundreary." Chicago saw it at Powers' theater.

HICAGO DAILY TRIBUNE:

A LINE O' TYPE OR TWO

Hew to the Line, let the quips fall where they may.

Reg. U. S. Pat. Office

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Speaking of Otto Eisenschiml, you may have read the astounding intelligence that our fellow citizen will enact the role of **John Wilkes Booth** in a presentation of the drama of Lincoln's assassination in the national capital, next May. It is quite true, he assures me. Ford's theater, now a national museum, will be in part made over for the occasion; stage and Presidential box will be as they were on the fatal night, and enough of the play that was in progress, "Our American Cousin," will be acted to set the scene for the tragedy.

It is an astonishing project, and as a friend of Dr. Eisenschiml I am pretty nervous about his part in it. Booth broke a leg, it will be recalled, jumping from the President's box to the stage . . . and later was shot and killed in a barn while attempting to escape his pursuers . . . but, even if the action is confined to the theater, it is obvious that the part has its perils. On all this, Dr. Eisenschiml is profoundly silent. I can't help thinking of the actor who played Lincoln so long and so earnestly that somebody said, "That guy won't be happy until he's assassinated!"

Chi. Tribune - 1-8-50

Greenfield Village Players
present the

AMERICAN DRAMA FESTIVAL

The Greenfield Village Players

PRESENT THE 1967

AMERICAN DRAMA FESTIVAL

HENRY FORD MUSEUM THEATRE

A SUMMER THEATRICAL SEASON OF EARLY AMERICAN DRAMA

MR. TOM TAYLOR'S Celebrated Eccentric Comedy which has maintained its popularity for over 100 years.

OUR AMERICAN COUSIN

Directed by Marshall Borden

Florence Trenchard	Rachel Dann
Mr. Binny	Harry Uher
Harry Vernon	George McGilliard
Lord Dundreary	Robert Bryson
Captain De Boots	John Johnston
Augusta	Mary Hirzel
Sir Edward Trenchard	Warren Colston
Mrs. Mountchessington	Joyce Morrison
Georgina	Ann Gundersheimer
Asa Trenchard	Robert Jones
Mr. Coyle	Leonard Skwarek
Abel Murcott	Kenneth Chomont

UNDER THE GASLIGHT

"Under the Gaslight" opened on August 12, 1867 at Augustin Daly's New York Theatre. Daly, the author of nine original plays and more than ninety adaptations, introduced in this, his first original play, the element of realism, which began the movement away from romanticism. Although the plot is drenched with melodrama – kidnaping, fights, mysterious strangers, and last minute rescues – the approach to these devices is realistic. Tying the hero to the railroad tracks as the train approaches was featured for the first time in this play. At each performance, the audience clamored for an encore of the famous rescue scene.

The Greenfield Village Players will present "Under the Gaslight":

July	7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 24, 27
August	3, 8, 12, 23, 28
Sept.	1, 7, 12

OUR AMERICAN COUSIN

Mr. Tom Taylor's celebrated eccentric comedy was first performed at the Laura Keene Theatre in New York City on October 19, 1858. It was enthusiastically received by American Drama Festival audiences when presented here in 1964 and 1966.

One hundred years of laughter have followed the performances of the "Yankee comedy", the adventure of an American abroad with his English cousin. The humor and outspoken quality of the American pioneer shatter the quiet of the English countryside and defeat the evil deeds of a black villain. This play was a favorite of President Abraham Lincoln, and it was while watching a performance that he was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth.

The Greenfield Village Players will present "Our American Cousin":

July	17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 28, 29
August	2, 7, 10, 17, 24, 29
Sept.	2, 4, 8, 13

THE HENRIETTA

"The Henrietta" was first performed in New York City at the Union Square Theatre on September 26, 1887, and in 1913 revised as "The New Henrietta" for a successful run at the Knickerbocker Theatre. The initial production ran sixty-eight weeks and made Howard's fortune as a playwright. Bronson Howard was the first American dramatist to make his living solely by playwriting. Throughout his career as a dramatist, he fought the popular opinion that valued only importations, discounting any treatment of American character or American life. It was his success in this struggle that earned him the title of Dean of American Drama.

The Greenfield Village Players will present "The Henrietta":

July	31
August	1, 4, 5, 9, 11, 19, 22, 26, 31
Sept.	6, 11, 15

SHENANDOAH

Bronson Howard's celebrated military comedy was first performed at the Boston Museum on November 19, 1888. One year later, the play opened in New York at the Star Theatre and was a smash hit.

Bronson Howard was a native Detroiter. His first play was produced in Detroit in 1864. Eighty years ago the initial production of his financial and personal success, "The Henrietta", was first performed in New York City. The Greenfield Village Players present "The Henrietta" this year as an indication of enthusiastic audience reception to "Shenandoah" in 1966.

"Shenandoah" lives on because the exciting battle of the Shenandoah Valley, the comic satire, intrigue and the heart-rending romance of a Union officer and a beautiful Southern spy give it variety and electricity.

The Greenfield Village Players will present "Shenandoah":

August	14, 15, 16, 18, 21, 25, 30
Sept.	5, 9, 14

In Our Summer Spotlight

The American Drama Festival, produced each summer by Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, is an important part of the Museum's educational program of bringing American history to life. It is the purpose of the American Drama Festival to restore and present American dramatic literature which reflects our nation's history as well as the evolution of the theater in America.

All members of the Greenfield Village Players – the repertory theatrical company – are vacationing students, faculty and professional staff members of educational institutions. The Festival sponsors an apprentice training program in the technical and performing arts.

NIGHTLY AT 8:30 P.M. – EXCEPT SUNDAYS

ADULTS, $1.50 – CHILDREN UNDER 16, $.75

NO RESERVATIONS REQUIRED . . . FREE PARKING

All income from the American Drama Festival is used to develop, maintain and carry forward the educational program of Henry Ford Museum – Greenfield Village.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: 313-271-1414

Henry Ford Museum Theater

at Greenfield Village, Dearborn, Mich.

