Economies of Touring in American Theatre Culture, 1835-1861

Nicole Berkin
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Economies of Touring in American Theatre Culture, 1835-1861

by

Nicole Berkin

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2015
This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

Economies of Touring in American Theatre Culture, 1835-1861

by

Nicole Berkin

Advisor: Dr. Judith Milhous

Employing methods from print and material culture studies, this dissertation explores the economic, social, and cultural dynamics of theatrical touring during a period, 1835-1861, when the ultimate symbols of anxiety over rising industrialization, migration, and urbanization—con artists and prostitutes or “confidence men and painted women”—were associated with both theatre and transportation. I argue that touring was central to the spread of theatre culture and is therefore critical to understanding U.S. popular culture. This project examines how geographic movements, as well as the circulation of extra-theatrical materials like newspapers and photographs, were instrumental not only for performers who attempted to solidify and enhance their status as stars, but also for utility actors not permanently attached to companies and for whom itinerancy became a necessity. It considers how performers responded to new modes of transportation and how managers developed circuits in the South, the Midwest, and the West to both accommodate and generate new entertainment markets. And it explores how “legitimate” systems of touring contended with informal or ostensibly “illegitimate” entertainment practices. Ultimately, my research examines acts of circulation within nineteenth-century theatrical culture as expressions of both capitalist expansion and of individual, sometimes oppositional, agency.
In each of my three chapters, I explore a different scale of touring as antebellum theatre culture: as a set of practices through which celebrity was negotiated (Chapter 1), as a generator of artifacts (Chapter 2), and as a tool for developing regional identity (Chapter 3). In each chapter I approach theatre not only as a set of events that took place inside theatres, but also as a channel for the circulation of ideas, people, and objects throughout the country. My case studies interweave close readings of archival materials, including diaries, newspapers, and ephemera; I am attentive to how print and material artifacts helped to construct notions of movement and agency, as well as regional differences, in the nineteenth-century cultural imaginary. By examining touring, I fill a noteworthy gap in theatre historiography and contribute to the growing body of work on the circulatory patterns of popular culture. I recover some of the market maneuvers and details of lived experience that occurred in what we might call the margins of theatrical life—in the transitions between theatrical events, in epistolary exchanges across distances, and in locations that have been largely neglected by theatre scholars.
Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I want to thank the four members of my dissertation committee. This project would not have been possible without the guidance and support of my advisor, Judith Milhous. I am grateful to Judy for encouraging me since day one of graduate school, for teaching me how to be a theatre historian, and for investing her time and effort in directing this project. David Savran initially inspired my interest in theories of popular culture, and his approach to the subject continues to shape my thinking. Conversations with Josh Brown at various stages of this project were invaluable; I thank him for his willingness to talk through and share ideas, and for providing me with new insights about nineteenth-century cultural history. Amy E. Hughes has been a generous mentor; her wisdom and tireless encouragement, and her own scholarship about nineteenth-century theatre, have been formative in my development as a scholar and teacher. I also thank Jean Graham-Jones, professor and Executive Officer in the Graduate Center Theatre Program, for sparking my interest in theatre history in my Master’s Program at Hunter College and for continuing to support me in my doctoral studies. I thank Lynette Gibson in the Ph.D. program in Theatre for her help and humor throughout this process. In addition, I thank several scholars outside of the Graduate Center for their guidance and encouragement at different stages of my graduate work: Marlis Schweitzer, Karen Miller, and Mark Cosdon.

I am grateful to my colleagues at the Graduate Center, and to the faculty and staff of the Theatre Program. In particular, I want to thank Julia Goldstein and Rayya El Zein for their friendship and support, and for continually inspiring me with their own work.

I also thank the librarians and curators that assisted me in my research. To the curators and staff at the Missouri History Museum Library and Research Center, the American
Antiquarian Society, the Harvard Theatre Collection/Houghton Library, the New-York Historical Society, the Library Company of Philadelphia, the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, the Louisiana State University Library, the UC Berkeley Bancroft Library, and the California Historical Society, I thank you for your help with accessing materials and collections.

I received financial support for research and writing from the American Theatre Research Fund, the Doctoral Student Research Fund (CUNY Graduate Center), and the ARC Knickerbocker Award for Archival Research. I thank the individuals who made these awards, and my research, possible.

I am most grateful for the loving support of my family. My parents, Vicki and Scott Kahn, have encouraged and sustained me through the long process of graduate school, and deserve more thanks than I can ever express. I dedicate this dissertation to my husband Otis Berkin, who always inspires me to think more deeply about culture and history, and whose love, humor, and belief in me have made this endeavor possible.
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Introduction

On September 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 1850, the \textit{New York Tribune} reported on an event that would become one of the touchstones of nineteenth-century American cultural history. Upon arriving in New York, the steamship \textit{Atlantic} was welcomed by “the spectacle of some thirty or forty thousand persons congregated on all the adjacent piers…From all quarters, crowds…could be seen hurrying towards the \textit{Atlantic} dock. The multitude increased so rapidly that we began to fear there would be difficulty making a way through it.” As the “distinguished visitors” disembarked, the reporter noted that several people in the crowd were “severely bruised, some came off with bloody noses, and two boys, about twelve years age, appeared to be seriously injured. Had not the rush been checked in time, many lives would have been lost.” This frenzy—typically reserved for the arrival of a political leader—was in honor of a “young, untitled woman” who was in fact a member of a professional class that was often considered socially dubious during the antebellum period. An opera singer had “won her way by genius, by effort, by lofty achievement, to the society and friendship of the noblest and most eminent of her sex and to the hearts of admiring nations.”\footnote{“Arrival of Jenny Lind,” 2 September, 1850, \textit{New York Daily Tribune}. I came across this quotation in Sherry Lee Linkon’s “Reading Lind Mania: Print Culture and the Construction of Nineteenth-Century Audiences,” \textit{Book History}, Vol. 1 (1998): 94.}

Swedish soprano Jenny Lind’s 1850-51 American tour, managed by the notorious entrepreneur P.T. Barnum, is one of the most well documented events in nineteenth-century theatre history.\footnote{Bluford Adams, \textit{E Pluribus Barnum: The Great Showman and the Making of U.S. Popular Culture} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Neil Harris, \textit{Humbug: The Art of P.T. Barnum} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).} Barnum manufactured an image of True Womanhood, of ideal feminine purity
and sentimentality, and created one of the period’s preeminent celebrities, surrounded by a public fervor dubbed “Lind-mania.” One scholar describes the Lind tour as “a crucial moment in the ongoing struggle over the politics of U.S. commercial amusements,” while another identifies it as an “opportunity for public discourse about gender, religion, business success, and public life” during the period.³ Although many historians have explored Lind’s celebrity and public image, as well as Barnum’s tactics in producing her fame, few have examined her appearances as evidence of the social and economic dynamics of touring itself. The Lind tour is instructive of how performers’ arrivals and departures, often taken for granted by theatre scholars in favor of traditional theatrical events, were meaningful, charged occasions that were central to nineteenth-century performance culture.

The Lind tour has received ample scholarly attention and will not be examined in depth in this project, though we will find theatres named for her in California. But, as a point of departure, it prompts broader questions regarding the politics of mobility and circulation in early American theatre culture. What were the various meanings and material conditions of touring in the antebellum theatre industry? How did performers and managers use touring, as well as the circulation of extra-theatrical materials that accompanied a tour, to advance an entertainer’s fame? How did performers on tour engage with local economies of entertainment? And how did touring generate particular social and economic relations between performers and managers?

While numerous studies have been devoted to tours by renowned figures like Lind, Tom Thumb (Charles Stratton), and Edwin Booth, why did lesser-known celebrities or non-famous performers choose to go on the road? How did touring function differently for performers who were not widely known by the public, for popular entertainers versus actors of the “legitimate”

³ Adams, E Pluribus Barnum, 42; Linkon, “Reading Lind-Mania,” 95.
stage, or for performers who, unlike Lind, extended their movements beyond only the major northeastern cities? This dissertation aims to address these questions, to explore some of the antecedents of the Lind tour, and thus to investigate a neglected area of nineteenth-century America popular culture.

**Background**

Since the earliest days of the American theatre, performers have reached far-flung audiences by any means necessary: by horses, flatboats, wagons, and, later, by steamboats and trains. In the colonial period, actor-managers established resident theatre companies and subsidiary circuits around each large east coast city. By around 1820, what was new was that population growth and migration had produced a demand for theatre that exceeded the supply. Resident stock companies became more numerous and, in response, leading actors began to exploit the possibility of performing with multiple companies in different cities in a single season. “Stars” traveled to support local companies, while lower-level itinerant performers—vestiges of the earlier American and English tradition of “illegitimate” strolling players—continued to travel in search of engagements. As the frontier rapidly expanded, professional players founded theatres in new areas of New England, the South, and the Midwest, and, following the discoveries of gold in 1848 and silver in 1859, a surprising number pursued their theatrical fortunes in San Francisco and the Nevada territory. Although the Civil War disrupted the antebellum pattern of touring actors cycling through resident companies, throughout the century, the spread of railroad lines made touring quicker and easier, and performers increasingly traveled farther and faster in order to produce theatrical events.4

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4 Bruce McConachie, “American Theatre in Context from the Beginning to 1870,” in *The*
Although the conditions of mid-century theatre made travel for work pervasive, touring was not a neutral activity. Within the emerging “star system,” managers paid visiting stars at disproportionately high rates, promoted the outsiders independently, and neglected lesser-known or regional stock actors. Many performers, managers, and critics decried the system’s unrestrained attention to profit and promotion, claiming that it sullied the profession and suppressed economies of local entertainment. In addition to fiscal concerns, touring engendered social uneasiness; theatres, as well as steamboats, stagecoaches, and trains, were depicted in visual and print culture not only as novel and egalitarian, but also as dubious sites of transformation and social mixing. As transitory practices in which strangers intermingled, theatre-going and travel participated in what cultural historian Karen Halttunen identifies as the dialectical relationship between sincerity and duplicity in antebellum culture; conventional Victorian displays of propriety and sincerity were largely cultural defenses against threats of rapid urbanization and a socially fluid environment epitomized by the figures of the con artist and the prostitute.\(^5\) However, the deception engendered by a society on the move was, according to scholar James Cook, not simply a social threat to be averted, but a critical mode of nineteenth-century popular culture, a market strategy that, rather than encouraging the detection of fraud, invited the slippage between authenticity and illusion.\(^6\) For performers, managers, and spectators in antebellum cities, encountering a society increasingly filled with strangers generated pleasure, profit, as well as ambivalence.

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In recent years, the circulation of knowledge, objects, and people during the antebellum period has attracted scholarly attention from a variety of disciplines. In his survey of the field of antebellum cultural history, James Cook argues that the best new work offers “fresh insights about patterns of domination and resistance in antebellum cultural forms specifically understood as national or transnational industries.” This important body of scholarship includes studies by Trish Loughran, Meredith McGill and David Jaffee on networks of nineteenth-century print and material culture; by Elizabeth Pryor, Will Mackintosh, and Catherine Cocks on travel and tourism; by Scott Gac and Gillian M. Rodger on popular music; and by Walter Johnson on the antebellum slave market. However, scholars have not fully explored the social, cultural, and economic conditions of touring within early American theatre culture. Although touring was

integral to the daily operations of the nineteenth-century theatre business, the construction of celebrity, and debates over regional and national cultural identity, it has been relatively neglected by theatre historians in favor of subjects like the dramatic repertoire and artistic achievements. Important studies of nineteenth-century U.S. theatre by Bruce McConachie, Amy Hughes, and John Frick (among others), appropriately focus on performances in the period’s economic and cultural northeastern centers, rather than on networks of touring or on circulation in other regions. However, without an understanding of the development of touring circuits and the spread of theatrical products across the country, we are left with an inadequate analysis of antebellum theatre, the most important purveyor of culture during the period.

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Contribution and Significance

This study fills an important gap in theatre historiography by examining the dynamics of touring and geographic circulation during a period, 1835-1861, when the ultimate symbols of anxiety over rising industrialization, migration, and urbanization—“confidence men and painted women”—were associated with both theatre and transportation. As a theatre historian, my interest in touring stems from a broader interest in theatre’s role in nineteenth-century American popular culture, and in what Rosemarie Bank calls “theatre culture,” the notion that “spaces of representation” or “stagings of culture” were not confined to theatre proper and that antebellum culture was itself a theatrical entity. I approach theatre not only as a set of events that took place inside theatres, but also as a channel for the circulation of ideas, people, and objects throughout the country. I thus recover some of the market maneuvers and details of lived experience that occurred in what we might call the margins of theatrical life—in the transitions between theatrical events, in epistolary exchanges across distances, and in locations that have been largely neglected by theatre scholars. I argue that touring was central to the spread of theatre culture and is therefore critical to understanding nineteenth-century American popular culture. My research fills a noteworthy gap in theatre historiography, contributes to the growing body of scholarship concerning the circulatory patterns of early American popular culture, and aims to advance the fields of cultural geography, celebrity, and everyday life studies.

This project explores how geographic movements, as well as the circulation of extra-theatrical materials like newspapers and photographs, were instrumental not only for performers who attempted to solidify and enhance their status as stars, but also for utility actors not

permanently attached to companies and for whom itinerancy became a necessity. It examines how performers responded to new modes of transportation and how managers developed circuits to both accommodate and generate new entertainment markets. And it explores how “legitimate” systems of touring contended with informal or ostensibly “illegitimate” entertainment practices. Ultimately, my research considers acts of circulation within nineteenth-century theatrical culture as expressions of both capitalist expansion and of individual, sometimes oppositional, agency.

My approach to touring as an expression of both industry growth and everyday lived experience aims to partake in what Stuart Hall calls a “materialist” mode of cultural analysis that intends to account for “the dialectic between agency and conditions.” James Cook describes his attitude toward cultural history in similar terms, as a study of “not just ideas, values, and perceptions,” but also “a vast system of structural constraint.” Historian Scott C. Martin also calls for an approach to cultural history that is sensitive to both institutions and individuals, arguing that, while historians have thoroughly studied the political and economic results of antebellum market developments known as the “market revolution,” “our knowledge of the cultural aspects of market expansion is far from complete.” By studying the business practices and market relations involved in touring alongside the forgotten stories of individual performers and managers, my project responds to Martin’s call for further study into how nineteenth-century Americans’ engagement “in widening financial networks,” “an ever-increasing array of consumer goods and services,” and “struggl[es] against the vagaries of impersonal and familiar economic forces influence[d] family life, class identity, gender roles, ethnic and racial

identification, and social interaction.” Conversely, I examine how “the cultural values and social practices with which Americans responded to economic change shape[d] the evolution of the market,” and specifically the market for theatre culture.\textsuperscript{13}

Inspired by recent work on transatlantic touring practices by Daphne Brooks and Marlis Schweitzer, along with Tracy Davis’s study of the economics of nineteenth-century theatre, this dissertation approaches theatre history as the movement and acquisition of different forms of capital.\textsuperscript{14} Despite public concerns over respectability and social mixing, poor traveling conditions, and local variation and unpredictability, most mid-nineteenth-century performers and managers traveled frequently, suggesting that they benefited from touring and regional/national circulation, however difficult. In keeping with Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of capital, I contend that touring furnished theatre professionals with symbolic capital accumulated through prestige or celebrity, as well as with cultural capital, concerned with forms of cultural knowledge, assets that were often as important to or more important to the field of cultural production than the accrual of profits alone.\textsuperscript{15} Major stars rarely advertised their movements as profit-driven, but rather, as ushering cultural innovation into a new city or venue. And ordinary non-famous performers who were unable to secure steady work in one location and toured out of economic necessity often treated their journeys as just another convention of the profession rather than admitting that they


were the result of failure or desperation. Managers of developing circuits who were forced to move their companies around from season to season in order to sustain themselves privately struggled to organize their finances, but publicly disavowed economic concerns, presenting ventures in new cities as signs of industry development and regional progress. Even when theatre professionals traveled to California during the gold rush, they promoted their activities as acts of participation in the myths of the West, as social and cultural reinvention, rather than merely as fortune seeking.

My thinking about how movements across the country, motivated in part by economic gain, engendered and invoked particular social geographies, is informed not only by theatre historians, but also by cultural geographers such as Doreen Massey, who conceives of space as a “product of interrelations,” and Mark Simpson, who argues that the movement of people and things are “contestatory processes” invested in the “making and breaking of subjectivities.”

Following Bourdieu’s and Stuart Hall’s approach to the cultural field as a site of social formation and struggle over capital, I examine how performers and managers attempted to use physical circulation to reinforce or re-map the social and cultural categories that circumscribed them, including popular vs. legitimate, respectable vs. scandalous, and star vs. unknown. The economic and social negotiations that comprised the economy of touring offer a framework for understanding nineteenth-century popular culture as a mutable and contested category, as, according to Hall, “one of the sites where [the] struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged.”

