

A CONTINUING HISTORY OF TOBY SHOWS
WITH AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE PAST
AND PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

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OF THE PAST AND PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

An Abstract
Presented to the
Graduate and Research Council of
Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Dawn Larsen Niceley
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ABSTRACT

This study is a continuing history of Toby shows with an acknowledgement of the past and plans for the future.

This study includes a review of literature regarding previous Toby shows; a brief biographical history of Shad and Mollie Heller, former Toby show owners and showpeople; a comparison of the Hellers' show with previous traveling Toby shows; a discussion of the latest on-going Toby show, written and produced by the author of this work; and an appendix containing the complete script of *How Now White Cow or You Can Put Your Shoes In The Over, But That Don't Make Them Biscuits!*

A CONTINUING HISTORY OF TOBY SHOWS WITH AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
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A Thesis

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Austin Peay State University

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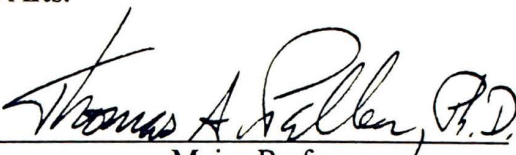
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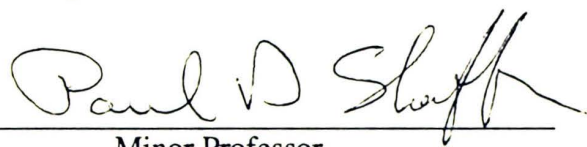
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To the Graduate and Research Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Dawn Larsen Niceley entitled, "A Continuing History of Toby Shows With An Acknowledgement of the Past and Plans for the Future." I have examined the final copy of this paper for form and content, and I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Communication Arts.

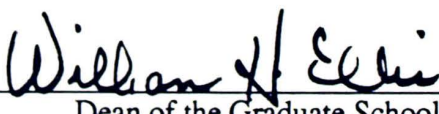

Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend
its acceptance:


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Accepted for the Graduate and
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Appreciation is extended to Dr. Paul Shaffer and Dr. Ellen Kanervo for their assistance in making this study possible.

Additionally, this work is dedicated to two of the finest troupers that I have ever known, my parents, who never once said to me, “Why don’t you get a real job?!”

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CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review of Toby Shows

The name Toby may suggest a child's storybook character, a type of mug or cup, a cigar, or a little dog of Punch and Judy fame. This thesis does not concern any of the above. Rather, it presents an integral chapter of American theatre history; a facet of theatre that most people, theatre historians included, have never heard of. In effect, the Toby show was a major theatrical force that was responsible for keeping rural theatre alive in the early 1900s, and which continued into the late 1980s.

The term "Toby show," in its heyday, denoted a traveling vaudeville-type melodramatic tent show. It was basically a vaudeville show with a plot that included one dominant feature that separated it from the rest of the theatre world, the character Toby. Toby is defined in The Oxford Companion to the Theatre, which draws from material by Robert Downing, as "a stock character in the folk theatre of the United States, a bucolic comedy juvenile leading man in provincial repertory companies of the Mississippi Valley and the Great Southwest" (Hartnoil 17).

This chapter of American rural theatre merits serious study and, despite theatre scholars' lack of familiarity with the subject, a considerable amount of research has been done, I believe that this topic deserves further analysis because the story of the Toby show remains incomplete. Scholars have concluded that the Toby show became extinct sometime in the late 1960s, but it did not. The last Toby show in America was Shad and Mollie Hellers' *The Toby Show* in Branson, Missouri, which closed in 1987. This show has never been completely examined or, for that matter, even cited in other research. This enterprise merits earnest study because it was an enduring, successful business that was the last of its kind. Although it differed from other earlier traveling Toby shows, in several ways, it was nevertheless a true Toby show.

Before completing this work, I examined many historical writings about earlier Toby shows. The greatest hindrance to any author conducting research on this topic is that there is little hard evidence regarding the early Toby shows, and the evidence uncovered was contradictory. This occurred because few of the early shows were scripted and those that were are difficult to locate. Moreover, all the early troupers have passed away and these shows were never recorded visually or audibly. Several conclusions had been drawn about different aspects of Toby shows. These conclusions tended to fall into three categories. They were either accepted as truths, seen as somewhat controversial, or, in one case, regarded as enormously debatable. In this literature review, I will first outline assumptions that most authors agree upon, I will then describe and discuss the controversial conclusions and their opposing viewpoints, and third, I will examine the one chapter of Toby shows that is very debatable. I will also briefly discuss the opinion of one author who tended to follow his own path.

Historians agree that the character description of Toby was standard. He was usually described as a red-headed, freckled-faced, silly-kid, rube character. Although he was a basic stock character, there were variations upon this description in accordance with the particular actor and the area in which he played. Larry Clark, in an unpublished doctoral dissertation, states that tradition fixed many elements of the portrayal of Toby. Some of these were (1) costume and make-up; (2) comedy techniques; and (3) ad-libbing (Clark 49).

The costume and make-up of the Toby character consisted of four basic elements: a red wig, freckles, a blacked-out tooth, and baggy, tattered clothing. Because of these conventions, the audience recognized Toby the minute he appeared on the stage (Pennepacker 50). Though each Toby employed these costume and make-up basics, their characters variously reflected their respective conceptions of Toby. For instance, Fred Wilson, a famous Toby, played him rather unadorned since he had natural red hair and freckles. "Wilson [said,] 'I came into this world with a shock of unruly red hair and later

acquired a flock of freckles that all the make-up in Stein's laboratory couldn't have improved upon. The character was just myself plus a hickory shirt, patched jeans, boots with run-down heels and a battered hat.'"(Downing 653). Neil Schaffner, on the other hand, played Toby as more of a clown-type character. He added peaked eyebrows, a raspberry mouth, and a great deal of red coloring to his face (Clark 50). Sometimes the exaggeration in make-up accounted for the actors' creeping age as Carol Pennepacker's article shows that "the freckles grew larger with the passing years, and the costume more ridiculous and elaborate; the face may have greater quantities of paint, perhaps a means of concealing the age of the actor, who may be all of fifty or even sixty" (Pennepacker 50). The differences in character may also have been personified by the geographical differences in the companies:

Vern Slout of the Slout Players, plays Toby as a Midwest farm yokel, for he tours Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Missouri and Arkansas. On the other hand, the Bisbee comedians travel in the mountains of Tennessee and Kentucky, so their Toby, played by Boob Brasfield, is more of a hillbilly, Out in the West and Southwest you're apt to find Toby in chaps and carrying side arms (Ranney 95).

Toby was sometimes called upon to wear other costumes, representing, for example, a policeman, fireman, or cowboy; but no matter what the particular role, the red wig and freckles remained constant.

Toby's comic antics were a major trait of his character. He was well known for his low comedy, the type of comedy that the rural audiences preferred. The Toby actor, "with his stock of winks, facial contortions and other tricks acquired through long experience on the boards, always brought the audience to life" (Pennepacker 50). The primary techniques utilized included slapstick and facial contortion. Toby was a master of slapstick. The plays themselves were fast paced, of the slapstick genre, and usually supplemented by the visual antics of Toby. Along with that, Toby was a master of various types of theatrical

gymnastics. “A Toby who [could] not execute efficacious and frequent pratt-falls, splits, glides and rubber-legs [was not] worth his salt along the bush circuit” (Downing 652). For example, one of Toby’s energetic entrances is described as he has just come from a fight, “he [entered] with his back to the audience sparring and hitting out violently with both hands” (Mickel 147). As Downing pointed out, Toby did not always reserve the physical action just for the stage, “Toby may [have climbed] the proscenium or [ridden] into the flies clutching at drop curtains.” (Downing 652). Often Toby used various facial effects such as mugging, rolling his eyes, or other such expressions to achieve his comic superiority. Fellow troupers knew Boob Brasfield (sometimes called the “king of Tobys”) to be a master of comic facial expression. “He would hitch up his baggy britches, stare stupidly across the footlights and the audience would scream with laughter” (Mickel, 1974, 155).

Little is known about the vocal aspect of the Toby character. It is assumed, however, that the actor used the voice best suited to his particular Toby in terms of character and demographics. Each would use the area’s particular accent and find a delivery style to suit that accent. “[Toby’s] witticisms in the West were the dry, cow-country type which would send the audiences rolling in the aisles with laughter, but would fall flat in another part of the country” (Mickel, 1967, 155).

Ad-libbing was a liberty that the Toby comedian took for granted. It was an integral part of the Toby character. With these ad-libs and asides, the Toby maintained the rhythm of the comedy much like the fifteenth century character, Arlecchino, in the *Commedia del ‘Arte* companies. Many historians noted that Boob Brasfield was a master of ad-libbing:

He was a natural comedian....He stayed in the general vicinity of the script though he would toss in a new line whenever he saw fit. If on account of this an actor happened to miss a cue, Brasfield would be ready to cover with more ad libbing, and help the actor back to his place (Mickel, 1974, 155).

Since Toby shows were seldom completely scripted, many have assumed that evidence of the structure of the shows themselves would be a hard thing to come by. Fortunately,

this is not so because early writers had interviewed numerous Toby show owners, managers, and authors. The structure of a Toby show was fairly standard in all companies.

The show began with a small concert by a band comprised of actors. The cast of a show, which in most companies consisted of Toby, his girlfriend, male and possibly female heavy, young male and female leads, usually, older male and female character types, and other assorted minor characters, was expected to do more than act. Not only did the performers set the tent up, advertise, and sell concessions, but many of them were hired because they could play an instrument. Early troupers knew this phenomenon as “doubling in brass.” After playing a few numbers, they would leave the stage to get dressed in costume. Then, it was time for the moment the audience was waiting for, Toby’s humorous curtain speech. Sometimes shows would use other actors instead of Toby to read a serious curtain speech. Clark quotes Clyde Robinson from the Iberson Show in Tennessee:

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a real pleasure for me to stand here before you again this year. We have been looking forward to our stand here in your good town of Bolivar all the year. There is just something good about being in Bolivar. We went away with some pleasant memories of a fine week here last year. And at this time we are going to show our appreciation by opening up tonight with *Big Money*, written by Mr. Iberson himself. Mr Iberson writes nearly all our plays, thus assuring you of the very choicest bits of drama in the whole country. He writes especially to fit the individual charms of each and every member of our talented cast. Tomorrow night we will give you *Bucking Horse* also written from the able pen of Mr. Iberson. We will announce the later plays along each night. Every member of our talented company asked me to tell you how pleased they are to be back in your good town and acting before you. And they

asked me to thank you for your splendid crowd on this rainy looking night. Good crowds make good actors act, so you are assured of our best acting. We are going to do our best to give you the best acting you have ever seen in the best play you have ever seen right here tonight. This is a splendid play, and I am sure you are going to enjoy *Big Money*. I thank you (Clark 9).

Regardless of the speaker, the speech included a welcome and, frequently, the cast of characters, since there were usually no printed programs. The company used this speech to establish a rapport with the audience and to prepare them for the play (Clark 9).

At the conclusion of the first act there was a short pause during which the orchestra, in costume and make-up, would again play. At this time, the rest of the cast appeared intermittently in various vaudeville acts. The shows also utilized these breaks for two important sales promotions, candy sales and after-show concert ticket sales. These provided an added and needed income for the show. The cast would make rounds through the audience to sell boxes of candy, promising a prize in every box, while Toby aided the sales with constant retorts from the stage. The concert usually took place immediately following the show. Some companies held it only on Saturday night and others performed the concert nightly. In the earlier days, when large companies traveled the circuit, they carried full orchestras to play the concert. As the road companies began to decline in number and become smaller in size, they utilized mostly vaudeville type acts as a supplement to the actor band. Usually, these vignettes took the form of musical and novelty numbers. Many vaudeville performers signed on with tent companies after the collapse of the vaudeville circuit as headline acts in the after-show concert, and sometimes, in addition, performed in minor roles. They also employed the break between the acts to read the list of local advertisers from "spots," signs hung around the act curtain. This was another income boost for the companies and most troupes carried a sign painter with them. Usually this person, called the "headman," would arrive in town before the cast to paper

the town with advertisements and sell “spots” to local merchants. Companies that lacked a painter would simply read the list from paper.

The last appearance in a run was called “get away night.” After the performance, the company would tear down the tent and pack up the show in order be on the road the following morning. To aid in the speed of packing, Toby would “pack scenery and props as the the play [progressed.] [He] customarily [assisted] the crew by removing stage effects during the third act, snatching cups and saucers from the hands of more dignified players and rolling up the carpets beneath their feet, to the intense merriment of the audience” (Downing 653).

The early plays are difficult to study because Toby shows were seldom, if ever published or copyrighted. Even more infrequently were they completely written down. The managers usually altered the scripts to suit the community in which they were appearing to incorporate local humor. None of the ad-libbing, which was such a significant part of the show, was included in the scripts. The few scripts or “sides” (parts of scripts that included one actor’s spoken dialogue and cue lines) that still exist are mainly found in the hands of the families of the early showmen.

Problems, due to Toby’s rapid increase in popularity, appeared for the troupers and authors alike. Near the turn of the century, when Toby shows first emerged, a few playwrights specialized in scripts for traveling tent companies. Downing saw these men as “seasoned craftsmen who, knowing their audiences, skillfully manipulated characters and plot” (Downing 654). One such playwright was George Crawley who wrote *Girl of the Flying - X*, which presented Toby as a stuttering comedian and influenced most Toby comedians to add at least some stuttering gags to their acts (Downing 654). As the Toby character became more popular, these scripts were in such demand that the authors could no longer keep up:

Repertory playwrights could not turn out Toby plays fast enough to meet the demand...Because of their tremendous popularity, ‘Toby comedians’

became an indispensable ingredient of every tent repertory company - so much so that more than one company was thrown on the rocks when its comedian quit in a huff (Johnson 17).

The early companies continually required new scripts. Professionals did not write these successful early plays; but rather, they were copied from professional plays by managers, actors, and writers attached to play-brokers who served tent shows from Kansas City, Chicago, and New York City (Clark 16). Play piracy became a significant and widespread problem, and it easy to see how this happened to occur. Downing notes that “many Broadway plays of the period were pirated for tall-grass consumption and current events were seized upon to provide novel background for the antics of Toby (Downing 654). In an interview with Clark , Walter “Pappy” Pruitt, a veteran tent showman, sums up the piracy situation nicely:

Only the big shows could afford to pay the kind of royalties that Broadway playwrights demanded for their plays. The agents didn’t seem to understand the economics of the tent-rep business at all. Naturally, this led to all sorts of skullduggery. Sometimes only the title of the play was changed if the show was playing very small towns and the manager thought he could get away with it. Other times the script would be rewritten slightly--a Toby added or a part rewritten for a Toby, perhaps. In Chicago and New York, several agencies specialized in tailoring scripts for Toby, and they didn’t much care where the original material to be tailored came from. They sold parts and rights for two to ten dollars, and you can’t blame the managers for using them. Most of the scripts were typewritten or mimeographed sides (Clark 18).

Royalties for legal plays and penalties for play piracy rose so many tent show owners began to write plays. Neil Schaffner was known to be one of the most prolific of the early

showmen, having written over fifty plays of which over one hundred and seventy companies leased for use. (Kittle 552).

An important element of the show was its title and often these were changed in accordance with what the manager thought his audience would react to. Schaffner points out that:

Titles are important. When we did *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, nobody came. But we changed the title to *The Unwelcome Relative* and they loved it. The best title I ever wrote was *Right Bed, Wrong Husband*, which was a farce, but a clean one (Schaffner 55).

The few scripts available, the frequently pirated plays, and the change of titles made the study of Toby a confusing ordeal. It must be concluded, however, that these authors knew their audiences and the tent business as a whole and wrote their scripts with great regard for these factors. Considering the tremendous popularity of the plays, these writers were very successful. Whether the actual actors who were to play Toby wrote the scripts or not, they certainly helped to shape them because the whole play was based on Toby. All of these components, including actors, managers, playwrights, and the audience helped to make a Toby play; in essence, they were the Toby show.

What is the genesis of these tremendously popular Toby shows? There have been characters similar to Toby since the days of Greek theatre, characters that the common man, often oppressed by the aristocrats, could identify with. This was the essence of folk comedy. Early Greek and Roman comedy frequently included a “boaster” and a “fool,” the fool usually being rustic in origin. The Attellan farces included as stock characters Bucco the boaster and Macco the rustic fool. Toby was a combination of both of these types (Slout 85). In other parts of the world, Toby can be likened perhaps to the fifteenth and sixteenth century Narr of German Fastnachtsspiel who used an assumed stupidity to cover a native shrewdness (Slout 85). Downing goes so far as to liken Toby to Shakespeare’s comic characters when he points out:

To understand Toby, one must appreciate the audience that created him. The pit as Shakespeare knew it is not dead. It has simply moved over. The gods and groundlings who loved Will's clowns now worship at Toby's shrine-- and for largely the same reasons (Downing 651).

Most historians agree that Toby's fairly contemporary American roots stem from the Yankee character, citing Royal Tyler's 1787 play *The Contrast* as the first script with a rural Toby-type character, there called Jonathon. The most famous portrayer of this low comedy type was Thomas Wignell. In one scene, Jonathon behaves in a very similar Toby fashion and is described by Slout as "fresh from the country, quick to aid a lady in distress, and using a language that is animated by colloquialisms and mispronunciations (Slout 87)." Wignell went on to play more rustic types such as an Irish farmer turned soldier in *The Poor Soldier* and the rustic Darby in *Darby's Return*. His characters' success not only won him praise, but established his fame as the founder of rustic comedy in America and allowed him to become, as Slout calls him, the "father of Toby comedians" (Slout 88).

An important similarity between Toby and the Yankee is the consistent use of the character's name. When the Jonathon character became established, Tyler clung to the name, Jonathon, to capitalize on it. As did most Toby showmen, he often used the name in the play titles to insure immediate success.

Another type of drama that influenced the Toby plays, was the melodrama. The success of the early melodramas peaked in the 1890s. Traveling opera house repertoire companies popularized this type of drama. The roots of the stock character are found in these melodramas. The stock character is a particular "type" that was known by different names in each play, but always bore the same character traits. It was from these characters that Toby show characters were born. The villain or villainess, the hero, the heroine, and the comedian or rube are what the Toby shows and the melodramas consisted of. There were some basic differences between the Toby show characters and the early melodrama characters. In the melodrama, the hero was usually the intelligent, clever character who

“saved the day and got the girl.” In the Toby show, Toby was the clever one who saved the day so that the male lead could get the girl.

The basic similarity between the two types of drama was the simplicity of the plot. These melodramas reduced life to the oversimplified formula of good and evil. The Toby shows adopted this principle because, as Jess Sund of the Sun Players states, “Simple audiences want to see simple plays” (Clark 26).

Comparing the Jonathon character, the Atellan farces, and Shakespeare’s characters, leads to the question of why there are so many similar characters in such diverse eras. This seems to occur because people, in their very essence, do not change. In each of these instances, the common folk found someone to identify with, someone who held the same fundamental beliefs that they did. Usually, there was some instance or happening in history that set this type-character’s popularity into motion, which, in Toby’s case, was the depression. This phenomenon came to be known as the “rural theory.”

At the onset of the Great Depression in the 1930s, tent show managers found their theatre market, which was solely based on rural folk, declining rapidly. The Depression was most severe on the rural farmer. He did not want to go to the theatre to “think,” but wanted to be entertained and to forget the troubles of the day. Early audiences came to the theatre to be entertained, to laugh and have a good time at plays that were “wholesome.” “They did not demand great dramatic literature, pungent social comment, or psychological probing” (Birdwell 54). At that time, the most important element of the Toby show came into play, its rural, moralistic, low comedy. This, of all things, gave the Toby show its tremendous appeal.

During the Depression, the rural farmer lost the social, political, and economic power that he had enjoyed from 1900 into 1920s. At this time, industry moved into dominance, thus the farmer felt animosity toward the city. In self-defense, the rural population developed certain myths, believing them to be fact. The myths consisted of premises such as the belief that the city was a wicked place that could corrupt the best of men, that the

country was the home of all virtue and honor, and that the poor and meek, even the stupid, would eventually triumph over the rich and clever. "The myth was already in the minds of the folk when Toby appeared to personify it" (Mickel, 1974, 151). In all Toby plays, the silly hillbilly outwits the evil city slicker through righteousness and integrity. The rural characters in each Toby play came to represent each man or woman in the audience. The plays were not about another time and place, but about problems close at hand. The fundamental concern to preserve rural wholesomeness was rooted deeply in each region (Snyder 105). For Toby, integrity was his defense and his strength and the optimal way was the honest way. This was the backbone of rural tradition. The country people put their faith in "mother, home and heaven." The comedy in the early Toby shows was never "blue." The general rule concerning comedy was, "If you can't tell the story Sunday morning in church, you can't tell it Monday night on the stage" (Mickel, 1974, 674). Only in later years, when tent-reps were in decline, did the material become suggestive.

Another aspect of this rural tradition was the audience's familiarity with the Toby show actors and actresses. These individuals made sure that they were highly visible in each small town, so that they could become well acquainted with the community. This was a very successful way to advertise. Not only did they use this technique for advertising, but it was also a method in which to obtain local material to use in the show. Toby shows utilized this local humor to make the material applicable to the area and to create a bond between the audience and the players. Therefore, the local people felt that the players were family, further strengthening the believability of the "mother, home and heaven" myth. This familiarity fostered intense loyalty on the part of the local townspeople towards the company. Many times, showmen and women were given special dinners, awards, and keys to the city. One such example of loyalty by the fans of the Schaffner troupe was appears Kittle's dissertation:

Before the tent season of 1955 opened, the town of Wapello held a two-day festival in honor of the Schaffners and their company. The program

began on May 17 at eight o'clock in the morning with "Toby and Susie" specials being offered in bargain sales by all the merchants. Just before noon a parade was held in the business district. Businesses closed, as did the schools, for the parade and the rest of the day. The evening program began with a concert by the Wapello High School band... (Kittle 354-355).

Except for one source, who will be discussed later, scholars agree that Toby actor Fred Wilson not only coined Toby's appearance, but also his name. A famous story, which has become a legend in the realm of tent theatre, of Fred Wilson's and manager Horace Murphy's stroll down the main street of Crawley, Louisiana, seems to provide an answer to these dilemmas. Robert Downing, who interviewed Wilson, dates this incident at 1909:

Wilson recalls that he and Murphy one day strolled down the main street of Crawley, 'side-stepping there in order to avoid the mud holes.' Near a hitching post, they were accosted by a ten-year-old Cajun who observed that 'Mr Murphy had his clown out for a walk.'

Pausing to chat with the boy, the showman learned that the lad was puzzled by the 'funny man.' He had seen Wilson as Toby Haxton in *Clouds and Sunshine* on Monday night of that week. On Tuesday night, Fred had played Toby Green in *Out of the Fold*; but on Wednesday he had perplexed his young admirer by changing his name to Bud in *Won by Waiting*. The youngster could see no good reason for the substitute name if Wilson was to look, dress, talk and act like Toby. (Downing 653).

According to the legend, manager Murphy found a tremendous idea in that discourse and thereafter he and Wilson applied the name, Toby to all first comedy roles. Later, Horace Murphy was said to have added a correction to the story. Murphy said that there was no such incident, but that it was an old man who met them on the street and replied, "I see that you have your idiot out for some fresh air"(Mickel, 1974, 148). When Murphy asked Wilson why he had told that particular story, Wilson replied, "I'd rather be called a

clown than an idiot” (Mickel, 1974, 148). Murphy also added that the town was called Crowley and the year was 1911.

The significance of this story lies in the fact that it was the first time that the name Toby was applied to all rube parts. Not only the same name, but the same character, with the same basic appearance, in different plays.

Performance and audience space are important subjects to pursue, since in this study lies the difference between modern and early Toby shows. Nearly all traveling companies performed early Toby shows in a tent, instead of in a permanent space. This occurred because, as previously established, Toby shows grew from rural traditions, and the only way to sustain a successful Toby company was to play to rural audiences. Moreover, the only way to play to a rural audience was to bring the show to them. The most logical manner employed, in a rural situation without a townhall or theatre, was to present the show under canvas.

Tent shows evolved through a series of events. As mentioned previously, traveling opera house road companies popularized the early successful melodramas. These companies were based in a home city and toured other opera houses and town halls with a repertoire of popular melodramas and classical plays. Near the turn of the century, opera house road companies began to decline. This phenomenon occurred for several reasons, though chiefly because radio and movies became so popular in the metropolitan areas.

As the road companies declined, rural theatre began to flourish. Agriculture experienced a temporary prosperity in the 1900s that would continue for two decades. Traveling companies no longer pursued the town hall; instead, new companies proceeded to rural America with tent shows. During these two decades of farm prosperity, the repertoire tent show developed into a rural theatrical institution.

But why the tent? Several sources cite The Business of Theatre by Bernheim. He suggests that it was for three reasons that these companies sought the road with tents:

The first, gathered from his correspondence with J. D. Colegrove, one time agent and play broker from Denver, is that the theatre went under canvas to escape the summer heat in the opera houses. The second, which he credits to Frank Kelmain, former member of the Equity office in Kansas City, is that the move was an outgrowth of the medicine shows through “the successive stages of vaudeville performances and Negro shows.” The third, and this is a theory held by most of the remaining tent men, is that the use of tents for theatre grew out of the circus (Snyder 9).