Greenfield Village Players present the

AMERICAN DRAMA FESTIVAL

FORD'S THEATRE

TENTH STREET, ABOVE E.

SEASON II.....WEEK XXXI.....NIGHT 19

WHOLE NUMBER OF NIGHTS, 495.

JOHN T. FORD.....PROPRIETOR AND MANAGER
(Also of Holliday St. Theatre, Baltimore, and Academy of Music, Phil'a.)
Stage Manager.....J. R. WRIGHT
Treasurer.....H. CLAY FORD

Friday Evening, April 14th, 1865

BENEFIT!

—AND—

LAST NIGHT

OF MISS

LAURA KEENE

THE DISTINGUISHED MANAGERESS, AUTHORESS AND ACTRESS,
Supported by

MR. JOHN DYOTT

AND

MR. HARRY HAWK.

TOM TAYLOR'S CELEBRATED ECCENTRIC COMEDY,

As originally performed in America by Miss Keene, and performed by her upwards of

ONE THOUSAND NIGHTS,

ENTITLED

OUR AMERICAN

COUSIN

FLORENCE TRENCHARD.....MISS LAURA KEENE
(Her original character.)

Abel Murcott, Clerk to Attorney.....John Dyott
Asa Trenchard.....Harry Hawk
Sir Edward Trenchard.....T. C. GOURLAY
Lord Dundreary.....E. A. EMERSON
Mr. Coyle, Attorney.....J. MATTHEWS
Lieutenant Vernon, R. N.....W. J. FERGUSON
Captain De Boots.....C. BYRNES
Binney.....A. G. SPEAR
Buddicomb, a Valet.....J. R. EVANS
John Whicker, a gardener.....J. L. DE BONAY
Rasper, a groom.....
Bailiff.....G. A. PARKHURST and L. JOHNSON
Mary Trenchard.....Miss J. GOURLAY
Mrs. Mountchesington.....Mrs. B. MUZZY
Augusta.....Miss H. VADEMAN
Georgiana.....Miss M. HART
Sharpe.....Mrs. J. H. EVANS
Skillet.....Miss M. GOURLAY

Above is an exact reproduction of the playbill for "Our American Cousin" as it was used at Ford's Theatre on April 14, 1865.

Henry Ford Museum Theatre Collection

The Greenfield Village Players

PRESENT THE 1967

AMERICAN DRAMA FESTIVAL

HENRY FORD MUSEUM THEATRE

A SUMMER THEATRICAL SEASON OF EARLY AMERICAN DRAMA

MR. TOM TAYLOR'S Celebrated Eccentric Comedy which has maintained its popularity for over 100 years.

OUR AMERICAN COUSIN

Directed by Marshall Borden

Florence Trenchard	Rachel Dann
Mr. Binny	Harry Uher
Harry Vernon	George McGilliard
Lord Dundreary	Robert Bryson
Captain De Boots	John Johnston
Augusta	Mary Hirzel
Sir Edward Trenchard	Warren Colston
Mrs. Mountchessington	Joyce Morrison
Georgina	Ann Gundersheimer
Asa Trenchard	Robert Jones
Mr. Coyle	Leonard Skwarek
Abel Murcott	Kenneth Chomont
Mary	Cheryl Bound
Buddicombe	Gus Kaikkonen
Wickens	Charles Wilson

Time — About 1845
Place — England

Technical Director	George Dusinckí
Scenery by	Michael David
Costumes by	Jack Casey
Lighting by	Gregory Olszewski
Properties by	Peter Linski
Stage Carpenter	David Biber
Sound Technician	Paula Land
Costume Assistants	Verajane Smith Nicki Sarrocco
Production Assistants	Gary Bruce, Pat Case, Donna Gardner, Bill Osburn, Alison Tack and Linda Wagner
Assistant Producer	Jack Casey
Company Manager	Harry Uher
House Manager	Robert Golding

OUR AMERICAN COUSIN

was first performed at the Laura Keene Theatre in New York City on October 19, 1858, and continued as a popular comedy for several decades. It played to sellout performances in Detroit during April, 1860. The play is typical of 19th century American drawing room comedy, and it satirizes the European view of the American "Yankee." While attending a benefit performance of "Our American Cousin" on April 14, 1865, President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth.

The American Drama Festival, produced by Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, is an important part of the Museum's educational program of bringing American history to life. It is the purpose of this theater to restore and present American dramatic literature that reflects our nation's history and its dramatic arts. All members composing this repertory theatrical company are students, faculty, and professional staff members of educational institutions. The Festival sponsors an apprentice training program in the technical and performing arts

THE PRODUCTION BY

JOSEPH FRENCH, MANAGER OF THEATRE ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

HENRY FORD MUSEUM and GREENFIELD VILLAGE

From

R. E. LEE

Date 12/6/67

To Dr McMurtry

___ Please answer direct.

___ Please note and return.

___ Please review and discuss with me.

___ Please furnish information indicated.

Thought you might like to see our condensed version of "Our American Cousin." It was a smash hit at the Royal Sewing Club party. We also had a "Lowell Bill" prepared for the event. We're ready to take the show to Broadway!! Thanks so much for your help.

Ree

dirty dozen players

present

OUR AMERICAN COUSIN

The
Dirty Dozen Players

present

early american drama

Mr. Tom Taylor's eccentric comedy which has excited the laughter and applause of the public for over 100 years.