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performers and managers competed with one another for cultural dominance. And, by booking and promoting visiting stars, managers in different cities participated in cultural rivalries and played upon spectators’ regional biases. In addition, touring sometimes functioned as its own public claim to prestige or success; although performers traveled for work, many brought with them connotations of travel as a privileged leisure practice that was sometimes presented during the period as natural and universally American. Whether they did so strategically or unwittingly, they thus promoted their own race, gender, and/or class-based membership and potentially mitigated their compromised respectability as performers. By investigating the relationship between touring and perceptions of cultural legitimacy, I aim to advance the rich body of scholarship concerning the politics of the popular within antebellum American culture.18

As a study of theatrical touring in the antebellum era, my project also intervenes in traditional narratives of American mass culture. Studies of touring have, for the most part, focused on the period leading up to and following the Panic of 1873, in which traveling “combination” companies displaced the era of resident stock-repertory companies and visiting stars that had been prevalent since the 1830s. Upon the completion of the transcontinental

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railroad in 1869, touring became tied to the development of centralized circuits that, by century’s end, coalesced into the Theatrical Syndicate, and scholars have positioned touring as an expression of theatre’s industrialization. Indeed, in his foundational study of nineteenth-century American culture and society, Alan Trachtenberg identifies “incorporation” as the central principle of cultural change during the period. Recent work by Beth Holmgren on the legitimate theatre, M. Alison Kibler on vaudeville, and Janet Davis on circus explains or implies the connection between touring and efficient circuits based on the transcontinental railroad.19 Douglass McDermott claims that the advent of touring stars “represents the shift from autonomous, self-governing communities to industrial entrepreneurship,” while Bruce McConachie describes touring combination companies as enterprises “in which a capitalist (the star) hired workers (stock actors and supernumeraries) for productive labor.”20 And transportation historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch asserts, glossing Marx, that the railway’s creation of a spatial distance between the place of production and the place of consumption affected the perception of goods and transformed products into commodities.

By characterizing touring as an instrument of theatre’s incorporation and standardization, scholars invoke the trends toward monopolization, bureaucratic expansion, and perhaps, the lack


of individual agency, associated with Theodor Adorno’s model of the culture industry, in which corporate power produces total domination, subdues individual experience, and precludes any notion of mass culture that “arises spontaneously from the masses themselves.” However, in this project, I examine touring during an earlier, under-studied period and complicate reductive correlations between touring and capitalist expansion. I follow James Cook’s reclaiming of the culture industry as a more flexible and historical concept that, unlike slippery terms like “mass” and “popular,” conjures the image of a far more concrete historical entity whose specific organizational patterns and stages of development can be carefully tracked and explicated without unraveling the larger category… by moving the term ‘culture’ from noun to adjective (mass culture to culture industry), we shift the conceptual emphasis from qualitative measure to mutable institution… Much like the term ‘market,’ industry simultaneously signifies a microlevel site of production and a macrolevel system of circulation.

By historicizing the antebellum culture industry, Cook aims to retain Adorno’s uncompromising attention to the study of popular culture and his “refusal to consider questions of aesthetic form or ideological function apart from the mediating structures of capitalism.” At the same time, this refashioning of the culture industry, partly inspired by Adorno’s revisions to his own concept, allows for struggle and resistance within popular culture that is more in keeping with theorists like Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams than with Adorno’s work. As Cook argues, “The production of the popular has never simply unfolded according to some inexorable logic of

23 Cook, “The Return of the Culture Industry,” 298
capitalist expansion. Rather, it always (simultaneously) runs through multiple axes of competing
products, shifting publics, and localized power struggles.”

Indeed, I demonstrate that touring was its own geographic and social arena of cultural struggle and capitalist development, of
agency through movement and of increased distribution across markets. Touring facilitated the
movement of economic and cultural capital before the era in which scholars locate theatre’s
corporatization. At mid-century, standardized, “official” conventions of touring, such as
coordination across markets and an intensifying professional hierarchy, coexisted with
idiosyncratic, improvised local practices. Travel was functioning as capital and theatre was
becoming conscious of itself as a capitalist enterprise well before the presumed era of theatrical
big business and corporate monopolies.

Along with complicating genealogies of American mass culture, I focus on neglected
performers, circuits, and regions. While the movements of acknowledged stars such as Jenny
Lind, Charlotte Cushman, and Adah Isaacs Menken comprise one aspect of the social and
economic dynamics of nineteenth-century touring, these figures have received ample attention
from scholars.

I contend that the touring activities of ordinary performers and lesser-known
local favorites offer a more nuanced picture of the industry, and show that touring was an arena
in which the category of celebrity itself was contested and negotiated. My study builds on Sara
Babcox First’s excellent study of early American celebrity, which parallels my own interest in
how economic and social practices inform and contradict one another within the cultural field.

26 Adams, E Pluribus Barnum; Eric D. Lehman, Becoming Tom Thumb: Charles
Stratton, P.T. Barnum, and the Dawn of American Celebrity (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan
University Press, 2013); Lisa Merrill, When Romeo Was a Woman: Charlotte Cushman
and Her Circle of Female Spectators (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000);
Julia Markus, Across An Untried Sea: Discovering Lives Hidden in the Shadow of
Convention and Time (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000); Sentilles, Performing
Menken; Brooks, Bodies in Dissent, 131-206.
First productively describes celebrity tours as requiring “an audience and accessible travel routes,” “communities with considerable financial and cultural capital, and “established print networks for publicity and promotion.” However, following Joseph Roach’s study of the “It-effect,” which traces the rise of secular celebrity worship, First focuses squarely on touring’s relationship to fame. Instead, I deliberately examine the travels of ordinary or neglected performers alongside celebrities, and the rhythms of everyday life on the road as well as celebrated events, and contend that a study limited to the famous glosses over the struggles over culture engendered by the economy of touring.

By examining touring in the South, the Midwest, and the West, I also attempt to challenge the privileging of the Northeast within studies of nineteenth-century American culture. Scholars have convincingly argued that the cultural reciprocity between the United States and England during this period demands a transatlantic framework, but they have consequently focused on the centers of cultural dominance—northeastern urban hubs with easy access to London and, later, to Europe. Theatre historians such as Sarah Meer and Marlis Schweitzer have explored nineteenth-century theatre in a transatlantic context, but few have attended to regional circulation within the United States. In this study, I contribute to the growing body of work on regional American performance culture, which includes work by Gillian M. Rodger and Felicia Hardison Londré, and contend that an examination of developing theatrical markets in the

30 Rodger, Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima: Variety Theatre in the Nineteenth Century; Feicia Hardison Londré, The Enchanted Years of the Stage: Kansas City at the Crossroads of American Theater, 1870-1930 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press,
South and West is crucial to our understanding of the nineteenth-century American theatre industry. Theatregoers, managers, and performers in these emerging circuits contributed to an increasingly national theatre culture that was aided by burgeoning networks of print (and practices of re-printing/circulation), while also resisting the influence from the theatrical centers of New York, Boston, and Philadelphia.

**Methodology and Case Studies**

Employing methodologies from cultural history and from print and material culture studies, my project takes an interdisciplinary approach and will contribute not only to theatre studies, but also to the fields of history and American studies. Each chapter is organized around case studies that interweave close readings of archival materials, including diaries, newspapers, and ephemera. Compared to archives of the post-Civil War period, the evidence regarding antebellum touring is uneven and limited. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the development of systematic circuits, booking agents and tour managers, and a clear interdependence between the theatre and the railroad produced invaluable sources for scholars, such as city directories published by and for the theatre industry. The fragmented, idiosyncratic nature of antebellum touring has produced an equally fragmented archive. However, these challenges have compelled me to explored materials that are under-utilized by theatre scholars and perhaps unexpected in studies of theatre history. Throughout, I harness quotidian anecdotes and apocryphal stories alongside market-driven data like maps and travel guides. I incorporate accounts by ordinary performers, sensational celebrities, and the press, as well as documentation from the early tourism industry. I am attentive to how letters, diaries, newspapers, and other print 2007).
and material artifacts helped to construct notions of movement and agency, as well as regional differences, in the nineteenth-century cultural imaginary. Because I focus on understudied regions, I rely heavily on local archives in St. Louis and San Francisco, as well as on more readily used collections of nineteenth-century materials housed in New York and Boston.

In each chapter I develop case studies that examine a different manifestation and scale of touring as theatre culture, focusing on neglected performers and locations. My case studies attend to several regional markets and to touring practices within a range of performance genres: theatre, popular entertainments, opera, and lecturing. Indeed, during the antebellum period, these forms typically appeared in the same venues and often shared a single evening’s bill. While each type of performance possessed certain conventions and particularities in terms of touring, the same managers negotiated with actors, minstrel performers, circus acts, vocalists, and lecturers. Of course, these transactions were fraught with conflict and ambiguity, and I aim to demonstrate that the culture and economy of antebellum theatrical touring, was comprised, in part, by the tensions engendered by competing types of performers who took to the road. However, while I deliberately include contrasting, representative examples in my case studies, this project is, of course, far from comprehensive. Entire books could be devoted to the touring practices of any one of the forms for which I only examine individual cases, as well as to the forms that I do not discuss, such as magicians and equestrian acts. In chapter one and only in passing, I discuss the phenomenon of child performers and the increased visibility of African American performers, two areas of touring that deserve further scholarship. At mid-century, child stars such as the Bateman sisters and Jean Margaret Davenport crisscrossed the country and became national sensations. And, although the evidence documenting the activities of touring African American performers like opera singer Elizabeth Greenfield and minstrel dancer William Henry Lane is
fragmented and scarce, significant work remains to be done concerning this important aspect of antebellum performance culture.\textsuperscript{31}

In chapter one, “Negotiating Celebrity Under the Star System: Touring as a Tool for Cultivating Fame,” I build on recent studies of nineteenth-century celebrity by Sara Babcox First, Renée Sentilles, and Sharon Marcus.\textsuperscript{32} Employing the Ludlow and Smith Company as a model, I analyze the institutional framework of touring in the South and Midwest and related constructions of celebrity. With a focus on actors Junius Brutus Booth and Edwin Forrest, minstrel dancer John Diamond, and stock actress Eliza Petrie, I argue that performers—major “legitimate” stars, popular entertainers, and stock actors—used touring consciously, with the connivance of management, to cultivate a higher profile. I argue that stardom was not just coincidental, with talent and opportunity resulting in public acclaim, but was negotiable in some respects.

In chapter two, “Everyday Life on the Road: Touring as Generator of Artifacts,” I focus on a range of performers’ diary-keeping practices, and argue that diaries were public and private artifacts that were instrumental to the mechanics of touring, to the establishment of a performer’s “respectable” professional identity, and to publicity and promotion. By reading diaries not only as texts, but also as objects, I demonstrate that, for performers, travel diaries served a variety of functions that were both personal and economic. In this chapter, I follow the lead of scholars


such as Robin Bernstein and Amy Hughes, whose scholarship on theatre and performance engages material culture and theories of everyday life. The diaries kept by actor-singer Thomas A’Becket, temperance lecturer John B. Gough, and musical conductor Anthony Reiff, Jr. provide a window into the rhythms and routines of everyday life on the road that are not accessible through letters and contracts.

In chapter three, “The Geography of Theatre Culture in California: Touring as Component of Regional Identity,” I undertake a geographic case study of the theatrical circuit that developed between San Francisco and the Nevada mining towns during the California gold rush. In California, unlike the long-settled South, entrepreneurs were compelled to negotiate what to import or imitate from the East. They had to balance the mythology of the West with its material demands, and California theatre culture reflected broader struggles over the region’s cultural identity. In addition to exploring how the physical geography of San Francisco and the interior shaped its cultural and social landscape, I examine the specific ways that women performers and managers harnessed both the material demands and the mythic, gendered perceptions of the West. I build upon work by scholars including Robert C. Allen, Faye E. Dudden, and Elizabeth Reitz Mullenix, who have thoroughly described how theatre participated in and crystallized debates over gender ideals and respectability. Interrogations of actresses also intersected with concurrent attitudes toward travel, since, as Amy G. Richter argues, the railroad was a “lightning rod” for examining the gendered parameters of public life, both by

asserting and challenging the ideal of separate spheres. She claims that the midcentury perception of public life “as uncertain, dangerous, and masculine” contended with “the modern ideal of ‘public domesticity’—a vision of an orderly, comfortable, and safe realm that, while not feminized, was no longer solely masculine.”\(^{35}\) Actresses who traveled to California such as Catherine Hayes and Caroline Chapman, as well as stars like Jenny Lind who were persuaded unsuccessfully to go west, both asserted and challenged these competing gender paradigms.

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This study fills a gap in theatre historiography, and contributes to the growing body of work concerning the circulatory patterns of early American popular culture. My project invites opportunities for further research regarding the relationship between theatre studies and celebrity, cultural geography, and everyday life studies, while also encouraging scholarship with a materialist approach to theatre and cultural history. Bringing the paradigm of mobility to bear upon nineteenth-century theatre culture, I contend that touring—both its material conditions and its social implications—is critical to an understanding of the era’s theatre industry. I aim to recover some of the details of lived experience that occurred in locations and transitional moments between theatrical events that are often unexplored or taken for granted in studies of the theatre. My project also intervenes in debates about the formation of American mass culture, supporting James Cook’s claim that it was not at the turn of the century, but “during the decades before the Civil War that the very first commercial entertainment industries began to emerge.”\(^{36}\)


\(^{36}\) Cook, “Antebellum Cultural History,” 71.
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Negotiating Celebrity under the Star System: Touring as Tool for Cultivating Fame

Figure 1.1
Map of the antebellum United States published in Sidney E. Morse’s *An Atlas of the United States* (New Haven: N & S.S. Jocelyn, 1823). This portion highlights Noah Ludlow and Sol Smith’s theatrical circuit in the South and the Midwest, composed of St. Louis, Missouri, New Orleans, Louisiana, and Mobile, Alabama. St. Louis and New Orleans were connected via the Mississippi River; Mobile was reached from New Orleans by a steamship around the Gulf of Mexico.
“Theatrical matters are going to be very uncertain,” Sol Smith wrote to his partner Noah Ludlow in 1839. “Nothing but the biggest and most fashionable stars will do and they take all the profits.” As evidenced by Smith’s complaint, by the third decade of the nineteenth century, the phenomenon of “stars” traveling to support resident stock companies was a common yet contested theatrical practice. Although troupes and singular “strolling players” had traveled since the colonial period, by around 1820, American population growth and migration had produced a demand for theatre that exceeded the supply. Stock companies became more numerous and, in response, leading actors began to exploit the possibility of performing with multiple companies in a single season.

The movements of visiting stars around the country increased their national visibility and public recognition. At the same time, stars’ physical movements encouraged publicity and interest far removed from the sites of visiting engagements, facilitating what Joseph Roach defines as celebrity: the circulation of an individual’s name or image independent of his or her own person. However, the star system became the dominant theatrical model in the antebellum U.S. not only because of the allure of theatrical luminaries, but also because of economic conditions during the 1830s and 1840s. Financial panics in 1837 and 1839 resulted in a period of sustained economic depression in all industries, including the theatre. Many company

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37 Sol Smith to Noah Ludlow, 16 April, 1839, Solomon Franklin Smith Papers, Box 1, Missouri History Museum Library and Research Center. Hereafter, cited as S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
managers, pushed to the edge of insolvency, could potentially boost ticket sales by offering novel attractions like visiting stars.

Despite the potential commercial advantages afforded to companies by famous visitors, managers and critics frequently bemoaned the economic excesses of the star system, decrying its emphasis on the profit and promotion of stars to the frequent detriment of managers and stock actors.40 As traveling performers seeking guest engagements became ubiquitous, theatre professionals and audiences also questioned whether a star’s status was deserved. Although many stars were admired national figures who possessed “it,” star billing was not simply synonymous with fame. With the advent of the star system, touring suggested some measure of acclaim and profitability, but the skepticism toward strolling players of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth century—connotations of dubiousness and superficiality—sometimes persisted in attitudes towards stars. Indeed, the term “star” became popularized in quotation marks as an implicit acknowledgment of the title’s instability and ambiguity and reflects a broader cultural interest in assessing whether stars were really stars and whether performers were really who they claimed to be.

In this chapter, instead of characterizing the star system as either an expression of the theatre industry’s impending commercialization or of a star’s celebrity,41 I examine,

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comparatively early in its development, its relationship to the politics of mobility, and to the acquisition of economic and cultural capital, within antebellum theatre culture. I aim to advance the growing body of work on early American celebrity by scholars such as Sharon Marcus, David Haven Blake, and Sara Babeox First. I contend that starring tours were sites of negotiation over both the material, logistical realities of arrivals and departures, and the unsystematic acquisition of cultural capital potentially made possible by a starring visit. Although the star system introduced certain economic principles associated with industrialization, such as coordination across markets and a heightened professional hierarchy, its operations were equally uneven and unsystematic. Formalized “official” theatre business conventions coexisted and competed with idiosyncratic practices based on networks of friendship and gossip. To some extent, the star system necessitated the emergence of more formalized travel routes, attempts at more precise and efficient negotiations between managers and stars, and the development of the role of the star as one of the central components of the modern theatre industry. However, although advances in steamboats and a proliferation of railroad tracks during the late 1830s and 1840s made getting from one city to another quicker and easier, touring was at best an unreliable enterprise, and the temporary addition of stars to local companies was far from seamless.