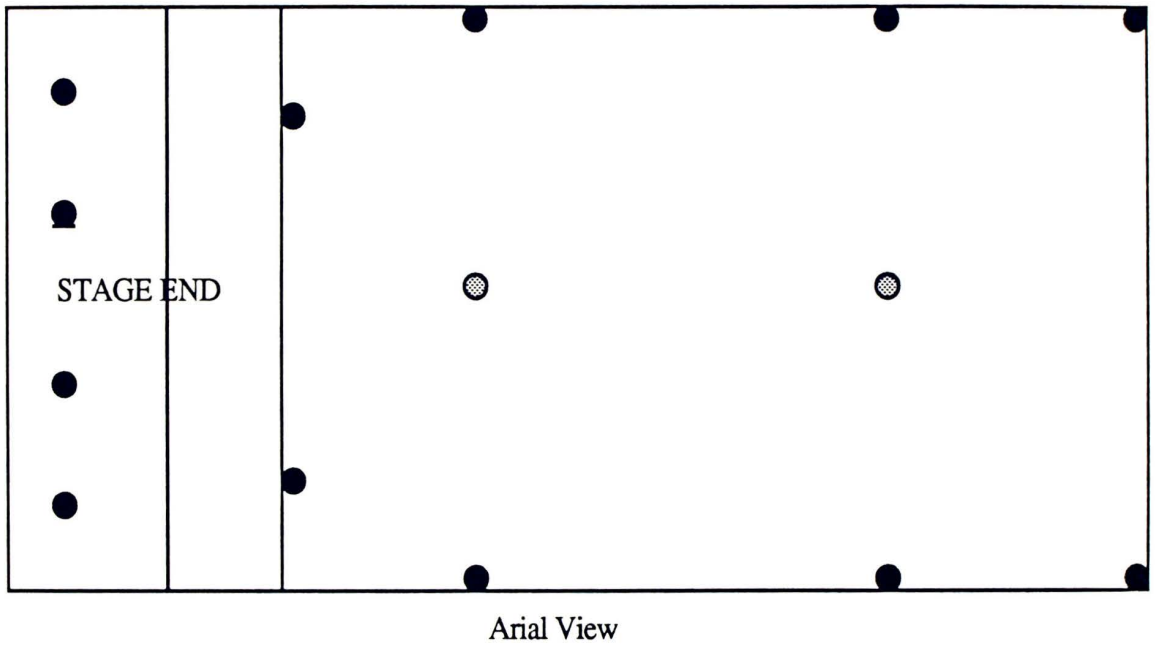
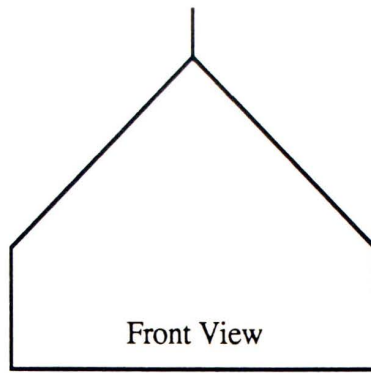
“The tent theatre was modeled on the conventional proscenium type developed during the Renaissance and eighteenth century and finally reaching its perfected form around 1900” (Mickel, 1974, 55). Further, as Slout suggested, the canvas theatre “evolved from the circus tent” (Slout 35). These tent companies usually tried to copy the opera house as closely as possible, with the larger companies carrying such extravagances as velour drapes and at times even opera boxes (Slout 45). Some of the larger companies used a type of raked floor in the seating area, but most of the time audience seating simply consisted of folding chairs set up on the ground in the front half of the house, for which a higher price was charged; and folding bleachers or “‘blues,’ from the blue flatboard seating of the circus,” along the back tent wall for general admission seating (Slout 44). Keep in mind that anything having to do with tent theatre had to be portable and all of this portable equipment had to be loaded, unloaded, set-up, and torn down.

The most frustrating dilemma of tent theatre seating was the sight line problem caused by the center support pole. Circus seating focused on the “rings.” and converting the circular seating to proscenium seating left several unlucky audience members with an obstructed view. Many managers devised their own methods of ridding themselves of the center pole. One method was to substitute a type of A-frame support in front of the proscenium. “The Slout Players of Michigan used this method as late as 1927” (Slout 41). As tent theatre became increasingly popular, a need grew for a different supporting pole

arrangement. The first design for a commercial dramatic end tent appeared around 1910 with Driver's Improved Theatrical Tent designed by Walter S. Driver (Slout 41). The stage end of the Driver tent was held up by two front stage quarter poles on either side of the proscenium opening, the bulk of the tent held by two center poles in the midsection, and three backstage quarter poles at the rear of the tent (See Figure 1). While this seemed to take care of the sight line problem for the most part, it caused other difficulties. For example, the dramatic end tent restricted the size of the canvas spread, which limited the seating capacity, thus reducing revenues. Additionally, during heavy rainstorms, water pockets tended to develop on the roof above the two poles flanking the proscenium, which could cause a great amount of damage to the tent. Other types of tents were developed to combat specific problems, but each type presented drawbacks of its own. During the heyday of the traveling repertoire company, diverse types of tents were in use, even used circus tents. A poor company used what it could afford.

Among all the problems associated with tent theatre, packing and unpacking of equipment, weight of the tent, teardown time, nothing, besides perhaps fire, was more devastating than a "blowdown." Heavy winds accompanying either rain or dust storms prevailed in the Midwest and South, especially in the most highly traveled area of the Midwest, known as "tornado alley." Danger came in the form of falling poles, broken electric lines; and waterpockets and wind that could rip the tent to shreds. Even lighter rain posed a small threat to the show, as anyone who has ever tried to act in the din produced by rainfall on a canvas roof can attest. It is imperative to note that the tent was the company's largest asset. The loss of the tent, for some owners, meant the loss of the business.

The basic design of the stage in the tent was similar in all companies. There were usually two main sets of curtains used by the traveling troupes. The front curtain was either raised or parted in the middle. The second curtain or olio was usually dropped. The



● TENT POLES

⊗ CENTER POLES

Figure 1. Driver's Dramatic End Tent
(not to scale)

stage itself was a temporary folding device designed for portability. The dressing rooms were usually housed either flanking the stage or behind it. Some larger companies, however, carried individual dressing trailers.

Sets consisted of conventional flats and drops, or legs and drops ornamented as best as possible by stage properties. The larger companies carried their own props and smaller companies usually borrowed props and set pieces from local merchants in exchange for advertisements. The larger companies were fortunate as they could afford freshly painted sets, but the smaller companies had to make due with stock sets. Slout illustrated the locals' attitudes toward these sets as he quoted a Michigan newspaper editor who suggested that the management "shoot the woodpecker on the stump in the rural scene, or make him catch the bug he has been chasing for the last ten years. . ." (Slout 5).

Scholars agree upon the development of the character of Toby, the origin of the character's physical appearance and use of the name, but they do not concur, however, upon the derivation of the name, "Toby." There are two leading opinions concerning this matter. The foremost is that the name was first applied in Cal Herman's play, *Clouds and Sunshine*, which contains the character, Tobe Haxton. According to Mickel, tent show tradition is strong in assigning the origin of the character to *Clouds and Sunshine* (Mickel, 1974, 150). Clark's holds the opinion that the name, Toby, was "probably selected because, according to several accounts, the role of Tobe Haxton in *Clouds and Sunshine* was a tremendously 'fat' part for the country comic" (Clark 101).

A second opinion maintains that *Clouds and Sunshine* was the copy of an earlier piece, Langdon McCormick's *Out of the Fold* and the character Toby Tompkins, according to Slout, inspired Fred Wilson to call all of his "silly kid" roles "Toby" (Slout 83).

Snyder's dissertation cites Pearle Wilson Nicholson's description of the schedule of the first run using the name, Toby:

...The idea to gather together all of the country bumpkin roles and to give them the one name of Toby originated [in] 1909. The Horace Murphy

Comedians, staked out for a week's run, presented *Clouds and Sunshine* with the troupe's comedian Frederick Wilson, cast in the role of Toby Haxton...The play for the next evening presented Wilson in the role of Bud in *Won by Waiting*. The third evening, *Out of the Fold* was presented and in it Wilson played the role of...Toby Green (Snyder 16).

Regardless of whether it was *Out of the Fold* or *Clouds and Sunshine*, the most important incident was Fred Wilson, by chance, selecting the name, Toby.

The second controversy uncovered, when studying these shows, pertains to the derivation of character of Toby's girlfriend. Research on the Toby show discloses many references to Toby, some references to the G-String character (which was a senile old man-type), but little to no information about the genesis of Toby's girlfriend, alias Susie, Sally, Ora, Sis, Cindy, or Elviry. This is odd because she was an ever-present character in Toby shows; and a very important embellishment to the show as a whole.

Caroline Schaffner is noted as the most famous "Susie." Delores Dorn-Heft, who played with the Schaffners as their ingenue for many years, remembers Caroline Schaffner's Susie as "a red head with pigtails and freckles, a simple but clever girl who [had] Toby wrapped around her finger" (Dorn-Heft 53). Neil Schaffner, in his book, cites *Clouds and Sunshine* as being the origin of the character Susie Green and cites Caroline as the first actress to play her.

There has been but one piece of scholarship devoted entirely to Susie and that was Helen Baird Branyon's paper, "Susie of American Tent Repertoire Theatre." In this paper, she traces Susie's character development evolving from a "stock soubrette character called Sis Hopkins" (Branyon 141). She further implies that Caroline Schaffner created her Susie character from this soubrette role. Branyon believes that *Out of the Fold* was the first Toby-Susie play, in which Toby and Susie were brother and sister. Later, in *Clouds and Sunshine*, Toby and Susie appear as Tobe Haxton and Susie Green, boyfriend and girlfriend.

Sis Hopkins was taken from the character portrayal by Rose Melville. Rose first appeared in 1894 with her sister Ida in a specialty act. It was later, in another specialty act that featured Rose as Sis Hopkins, that she won such acclaim that her management immediately expanded Sis into a principle role (Slout 72).

Susie was not just a foil to Toby's role, but an integral part of the show. People loved her as much as Toby. "Although Susie's popularity may have been eclipsed by Toby because of her sex, she remained a favorable small town image" (Branyon 147)

The most debated issue encountered while conducting this study concerns the dilemma of the decline of Toby shows. Toby shows seemed to have faded out of existence sometime in the mid 1960s. Each historian seems to have a personal opinion as to why Toby shows ceased. First, the depression hit the smaller tent companies hard and many companies folded simply because of lack of funds. Later, movies and automobiles became much more accessible in rural communities and so contributed to the tent show demise. World War II had a large impact on the tent companies, though the companies that did continue to travel during this time had the most profitable business of their careers (Kittle, 1969, 57). Finally, in the late 1950s, television became more accessible to the rural community. The companies that were on the road in the 1950s were very successful, however, since there was little competition because the number of rep companies still traveling was small. Because of this instance, each company secured its own territory. All of these factors contributed to the demise of the Toby show.

The most intriguing part in the study of the decline of Toby shows is that the authors' views seemed to have changed with time. Keep in mind that the publication dates of the materials that I studied ranged from 1946 through 1989, so within the period that many articles were written, Toby shows were still successfully traveling. Downing's article, written in 1946, he does mention that many rep shows have "hit the lots year after year" (Downing 654), but we find that there are several companies that were still traveling. In Omar Ranney's article written in 1953, he notes that, "movies, radio and television have

cramped the old style of the Toby shows, but they have not beaten them into oblivion” (Ranney 73). One can see that although Toby shows are not of the numbers that they used to be, there were still, according to Ranney, at least a dozen companies touring (Ranney 73).

A new viewpoint appears with Delores Dorn-Heft’s article in 1958. She states:

“The five remaining Toby companies are run by men long seasoned in the trade, and there are no younger followers receiving the necessary training to take their places and carry on. Unless the appeal and fascination of the traveling Toby shows can beckon some younger impresarios quickly, these last valuable vestiges will soon be nothing but a part of our theatrical lore” (Heft 52).

Throughout her article, she pleads with the readers to become interested as actors, so the Toby show trade will not die. She also explains how beneficial it is, for any young actor, to do a season of rep.

In the early 1960s, the first dissertations about Toby shows were written. These historians seem to have analyzed the events in time and formed their own opinions. Generally, they state two conflicting opinions regarding the decline of the Toby shows. The first, that history was the cause of the decline. The historians then proceed to debate over which contributing factor was the most harmful. The second assumption was that Toby himself was the demise of the tent business.

The latter point of view is very interesting and, I believe, quite valid. This argument is based on the observation that the Toby shows refused to change with the times and that the Tobys themselves became overdone, grotesque, and at times vulgar. Some Tobys were worse about this exaggeration than others. They became so broad in character as to cover and lose the storyline and so leave the play without a plot. The show became just a series of vaudeville type sketches. Slout, sums up this opinion very nicely:

It might even be suggested that Toby was in part responsible for the decline of tent shows. His strong rustic heritage expressed through the antic of low comedy did not allow tent drama to progress with changing times. The rural setting endured, since it was necessary for Toby's bucolic comedy, into the age of H-bombs, jet planes, and massive urban problems. Tent shows were unable to get off the farm. Toby further deteriorated tent show quality by his refusal to stay within the play. Exuberant tomfoolery, leaping out of character, stopping the play and even running up and down the aisles. Such behavior pushed the play into secondary importance; and when the drama is lost, so are the actors and the audience (Slout 111).

I believe that there were many reasons for the decline of the Toby show. Those of us in the business of theatre must take them for what they are and strive to learn from them. We cannot change history, but we can learn to change as our audience changes, for is a good actor not a reflection of the world around him?

As established earlier in this work, most of the opinions found in existing literature on the history of Toby follow a similar path, though some specifics are disputed. There is one author who seems to disagree with all others. His theories are of merit, however, because he is known, sometimes jealously, as the most prolific Toby. Neil Schaffner was one of the most successful Tobys of his day. He carried Toby through the hardships of history and even on to radio. He and his wife, Caroline (Susie) began a radio career in Carthage, Illinois, moving to Chicago. They broadcasted *Toby's Corntussle News*, featuring Toby and Susie. They continued the Toby tradition for many seasons until they retired in 1962. Scholars have widely researched Neil and Caroline Schaffner. This research led to several case studies and a book that Neil co-authored with Vance Johnson. This is biased research, however. Neil Schaffner, while being a great showman, has his own, perhaps egotistical, opinion of the history of Toby shows.

Schaffner claims that it was he, not Fred Wilson, who coined the name for all Toby characters. He did agree that *Clouds and Sunshine* was the first play in which the name Toby appeared, but alleges that he played that role first in another company, citing the year of production as 1912 (Schaffner 5). He claims that the script was sent to Horace Murphy along with letter explaining how well the play was accepted by the audience, whereupon Murphy gave the script to Fred Wilson.

Schaffner also claims that he was the last Toby. Not only was he not the last Toby, but he was not even the last traveling Toby. When he retired there were at least three other companies still on the road, one of them Schaffner's own company, which he sold to Jimmy Davis. Toby showmen were quick to deny his claim. From the study of the literature, showmen did not care for Neil Schaffner. Perhaps this attitude was due to jealousy because of Schaffner's great success. Clark quotes a Toby actor who asked to remain anonymous:

Neil wants to be Mister Show Business of the tent world. He had a good show and he wrote good plays, but he wasn't the first Toby. Hell, my granddad was doing Tobies when Neil was still playing juvenile leads.

One thing for sure, the first Toby is dead. If it wasn't Fred Wilson, it had to be someone about his age or even before him--and that person was just the first one to call himself Toby all the time. There had been Tobies in everything but name for a long time before that.

But, back to Neil. Now, he is trying to claim he was the last Toby, and everyone knows better than that. He can't win on either end (Clark 100).

These exaggerations on Schaffner's part are usually regarded as either pipe dreams or simply other attempts to promote his show.

No matter what opinions on the history of Toby shows are maintained, one truth is clear. Though Toby shows did decline in numbers, the genre did not completely die. In

Branson, Missouri, *The Toby Show* had a very successful run for seventeen years. This show differed in various specifics from earlier Toby show companies, but nevertheless, it was a Toby show. As previously established in this work, historians have thoroughly demonstrated that Toby shows, in general, merit study and that they are important to American theatre history; but in the process, they have ignored a very vital business. Scholarship is now necessary to learn how this later Toby show succeeded and changed with the times.

CHAPTER TWO

Biographical History of Shad and Mollie Heller

In a small town in Southwestern Missouri, there once stood a little theatre whose main claim to fame was to have successfully continued a popular American stage style for seventeen years. Lloyd “Shad” and Ruth “Mollie” Heller owned and operated the Corn Crib Theatre in Branson, Missouri. It seems odd that no one has researched this important theatre. While their theatre and its troupe did not fit the precise mold of earlier traveling Toby shows, as the last long-running Toby show in America, it continued the Toby tradition. Before I discuss The Toby Show, or *Hills a Poppin*, as the Hellers called it, a glimpse into the lives of the producers is necessary. It seems essential to outline their personal histories, not only because they established the only successful Toby company that has never been researched, but also because looking into their past will perhaps establish why their operation was so successful.

The information contained in this chapter comes chiefly from two sources. One is Shad, a biography by Margaret Newton; the other is a lengthy interview that I conducted with Shad, Mollie, and Mollie’s son, Bob Soles, in their home on December 29, 1989. The broad concept comes from this interview. Because Shad and Mollie were in their seventies and eighties and Shad suffered from Parkinson's Disease at the time of this interview, I have added detail from the book.

Lloyd “Shad” Heller was born in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania on July 17, 1913. Although he remembered much love in his home, he lived in a troubled family. His father was a stern businessman with a drinking problem. Because of this and problems in America as a whole, Shad lived in a stressful situation. As a boy, he worked with his father’s construction company doing odd jobs. His love for theatre began when his father’s company built the Sherman Theatre in Stroudsburg in the summer of 1925. Shad

said, "From the time I was twelve until I left that country, I wouldn't miss a show" (Newton 4). When he turned fourteen, he worked backstage at this theatre, known locally as "the Stroud." As well as being able to watch the actors and stagehands, he had the opportunity to witness the first motion pictures. His favorite movie stars, those which he later drew from when he performed, included Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplain (Interview). When asked about Buster Keaton, Shad said, "I adore that man. He had a fantastic face" (Newton 16). Shad was also fortunate to have seen the last vaudeville show at the Stroud in the summer of 1927.

In 1928, when Shad was sixteen, he went to Prescott, Arizona to help an ailing sister. While there, he heard about a new show that was taking Arizona by storm, the *Coronado Exposition*. The *Exposition* was an outdoor pageant that traced the explorations of the explorer, Coronado. Though no roles were available, Shad found his first job in the theatre world as a stagehand for this Exposition. He traveled with the group throughout the Midwest and West for more than a month working on the technical aspects of the show. The acting career of Shad Heller began with the Coronado Exposition when he was cast as an extra, "a spear carrier." Though Shad said the part was just a walk-on, it was enough to, "get me hooked" (Interview).

In the fall of 1928, Shad began his junior year at Prescott High School, where he would develop an important relationship with two teachers who had a significant effect upon his performance career. Lillian Savage taught drama. Shad entered her class and found himself in many of her productions that year. Shad remembered her as a wonderful influence on him and someone who gave him structure and training in acting. Shad also befriended George Back, the music teacher in the high school and sang baritone in the school choir. Shad said Mr. Back had a love of performing and a great deal of experience. Both talked for hours about their dreams. George Back encouraged Shad in his pursuits was helpful to this young man growing up in a world that frowned on such endeavors. Also from Back, Shad learned and began to understand the art of spontaneous

entertainment, or improvisation, that was to become Shad's performance trademark.

George Back had an extensive career in Chatauqua and "vaude." According to Shad:

Chatauqua was a sneaky way of giving people show business under the guise of religion, philosophy, or education. The main purpose was to teach and to spread the Gospel, but it was soon realized that giving the audiences a little entertainment along the way help keep their attention. Eventually, Chatauqua was nothing but show business and the religion got lost (Newton 25).

In 1929, Shad had to go back to Pennsylvania because of the stock market crash. His father's business was failing and he felt the need to return home. Shad said it was one of the toughest decisions of his life to have left such happiness behind. This was the beginning of a destructive period in Shad's life that was to last nearly thirty years. He began drinking at seventeen, while working with his father's construction crew. It was not a problem in his youth, but was to become a terrible burden later in life.

Shad yearned to return to Arizona and his good friends, so he began looking for ways to make extra money to pay for the trip. The Bouschal Carnival set up on the end of town and Shad took a job running the fireworks display and doing odd jobs on the midway. Shad remembers loving the work and claimed that, "It was good experience," (Newton 23). He learned to "ballyhoo," or to "pitch" for different attractions. The pitchmen were, and still are in some carnivals, the individuals who "pitch" or advertise the various attractions by using stimulating language coupled with improvisational techniques. This new trade provided Shad with more improvisational experience. By the end of the summer, he had earned enough money for bus fare back to Prescott.

After graduating from Prescott in 1930, with numerous high school productions under his belt, Shad found it necessary to return again to Pennsylvania to help his family. The Great Depression had just hit and his father's construction company was deteriorating. Once he arrived in Pennsylvania, he found that there was little to no construction work

because no one could afford to build. His father could not put him on the regular payroll. Shad worked on and off for the construction company and did any acting that he could find. After he had struggled for a time, Shad and his brother decided to start their own company. With help from their father, they called this business the Heller Brothers Excavators and Concreters. Their business was erratic so Shad searched for performance jobs to fill the off times. In 1931, the business was not prosperous, so Shad left. He decided that that was a good time to go away to search for the “big time,” full time.

Shad worked for many small theatre companies during the next three years and learned some valuable lessons. The first theatre Shad worked for was the Cherry Valley Players near Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania. Since the Cherry Valley Company was supported by Lafayette University, Shad assumed that this might be a profitable experience. The Depression, however, forced the theatre company to close, once again leaving Shad jobless. He then heard of a theatre that had attracted New York money, called the Ponaco Players. He finished out the fall in 1931 with them. It was at this time that Shad found repertory theatre experience. When the summer theatre companies closed, Shad again worked construction to support himself. He found himself frustrated because he was not living his dream, so he decided to move on.

He relocated near Boston. There he did a stint in a “vaude” house playing some comic roles, but mostly playing the straight man. He said he especially loved being the comic. This was tremendous experience. As a vaudeville performer, it is important to know both the comic and the straight in order to learn to time comedy correctly. It was there that he met Gene Hale, a baggy-pants, tramp clown. Hale was a “banana,” a comedian who did mostly one-liners. Hale and Shad began a great friendship that would last many years.

Shad was honing the various facets of his art at this time. He recalled that at this point in his career he had strong feelings concerning legitimate theatre. He was not sure that this vaudeville was the right direction for him to go. This was, and still is, a typical paradox for actors. An actor will spend years, sometimes, training formally only to find that in

order to eat and pay rent, it is necessary to do something lighter, less legitimate, for an extended period of time. Though at that time actors may feel it is beneath them, they soon learn that it is reality, and the successful ones find a way to make it a positive experience. That is what Shad was doing at this point in his life. He was finding his reality, his niche that would make him financially and emotionally successful. Shad made it a positive experience by working to be the best actor he could be. He said, "I used a mirror a lot in those days. You have to, you know, to learn how to use expressions, to watch facial movements, to watch body movements" (Newton 36). He carried a mirror with him wherever he went. He drew from the old Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplain movies. He learned to work with make-up techniques on his own. He worked with pantomime, using himself as his own best audience. He carried the "mirror philosophy" throughout his life and passed it on to the fortunate actors who studied with him. (Interview). According to Shad, those years in the East had been his acting school. "I learned more in those years than any one place that I had been." (Newton 37).

Shad went through some painful family experiences after performing in the East and felt that it was time to cut the apron strings, so he set out for Arizona for good. Many things happened to Shad at this point in life. In Arizona, he went to work for a mining company where he learned about blacksmithing, which was to become very important to him in later life. He married for the first time, but it was a marriage troubled by his alcoholism. He also became reacquainted with Gene Hale, who was living in Prescott. Most significantly, he became involved in one of the most important organizations in his life, the Smoki.

The Smoki people were a business and professional white men's organization dedicated to preserving Indian rituals by means of an outdoor pageant (Newton 56). The group originated because the Smoki saw young people leaving reservations and feared that their rituals would be lost forever. Though it was usually referred to as a men's organization, the wives and children of the Smoki played an integral part in the show. The pageant started out as a fund raiser and tourist attraction. They performed once a year with

preparation for the next year's pageant immediately following that year's show. Vast research was required to perform ancient rituals with accuracy.

Smoki operates on a system of clans like that of the Hopi Indians. The Smoki member is given a small tattoo on his left hand as he or she moves upward through the clans. Even the Smoki women have a tattoo system. The Smoki people take the ceremony very seriously, for "when you become a Smoki, you are a Smoki for life" (Interview). Each clan is responsible for part of the ceremony. Shad began by being sponsored by a man within the Smoki. He moved through each clan until reaching the prestigious, and his favorite, Snake Clan. His good friend, Gale Gardner, sponsored him into this clan. The Snake Clan were the stars of the show for this clan danced with live snakes in their mouths and hands. Shad took this honor very seriously and approached his role with a "method" philosophy. "[Shad] studied the Indian tribes and their culture in order to perform the rituals in 'the right way.' [Shad] asked himself how the Indian felt, how the Indian walked, how the Indian talked, moved, and danced" (Newton 64). In Shad's own words:

I got quite a lift out of the dancing. It's a different feeling from working on a conventional stage. I found myself trying to think like an Indian and tried to put myself in an Indian's world. That was a difficult characterization for a white man, a true acting challenge. The exhilaration of dancing in the primitive sense...raises your emotions to a high pitch...sometimes I wondered whether I was involved with the Indian or if I was going back into my own primitive state (Newton 68-69).