OUR AMERICAN COUSIN

Mrs. Binny	**DOROTHY MURPHY**
Mrs. Budicombe	**ANNA FISCHBAUGH**
Florence Trenchard	**MARILYN VACHON**
Sir Edward Trenchard	**JOHN WILLIAMS**
Lord Dundreary	**ROBERT LEE**
Georgina Mountchessington	**MARY BLIGH**
Augusta Mountchessington	**JULIA OLDENKAMP**
Mrs. Mountchessington	**LOIS FULKERSON**
Asa Trenchard	**RICHARD BERGHOFF**
Mr. Coyle	**DEAN THOMAS**
Mary Meredith	**ESTHER KEMPF**

ACT I – Sitting Room of Trenchard Manor

Scenery By	Grady Hoggard
Costumes By	Dior
Lighting By	Thomas Edison
Properties By	Lincoln Life
Stage Carpenter	Ray Kouder
Sound Technician	Billy Ketteman
Production Manager	Strictly Annonymous

Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen, on an occasion such as this, one is hard pressed to come up with a rendition suitable for an august, discriminating audience such as you represent. Over the years, you have been exposed to the most extra ordinary talent that money can't buy. Very likely, our poor offering this evening will not measure up to the high standards to which you are accustomed, but we trust you will bear with us as we present a very timely melodrama.

Inasmuch as the Lincoln Life has graciously offered to sponsor the re-activation of the Ford Theater in our nation's capitol, it seemed but fitting that we, too, should acknowledge this important historical effort. Thus it is we have elected to present our version of Mr. Tom Taylors celebrated eccentric comedy, Our American Cousin.

The original play was first performed in the Laura Keene Theater in New York City on October 19, 1858. It describes the adventures of an American abroad with his English cousins. The humor and outspoken quality of this American shatters the quiet of the English country side and defeats the evil deeds of a black villan.

This play was a favorite of President Lincoln and it was while watching a performance of ~~at~~ Ford Theater that he was assassinated.

Needless to say, we've taken considerable liberties in reducing a play of three acts and 12 scenes to such a short rendition as you will see tonight. Before it is over, you may well decide that John Wilkes Booth shot the wrong man.

Picture if you will, a large English Manor house on a vast estate near London. Our play takes place in the sitting room of Trenchard Manor, the baronal estate of Sir Edward Trenchard.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Dirty Dozen minus one bring to you, direct from a six weeks run in an old barn in New Haven ~~xxx~~ OUR VERSION OF

Our American Cousin

OUR AMERICAN COUSIN

(As the play begins, two maid servants enter the sitting room of the Trenchard Manor. They are discussing the Trenchard family fortunes as they dust and straighten the furniture.)

Mrs. Binny: I don't know how you feel about it Mrs. Budicombe, but this has become a most uncomfortable and mixed up family.

Mrs. Budicombe: Very uncomfortable! I am afraid Sir Edward is in a queer strait. Only this morning, Mrs. Skillet the second cook, told me the wine merchant told her that he hasn't been paid for six months.

Mrs. Binny: Yes, and I hear last year's milliner's bill is still unpaid. And poor Miss Florence has not had a new dress from London all Winter. (Mrs. Binny looks off stage and continues) - Ha, here comes the postman with the mail. I better bring the letters in from the box. (Binny, goes off stage after the mail).

Mrs. Budicombe: (Momentarily alone, continues to dust furniture) - I know it isn't the place of servants to discuss their employers, but things certainly have changed around here. A body can't help but wonder where it all will lead us. To the poor house, I suspect.

Mrs. Binny: (Re-enters with the mail) - Ha! Just as I expected! Bills! Bills! Bills! But here are letters for Miss Augusta, Mrs. Mountchessington, Lord Dundreary and Sir Edward - - from the Admiralty. And what's this? A letter for Miss Florence Trenchard from Brattleboro, Vermont.

Mrs. Budicombe: Where's that, Mrs. Binny?

Mrs. Binny: Why that's in the Hewnited States of Hamerica. A main good place for poor folk.

Mrs. Budicombe: I heard that's a place where nobody works! Nobody!

Mrs. Binny: From what I've heard, it's a place where everybody works everybody! (Looks off stage and continues) - Mind your station. Here comes Miss Florence tearing across the lawn like a three year old colt.

Miss Florence: (Enters) - Oh, dear! I'm fairly out of breath! Good Morning, Binny. Mrs. Budicombe. Didn't I see Mr. Wickens with the letter bag? I thought I could catch him before he reached the house. (Sits on sofa) So off I started. I forgot about the fish pond; it was either in it or over it. I got over but I'm afraid my hat fell in. Mrs. Budicombe, I do wish you'd fish it out for me. You won't find the pond very deep.

Mrs. Budicombe: (Grimaces; as she starts to leave the stage, she says aside to audience) - Me fish for an 'At? Does she take me for a blinkin' hangler? (Goes off stage)

Miss Florence: Give me the letters, please, Mrs. Binny. (Takes them). Oh, blessed budget that descends on Trenchard Manor like rain on a duck pond. (Pause) Tell papa and the others that the letters have come. Everyone is on the terrace, I believe.

Mrs. Binny: Yes, Miss. (leaves stage)

Miss Florence: (Reading the envelopes) - Here's a letter for Papa from the Admiralty. I do hope it is an answer to Harry's application for a ship. Papa promised to use his influence to assist him. (Pause) It would mean that dear Harry would have to be away for heaven knows how long. But we could be married before he leaves. I would bid him good bye as a lass who loves a sailor should.

(Enters Sir Edward, Mrs. Mountchessington, Augusta and Georgina.)

Miss Florence: Papa, dear, here are letters for you. Also one for you, Mrs. Mountchessington and for you, Augusta. (Pause) Papa, what is the news about Harry's ship? Do open that one first.

Sir Edward: (Does so) - I'm afraid he hasn't a ship yet. Perhaps my influence with the Admiralty is not all I thought it was. However, we'll keep trying my dear.

Miss Florence: I'm so sorry for Harry but glad he will be around for a while longer. But where is Lord Dundreary? Has anyone seen him?

(Enters Dundreary)

Lord Dundreary: Good Morning, Mith Florence and a good morning all! It-th a beautiful day for Jolly Old England. One can almotht thee the tree-th acroth the road.

Miss Florence: Good Morning, my Lord. Who do you think has been here? What does the postman bring?

Lord Dundreary: Well, thome timeth he bringth a bag with a lock on it, thome timeth newth-paperth, and thome timeth letterth. I thuppoth.