Theatre historians generally associate the development of the star system with Stephen Price, who was manager of New York’s Park Theatre between 1808 and 1840, and, between 1826 and 1830, of London’s Drury Lane. Price used his transatlantic position to serve as an agent for English and, later, European performers who sought higher earnings and acclaim in the

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*and Culture 1800-1850* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968). Theatre scholars have more readily studied touring after the star system’s decline, following the Panic of 1873, in which traveling “combinations” displaced the era of resident stock companies and visiting stars. On touring after 1873, see Holmgren, *Starring Madame Modjeska* and Davis, *The Circus Age*. 
United States, where theatrical success was “partially dependent on a New York reputation.”

However, the Ludlow and Smith firm, known as the first prominent “Western” company because of its founding in St. Louis, was also entrenched in the star system. Ludlow and Smith, two New Yorkers, chose to travel to the western territories of the United States in their early twenties to pursue theatrical careers. In their respective memoirs, each man describes the departure from the East as an expression of the frontier spirit of adventure and progress. Recalling his journey to Kentucky in 1815, Ludlow notes that forming a traveling company was difficult, since few “experienced stage-performers, holding comfortable positions in Eastern theatres” were “bold and adventurous enough to risk their lives and fortunes in a Western wilderness.”

In 1835, Ludlow and Smith, having acted and managed separately in Mobile, Natchez, Cincinnati, and Louisville, realized the potential profit in founding a resident company with a steady influx of visiting stars that performed in multiple cities. Until 1851, their company presented two seasons per year in St. Louis, opening in late spring and playing through the fall. From 1835 until 1840, and from 1843 until 1848, the managers presented winter seasons in Mobile. In the 1840 fall season, they established a company in New Orleans that closed in 1853 when they dissolved the firm.

Although critics of the star system accused managers of prioritizing star actors and neglecting their stock companies, Ludlow and Smith were not always able to book the most famous eastern or British stars. Unlike Price and his partner Edmund Simpson, who conveyed the most renowned British stars to New York and vice versa, Ludlow and Smith had to

42 David Grimsted, *Melodrama Unveiled*, 47.
43 Noah Ludlow, *Dramatic Life As I Found It* (St. Louis: G.I. Jones and Co., 1880), 5.
coordinate with guest actors who spanned the spectrum of stardom and consistently relied on a cadre of regional stock actors, many of whom later rose to prominence. For the western managers, the star system was embedded in theatrical life on the move, and they tried to spread themselves equally among their theatrical interests, both physically and financially. They continually rented, bought, and sold properties in three cities, and borrowed and exchanged money at banks in different states with varying interest rates; each man lived in perennial debt. Although both managers frequently made the ten to twelve day journey between St. Louis and their southern theatres, Ludlow maintained a home in Mobile and assumed more of the responsibility in that city while Smith took a dominant role in St. Louis. In addition, each year Smith would make the two-week journey east to recruit both stock and star actors.

The managers were inured to their profession’s unpredictability, which was exacerbated by their presence in multiple cities; if or when the company would play in a particular city changed from season to season, and the managers often closed seasons early or began late due to inclement weather or an incomplete or unprepared company. Schedules that changed frequently were aggravated by an unreliable postal service, and Ludlow and Smith’s daily correspondence with actors and with one another always began by acknowledging receipt (or not) of a previous letter, a practice that was not only conventional, but also necessary. However, despite the challenges of antebellum travel, Ludlow and Smith used their multiple locations strategically, and they frequently comparison-shopped between cities for performers and theatrical services.

45 See Henkin, The Postal Age.
46 In 1838, Smith asked Ludlow to engage a good flute player in Mobile, since he had “no faith” in the musician in St. Louis and, later that year, requested that “a team of musicians” be brought from New Orleans since “none can be got” in St. Louis, as well as “a girl or two,” since “we shall be a little short in the female way.” When Smith departed St. Louis for New Orleans in 1842, and in a hurry forgot the trunk containing his private stage wardrobe and wigs, he was able to ask Ludlow to bring it with him on his next visit west. And when the script for the
In this chapter, I focus on three episodes from the Ludlow and Smith firm’s history: the managers’ negotiations over contracts and itineraries with actors Junius Brutus Booth and Edwin Forrest, the strategic movements employed by traveling minstrel dancer John Diamond, and the debates over stock actress Eliza Petrie’s position within the company. Together, these three stories are instructive of the physical movements, and the social and economic maneuvering, that comprised the star system. Rather than examine particular performances or plays that served as star vehicles, I focus on the backstage or surrounding transactions that undergirded stars’ appearances, on touring as one aspect of what Tracy Davis calls “the performance of capital itself, a double entendre of money put to work and the ideology that animated the apparatus of [the theatre] industry.” Importantly, these dynamics implicated not only undeniably famous touring actors like Booth and Forrest, but also stock actors and popular entertainers. Rather than take the star system for granted as an expression of impending commercialization or of a star’s fame, I contend that star tours were sites of negotiation over both the material, logistical realities of arrivals and departures, and the unsystematic acquisition of cultural capital or fame potentially made possible by a starring visit.

melodrama *The Mountain Sylph* was lost in New Orleans, Ludlow sent the copy from Mobile so that the company could continue with the production; Smith to Ludlow, 24 April, 1838, S.F. Smith Papers, Box 1, Missouri History Museum; Smith to Ludlow, 24 April, 1838, S.F. Smith Papers, Box 1, Missouri History Museum; Sol Smith Diaries, 4 November, 1842, S.F. Smith Papers, Box 6, Missouri History Museum; Smith to Ludlow, 27 November, 1838, S.F. Smith Papers, Box 1, Missouri History Museum.

47 Although Davis writes about nineteenth-century British theatre, many of her observations also apply to the American theatre of the period. Tracy C. Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage 1800-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 13.
Figure 1.2
Playbill for performances by the Ludlow and Smith company at New Orleans’ St. Charles Theatre during Charlotte Cushman’s 1851 star engagement. Collections of the American Antiquarian Society.
The Paratexts of Touring: Starring Junius Brutus Booth and Edwin Forrest

With the managers stationed in different cities or traveling—Ludlow took a more dominant role in New Orleans, while Smith spent more time in St. Louis—and stars and company members also dispersed geographically, coordinating and executing a theatrical season was a challenge. Simply getting to and arranging a star’s performances—the geographic and administrative paratexts of theatrical life—was central to stars’ and managers’ ordinary, everyday experiences, as well as to the construction of celebrity itself. For scholars of literature and book history, paratext refers to the physical presentation of the text and to additional, supplementary, or surrounding texts and information. However, more recently scholars have extended this definition and approached the paratext as both a material and a conceptual category. While they are not exclusively linguistic or material, paratexts are always “marginal spaces” that contextualize, structure, or prepare for the primary text or, in this case, the theatrical event.48

Forrest and Booth each played several engagements with the Ludlow and Smith Company, and crossed paths during their first appearances in the winter and spring seasons of 1839 in Mobile and St. Louis respectively. Forrest then played in New Orleans in the fall of 1843, followed by a spring season in Mobile and Cincinnati, and played a farewell engagement in New Orleans and Mobile in 1847. Booth starred with the company in New Orleans and Mobile in the fall/winter of 1845, followed by a summer season in St. Louis in 1846, and, in the final engagement of his life, played in the New Orleans fall season of 1852. In addition to announcing the billing and schedule for these performances, newspapers also printed Forrest’s or

Booth’s arrival and departure dates in a particular city; visiting the local community was as important as the evening’s bill. However, even during seasons when Forrest and Booth did not visit the South and West, audiences in cities like St. Louis and Cincinnati could stay apprised of the actors’ whereabouts, since stars’ movements around the country were printed regularly in local newspapers; indeed, it was not coincidental that the star system and the popular press developed alongside one another in the 1830s.

Whereas a few stars of the antebellum period undertook cohesive “tours” coordinated by agents like Stephen Price or authoritarian managers like P.T. Barnum, the term “travel” might more suitably describe the majority of the flexible and arduous journeys that most performers, including stars, made during the 1830s and 1840s. Ludlow and Smith’s stage manager W.H. Chippendale sometimes traveled east to act as an intermediary between the managers and New York actors, but Chippendale was more of a go-between than an agent, and performers more frequently corresponded directly with Ludlow and Smith. As opposed to the late-nineteenth century, when actors’ itineraries were secured by combination company managers, and finally, central booking agencies, some of the most famous antebellum performers, including Booth and Forrest, booked their own schedules. The managers’ business transactions with two stars of the period who were also undeniably famous comprise a pair of interrelated stories about the deferrals, miscommunications, and struggles over control that took place along the perceived fringes of star engagements.

**Contracts and Uncertainties**

Beginning in their first season and in every subsequent year of their partnership, Ludlow and Smith made it their mission to pursue Forrest, recognizing the value in introducing a major
eastern star to their theatres. The managers frequently took notice of the “raw” styles of acting that “suit[ed] the people” in St. Louis and Mobile, and perhaps felt that Forrest’s physical, impulsive performance style would be a success with local audiences.\(^\text{49}\) In fact, Ludlow, who first met Forrest in 1824 while both performing in James Caldwell’s New Orleans company, identified an affinity between himself and the Philadelphia-born actor amid a theatrical milieu dominated by British performers, not as Americans, but because “we were both Western actors.”\(^\text{50}\) According to Ludlow, Forrest, who at that point had yet to appear before a New York audience and become known as the “great American tragedian,” spent his formative acting years in the West.

Despite Ludlow’s claim, it took several years for the managers to attract the star to their theatres. Ludlow and Smith repeatedly adopted a tone of deference toward Forrest, writing him frequently “to ascertain whether you have yet decided on visiting the West-- & if so to invite you to name terms & close the engagement.”\(^\text{51}\) The managers never gave such leeway to visiting stars of lesser renown. During that year they told comedian Dan Marble that they “probably” “could afford” him particular nights and informed visiting actor Thomas Cooper that his nights were only engaged “conditionally.”\(^\text{52}\) Instead, Forrest was given an annual open invitation to name his own terms and schedule. Ludlow and Smith’s policy was to book stock actors for no less than a year, in order to play each of their seasons, while star engagements were more varied, but were


\(^{50}\) Noah Ludlow, Dramatic Life As I Found It (St. Louis: G.I. Jones and Co., 1880), 252.

\(^{51}\) Ludlow and Smith to Forrest, 23 July, 1838, Box 4, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.

\(^{52}\) Ludlow and Smith to Marble, 9 June, 1838, Box 6, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum; Ludlow and Smith to Cooper, 22 January, 1836, Box 6, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
typically booked for a period of about a week to several months, with an effort to span seasons in at least two of their cities. Starring contracts depended on the size of the star, the needs of the company, and the schedules of the parties involved. However, the managers went beyond their usual practices in order to accommodate Forrest, suggesting that he might perform 10 or 14 nights here to advantage—but as we suppose even that number of nights in St. Louis alone would scarcely be a sufficient inducement for so long a journey, we have this day addressed the Louisville and Cincinnati Managers, asking them to join us in an arrangement for an engagement with you in the three cities. In your reply please say whether an arrangement of that kind would suit you-- & if so, say what will be your terms... if you would prefer a certainty to sharing...

Clearly the managers were eager to book Forrest, since they were rarely so compliant with actors and never apologetic about travel demands. “To tell you the truth,” Smith told him, “‘you are hotly called for’ in the West.”

Ludlow and Smith would negotiate one of two options for a visiting star: a nightly salary, called a “certainty,” which usually amounted to $200 for major stars of the period, plus a benefit in which the actor would earn all or a share of the house receipts less house expenses; or, a predetermined sharing plan for the entire engagement. Ironically, both the certainty and the sharing arrangement involved a great amount of uncertainty and risk. Depending on ticket sales, which were mercurial and unpredictable during the financial Panic-stricken antebellum decades, a certainty or sharing could ultimately favor the managers or the star. For Forrest, Ludlow and Smith offered whatever combination of sharing plan and fixed salary the actor preferred. Moreover, in addition to inviting Forrest to name the terms of the contract, Ludlow and Smith agreed to collaborate with managers in other cities who were sometimes their regional competitors, such as Cincinnati and Louisville manager John Bates, to develop a more cohesive

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53 Ludlow and Smith to Forrest, 23 July, 1838, Box 4, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
circuit in order to make the trip worthwhile. Probably taking a cue from Price and Simpson, Ludlow and Smith acknowledged that securing additional cities made an engagement more enticing as well as more of a genuine “tour.” They recognized that, unlike New York or Boston, St. Louis might not be “sufficient inducement” for the journey, and that their location might generally seem undesirable to eastern or European stars. Newspapers printed in New York, Philadelphia, and elsewhere often remarked upon the low standards of critical taste outside the major northern cities. A journalist for the *New York Herald* offered this picture: “When you go to a Western theatre there is always some second class star, who lacks merit…The stock actors are generally sticks; if one is passable he quickly finds his way to the metropolis.” For Forrest, Ludlow and Smith would have to expand their small circuit in order to promise the star maximum potential earnings and mobility.

Despite Ludlow and Smith’s persistent attempts to engage Forrest in their theatres, the actor’s personal and professional commitments kept him from the West and South for several years. He finally agreed to visit Mobile with an important condition: half the receipts of the engagement. Although this figure became the standard for major stars after 1850, for Ludlow and Smith, it was unprecedented and violated their policy that no visiting attraction would ever receive a greater share of an engagement’s profits than either manager. Even though the outcome of certainties versus sharing was unpredictable, by prohibiting an equal sharing plan, Ludlow and Smith aimed to preempt the exorbitant salaries that they considered to be one of the abuses of the star system. Despite the managers’ flexibility with Forrest, unique among their negotiations with stars, they tried to fend off his excessive request, declaring it out of proportion with the standards

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54 “Theatre in the South and West—Young America in the Field,” *New York Herald*, 9 May, 1857.
of contemporary star engagements: “Miss [Ellen] Tree, [Madame] Celeste & the Ravels (the greatest attraction we have had) did not require such terms,” and “Booth is engaged for Mobile at a third recpts & a half Benefit.” Following Forrest’s debut with the company, Ludlow and Smith would reverse this strategy, frequently invoking Forrest’s name to other actors as the standard-bearer of stars. One year later, in the hopes that danseuse Fanny Elssler would not “form a wrong conception of our section of the country,” the managers offered “a few items to judge by in arranging your proposals,” including the receipts averaged during Forrest’s engagement. Rather than referencing a consistent set of standards or policies under the star system, Ludlow and Smith leveraged their history with stars to secure other engagements, suggesting that star status was relative and provisional, rather than a fixed phenomenon.

Ludlow and Smith came to an agreement with Forrest, but the exact terms of their contract are absent from the historical record. Although frustrated with the bargaining process, Smith recognized that “We cannot afford to let him slip as the people are crazy to see him,” and advised Ludlow to “do any thing else to better the business.” A few weeks later, Smith was still exasperated by negotiations with the actor: “Forrest will not change the terms—holds on like a leach and no moving him.” Whether or not Forrest received his desired sharing plan, he certainly got his way regarding start dates and billing. On April 24th, after playing his nights in Mobile and in Vicksburg, Mississippi en route to St. Louis, he wrote to the managers, still elusive, perhaps strategically, but also decisive in his demands: “I think it is likely I can open

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56 Ludlow and Smith to Forrest, 29 September, 1838, Box 6, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
57 Ludlow and Smith to Elssler, August 2, 1840, Letterbook, S.F. Smith Papers, Box 6, Missouri History Museum.
58 Smith to Ludlow, 1 April, 1839, Box 1, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
59 Smith to Ludlow, 5 May, 1839, Box 1, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
with you on Monday 6th of May. Of this however I cannot be certain. Let the opening play be ‘Virginius’…Secure rooms for me at the best hotel. Announce me for 6 nights and a Benefit.”

Theatrical engagements were fluid and required relentless communication and revision; Smith promptly informed Ludlow that he had “just heard from Forrest” about his impending arrival.60 Many traveling stars booked their own accommodations, but in this case, indicating Forrest’s prestige, Ludlow and Smith were responsible for reserving the actor’s hotel; Forrest probably stayed at the fashionable Planter’s House. Unlike the majority of stars that suggested or requested the plays and dates of a starring run, Forrest reported the details of the engagement definitively to Ludlow and Smith.

As shown by Forrest’s coordination with the managers, visiting performers did not only convey their physical bodies to far-flung engagements; they brought with them their star vehicles, as well as costumes and sometimes copies of plays. Under the star system and its lines of business, Ludlow and Smith could expect that a star would be playing parts within his or her line. Especially with well-known performers, the content of the performance appears secondary to the travel itinerary, since lines of business were a more reliable aspect of the star system than movements around the country. Indeed, in theatrical announcements, newspapers often printed the character that an actor would be playing rather than the title of the play.61 Ludlow and Smith likely assumed the set of star vehicles Forrest would bring with him, and only after his engagement had been almost finalized is there any mention of roles or plays.