This was yet another form of theatre experience that Shad could use to better himself as an actor.

Shad progressed to sub-priest in charge of the sand painting for the Smoki show. Each year, one clan was responsible for composing a large sand painting in the middle of the stage floor. Besides being decorative, it was used as part of the ceremony. The problem with this painting previously had been that the show took place at night when this beautiful

and intricate painting was barely discernible. He used his previous technical expertise to create a sand painting that would be highly visible at night. Visibility had always been a problem that no one had solved, but Shad was a very creative person. He decided to try blacklights and florescent paint on rice. Correspondence with Max Factor in Hollywood established that blacklights had not previously been used outdoors because they thought moonlight would kill the effect (Newton 72). The painting was a grand success and became the first outdoor florescent scene.

Shad eventually became chief of the Smoki people. He was known as “Chief White Fawn” and his picture still hangs in the Smoki museum. When I arrived at Shad and Mollie’s home to conduct the interview, after all the hugs were over, the first thing Shad said to me was, “See that picture there?” He pointed to a group picture of the Smoki people. “They quit doing the pageant last year.” He was so sad. He told me that he learned so much about life and theatre there, as well as making a multitude of friends.

Though he had been a pillar of the Prescott community, Shad was having a hard time with alcohol. The one thing that had kept him going was his association with the Smoki. Shad’s drinking problem had become so great that his marriage failed and the Smoki had to turn him away. He said that leaving the Smoki crushed him. The banishment by the Smoki, combined with business problems caused by World War II, prompted him to leave Prescott behind. During this extended period, he played some small roles in B movies in Arizona. Twice he played with big names, *Broken Arrow* with James Stewart and *Billy the Kid* with Robert Taylor. These companies had come to Arizona to film the popular westerns.

He also took a job with Bouschal’s Carnival again and, while touring in New York, saw Ringling Brother’s Circus. The circus fascinated Shad and he was most taken with the clowns. The great Emmett Kelly was performing with Ringling’s at this time and Kelly’s tramp clown astonished Shad.

In 1947, Shad joined Ringling Brother's as a roustabout. Roustabouts put up chairs, did janitorial work, and helped around the circus wherever they were needed. He wanted to be around the circus and hoped that the change would help him kick his drinking habit, but he found that the lack of stability only made it worse. He worked on and off with the Ringling's, hoboed for a while, and at last joined the circus again in 1953 after "bottoming out" on a train bound for Tucson. Shad said he looked into an old drunken hobo's face on that train and saw himself. He said, "It scared the hell out of me!" Ringling rehired him on the condition that he stay sober.

His original job was to set up chairs. Later, using his carny experience, he did some pitching for "The Giant." He found a family among the circus people and felt as if the public was unfair in their attitudes toward them. He said he learned a great deal about life from those people. He especially remembered the armless and legless lady. He said she accepted her life as it was and when he talked to her, he realized his own problems were not that major. That gave him a certain strength to conquer his obstacles.

Finally, Shad got the chance to perform with the circus. They needed an extra clown for the parade. Shad's clown was a tramp clown. He said one of the biggest thrills of his life was to be a clown in a parade led by Emmett Kelly. He said he did talk to Kelly about clowning, but that Kelly was getting very old then and did not offer much constructive criticism. He was around other fine clowns though, who had a great impact on him. One such clown was Otto Griebeling. He was a warm-up clown and Shad would watch him work and improvise with the people. Shad said he gained considerable experience and informal training in those years that would last throughout his life.

While working with Ringling's, he had many problems accepting the church's attitude toward the circus because he had been very involved with churches throughout his own life. One day he tried to help a child who had fallen and the parents told him to "keep his filthy hands off of her." He said that that had infuriated him. It was the proverbial straw. He was getting old and tired, and tired of bathing in a bucket, and if he was going to stay

sober he needed some stability, so he left Ringling's while they were in Independence, Kansas. He said, "The only thing I have left of those years with the circus are some tough memories and a Ringling's commissary ticket. They still owe me a nickel." (Newton 110)

A job in construction took him to Coffeyville, Kansas, where he eventually joined Alcoholic's Anonymous and where he also met his wife-to-be, Ruth Soles, hereafter referred to as "Mollie." Mollie was a widow with two children from a previous marriage. She was the office manager for an insurance company and freelanced with her own bookkeeping business. She was very active with the Coffeyville Community Theatre, where Shad found another outlet for his creativity.

In 1954, Shad was traveling with a Chemical Company as a salesman and did not have much time to act in any productions in Coffeyville, but he did help with the production and direction of those shows. Mollie said that they were very supportive of each other because both had pushed performing aside to make a living. It was at this time that Mollie made her debut in a leading role, and was also in the first stages of creating a character that would follow her for the rest of her life. The role was a comic character called Mrs. Feely in *Suds in Your Eyes*. It was a clown-like character with an outrageous costume and dialogue.

Shad's job with the chemical company led him to Missouri, where he discovered Branson in 1957. He said the countryside reminded him of Pennsylvania and there he felt at home. While he was there, he attended a play called *The Shepherd of the Hills*, based on a book by Harold Bell Wright and performed at the Waterfront Theatre in Branson. Shad had become interested in Wright in Arizona, where many of Wright's stories were based. Shad's friend, Gale Gardener, had known Wright and was familiar with his works. Shad and Mollie became involved with this theatre, Shad playing Dad Howitt and the Shepherd and Mollie playing Aunt Mollie. They commuted for two years between Coffeyville and Branson on weekends to work in the show.

In 1959, they decided to move to Branson permanently. The show was growing and several university students, including my parents, from Warrensburg, Missouri, were playing roles there in the summertime. They became so well known by the locals that they were given the names of “the Shepherd, Dad Howitt,” and “Aunt Mollie.” The young actors knew Shad as “Dad” Heller. He helped coach them in their craft, drawing from his varied past experience.

When Shad came to the Ozarks, he discovered even more folklore and information about Wright. Through many of the local stories, Shad had accumulated much background information on Wright and on the characters in his book. Though at this time, many of the people the characters supposedly reflected were dead and buried in Branson, the stories surrounding them were very much alive. Shad researched everything he undertook, being an avid reader, and found much history about Wright’s character and the surrounding area. He was “doing his homework” on the character he played and the production he was in.

In 1960, two advertising men from Springfield came to Branson looking for financial backing for a TV movie version of *The Shepherd of the Hills*. They found this through Mary Herschend, owner of Marvel Cave, and Mary Trimble, owner of Shepherd of the Hills Farm. Shad was very active in this film and played the Shepherd. The *Radio TV Mirror* awarded Shad a special award for his acting as the Shepherd and the film won the *Mirror’s* award for Best Midwest TV Program of 1960 (Newton, 171). As the production neared completion, Shad had become great friends with one of the Springfieldians, Larry Dixon, and they began to talk about creating a new theatre for this drama. Shad envisioned a theatre company that would train and house young actors in the summer, one where they could work and learn.

The Shepherd of the Hills outdoor drama opened August 6, 1960, but there were numerous trials and tribulations before arriving at that point. One quandary was where to perform it. 1960 was the same year that Silver Dollar City started, which initially was an 1880's craft village and now is a full-blown amusement park. Shad remembers that they

came close to producing it there, but Mary Herschend could not attempt the show and the opening of the "City" at the same time. She encouraged Shad though, and said she would help him as much as she could.

He then went to Mary Trimble, another influential Branson woman, and sold the pageant idea to her. He met with several people, including Larry Dixon and the Trimbles, and they agreed that they would do the pageant, form a corporation, the Old Mill Theatre Players, Inc., and lease the land from Shepherd of the Hills Farm.

On the "Farm," was a beautiful, natural amphitheatre with natural acoustics. They staged the show at the bottom of this space. Shad, as usual, researched the play's period well and wanted to create the feeling, for the audience, of actually going back in time. Walking down to the seating area, audience members followed a kerosene-lantern lit path. As they do today, galloping horses, gunfire, Ozark music, and a sense of simple and religious values fill the show.

Shad, in addition to playing the main role, directed the show. He sent the show's main thesis to a friend in Coffeyville with whom he had worked in the community theatre. Jim Collie wrote the script, Shad edited it, and Mollie typed it. Shad found many technical difficulties to overcome. He wanted to make this show as exciting as possible. Shad drew upon his experience, especially the technical expertise he gained from working with the Smoki, to make the show an experience one would never forget. He also helped to train the actors and many remember his helpful hints. Terry Bloodworth, an early Heller Toby, describes Shad's teaching in this way:

Shad was the only person who encouraged me to be a director. He showed me how to develop an "audience eye," to see the show from the "persona" of the audience. I've worked for some good people in show business, but I learned more from Shad than all the rest put together (Newton 256).

Though the actors did not live there, as Shad had envisioned, they did find an important and profitable production to perform in the summer.

Mollie, aside from typing the script, made other important contributions to the show. She sewed costumes, sold tickets during the day, played a character at night, and did the bookkeeping for the company after the show. Since they were on a tight budget, the production was a unified effort with everyone doing more than their share of the work.

Unfortunately, they lost the lease in 1966, but still owned the corporation, The Old Mill Players, later to become the Toby Show company. Presently, because of Shad's efforts, the Shepherd of the Hills Homestead provides employment to young actors and still uses the philosophies that Shad endorsed thirty years ago.

Mary Herschend had seen Shad's work in the TV film and admired it. The Herschends were trying to attract experienced entertainers to work as characters and to produce street shows in their craft village. In 1960, The Herschends asked Shad and Mollie to work as street entertainers. During that first season, Shad worked as the "Sheriff" character and did art work and sign painting. Mollie worked in the general store and as a street entertainer. They made famous the characters of Mollie as Ma McCoy and Shad as Pa Hatfield in the Hatfield and McCoy feud.

Shad had much experience with vaudeville comedy and he helped the Herschends create the Hillbilly atmosphere that prevails today. Through the seasons of working at Silver Dollar City, the shows and characters changed and grew. Shad created his own locally famous characters such as his clown, Shellshock, a silent Confederate clown who could not march or do much of anything right. Shellshock had a special "bit" at the end of the day, when the time came to present the flag for the Retreat Ceremony. Shellshock had been bumbling all day but when it came time to present the flag, he snapped to attention and carried out the perfect military maneuver required to handle the flag. It was a touching ceremony. However, it was his "Shad" the blacksmith and mayor of Silver Dollar City character that has lasted and made him, in effect, the mascot of Silver Dollar City. Shad

created a demonstration and show at his forge on Mainstreet at the City using the blacksmithing skills he had learned in the 1930s in Arizona. He related the skills involved and demonstrated his craft, while entertaining the visitors at the same time. He says the name Shad came from an article he was reading in *National Geographic* about the Appalachians that included a picture of a man named Shaddrack, an old Ozarks name. He never figured that it would stick with him to the extent that few called him by his real name.

Mollie played many roles at Silver Dollar City too, but her Aunt Kate character has become the most well known. Aunt Kate was an aging Madam who would go after just about anything in pants. She adapted this persona from the Mrs. Feely character that she had played in Coffeyville, but made it more exaggerated by being even more outrageous in her dialogue and costume.

The atmosphere at Silver Dollar City is unlike that of other amusement parks. Most people describe it as a friendly and fun place (Newton 193). Some entertainers were hired solely to work outside on the streets to improvise with visitors, a process called atmosphering, and to do street shows. This takes a special acting ability that is chiefly considered to have come from the Hellers. Shad had much experience in this area, including pitching for the carnival and clowning with Ringling's. Shad helped to train the Silver Dollar City Players and helped them understand that acting on the streets required a different kind of discipline and concentration than traditional theatre. The same street shows occurred many times each day and the performers had to make each repetition look fresh and spontaneous, even in uncomfortable situations from the cold and rain to the Ozark's humid July heat. The entertainers performed different characters each day, making this a tremendous training ground for actors. Shad taught these entertainers through discussion and example. Shad's coaching usually took the form of a "visit." "He never stepped out to direct, but offered helpful comments" (Newton 204).

According to Shad, Mollie was "one of the best" at creating atmosphere in the early days. For example, she would roam around as Aunt Kate until she found a pretty plant in

the park. She and another character would begin to argue, "It is not. It is too." Finally, they would approach a lady visitor and ask her if she grew flowers at home. When she said that she did, they would ask her to bend down and touch the leaves and tell them what kind of plant that was. When the victim offered a reply, Mollie/Kate would shake her head "no." The other character would say, "Well, Kate I guess you're right, that is Poison Oak, after all!"

The Silver Dollar City promotion director wrote to Paul Henning, the producer of the *The Beverly Hillbillies*, asking him to visit Silver Dollar City because he thought the two were compatible, both centered on "hillbillies." Upon arriving, Henning fell in love with the "City" and its people and decided to film several episodes of *The Beverly Hillbillies* there. Henning was very impressed with Shad and decided to use him as a main character in those episodes. That was a big time in Branson, as I can remember going to the "City" as a child to meet the "famous hillbillies." The shows went so well that in 1969 Shad flew to Hollywood to tape several more episodes of *The Beverly Hillbillies*. These were also successful and later, in 1981, Shad returned to Hollywood to film the television movie, *The Return of the Beverly Hillbillies*.

In his long relationship with the cast of *The Beverly Hillbillies* he had made many friends, including Buddy Ebsen, Paul Henning, and especially one lady who would have an impression on his later life, Irene Ryan, who played "Granny" on *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Ryan was partially responsible for the genesis of The Toby Show in Branson.

The explanation of the origin of the Heller's Toby Show's is complicated. It all began with an evening show produced by the Hellers in 1967 at the Royal Pavilion Theatre at Rockaway Beach, Missouri, then a thriving tourist community on Lake Tanycomo. They based the show on the melodrama, *Our Gal Sal*. Again, atmosphere was an important aspect of the production to Shad and it included red-checkered tablecloths and homey surroundings. Surrounding the melodramatic plot were old songs and vaudeville sketches. Shad called it a "vaude review." As a new home for the Old Mill Players, the first two



Figure 2. Shad Heller with Irene Ryan

years went well with great reviews and financial success, but in the third year they lost money and had to drop the show.

While the Rockaway show was in production, Shad was also involved with *The Beverly Hillbillies*. He and Irene Ryan had similar backgrounds in theatre and talked about the old days of vaudeville. Ryan had played vaudeville all over the Midwest with a troop originating in Kansas City. She had also played with Neil Shaffner, one of the most well known Tobies. She suggested, since the Rockaway show was not doing well, that Shad and Mollie could do a Toby show in the hills. Shad had never been to a Toby show, but had heard a lot about them. With Irene's help and his own creative imagination, he began to form what would become the last long-running Toby troupe in America.

In 1967, Shad built a forge on property they had purchased on Highway 76 in Branson. He called it Wilderness Metalworks and it was a place where he could produce more products for his shop at Silver Dollar City. Along with his forge he built a general store that Mollie ran and several smaller buildings that housed other craftsmen. He thought that would be a perfect place for a small theatre, a theatre that would fulfill his dream of a place where young actors could work and learn.

Shad had in his background everything it took to create a successful Toby show. As pointed out in Chapter 1, The Toby Show developed from a number of theatre styles, circus, Chatauqua, vaudeville, legitimate theatre, outdoor drama, and melodrama. Though Shad Heller had never seen a Toby show, he had the same kind of background that the Toby show had. This is very significant to the success of The Toby show in Branson.

Shad's philosophies of acting and the life he lived also added to the success of the show. Stanislavsky believed that one must experience as much of life as possible to be a versatile actor. Shad Heller certainly experienced much life and theatre. Perhaps his philosophy of life and laughter sums up this chapter best and provides the best insight into this fine person. "Laughter is 'good medicine' especially when sickness is a matter of

moral behavior. When life is so hard, laughter is essential” (Newton 67). Shad Heller passed away January 13, 1991.

CHAPTER THREE

Hills A Poppin

This chapter deals specifically with the factual and theoretical aspects of The Toby Show in Branson, Missouri. The information in this chapter comes principally from two sources, my experience as an Old Mill Player and the December 1989 interview. I must note that much of what I learned as an actress and a historian while performing with the Hellers' company was handed down by way of many former cast members of The Toby Show. During my employment, the Hellers both suffered from poor health. Shad and Mollie appeared on stage only one to two times during a typical six nights per week run. Unfortunately, I did not acquire as much technique from them as many of the earlier Heller troupers had. Furthermore, I was not there during the genesis of the Hellers' show, to learn first hand the reasons for the show's structure, why the show differed from the earlier Toby shows, and what motivated the Hellers to make the decisions that they made concerning their show. In the December 1989 interview, I found answers to these questions. Keep in mind, there is one basic difference between the Heller's show and the earlier Toby shows; the earlier shows traveled and the Hellers' show was performed in their own permanent theatre.

The Toby Show in Branson, Missouri, began as had many earlier tent repertory companies, with limited funds. Shad counted on his many memories of the road companies he had performed with, the small resources that he had saved, and help from several Ozark craftsmen to complete his dream of a small theatre where actors could come to learn and people could come to laugh (Interview). In formulating the design of the theatre, Shad considered the nature of the comedy. He knew that the theatre had to be "small and intimate" with the audience "close enough to draw each person into the fun."

(Newton 238). So, he and his friends began to work on a new structure in the Wilderness Settlement.

As the construction phase of the project proceeded, he and Mollie tried to come up with an applicable name for their theatre. Shad believed that the name chosen must represent the attitudes and the type of show that he had crafted. After much deliberation, they decided upon the "Corn Crib Theatre." He thought that the name must reflect what happened on the stage as well as his love for the Ozarks and its people. He had read about how hard it was to survive in the early days and how families would store grain in small cribs. He thought since laughter and entertainment were necessary to the survival and growth of a person, that the Corn Crib Theatre would be a perfect name (Newton 238).

The completed theatre consisted of a cedar log cabin that served as the backstage area and dressing rooms, and an extended front porch that served as the stage. The stage right side of the porch-stage extended past the roof line to accommodate the corn crib that was, in reality, a wooden box that protected the upright piano during the day. At night this area served as the bandstand. Past stage left sat a replica of an Ozark outhouse. This structure had a front door with a typical quarter moon cutout and a back door to allow for actors' entrances. The outhouse was a two-seater in which various musical instruments were stored during the day. Mollie related an amusing story about this outhouse:

One night we came to the part in the show where [Toby] was supposed to come out of the outhouse carrying all of our instruments. We were going to perform a little musical number with a mouth harp, a washboard, and other little hand instruments. It took the longest time for him to come out. Finally he did with this terrible look on his face. After the show that night, we found out that someone had used the outhouse earlier that day all over the instruments! From then on we had to padlock it during the day.

(Interview, Dec. 1989).

The “set” remained constant from the first performance to the last, with a few pieces needing only a new coat of paint every few years. It was sparse, consisting of a back wall, actually the front of the cabin, with entrance doors on either end and a large “barn door” opening in the middle. A masking wall, painted like an interior wall, stood behind the barn doors. An olio curtain dropped approximately six feet in front of the closed barn doors.

Andy Miller, the artist and designer for Silver Dollar City, originally designed the olio. It displayed advertisements from local merchants, but unlike the traveling shows that repainted the olio for each community, the Hellers made theirs somewhat permanent, as it was painted once every ten years or so when the curtain began to show too much wear. As in vaudeville, the Hellers’ olio curtain was an important part of the show. The olio was used to signify the beginnings and ends of acts, bits, and scenes, to mask the scene changes, and as a prop in the show itself. The dropping of an olio curtain cut many a cameo number short. It brought the house down just as the giant hook had in vaudeville. The olio also served an important function during the crossover routine. Crossovers were short jokes used to open the second act. Characters would enter from behind the olio and “crossover” or cross in front of the straight man (Toby) when the joke was completed, then exit behind the opposite side of the olio.

Few set changes occurred because there was never much of a set to change. Usually, changes involved raising or lowering the olio curtain, turning the pictures on the masking wall over to reveal new pictures for the second act, and adding or subtracting various set pieces. These pieces consisted of a few chairs, cutouts, and a potentially confusing array of 75 to 100 hand props brought on by actors at various points in the show. The set pieces and props virtually remained fixed, as evidenced by the Sears Catalog used as an outhouse prop at the time of my employment, dated Summer, 1974.

The auditorium began as an open air space that seated 300 people on wooden benches. Because rainouts, a term used to denote the cancellation of a performance due to rain, occurred regularly, the company roofed the audience area as the theatre became more

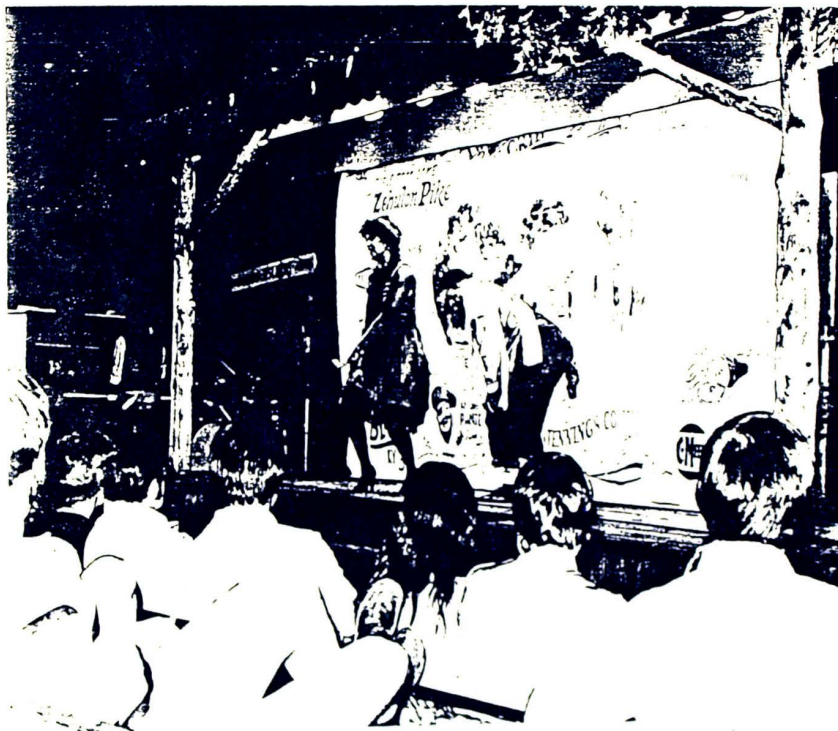


Figure 3. View of the Corn Crib Theatre Including Bandstand and Olio

established and revenues improved. Unfortunately, the roof did little to stop rainouts. Like the early troupers, the Hellers' company had many problems with rain. I remember when we had a "blowdown" of our own. As another actress and I were standing backstage putting on our make-up, everything suddenly got deathly quiet. The loosely-slatted floor of the make-up area stood above a "basement," used to store scenery, that had no back wall. Suddenly, the wind came up, my dress flew over my head, and the worst storm of the summer broke loose. An audience had already gathered, so we took them and ourselves down to the storm cellar under Aunt Mollie's General Store beside the theatre. The storm blew over quickly and the theatre sustained little damage. It certainly gave the audience something to talk about when they got home. This occasion illustrates the relationships that developed between the audience and the players. At the time of the tent theatre, the audience would take the players into their homes; in the same spirit, we took the audience into ours. It created a unique relationship between the audience and the performers.

As with the rest of the operation, lights and sound were a very simple arrangement that developed out of convenience and lack of funds. The lighting system originated as a few instruments hung on trees at the back of the seating area which less than adequately lit the stage. Later, as the show progressed financially, the instruments grew to a number that sufficiently lit the acting area and the roof covering the seating area made a more convenient place to hang them. The sound system consisted of one microphone, an amp, and two speakers. The company used this audio arrangement to play taped music during the intermission and to amplify an unseen announcer's voice during special bits. Just as in the days of vaudeville, special effects were both unheard of and unnecessary because the comedy was the most important element of the show.

Another important facet of the physical theatre was costume. The Hellers' costume policies were very similar to the early Toby troupes'. In nearly all tent theatre, "every actor had to furnish a full and complete wardrobe unless he was called on to appear in a costume

play” (Mickel, 1974, 75). Just like the traveling actors, we were responsible for our own costumes, unless a special costume piece was required that Mollie had on hand. Like the Old Mill Players, early actors acquired their attire in bits and pieces and quite often this clothing was second hand. Though salaries were adequate for the time, in most companies, the expense of a new wardrobe was a financial strain. Mickel notes an interesting solution to this problem:

Society women often wore a new dress once or twice. The dress was still in almost perfect condition but could no longer be used. The woman would offer it to a re-sale shop rather than have it clutter up her wardrobe. An actress could acquire an astonishing array of gowns for a reasonable price from these shops (Mickel, 1974, 75).

Similarly, we searched for costumes in thrift stores or made our own from whatever we could find, unless there were hand-me-downs available from a prior actor. We were a little more fortunate, however, for we only performed one show, compared to the earlier rep companies who had performed several shows in one week.