Miss Florence: There, a letter for you. (Gives it)

Lord Dundreary: Thank you! Did I hear talk of Harry's thip. Itth too bad thuch an enthuthiathtic thailor mutht be land locked. By the way, did you hear the one about the thailor who waited tho long for hith thip to come in, his pier collapthed?

Georgina: My Lord, that'a a bad joke on Cousin Florence's poor sailor boy.

Lord Dundreary: I thought it was hillariouth. Oh, my! I think I am going to sneeze. Perhaps I am allergic to my own humor.

Augusta: Ah! Florence, dear, here is a letter for you among my mail. (Gives it)

Miss Florence: (Opening letter) Why, Papa! It's from dear brother Ned. He writes from Brattleboro, Vermont. He says, "I'm quite well. Just came in from a shooting excursion with a party of Crows. Splendid fellows, six feet tall."

Lord Dundreary: Birdth! Thix feet high? What tremendouth animalth they mutht be.

Miss Florence: He means a tribe of Indians called Crows. Not birds. He says, "Bye-the-bye, I recently came upon another branch of the family which emigrated to America at the Restoration. They are thriving in Vermont. They received me most hospitably. I have cleared up the mysterious death of old Mark Trenchard."

Sir Edward: Of my Unck? UNCLE

Miss Florence: (Reading letter) - It seems when he quarrled with his daughter over her marriage with poor Meredith, he came here in search of a stray shoot of the family tree,

found them and eventually died in their house, leaving Asa, one of their Sons, heir to his personal property in England, which ought to belong to poor Mary Meredith. Asa is sailing for the old country to take possession and he should arrive almost as soon as this letter. I gave him directions how to find you. Receive him kindly for the sake of the kindness he has shown me here. Your affectionate brother, Ned."

Sir Edward: An American branch of the Family!

Mrs. Mountchessington: Oh, how interesting!

Georgina: (Enthusiastically) - How romantic. A Wild young hunter. An Appolo of the prairie.

Augusta: An Appolo, indeed. With a nasal twang and a decided taste for tobacco and cobblers, no doubt.

Sir Edward: You forget he is a Trenchard and no true Trenchard would have a liking for cobblers or low people of that kind.

Miss Florence: I hate him, whatever he is. Coming to rob poor Mary of her grandmother's guineas. All she has is her dairy farm and she loves it so.

Sir Edward: Florence, how often must I ask you not to speak of Mary Meredith as your cousin?

Miss Florence: Why, she is our cousin, is she not? Besides she presides over her milk pails like a duchess playing dairy maid.

(Sir Edward leaves, shaking his head) (Florence continues) -

Miss Florence: Papa won't let me speak to my poor cousin and I'm so fond of syllabubs. Dundreary, do you know what syllabubs are?

Lord Dundreary: Oh, yeth indeed. They are thilly babies; idiotic children. Yeth, thats it. (About to sneeze again)

Miss Florence: Not at all, what you mean are called cherubims.

(Mrs. Binny enters while Florence is talking)

Mrs. Binny: If you please, Miss. There's a gent here who says he is expected.

Miss Florence: What's his name? Where's his card?

Mrs. Binny: He didn't give 'is name and when I axed him for his card, he said he had a whole pack in his valise and if I had a mind, he'd play me a game of black jack. He says he's come to stay and he looks like he didn't mean to go.

Miss Florence: That's him! Show him in, Binny! He's our American Cousin, I know he is!

(Binny leaves stage)

(Enters Asa Trenchard carrying a valise)

Asa: Where's the Squire?

Miss Florence: He's not present, but I'm his daughter.

Asa: I guess you'll do about as well. Where's my room? (Looks about him) I guess you all belong to my family. I'm Asa Trenchard. Born in Vermont and raised on the banks of Big Muddy Creek. I'm about the tallest gunner, slickest dancer and loudest critter in the state. (Pause) So you're my cousin! Wal, I ain't got no objection to kissin' you, as one cousin ought to kiss another. (Starts to do so).

Lord Dundreary: Thir, how dare you?

Asa: Are you one of the family? If'n you ain't, don't interfere. If'n you air, don't worry cause I ain't goin'to kiss you.

Lord Dundreary: I thould hope not! (Nearly sneezes again)

Miss Florence: In this country, Mr. Trenchard, cousins content themselves with shaking hands. Here's mine.

Asa: (Taking her hand) Well, that'll do about as well. Where's my room? I'd like to fix up a bit and put on a clean buzzom. You-all look so all-~~fixed~~ FIXED go-to-meeting here!

Miss Florence: Come, cousin, we'll show you your room. (All leave stage).

(Mrs. Budicombe enters with Mr. Coyle)

Mrs. Budicombe: Sir Hedward will see you directly, Mr. Coyle.

Mr. Coyle: Very well. PAUSE House full of company, I see, Mrs. Budicombe.

Mrs. Budicombe: Cram full, Mr. Coyle. As one of the first families, we must keep up our position.

Mr. Coyle: (Craftily) - Certainly, certainly! That is as long as we can, Mrs. Budicombe. (Pause) You will find my clerk, Mr. Murcott, in the servants hall. See that you keep strong ale out of his way. People who serve me must have their senses about them.

Mrs. Budicombe: (Aside to audience) I should say so, or 'e'd 'ave hevery tooth hout in their 'eds, the viper. (Leaves stage)

Mr. Coyle: (Craftily looks about, nodding at the general condition of the room - then says) - 'e's done quite well in spite of the money I've stolen from 'is accounts. But I'll show the pompous baron the precipice on which he stands.

(Enters Sir Edward)

Sir Edward: Good morning, Mr. Coyle. As my business agent, tell me the condition of my accounts, Sir. I detest business matters but understand many bills remain unpaid.

Mr. Coyle: Sir Edward, your funds are nearly exhausted. Too prevent embarrassment to you, I personally bought up the mortgage on your estates. It is now past due and even I may be forced to foreclose it.