In the winter of 1839, while trying to finalize negotiations with Forrest, Ludlow and Smith were fielding letters from Junius Brutus Booth about his upcoming engagement in Mobile.

60 Forrest to Smith, April 24, 1839, S.F. Smith Papers, Box 4, Missouri History Museum.
61 For an example, see the New Orleans Times-Picayune 16 January 1845; Booth is announced to play the character of Sir Giles Overreach.
In contrast to their accommodating pursuit of Forrest, the managers’ treatment of Booth suggests that the British-born actor’s star capital was dwindling. After trying to reach the managers several times without success, Booth wrote to them again in February, declaring that he would be in Mobile on the 18th to play one of his signature roles, either Richard III or Hamlet. Although Booth’s engagement had been booked, his start dates and billing had apparently not been settled in advance, and like Forrest, Booth attempts to direct the schedule and billing. However, contrary to Booth’s assumption that announcing his upcoming arrival with his signature roles would ensure an engagement, Ludlow and Smith replied that the 18th was “utterly out of our power to give you—the same having been appropriated some time ago to Mr. Forrest.” Travel and scheduling challenges often produced the dilemma of a double booking, but the solution was not a simple matter of who booked first. A decade later, one of Barnum’s proposed nights for Jenny Lind’s 1851 visit to Ludlow and Smith’s theatre in St. Louis had already been reserved for visiting star Charlotte Cushman. Cushman agreed, reluctantly, to give up the night to Lind, on the condition that she was paid for doing so.

For Ludlow and Smith, refusing to give up the night for Booth was a declaration of Forrest as the bigger star, as well as perhaps a platform for the managers to secure the upper hand in contract negotiations. As they told Booth, to revoke Forrest’s night would be an “[i]njustice to ourselves and the public.” The managers were also undoubtedly aware of Booth’s reputation and treated him accordingly. In 1821, after failing to succeed in London against actor Edmund Kean, Booth immigrated to the United States. Although American audiences

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62 Junius Brutus Booth to Ludlow and Smith, 9 February, 1839, Box 4, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
63 Ludlow and Smith to Booth, 13 February, 1839, Box 6, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
64 Cushman to Smith, 24 February, 1851, Box 4, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
appreciated his commanding performance style, which rejected the high-neoclassicism of his British predecessors, Booth’s acting abilities were sometimes overshadowed by what were known as his “eccentricities.” A notorious alcoholic, Booth was rumored to be seized by spells of “madness.” Wary of an actor that was known to be unreliable and possibly unstable, Ludlow and Smith unapologetically told Booth, who was already in New Orleans and therefore left with two weeks without work or pay that “we trust that you will be able to fill up your time.”

Typical of the communications during the period, it is unclear whether Booth even got the message before he left New Orleans, since on February 15th, he notified the managers that he had not received their reply, that he closed there the following day and was unsure whether “different arrangements have been made than you settled with me.” Despite the constant stream of communication by letter, sometimes an actor would arrive in a city unclear about the details of a production going up that night. Perhaps Booth had to make the trip to Mobile and hear the unpleasant news about Forrest’s engagement in person.

MAIN EVENTS?

The success of Forrest and Booth’s individual engagements with Ludlow and Smith is difficult to determine, and their 1839 performances are no exception. Because of the star system, profits alone can be deceptive, and one needs to sift through the terms of a contract (if they are available) to determine whether the outcome actually benefited all parties involved. Depending on whether a star was booked on a sharing plan or a certainty could mean success for a star, but

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66 Ludlow and Smith to Booth, 13 February, 1839, Box 6, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
67 On nineteenth-century letter writing and communication, see Henkin, *The Postal Age*. 
meager profits for the management and stock actors. Forrest’s 1839 debut in Mobile seems to have been lucrative—the managers record about $300 average nightly receipts during his fourteen nights to a house “filled to overflowing.” However, after the first night of the star’s engagement in St. Louis, Smith wrote to Ludlow, panicked that opera singer Madame Caradori Allan, who was playing at St. Louis’s National Hotel, was drawing crowds away from Forrest:

Forrest’s 1st night—$506. Car. Allan’s concert crammed—they say $400—but probably over $200…Our house is not to be sneezed at, certainly—but it does second to one that on the 1st night in St. Louis of Edwin Forrest there ought to be $1000 in the house!!!…D—n ‘em, haven’t they got the most attractive tragic actor in the world? 69

Smith’s description illustrates the complexity of evaluating a star engagement in 1839. At the time, $506 would have been a strong night at the box office for Ludlow and Smith. The managers typically considered anything above $200, the cost of operating the St. Louis Theatre, to be a success. Many nights they lost money, and frequently could not afford to pay actors’ salaries, hire key personnel, or finish a complete season; the firm was in perennial debt. Receipts over $500 would usually signal a major triumph, but in this case, profits did not measure up to Smith’s expectations for one of the country’s preeminent stars. The manager’s frustration lay more with the St. Louis theatregoers than with Forrest; Smith suggests that receipts would have been commensurate with the star’s ability and fame if local audiences had more discerning taste. Further complicating this assessment, Smith assumes that reports of Allan’s receipts had been inflated by her promoters or managers at the National Hotel, thus preventing an accurate comparison between Forrest and the local competition. Smith’s appraisal of the visiting star thus depended on multiple intersecting factors, including perceptions of Forrest’s drawing power,

68 Ludlow, Dramatic Life As I Found It, 509; Solomon Smith, Theatrical Management in the West and South for Thirty Years, 135.
69 Smith to Ludlow, 6 May, 1839, Box 1, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
70 Smith to Ludlow, 8 March, 1839, Box 1, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
rival local attractions, and industry gossip. Whether or not Forrest’s debut in St. Louis can be deemed a success for Ludlow and Smith, a journalist for the *Times-Picayune* did suggest that critics were paying more attention to the opera singer than to Forrest: “Madame Cardori Allan and Edwin Forrest are in St. Louis. The Gazette man is in ecstacies [sic] with the singing of the former.” However, one week later, the same paper printed that Forrest was in St. Louis “prosecuting his profession.”

The details of Booth’s 1839 engagement are similarly inconclusive. Even though Ludlow and Smith told Forrest that Booth was booked at one third of the receipts, they write in their memoirs that he was paid at a certainty of $100 for each night’s performance; they may have recorded incorrect information or misremembered—or told Forrest a convenient fib. According to the managers, Booth played for ten nights, and although his benefit, *Richard III*, grossed $690, the average for the first nine nights was $225.44 per night; so, if Ludlow and Smith did in fact pay Booth a certainty, their risk on the star did not pay off, since Booth would have made almost twice as much as either manager on any given night. According to Smith’s memoir, “Booth, who—on a ‘certainty,’ as it is called when managers take all the risk and pay the star a stipulated sum—played to any thing but good houses.” Such were the conditions of the star system.

Ludlow claims that Booth’s engagement started out promisingly, with full houses on the first two nights, but then failed due to one of his “insane or drunken follies (call it which you please).” Although the economic success or failure of a particular performance or run may provide evidence of a performer or play’s popularity, Ludlow and Smith recognized that inconsistent or poor engagements were par for the course, and they did not necessarily blame the performer.

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72 Smith, *Theatrical Management in the West and South*, 135.
73 Ludlow, *Dramatic Life As I Found It*, 509.
They were often disappointed with Booth’s unpredictable behavior; and Forrest’s second appearance in 1844, in which the actor played in Mobile and Cincinnati but refused to play in St. Louis and follow closely behind rival actor William Charles Macready, was “fatal to the pockets of the mangers.” However, Ludlow and Smith continued to engage both actors. Although Forrest and Booth were inarguably two of the most famous and bankable stars of the period, due to frequent financial crises and the general precariousness of the theatre business during the 1830s and 1840s, profits were often uneven and did not serve as a reliable index to a star’s drawing power or renown. As Tracy Davis argues, since nineteenth-century theatres were connected to local economies, “sometimes neither the artistic or business decisions of entrepreneurs are the most important aspects of determining success or failure.”

The paratexts of Booth and Forrest’s star performances with Ludlow and Smith, the excess of communication about contracts and itineraries, may reveal more about the mechanics of the star system than engagements of varying profits and ticket sales. In their correspondence with Forrest after 1839, Ludlow and Smith continued to treat the actor as a paragon of stardom, establishing a dynamic that solidified his star status and perhaps superseded whatever might happen once an engagement began. Forrest’s four-year deferral of a return to the West following his 1839 debut may have also heightened his desirability. In 1840 Forrest’s “engagements in the North” prevented him from traveling west, while in 1841 he decided to go no further South than Charleston. Later that year he was so busy “ ‘getting out’ the new play” that he did not have time to promptly respond to Ludlow and Smith’s inquiries, let alone to make a trip to their theatres,

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74 Smith, *Theatrical Management in the West and South*, 181.
and in 1843 he could not “accede” to the managers’ “proposition.” Even when Forrest repeatedly chose not to visit their company, Ludlow and Smith still put effort into developing a relationship with the star and setting the stage for a possible future contract. During Forrest’s four-year absence from Ludlow and Smith’s theatres, the managers wrote to the actor frequently, even asking him to recommend other stars for their company in his stead. Even though these exchanges did not result directly in a production, they were central to the star system. Establishing relationships through correspondence was one of the system’s essential intangibles.

**GETTING THERE**

While Forrest was busy declining Ludlow and Smith’s invitations, Booth was pursuing them. Writing from his home in Baltimore on August 13th, 1845, he wrote to the managers with “an idea of moving south again this next season,” proposing an engagement beginning in the winter that included all three of the company’s cities. The actor suggested eleven nights in New Orleans at $100 per night and one third of the benefit night, and, in St. Louis and Mobile, either a sharing plan of half the total receipts or a certainty; essentially, he leaves the terms open to the managers. Booth, hoping to imply his strong drawing power, added that if, in New Orleans, his name would be announced for two benefits, he would collect a third of the night that proved most profitable. Ludlow and Smith accepted the actor’s terms on August 23rd, noting that he could begin in St. Louis from the 25th to the 30th of September, “the time of beginning in Mobile and New Orleans to be mutually agreed upon hereafter.” Ludlow and Smith’s response to Booth

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76 Forrest to Ludlow and Smith, 19 May, 1840, S.F. Smith Papers, Box 4, Missouri History Museum; Forrest to Ludlow and Smith, 26 May, 1841, S.F. Smith Papers, Box 4, Missouri History Museum; Forrest to Ludlow and Smith, 17 March, 1843, S.F. Smith Papers, Box 4, Missouri History Museum. The title of the play that Forrest to refers in the letter on 26 May is illegible.
appeared to be conclusive, but on September 6th, while still in Baltimore, Booth objected to the logistics. The managers gave Booth a one-week window for the arrival time, perhaps in order to allow for travel mishaps, flexibility with other visiting stars, or a bout of erratic behavior, but Booth required firm start dates for each city.

Your time for St. Louis will not at all suit my arrangements—and I, previous venturing to New Orleans, should know the time as nearly as possible for my beginning, in order for making suitable arrangements with other Managers. Please inform me therefore how it can be fixed for my continuing on with you—say from St. Louis to Mobile & N. Orleans. Please state the very latest you can receive in St. Louis as I must know what answers I must make to others—State my time for each place accordingly and confer thereby an obligation.77

Booth was transparent about supposedly coordinating with other managers simultaneously. Unlike Forrest, Booth, perhaps because he felt the need to advertise his desirability, wanted Ludlow and Smith to think that he had other offers. Whether Booth was actually waiting for responses or bluffing in order to heighten his star appeal is unclear. Whereas Ludlow and Smith were willing to extend their three-city circuit for Forrest and take on the burden of coordinating with other managers, Booth was responsible for stringing together piecemeal engagements in order to generate a somewhat cohesive tour.

What appears to be a simple arrangement concerning Booth’s arrival in each of Ludlow and Smith’s three cities develops into a struggle over control. The managers favored a flexible start time so that they could line up the rest of their company or stars, and Booth preferred a fixed start time for each city so that he could confidently relay his availability to other managers. On September 16th, with a tone of transparent compromise, Ludlow and Smith agreed to change the dates of the engagement so that Booth could play consecutively in each city with specific start dates: “You desire that you may lose no time and that you may proceed on with your whole

77 Booth to Ludlow and Smith, 6 September, 1845, Box 4, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
engagement after commencing, with the least possible delay.” Rather than starting in September with a flexible opening night, they proposed beginning in St. Louis on Monday, October 20th, playing eleven consecutive nights with one benefit, beginning in New Orleans or Mobile on November 17th, and opening on December 1st in the remaining city. “This will give you a reasonable time to get from one city to the other after playing your nights through in the previous one.”

The managers were willing to be flexible with Booth, but not to the same degree as Forrest. Moreover, while Forrest alerted Ludlow and Smith to his own policies—that he didn’t play on Sunday nights and that he had to know the stock company in advance—with Booth, the managers repeatedly voiced their official procedures. Since Booth had not played with Ludlow and Smith for a few years and perhaps underscoring Booth’s unreliability, the managers found it necessary to mention a company rule, “one that has freely been conformed to by all Stars (as well as Stock Actors)…Those who play in our theaters are not to appear in any public entertainment other than with us in the same city, during the theatrical season of their engagement with us.”

Ludlow and Smith’s “do not compete” clause constitutes one particular convention of the star system amid a sea of unreliable communications and flexible practices. The managers restricted the local community’s access to the star, emphasizing the company’s exclusive arrangement with the performer for a limited period of time. Ludlow and Smith, while presenting the visitor as a novel attraction, also controlled the extent of his mobility within the region. Importantly, rather than treat Booth as an exceptional star, they informed him of a

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78 Ludlow and Smith to Booth, 16 September, 1845, Box 4, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
79 Ibid.
universal policy, reminding him that he was subject to the same rules as all actors—both stars and stock.

Although Booth was satisfied with the terms, the material realities of getting to St. Louis—perhaps mixed with his own resentment at being treated as just another performer—continued to threaten the engagement. While Forrest mentions very little in his correspondence regarding the demands of traveling to the West, Booth is preoccupied with logistics, as well as with advertising his other engagements: “...if I can only reach you in time,” he wrote,

as this next Monday 29th I play in New York. Monday 6th Oct—in Boston closing there on Friday the 10th. I shall leave Boston on Saturday 11th and come to St. Louis as quickly as Conveyances can carry me on. All I fear is not finding Boats ready on the day at Wheeling or Cincinnati. It will be needful therefore to allow for such possible detention…. At any rate I conjecture it will be but a day or so at furthest after the 20th—I can leave here for Cleveland after quitting Boston on Monday 13th October—After the 11th you may consider me as travelling on for St. Louis, where God willing I hope to arrive by or about the period you have written.80

Even though Booth promised that he “shall not delay progress after the 11th until I join you,” his letter is rife with contingencies and potential complications. Booth biographer Stephen Archer chronicles equally convoluted negotiations over contract obligations between the actor and other managers of the period, a pattern that may suggest Booth’s industry shrewdness—or his “eccentricities.”81 Booth’s pessimism about the forthcoming engagement, albeit rather comical, conveys the nature of booking actors amid unreliable conditions and underscores a traveler’s expectations of the trip from Baltimore to St. Louis in 1845. Booth’s series of engagements, although reliant on antebellum theatrical circuits, was far from a unified tour, and the star, while already on the road, had to arrange his itinerary and quickly identify possible means of transportation.