Mollie was in charge of the wardrobe and insisted that costumes, in general, be cartoonish and always comic. Toby’s family and friends’ costumes were very homespun and colorful because these characters were the clowns of the show. Toby always donned the traditional straw hat, overalls, and freckles. The villain and his accomplice wore flashy “show biz” type costumes with the predominant color being black, symbolizing their inherent evil. The two musicians in the Heller’s show wore some type of matching jackets or vests over overalls to suggest a musical “group.”

This description of the physical theatre leads naturally to an examination of the performance theory, which is most significant to this work. A Toby show can virtually be performed anywhere, but the central ideas must remain constant. A Toby show must, aside from being funny, illustrate the concept of “mother, home, and heaven.” The Hellers’ show successfully accomplished this task with a somewhat different structure than

that utilized by earlier Toby shows. The paragraphs that follow compare the business and theatrical policies used by Shad and Mollie Heller to those of the earlier Toby shows. The two eras are quite similar in some respects, but that should be expected since Shad drew from his varied theatrical experiences to create this new Toby show.

A season with the Hellers' show was much more abbreviated than a stand with the earlier Toby shows, which ran four to five months with a repertory of seven shows per seven nights' run. A typical run with the Hellers consisted of one show per night, six nights per week each season. A season consisted of three summer months, running from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend. Attractions in the Branson area usually operated on this seasonal time frame because that region is a blue collar tourist belt and that particular time period seemed to be when most companies gave their employees vacation time. As Branson grew in popularity, the seasons progressively expanded, but Shad and Mollie's show schedule did not. They continually employed the three month season through 1987, by which time most attractions were running at least six months. As the seasons were getting longer, Shad and Mollie were aging and they could endure only three months of days at the Silver Dollar City and nights at the Toby Show. This was somewhat of a relief to the actors, too. Since Branson is a seasonal employment area, an actor had to work two to three jobs per summer in order to save enough money to live on unemployment in the winter. Towards the end of the season, the conclusion of one job was a pleasant, though less prosperous, eventuality.

Like many of the early traveling companies, we worked as contract labor, mainly because it made the bookkeeping and tax work easier on Mollie. She insisted on doing all the bookwork. The Hellers paid \$25.00 per show on a weekly basis. As mentioned earlier, rainouts were a problem even with the roof over the seating area, so the Hellers developed a rain policy. If the first act was interrupted by rain, the audience got their money back. If the first act was completed before the rain drove the patrons away, the

audience was charged, which meant that the actors got paid. Though the amount seems meager, the experience the actors inherited was worth a fortune.

Along with many of his other policies, Shad founded his advertising strategies on the early traveling companies. The Hellers used the olio to advertise area business in exchange for a small fee and a good word to tourists about the show. They advertised in the newspapers, and used posters and fliers, but most significantly, the Hellers, like the early troupers, intermingled with the townspeople. Just as the early frontmen would come into a town and congregate with the residents, the Heller cast would associate with the tourists in the area. Shad carried his “atmosphering” policy from his early experiences over to his show. We found this association a good way to preview the show. We would go to resorts, malls, or even to the streets to do bits of the show and “bond” with our prospective audience. Actually being able to meet the characters and see part of the show seemed to generate the most attendance. Like the early shows, the Heller cast tried to discover information about people to incorporate into the show. This technique worked especially well with the many bus groups that were so fond of the Branson area. We would try to uncover the inside humor of the group and to discover who would be the most fun to pick on in the show. Not only did this routine generate immediate attendance, but it enhanced repeat business.

Shad and Mollie utilized tried and true methods to make the business part of the show successful, but most formidable were their artistic policies concerning the show itself. Primarily, the show always entertained the audience while retaining a moral within the humor. The show’s success was founded on Shad’s unique style of comedy. This style grew from his theatrical career. The comedy emerged from his experience and he modernized it to conform to contemporary audiences, but allowed it to retain an “old-timey” ambience. Like their ancestors, the Hellers’ Toby Show was a mixture of vaudeville, legitimate theatre, “mellerdrama,” circus, and a great deal of audience participation and fun. The olio and presentational style of acting used in *Hills a Poppin* came from vaudeville.

The first rule was to face the audience, especially on a punchline. The format of the show, the use of bits, the scenario we worked from, and the variety surrounding the plot also evolved from Shad's vaudeville experience. Additionally, according to Shad, legitimate theatre and formal training benefitted the Toby actor. Actors needed the basics of theatre, including concentration, breathing, and blocking techniques, to make them believable characters in a Toby show. Actors needed to know what "serious" drama was like in order to parody that style successfully. Shad used "Mellerdrama," a term that signifies a type of exaggerated dramatization and gesture, to emphasize the melodramatic plot lines of the show and provide an extreme to heighten the comedy. He drew from his circus experience to teach his actors improvisation and to create the clown-like characters in his Toby show.

We learned from Shad and Mollie by watching them at work. Shad's own characters' growth urged his actors to be creative in their characters' advancement. His students perceived his past within each wonderful character that he created. His clown, Shellshock, mentioned earlier, grew principally from his days in the circus, when he played a mute tramp clown, and out of his work with the mirror and pantomime. Shellshock then evolved into a similar character that he made famous, known as Mr. Posey. Posey was Shad's Toby Show character. He was a lovable, childlike, mute tramp. Just like Shellshock, Posey would usually wander into scenes doing something silly, interrupt the show, and botch things up for the other characters. He was so lovable that the audience did not mind the intrusion. In fact, his entrance delighted them. Shad showed us through example that it was imperative that the audience love each character, even the villains, in order for the show to be successful. The most outstanding example of this philosophy occurred near the end of the show when Posey would walk up to Toby at the point when Toby was about to do the "best act ever" and whisper something in his ear. Toby would say, "You mean the reason you haven't talked all night is because no one gave you your cue?" Posey would nod "yes." Then Toby would cue him, "Tell us about the Shepherd." Shad would do a beautiful and innocent version of the Twenty-Third Psalm that would



Figure 4. Shad Heller as Mr. Posey

bring the audience to tears. His strategy was very clever. Not only did they find love out of their frustration with him, but after an entire evening of hilarity, Shad would offer a turning point, going from hilarity to tears to joy. Further, the Psalm lent the show variety and reinforced the “mother, home, and heaven” philosophy so necessary to the Toby show. An audience member illustrated this point best when he said, after a show one evening, “I laughed. I cried. I certainly got my money’s worth!” Perhaps that is why the Hellers had so much repeat business.

The script, or plot, for the original Hellers’ show came from a collaboration between Shad and an actor who worked with him in the Rockaway vaude review, Pat Carrithers. Shad wanted to keep some of the elements of the Rockaway show, namely the villain, Bates, and the ingenue/vamp, Lillian Dumas; both originally came from a melodrama, *Our Gal Sal*. Shad thought that script could be combined with an old vaudeville classic that he thought could be revamped called, *Aaron Slick From Punkin Crick*. This effort resulted in the first *Hills a Poppin* script, which contained a thin plot comprised of several subplots. Toby and his family wanted to get into show business and two city slickers just happened to have come down for a vacation. During this furlough, Bates thought that he had found oil on a back pasture on Toby’s farm so he attempted to swindle the “dumb hillbillies” out of their land. In the end, the slickers bought the land from Toby only to find that the place where they thought they had found oil was where Toby had been changing the oil in the Model A. Toby and his family took all of his new found wealth and went back to city with the villains to be in show business. As in earlier Toby shows, Toby accomplished this happy ending through honesty and integrity. Bates’ greed was his own undoing.

All sorts of songs, variety acts, and comedy ran through this simple plot. Whereas previous Toby shows presented a plot interrupted by comic bits by Toby and variety-acts during intermissions, the Hellers reversed this formula, offering audiences a variety show interrupted by plot segments. The Hellers’ script featured a series of bits that would

change in order nightly, which is why the Hellers' show operated on a scenario basis. A large sign, posted backstage, informed the cast what bit to perform and in what order. Changing the order of the non-plot bits seemed to give both show and cast spontaneity.

Audience participation was one of the most important elements of the show. Shad scripted the musicians to instruct the audience to boo and hiss at the villain and to "hooray" for the hero. That was the first and last spoken direction given to audience members, from then on it was an improvised show. To encourage audience response, a specific theme music or bit accompanied each character's entrance, and each would produce their own audience response. The vamp would enter with swaying hips accompanied by bass drum beats and be greeted with whistles. Sally would enter on high trills to be met with "Aaaahs." Zenus, the clown, usually entered doing something silly and confronted with laughter. Audience participation made the patrons feel as though they were part of the show, which in turn caused a special relationship between the audience and the characters. Audiences used to a "fourth wall" in legitimate theatre were delighted to participate in The Toby show because it broke down that wall and encouraged them to interact with the players.

The Hellers printed script was very similar to the older traveling show in that both often used "sides" instead of a full script. A "side" is a printed version of one role, comprised only of the character's lines and cue lines. Whereas this device originally protected the playwright's work, the Hellers used it more for the sake of convenience. A new bit that required a written script usually included two to three actors. In the days before computers, it was far easier to handwrite a side for these performers than a whole script.

A comparison of the older Toby shows to the Hellers' production highlights one puzzling difference between them, the fact that Toby was not the comedian in the latter. In the older Toby shows, besides being smarter than he looked and always duping the villain, Toby was the comic relief, the clown of the show. In the Heller's show, Toby duped the villain, was smart, but was more of a straight man. The Hellers added another character,

Toby's "dumb brother, Zenus" as the comic relief. This change was a complete turn away from early Toby philosophy and the greatest contrast found between the Hellers' and the early shows. When asked why this happened and where the idea for the character came from Shad said, "Because we hired Wayne." Wayne Milness, a very creative, very funny comedian and mime, played Zenus for over ten years. His complete silliness helped to lend Toby more credibility and give him more control. Shad said that he always formed the show around the available performers so that when he hired Wayne he found this new character.

Once Shad cast his show, he taught his actors by example. He coached his students without their knowing what he was doing. He refined our natural ability by training us be aware of everything that was going on around us, to be alert to audience response. He and Mollie were always around with an encouraging word and support. His directing techniques were subtle ones. Unfortunately, by the time I came to the Toby Show, Shad's health was deteriorating. He was not actually doing much of the directing per se, but was always around to support us and to encourage us to be creative. Jana Henlaben, a former Toby show actress, talked about Shad's directing style.

If one of the cast [came] up with an idea to put into the show, they just [went] to Shad and [said], 'Hey, I think this will work.' He always [allowed] us to try our ideas. And he [was] going to know if it [was] funny or not. He would never let just anything go into a show, but if it would pass, so to speak, he would let us do it. Shad always let us learn that way, by giving us freedom" (Newton, 257).

Shad always urged us to be witty, at the drop of a hat, by opening himself up for puns and gags. The day I interviewed Shad and Mollie was yet another test of my creativity. Before we began the interview I suggested that we all sit down. Shad said, "Surely, you're not tired all ready!" I saw that gleam in his eye and said, "Yes I am and don't call me Shirley." He was delighted and said, "Oh, you're quick." It was just a small moment,

but things like that always kept us on our toes. When you worked with an audience that responded freely, you needed to be on your toes!

Shad made his philosophy of comedy easy for us to understand. He lived by a few basic rules, one of which was, "If it works, milk it. If it doesn't, get out of it." He also stressed that it was necessary for the audience to love each character, even the city people. The insults that the villain hurled at the audience would never have worked if the audience disliked him. He told us that you had to establish a personal relationship with the audience in order to know how to read and control the situation. He showed us how to play frustration instead of anger because anger is not funny. Most importantly, he stressed timing. Comic timing is a difficult concept and a skill that only comes with a little natural ability and a lot of practice. Shad recognized the ability and provided us with the practice.

The rehearsal period was like nothing I had ever encountered, though it was very similar to the traveling companies' policies. The first year that I did the Hellers' show with a completely new cast and script, we rehearsed eight times of no more than three hours per rehearsal. The second year we rehearsed three times. Since the show incorporated such an extended run, the Hellers concluded that we would get it right sooner or later. And since the show contained such a large amount of improvisation, it would be pointless to rehearse too much. Later in the run, new bits were added minutes before a show and would be penciled in on the scenario. The cast was usually given the actual bit by example. Shad or the acting director would tell us the dialogue and instruct us as to how the bit should be done. We would then practice the new bit a few times before that particular night's performance. The entire run was a rehearsal in a sense, for each show was different. By the second year, we were becoming a true ensemble. We seemed to know what to expect from each other in particular situations. We had also become good friends. There was some animosity between a few actors in our cast and that seemed to hinder us as far as working as a team. The previous cast had been very close and I believe were a little more successful because of their relationship with each other.

Shad had always wanted a place where young actors could learn. Therefore, there was a parade of young actors in and out of the Corn Crib. Since Shad used whom he had, many new characters were added and old ones taken away from the show. During the most successful period of the Hellers show, however, there were five main characters, two musician “cousins,” and Shad and Mollie. The cast seemed to be divided between Toby’s family and friends (good), and the city people (evil).

The main character was Toby. In the older shows, Toby had been the Harlequin, controlling the pace and direction of the show. He was often inserted into an existing script because his character was so popular. Toby was written into the Hellers’ show, however, as the main character. Having another character to do the really ridiculous material made Toby a more believable smarter-than-he-looks hillbilly. Toby could do all the things that he needed to do, including controlling the show better, as a humorous straight man. In the Hellers’ show, Toby was the announcer. He introduced the bits. Toby was seldom a red-head in the Hellers’ show because Shad thought a red wig was not necessary, but he always donned the freckles and that, along with the costume, seemed to give him the homespun look Toby was famous for.

One important member of Toby’s entourage was his girlfriend, known in the Heller’s show as Sweet Sally. She was not in the original Heller script, but was later added as they found an actress to play her. The more well known Toby troupes had a Sally, Susie, or Cindy. She was always very sweet, innocent, and dumb. She continually tried to get Toby to notice her, often taking instruction from the vamp as to how to get a man. She added nice subplots between herself and the villains. The villain was always trying to make advances toward her. This worked nicely with the homespun philosophy that city people were always evil; it also added a melodramatic aspect. The Hellers’ “Sally” was very similar to many early Toby troupes except that the Hellers’ Sally was always pretty. One famous Susie was Caroline Schaffner, mentioned earlier, of the Neil Schaffner troupe, who played Susie as rather homely female version of Toby.

Zenus was the favorite character in *The Toby Show*. He provided the comic relief. He was the clown, wearing big pants, long underwear, and floppy shoes. In the history of the Hella's show, there were only two Zenuses, Wayne Milness, who played the part for 15 years, and Rick Giles, who played "Hoover" for the last two years. Possibly Zenus and Posey combined operated as the early Toby shows' G-String character mentioned previously in this work. It is difficult to assume exactly what the G-String was other than a senile, ridiculous old man, but both Zenus and Posey seemed to possess similar character traits. The Zenus character always frustrated the villain, which added to the hilarity as one so silly could aggravate the so-called intelligent city slicker. He was also a bungler who would interrupt each bit with a joke, or some type of slapstick bit.

Bates, the villain, was the antagonist of the show. He followed the typical, melodramatic stereotype. He thought he knew it all and "greed" was his middle name. He would hurl insults at the audience, which would make them boo, hiss and double over with laughter. He set the audience response into motion. In the early shows there was usually some kind of "heavy," but not nearly so melodramatic as Bates. His stereotypical portrayal gave the modern audience something that they could relate to, the evil villain with the black top hat and cape.

The vamp was usually less jaded than the villain. She always seemed to have some morals and common sense. She would often remark, "I don't think those hillbillies are as dumb as they look, Bates." She was more important in the Hella's show than she seemed to be in the earlier shows. Many of the earlier scripts called for a "female heavy," an ambiguous term. The Hella's used this character to buffer the "evil" of the villain.

Shad and Mollie played two characters that were not part of the plot, wandering in to do various bits. Shad played his famous Mr. Posey, discussed earlier, and Mollie her Aunt Kate. Aunt Kate was an aging Madame who came to the hills from St. Louis to visit her nephew, Toby. She was a "man-chaser" who would annoy the men in the audience, much to their partner's delight. There was a small subplot surrounding these two



Figure 5. Mollie Heller as Aunt Kate

characters that seemed to mimic the Toby-Sally relationship. Kate would chase Posey and he would spurn her until the very end, when they would wind up together.

The musicians, usually identified as Toby's cousins, consisted of a pianist and a drummer. That seemed to be all that was necessary, a pianist to accompany and to provide fill music and a drummer to do rim shots. Shad would have liked a larger ensemble, but he did not have the finances nor the room on stage for more than two. These people were expected to develop characters in addition to providing music because they also did some comic bits and dialogue. Music was a very important part of the Hellers' show. Ragtime music, especially, seemed to create the necessary atmosphere. It seemed to put the audience into the right frame of mind for a show filled with silly songs and musical numbers.

Throughout the years of the show, Shad and Mollie used many new people to understudy the main roles. They encouraged these newcomers to take on other responsibilities around the settlement so that they could be near the show and its cast. He thought that they too could learn by watching, by example. He felt that they could experience more by "doing," so they were urged to create and perform cameo roles when they were not acting as understudies. His whole world at the Corn Crib revolved around nurturing young actors. The fact that a single main cast populated the show for so many years frustrated Shad's idea of the Corn Crib as a place where new, young actors could learn. That soon changed.

When I became involved with the Toby Show as an actress, Shad had just had a stroke and Mollie was suffering from cataracts. They were not involved with the show very much. Because of their health, a cast that had been with them too long, and other local business problems, Shad felt that a brand new cast and show were in order. When Silver Dollar City began, the area was a quaint tourist spot with one or two country music shows and recreation centering on the surrounding lakes. By the time I was in the Toby Show, Branson had grown to become a commercial quagmire of twenty-five music shows, hundreds of motels, highways that could not support the traffic flow, and "big city"

money. Shad and Mollie could not compete with Roy Clark, Mel Tillis, and others and their multimillion dollar theatres. Because of the growth of entertainment in that area, Branson began attracting a different genre of tourists. These people wanted to see famous country music stars, not local shows. It rather follows the storyline of a Toby show, the city slickers came and took the business away from the locals. Possibly, that is why the Toby show was always so popular with the locals. They hoped that good would triumph over evil. The natives could not support the show, however, because they were all working during the summer at city businesses and could not attend The Toby Show. Shad also “comped” most local people, making those revenues nonexistent.

Besides the rapid growth of competition in the area, the Toby Show had been declining financially for a few years prior to 1985. Shad and Mollie thought that by giving the show a face lift they could attract more people. There were always fans who came to the show year after year, but they also needed the walk-in business to supplement income. They decided to hire a whole new cast and write a new script. Not only would this give the show freshness, but they would be able to coach new, young actors. This helped but also hindered the show, because the regulars supported their favorite characters and suddenly those actors were gone.

The same characters were employed, but in a completely new script. It contained the same basic plot line, Toby won in the end, but the names, faces, and places had changed. Rick Medlen, then the pianist and director, collaborated with Wayne Milness to write a new script dealing with country music. Branson is a big county music center and they felt that that particular subject would cause an increase in attendance. The two villains, named Bates and Roxy Lame`, this time from Nashville, had come to the country for a vacation. They overheard Toby and his girlfriend singing and tried to get them to sign a contract to come to Nashville to be stars. The contract, of course, gave all of their earnings to the villains. In the end, Toby switched the contracts and ended up with all

the villains' money. The whole family went to Nashville with Roxy and Bates to be in show business.

When the show changed, Shad and Mollie were recovering from unforeseen illnesses. Because of this, they were unable to star in the show until the end of the first season. This not only hurt attendance, because many of the regulars came to see Shad and Mollie, but without their leadership and presence, the show was doomed.

Many people speculated that the show closed because that particular type of comedy was falling from popularity. That was not the cause of the Toby Show's demise. Watch Saturday morning television or primetime sitcoms; it is the same comedy that the Toby shows founded upon. The show's and the area's changes caused the problems. The attendance fell and there was not financial backing available to help the Heller's continue the tradition.

All of us who were raised in the Ozarks hated to see the show close, but even more distressing is that the Wilderness settlement is slated to be torn down in the summer of 1991. With it exits the last remaining genuine Ozark craftsplace and show. That is the last of old Branson. Towns move on and someday the Roy Clark complex will be a fond memory to someone. For many of the natives, the Wilderness settlement will be sorely missed.

So, it is my mission by choice to reintroduce this American stage style to the public, to continue this vital tradition. I took my background from Shad and expanded it. I took basic elements of his scripts and changed them to suit my cast. He had the timely experience of all of those types of entertainment that I lacked. I took everything I learned from the Hellers and built on it just as Shad had taken everything he had experienced from the old days and built on it. This work is not a sequel or history of Toby shows, nothing so finite. Rather, it is an on-going process with the intent to perpetuate this art form. The next chapter outlines my continuation of the most popular American stage style.

CHAPTER FOUR

Toby 1990

This final chapter is about the last, hopefully continuing, Toby show in America, the Hard Corn Players production of *How Now White Cow or You Can Put Your Shoes in the Oven, But That Don't Make Them Biscuits!* first performed at Austin Peay State University, December 8 and 9, 1990; and its conception. Some personal history will help to explain the motivation behind this production and the present academic work.

All of my life, I have been obsessed with Toby, possibly I should say that Toby has haunted me all my life. I assume this fixation began with my attendance at the Hellers' shows as a child. It continued as I attended the University of Missouri in Columbia where, coincidentally, my advisor happened to be Dr. Larry D. Clark, the first to author a dissertation about Toby Shows. While there, I chose the Toby Shows as a topic for my senior research paper; I considered nothing else. Upon graduation, I returned to the Branson area and became involved with the entertainment community, where I finally fulfilled a dream by becoming a member of the Heller's cast. After the company closed, I moved to Illinois, where I worked as an actress and began to write a Toby script. While there, I decided it was time to pursue graduate school. Strangely enough, when I was a teenager, I had planned on going to graduate school, and furthermore, eventually write my thesis about Toby shows. Moreover, I had planned to write a Toby show and produce it. It seems, somehow, that carrying on this Toby tradition is, forgive the cliché, my destiny.

This chapter will present descriptions of the formulation of the project, the rehearsal period, the production itself, and end with post-production thoughts from the cast and myself. It will be helpful, at times, to refer to the script contained in Appendix A.

The script is composed of a series of numbered "bits," each one a small sketch within the confines of the act, sometimes advancing the plot and sometimes having nothing to do

with its action whatsoever. Some bits define what is referred to as a “running gag.” These particular bits share a basic premise, but use different characters or subjects in each instance. These running gags are also numbered separately for simplicity’s sake. I must also note that this is a complete script. Some bits in the script did not appear in my production for various reasons, which will be discussed at a later point in this work.

A few theatres have approached me asking for permission to produce this play. That is why the script is complete and why there are so many “fill-in-the-blanks.” Someone who is not familiar with this form of theatre might not otherwise know to “fill in” names and places familiar to their audiences.

Finally, keep in mind that though this is a chronological discussion of this project, many of the facets of my production happened at the same time. I was not prepared for what or how things would occur. This project and this academic work were absolute learning experiences for me.

I began this script while working as a resident actress at a dinner theatre in Illinois. A fellow actress was successfully writing and producing children’s shows both at the dinner theatre and in Chicago. We discussed my Toby fascination, my dream to write and produce a Toby show and she encouraged me to begin writing this script. She motivated me to begin to make my dream into a reality. I finished the plot outline and most of the bits for the first act in while there in 1988.

I deliberated over the plot line for quite some time before writing bits for the show. There were so many things to consider. Primarily, I wanted to do a show more similar to the Hellers’ than to the original Toby shows, one that contains more vaudeville than the earlier scripts. I wished to keep the show as historically accurate in theme as possible, but also to make it entertaining for a modern audience, and I believed it would take something with more vaudeville in it to accomplish that. The main idea needed to be simple, yet include a twist to the end; and still incorporate the central theme of “good triumphs over evil.” I tried to recall the plots in the various Heller shows as groundwork, but I did not

want to copy them. The plot had to be rural and concerned with hillbillies. I wanted to use the basic characters that the Hellers used because I was familiar with them, but to change the names to suit my show. I had to keep in mind the simple traits that these stock characters embodied; the villain's greed and Toby's goodness and honesty.

I began actual work on the script by asking myself, "What do you associate with hillbillies?" All of those ridiculous post cards came to mind depicting Ozark life that shops around Branson sold to tourists, cards that represented the typical Ozark family as lying around the pig pen in tattered clothing. Images such as corn, cows, pigs, moonshine, shacks, poverty, and bare feet emerged. Those cards became the genesis of my show. I wanted to stay away from the dominant images that the Hellers had utilized, so I began by making a list of related items. Instead of using pigs as the Hellers had, I wrote down cows, and so on until I came up with a few images that I could use. My simple list consisted principally of cows, moonshine, and corn. I put these things in the back of my mind and finally the silly idea came to me while onstage in the middle of the second act of "Not Now, Darling:" a cow that gives spiked milk.