Sir Edward: I do not understand, Sir. I thought Mr. Sharpe, your predecessor, told me the mortgage had been satisfied a number of years before he died. (After anguished pause) What can I do without funds? Am I to see my children reduced to labor for their bread? Even to misery, perhaps?

Mr. Coyle: (Slyly) There is an alternative, Sir. If Miss Florence were to give me her hand in marriage, why of course Trenchard Manor would stay in the family.

Sir Edward: (Aside) Florence detests him! Still the match would save her, at least, from ruin. Mr. Coyle, you present a difficult alternative and I must consider carefully.

Miss Florence: (Off Stage) Papa, dear! (Enters gaily but is startled at seeing Coyle) Papa, pardon my breaking in on business, but our American Cousin has come. Such an original! We are waiting for you.

Sir Edward: I'll come directly. Mr. Coyle, my dear. Perhaps you did not see him.

Miss Florence - (Disdainfully) - Oh, yes! I saw him papa! (TURNS AWAY)

Sir Edward: Nay, Florence, Your hand to Mr. Coyle. I insist!

Miss Florence: Papa? (Reluctantly extends her hand which Coyle attempts to kiss but she snatches it away).

Sir Edward: Come Florence! Mr. Coyle, will you join us? (Hurries off with Florence).

Mr. Coyle: Shallow, selfish fool. She warned you of me, did she? A pity you did not heed her. (Walks up and down). How lucky the seals were not cut from the mortgage when it was paid off years ago. It makes the Manor mine while the release that restores it to Sir Edward lies in the recesses of my desk. I'll prick this wind-bag of a Baron. I have a bone to pick with him and his daughter.

(Stalks off stage-left, laughing vengefully)

(Enter Mrs. Mountchessington and Augusta talking as they enter stage from right).

Mrs. Mountchessington: My dear Augusta, you must be very careful. I don't want you to give up Lord Dundreary for he is quite wealthy. But pray be attentive to this American savage. I rather think he may prove to be the better catch of the two if what I hear of old Mark Trenchard's property is correct.

Augusta: (Sighing) Yes, mama. But what am I to be enthusiastic about with that vulgar American?

Mrs. Mountchessington: My dear we must all make sacrifices to society. Read up on Sam Slick; it might be useful. Also know something about George Washington of whom the Americans are so proud. (Looks off stage). There goes Asa now. I must visit with him myself. (Mrs. Mountchessington leaves stage right - passes Lord Dundreary) Oh, hello My Lord! (She exists).

Lord Dundreary: (To Augusta) Will you try and strengthen your limbs with a gentle walk in the garden?

Augusta: No, thank you, my Lord. I am so frail and delicate. It is so painful to walk languidly through life, to be unable, at times, to bear even the perfume of one's favorite flowers. I am so delicate.

Lord Dundreary: Do you know I am getting quite robust? I am strong enough for both of us. If you would marry me, I would care for you forever.

Augusta: Oh, my Lord, my Lord! I am going to faint.

Lord Dundreary: And I am going to sneeze. You faint while I sneeze.

Augusta: Oh, my Lord. (Puts hand over her heart).

Lord Dundreary: Do you know what a sneeze is?

Augusta: No, my lord.

Lord Dundreary: Did you ever sneeze?

Augusta: No, my lord.

Lord Dundreary: She never sneezes. I'll tell you what a sneeze is. Imagine a large spider.

Augusta: (Screams) Where, my lord?

Lord Dundreary: No, no. Not a real spider. Only an imaginary one. A large spider getting up your nose. And all of a sudden, much to his disgust, he finds he's put his foot in it and can't get out again.

Augusta: That must be most distressing.

Lord Dundreary: For the spider, yes. And not very pleasant for the nose.

Augusta: Oh, my lord, take me to mamma.

Lord Dundreary: No, you lovely sufferer, let's take a walk. (Assists her to rise).

Augusta: But, my lord, I am so delicate.

Lord Dundreary: (Leading her off stage-right) The exercise will do you good. Let me ask you a widdle. Do you know why a duck goes under water? For divers reasons, of course!

(As they leave stage, they pass Florence and Asa entering stage)

Miss Florence: American Cousin, I must talk to you. I am in dire need of your help. I've just learned from Mr. Murcott, who is the clerk for Mr. Coyle, papa's business agent, that Mr. Coyle has been stealing from the estate. Also, he has lied to Papa by telling him that Mr. Coyle holds the mortgage on Trenchard Manor and will foreclose unless I agree to marry him.

Asa: Dear Cousin, I've dealt with snakes like him in the Vermont woods many a time. You just rest easy, now. I'm a rough sort of customer but I've got a cool head, a stout arm and a willing heart. I think I can help you, just as one cousin oughter help another. (Pause) Let's talk about Mary Meredith. I wish Old Mark Trenchard had met her afore he died. She's the sweetest little punkin seed I ever did meet. She's a regular rip snorter of a country gal. And to think I'm keepin' that everlastin' angel out of her fortune with this bit of paper. (Takes paper from pocket).

Miss Florence: What's that?

Asa: Old Mark Trenchard's will.

Miss Florence: Don't show it to me. I don't want to look at it. The fortune should have come to Mary.

Asa: Say, you ain't told her about it, have you?

Miss Florence: No. I haven't the heart to tell her of her misfortune.

Asa: Wal, danged, if you didn't show good sense at any rate.

Miss Florence: (Looks off stage) Here she comes now. (As Mary enters, Florence says) - Hello, dear. We were just talking about you. It seems you've made quite an impression on this rugged woodman. I'll leave you to visit again for I must find papa.

(Mary smiles shyly at Asa and sits on the sofa. Asa goes over to her side)

Mary: It was kind of you to help me with the milk pails yesterday. (Looks about) My this is a pretty place. Not at all like my humble dwelling. But I am happy as the birds. And my uncle, Sir Edward, is kind to me in his pompous patronizing way, even though I am but a dairy maid.

Asa: Wal, darn me if you ain't the first real right down useful gal I've seen this side of the pond. You can milk cows, set up butter, and make cheese. Danged if them ain't what I'd call real down right feminine accomplishments.