80 Booth to Ludlow and Smith, 25 September, 1845, Box 4, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
Although Booth did end up appearing with Ludlow and Smith’s company in November, he did not make it to St. Louis as expected. On October 22\textsuperscript{nd}, while still in Baltimore, he informed the managers that “severe sickness” prevented him from getting to St. Louis on time. He vowed to try his best to reach them, but “fear[ed] you will have left St. Louis before my arrival…I shall endeavor it possible to be with you in time for New Orleans & Mobile.” On November 6\textsuperscript{th} he wrote that he would be leaving for New Orleans the following day and would “perhaps be with you as soon as this letter—however, in case of accidents, it’s best to write to you with good wishes.”\textsuperscript{82} Booth made it to New Orleans, playing November 18\textsuperscript{th}-26\textsuperscript{th}. On the 27\textsuperscript{th}, he was advertised to perform Richard III, but, as Ludlow describes it, “he got on to one of his occasional unhappy frolics, and did not appear, and other plays had to be substituted.”\textsuperscript{83} Attempting to appease Ludlow and Smith for his disappearance, Booth agreed to play the part of Richard “gratuitously” as “compensation for the disappointments experienced and damages sustained in consequence of my failure to fulfill my engagement at St. Charles Theatre.”\textsuperscript{84} Although the local papers quickly took notice and announced Booth’s extended stay,\textsuperscript{85} Ludlow claims that this free night was poorly attended, with an audience of “principally transient people,” since Booth’s bad behavior had “created much disgust in New Orleans” among the actor’s admirers.\textsuperscript{86} Tellingly, as a favor, Booth offered the managers a particular role, highlighting how he was defined by a particular set of characters. Booth’s hesitancy to stick to a clear itinerary along with his unpredictable behavior modified the billings planned by Ludlow

\textsuperscript{82} Booth to Ludlow and Smith, 22 October, 1845 and 6 November, 1845, Box 4, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
\textsuperscript{83} Ludlow, \textit{Dramatic Life As I Found It}, 637.
\textsuperscript{84} Booth to Ludlow and Smith, 30 November, 1845, Box 4, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
\textsuperscript{85} See \textit{New Orleans Jeffersonian Republic} 20 November, 1845.
\textsuperscript{86} Ludlow, \textit{Dramatic Life As I Found It}, 637.
and Smith for Booth’s visit. Shifts in arrivals and departures were not simply postscripts to the performances themselves; they were integral to the roles and performances that were offered. Ludlow and Smith were often openly frustrated about the process of booking actors, but they were habituated to its demands, and went on to schedule Booth for an eleven-night engagement in June 1846, which began as planned, but ended abruptly because of a breach of contract due to his “having appeared upon the stage…in a state of intoxication” and consequent “imperfect personation of the character of Sir Edward Mortimer.”

FORREST’S FAREWELL ENGAGEMENT

Forrest’s final engagement with Ludlow and Smith for the 1847-48 season is noteworthy not for its apparent success—30 nights in New Orleans, plus two weeks in Mobile, to receipts that averaged $384 per night, plus a benefit that grossed $802—but for the politics around securing it. Except for one unrewarding engagement in the spring of 1844, the actor had declined Ludlow and Smith’s invitations until the fall of 1847. Writing to Ludlow and Smith’s sometime-representative W.H. Chippendale, Forrest insisted once again on the terms that may have eluded him at his debut—half the total receipts for twenty-five nights—and refused to settle anything until being given the names of the stock company members who would be supporting him. Forrest went out of his way to assert his own power over the negotiations, undermining Chippendale’s role and claiming that, “Messrs. Ludlow & Smith have given full powers to settle everything with me in this matter” and that he could “only make an arrangement with Messrs.

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87 Ludlow and Smith to Booth, 23 June, 1846, Box 4, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
88 Smith, Theatrical Management in the West and South, 206.
Ludlow & Smith upon the terms I proposed." According to both Smith’s and Ludlow’s memoirs, Forrest ended up receiving what the managers vowed to never allow, and played for half the gross receipts in Mobile and New Orleans.

Forrest’s engagement was, however, cut short. Although the actor had planned for a spring season in the West following his nights in the South, Smith, as resident manager in St. Louis and against his partner’s wishes, refused to accede to Forrest’s demands for half the receipts in that city. Smith learned of the fallout of this decision from his friend Cornelius Logan, actor and stage manager for John Bates, who owned theatres in Cincinnati and Louisville that Ludlow and Smith sometimes rented in order to supplement starring engagements (as they did with Forrest in 1839). Logan wrote to Smith, complaining that Forrest’s engagement in Louisville was “a failure” in which the actor received “$200 for each night, and on some nights he played to a less sum…Blessed [star] system!” According to Logan, Forrest, indignant that Smith had rejected his terms, was making arrangements with Bates to build an opposition theatre in St. Louis. “Forrest is evidently angry with you…He told me yesterday (but, remember this must not be mentioned as coming from me) that he intended to pay a visit to St. Louis.” Logan then recalled a similar incident a few years prior, when Forrest had announced that he intended to “pay a visit” to a manager in Charleston who had declined his terms. Unwilling to be overpowered by the manager, Forrest confronted him in person and persuaded him to accept the terms of the contract.  

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89 Forrest to Chippendale, 1 September, 1837 and 4 September, 1847, Box 4, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
90 Logan to Smith, qtd. in Smith, Theatrical Management in the West and South, 207; On Forrest’s terms with Bates, also see letter from Logan to Smith, 3 June 1848, Box 4, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
The veracity of Logan’s letter, filled with rumor and hearsay, is not as significant as its fidelity to the unofficial and idiosyncratic arrangements that fueled the star system. Just as Ludlow and Smith developed relationships with actors and managers to benefit their business, Logan and Smith, ostensibly competitors, traded gossip and anecdotes between cities for each man’s personal gain. Although Logan betrayed Bates by revealing the manager’s plan to Smith, Logan also defended his employer’s actions as part of a star system in which Smith was equally complicit. Amid your “indignant denunciations,” Logan wrote to Smith, “ask yourself if you are not an inactive particeps criminis in [the star system].” Although Ludlow and Smith paid lip service to the notion of stars’ inflated certainties, when stars visited the South and West, the managers would maintain excessive salaries, forcing their regional colleagues like Bates to follow suit—and often lose money—in order to keep up. As Logan puts it,

John Bates from the first took a strong stand against this monstrous abuse…But you always pursued the old course, and (as Bates says) endeavored to force certain stars upon him at exorbitant terms. It seems now that he is tired of refusing terms that all other managers give…Hence Forrest at length has triumphed, and draws from the treasury $200 a night!\(^\text{91}\)

According to Logan, in this case, it was not the self-important star who was responsible for the excesses of the star system, but Smith.

Smith’s correspondence with Logan is instructive of how the star system operated, not as fixed rules or policies, but as unsystematic networks of gossip and relationships. Ludlow and Smith knew how to play this game. In 1839, when Forrest and Booth first appeared with Ludlow and Smith and when stars, as usual, were the order of the day, the managers got word that one of their company members was spreading some potentially damaging news. The actor, who had just arrived in St. Louis from Mobile, claimed that business was so bad in the South that the

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\(^{91}\) Logan to Smith, qtd. in Smith, *Theatrical Management in the West and South*, 207.
managers could not afford pay actors’ salaries or steamboat passages, thus preventing most of the company from traveling to St. Louis. “The scoundrel can’t speak the truth,” Smith wrote to his partner, “he always was a foulmouthed old fool.” Rumors about a theatre’s success or failure circulated quickly within Ludlow and Smith’s regional network and, whether true or exaggerated, could impact theatre attendance. However, Ludlow and Smith were savvy enough to work with, rather than against the conditions of the theatre business. “I let him begin on Monday,” Smith said of the unscrupulous actor. For theatre professionals aspiring to success within the star system, strategic engagement in industry gossip was crucial. Perhaps not surprisingly, Smith did not respond to Logan’s disclosure about Forrest by renouncing negotiations with the actor or disparaging the star system, but by writing to offer Forrest the same supposedly inflated terms he had with Bates in Louisville, a certainty of $200 per night, which Forrest did not accept, asserting that “no amount of money could induce me to do so.”

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Ludlow and Smith’s negotiations with Booth and Forrest may sound like a comedy of errors, but they reflect the nature of industry dealings under the star system. The challenges of agreeing to a contract with a star, of physically getting him to a city on a particular date, and of completing an engagement as planned, were crucial aspects of the star system in practice. Ludlow and Smith seem to spend more time communicating with performers through letters than they do onstage, an excess of communication that was not benign, but a series of strategic market maneuvers. The style and frequency of these epistolary exchanges were central to the resulting economic arrangements. Joseph Roach has examined the cultural “effigies” that audiences encountered in place of a celebrity’s physical body. Contract negotiations and itineraries served

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92 Smith to Ludlow, 13 May, 1838, Box 1, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
93 Smith, *Theatrical Management in the West and South*, 208.
as another kind of substitution for a famous person that constructed his celebrity. Ludlow and Smith were not only negotiating with Forrest and Booth over contract terms and itineraries, but also over whether each actor deserved his designation as a star. In a period marked by debates over social detection and authenticity, as well as by economic insecurity and uncertainty, the managers repeatedly struggled with the possibility that the two stars, although inarguably famous, would fail to yield stardom’s alleged financial rewards. Ludlow and Smith’s relentless negotiations compelled the actors to earn their star billing. At the same time, Booth and Forrest each used exchanges over contracts to assert his presumed position as a star. Forrest’s declines and deferrals and Ludlow and Smith’s corresponding accommodations affirmed the actor’s star status perhaps more than his profits or performances. Booth’s dithering also betrayed concerns that were not solely practical, and perhaps the actor deliberately resisted placidly agreeing to Ludlow and Smith’s terms. Forced to yield to a fresher generation of major stars and hampered by his reputation as a madman, it is likely that Booth did not want to seem desperate or deferential. Conversations about scheduling also provided Forrest and Booth, as well as Ludlow and Smith, with the opportunity to divulge other engagements, demonstrating one’s professional desirability indirectly through geographic movements.

Although Booth and Forrest were two of the most famous actors of the period, scholars often take for granted their celebrity, neglecting to acknowledge the negotiations and travel that went into maintaining their status as stars. The actors had to secure a steady stream of starring performances through a process that, as the previous episodes evidence, was often tedious. Star

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status was not so much a label fixed permanently to a performer, but something that, before the age of the mass-produced photograph, had to be repeatedly renewed through visiting engagements, coordination across distances, and geographic exposure. At the same time, what happened backstage—outside of theatres, in letters, contracts, and travel plans—was as important as the presumed “main event.” Forrest’s absence from Ludlow and Smith’s 1848 spring season and Booth’s various delays and disappearances represent the histories that may be found within gaps in the performance record, in engagements that were delayed, interrupted, or that never took place.

Celebrated Stock and Ordinary Stars: The Case of Eliza Petrie

In her recent essay about nineteenth-century theatrical scrapbooks, Sharon Marcus demonstrates that a close reading of archival materials might lead us to challenge long-held assumptions of early American celebrity. Marcus began her research looking for evidence concerning Sarah Bernhardt, a figure who is well known to contemporary historians, but encountered few references to her intended subject. Instead, the scholar discovered that fans of nineteenth-century theatre paid homage in their scrapbooks to names that have since been forgotten, such as Fanny Davenport and Julia Marlowe.\footnote{Marcus, “The Theatrical Scrapbook.”} In this section, building upon Marcus’s argument, I consider one example of a nineteenth-century performer rarely mentioned by historians but who was integral to the antebellum theatrical landscape in the West and South. Although relegated to the margins of theatre history today, actress Eliza Petrie is representative of the many stories of supposedly ordinary or unexceptional players lying dormant in the archive that may enrich our understanding of antebellum popular culture. Just as Booth and Forrest were
constantly debating the terms of their celebrity, and entertainers like Master Diamond persistently engaged the geographic networks instantiated by the conditions of antebellum theatre, stock actors negotiated and challenged the cultural and geographic implications of the star system. Even though stock actors are generally excluded from discussions of that system, they were essential to its dynamics, in some cases operating as foils or rivals to the stars ostensibly at the system’s center.

Petrie was one of the founding members of the Ludlow and Smith Company in the 1835 Mobile fall season and played consistently with the managers until around 1840. In one of the few extant references to Petrie’s biography, Ludlow claims that he first met the actress when she was about sixteen years old, in the fall of 1830, when she and her mother played with his company in Cincinnati. T. Allston Brown includes a brief entry for Petrie in his history, but only notes her performances under William Burton’s management in the Northeast. Although Petrie did play for a few years in Philadelphia and in New York, at the National and at the Chambers Street Theatre respectively, Brown fails to mention that she spent most of her career in the South and West. Petrie usually held supporting roles, playing second to the leading actress in the company, Eliza Riddle Field. For example, in the first season in Mobile, the company performed *The Hunchback* with Riddle receiving top billing as Julia, and Petrie as Helen. However, occasionally Petrie played the lead. In 1836, Petrie performed with the company in both Mobile and St. Louis. The St. Louis season began on August 29th, but Petrie did not arrive from the South until September 9th and, although already part of the stock company, “being a favorite with the St. Louis people, she was announced as a ‘star’ for a few nights.” Petrie went on to play for

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96 T. Allston Brown, *History of the American Stage: Containing Biographical Sketches of Nearly Every Member of the Profession, from 1733 to 1870* (New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1870), 286.

97 Ludlow, *Dramatic Life as I Found It*, 558-59.
one week, starring in operatic and comic roles, such as the title character in *Black Eyed Susan* and Rosalie Somers in *Town and Country*. According to Ludlow, on Petrie’s last night, her benefit, “This young lady was then announced as being engaged for the remainder of the season.”\(^\text{98}\) Since Ludlow and Smith booked stock actors for the duration of one year, they had likely scheduled Petrie for St. Louis when they booked her for Mobile. However, Ludlow’s remark suggests that the managers initially presented her to St. Louis audiences as a visiting star, making the declaration of her stay with the company newsworthy or exciting. Perhaps Petrie’s late appearance was not simply another scheduling snafu, but a deliberate plan on the part of the managers to have her arrival coincide with her star billing.

At the same time, audiences in St. Louis could have easily known about Petrie’s performances with Ludlow and Smith in Mobile a few months prior from newspapers, and therefore recognized that she was already a member of the company. Spectators may have also been familiar with Petrie due to her earlier years playing in cities in the South and West. They may have thus perceived her star billing in one of Ludlow and Smith’s home cities as a different phenomenon than that of a visiting guest star, as a sign of local appreciation rather than an acknowledgment of national renown. Ludlow alludes to this broad spectrum of stardom when he notes that, in the first Mobile season, Eliza Riddle was initially billed as a star in the lead role of *The Hunchback*, but that “the first ‘star,’ really, of the season was Mr. Barton, an English actor from the Edinburgh Theatre.”\(^\text{99}\) Since broadsides from Petrie’s tenure with Ludlow and Smith have not survived, I have been unable to determine how the actress’s temporary star billing was presented to the St. Louis public. Her name may have been printed first and in large letters on posters, playbills, and in ads. Or, since Petrie was only the star for the beginning of the

\(^{98}\) Ibid., 460, 461.  
\(^{99}\) Ibid., 449, my emphasis.
engagement, when there was no visiting performer, Ludlow and Smith may not have attempted to promote her appearance using the conventions reserved for visiting stars.

Theatregoers in St. Louis may have initially accepted Petrie as just another unexceptional performer on the merry-go-round of visiting stars, or they may have recognized that although she received star billing, she was not a star really. Nevertheless, audiences would have quickly caught on to the fact stock company members only played leading roles in the absence of a visiting star from outside the company. A star’s delay, or failure and early departure, could usher stock actors into benefits for which they had no time to prepare, what Tracy Davis describes as “a classic example” of theatre managers “switching the entrepreneurship and risk on to the vulnerable employees.” However, the timing of stock players’ benefits could also be purposeful and “demonstrated their order of precedence in the company while the audience in attendance attested to their favour in the community.” ¹⁰⁰ For Petrie, a series of successful performances in leading roles, whether as a “real” star or not, increased her chances of concluding the engagement with a lucrative, well-attended benefit.

Since Petrie was not the leading actress in the company, her opportunities to achieve even the pretense of stardom were limited. Eliza Riddle more frequently received star billing in the absence of a visiting star actress, as well as the secondary female role during a visiting female star’s engagement. Since few plays in the nineteenth-century repertory had multiple major female roles, especially for actresses suited to comedy, when both a visiting actress and Riddle were performing in a production, Petrie often did not appear in the cast or was included only in a minor role. When Petrie did play the lead, it was often because Riddle was travelling or sick, as was the case on September 6\textsuperscript{th}, 1837, when Petrie played Desdemona in \textit{Othello} only because

¹⁰⁰ Davis, \textit{The Economics of the British Stage}, 212, 211.
illness prevented Riddle from performing.\textsuperscript{101} Moreover, during the periods when Ludlow’s and Smith’s wives performed with the company, both Riddle and Petrie were given fewer opportunities to play lead female roles.\textsuperscript{102} Petrie seems to have had the edge over Riddle and the other company actresses only in comic singing characters; for example, when the company performed the comic opera, \textit{Rosina, or the Reapers} without a visiting star, Petrie was cast in the title role.\textsuperscript{103} Under the star system, managers constantly had to reshuffle casts according to company members’ lines of business and visiting star’s repertory. The unpredictability of the star system—scheduling errors, travel mishaps, and miscommunications—led to unexpected chances for Petrie to break out of her position in the company hierarchy. However, as a secondary, comic actress, Petrie had to wait a long time for such windows of opportunity.