I worked with that thin plot line until I came up with the story for the show. The villains, entertainers from New Orleans, have come to the hills for rest and relaxation, where they meet Toby's friends and family. One day, the villain takes a walk into the woods on Toby's farm and gets very thirsty. He happens upon Toby's brother, Sturgill, who is carrying buckets of milk that he had gotten from their cow, Lightning. When the villain drinks the milk, the "kick" almost knocks him down. Blinded by his greed, and with a little innocent misleading dialogue by Toby's brother, he comes to the conclusion that Lightning gives spiked milk (see Bit #11 - Pails). He justifies this ridiculous presumption by noting that the cow eats corn, and stands in "the muck and mire," which he assumes ferments the corn (see Bit #13 - White Lightning). The rest of the show deals with the villains trying to swindle Toby out of the cow in order to bottle the spiked milk and make a fortune.

To make the outcome of the show as deserving as it could be for the villain, I added two subplots. One dealt with Toby's family wanting to be in show business and their assumption that the villains could make them famous. Toby and his family know that there is an audience and are continually trying to do a show for them, but can never get to it because of all the interruptions. Throughout the show, Toby's dumb brother, Sturgill, tries to show the villains that he has talent (see Bits # 11, 26, 29). Sturgill consistently, innocently frustrates the villain. The second subplot concerned money. By the end of the show the villain has lost all of his money to Toby through his own greed. Toby and Sturgill had previously turned the villain's plan to swindle them into an opportunity for the family to go in New Orleans. They do this by ending up with all the villain's money through the running gag, which ends with Bit # 30, and through the purchase of the cow (Bit #32 - Stipulations). In the end, instead of loaning the villains money to go back to New Orleans, Toby takes them to New Orleans with him and his family. It is always important to make the villain the cause of his own undoing.

The plot originated in Illinois, so most of the locations cited in the original script related to the Peoria area. For example, the villains "came all the way from Chicago," instead of "New Orleans." Similarly, original Toby shows' producers changed the locations in the script to suit the area in which the show would be produced. I wanted to bring the story home to the audience as the earlier shows had with their frontmen. The script, I felt at the onset, had to be versatile enough to take anywhere. This became helpful because the show was finished and produced in Tennessee.

Writing bits for the show was the fun part. I watched old Marx Brothers movies, Burns and Allen shows, and miraculously recalled many old jokes from my past. I felt divided about stealing ideas. I wanted the show to be "my own." After discussing this dilemma with people familiar with my project, I came to the conclusion that everyone "steals" ideas. Authors acquire their ideas from other's ideas. I would not be "stealing," but borrowing

and expanding concepts to suit my show. I justified my actions by realizing that what I was doing was nothing compared to the actual play piracy of the heyday of Toby shows.

Since my show was a continuation of the Hellers' style, it was important to make sure that the plot was thin and surrounded with variety. The plot bits consisted of numbers: 1, 5, 11, 13, and 20 in the first act, then 22, 26, 32, and 35 in the second act. The storyline dictated the order of these bits. The running gags that consisted of the \$5.00 bit, numbers 2, 8, 25, 28, and 30; and Great Moments, numbers 4, 10, 19, 23, and 35 needed to be in an order that was the most efficient. All the other bits, except for the plot bits, were filler, so they could be arranged differently every night. I must note that this show was not written for one or two performances, but with the dream that it could become a long run of many weeks or years. Like the Heller's show, spontaneity is everything and being able to switch bits the filler bits helps the actors to keep the show fresh. The only requirement for these filler bits was that they had to further the characters; if they also happened to further the plot, so much the better. These bits need not be part of the action, but must support the main ideas, consistently reflecting the villain's greed, Toby's integrity, and so on.

In the beginning, I did not think about advertising the show, even though I knew in the back of my mind that I would probably not have a publicity person. Luckily, during the summer before the production of the show, I took a public relations class. The final project for this class required a public relations campaign for a real or fictitious company. I decided to base my project on my own Toby show. This forced me to name my company, create a theme for the advertisement of the show, prepare a press kit, and script various commercials. This proved very helpful because I realized that I would not have had time to direct, write, and worry about publicity. I went about the campaign as I had gone about deciding upon a plot line, by making a list and trying to come up with images that people would relate to. The first images I decided to use were a corn liquor jug, since the plot related to moonshine, and a picture of a hillbilly, suggesting Toby (See Figure 6).

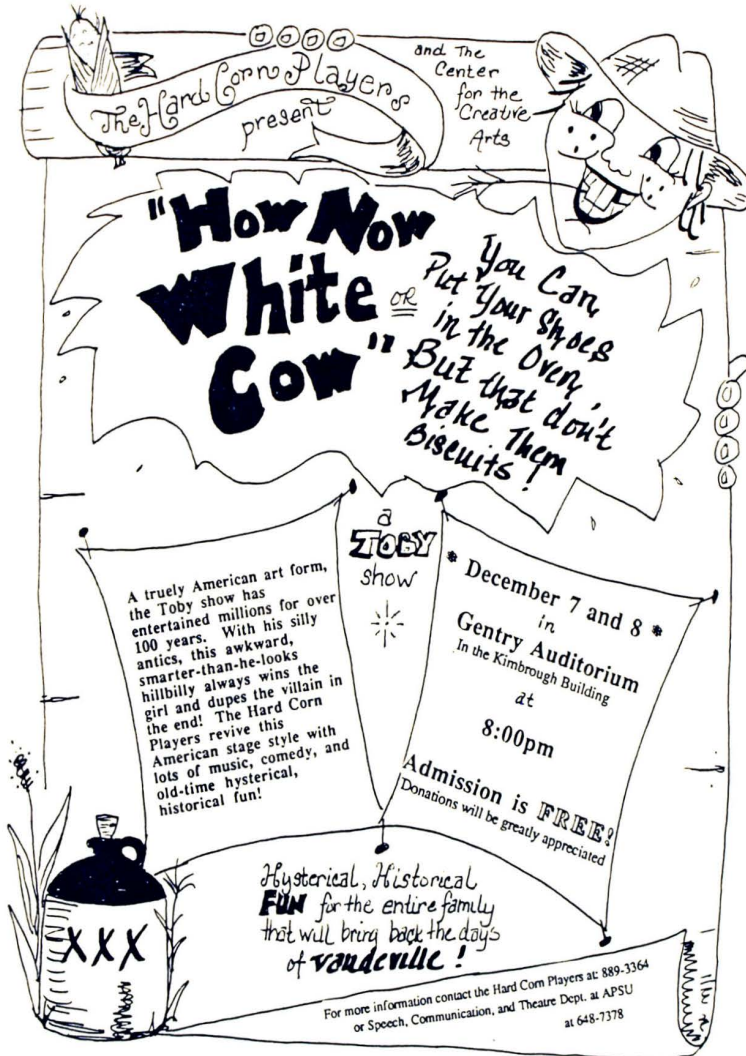


Figure 6. Flyer for *How Now White Cow*

While working with this campaign, the basic problem of doing a Toby show for a modern audience became even clearer to me. I needed to find something that I could put in my advertising that the patrons would be familiar with, since Toby shows have long since disappeared in the Southeast. I had previously considered basing my advertising on the *Hee-Haw Show*, which contained low, rural humor, but I feared that that particular association would discourage educated audiences. The *Hee-Haw Show*, to me, conveyed no presence of intelligence. Toby needed to possess an cleverness and knowledge that would shine through his rural character. Again, I decided that vaudeville was the closest thing that a modern audience could associate with a Toby show. Cable television stations broadcast re-runs of many vaudeville-type shows, such as *The Burns and Allen Show*, as well as programs that incorporated vaudeville into their show, such as *Laugh-In*, so modern audiences seem to be somewhat familiar with this genre of comedy. I incorporated the idea into my existing advertising campaign by promising that the show would “bring back the days of vaudeville.”

This reflective period helped me to focus the show and myself more strongly. Not only did it lead me to write bits for the show, but it revealed more things to consider about the show and the script. I came up with the key slogan, “hysterical, historical fun!” I thought that if I could show that this would be a learning as well as an entertainment experience, people would be further interested in seeing a piece of history come back to life and that, later, I could pitch the show to schools. In fact, I am now negotiating with a few schools that are interested in using the show for assemblies. To further this idea, I explained in my promotional literature that the troupe wanted to “reintroduce this American stage style” and how important it was that this type of show should not be lost to the American public.

I wanted to make publicity for the project historically accurate as well. I considered what the early frontmen would have used as advertising, always keeping in mind that I would have to back the entire show and my financial resources were slight. I thought about the Hellers and what forms of advertising had been most effective and cost efficient

for them. I narrowed my choices and finally decided that flyers, posters, the olio, and word of mouth would be the most effective forms of advertising that I could use. I had intended upon also using the olio to sell advertising spots to pay for the cost of the muslin. Unfortunately, due to the lack of time and finances, the olio was never completed.

Finally, personal experience told me that word of mouth is the most effective advertising technique. I had written extra bits to use for advertising purposes. I was hoping to visit area malls, parks, and social functions to present these cameo bits and encourage attendance to the forthcoming show. I never accomplished that part of the campaign, however, because of problems with some cast members' availability. Instead, we, as a cast, tried to talk about the show as much as we could wherever we happened to go. I still believe that, had we used these cameos, we would have greatly enhanced our attendance.

The last consideration prior to the actual production period was the music, though it is a very integral part of the show. I wanted to delay until I found the right musician, one who would hopefully help me through personal input. I wanted someone with a musical sense of humor. That "right person" did not appear and I did not have the time, or perhaps the ability, to write all original music for the show; so I relied upon silly songs that I had heard in previous shows and as a child. Rather than concentrating on a particular period, I sought tunes that would suit the bits while suggesting a "show" atmosphere. The drummer was particularly important because it was his job to execute the sound effects and the rimshots that accompany punchlines throughout the show. Rimshots add to the rhythm and pace of the show. They keep the comedy moving. The pianist's importance rested mainly in playing short cameos to signify the end of each bit. These small musical interludes were also useful when a blackout needed to be filled.

The time finally arrived to go into production. I define "production" as the period when work with actors and the technical effort began. I had already decided upon a rather unusual rehearsal schedule. Since it seemed that no performers in the area, with the exception of myself, knew what a Toby show was, much less had ever seen one, these

actors would need familiarization as well as rehearsal. I had previously talked to many people in the theatre department at Austin Peay and discovered the students had little experience with the type of improvisational theatre that a Toby show required. With these needs in mind, I set up a twelve-week rehearsal period. The first eight weeks were reserved for one night per week meetings to do improvisational exercises and to brainstorm about bits for the show. I wanted the actors to be a part of the creative process. The last four weeks would be a more typical rehearsal period, consisting of three to four nights per week. Of course, nothing ever works out according to plan.

I had tried devise a feasible director's philosophy prior to the rehearsal period. Typically, when I direct, I like to act as the "queen." I encourage suggestions, but reserve the right to make the final decision about any particular dilemma. I operated on the same basic premise, except that the script was not complete and I needed the actors' help and cooperation to finish it. Thus, I had to be a little more open to suggestion than usual, though when it came to questions about acting philosophies, I was fairly strict. I adopted this attitude because I was the only person involved in this project with any Toby show experience. The cast members proved very accommodating to this style of direction.

I tried to communicate the basic qualities that I was looking for in a Toby show actor. Primarily, I wanted them to be professionals. I desired a commitment from them to the project. The cast was expected to be on time for rehearsals and to take the project seriously. I told them that though rehearsals would be work, the fun would come, especially in performance. Second, I wanted them to love this Toby genre at least half as much as I did. I realize now that that was asking a great deal of them but, happily, I believe that a few of them accomplished this task.

I did not want to color their performance by my experiences in past shows. I did not want them to do it as "we did it." I had to constantly remind myself of this fact. It was very difficult, however, to achieve the characters that I wanted without creating models for the actors. Though my training told me it was a violation of the number one rule of

directing, there were times when imitating me became necessary. This mostly involved the pacing of certain bits. The performers had no idea that their cues should be so tight and that the rhythm of the show needed to be carefully orchestrated in order to achieve maximum comedy potential.

As the rehearsal period progressed, a number of problems developed. I must preface this section about the rehearsal period by saying that the show turned out better than I could have hoped for and that the many problems we encountered only helped to make us stronger as a unit. The problems referred to in the following section are concerned chiefly with the nontechnical aspects of the show.

I do not believe that I failed to communicate to the cast my expectations of them as actors, but just that some of the actors were not dedicated people; not bad people by any means, just not dedicated to this show. I had difficulty getting these particular cast members to attend rehearsals. I tried every motivational technique that I had been trained to use in these cases. My basic problem was that I had nothing "material" to motivate them with. I could offer no pay, no grade; I could only offer my pledge to try to continue the company in the spring. I finally had to recast three weeks before production, which left me with one problem actor. This necessity reduced the number of rehearsals devoted to improvisation from eight to four. We had a total of ten full rehearsals before opening night, including one dress rehearsal. Though I had had very few rehearsals in my experience with the Hellers, I had grown up with this kind of comedy. These people had never experienced any thing like it. I grew stressful, which began to become apparent, though I tried to contain it. I resorted to threatening to cancel the project, but was not very believable in that statement. I finally got through to the problem actor when the cast read the director's note as they were proofing the programs (See Figure 7). They understood that this was very important to me and that I did believe in them. Sometimes it takes a "sympathy" attack to get through to actors, who are historically emotional people. I must make the comment that three cast members were particularly loyal and accomplished a great

The PLAYERS

* in order of appearance *

Pete

Burton Rayborn

Repete

Dawn L. Niceley

Toby T. Taylor

Ric Kerr

Hailly S. Darkheart

Scott Hutchinson

Ida Clare

Lydia Ledding

Sweet Suzy

Falicia Hart

Sturgill

Mike Miller

Place: Somewhere in the Hills

Director's Note:

I cannot begin to express my appreciation to all of those individuals who helped create this Toby show. They have made a dream come true. Since the closing of Shad and Mollie Heller's show in Branson, MO, I have dreamed of continuing this fine tradition of showmanship. Throughout the many seasons of the Old Mill Players I found as an actress, strength; as an audience member, delight. I would like to dedicate this production to Shad and Mollie Heller as a small token of my gratitude for their patience, teaching, and kindness; to continue the Toby that they love so well. And with this show, if you receive even a fraction of the bliss that it has provided me - I am content.

Figure 7. Director's Note

deal in terms of the script and characterizations. It is interesting that the problem actor's surprising last moment commitment grew out of the experience gained on opening night. This person is now a driving force in the desire to continue this show.

I hypothesized that some type of improvisational instruction, during the rehearsal process, would be required because these actors had no experience with this particular type of comedy. Luckily, I cast individuals of considerable natural wit and ability. I had previously been involved with directors who used "theatre games" to form a more cohesive unit. These games usually dealt with exercises in trust and pantomime. I did not think those types of exercises useful to this type of comedy. Instead, techniques that would exercise quick wit and characterization proved more effective. For example, I used a game called "party" that I found in an old theatre notebook. Each person drew a slip of paper containing a descriptive word such as "bug, poet, James Bond," etc. They then imitated this word. I would be the host of the party and the actors would have to make me guess what they were by using dialogue and action. This, I believe, helped them to come up with the broad characters most useful in this type of comedy. As every director knows, it is easier to pull a very broad actor back than it is to push a narrow one ahead. Another game we used, called "Author," came from an improvisational English game show entitled, "Who's Line Is It Anyway?" Each person would pick an author that they wanted to imitate, such as, Poe, Sidney Sheldon, or the person that writes the "Dick and Jane" series. I would give them a subject and they would tell a progressive story using that particular author's style. This game helped the actors to think quickly and sharpened their sense of comedy.

During the rehearsal period, we worked many hours on characterization. The actors had no idea what I wanted from them; and it was difficult for me to know where to begin to communicate to them something that was so deeply ingrained in me. I could not take for granted that I had grown up with this kind of comedy. I told the cast at one point that I would love to take them to Silver Dollar City for twenty minutes to show them what type of

characters I was looking for. I had a video tape of earlier Heller Toby shows, but I did not want to use it because I did not want the performers to imitate other actors. I wished the characters to come from somewhere inside them; otherwise they would not have been believable, and believability in broad comedy is essential. I tried to nurture their characters by suggesting broad character types from cartoons, which utilize a similar type of humor. That seemed to work. When asked later how they came up with their characters, they said they used my basic suggestions and expanded upon them. For example, the villain in my show based his character on a cross between Snidely Whiplash (cartoon character) and Milburn Drysdale (of *The Beverly Hillbillies*), focusing on the greed and evil aspects of the villain character. Like the audience, the cast needed to find something modern to relate to.

At the same time that the actors were working on characters, they were laboring on the comedy style. I tried to help the performers understand the required type of humor by suggesting some related types of comedy that they could identify with. Some of us watched Marx Brothers movies together and that was an approximation, but the dialogue was a little too intellectual for a Toby show. The Marx Brothers movies, however, did help them to grasp the “slapstick” aspect of Toby. I urged them to watch Burns and Allen to get an idea of the vaudeville delivery style. Delivering punch lines “to” an audience is difficult for the realistic actor to get used to. The cast found this very difficult and I assured them, from personal experience, that once you do vaudeville for a while, it is difficult, later, NOT to face the audience on an important line in a straight play. In addition, I suggested that they watch the old Loony Tunes cartoons and the *Pee Wee Herman Show*. Those were the closest modern shows I knew that would help them to understand the concept of Toby’s comedy. In the end, they all did very well. When I asked them how they came to understand the type of comedy that I wanted from them, they could not give me a definite answer. I think they simply grew into the show.

Another problem associated with this kind of comedy was that the performers were very used to working with a “fourth wall.” Vaudeville style comedy breaks down that barrier.

Some of the actors were more uncomfortable with this inevitability than others. I feared what would happen the first time someone in the audience shouted something at the cast. Would they freeze? I could not prepare the actors for this in rehearsal. I knew that the cast would only learn how to handle this ordeal by working with an audience. I asked my faculty sponsor to come to see our progress midway through the rehearsal period, to react to them so that they would know, in a small way, what to expect. He did a wonderful job and, in the process, he helped me to gain an idea of which bits would work. I was getting as paranoid about the project as the actors were about the comedy and their characters.

The performers contributed several bits that appeared in the final script. They brought bits to me, throughout the rehearsal period, that they wanted to try. The "Math Bit," Bit #15, was a bit that one of the actors knew from an Abbott and Costello film, which we adapted to our show. We also brainstormed on a section of the script called, "Great Moments in World History (Bits 4, 10, 20, 24, 36). Several of these were written by the cast. On the other hand, there were a few bits in the script that the cast did not want to perform (Bits number 14, 17, 18) because they thought them "stupid" and felt "stupid" doing them. These bits were successful, I knew, because I had used bits similar to them in previous shows. What they did not realize was that these particular bits were the most difficult, in terms of timing, in the entire script, especially Bit #14 - George and Gracie. I allowed them to drop Bits 14 and 18 because it was becoming late in the rehearsal period and it would have taken extra time, that we did not have, to perfect these bits. We needed the remaining time to polish the bits that they felt comfortable with. The actors agreed to perform Bit #18; perhaps because of the three, this was the least difficult. Bit #22 was also not attempted because we did not have a pianist that could accomplish this task; a problem that will be discussed later.

At the same time that we were having problems in rehearsal, I was having problems with the technical aspects of the show. Like Shad, I wanted an intimate space. Since the theatre department at Austin Peay had no smaller studio theatre, I had to look elsewhere. I

chose a small lecture hall in the business building. It had a warm, intimate atmosphere and seated 150 people; but it had no piano, a very small acting space, and was part of the business department. This department was very supportive and flexible in a situation that was foreign to them. The flurry of activity, the week before opening night, was somewhat disruptive to their rather quiet environment. The circumstances were alien to a theatre group as well. Because of the business class schedules, the set was put up and torn down every night. All the technical equipment involving lights, sound, and music was portable and had to be stored in a locked room at the back of the auditorium. This extra time and effort would not have been necessary in a theatre building, but the space and the support from the business department were well worth the small inconveniences.

I was lucky that Toby shows are very versatile, lend themselves to almost any environment, and need very little scenery. Since I funded all but \$125.00, generously given to me by the Center of Excellence for the Creative Arts, like the earlier companies, I was on a tight budget. My original design included flats to mask the back part of the room and provide a backdrop for the show. Ten feet in front of the flats was an olio curtain (See Appendix, p. 80). As stated earlier, I felt that the olio was an important element in a Toby show. I thought it would set an atmosphere and aid in scene changes. Due to the lack of time and money, I had to forgo the olio. With the help of Dr. Tom Pallen, the faculty sponsor of the show, I came up with a set that folded like a screen and acted as an olio and backdrop. This turned out to be the best choice, especially if the troupe decided to travel. This set lent itself nicely to the circular pattern involved with crossover jokes. It was very portable and all that the script required. Its only drawback was that it did not offer as many blocking choices as the original design. The olio would be a beneficial addition to the set later.

Akin to the set's simplicity, lights and sound required a modest arrangement. The lighting needs were basic; the audience needed to see the actors and the show needed a blackout. Those needs resembled the needs of the early Toby shows except, instead of

using a blackout, producers used a curtain. We borrowed a portable lighting system that was much more adequate than we required. The sound too was very elementary. Only background music was necessary, which I provided with my home stereo cassette system. Additionally, we borrowed a public address system that surprisingly, though noisy and decrepit, provided us with an “old-time” sounding amplification rather like an old Victrola, which we used to announce the Great Moments bits.

Like the other physical aspects of the show, costumes were very simple. I wanted the costumes to be bright and comical, but I did not want them to overshadow the comedy. I wanted the words and actions of the show to be the predominant element. I tended to think in terms of cartoons in the costume area as well. There were never required full costume changes, but rather changes in wigs, hats or other small costume pieces. Bugs Bunny never completely changed costume. The show did not have a specific period, but rather an atmosphere. I did not think the historical period was as important as finding costume types that the audience would associate with the stock characters, vaudeville, and the “hills.” The costumes’ period was sort of a cross between the 1880s and the depression era. This encompassed the heyday of Toby shows. Some of the costumes were borrowed from the theatre department; others I found or had made. The villains’ costumes had a showboat feel and tended to fall somewhere near the turn of the century. They had a coordinated color scheme, so that one would identify them as a showbusiness team. Toby and Sturgill symbolized what most people consider a hillbilly. They wore rural attire, such as overalls, tattered hats, and suspenders. Susie was a tad more “pretty” than a typical hill-type because I wanted to elicit the “ooh, aah” response. She wore a very rural, gingham “Sunday-go-to-meetin’” costume. The musicians wore “hillbilly” clothes with one matching piece, a vest, that would tie them together as a musical group. These choices created a cohesive “look” for the show.

The largest technical problem with the show was that it required a myriad of hand properties and costume pieces. Because of the small budget, I had to make almost all the

special pieces, which was an enjoyable adventure for me. Hand props in a Toby show should look “homemade” as if Toby and his family had made them out of the limited resources available. Since this was the case, the props were very successful within the confines of the show. For example, I made the beard for Moses and the wig for granny out of quilt batting; a choice justified by the fact that Toby’s family would have had quilting materials. Sturgillini’s (see Bit #37) turban was made from a horrid looking bath towel with old jewelry hanging from it. I tried to approach all problems realistically while making the properties as comical as possible.

As what most people call “tech week,” the week before opening night, approached we were still working bits and found ourselves with even more problems. Final exams fell the week after the show and everyone was very stressed, tired, and short of free time. Musicians, involved in preparations for their own required academic performances, became especially hard to find. Luckily, I had found a drummer earlier in the rehearsal period. As a last resort, had to cast myself as the pianist in order to rehearse the cast with the music, not to mention that if I were going to play, I too needed the rehearsal. I am sorry to say that I lost much of my objectivity due to this decision. I had to focus on the music too much to concentrate fully upon the cast. By that time, however, they seemed to understand the concept of the show, but because I had lost a part of my “control.” It was difficult for me to be certain that the cast would be successful in their characterizations. Later however, I came to the realization that it would have been impossible to polish this show completely since it involves audience participation and each performance has the necessary ingredients to become completely different.

During our only dress rehearsal, I felt that I needed to give the actors last minute advice. I could nit-pick no longer and felt that some general suggestions would be most beneficial. I told them three things. The first was never to use children or very reactive people in stooge numbers (Bit numbers 6, 16, 19, 27, 33, and 37) because they will steal the show. I suggested that they always try to find someone who would be embarrassed by the

number. I explained to them that they, as actors, had to be in control of the situation constantly. The first night they used a child, who ended up screaming, in one bit; and a theatre student who created his own play within our play in another. It was quietly humorous to me when the cast came to me after the show and said, "You were right." The next night they used an elderly, shy man and a shy woman, thus everything progressed like clockwork. Second, I passed on Shad's advice, "If it works, milk it; if it doesn't get out." The first night the timing on the WWF Bit # 18 was totally wrong and the bit bombed. However, when Susie and Darkheart realized they were at the point of no return, they got out of it quickly and in the next bit were able to bring the audience back up to the level that they rendered previously. The last and most important piece of advice that I gave to them was to enjoy themselves. That was the key to the whole project. If the performers have fun, the audience has fun for enjoyment is contagious.