Mary: That's very kind of you. (Rises) I'd love to stay and visit but I must see to my dairy herd. It is time to feed them, again.

Asa: Miss Mary, I do wish you'd stay a bit longer. There's a heap I'd like to

say to you. Even though I've knowed you only a short while, I feel real lost when you ain't here to talk to.

Mary: Very well, I can stay a while longer.

(Mary sits on sofa - Asa beside her) (Awkward pause)

Mary: Tell me more about your home in America. You know, I've listened to your stories so long, I feel I'm half a back-woodsman's wife already. I can shut my eyes and almost fancy I see your cabin in the woods. And your two sisters in their sunbonnets. And the smoke curling from the chimney as your mother fixes supper. And everyone sitting around the fire afterwards with a demi-john of peach brandy.

Asa: Doggone it girl, You're a darned sight too good for this country. Why don't you pack up and go back with me to Vermont and live with Ma and my sisters. 'Course I'd be there, too.

Mary: I'm afraid your mother would find a poor English girl a sad incumberance.

Asa: Oh, she's knowed Britishers before. There was Ned Trenchard and 'afore him Old Mark Trenchard.

Mary: My grandfather?

Asa: He was a fine old hoss. He was sort of mad at his folks here, so he came to America to look after the other branch of the family, that's our branch.

Mary: Did he ever mention his daughter, my poor mother?

Asa: Yes, as nigh as we could figure it, she had gone and married against his will and that made him hoppin' mad. The older he got, the crustier he got. One day, he took sick. Seeing as how I was his favorite, he called me in, gave me a piece of paper he said was his will, leaving me all his property in England. Then, a few days later, before he died, he asked me for the paper and burned it up, sayin, Asa, I've been too harsh on my daughter and her child. I'm disinheriting you and leaving all my property to my granddaughter, Mary Meredith. Then he smiled, lay back on his pillow and that was the last of him.

Mary: Poor, poor grandfather!

Asa: (Aside) Wal, I guess I better leave her alone. Asa, you old hoss, you jest blew $400,000. (Leaves stage. As he leaves, Mary speaks).

Mary: To me! All to me! How we have all wronged poor grandfather. I can hardly believe that I, a penniless orphan an hour ago, am now an heiress. (Florence enters as Mary continues). But, alas, I am still an orphan, with no one to share my good fortune. No one to love me.

Miss Florence: (Putting arm around Mary). What treason is this? I love you dearly. (Indignantly) Was that American savage rude to you?

Mary: Oh, no! He is a gentleman and he told me about grandfather leaving his estate to me.

Miss Florence: I thought he'd popped his cork! How can Mark Trenchard's estate be yours unless you marry the legatee? Old Mark left everything to Asa. I saw the will myself only yesterday.

Mary: Why, what does this all mean?

Miss Florence: It means Asa is a true hero and he loves you, silly! Wait 'till I find him!

(Florence rushes off with Mary right behind, calling for Florence to wait for her).

(Enter Mrs. Mountchessington with Augusta and Georgina)

Mrs. Mountchessington: Have you heard, my dear, that the American did not really inherit Old Mark's fortune? I suggest you begin to pursue Lord Dundreary after all. He has many good qualities besides his money. With all his sneezing, he should have a clear head. He convinced the Admiralty to give Florence's young man a ship. Also, he and the American recovered Sir Edward's cancelled mortgage from Mr. Coyle's desk and obtained full repayment for the money stolen from him. My dear, Lord Dundreary is really quite a hero - - even though he is still an idiot, he is a rich one. Here he comes now. Go after him, my dear.

(Enter Lord Dundreary - Mrs. Mountchessington moves aside).

Lord Dundreary: Ah, my thweet, delicate Augusta. You look so radiant. Can it be you are glad to thee me?

Augusta: Yes, my Lord Dundreary. I shall always be glad to see you. Your very presence gives me strength. Stay by my side forever.

(Enter Asa, Mary and entire company) (Asa and Mary at center front of stage)

Lord Dundreary: Oh my, yeth indeed I will.

Mary: Mr. Trenchard, what can I say to you but offer my life long gratitude.

Asa: Don't now, Miss, don't - - -

Mary: If I knew what else to offer. Heaven knows there is nothing that is mine to give that I'd keep back.

Asa: Give me yourself. I know what a crude, ill-mannered lout I am; but there's a heart inside me worth something.

Mary: Asa Trenchard, here is my hand and my heart is in it.

Asa: Mary, there is something tell's me you'll never regret it. (To all assembled) - I hope none of you will ever regret the visit of your American Cousin.

(All leave the stage)

(As Lord Dundreary leaves last, he turns to the audience and says) -

Lord Dundreary: Thatth all Folkth! (Finally sneezes)

Sunday Star, Wash. D.C. Feb. 8, 1968

One Actor Was On-Stage When Booth Fired

Continued From Page D-1

Library in Baltimore to locate a copy of the printed play, the Library of Congress and the D.C. Library having been unable to turn one up, although it is listed in their card files. Here are some sample lines:

Opening words of Mr. Binney, the Butler:

"Mind your hown business! Ha, 'ere hare the letters."

If, after close study, you deduce that Mr. Binney was supposed to be a Cockney, that he was irritated, and that the morning mail had just arrived, you would 'ave 'it hit pretty haccurately. (Later, Mr. Binney made several references, none of them flattering, to the "United States of Hamerica.")

The opening lines spoken by the "American cousin" are even harder to decode. Asa, having just arrived in England, was heard saying, offstage, to Binney:

"Consarn your picture, you are as obstinate as Deacon Stump's forelock! Wal, darn me if you ain't the consarndest old shoat I ever did see since I was baptized Asa Trenchard!"

From Asa's language in general I got the impression that the Americans Mr. Taylor had been listening to at the Crystal Palace constantly and mystifyingly said "Consarn your picture!" to each other—and frequently reproached themselves with the expression "Darn me!"