The press, along with Ludlow and Smith, seemed to find Petrie capable, but not exceptional. An announcement for the St. Louis theatre in 1837 suggests the actresses’ position in the company: “The ‘St. Louis Theatre’ opened on the 4\textsuperscript{th} of July, under the management of Old Sol with the patriotic play of the ‘Plains of Chippewa, or, she would be a soldier.’ Miss Riddle, Tom Placide, Mr. J.M. and Mr. M. Field, Mr. and Mrs. Bennie and little Miss Hennings, constitute a part of the company. Mr. De Camp, an excellent old actor, and Miss Petrie, were there likewise, also.”\textsuperscript{104} Describing one of her benefit nights with Ludlow and Smith, one reporter wrote: “This young lady is well known to the profession, and the public, as an indefatigable and agreeable actress, estimable in her private relations, and upon the stage always

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\textsuperscript{101} Ludlow, \textit{Dramatic Life as I Found It}, 462.
\textsuperscript{102} Ludlow recounts examples of this throughout his memoir. Stock company actresses were also displaced when traveling star actors insisted upon roles for their wives or daughters.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 462.
\textsuperscript{104} \textit{New Orleans Times- Picayune}, 13 July, 1837.
\end{flushleft}
respectable. Through the present season at the American she has labored assiduously."\(^\text{105}\) Another New Orleans journalist called Petrie “one of the most useful members of the profession now on stage,” a “very popular” actress known for “studying all her parts most faithfully.”\(^\text{106}\) Ludlow was somewhat less complimentary in his reminiscences, claiming that Petrie was a “very fair singer in her day,” but “had very little power as an actress.” Still, he concedes that, “she played a great variety of business very passably.”\(^\text{107}\) Petrie usually played singing and comic roles and was, according to Ludlow “out of her element” in tragedy.\(^\text{108}\) To some extent, her line corresponded with her level of fame, since leading actresses generally played dramatic roles.\(^\text{109}\) Ludlow and Smith, as well as theatre critics, characterized Petrie as a hard worker who was useful, reliable, and eager to play any role, rather than as a great talent.

Even though Petrie’s tentative star status would quickly be revoked by the arrival of a more famous visitor, she possessed a quality that her internationally famous colleagues like Ellen Tree or Fanny Elssler lacked in the South and West. Regardless of Petrie’s reputation as an actress or her line within the company hierarchy, Smith called her “deservedly a great favorite in Mobile,” and “a great favorite with the St. Louis people.” The New Orleans *Times-Picayune* also repeatedly referred to Petrie as “our old favorite.”\(^\text{110}\) One night in St. Louis, a wreath was thrown upon the stage to her that contained $150, “a club purse from the young men of th[e] city.” This variation of the floral tribute, a convention associated with visiting stars rather than stock actors, signaled to Ludlow that in St. Louis, Petrie had “become a great favorite here with

\(^{105}\) *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 24 February, 1842.  
\(^{106}\) *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 2 April, 1844.  
\(^{107}\) Ludlow, *Dramatic Life as I Found It*, 558.  
\(^{108}\) Ibid., 462.  
\(^{110}\) *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 27 October, 1844, 26 November, 1844.
every body.” Petrie was not famous, but since at least 1830, she developed her career exclusively in the South and West, enabling her to become a household name in the region. For local audiences, Petrie was not a distant famous person, but a familiar member of the community. Bluford Adams credits Jenny Lind’s appeal during her 1851 tour “with maintaining an aura of informality and familiarity that belied her status as a public figure.” When Lind played her rendition of the song ‘Home, Sweet Home,’ one listener mused that wherever the song was heard “that place is the desired ‘Home’ forever.” Petrie was also able to trade on connotations of familiarity and domesticity, but in a very different manner from Lind; rather than possessing a “domestic mystique” or embodying an ideal image of home, for audiences in Ludlow and Smith’s circuit, Petrie represented their actual hometown.

**STOCK/STAR DYNAMICS AS PROMOTIONAL TACTIC**

Eliza Petrie was no Charlotte Cushman or Jenny Lind, but she possessed something that those more famous performers lacked in the West—she was a local—and Ludlow and Smith recognized her value in contrast to the bevy of actors—many of questionable merit—that were willing to abandon their stock companies for the potential financial rewards of starring. As Benjamin McCarthur notes, turnover within resident companies was high, since “few actors wanted to spend their entire careers in supporting roles,” and a move to a more prominent company in New York or Boston “might herald stardom.” Becoming a local favorite was not something that was easily earned, and few performers stayed with one company long enough to

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111 Noah Ludlow to Cornelia Ludlow, 1 September, 1837, Box 1, Ludlow-Field-Maury Family Papers, Missouri History Museum.
develop a rapport with local audiences. Even those who did were subject to the whims and idiosyncrasies of regional variations. For example, although Matt Field, Ludlow’s son-in-law and Joe Field’s brother, was an established favorite, when the actor wished to be engaged for leading business, Smith was ambivalent about the extent of his local appeal; although confident that Field “would suit the people [in St. Louis],” Smith was “not sure about Mobile.”

Despite conceding to audience demand for and expectations of stars, like most critics of the star system, the managers viewed some stars as fleeting, superficial novelties that did not deserve high salaries or audience devotion. Early in their partnership, Ludlow recorded this assessment of their winter season: “Stars—Mrs. Drake, Mrs. Prichard, Mr. Balls, Mr. Lewis—and now Wallack—all making money and all (with perhaps the exception of Wallack) possessing not much more talent than many of our stock actors. Thus it is some actors make $15 each per week and others 15 hundred!” Ludlow’s description was not exaggerated, and the firm paid their company members $15 to $40 per week, while stars could make upwards of one thousand dollars in a visiting engagement of the same length. Despite Ludlow’s lament about stars’ exorbitant salaries, by paying these excessive sums, the managers frequently plundered the firm’s profits to the extent that they could not afford to pay their stock actors. At one point, having borrowed money in order to renew the lease at the Mobile theatre, Smith expressed to his partner the wish to “let the company have a little—for they have had almost nothing—some of them literally nothing, since you left.” Although anxious about how company members would sustain themselves “without any thing in their pockets,” Smith had no way to come up with the money. The managers were perpetually caught up in webs of credit and were constantly in

114 Smith to Ludlow, 28 April, 1839, Box 1, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
debt. On several occasions, when money matters were what Smith calls “a leetle gloomy,” the managers even asked dependable stock company members like Eliza Petrie to lend their benefit money so that the firm could stay afloat. Petrie may have obliged because she genuinely wanted to help her friends. She may have even appreciated being privy to the financial dealings of the company. Or, perhaps Petrie lent her employers the money because she felt she had no other choice in order to keep her job.

Despite Ludlow and Smith’s objections to the exploitation of stock actors, and while nurturing friendships with Petrie and other longtime company members, Ludlow and Smith participated vigorously in the star system, even using their stock actors to perpetuate that very system of inequity. The managers would often boast of their strength in stock in order to engage stars. In an attempt to lure actor George Barrett as a visiting star, the managers asserted that “the average without Stars has been $333 per night this season.” They used the same strategy with T.D. Rice: “As a matter of information we still state to you (confidentially) that our receipts last season during the month of Decr averaged $411 per night with nothing but our Stock company.” Reports of success without stars demonstrated that the company was not dependent on flashy visitors and that the star would be supplied with an able supporting cast. During a period when the theatrical landscape was cluttered with unexceptional stars, the assertion that the Ludlow and Smith company possessed genuine talent was noteworthy.

116 Smith to Ludlow, 28 March, 1840, Box 1, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum. 117 Smith to Ludlow, 17 April, 1837, Box 1, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum. Also see receipt of loan from Petrie to Mary Ludlow, 3 May, 1842, Box 2, Ludlow-Field-Maury Family Papers, Missouri History Museum. 118 Judith Milhous has alerted me to the fact that this practice, although infrequent, dates back to early eighteenth-century England. Richard Brinsley Sheridan was a prime example of someone who both didn’t pay his stars and who borrowed money from them. 119 Ludlow and Smith Letterbook, 5 October, 1841, Box 6, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
Ludlow and Smith realized that stock actors could be effective not only in pursuing stars, but also in courting audiences. The stock company, and especially its distinction from visiting stars, could be fodder for the company’s promotion. A few years into their partnership, at the opening of the New St. Charles Theatre in New Orleans, Ludlow and Smith introduced a set of reforms that utilized the distinctions between stars and stock. Their opening address began:

Being impressed with the belief that the public can very well dispense with Playbill ‘Puffs’ and extravagant eulogisms on the performers who act and the plays which are represented—believing that visitors to the Theatre may, possibly, be capable of distinguishing the different grades of talent possessed by the several actors, without the aid of CAPITAL LETTERS, to enlighten their powers of perception…

The managers lauded their audience’s ability to see through fleeting, over-hyped stars and to celebrate “individuals attached to the Dramatic Profession who possess considerable merit, but who are willing to form engagements for a longer period than ‘SIX NIGHTS ONLY.’”

Solidifying their commitment to a skilled stock company, rather than to illusory stars, the managers declared that all advertisements would now be limited to a single sheet with the names of all actors in type of a uniform size, that they would abstain from the hyperbolic promotion of a play or performances “‘GREAT SUCCESS,’” and would “announce no engagements with eminent individuals, for limited periods, until they have actually arrived in the city.” The managers summed up their alleged new approach when they resolved “to make this NEW TEMPLE, now first opened to the public, no party to the System of DECEPTION which has been generally practised…throughout the Theatrical World.”

Unsurprisingly, the professed reforms did nothing to change Ludlow and Smith’s business model in practice. Their printed indictment of overblown promotional tactics was itself a publicity stunt, excessive capital letters

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120 Playbill, 18 January, 1843, inserted in Sol Smith Diary, Box 6, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
and all. A New Orleans journalist acknowledged that the reforms presented were unlikely to become regular occurrences, but also suggested the success of Ludlow and Smith’s scheme: “We like now and then to see a new thing started, for any movement of enterprise, even if it fails, assists in keeping our daily current of events from stagnation.”121 The managers clearly never actually intended to abandon stars, and the night after their grandiose announcement, Ludlow had to admit that an actor like Joe Field, “although a favorite, was not a novelty.”122

ELIZA PETRIE AT HOME AND AWAY

Eliza Petrie’s performances with Ludlow and Smith illustrate the specific kind of cultural capital held by certain stock actors and how this might be leveraged economically. In the spring season of 1837, Petrie was playing with Ludlow and Smith in Mobile, with a planned departure for the St. Louis summer season in early July. In May, a Mobile resident contacted Smith after hearing that “you contemplated making a change in your theatrical corps by summoning Miss Petrie and substituting some actress in her stead.” According to this gentleman, Ludlow and Smith “could get no one so well qualified to fill the station she occupies,” or “who will ever possess so large a share of public favor & estimation.”123 Despite at least one Mobile theatregoer’s dissatisfaction, Petrie left with the company in late June for St. Louis, arriving on July 1st and performing in the start of the season there on July 3rd. A few weeks after Petrie and the company returned to Mobile on November 20th, the Ferry and Wilkins management team approached Ludlow and Smith, explaining that they wished to resign from management and asking the western managers to take over their company of about a dozen actors. Ludlow and

121 “A Long Shot at the Stars,” 29 June, 1842, New Orleans Times-Picayune.
122 Ludlow, Dramatic Life as I Found It, 563.
123 Mr. Georgian to Sol Smith, 6 May, 1837, Box 5, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
Smith saw the proposal as an opportunity for an “experiment.” Since their company was already full, they decided the “best policy would be to dispatch a part of them to St. Louis [along with the performers from Ferry and Wilkins] and try what success could be obtained in a winter season in that city.” Although the St. Louis theatre would be difficult to warm in the winter, under financial pressure, Ludlow and Smith decided to go ahead with the venture, planning to send a corps of the company, including Petrie, to St. Louis, with Matt Field to act as temporary manager there until Smith could travel up from Mobile. The Ludlow and Smith company typically performed individual separate seasons in their different cities, but in the winter of 1837, they attempted to increase revenue by undertaking simultaneous seasons in Mobile and in St. Louis. It is unclear whether being selected to perform in St. Louis in the winter was an expression of the managers’ confidence. Ludlow and Smith may have chosen Petrie because they felt that she could effectively draw audiences during that city’s off-season, or they may have viewed the endeavor as a side project, reserving their top company members—like Joe and Eliza Field—for the regularly scheduled season in Mobile. Either way, it would have made sense for Petrie to abide by Ludlow and Smith’s wishes in order to maintain her position with the company that season.

In December, a petition began to circulate signed by sixty “Young Men of Mobile” protesting against the departure of Petrie and Matt Field for St. Louis and requesting that the managers retain them through the season: “We the undersigned young men of the City of Mobile feeling deeply sensed of the Great Loss we shall sustain by the departures of Mr. Field and Miss Petrie from the boards of our Theatre and not believing their place can be supplied do hereby solemnly protest against their leaving and do earnestly request that the Managers will retain them

124 Ludlow, *Dramatic Life as I Found It*, 493.
125 Ibid.
through the season.” It seems that the Mobile resident’s letter the previous spring was part of a more widespread conversation about Petrie’s position in Mobile. Theatregoers in that city felt that they were entitled to be part of the conversation about casting and theatrical activities and two years earlier, “the theatrical going community” conducted a similar protest on behalf of Miss Mary Vos. In that instance, Mobile residents demanded a full explanation for why the actress’s application for engagement with Ludlow and Smith had been refused and threatened that “if good and sufficient reasons are not given…the play for tonight cannot proceed.”

As Smith tells it, on December 20th, 1837, the night of Petrie’s benefit, a circular was handed out to the managers on behalf of “a great many young men who often frequent your theatre,” who had heard of Petrie’s alleged departure and formed a committee. The statement alerted the managers that if the rumor proved to be true, the theatregoers pledged to “never again darken the doors they have so often entered,” as well as to “do their best endeavors to forward the establishment of another in this city.”

The following day, a note from the young men appeared in Miss Petrie’s dressing room, informing the actress of the circular and requesting her “co-operation and acquiescence” in remaining in Mobile. On December 21st, the day after Petrie’s benefit, the actress wrote to her employers, concerned about the petition that she learned was about to be presented to them. Anxious that Ludlow and Smith might think that she was involved in the committee, Petrie wanted to make her views clear. Although “highly flattered by the notice” from the men of Mobile, the actress was eager to abide by her managers’ business decisions. She wrote to her employers, “I feel flattered that I have been selected as one of the principal performers in the corps destined for that City, and I shall take pleasure in exerting

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126 The Theatrical going community of this city to Ludlow and Smith, 9 November, 1835, Box 1, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
127 J. Hazrell to Ludlow and Smith, 20 December, 1837 in Smith, Theatrical Management in the West and South for Thirty Years, 132.
myself towards carrying out your views and efforts in a business in which it has always appeared to me to be your endeavor to do strict justice to every body connected with you. Believe I comply with your wishes with the utmost cordiality.”128 However, it seems that Petrie had no other choice than to cooperate if she wanted to remain employed for the winter season.

According to Smith, “Miss Petrie wanted to go.” At the end of her benefit night, “she very plainly told the public that while she thanked the writers of the letter for the interest in her welfare she supposed prompted them to interfere in her affairs, she felt herself quite capable of attending to her own business arrangements.”129 Direct communication with the audience was a practice that was usually reserved for visiting stars, highlighting Petrie’s privileged status as a stock actor who participated in certain conventions of starring. At the same time, Petrie’s announcement underscores a level of familiarity with and accountability to her audience that was relatively unusual for the period. Smith claims that Petrie “concluded her little speech” by informing the audience, “‘I have engaged to go to St. Louis, and go I must and will.’” Although Smith wished for his audience to believe that Petrie had autonomy over her itinerary and professional choices, he “confess[ed]” that the speech was one “I wrote for her at her own request.”130 It is unclear whether Petrie, perhaps with Smith’s assistance, was exerting her own professional agency by not submitting to the Mobile audience’s protests, or whether Smith simply wanted the audience to think that Petrie was acting independently. Theatregoers, rather paradoxically in light of their own demands over Petrie, wished to see Petrie as acting on her own personal volition; perhaps they preferred to view her as a relatable everywoman making her own choices, rather than as either a manipulated employee or a shrewd businesswoman.

128 Petrie to Smith, n.d., 1837, Box 5, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
129 Qtd. in Smith, Theatrical Management in the South and West, 133.
130 Ibid.
Both Petrie and Smith recognized that the way the Mobile audience viewed her was critical to her success and were careful to maintain her reputation with the community, even while making business decisions that went against their wishes. The theatergoing communities in each of Ludlow and Smith’s three cities were critical to the firm’s survival as both ticket purchasers and shareholders of the theatres. Ludlow and Smith exerted as much energy on courting local spectators as they did performers, since, as Davis asserts, “theatres’ fortunes rose and fell depending on localized factors.”

The managers often resented feeling beholden to audiences so attuned to theatrical matters. Following yet another period of low theatre attendance and economic distress, Smith mocked the local community’s involvement with the theatre:

> And now that houses are beginning to be tolerably fair, the citizens begin to talk in this manner: ‘Well, I am glad to see you are getting first rate houses now—we must support the theatre—it is a great credit to the city & we support it—we know you have lost money in the winter—we must now make it up to you, which we are doing, and aint we?’...We!!...Never mind—we (that is vous et moi) don’t care ‘where the money comes from.’