Opening night was a wonderful success. Audience members told me that they had an extraordinary time. This helped me to overcome a previous paranoid delusion that this kind of comedy is dead. Those of this opinion that I had previously talked to, did not realize that that type of comedy is what adults watch on prime-time television and what children see on Saturday morning programs. I was also confronted with an argument that assumed that the whole premise was "too hokey." It is my philosophy that no matter whom you have become, if you were raised in the Midwest or South, you tend to believe, deep inside your being, that good really does triumph over evil. I think that there is a fundamental hope in all of us that things really do work out for the best, that you reap what you sow, and that morals serve a purpose. The comedy in this show is so "corny" that the "hokiness" of the premise is masked somehow. I could see and hear the audience and know that the show was successful in that respect. I did not know, however, if it was as good as the Heller's show or if I had missed the whole point. I was relieved to hear a friend, a veteran Silver Dollar City entertainer and a very critical source, say, "I'm surprised. They did a terrific job!"



Figure 8. The Cast of *How Now White Cow*

Personally, the cast's reactions to opening night on opening night made this whole project worthwhile. They were elated. The performers said that they had had the best time of their lives. I had previously explained to them that, to me, this type of show was addictive and that if I could choose to do any type of theatre, it would be a Toby show. Scott Hutchison, who played Darkheart, the villain, said, "You know, before tonight I thought, 'I can't wait to get this over with!'" But now I could do this for the rest of my life!" The cast agreed that they would very much like to continue this troupe and this show.

Looking back on this whole ordeal, I find an interesting metamorphosis of emotion that took place within myself. I started out very calm, composed, and confident and then turned very paranoid about my own abilities. I began to think that, as a director, I should be able to make the problem cast members dedicated. I took for granted that everyone who participated in a production made that production the most important thing in their lives. Working in professional theatre made alien to me the concept of being noncommittal. I felt helpless because there was no one to replace these problem actors. I finally came to the realization that I either had to use them or terminate the project. I first tried to explain to them that I, too, had final exams and I knew how they felt, but since committed to me, I expected the cast to be professional in their commitment. When that did not seem to work, I stated that I would cancel the project and, in my own mind, meant it. That seemed to do the job. After that declaration, I seemed to have much more cooperation. This incident should have encouraged me, but it did not. I finally became confident again only after the success of opening night.

Within my own mind, the actor versus director roles made this an interesting experience. Even though I was in classes with the performers and had the same problems that the actors did with free time, they expected me to be a superperson. They did not take into account that I could be under stress as well. Of course, we are all egotists, but I was

surprised that they viewed me so differently from themselves. Looking back, I see that was desirable since I had to command a leadership role.

Ultimately, every director, I assume, later thinks, "If I had it to do over again, I would have done things differently." I was no exception. Principally, I would have had a material motivation so that I could have had some leverage in casting. It was difficult to punish when I have nothing to take away. I needed more cooperation from the actors because we needed more time for creativity as a unit. I wanted more from the cast in terms of original script material. The rehearsal process is so important to those that have never dealt with that kind of theatre that I would make it a mandatory rehearsal schedule. Second, I would have had a longer run, if possible. Third, I would not have allowed them to ad lib until they knew the script perfectly. At times in this show, the ad-libbing got somewhat out of hand. Finally, I would have used an olio.

In all, this was one of the most personally satisfying theatrical experiences that I have ever encountered, the realization of a dream. It was rather gratifying for me to be able to say, "Ha! It is funny." I proved many things to myself, most importantly, that to continue this wonderful Toby tradition is not only worthwhile but, to me, a necessity. The passion for Toby begins and ends for this troupier with a quotation from Henry L. Brunk of Brunk's Comedians:

I remember one night we were in this little town and during the show I was out behind the tent. It was a moonlight night, . . . [the] tent was packed, and people were laughing and enjoying the show. I just looked up and thanked the Lord for letting me take part in all this.

APPENDIX

HOW NOW WHITE COW
OR
You Can Put Your Shoes in the Oven, But
That Don't Make Them Biscuits!

a Toby Show

conceived
by
Dawn L. Niceley

This script is dedicated to Shad and Mollie Heller as a small token of my gratitude for their patience, teaching, and kindness; to continue the Toby that they loved so well.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

The heyday of Toby Shows fell during of time of unrest in this country, a time of Prohibition and the Great Depression. Prior to this, at the turn of the century ,agriculture had experienced a temporary prosperity and rural people had enjoyed a somewhat easier life. When the Great Depression hit the Midwest and South, it hit hard and the rural folk looked to the city as the cause of their problems. The city people were supposed to have been more clever than the country folk, and in rural eyes, the cities controlled all the wealth. The city had taken rural sons away from their families where they were surely doomed to corruption and despair. These images of the city by the country folk were why Toby shows were so popular. Toby (representing the country) always outsmarted the villain (representing the city) through honesty and integrity. It is extremely crucial therefore, that Toby and his family are honest in their intentions. They can NEVER be blatantly conniving or hurtful, but can be "ornery" at times. They also cannot be pointedly "blue." Toby shows were family shows that stressed "mother, home, and heaven."

Toby Shows are improvisational shows. The audience is encouraged to respond, consequently, a quick wit is required of the actors. The actors must possess complete control of the situation at all times. I must also point out that too much ad-libbing is not a good thing. The purpose of ad-libbing is to add to the show, not steal from it.

Of all types of theatre that I have been associated with, I learned more in my years at the Toby Show in Branson MO, than all other formal and informal training combined. As a cast, you are about to embark on a wonderful adventure! You are helping to revive and preserve the most popular form of American theatre, while at the same time, having a hell of a lot of fun.

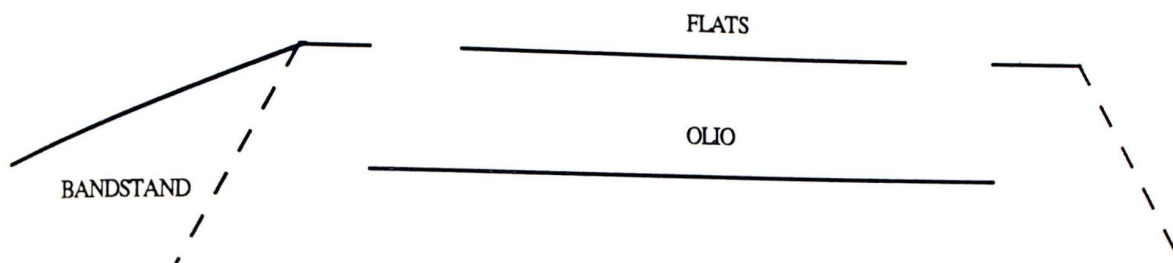
Break your legs,

Dawn Niceley

THE CHARACTERS

- TOBY:* A young, red-headed, freckle-faced, smarter-than-he-looks rube character. Toby controls the pace of the show, being somewhat of the straight man. He outsmarts the villain ALWAYS through honesty and integrity.
- SUSIE:* Toby's girlfriend. Young, naive, sweet, and very silly
- STURGILL:* Toby's dumb, but lovable brother. The clown of the show.
- HAILLY S.*
- DARKHEART:* The evil city-slicker from New Orleans. He has come to the hills for rest and relaxation and to find raw talent to take back with him to New Orleans. He is blinded by his greed. This characteristic allows Toby to outsmart him and others to make a fool of him.
- IDA CLARE:* Darkheart's accomplice. She is a vampish torchsinger from New Orleans. She is also greedy, but with a bit more finesse. She is more sympathetic to the hillbillies than Darkheart is.
- THE BAND:* The band's size can range from as little as one piano player to several pieces. They are Toby's musical cousins. They usually have silly names such as Pete and Repete, etc. They are the "plants" to spur audience reaction.

SET: The set consists of painted flats representing a cabin with two entrances on either side. A painted olio curtain is positioned 10 feet in front of set. The bandstand is stage right.



MUSIC: Music can be anything with a ragtime/vaudeville feel. Each character should have his/her own theme music that is played on each entrance. For example, Ida has her "bumps" with a drum beat and Darkheart has an ominous strain to accompany boos and hisses from the audience. Toby has a major chord to accompany the "hooray's" and Susie needs some sort of trills to facilitate "ooh's" and "aaah's." Sturgill, on the other hand, only needs music during his introduction.

The drummer/percussionist is a very important person in this show. She/he is responsible throughout the entire show, for rim shots and other sounds associated with vaudeville .

Act I

Place: Somewhere in the Hills

The lights come up on the band. The olio curtain is down. The band plays one or two opening numbers. Then enter Toby from the aisle.

Bit #1 - Opening and Intros

TOBY: Howdy folks! I said "Howdy!!!" (*Oh you can do better than that, or That's great!*) My name is Toby T. Taylor and I want to welcome you to "How Now White Cow." - a Toby Show. Now, how many of you all have ever been to a Toby Show? How many of you have never been to a Toby Show? How many of you don't know where you been? (*All right! or That's what I thought*) Let me tell you friends, Toby shows were a very important part of American history. At one time there was over 1000 of these Toby shows traveling throughout the Midwest and South. See, they'd come into a town and maybe set up their show in a big tent or do their show in somebody's barn, and they'd have lots of singin and dancin and funny stuff. And just about everybody and his dog would come out to the show. Now well....Now, there's just two. One in Nashville, TN, and one other one. And guess where the other one is?! (*to man in audience*) It's here buddy. Keep up with me all right?!..... And a Toby Show, well friends, a Toby Show is sorta like a vaudeville show, you know, with songs and jokes and fun, only a Toby Show has a plot.....Well, kind of a plot. Really sort of a "small" plot runnin' right smack through it. It's kinda thin. If you was to blink, or bend over to tie your shoe, you might miss it. And if you was to get up to go to the outhouse.....well... So I'm gonna tell you about it in case you fall asleep half way through you won't miss anything. You see, Mr.Hailly S. Darkheart and Miss Ida Clare came up here to the

country for some rest and relaxation all the way from the big city of New Or-leans. See, they're in show business on that big paddleboat they got down there called the Cottonblossom. Me and my family and friends sure would like to be in show business. And we been hearsin and rehearsin and well, we think our little show here is pretty good and we sure would like to take it to New Or-leans and become rich and famous. If only we could figure a way to get enough money to get there. Oh well, I'll work on solvin that problem a little later.

Movement concerning olio is usually circular. Darkheart and Ida enter from same side and Sturgill and Susie enter from same side.

Right now, let me introduce you all to characters in our Toby Show. First my musical cousins, (*introduce band*) (*Music*) From the big city of New Or-leans, Mr. Hailly S. Darkheart.

DH: (*enter, evil laughter*)

TOBY: His lovely female accomplice... er, I mean partner, Miss Ida Clare

IDA: (*enter, hip bumps with drum beat . She repeats this each entrance and may build upon it as show progresses*) Thank you.

P&R: I-da Clare!!!

TOBY: Now folks, my girlfriend, Sweet Sue.

SUE: (*enter,business*)

TOBY: And last, but not least my dumb brother, Sturgill.

STU: (*business*)

TOBY: And now friends, we want to get things started with a great big fat,

ALL: HOWDY!

(*all exit s.l.*)

(*re-enter Toby s.r.*)

TOBY: And now folks, in a Toby Show, the audience - that's you, is just as important as

the performers - that's us. So you gotta help us out, OK? OK? Like when I say OK, you say OK, OK? (*OK business. He repeats "OK" several times with, hopefully, audience response*) All right! (*"Gotcha" or "You're quick"*). And when ever you see Mr. Darkheart you gotta boo and hiss cause he's the villain. (*Darkheart appears around olio as pianist raises "BOO" sign*) And when you see me you gotta yell "Hooray" cause I'm the HERO!! (*pianist raises "HOORAY" sign*) Now that we got that settled, get ready for some hysterical, historical fun. Now friends, for the first number....

Bit #2 Toby/Susie \$5.00 Running Gag

(*enter Susie from opposite side of olio*)

SUE: Hi Toby.

TOBY: Oh, hi Susie. Hey Susie, how'd you like to make 5 dollars real fast?

SUE: Well sure!

TOBY: Well, I'm gonna bet you five dollars that you're not here.

SUE: You're gonna bet me five dollars that I'm not here.

TOBY: Yep.

SUE: Well OK. (*makes "he's crazy" move*)

TOBY: You're not in De-troit are you?

SUE: Nope, not in De-troit.

TOBY: And you're not in New York, are you?

SUE: Not in New York either.

TOBY: And you're not in (*insert name of nearby town*), are you.

SUE: Thank goodness.

TOBY: Well, if you're not in Detroit, New York, or (*town name*), you must be somewhere else, right?

SUE: Right.

TOBY: And if you're somewhere else, you're not here!

(*Toby and Susie exit opposite sides*)

Bit #3 **Herd of Cows**

(*Enter, Toby, Susie, Sturgill*)

STU: Wow, there's a whole mess of people out here!

TOBY: Wait a minute, Sturgill, you don't call people a mess.

SUE: He does.

TOBY: What I mean is you shouldn't call people a mess.

STU: Why not?

TOBY: Because people aren't a mess, they're a crowd. Now tell these people you're sorry.

STU: Do what?

TOBY: Tell them you're sorry.

SUE: All right

SUE &
STU: You're sorry!

STU: As a matter of fact, you're the sorriest mess of people I've ever seen.

TOBY: Sturgill!

STU: Well, look at that guy! (*points to someone in the audience*)

TOBY: No. You don't understand. Now listen, herd of cows.....

STU: Of course we've heard of cows.

TOBY: What I mean is a cow herd.....

SUE: What do we care if a cow heard?

STU: Keep no secrets from our cows. We tell our cows everything.

TOBY: No, no. A mess of cows is called a herd of cows.

SUE &
STU: Oh

TOBY: Now, from the beginning. Look at these people. What do you call them?

STU: Bored?

TOBY: No.

SUE: Confused?

TOBY: No

STU: A herd of cows!

TOBY: NO!!

SUE: I don't think we're gettin this.

TOBY: No, you're not. Now listen, a gathering of eagles is called simply that.

STU: Simply what?

TOBY: A gathering.

SUE: So what do you call them?

TOBY: A gathering of eagles.

SUE: Oh! A gathering of eagles.

TOBY: Yes.

STU: A school of fish.

TOBY: Yes!

STU: A college of porpoises.

TOBY: No.

STU: A university of whales!

(band plays a rapid Pomp and Circumstance)

TOBY: Hold it! I'm just trying to point out what a nice looking crowd we have with us tonight.

STU: Oh Toby, we knew that.

TOBY: Oh you did.

STU: Yes, my girlfriend is in this crowd today.

TOBY: Your girlfriend is in this audience?

STU: Yep.

TOBY: Where?

STU: Well, you see that beautiful blonde back there?

TOBY: Yeah!

STU: With the big blue eyes.....

TOBY: Yeah!

STU: And the beautimos figure?

TOBY: Yeah!! Is that your girlfriend?

STU: Nope, it's the ugly one behind her! (*BLACKOUT and olio up*)

95

Bit #4 Great Moments in World History - Moses

(we hear theme from 2001 until the timpani section, fade, then over a loud speaker we hear:)

Announcer: Ladies and Gentlemen....., the (Hard Corn Players) in conjunction with (organization name) proudly present Great Moments in World History and you wuz there. The date is Tuesday, March 2, eleventy thousand BC and Moses returns from Mount Sinai.

(As lights and olio come up, Sturgill appears dressed in bathrobe and gray wig carrying 3 stone tablets)

STU: The Lord has given us these fifteen, *(drops one tablet and it breaks)* ten, ten commandments.

BLACKOUT and olio drop.

Bit # 5 **X-Spert**

(enter Darkheart. Each time Darkheart appears, he hurls an insult to the audience such as,

"Aaagh, your sister chases cars)

DH: Well, I'm out here looking for raw talent to take back to New Orleans. (*notices Toby, aside*) Now, you'll see how dumb these hillbillies really are.]
 (to Toby) Toby, oh Toby, just the man I was looking for....

TOBY: (*runs into him*) Gee, Mr. Darkheart, gee I'm glad I ran into you! Did you say you wuz looking for raw talent? See we got this little show here and we sure would like to go to New Or-leans and become rich and famous.... and....

DH: Now Toby, you really don't know much about show business do you?

TOBY: Well, no Mr. Darkheart, I really don't know much about show business, but....

DH: So unlike myself, you are certainly no expert when it comes to show business are you?

TOBY: Well, I guess not.

DH: Toby, do you even know what an expert is?

TOBY: Well, let's see. X always stands for the unknown, and a spert is a drip under pressure. So I guess that makes you an "unknown drip under pressure." (*to audience*) Come on folks. These are the funny ones. They don't get much better than this so yuk it up.

DH: Wait a minute Toby, I didn't come here to be insulted.

TOBY: Then where do you usually go? (*business to audience - "you're catching on" etc.*)

DH: Toby, you haven't been telling these good...these people that I'm a jackass have you?

TOBY: (*shocked*) Heck no Mr. Darkheart, they can tell that by lookin.

IDA: (*bumps*) Thank you. Now Darkheart, if you're going to try to swin.....

DH: Shhh! Ida. (*points to Toby*)

IDA: Well hello Toby, you wonderful thing you. It's so nice to see you.

TOBY: It's nice to see you too Miss Ida.

DH: Now Ida, I have important business to discuss with this man.

TOBY: Hold on Mr. Darkheart, I have important business of my own to take care of -
(*gets catalog from musician*) - at the outhouse. Now where the heck is the
outhouse in this place. (*Toby exit through aisle*)

Bit #6 - **Big Spender**

DH: Well, Ida, since Toby is a little indisposed, why don't you favor us with a little
number.

IDA: A little number? Three.

DH: No Ida, a song, a song.

IDA: All right.

Ida may sing any type of torch song during which, she moves into the audience to sing to one male member. During the song Susie peeks out from behind the olio for a few moments.

BLACKOUT and olio up.

Bit #7 - Pilot

(enter Darkheart, insult , then enter Sturgill)

STU: Dog gone. Dog gone. Dog gone!

DH: What's the matter Sturgill?

STU: My dog's gone. Besides my maw's real mad at me. All she does is gripe, gripe, gripe.

DH: I know how that is. My mother was the same way. The slightest thing would set her off.

STU: Well, you're lucky. Your maw had to be set off. Mine's a self-starter.
And you know what? She went to the beauty shop and got one of them new mud packs.

DH: Did it work?

STU: Yeah till the mud fell off.

DH: I know what the trouble is. You need a job.

STU: Oh, I don't know, Mr. Darkheart, I used to have a job.

DH: What kind?

STU: I was an undertaker.

DH: What happened?

STU: Business died. Then I worked in a knife factory.

DH: What happened there?

STU: Got dull. But then I was a pilot. (*music - a strain of Wild Blue Yonder*)

DH: Wait a minute. Stop that. You were a pilot?

STU: Yep. I was a pilot. (*music*)

DH: Hold it. Stop that.

STU: (*crosses to piano and whispers*) Pilot. (*music*)

DH: (*to pianist and Sturgill*) Now cut that out! Now what did you do as a pilot?

STU: I used to pile it here and pile it there.....*BLACKOUT and olio drop*

Bit #8 - **Susie/ Sturgill \$5.00**

(*enter Susie and Sturgill*)

STU: Hi Susie.

SUE: Oh, hi Sturgill. Hey Sturgill, how'd you like to make 5 dollars real fast?

STU: Well sure!

SUE: Well, I'm gonna bet you five dollars that you're not here.

STU: You're gonna bet me five dollars that I'm not here.

SUE: Yep.

STU: Well OK.

SUE: You're not in Detroit are you?

STU: (*Thinks about it*) Nope, not in Detroit.

SUE: And you're not in New York, are you?

STU: Not in New York either.

SUE: And you're not in (*insert name of nearby town*), are you.

STU: Thank goodness.

SUE: Well, if you're not in Detroit, New York, or (*town name*), you must be somewhere else, right?

STU: Right.

SUE: And if you're somewhere else, you're not here!

(*Sturgill and Susie exit*)

Bit #9 - **Violets are Pink**

(*Enter Toby and Susie*)

SUE: Hi Toby.

TOBY: Hi Susie. Hey Susie, I'm kinda glad you're out here cause I wrote a poem for you, and I'd kinda like to say it for you if I could.

SUE: Gosh Toby, you wrote a poem for me?

TOBY: Yeah, I did.

SUE: Well, I sure would like to hear it.

TOBY: OK (*Toby pulls toilet paper from his pocket*). It goes, "Roses is red. Violets is pink. My girlfriend Susie....."

SUE: Wait a minute, Toby. I don't want to interrupt, but you made a mistake there. It's "Roses is red. Violets is *blue*." You might want to start over.

TOBY: No, it goes: "Roses is red. Violets is pink. My girlfriend Susie sure..."

SUE: Toby, you made that same mistake again. It's supposed to be, "Roses is red. Violets is *blue*."

TOBY: Susie, I wrote the poem. I know how it goes. It goes, "Roses is red. Violets is pink. My girlfriend Susie sure does....."

SUE: Toby! What makes you think violets is pink?!

TOBY: (*pulls large pink underwear out of back pocket*) Cause I got these off Violet Yokum's clothesline and they're pink!!!

BLACKOUT

(we hear theme from 2001 until the timpani section, fade, then over a loud speaker we hear:)

Announcer: Ladies and Gentlemen....., the (Hard Corn Players) in conjunction with (organization name) proudly present Great Moments in World History and you wuz there. The date is June 18, 1815 and we find Napoleon and his troops at the battle of Waterloo.

(lights and olio up on Toby as Napoleon)

STU: *(dressed as French soldier)* Mon Cap-i-tan, our ships are sinking, our ammunition is diminishing, our troops are falling, what shall we do?

TOBY: Well, it is time.

STU: Time for what?

TOBY: Time for lunch! *(Pulls sandwich out of jacket)*

BLACKOUT and olio drop

Bit #11 - **Pails**

(Enter Darkheart - musician does not show "BOO" sign)

DH: *(to audience)* Did you forget who I am? *(reaction)* Ladies and gentlemen... and you too mister, I'm here in these beautiful hills looking for raw talent to take back to New Orleans to the Cottonblossom...

STU: *(enters whistling, singing...)* Oh, howdy Mr. Darkheart. Hey Mr. Darkheart, when I get to New Or-leans, I want to be one a them magicians. So I been practicin some card tricks. I got a good one to show you. OK, OK, *now* the black ones is smoke and the red ones is fire. OK? OK Oh, that reminds me of a joke. Did you know there wuz firemen in the Bible.

DH: No Sturgill, I didn't know there were firemen in the Bible.

STU: Ain't you never heard of the three wiseguys that came from afar?! *(laughs hysterically)*. OK, OK, *now* the black is smoke and the red is fire. *(does the old Smoke/Fire trick)*

DH: Oh Sturgill!! Sturgill?

STU: Yes sir, Mr. Darkheart.

DH: What have you got in those pails?

STU: What pails?

DH: Those pails!

STU: Oh! Well, fresh cow's milk sir, straight from old Lightning.

DH: Lightning?

STU: Yes sir! She's our milk cow.

DH: Well, I was wondering if I could have a small bit of that milk. I've been walking through your lovely countryside communing with nature...

STU: Doin what?!

DH: Communing with nature and.....

STU: We got an outhouse for that.

DH: No Sturgill, just walking, walking! and I've become very thirsty.

STU: Well shore, Mr. Darkheart, have a snort!

- DH: Thank you. (*drinks out of a yellow bucket and it almost knocks him down -(business)*) That's cow's milk? It's got quite a kick!
- STU: Well Lightning is a special cow. She's.....
- DH: You mean that white cow that I saw standing in the muck and mire?
- STU: Yes sir. She's....
- DH: What do you feed her?
- STU: Corn. She's our.
- DH: (*runs off with bucket, evil laughter*)
- STU: She's our favorite family pet. (*shrugs trips over buckets -business*)

SUE: Sturgill, I had the awfulest dream last night. I'm afraid that it might come true.

STU: Susie, Susie, Susie, don't you know that dreams are all in your head. They don't really come true.

SUE: But Sturgill, this one seemed so real.

STU: Well, tell me about it Susie.

SUE: *(counters u.s. from Sturgill so she can't see what is taking place)*

Well, I was standing in *(describe room/auditorium, for example: "this great big room with orange fold-up chairs...")* minding my own business when two mean old robbers*(or Baldknobbers, Jayhawkers, etc.)* *(enter two male players with masks)* came up and grabbed me *(they start to grab Susie)* No, they didn't grab me, they grabbed you Sturgill *(they grab Sturgill)* and they tied you up. *(they tie up Sturgill's hands under suspenders)*

Susie's entire dream is mimicked by the robbers and Sturgill throughout this piece. Sturgill constantly reacts with muffled sounds.

STU: Susie!

SUE: Don't interrupt Sturgill! It's all coming back now. After they tied you up, they laid you down on the ground and started kicking you *(they lay STU down and start to kick him)*. No, in fact, they didn't lay you down at all. *(they pick STU up)*. One of them picked you up over his head *(try to pick up STU)* and spun you around and around and threw you to the ground. *(they are still trying to pick up STU, but can't)*. No, wait a minute.

STU: Susie, help!

SUE: No, I don't need any help, it'll all come back to me.

STU: That's what I'm afraid of!

SUE: Now I got it! You were standing up, and they tied a blindfold over your eyes,

(*bandana over eyes*), or was it a gag? (*moves to mouth*), No, it was a blind fold and a gag (*robbers react to all of this*). Wait a minute, you weren't blindfolded at all. They pulled your hat down over your eyes (*React*). Then they decided they were going to hang you (*one takes out a noose and puts by Sturgill's neck*) by your feet (*moves to feet*)... but they didn't have any more rope. (*Robber tosses over his head*). Then they decided they would hang you by your suspenders (*pulls STU's suspenders up and off and pants fall*), but they don't want to hang you till they beat you up. So they start hitting you (*starts to deck him*). No, they laid you down and started kicking you (*react*).....or maybe they started tickling. That's it! They started tickling you. (*STU is going crazy from being tickled*). Only you weren't ticklish. (*All three take toward Susie*).