Asa, as he was being escorted onstage, called Binney, "a tarnal fat critter swelled out like a old turkey cock in layin' time," and the aggrieved butler complained:

"I supposed I shall be a hox next, or perhaps an 'og."

That Asa remained impatient with poor Binney may be reasonably inferred, I think, from the following second-act dialogue:

Asa: "Make tracks!"
Binney: "Make what?"
Asa: "Vamoose!"
Binney: "Make vamoose?"
Asa: "Absquatulate!"
Binney: "Ab—what sir!"
Asa: "Skedaddle!"
Binney: "Skedaddle?"
Asa: "Get out!"
Binney: "Oh!"

Wal, it was all in a spirit of fun, as in these early in-character lines spoken by Lord Dundreary:

"I can never forget — when I can recollect! Yeth, yeth! Ha ha! That wath a joke, that wath!"

Moments of Truth

One may be permitted astonishment that with such material, E. A. Sothern could have built his famously memorable character — in fact, darn me if I can see how he wath able to do it!

I went on reading the incredible lines, enjoying some of them, pausing perforce whenever Mr. Taylor's weird conceptions of the American language, or slanguage, stopped me cold.

But when I got into the third and final act, and then into its fateful second scene, I began to feel a nightmare sensation like that of drifting in a boat toward the brink of Niagara.

And a picture took form in my mind . . .

I saw Abraham Lincoln enjoying the frothy play, rocking gently in his chair in the dim light and seeming safety of the State Box, the joys of peace just beginning to lighten his bone-deep war-weariness. I saw his face relaxed, as in those historic last photographs Alexander Gardner took only four days before.

But in his desk at the White House lay an envelope holding 80 letters threatening his life.

He had said, two weeks before, to Secretary of State Seward: "I know I am in danger, but I am not going to worry."

He had said, three days before, to Secretary of the Interior Usher, who was deeply concerned about possible assassination attempts: "If anyone wants to do it, he can do it any day or night, if he is ready to give his life for mine."

"If They Kill Me . . ."

The day before, he had said, in a lighter vein, discussing the ever-present topic of assassins with Secret Service detective L a F a y e t t e Baker: "Why should they want to? If they kill me, they run the risk of getting a worse President!"

Now he sat quietly watching the brightly lighted stage.

A man and two women were on it. One woman exited, then the other. The remaining actor, Harry Hawk, playing Asa Trenchard, was alone there now — as John Wilkes Booth was well aware he would be.

This was the moment Booth, who knew the play intimately, had planned to use.

Booth was stealthily entering the hallway outside Lincoln's box, John F. Parker, the assigned guard, having left his post in one of the most appalling acts of negligence in history.

Booth heard the parting-shot line of the Mrs. Muzzy who was playing Mrs. Mountchessington, a dowager-type lady attempting to marry her daughter off to Asa:

"I am aware, Mr. Trenchard, that you are not used to the manners of good society".

Booth Fires

The assassin tiptoed into the State Box, pistol in one hand, knife in the other, hearing Harry Hawk chuckle as he said:

"Don't know the manners of good society, eh? Wal, I guess I know enough to turn you inside out, old gal — you sockdologizing—"

Approximately t h e n, the crack of Booth's pistol was heard.

That much was proven, time-wise, amidst the later confusion-caused uncertainty, by Hawk himself in a letter he wrote to his father on April 16th: "I was answering Mrs. Muzzy's exit speech when the shot was fired." (It was a broken-hearted letter, ending: "On that night, the play was going *so* well. Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln were enjoying it *so* much. Mrs. Lincoln was laughing at my speech when the shot was fired. In fact it had been one laugh from the time the curtain went up—and to think of such a sorrowful ending.")

In his book, "The Day Lincoln Was Shot," based on prodigious research, Jim Bishop wrote: "The shot came in the midst of laughter, so that some people heard it and some did not. The President did not move. His head inclined toward his chest and he stopped rocking."

A scuffle followed in the box. Maj. Rathbone, one of the Lincolns' two guests that night, was slashed deeply on the arm as he grappled with Booth. Clara Harris, Rathbone's fiancee, screamed. Mrs. Lincoln screamed.

A Clumsy Jump

Booth leaped to the stage, the spur on his right heel catching in the flag that decorated the box's front.

I think a case could be made that Harry Hawk—unclear as to what was happening, uncertain as to what he should do—briefly continued in his lines on sheer momentum:

"—old mantrap! Wal, now when I think what I've thrown away in hard cash today, I'm about to call myself some awful hard names!"

Approximately there, it may

E. A. Sothern's performance was largely responsible for the success of "Our American Cousin." He was not in the cast at Ford's.

be argued, the play, "Our American Cousin," may have died at Ford's, for approximately then, it may be further argued, John Wilkes Booth may have landed on the stage beside Hawk, breaking his leg in his clumsy leap but swiftly limping offstage after shouting—or not shouting—(the authorities fiercely contend the points)—"*Sic semper tyrannis!*" or "Revenge for the South!"—or both.

The superb book, "Twenty Days," published a couple of years ago, dealt in extraordinary detail with the assassination and subsequent events. In it, the authors, Dorothy Meserve Kunhardt and Philip B. Kunhardt, Jr., stated: "The last words Lincoln heard were 'You sockdologizing old man-trap.' "

But there can be no such certainty here—all students of these events are dealing with confused micro-seconds of a century ago.

I reserve my right to theorize, as I have done above, a micro-second difference—that the last word Lincoln heard may have been "sockdologizing."

And I'll tell you, in conclusion, why I hope it was.

"Sockdologizing"

It is impossible to know what Tom Taylor had in mind, other than mere comic effect, when he coined, and used as an adjective, the participle, "sockdologizing," of a non-existent verb. It has no ascertainable meaning, and you won't find it in any dictionary.

"Sockdologer," however, meaning "A crushing, decisive answer," is generally listed—and traced back to "sockdology," a nonsense rearrangement, popular in 19th Century New England, the Midwest, and the South, of the solemn word "doxology."

"Humorous American slang" and "An arbitrary American reversal" is all the reference books have to say about "sockdology."