In spite of their unpredictable artistic preferences and inconsistent theatre attendance, local residents in St. Louis and in Mobile took ownership over their city’s entertainment culture. Ludlow and Smith tried to accommodate the elusive regional particularities in their three cities, modifying their company depending on where they were performing in attempt to cater to the shifting proclivities of a public they referred to, with a mix of affection and contempt, as “the people.” Around the time of the protest over Petrie, the managers were particularly frustrated with their Mobile audiences. Smith told Ludlow he was anxious for their lease to be up in that

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132 Smith to Ludlow, 2 March, 1838, Box 1, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
city, since “The people there don’t deserve us,” and Smith threatened “never to set my foot in Mobile again.”

While both Petrie and Smith hoped to avoid any actions that would risk alienating local theatregoers, clearly they were not equal participants in the debates over her remaining in Mobile. As an actress, Petrie had to operate within the gendered conventions and obstacles of a male-dominated profession. She was at a particular disadvantage as a single woman without a husband to negotiate contracts and itineraries on her behalf. Ludlow and Smith often employed couples, such as the Fields, and marrying an actor, especially one within the company, afforded an actress additional security within the firm. As Davis explains, “marrying within the theatre undoubtedly increased women’s ability to maintain a career.”

Even though journalists and audiences seemed to find Petrie respectable, the attention from her male admirers must be viewed with respect to what Davis calls the actress’s “sexual equivocality” during the period, an ambivalent social and economic position that was “constantly reinforced by the theatrical conventions in which actresses were presented to male audiences as beautiful, sexual, available beings, in the compromising milieu of the playhouse.” The theatre afforded Petrie the rare opportunity of financial self-sufficiency, and middle-class roles in legitimate dramas promoted a modicum of respectability, but as a single woman in public, and especially as a stock actress rather than a star, she had to forge her career amid patriarchal constraints. The protest in Mobile underscored Petrie’s compromised position, even as a darling to local theatregoers and as a friend to Ludlow and Smith. The petition had to result in her disappointing either the male theatregoers of Mobile or her male managers—two parties who both had more social and

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133 Smith to Ludlow, 17 April, 1838 and 19 April, 1838, Box 1, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
134 Davis, *Actresses as Working Women*, 43.
135 Ibid., xiv-xv.
economic capital than she did. Although the petition’s signers suggested that Petrie was able to act independently of her male managers, they also insisted upon her submission and acquiescence to them rather than encouraging her individual agency. The petition thus demonstrates Petrie’s privileged status in Mobile, but is also evidence of Davis’s assertion that “the development of a woman’s career was largely decided by factors beyond her control and unresponsive to her talents or her determination.”

Whether or not Petrie wished to go to St. Louis, she seems to have recognized the incident in Mobile as a potential career opportunity. The petition confirmed her distinction in the region and compelled the actress to convert the public attempt to control her movements into more professional independence. The petition also gave Petrie a bargaining chip in contract negotiations, and a few months following the protest, she requested a raise in her salary. At that point, the actress was the second highest paid member of the stock company, receiving $30 per week, the same amount as her male counterpart Matt Field. The only actors who received more, $40, were paid as couples. Petrie told Smith that she had opportunities waiting for her in the North, and had also been offered $40 by regional competitors J.M. Scott and Charles Thorne. She would remain with Ludlow and Smith only under the following conditions: $35 per week for the winter season, $22 for the summer, and two benefits per season, with Petrie taking half of the better one. She also demanded that unless her mother was also engaged, the offer could not be binding, presumably to allow Petrie to pursue other opportunities while working for Ludlow and Smith. An example of the additional, costly responsibilities foisted upon women in the profession, Petrie was responsible for caring for her widowed mother. That Petrie—the local favorite—was toying with the idea of leaving the company for another firm in the region, let

136 Ibid., 52.
137 Smith to Ludlow, 8 March, 1838, Box 1, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
alone one in the North, surely posed a threat to Smith. He deemed Petrie’s proposed salary “higher than I felt justified in giving her,” but also knew that the people in St. Louis and in Mobile “expect her to be re-engaged and would not consent to part with her.” Always attuned to finances, Smith considered that, if Petrie left the company, “her salary would be saved in her absence,” but also that, if they were to make such reduction in the company, the local theatregoers “would growl.”

As Petrie carried on contract negotiations, she continued to test the extent of her professional autonomy. While playing in St. Louis, she agitated Smith by attempting to benefit directly from her local popularity. Petrie had agreed to appear in a concert held by the Musical Fund Society, a local charitable organization. Smith heard about the engagement from someone other than the actress and was irate that Petrie had booked the performance without first consulting with him, thus excluding him from discussions of billing as well as a share of her earnings; even with charitable solo engagements, performers were expected to book through their company managers. Unbeknown to Petrie, Smith contacted the Society’s director and canceled her appearance. As with the Mobile petition, Smith disapproved of Petrie coordinating directly with the local community and insisted upon acting as intermediary. However, by barring Petrie from the event, Smith disappointed the public, offended the Society’s director, and damaged his relationship with the local organization. The episode seems to have shown Smith that it was to his advantage to honor the community’s preferences and to give Petrie what she wanted, since by April, the actress and the managers had come to an agreement about her contract. Smith wrote to Ludlow: “Miss Petrie gives up her journey north on the condition we let her be gone a month to Cincinnati & make what she can for herself if she had wish to play

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138 Smith to Ludlow, 9 March, 1838, Box 1, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
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Petrie had agreed to remain in Ludlow and Smith’s company, but with the stipulation that she was permitted to perform with Scott and Thorne for one month, leading the managers to exert time and energy into temporarily filling her position. A compromise that violated Ludlow and Smith’s no-compete policy was rare and demonstrated that Ludlow and Smith were willing to make concessions in order to keep Petrie.

Petrie’s brief stint with Scott and Thorne in Cincinnati developed into a full-fledged departure from Ludlow and Smith, and in December, 1839, the Times-Picayune announced that “Miss Petrie, formerly attached to Sol. Smith’s theatrical corps, is now playing with Scott & Thorne at Vicksburg.” However, perhaps due to bruised egos or the hope that Petrie might change her mind, Ludlow and Smith continued to track her career. On July 6, 1840 Smith wrote to Ludlow from Cincinnati, where he was playing an engagement for a few nights. Smith was clearly pleased to discover that he and Ludlow were not the only managers that had been abandoned by Petrie for greater prospects in the country’s northeastern theatrical centers. Smith wrote, “Miss Petrie has gone off East somewhere and Scott states he is very much disappointed in her. Scott will open in Vicksburgh the ensuing Winter and Thorne goes to Philadelphia to Burton.” Although it was typical for Ludlow and Smith to stay apprised of actors’ and managers’ movements in the region, they were especially fixated on those who went to New York, Boston, or Philadelphia, maligning such figures as overly ambitious sell-outs to the South and West. Of course, Petrie had a right to seek higher paying or more prestigious employment if she could get it. The managers’ outrage betrayed a cultural inferiority complex, which they did not explicitly acknowledge, but only implied with veiled humor. For example, during a brief

139 Smith to Ludlow, 17 April, 1838, Box 1, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
140 Smith to Ludlow, 13 May, 1838, Box 1, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
141 New Orleans Times-Picayune, 25 December, 1839.
142 Smith to Ludlow, 6 July, 1840, Box 1, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
journey to the Northeast in 1837, Smith claimed to be surprised that he, a self-proclaimed “backwoods actor,” was successfully received by audiences in New York and Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{143} Ludlow and Smith also repeatedly built up their cities in the West and South, dismissing cities where they did not own theatres, such as Cincinnati and Louisville, as “small towns” that held no “comparison with our City in the great west” (St. Louis), or with New Orleans or Mobile.\textsuperscript{144}

By the fall of 1840, Petrie had gone against her former managers’ wishes in full—she was playing in Philadelphia with Burton’s National Theatre, where she remained for two years. Still burned by Petrie’s departure and regional betrayal, as well as the independence that it implied, Ludlow and Smith continued to stay apprised of the actress’s activities in the East, persisting in their attempts to resume contract negotiations. When Petrie first arrived in Philadelphia, she boarded with Smith’s friend and former company member Edwin Woolf, who kept Smith regularly informed of news about the actress. In the spring, Woolf wrote to Smith with what Petrie’s former employer likely wanted to hear: “Petrie seldom looks pleasant; she appears uncomfortable and sighs and fidgets. Entre nous I think she is tired of the North, and yearns for…Cincinnati, New Orleans and St. Louis.”\textsuperscript{145} Woolf implied that Petrie was homesick, out of her element in Philadelphia, and second guessing her decision to leave her local fans for the promise of greater profits or prestige in the Northeast. Later that Spring, Smith wrote to his business partner and echoed Woolf’s assessment: “You will see she does not accept our offer, & invites further offers. She appears to be dazzled by the name of high salary at the East (and only

\textsuperscript{143} Sol Smith Memorandum Book, 18 January, 1837, Box 6, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
\textsuperscript{144} Smith to Ludlow, 13 April, 1838, Box 1, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
\textsuperscript{145} Woolf to Smith, 4 April, 1841, Box 5, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
get ½ of it!)—but I think she leaves very much in the west & South.” According to Smith, despite Petrie’s ambitions, there was “no use making stars of stock actors.”

Smith and Woolf also took an avid interest in Petrie’s personal life, and suggested that Petrie’s supposed ambition and professional rebelliousness was related to her unmarried status. As women in public, actresses’ private and professional lives were always interpreted as being interconnected, and journalists and critics often commented about the martial prospects of female celebrities. “Why don’t she marry?” Woolf wrote to Smith in the spring of 1841. “I once ventured to give her my decided opinion that she would die an old maid, whereupon she grew snappish.” A full year later, while still under Burton’s management, Petrie’s relationship status was again a matter of intrigue. Woolf referred to Petrie as a woman “on whom I hope and trust the lord will shortly bestow a husband.” That summer, Woolf wrote to Smith, “Does Eliza Petrie intend to get married or not? I am tired of waiting for that event! If she continues in the same mood much longer, I shall begin to entertain suspicions that she is a Man-hater.” In another letter, Woolf sardonically vowed to “celebrate the joyful event whenever it may occur, in songs of joy.” In one exchange, Woolf explicitly connects Petrie’s professional movements to her singledom: “Chippendale informs me that she is about to visit New York this summer. Pray you inform me also if such is her intention, for I will cause a deputation of old maids to wait upon her the moment she arrives.” Woolf suggests that an actresses traveling independently, especially a western stock actress trying to elevate her career in New York, must be of questionable femininity. In his discussion of Jenny Lind’s U.S. tour, Bluford Adams demonstrates that the

146 Smith to Ludlow, 3 May, 1841, Box 1, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
147 Adams, E Pluribus Barnum, 53-54.
148 Woolf to Smith, 4 April, 1841, Box 5, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
149 Woolf to Smith, 27 March, 1842, Box 5, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
150 Woolf to Smith, 12 July, 1842, Box 5, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
151 Woolf to Smith, 4 June, 1842, Box 5, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
press interpreted unmarried women in public life as prioritizing fame over the love of a husband and home. When Lind married in 1852, newspapers rejoiced that she had chosen love over the evils of fame. While Petrie was not famous like Lind, Smith and Woolf’s exchanges about her relationship status reflect their anxiety about Petrie possibly seeking greater fame in the Northeast, and what Adams calls “the transgressive potential of the unmarried female performer.”\textsuperscript{152} For many men within the male dominated theatrical profession, an unmarried actress, and especially one who coordinated her own contracts, defied her male managers, and deserted her local fans, was equivalent to a “man hater” or “old maid.”

Eliza Petrie’s career was not exceptional, but it was representative of the complexities of fame, particularly for actresses, during the antebellum decades. On the one hand, Petrie was able to capitalize on her position as a local favorite, and on the ambivalent distinctions between stock actors and stars, in order to forge a successful career as a mid-level actress. On the other hand, the association of her career with the West and South was at times an obstacle that Petrie had to overcome, and in some instances a regional persona that may have held her back from becoming perceived as a “real” star. Although the protest against her departure from Mobile is a minor, forgotten event in theatre history, it suggests that theatre audiences were devoted not simply to the “great names” of nineteenth-century theatre, but to the politics of their city’s entertainment culture and the performers with whom they felt a local connection. This was especially true in the West and South, where theatre professionals and audiences resented their theatrical culture being perceived as inferior to that of the Northeast. For theatregoers in Mobile or St. Louis, to celebrate local favorites like Petrie was to claim their own cultural pedigree. Although Petrie and

\textsuperscript{152} Adams, \textit{E Pluribus Barnum}, 54.
her managers capitalized off her regional popularity, the actress also challenged her male
managers and audiences to view her as *more* than a local favorite.

**Antebellum Touring and the Culture of Deception: The Case of Master Diamond**

In 1821, while performing with James Caldwell’s company in Norfolk, Virginia, actor
Noah Ludlow first met visiting star Junius Brutus Booth. Ludlow could hardly believe that the
short, disheveled man before him was “one of the brightest ‘stars’ in the Western dramatic
horizon.” In fact, he had “some doubts whether he was the *real* Booth, or some impudent
adventurer, who, having heard that Mr. Booth contemplated visiting America, took this peculiar
way of introducing himself, and, if possible, ‘humbugging’ the Yankees before the real Booth
should arrive.”153 It was not until the fourth act of Booth’s performance in *Richard III* that
Ludlow finally witnessed a great talent and was convinced of the star’s true identity. A few years
later, while traveling with a small circus, then-emerging entrepreneur P.T. Barnum was also
entangled in a case of mistaken identity, but one of a very different sort. Upon arriving in
Camden, South Carolina, he was suddenly abandoned by the blackface minstrel dancer in his
company, prompting an instance of the showman’s characteristic resourcefulness: “I had
advertised negro songs; no one of my company was competent to fill his place; but being
determined not to disappoint the audience, *I blacked myself thoroughly*, and sung the songs
advertised…to my surprise, my singing was applauded, and in two of the songs I was encored!”
According to Barnum, this act was a bit *too* convincing. Following one evening’s performance,
he intervened in a dispute between a man and some members of the company. Seeing Barnum,

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153 Ludlow, *Dramatic Life as I Found It*, 223.
the man pulled out a pistol: “‘You black scoundrel! dare you use such language to a white man?’” Barnum quickly responded: “I rolled up my shirt sleeves, and replied, ‘I am as white as you are, sir.’ He absolutely dropped the pistol with fright!”

Ludlow and Barnum suggest the prevalence of impersonation and detection, not simply onstage in theatrical productions, but in the broader milieu of antebellum performance culture under the star system. Historian James Cook describes the preoccupation with cultural fraud during the period as “artful deception,” a paradoxical reception pattern that encouraged the slippage between “truth” and illusion in nineteenth-century popular entertainments. A commercial strategy epitomized by Barnum’s elaborately staged public hoaxes, artful deception did not invite audiences to detect the sham, but rather, as the New York showman famously explained, to “let the public decide.” Indeed, as traveling performers seeking guest engagements became ubiquitous, so did debates over whether a star’s status was deserved, and the term “star” became popularized in quotation marks as an implicit acknowledgment of the title’s instability and ambiguity. This hesitation reflects a broader cultural interest in assessing whether stars were really stars, and whether performers were really who they claimed to be.

The growing geographic circulation of performers in the antebellum period, before images to verify their identities were widely available, instantiated debates over their authenticity. Ludlow’s suspicion toward Booth conveys the impression that “star” billing or even a famous name was not enough to verify an actor’s legitimacy, while Barnum describes an instance of spectators believing a false impersonation, rather than doubting the display of “true” identity.

The ambivalence of racial impersonation was inherent in minstrelsy, and, as Eric Lott has

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156 See Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*. 
argued, instances when the racial counterfeit supposedly broke down indicated the power of the black practices that minstrelsy aimed to contain.\(^{157}\)

Despite the obvious differences between Barnum’s and Ludlow’s stories, they are undoubtedly related as two responses to the new mobility that performers experienced in the decades during the star system. These anecdotes—both certainly embellished and in Barnum’s case likely invented—also suggest that questions of legitimacy, of identifying the “real” thing, pervaded both the ostensibly “legitimate” theatre of scripted dramas and the realm of popular entertainments, particularly minstrelsy, thus undermining easy distinctions between these two categories of performance. The mixed connotations of stardom, and its potential for misidentification or impersonation, thus reached beyond star actors to encompass a variety of touring performers, and it is well known that during the antebellum period, a typical evening at the theatre consisted not only of plays, but also of popular entertainments. Blackface minstrels and acrobatic troupes, along with singers and musicians, appeared between the acts of scripted dramas and as afterpieces. Since stock companies primarily consisted of actors and actresses skilled in tragedies and comedies, or “legitimate” theatre, managers usually had to look outside their companies—to visiting performers—in order to present audiences with the popular entertainments that they expected to accompany plays. While jugglers, circus performers, magicians, and minstrels were not directly involved in star-stock dynamics related to lines of business or the dramatic repertoire, they were crucial to the larger frenzy for novel attractions—such as visitors who were new to local audiences—that was enabled by the star system.