And since you weren't ticklish, the robbers became very angry. They were furious! And they decided they would scalp you. (*Reaction to all of this*) So they pulled out a knife, (*one pulls out knife*), or was it a razor? (*other pulls out disposable razor*) Yes, it was a straight-edged razor. (*First robber responds*). And the robber came at you with the razor and he scalped you. No, wait, he didn't scalp you because the other robber stopped him. (*Robber shakes his head NO*). Yes he did. He stopped him because he wanted to scalp you Sturgill and the other robber wouldn't let him. So the fight was on over who got to scalp you. It was terrible, fists were flying, they were rolling all over the ground. (*Reactions to all of this*). And during the fight, Sturgill, you desperately tried to get untied. (*Sturgill drops rope*). But you couldn't (*STU picks rope back up*). And the furious battle between the robbers continued. During the fight the two robbers pulled each other's masks off. (*React*). And that was when you realized that it was insert characters names and that all of this was a practical joke. You got so mad, Sturgill, that you grabbed a bucket of water and you soaked the audience. But it wasn't water in the bucket, it was confetti. (*React to this*) But this was such an old joke that it didn't fool the

audience at all. And this turned the audience into an angry mob and they all started growling like this (*Susie growls, if no audience response, repeat last line*)...and they became angrier and angrier and growled louder and louder. Then you got really mad and you picked up a real bucket of water and threw it on the audience (*instead Sturgill gets a better idea and starts sneaking up on Susie*).....then I woke up in a cold sweat.

STU: Did the cold sweat feel like this?! (*STU pours water over Susie's head*)

SUE: Hey! That's not how my dream ended!

STU: I told you Susie, dreams don't really come true!

(Susie chases Sturgill off stage)

(enter Darkheart, insult)

DH: Ida, oh, Ida

IDA: (enter Ida) Thank you. What is it Darkheart?

DH: Have I got some news for you!

IDA: Uh, oh.

DH: Taste this?

IDA: (business of drinking spiked milk) What was that? Wow!

DH: Cow's milk.

IDA: That wasn't like any milk I've ever tasted!

DH: That's right! And it's straight from Toby's milkcow, Lightning.

IDA: Lightning?

DH: Like *WHITE* Lightning.

IDA: What? You mean that OLD white cow standing in the muck and mire?

DH: She only eats corn so.....

IDA: So what?

DH: The muck and mire must ferment the corn and.....

IDA: And?

DH: That cow gives spiked milk!

IDA: Oh Darkheart!

DH: That cow is our gold mine!

IDA: Darkheart, I don't think.....

DH: Why else would they have called her Lightning?

IDA: Well....

DH: That dumb hillbilly doesn't know what he's got. How can I swindle Toby out of that cow?

IDA: I don't know Darkheart, Toby's not as dumb as you think...

DH: I can see it now.... We'll bottle it and sell it exclusively. We'll make a fortune.
And we'll call it: **Hailly's Birish Cream!**

BLACKOUT and olio drop

Bit #14 - George and Gracie

(Enter Toby)

TOBY: And now friends for our next number, me and Susie are gonna juggle some pigs!

(pause) I said me and Susie are gonna juggle some pigs! *(ad lib)*

(Enter Susie)

SUE: Hi Toby, I'm here.

TOBY: Susie, you're late.

SUE: I know.

TOBY: Well, why are you late?

SUE: I got lost.

TOBY: How did you come to get lost at town or place troupe is playing ?

SUE: Well, I didn't come to get lost. I came to be on the show!

TOBY: And you got lost.

SUE: Isn't that what I just said?

TOBY: Well, you're here now.

SUE: And the funniest thing just happened!

TOBY: Just now?

SUE: Yes, see that man right there? *(points to man in audience)*

TOBY: Yes.

SUE: He said, "Hi ya cutie. How about a bite after the show?"

TOBY: Oh he did?! And you said?

SUE: Well, I said, "I'm busy tonight after the show, but I'm not doing anything right now." So I bit him.

TOBY: You bit him?

SUE: Yes.

TOBY: That was brilliant.

SUE: Oh, you think I'm brilliant?

TOBY: I think you're absolutely brilliant. As a matter of fact, I'm beginning to think you're a wizard.

SUE: (*puzzled*) A wizard?

TOBY: Well sure. You do know what a wizard is don't you?

SUE: Well sure. A wizard is a snowstorm.

TOBY: If that's a wizard, what's a blizzard?

SUE: Toby, anybody knows that a blizzard is inside a chicken.

TOBY: If that's a blizzard, what's a gizzard?

SUE: A gizzard is a little brown thing with a long tail that eats flies.

TOBY: Susie, did something happen to you when you were born?

SUE: When I was born, I was so surprised, I couldn't talk for a year and a half.

TOBY: Susie, did the nurse drop you on your head?

SUE: Oh no Toby, we couldn't afford a nurse, so my mother had to do it.

TOBY: I'll tell ya what Susie, let's play a little game.

SUE: Oh I love games.

TOBY: Now this is what I want. This might help us get to New Orleans. I'm going to ask you a question, then you repeat it back to me, and I'll give you the answer.

SUE: You ask the question, and I repeat back to you, then you give the answer.

TOBY: Right! In other words, I'm going to be the comedian.

SUE: Oh, I get it. You're gonna be the funny fellow.

TOBY: Right!

SUE: Okay, be funny!

TOBY: Well, I'll try. Now if I was to say, "Why are apples green?" You say, "I don't know Toby, why are apples green?" Just repeat what I say.

SUE: I just repeat it back to you and you give the answer.

TOBY: Right

SUE: Okay.

TOBY: All right, here goes. "What fellow in the army wears the biggest hat?

SUE: I don't know Toby, why are apples green?

TOBY: No, NO. If I say, "What fellow in the army wears the biggest hat?" You say, "I don't know Toby, what fellow in the army wears the biggest hat?"

SUE: The fellow with the biggest head!

TOBY: I certainly am the comedian.

SUE: Oh you are. This is fun.

TOBY: You've done this before haven't you?

SUE: Yes.

TOBY: Do you have any showbusiness in your background?

SUE: Oh I do. I used to be a lion tamer.

TOBY: You used to tame lions?

SUE: Well, I used the house cat.

TOBY: Of course you did.

SUE: But I taught her all kinds of tricks, rolling over, playing dead, sitting on a pedestal, you know, the usual.

TOBY: Taught her everything you know huh?

SUE: Yeah, but when that silly cat got in front of the audience, she forgot all her tricks.

TOBY: Oh?

SUE: She just had kittens.

TOBY: Well, I'm sure that caused quite a ruckus.

SUE: Well it did. But what good was it?

TOBY: Huh?

SUE: The silly cat wouldn't do it again for the next show!

(BLACKOUT and olio up)

Bit #15 - **Math Bit***(Enter Toby)*

TOBY: And now friends for our next stupendous act.....

(Enter Darkheart)

DH: Oh Toby, I have a little business matter to discuss with you.

TOBY: Really Mr. Darkheart, what would that be?

DH: Do you remember that I loaned you my shovel this afternoon at 2:30 for \$13.00 per hour and it's now 9:30 *(make this bit timely - excuse the pun)* so that's seven hours at \$13.00 per hour- a very good price, I might add. Let's see that come out to be \$91.00.

TOBY: *(at same time DH says \$91)* \$28.00!

DH: No Toby, that's \$91.00.

TOBY: \$28.00. Mr. Darkheart, I'll show you. *(gets blackboard from backstage or someone could hand to him)*. Let's times it. *(Illustrates each math bit on board)*

Thirteen times seven. Now three times seven is...?

BOTH: 21

TOBY: Right 13X 721And seven times one is... 7BOTH: 7 28

TOBY: 21 and 7 is 28!

DH: No Toby!

TOBY: OK Mr. Darkheart, let's devise it.

DH: All right Toby, why don't you "devise" it.

TOBY: OK. Now 7 won't go into 2, right?

BOTH: Right.

TOBY: So I'll just let you hold that 2 (*erases 2 and hands an imaginary 2 to DH*).

DH: Hold the 2. (*throws 2 down then rim shot and they both take*)

TOBY: Now 7 goes into 8 how many times?

BOTH: 1

TOBY: 8 minus 7 is 1. Now give me that 2 back. (*Puts 2 in front of 1*).

And 7 goes into 21 how many times?.....3.....13!!

$$\begin{array}{r} 7 \overline{) 28} \end{array}$$
 take away 2

$$\begin{array}{r} 1 \\ 7 \overline{) 8} \\ \underline{7} \\ 1 \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{r} 13 \\ 7 \overline{) 8} \\ \underline{7} \\ 21 \end{array}$$
 Puts back 2

DH: Now Toby, you're doing this all wrong.

TOBY: Now wait just a minute Mr. Darkheart, I learnt all my rithmtic at nearby college .

DH: Well, maybe you should have attended an institute of higher learning! Now
Toby, let's try addition

TOBY: OK (*gives chalk to DH*)

DH: Now I'm going to put 13 down seven times.

BOTH: 1,2,3,4,5,6 and 7.

DH: Now pay attention Toby. (*Marks by each number 3*) 3,6,9,12,15,18,21.

TOBY: (*Takes chalk and marks by each 1*) 22,23,24,25,26 and 28.

(*Both exit ad libbing*)

Bit #16 - A Day in Court

(Enter Sturgill and Susie)

STU: I did not!

SUE: You did too!

STU: I did not not, I wasn't anywhere near old man person of notoriety's property!

SUE: Yes you was and you was poachin deer.

(Enter Toby)

STU: I was not and I like my deer over-easy!

TOBY: Sturgill, poachin deer means you was shooting deer out of season.

STU: Well, it was self-defense.

SUE: You was also trespassin!

STU: My mind wandered so I followed it.

TOBY: Now tell the truth Sturgill, are you innocent or guilty?

STU: Yes.

SUE: You'll get your just desserts!

STU: I want coconut cream pie!

TOBY: I'll tell you what Sturgill, this case is going to have to go to court!

STU: Court?!

TOBY: Yep and you're gonna need a lawyer.

STU: A lawyer? Where am I gonna find a lawyer? Hey lady, do you know any lawyers? *(to lady in audience)* Then I guess you'll have to do! *(brings her to stage)*

TOBY: All right. Since you have a lawyer, let's have a mock trial. Susie you be the prosecutin attorney, and I'll be the judge. Everbody ready? Hear ye, hear ye.....

STU: Yeah, we hear ye.

TOBY: His honor Toby T. Taylor presiding. All rise....

STU: All rise? What are we, a bunch of rolls?

TOBY: Sturgill! Now what's the first case before the court?

SUE: You can't have a case before the court.

TOBY: Huh?

SUE: If you have a case before the court then court hasn't started yet.

TOBY: Never mind. What's the charge?

STU: No charge your honor, drinks are on the house!

SUE and STU: Then let's get on the house!

TOBY: What's the current suit.

STU: The current suit is *(using a model's turn, describes what he's wearing)*

TOBY: Alright, alright now....let's get serious. Will the guilty party please step forward?

(Susie and Sturgill take one step back) Will the plaintiff step forward? *(Susie and Sturgill take one step back)* Well, this is getting us nowhere!

STU: Oh, I don't know. We're almost to use a place near theatre.

TOBY: Sturgill, do I look like an idiot?

STU: No your honor, an idiot looks like that. *(points to man in the audience)*

SUE and TOBY: Ooooh.

TOBY: I can tell right now that yours is a hopeless case.

STU: *(to woman)* You're my lawyer, say something in Latin.....OK, pig
latin.....Lady, they're gonna fry me.

TOBY: Susie, were there any witnesses to the crime?

STU: No.

SUE: Yes.

TOBY: Who?

SUE: Him. *(points to man in audience)*

TOBY: What's the witness' name?

SUE: *(say whatever man's name is)*

STU: He did it judge. He's the criminal!

TOBY: How do you know?

STU: Well, last night he snuck into my house and threw my clothes out the window.

TOBY: So??

STU: I was still in them! Let's hang him instead.

TOBY: Where was this man during the time of the crime?

SUE: Uhh..., uhh..., he was traveling with the circus.

TOBY: What's he do for the circus?

SUE: Uhh..., uhh..., he's the midget.

STU: Ain't he kinda tall for a midget?

SUE: That's it! He's the world's tallest midget!

TOBY: Don't worry mister, we won't hang you.

SUE: No noose is good noose....*(wait for moan)* Let's hang the lawyer!

STU: *(to lady)* No, no, not my darling....What'd you say your name was?

TOBY: Let's face it Sturgill, you've been a criminal all your life, ain't you?

STU: Not yet.

TOBY: I have a sentence for you.

STU: For me?

TOBY: Yep. 50 years.

STU: That's not a sentence, that's a whole paragraph!

TOBY: Court's dismissed..*(Sturgill takes woman back to seat then returns to stage)*
except for you Susie.

SUE: Me?

TOBY: Yes. I understand you've been involved in a little criminal activity yourself.

SUE: Who me?!

TOBY: Yes. Rumor has it that while you were picnicking in the park, you shot all your mother's sisters.

SUS: It's true, judge. Everbody hates:

ALL: Aunts at picnics!!!!

BLACKOUT

Bit #17 - "Casey at the Bat"

(Toby enter s.r.)

TOBY: Well, folks it's time for our culture corner. So we're gonna whip a little culture on you. Our resident culturer, Miss Elizabeth Carrot Frowning, if you will.

SUSIE: *(Enter in graduation robe and mortarboard. Rest of cast line up behind her.)*

Casey at the Bat by Ernst Lloyd Thayer.

(Susie proceeds to recite Casey at the Bat in a very sing-song manner while the "chorus" does sound effects and choreography behind her.)

SUSIE: The out look wasn't brilliant for the Mudville nine that day.

The score stood four to two.

CHOR: Four to two *(Hands show "four" and "two")*

SUSIE: With but one inning left to play.

CHOR: Just one. *(Hand show "1")*

(Continue, using Toby as Casey and Darkheart as Pitcher. End bit with last strain of "Old Ballgame")

ALL: So it's one, two, three strikes your out at the old ball- game!

Bow and **BLACKOUT**

Toby and Sturgill exit through aisle

Bit # 18 - **WWF**

(Enter Susie and Darkheart)

DH: My dear Susie, may I have a brief word with you?

SUE: Why shore, Mr. Darkheart. What do you want?

DH: *(aside)* Toby's cow.

SUE: What?

DH: I said come with me now. *(She takes his arm. They cross DR)*. My dear young lady, I know that when you first laid eyes on me you probably said to yourself "There goes one of those fast talking city slickers who comes down here to the hills and tries to swindle all the dumb country folks and tries to make time with every pretty you girl he sees.*(Susie shakes her head "no")*. Now don't deny it *(he dips her)*...I know that was just what you were thinking wasn't it?

SUE: *(delivers lines in very straightforward and unforced manner)* No Mr. Darkheart, I never thought any such thing as what you just said. *(she flips him karate style to the floor, he is stomach down)* As a matter of fact, *(she straddles and sits on him facing his feet)* when I first seen you, I said to myself, now there goes a fella without the brains *(takes DS leg and bends toward her)* or the muscle *(takes US arm and pulls toward his bent leg - as says next line takes bandana from pocket and ties leg and arm together)* to take a stick of candy from a baby or steal a kiss from me. *(She rises and stands us from DH)*. If you'll excuse me Mr. Darkheart, I've got to plow the north forty before dinner.*(Exit)*

DH: *(still on floor tied up)* I think I'm beginning to bring her around. When I tried to kiss her last night, she threw me in the well.

BLACKOUT and olio drop

Bit #19 - **SACRED** - song

Lights up as piano starts playing intro, Toby and Sturgill have gotten a man out of the audience and are bring him to stage where we find, as the olio comes up: Ida in nightgown on a stool with an empty stool next to her and Darkheart enters with big book

MEN SING: *Ida reacts*

On a park bench I noticed a couple.

The poor little girl was in tears.

The fellow was pleading with ardor and stress.

I lent the occasion my ears.

At last she courage to answer,

Forgetting her tears for the nonce.

She looked her tormentor direct in the face, *(Toby turns man's face toward Ida)*

And gave him this stinging response:

IDA: *(turns face toward man and very loudly cries:)* WAAAGH!

IDA: *(talk-sings this verse)*

You told me storks didn't bring babies.

You said Santa Claus was a lie.

And as for the gold at the rainbow's end,

You said there was more in your eyes.

I thought four-leafed clovers was lucky.

You told me that that wasn't true.

You laughed at the tin-type of my dear old Ma.

Ain't anything sacred to you?

ALL:

It's all very well to be clever.

It's all very well to be smart.

But I'd rather be dumb at the cost of my brain,

And still keep the faith in my heart.

You go through this life being sceptic,

And what have you got at the end?

Just the shards of the idols you shattered and broke.

How dare you assume you're my friend.*(as she sings this line, she stands and turns toward him and we see she is VERY pregnant.)*

ALL: *(DH puts on preacher's collar. Toby has them join hands. Susie enters with guns and hands to STU and Toby.)*

Chorus: You told me storks didn't bring babies.....

And now you must tell her "I do"

And now she is married to you.

As piano is playing "Here Comes the Bride," Ida takes man back to seat and all exit.

BLACKOUT and olio drop

(We hear 2001 theme until timpani section, fades, then over a loud speaker we hear:)

Announcer: Ladies and Gentlemen....., the (Hard Corn Players) in conjunction with (organization name) proudly present Great Moments in World History and you wuz there. The date is Oct 4, 1879 and we find the great inventor, Thomas Alva Edison, in his laboratory perfecting the electric light bulb.

STU: *(As lights and olio come up, Sturgill is in white lab coat holding a light bulb up.
After a few beats he puts it to his ear and says:) Hello? Hello?*

BLACKOUT and olio drop

(olio up, enter Toby)

TOBY: And now folks for our next number.....

DH: *(enter Darkheart)* Oh Toby, Toby. I was wondering, how would you like to get rid of that old milk cow that you have?

TOBY: You mean Lightning? Oh no sir Mr. Darkheart, I could never do that. She's.....

DH: Now just a minute Toby....*(Sturgill enters doing something dumb)* How much does that cow of yours weigh?

STU: Oh I'll find out for you Mr. Darkheart OK? OK? *(ok business)* They remember.
(exits R)

TOBY: Just to take a guess, I'd say she weighs about 900 pounds.

DH: Well I'm prepared to offer you.....

STU: *(Sturgill enters L with bath scales)* I'll be right back, don't you go anywhere!

DH: Like I started to say, I am prepared to offer you 5 cents a pound for that cow.

TOBY: 5 CENTS A POUND?! Gosh Mr. Darkheart that's almost.....*(figuring business)* \$45.00! I don't know see she's a special cow and.....

DH: 10 cents a pound.

TOBY: Oh, Mr. Darkheart I don't think....

STU: *(enters with chalkboard with "COWAY" on it. Tired business- breathing heavy, leaning on things, etc.. Keeps pointing at sign).*

DH: What?! What is it Sturgill? *(more tired business)* Coway? What's a coway.

STU: About 950 pounds. *(Darkheart chases him off.)*

TOBY: 950 pounds? That's even more, that's *(figuring business)* She's our favoritist family pet. Should I sell her? *(audience business)* If I did we could all go to New Or-leans and become rich and famous. Heck, she ain't even worth \$10.00. She's dry half the time. Oh well, I can't give him an answer right now anyway.

(olio drop, music)

DH: *(from behind olio)* Why not?

TOBY: Because the first act's over! *(to audience)* Did you all like the first act? *(Great or Well, awesome dude, etc)* Well, you ain't seen nothin yet. In the second act we got more singing and pretty girls and more brand new old jokes. So don't go away, we'll be right back!

BLACKOUT

INTERMISSION

House lights up

At this point the characters take a 5 minute break and then "atmosphere" with the audience for the remaining 10 minutes.

ACT II

The players begin the second act by Toby shouting, "Come on, it's time to start the second act!" Sturgill and Susie find themselves a seat and ad lib about how excited they are that the second act is starting. Toby reappears and collects Sturgill and Susie.

Bit #22 - **Musician's Opening**

TOBY: Well, you know I was comin out of that fancy indoor outhouse you all got out there during intermission and these two fellas/folks walk up to me, and well I hate to spoil the festive activities with this story, but these two fellas/folks come up to me and they was right snooty with me and they said, "Hey, why don't you let them musicians play another song?" And I said, "Well, if time allows sir, I'd be just pleased as a hot hog in cool mud to let them play another." And then the other fella says, "Yeah, why don't you let the musicians play another song." And I said, "Well sir, if time allows I'd be more than happy to let them musicians play another song." And then the first guy kinda picked me up and said, "Yeah buddy, Why don't you let the musicians play another song." And I said, "Well, if you guys will leave me alone I'll let you play another one." So here they are again...Pete and Repete.

Bit #23 - **Bill of Sale**

(Olio up. Enter Darkheart, insult, and Ida)

DH: The coast is clear! See this Ida? I've drawn up a little bill of sale for Toby's cow Lightning. He'll sell me that cow for 10 cents a pound!

IDA: I don't know if he'll fall for that Darkheart. Most cattle sells for 90 cents to a \$1.00 a pound.

DH: I know that and you know that, but those dumb hillbillies don't know that. Besides all it will take to swindle...er I mean purchase that cow is a little persuasion, you know a little small talk and...

IDA: I don't know....

DH: Shhh, here he comes now *(enter Toby)* get out of here so I can work on my....I mean "our" fortune. *(exit Ida)*

DH: Ah Toby,

TOBY: Oh, howdy, Mr. Darkheart.

DH: By the way how are your hogs?

TOBY: Oh fine, and how's your family?

DH: Toby, I've taken the liberty of drawing up a bill of sale for Lightning and....

TOBY: Now Mr. Darkheart, I already told you she's a special cow and I don't think that I really want to sell her...

DH: If you just look it over, I'm sure you find that it's a sound contract and..

TOBY: *("should I" bit with audience)*

DH: Why can't you hillbillies seem to make up your minds?

TOBY: Well I guess that's why we got cleaner minds than you city folk.

DH: Cleaner minds, how's that?

TOBY: We change them more often! *(both exit)*

BLACKOUT and olio drop

Bit #24 - Great Moments in World History - Mark Antony

(We hear 2001 theme until timpani section, fades, then over a loudspeaker we hear:)

Announcer: Ladies and Gentlemen....., the (Hard Corn Players) in conjunction with (organization name) proudly present Great Moments in World History and you wuz there. The date is April 7, 200 BC and Mark Antony is addressing the masses.

STU: *(As olio and lights come up, Sturgill is dressed in sheet and vine around head)*

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears.

(Ida and Susie come enter on opposite sides of stage with ears of corn, ad libbing, "Here Mark," etc.)

BLACKOUT and olio drop

STU: Hi Susie.

SUE: Hi Sturgill.

STU: Hey Susie, you know Toby sure is crazy about you.

SUE: Oh you think so?

STU: Yep. Me and Toby was just backstage talking about it. You know trying to figure out what everybody sees in you.

SUE: It must be my nice figure.

STU: That's not what Toby says.

SUE: I must be my big green eyes.

STU: That's not what Toby says.

SUE: It must be my bubbling personality.

STU: Nope. Toby don't say that neither.

SUE: Well, I give up.

STU: That's what Toby says! *(exit)*

(enter Toby cross in front of Susie and she kicks him in the pants)

SUE: You know what that's for?

TOBY: I give up.

SUE: Huh!!!! *(exit)*

(enter Sturgill and Ida)

STU: Howdy Miss Ida.

IDA: Oh, hello Sturgill.

STU: Hey Miss Ida, how'd you like to make \$5 real fast.

IDA: Well, what did you have in mind?

STU: I gonna bet you \$5 that I'm not here.

IDA: What?

STU: Oh no, I mean I'm gonna bet you \$5 that you're not here.

IDA: Well, all right. *(they both take out \$5)*

STU: OK now, you're not in New York, are you?

IDA: No, I'm not in New York.

STU: And you're not in Detroit, are you?

IDA: No, I'm not in Detroit.

STU: And you're not in pick a town nearby

IDA: Thank goodness.

STU: *(with a little difficulty)* Well, if you're not in New York, and you're not in Detroit, and you're not in _____, then you must be somewhere else, right?

IDA: Right.

STU: And if you're somewhere else.....You're not here! *(takes money both exit)* It worked, it worked!!

(Both exit, olio up)

(enter Darkheart, insult)

DH: Now, I'm out here again looking for raw talent to take back to New Orleans.

(enter Toby and Sturgill)

TOBY: Did you say "raw talent?" Well we're back with a brand new act!

DH: Brand new?

TOBY: Right....It's socko, it's boffo, it's...

DH: Putrid!

TOBY: And best of all it goes just like this! Hit it boys *(to musicians)*

Toby selects a woman out of audience to stage. Sturgill and Toby hold a black cloth with girdle velcroed to back in front of woman. They count "1,2,3!" Take the cloth away and Sturgill holds up girdle. They take lady back to seat ad libbing "I'm sorry, etc."