In any case, its derivative, "sockdologizing," though coined by an Englishman, is thus provably rooted in good, gusty American slang.

"Now he belongs to the ages" was said of Lincoln after he died next morning—the first American President to be assassinated.

He belongs to us, too, to all of us.

And if our good, gusty, humor-loving Abraham Lincoln heard the odd word, "sockdologizing," from the odd comedy, "Our American Cousin"—if it was indeed the last word he ever heard—I think we can reasonably and consolingly assume that he responded to it with the smile of gentle amusement it was intended to evoke.

THE "INN" THEATER
SUMMER 1969

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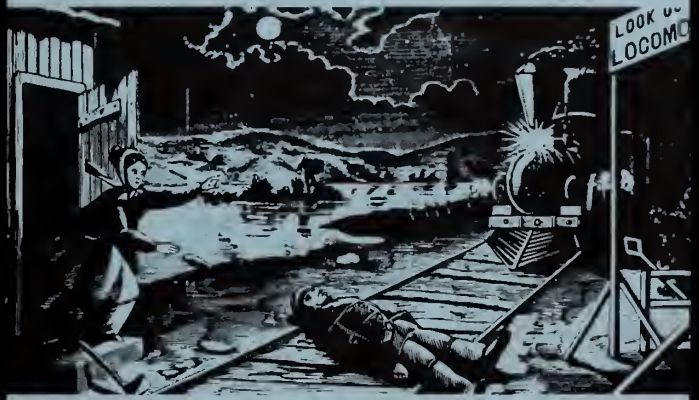

* *Our American Cousin*

* *Under the Gaslight*

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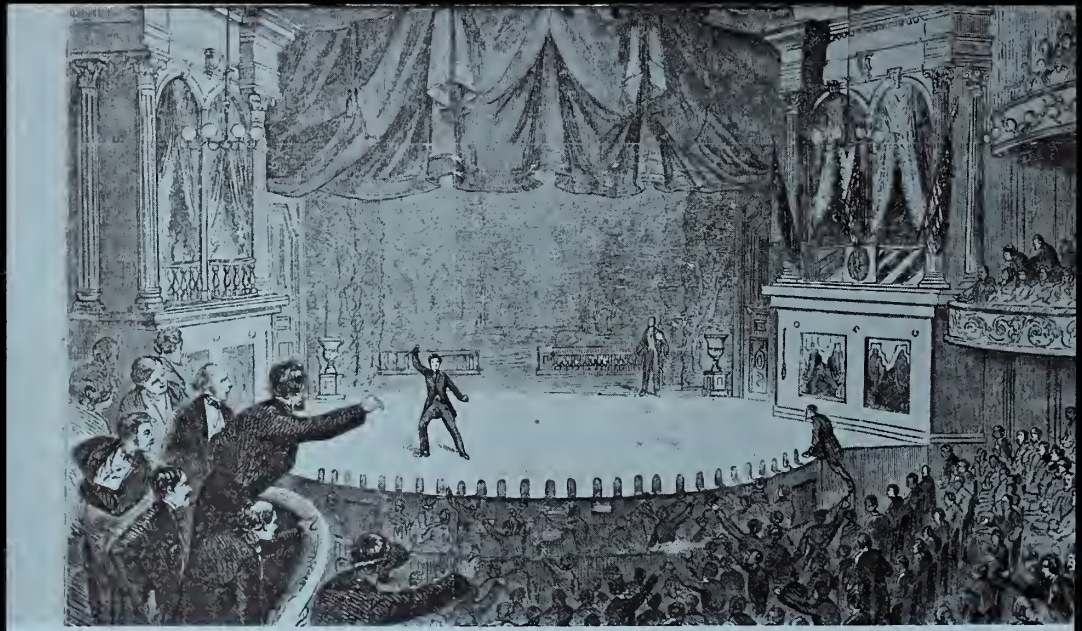

FORD'S THEATER WASHINGTON, D.C.—APRIL 15, 1865

1983

Letter to the editor

'Cousin' was in town

To the Editor of The News:

That was like a page out of history to open The News on April 21 and find that "Our American Cousin" is in town at the Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis Theatre. What a fine opportunity for the local community to see the same production which was presented at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C., that sad night 118 years ago when President Lincoln sought respite there from the heavy burdens of his office, only to be cut down by an assassin's bullet.

In her excellent and detailed article about "Our American Cousin," Bernice O'Connor wonders: "If it (the play) has been performed in Indianapolis before, the records are gathering dust in someone's attic." No need to wonder any more: "Our American Cousin," with almost the same cast which performed at Ford's played in Indianapolis at the old Metropolitan Theatre on Washington Street before packed crowds for five nights in October, 1864.

The local news media of that day used flattering adjectives to describe actress-manager Laura Keene. The Indianapolis Sentinel called her "great, the most gifted, versatile, famous, and accomplished of actresses." The newspaper added that Laura's "benefit last night was an ovation. Our citizens complimented themselves in testifying their cultivated appreciation of this accomplished lady and gifted actress."

The Indianapolis Journal, on the other hand, did not think the talented actress had "improved any in her style or beauty since we last saw her some three years hence." Terming her local engagement a success, the Journal felt Laura had established "herself as a favorite, and richly merits the encomiums bestowe upon her by our citizens."

As far as the play itself, the Journal had little to say that was complimentary. Indeed, an unnamed reviewer questioned "why was it ever written; and being written, why was it ever put upon the stage? Why people go to see such a mass of absurd incongruities is one of the unexplained mysteries of the age." One character in the play, Asa Trenchard, was regarded by the writer as "at least passable," because the part was played by actor Harry Hawk, who was "neither overdressed nor overdone, as are a majority of stage Yankees. We thank thee Harry Hawk."

Ironically, Harry Hawk was the only actor on stage at the moment Lincoln was shot from behind by another actor, John Wilkes Booth, a little over five months later.

ELBERT L. WATSON
Cambridge City

Laura Keene — a Watson collection photo.