STU: Well, what do you think? Huh, huh, huh,

DH: *(starts to say no, then gets an idea)* Oh that was terrific? I think I'll take that to New Orleans!

TOBY: Sturgill, did you hear that? He's gonna take us to New Orleans! Imagine me, Toby T. Taylor on the Cottonblossom!.

(Tonite Show bit - Toby swings imaginary golf club while musicians play theme and hits Sturgill in head)

DH: Now you've got everything you need to go to New Orleans don't you?

TOBY and STU: Sure!

DH: That means costumes, scripts, make-up, music, scenery?!

TOBY: Wait a minute, I thought they furnished all that stuff.

DH: Why no. You have to furnish or rent all of that and that costs lots of money!

TOBY: Money, why we ain't got no money.

DH: Oh, no money? Gee that's too bad. No money, no New Orleans.

STU: Toby, where we gonna get all that money?

TOBY: Mr. Darkheart, where we gonna get all that money?

DH: Gee I don't know, but if you happen to think of a way to make some money,
(*indicates bill of sale to audience and winks*) come see me. (*exit*)

TOBY: Oh boy, where are we gonna get some money?

STU: Toby, I know. We can sing these people a song. I bet they'll throw money to
hear us sing! (*exit*)

TOBY: Or to get us to quit! (*exit*)

(*Olio drop*)

(this song is done in a VERY serious manner, all come out one at a time with hands clasped in front - typical singer's pose)

PIANIST: Had a hen, no eggs would she lay,
 Had a hen, no eggs would she lay.
 One day a rooster got into our yard,
 And caught that hen right off of her guard.
 We're getting eggs now just like we uster.
 We're getting eggs now just like we uster.
 We're getting eggs now just like we uster.
 Since that rooster got into our yard.

TOBY: Had a dog, no pups would she have.
 Had a dog, no pups would she have.
 One day a rooster got into our yard.
 And caught poor Rover right off of her guard

PIANIST & We're getting pooched eggs, just like we uster.

TOBY: We're getting pooched eggs, just like we uster.
 We're getting pooched eggs, just like we uster.
 Since that rooster got into our yard.

SUSIE: Had a cow no milk would she give.
 Had a cow no milk would she give.
 One day a rooster got into our pasture.
 He caught poor Bossy (*spoken*) it was quite a disaster!

SUS, TOBY & We're getting egg nog, just like we uster.

PIANIST: We're getting egg nog, just like we uster.
 We're getting egg nog, just like we uster.
 Since that rooster got into our yard.

STURGILL: (*sings very off-key*)

Had a gum tree no gum would it give.

Had a gum tree no gum would it give.

One day a rooster got into our yard.

And I don't know what happened but it sure caught that gum tree offen
its guard.

ALL:

We're getting chicklets just like we uster.

We're getting chicklets just like we uster.

We're getting chicklets just like we uster.

Since that rooster got into our yard.

(Grand bows and olio drop, BLACKOUT)

(Lights up, enter Ida and Darkheart)

DH: Hello Ida.

IDA: Hello Darkheart. Say Darkheart, how would you like to make \$5 real fast?

DH: Need you ask?!

IDA: I'm going to bet you \$5 that you're not here.

DH: You're going to bet me \$5 dollars that I'm not here?

IDA: Yes.

DH: All right. *(both take out \$5)*

IDA: All right now, you're not in New York, are you?

DH: No, I'm not in New York.

IDA: And you're not in Detroit, are you?

DH: No, I'm not in Detroit.

IDA: And you're not in *pick a town nearby*

DH: Thank goodness.

IDA: Well, if you're not in New York, and you're not in Detroit, and you're not in _____, then you must be somewhere else, right?

DH: Right.

IDA: And if you're somewhere else.....You're not here! *(takes money both exit)*

(enter Darkheart and Toby)

DH: Toby, I need your help. I want to put together a fine piece of dramatic literature.

TOBY: A what?

DH: A play.

TOBY: A what?

DH: A skit.

TOBY: A what?

DH: A skit.

TOBY: Bless you!

DH: Toby! You see I've put together a short play and there's a part in it
for you

TOBY: For me?

DH: Yes Why this could be your big chance.

TOBY Oh boy Mr Darkheart, what do I do?

DH: Well unfortunately we're still short one member of the cast so I need a volunteer
from the audience! Would anyone care to.....

STU: *(From the back of house)* I'll volunteer, I want to do it. *(DH can't see him)*

DH: Come on up here son! *(Sturgill gets half way down the aisle when Darkheart
realizes and reacts accordingly)*

STU: I want to do it!

DH: No

STU: I want to do it!

DH: No

STU: I want to do it!

DH: OK

STU: I want to do it!

DH: OK, you can do it.

STU: I can do it?

DH: Yes.

STU: I've always wanted to do it!

DH: Now gentlemen, the parts that you play are very simple.

TOBY: Simple?

DH: Because the two of you are very simple.

TOBY & STU: YeahHuh?

DH: Now Toby, you get to be the villain.

TOBY: Oh I get to be the villain! (*sneer sneer, ad lib*)

DH: Now Toby when the scene begins, a lovely young lady will come out and she will say "My what a beautiful day, I think I'll pump some water for my dear old mother." At that point you jump out and you say "Ah-ha me proud and haughty beauty, marry me or be my wife!"

TOBY: Marry me or be my wife?

DH: That's right!

TOBY: Boy, you got some snappy dialogue in this thing. Let me see if I got this straight. The young lady comes out and says, "I'm gonna pump some water for my dear old mother," right?

DH: Right

TOBY: Then I jump out and say, "AH HA! me proud and haughty beauty, marry me or be my wife!"

DH: That's right!

TOBY: Then what do I do?

DH: Then you say, "Or I shall be forced to choke thee!" Then you choke her.

TOBY: Then I choke her!

DH: Right! (*notices Sturgill*) Then there's you.

STU: Oh am I in this?

DH: I'm afraid so.

STU: Well who am I? Who who who?

DH: Well it's a bit part....

STU: I'm a horse?

DH: No, your a walk-on.

STU: I'm a carpet?

DH: No its a speaking roll.

STU: Oh...I'm a talking biscuit!

DH: No Sturgill, you talk.

STU: Oh talking! I can do that!

DH: You're the hero.

STU: I'm the hero

DH: You're the good guy

STU: I get the girl in the end

DH: No! You end up with the girl

STU: Oh, I end up with the girl. Well what do I say? What's my line?

TOBY: To tell the truth

STU: I gotta secret

TOBY: 20,000 dollar pyramid

STU: Come on down!

TOBY: Tell em what he's won Johnny!

DRUMMER: A new car!

DH: A new car?! *(is caught up in this for a moment then)* Wait a minute! *(to Sturgill)*

When you see the villain choking the young lady, you jump out and
say....*(Dudley Do-right)* "Stop! touch not one single hair on that fair damsels
head!"

STU: Stop! I didn't understand a single word you said!

DH: Your line is, now repeat after me(*Sturgill repeats*). Stop.....Touch notone single hair..... on that fair damsels.....head.....

STU: Oh head...I feel it right here (*thumping heart*)

DH: Now when the scene opens, Toby you'll be behind that tree, and Sturgill you'll be behind that rock; let's get started! (*Toby and Sturgill are looking for scenery, there is none*)

STU: Wait a minute! Now when the scene opens, he's gonna be peeeeeeeepin behind a tree and I'm gonna be squattin behind a rock?!

DH: NO you're sitting behind the rock.

STU: (*thinks he's said "shitting"*) I'm what?

DH: SITTING behind the rock.

STU: OOOOOOOOOH!

DH: Now I believe its time we introduced our leading lady!

STU: Is that her? (*to lady in audience*)

DH: No that lady wouldn't waste five minutes with you

STU: Five minutes with me wouldn't be wasted!

DH: Stop that! (*Slaps him on shoulder*) Here she isthe lovely Miss Ida Clare!
(*Ida enters*)

TOBY: Ida Clare!!!!

STU: Hubba hubba what a hunk of blubba

DH: Miss Clare, this is your villain.

TOBY: Hi there. you and me get to have a couple of good chokes together.

STU: And I get to be your hero!

IDA: Well hello there (*to Toby*)

DH: You and me end up behind a rock!

DH: NO! now Miss Clare I believe you know your lines?

IDA: I believe so yes.

STU: Wait a minute, I forgot my line!

DH: Your line is: Stop, touch not one single hair on that fair damsel's head.

STU: (*repeats line fast*) I feel it right here! (*again thumping heart*)

DH: Fine. Now places. Toby, you behind the tree and Sturgill, you behind the rock.

TOBY: I'm behind the tree (*looks around, shrugs, assumes a pose*)

(*Sturgill just stands there*)

DH: Well Get down!

STU: Say what?!

DH: I said, get down!

STU: OK (*he dances to disco beat*)

DH: No you're supposed to be hiding. Miss Clare, if you will.

IDA: My what a beautiful day, I think I'll pump some water for my dear old mother.

TOBY: That's me! (*hits head on imaginary tree and falls down*)

DH: What are you doing?

TOBY: I hit my head on the limb of that tree.

DH: Well why don't you watch where you're going?!

TOBY: Well you put it there.

DH: Oooh!

STU: Stop! Don't shave her hair look at my underwear!

DH: No no no no!

STU: But those are the words you told me to say!

DH: But they're all wrong.

STU: But I got em all in. Tell me again what do I say?

DH: You say: Stop touch not one single hair on that fair damsels head? (*slap Sturgill on the head*)

STU: Oh head. I feel it right here! (*rubs head*)

DH: Let's try it again, places please (*tree and rock positions*) Miss Clare if you will!

IDA: My what a beautiful day, I think I'll pump some water for my dear old mother.

TOBY: Ah-ha me proud and haughty beauty, marry me or be my wife!

IDA: Never never!

TOBY: Then I shall be forced to choke thee. (*choke bit - Toby chokes Ida saying "choke, choke, etc. Ida is saying "ooh, ahh, ooh, ahh," Toby moves hands down to Ida's chest and her "ooh/aah's" get strained*)

DH: What do you think you're doing?

TOBY: I'm a fancy choker.

DH: Fancy choker?!

STU: Stop! Don't you shingle on her shangle or her dingle will dangle!

(*groans from Darkheart and Ida*)

STU: Did I goof?

DH: No you didn't goof, your father goofed!

STU: He knows that. Maybe if you give the line with a little feeling, I'll get it this time!

DH: Feeling?

STU: Yeah feeling.

DH: You want feeling? I'll give you feeling! (*booms*) STOP TOUCH NOT ONE SINGLE HAIR ON THAT FAIR DAMSEL'S HEAD!

STU: And don't you forget it!

DH: (*strained*) Places! Miss Clare, if you will.

IDA: (*angry*) Oh what a beautiful day! I think I'll pump some water for my dear old mother!

TOBY: Ah-ha me proud and haughty beauty, marry me or be my wife!

IDA: Neigh neigh!

TOBY: Neigh neigh? What is she, a horse?

DH: No choke her.

(*Toby chokes her with sound effects*)

DH: Oh that's good

TOBY: You like that?

DH: I like it.

TOBY: Good, I want more money.

DH: More money?

STU: STOOOOOOOOOP! (*can ad-lib or be silent*)

DH: I thought you said you felt it right here!

STU: Musta been gas. Ok one last time! Stop. Touch not one single hair (*pulls Darkheart's mustache*) on that fair damsel's head (*hits Darkheart on the head*)

DH: Ooooooh! Miss Clare.

IDA: My what a beautiful day, I think I'll pump my mother for some dear old water.
(*realizes she's goofed*)

STU: She goofed.

DH: Go on with it!

TOBY: Ah-ha me proud and haughty beauty, marry me or be my wife!

IDA: Then I shall be forced to choke thee. (*chokes her with sound effects*)

DH: (*to Sturgill*) Get in there.

STU: Look what he's doing.

DH: I know. Get in there.

STU: Stop!Single damsels have more hair!

(*BLACKOUT and olio drop*)

(enter DH and Toby)

DH: Ah Toby, how would you like to make a little wager?

TOBY: Is that anything like a bet?

DH: Yes

TOBY: For how much?

DH: Let's say 5\$.

TOBY: Well sure Mr. Darkheart, I think I got 5\$ on me somewhere.

DH: I am going to bet you 5\$ that you are not here.

TOBY: *(to audience)* I've heard this one before. *(to DH)* Well all right Mr. Darkheart.

DH: On second thought Toby, how would you like to double that bet to \$10?

TOBY: Are you sure Mr. Darkheart? *(DH nods)* OK.

DH: Wait a minute. Let's make it \$20.

TOBY: Now Mr. Darkheart, are you sure?

DH: Wait Toby. *(he counts his money and says to audience)* Let's see that's half of what I have. *(to Toby)* I'm a sporting man, I'll bet you this much *(shows Toby)* money that you not here.

TOBY: Now Mr. Darkheart are you sure, that's an awful lot of money.

DH: Quite sure.

TOBY: Well, OK *(shrugs)*

DH: Now you're not in New York, are you?

TOBY: No, I'm not in New York.

DH: And you're not in Detroit, are you?

TOBY: No, I'm not in Detroit.

DH: And you're not in *pick a town nearby*

TOBY: *(this time may get the audience to say this line)* Thank goodness!

DH: Well, if you're not in New York, and you're not in Detroit, and you're not in *(town name)*, then you must be somewhere else, right?

TOBY: Right.

DH: And if you're somewhere else..... You're not here!

TOBY: (*Toby takes money and starts to exit*) That's right!

DH: Wait just a minute Toby, you took my money.

TOBY: Oh, no I didn't Mr. Darkheart.

DH: Yes you did.

TOBY: You said I'm not in New York right?

DH: Right.

TOBY: And I'm not in Detroit right?

DH: Right.

TOBY: And I'm not in (*town name*), right?

DH: (*increasingly impatient*) Thank goodness, get on with it.

TOBY: Well, if I'm not in New York, Detroit, or _____, then I must be somewhere else right?

DH: Right.

TOBY: And if I'm somewhere else, I couldn't have taken your money!!

(*both exit*)

Bit #32 - **Pie in the Face**

(*enter Toby*)

TOBY: All right friends, it's time for the biggest act of all.....

STU: Hi Toby. Hey Toby, when we go to New Or-leans, I wanna be funny.

TOBY: No.

STU: I wanna be funny

TOBY: No.

STU: (*booms in Toby's face*) I WANNA BE FUNNY!!!

TOBY: OK, be funny.

STU: These two nuns were walkin down the street.....

TOBY: (*puts hand over Sturgill's mouth*) Whoa Sturgill!!! You can't tell those kind of jokes here.

STU: Oh, why not?

TOBY: These people didn't come to hear that kind of humor.

STU: (*points to guy in audience*) That guy did.

TOBY: Well, except for him, this is a high class crowd.

STU: Oh.

TOBY: They came to hear high class humor.

STU: (*in mocking tone*) Ooooooh.

TOBY: So be careful.

STU: OK, OK I'll be careful. I got some good jokes.

TOBY: Just be careful.

STU: OK Toby, picture this....We're up on stage and I say, (1)"look" (*points down to floor*)

TOBY: (2)What? (*looks down*)

(*Sturgill hits*(3) *Toby on forehead - this takes place in three distinct beats - see numbers*)

STU: Ain't that funny?

TOBY: No Sturgill, that's not funny.

STU: Oh. Well what if I took this powder puff and yelled, "MAKE - UP!!" (*hits Toby in face with powder*). Ain't that funny?

TOBY: No Sturgill, that's not funny. (*Can use this as an aside*) Boy, you sure put a lot of powder on it this time didn't you?

STU: You didn't like that one, Toby?

TOBY: No.

STU: Well, there's more where that came from. What if I took this glass of cold, wet, extremely cold and wet ice and poured it down your.....(*Toby thinks he going to pour it down his pants but, Sturgill pours ice down Toby's shirt*)

TOBY: NOOOOOO!!

STU: Shirt. Ain't that funny?

TOBY: No. It's cold, but it's not funny.

STU: Well, dadburnet Toby, I wish I could think of something funny. (*Piano plays a bass tremolo as a pie appears around olio*) Toby, what if I was to take this pie and.....

(*Toby crushes pie into Sturgill's face*)

TOBY: Now that's funny!

STU: I don't know.....

(*BLACKOUT and olio up*)

(enter Susie with stool and bucket, she sits down and begins to pull feathers out of bucket, like she is plucking a chicken. Ida enters and notices Susie)

IDA: Hi Susie.

SUE: Oh, hi Miss Ida.

IDA: Susie, what are you doing?

SUE: Well Miss Ida, I'm plucking this here chicken.

IDA: Oh are we going to have chicken for dinner?

SUE: Oh no Miss Ida, I gonna make one of them sexy feather things like you got *(meaning Ida's boa)* so Toby will notice me.

IDA: Oh now Susie, you don't need one of those. I think you're very appealing just the way you are.

SUE: APPEALLING?!! Oh good! Granny Kate told me my freckles would peel off if I used buttermilk on em everyday.

IDA: No Susie. I meant you're very attractive just the way you are. All you need is a little...uh,... refinement.

SUE: Well Miss Ida, I been sorta hearsin one of them sexy songs like I saw you sing a while ago. Would you help me with it?

IDA: Why Susie, I'd be delighted!

SUE: OK, Miss Ida, you just come and sit right over here. *(puts her on some man's lap or empty chair in audience)*. I'll just borry this from you. *(takes her boa)* And you can hold this for me, if you would. *(pulls rubber chicken out of bucket and sticks in Ida's face)*

IDA: AAAAAAGH!!!

SUE: Hit it boys!

Susie sings a rather bad rendition of "Stormy Weather," trying her very best to be sexy.

Ida can comment somewhat as to her actions. Susie may also choose to mimic Ida's stooge number by playing with some man in the audience and botching the whole thing up.

Everytime Susie sings the phrase, "keeps raining all the time," Sturgill appears in long johns, a tiara, and a tutu holding a glass of water and flicks it in Susie's face. Susie gets more and more agitated until the final time the phrase is sung, Susie splashes the whole glass in Sturgill's face. All exit. BLACKOUT

(Lights up. Enter Darkheart)

DH: Well, I out here one final time tonight....*(musicians cheer to prompt audience. Darkheart insults)* looking for raw talent to take back to New Orleans.*(enter Toby)*
Well Toby, I'm prepared to sweeten the offer for old Lightning.

TOBY: How much money?

DH: All that I have left after you swindled me on that bet you made. This much money!
(shows Toby the wad of money that he has left)

TOBY: That was an honest wager and That's a lot of money!

DH: That's right and with all of that money you could go to New Orleans and become rich and famous.

TOBY: Well

DH: Think of your family, Toby. They really want to go to New Orleans.

TOBY: Well...

DH: And what would a rich and famous man like you need with an old milk cow?

TOBY: Well you got a point there but....

DH: And you could visit her anytime you'd like.

TOBY: And you'd give her a good home? She's real happy here.

DH: Oh the best corn, the best muck and bire...

TOBY: Could we put all that in the contract for sale?

DH: Why of course, you put in any stipulations you like...

TOBY: What?

DH: Clauses

TOBY: I cut my nails same time as I take a bath.... once a month whether I need it or not!

DH: No Toby, terms. You can put any terms in that you like.

("Should I sell her?" business with audience)

TOBY: Oh. Well OK, where do I sign?

(Darkheart hands him pen and paper and Toby pushes Darkheart over to use as a desk. As Darkheart is fantasizing about what he'll buy with his fortune, Toby is echoing these as stipulations for the cow in the contract. He finishes by signing his name and dotting the end rather hard, stabbing Darkheart)

DH: *(aside) I'll show him! (Darkheart bends Toby into the same position and just as he is about to stab him with pen, Toby moves and Darkheart exits with the contract, laughing)*

(enter Sturgill)

STU: He was awful happy.

TOBY: Guess what? I got money so we can all go to New Orleans!

STU: WHERE'D you get that?

TOBY: I sold Mr. Darkheart Lightning!

STU: Oh no Toby! *(cries business)*

TOBY: Wait a minute Sturgill. Mr. Darkheart said I could put in any terms that I wanted and so I said, since we wuz all gonna be in New Orleans anyway that you could look after her for him! And that she gets the best of everything a cow could ever want.

(exit)

Bit #35 - **MONEY, MONEY** - song

DH: Ida! Ida! Come here!

IDA: What is it Darkheart?

DH: He signed it!

IDA: He signed? We're gonna be rich!

DH: Yes with lots of money!

IDA: Money

DH and IDA: Money, money, money (song MONEY)

DH: I'm going down there to milk her right now so we can toast to our forthcoming wealth. (*BLACKOUT and olio drop*)

Bit #36 - Great Moments - Pie Alamo

(We hear 2001 theme until timpani section, fade, then over a loudspeaker we hear:)

Announcer: Ladies and Gentlemen....., the (Hard Corn Players) in conjunction with (organization name) proudly present Great Moments in World History and you wuz there. The date is March 1, 1836 and we find David Bowie, Davy Crockett, and John Wayne fighting at ...the Alamo.

(As lights and olio come up, Toby, Darkheart, and Sturgill are in cowboy hats with toy guns shooting when Susie appears with 3 small pies and puts a pie in each males' face)

DH, TOBY & STU: Hey, what was that for?!

SUE: Haven't you ever heard of.....Pie Alamo?!!

BLACKOUT and olio drop

Bit #37 - Last Scene

TOBY: Well folks, it looks like we gonna be going to New Orleans to be rich and famous! And just for you folks we gonna show you this new act.....

DH: (*enters angry*) Toby!!! What's wrong with Lightning?!!!

TOBY: What do you mean Mr. Darkheart?

DH: I just tried to milk her and nothing came out.

TOBY: Are you sure you grabbed the right thing? (*aside*) You never can tell about these city folks.

DH: Yes, I'm sure.

TOBY: Mr. Darkheart, I been trying to tell you, She's dry half the time. Just give her a few minutes and everything'll be just fine. (*DH exits with cup from stage.*)

TOBY: Anyway like I was sayin, We got this brand new act that we're planning to take to New Orleans and we sure would like to show it to you.

(*Toby introduces the "Great Sturgillini." Sturgill appears in a cape with a bath towel turban complete with jewels on it to look like a swami. Toby asks for a volunteer from the audience. Toby asks the volunteer to "pick a card, any card." He directs the volunteer to memorize the card, then to show it to Toby, then to the audience, then to the Great Sturgillini. He asks Sturgillini, "What is that card?"*)

STU: Uh....five of sixes? No, no....uh....diamond of clubs?.....

(*enter Darkheart as Toby seats stooge*)

DH: (*storms in with cup*) Taste this!

TOBY: Yep. That's Lightning's good sweet milk!

DH: But it's not the same as it was before?

TOBY: What do you mean?

DH: Well it had pizazz, a kick, it was spiked!

TOBY: What?! Oh no. Did you drink that spiked milk out of a yellow bucket?

DH: Well, yes I believe I did...

TOBY: (*Sturgill has been trying to sneak off*) Sturgill, have you been using the still bucket to milk the cow in again?!

STU: Well...I....

TOBY: You know what happened last time.

STU: I do?

TOBY: Granny drank it mistakin it for milk and ended up blowin the door off of the outhouse! (KA-BLAM) Oh no! Sorry folks. (*all other enter with granny who is someone well-known in the audience. Susie and Ida have picked the stooge earlier and dressed him in skirt, shawl, and gray wig. Much ad-libbing here. Seat granny in front row*)

DH: You mean it wasn't spiked after all?! I'm ruined. RUINED!!!!

TOBY: Don't worry Mr. Darkheart! We'll get you back to New Orleans.

DH: Thank you Toby, I'll send you the money back, I promise.

TOBY: You don't have to do that.

DH: I don't?

TOBY: Heck no Mr. Darkheart cuz we're going with you!!!

(*Hooray, whoopee, etc.*)

STU: Hey Toby. This sounds like a good place for the grand finally.

DH: Grand Finally? What's a grand finally?

TOBY: That's where everybody in the audience goes:

ALL: (*wipe brow*) WHEW! FINALLY!!!

(THE COTTONBLOSSOM)

Bit #38 - COTTONBLOSSOM - song

VERSE: (*sung by individual actor*):

If I could be anything I wanna be

Anything under the sun.

I guess I'd be the (*insert ship part*)

On the old Cottonblossom number 1, number 1,

The old Cottonblossom number 1.

And I'd go (*sound and movement of ship part*)

ALL:up the river.

And (*sound and movement by individual*), coming down.

(*sound and movement by individual*) to the kids along the bank.

And I'd serenade the folks in the town, in the town,

Serenade the folks in the town.

1. Ida - big paddlewheel - "chug-a-chug-a-chug-a-chug-a"

2. Susie - steam calliope "boop-boop-boop"

3. Darkheart steamboat whistle "Twee-eet" (*in bass tone*)

4. Sturgill steamboat boiler (silly noise)

5. Toby steamboat captain (*first time*) "Push that barge"

(*second time*) "Tote that bale"

(*third time*) "Just say 'no'"

"And I love all the ladies in the town, in the town,

etc"

ALL: If we could be anything we wanna be,

Anything under the sun.

I guess we'd be that grand old boat,

The Old Cottonblossom Number 1, Number 1,

The Old Cottonblossom Number 1. And we'd go....

(all do sound and movements together)

Toby's goodnight speech is improvised, with thank-you's, etc. Instead of a curtain call, after speech and "Good-bye" from everyone, they run around the olio one time.

THE END

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