In this section, by examining a series of episodes that took place across the country in 1841, I demonstrate how popular entertainers and theatre managers capitalized off the mobility of performers...\(^{157}\) Lott, *Love and Theft*, 113.
facilitated by the star system in specific ways, as well as how touring helped to promote and complicate familiar connotations of “popular” and “legitimate.” I argue that touring was significant not only for stars of the legitimate stage who were famous enough to undertake transatlantic tours, but also for popular performers who operated on the fringes of respectability and who negotiated with managers outside the major northeastern cities.

To Cook’s theory of artful deception, I add that touring itself was a mode of cultural fraud. As a commercial strategy, deception was not only a “a perceptual contest played out between showman and viewer,”158 but also a way for performers and managers to compete with one another for cultural and economic control over the theatre business, and specifically for authority over expanding entertainment circuits in the South and West. Both performers and managers attempted to use circulation to reinforce or re-map the social and cultural categories that circumscribed them, including legitimate vs. popular, respectable vs. scandalous and star vs. unknown. This struggle for cultural power frequently occurred in what we might call the “margins” of the entertainment industry—in the journeys to and from theatrical events, in surrounding business transactions, and in cities outside of the northeastern cultural centers; these practices were not incidental, but constitutive of antebellum popular culture.

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In the years following the 1837 and 1839 financial panics, early in his career and before establishing the American Museum, P.T. Barnum frequently managed small troupes of traveling performers. The economic collapse diminished Barnum’s career prospects in New York, compelling him to go on the road in search of new regional markets. Although Barnum clearly recognized the opportunities afforded to traveling acts by the star system, he claims to have been

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“disgusted with the life of an itinerant showman” and “always regarded it, not as an end, but as a means to something better,” to future employment in “a respectable, permanent business.” Of course, Barnum later became famous for glossing over his mercenary business ventures with the appearance of respectability. By disparaging traveling troupes as illegitimate while also exploiting their novelty and profitably, Barnum promoted his entertainments as both genteel and sensational. Barnum’s posture of disapproval reflects a long history of attitudes toward theatrical itinerancy and popular entertainments that were still widespread during the antebellum period.

In the spring of 1840, Barnum set out on tour with singer and Yankee delineator C.D. Jenkins, an “orphan vagabond” named Francis Lynch, and seventeen-year old Irish-American minstrel performer John Diamond, “the best negro-dancer and representative of the Ethiopian ‘break-downs’ in the land.” Because Diamond was not quite an adult, his contracts and payments were coordinated between his father and Barnum. In addition, due to Diamond’s small stature and the potential publicity that came with the exhibition of a dance prodigy, Barnum presented the dancer as being only twelve-years old, as “Master Diamond,” a title then conferred upon male child performers. In his memoir, Barnum recounts these early-career journeys as a series of adventures and mishaps; as opposed to the lucrative professional tours he would undertake a few years later with General Tom Thumb (Charles Stratton) and opera singer Jenny Lind, these travels were marked by their spontaneity and disorganization. Throughout, Barnum and his performers had to scramble to secure means of transportation, performance engagements,

159 Barnum, The Life of P.T. Barnum, 207.
160 Ibid., 210.
and boardinghouses while already on the road. They ventured through Buffalo, Toronto, Chicago, Springfield and St. Louis before taking a steam ship to New Orleans, where they arrived in early January 1841. By that point, recalling Barnum’s earlier tour and brief foray into blackface minstrelsy, Barnum’s company of performers had been “reduced, by desertions.” Jenkins and Lynch had abandoned Barnum, and the showman had only $100 in his pocket. Eager to recoup his losses by employing the one performer he had left, Barnum sought an engagement for Diamond. Unlike touring star actors, who at least attempted to book their engagements months in advance, Barnum arranged the New Orleans performances for Diamond only upon arriving in that city. As opposed to actors traveling with their repertoire of roles, minstrels could, on short notice, insert their brief acts into the play billed for the evening. This flexibility also provided minstrel performers with promotional opportunities; before Diamond arrived in New Orleans, the local press took notice of his presence in the region and publicly speculated upon his possible performances in their city. Sending a signal to theatre managers in New Orleans, one reporter wrote: “This young extravaganza singer and dancer was at Vicksburg at last dates…Whether he has an engagement at either of our theatres or not we are unable to say; but at New York he provided a great card to the managers and would doubtless draw here.” When Diamond did indeed reach New Orleans, followed by gossip that he was spotted at the St. Charles Hotel, another journalist wondered which of the two rival theatres—the St. Charles managed by James Caldwell, or the American managed by Noah Ludlow and Sol Smith—would engage the celebrated performer. Barnum ended up securing an engagement for Diamond at the St. Charles. The impromptu opportunities that arose for traveling popular entertainers seemed to work to Barnum’s advantage in this instance, and according to the showman, “the tide began

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162 Barnum, *The Life of P.T. Barnum*, 211.
163 *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 1 January, 1841; 2 January, 1841.
“...to flow” and he received $500 as half the share of Diamond’s benefit, the first of three nights. The press quickly responded with enthusiasm. Of the blackface dancer, one reporter wrote: “No other diamond ever cut such shines…None but himself can be his parallel.” At the end of the St. Charles engagement, another professed that even “lovers of the legitimate” “are waiting for another visitation from Master Diamond.”

Although Ludlow and Smith quickly became aware that Barnum and Diamond were engaged at their competitor’s theatre, one letter suggests that the dancer was on the managers’ minds even before his January arrival in the South and establishes the ambivalent mingling of popular and legitimate in theatrical business transactions. A few weeks prior, Ludlow received a note from his friend, actor Charles Keemle, who was in St. Louis assisting the managers with operations of their theatre in that city while the company was in New Orleans. Ludlow and Smith had instructed Keemle not to rent the unoccupied theatre under any circumstances, and Keemle “therefore declined letting it to any of the numerous applicants in the shape of jugglers, magicians—il est omnes genres.” Entire theatrical companies occasionally rented theatres that were owned or leased by other managers for entire seasons, while traveling popular entertainers often sought space for shorter engagements. As shown by Barnum’s early travels, in the early 1840s, circus troupes and blackface minstrel performers traveled separately from the larger infrastructure of theatres, visiting stars, and resident company managers, sometimes engaging with these “legitimate” houses, but also finding alternative performance venues like dance halls, taverns, or vacant theatres. Popular entertainers, whether as individuals or troupes, could arrange with local companies for lengthy contracts, but they were rarely committed to a “home” theatre

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164 Barnum, The Life of P.T. Barnum, 212.
like members of stock companies. As Tracy Davis argues, the fact that theatres were never held exclusively to dramatic events and were leased to other kinds of entertainment “demonstrates the fluidity of these enterprises under financial constraint;” her statement, although directed at the nineteenth-century British theatre, applies to the theatre industry in the United States as well, especially during the recession laden 1840s. Since Ludlow and Smith’s firm was in perennial debt, the managers must have had strong reasons for foregoing the extra funds they would have received on rent. Perhaps they preferred to avoid the potential business conflicts that might arise with a tenant. Or they may have explicitly not wanted to be associated with these “omnes genres,” for fear that it would tarnish their theatrical reputation. Although circus, minstrelsy, and acrobats were integral to Ludlow and Smith’s seasons and appeared on essentially every evening’s bill, the managers were ambivalent towards these genres and, like many journalists and cultural critics of the period, often cast them as illegitimate lowbrow “amusements of a rougher nature.” Whatever the reasons for Ludlow and Smith’s concerns, Keemle thought that Ludlow might want to make an exception for one applicant, “who wishes to show up Master Diamond (a sharp youth no doubt) a great actor or ‘spouter’—and ‘all-fired’ relator of Yankee Stories—an indescribable Dancer.”

Although I have been unable to confirm whether Keemle convinced Ludlow to rent the theatre, their exchange illustrates that, curiously, a young performer wished to challenge Diamond in St. Louis just as the dancer was arriving in New Orleans; perhaps it was Yankee performer and Barnum defector C.D. Jenkins or a dancer hoping to benefit from Diamond’s

166 Davis, The Economics of the British Stage, 163.
168 Keemle to Ludlow, 13 December, 1840, Box 2, Ludlow-Field-Maury Family Papers, Missouri History Museum.
reputation as a formidable minstrel dancer. During the antebellum period, performers’ whereabouts were often elusive, and, as this instance demonstrates, popular entertainers were particularly peripatetic, since they usually traveled independently and booked engagements on the spur of the moment. At the same time, Keemle’s letter suggests that Ludlow and Smith were quickly made aware of Diamond’s as well as his competitor’s presence in the region, and the series of arrivals and departures that came with itinerancy—while possessing connotations of cultural illegitimacy and impermanence—also generated gossip and press. Ludlow and Smith, through their multilateral presence in the West and South as well as through correspondence with their professional network, were better positioned than many to learn about spontaneous arrivals and departures in their regional circuit.

In 1841 then, minstrel performers like John Diamond could be found on tour, performing spontaneously wherever they could find a booking that would subsidize lodging and travel expenses, as well as in established “legitimate” theatres in urban centers. During the antebellum period, traveling popular entertainers operated according to different rules that were separate from the institutions of the star system and legitimate theatres; at the same time, they often capitalized off that very network of venues, company managers, and scheduling conventions. Legitimate and popular performers adhered to different touring and booking practices, but were also interrelated, both onstage and in business arrangements that occurred behind the scenes. Moreover, although the burnt cork mask made minstrelsy an inherently elusive performance practice, during the early 1840s, it was particularly enigmatic. T.D. Rice had, by the early 1830s, established his reputation for having “jumped Jim Crow;” but according to Eric Lott and Dale Cockrell, it was not until the formation of the first minstrelsy troupe in 1843 that the minstrel
show became a more codified genre; in the early 1840s, the form was an “interstitial art” characterized by a looser combination of singing and dancing practices that centered on racial impersonation. In addition, although minstrelsy has most frequently been identified with male working-class audiences, such as the sporting subculture of New York’s Five Points district, like the series of popular entertainers who attempted to rent the St. Louis theatre, Diamond’s engagement at the St. Charles and his participation in theatrical practices like the benefit system locates antebellum minstrelsy within in a variety of cultural spaces. In fact, minstrelsy’s generic slipperiness in the early 1840s—its status as disparate song and dance routines rather than the formalized minstrel show—facilitated its closeness to the “legitimate” stage and “respectable” productions.170

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Although Ludlow and Smith would come to know Barnum very well, in 1841 the western managers were not personally acquainted with him, and Diamond’s performances at Caldwell’s theatre provided the perfect introduction to the New York showman. “Humbug,” Smith began his diary entry on January 21.

At the St. Charles, a Yankee Humbugger named Barnum got up a pretender bet of $250—on the dancing—negro dancing!! of Master Dimond & a ‘Mr. Mercer’ of Kentucky (as the bills had it)...a supernumerary came out with Dimond & shuffled out, squatted, turned & twisted in imitation of the youthful hero—a tall person came forward & announced that Master Dimond had won the wager & thus ended the humbug!171

Clearly perturbed by the event, Smith also wrote about it to his friend and former musical director of his company Edwin Woolf, noting that the supernumerary was beaten by Diamond, “a

169 Lott, Love and Theft, 112.
171 Sol Smith Diary, 21 January, 1841, Box 6, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
brilliant star” and “jewel of dancers.” According to Smith, in New Orleans, “humbug carried the night,” since receipts at the St. Charles totaled nearly $2000, while those at the American amounted to only $400. The movements that Smith describes—shuffling, squatting, twisting—were associated with cruel imitations of nominally black dances, and racial derision was undoubtedly at the forefront of Diamond’s act; Eric Lott has characterized these displays of racial caricature as expressions of the white desire for and containment of black practices. However, Smith seems less preoccupied with the content of Diamond’s dances than with the deceptive event—the humbug—and its commercial success. While nineteenth-century audiences mistaking the “seeming counterfeit” of the blackface performer for the “genuine article” was part of the lore and appeal of minstrelsy (as shown by Barnum’s reminiscence), for Smith, the humbug lay not in the minstrel mask, but in the bogus challenge. Outraged that the dance competition was fixed by Barnum’s “pretender bet,” Smith exposes Diamond’s competitor as sham, suspecting that this “Mr. Mercer” was not an authentic Kentucky minstrel dancer but a lesser actor in the company with little dancing skill. During the 1840s, Diamond built his reputation on precisely these kinds of potentially deceptive challenges.

Described by James Cook as “highly ritualized cultural phenomena, with multiple judges, elaborate scoring systems (for speed and accuracy), and surprisingly lucrative pay-offs,” the challenges often featured one of the two dancers imitating the other or mimicking other well-known minstrels of the period. Clearly audiences delighted in this interplay of impersonation and competition; indeed, it is likely that spectators, like Smith, recognized that Diamond’s competitor was no match for the skilled dancer. Although audience members delighted in the

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172 Smith to Woolf, n.d., Box 5, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
173 Sol Smith Diary, 21 January, 1841, Box 6, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
174 Lott, Love and Theft, 113.
175 Cook, “Master Juba, The King of All Dancers!,” 12.
pronouncement of a winner, most were probably able to distinguish between genuine contests between two experienced minstrel dancers and a fixed challenge like the one Smith witnessed. Whereas audiences probably took pleasure in both kinds of performances, Smith was still incensed by Diamond’s spurious victory nearly a week following the dancer’s engagement at the St. Charles. “Nothing but humbug has been running in my head ever since the Dimond affair,” he wrote to his business partner, and proposed an idea for “a most splendiferous humbug for next summer.” Smith refused to trust his “gigantic views to paper,” preferring to speak face to face, but was willing to share the hint that if Ludlow would consent to “bring about an engagement with the dark individual I have in view, I’ll be d—d f I can’t beat Barnum (even) in his own country (Yankee land) & perhaps cross the Atlantic & humbug the English too!”

Although Smith’s plan and the identity of this “dark individual” are deliberately mysterious, his proposal suggests his willingness to engage in humbug not as a simple act of revenge, but as a commercial strategy. Perhaps feeling proprietary over the entertainment scene in the West and South or betraying his own feelings of regional inferiority, Smith was particularly eager to execute his plan in a more culturally “significant” transatlantic context.

Diamond was not the only popular entertainer exasperating Ludlow and Smith during the winter of 1841. Around the same time that Barnum and Diamond arrived in the South, a traveling circus and equestrian troupe under the management of Fogg and Stickney appeared in New Orleans. Like Barnum, Ludlow and Smith were struggling amid the economic depression and sought opportunities to augment their earnings. Anticipating that the “celebrated circus company,” which was “well known throughout the South and West,” would attract audiences away from their theatre, Smith decided to preempt any competition and engage them himself.

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176 Smith to Ludlow, 24 January, 1841, Box 2, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
177 New Orleans Times-Picayune, 27 September, 1840.
Despite Ludlow and Smith’s frequent disapproval of popular entertainers, they clearly saw them as genuine competitors. The managers arranged a contract for $700 a week to perform at the American and elsewhere in the region until the first of April, with the stipulation that they should only perform at their theatre for the remainder of the New Orleans season and “also that for one year they should not perform in the city of St. Louis except under our direction or in connection with us.”

Smith determined that he would travel through the South with Fogg and Stickney while Ludlow would carry out the regular season in New Orleans. In fact, Smith read about Master Diamond’s performances at Caldwell’s while touring with the circus and equestrian troupe. However, the sojourn did not go smoothly, and Smith was continually vexed by the challenges of traveling with a team of horses. “Mud! Mud!! Mud!!!,” he wrote in his diary from Natchez. “Last night at 11 o’clock, a cavalcade of 12 horsemen might have been seen, if it had not been so dark that you could scarce see the hand before you! Wending their uncertain way up the hill of Natchez—through mud & mire.”

Such difficulties were not tempered by profitable returns: Smith complained to Ludlow a few days later that “We have stuck our feet in it by engaging Fogg and Stickney.”

But the tour with the circus may not have been all for naught. Reports from the New Orleans Times-Picayune suggest that Smith arranged a little side business while en route with Fogg and Stickney from Natchez to New Orleans. On February 9th, the paper printed a notice of “another humbugging match” in Vicksburg “between Master Diamond and some fellow probably employed for the purpose.” The following day, one journalist noted a rumor that Master Diamond “is to appear at the American Theatre,” but that the dancer

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178 Sol Smith Diary, 3 May, 1841, Box 6, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
179 Sol Smith Diary, 22 January, 1841, Box 6, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
180 Smith to Ludlow, 24 January, 1841, Box 1, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
most respectfully begs to inform the public that notwithstanding the very urgent solicitations for his services by the managers of that establishment, to perform at their theatres in New Orleans and St. Louis, their offers were not accepted. It is certainly true that Mr. Sol Smith made an engagement with Master Diamond for the Vicksburg Theatre, from which place he has just returned with the most triumphant success. He therefore wishes to remind his numerous friends that it is at the St. Charles he hopes to see them again on Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday nights, 10th, 12th, and 14th inst.”181

Advertisements indicate that Diamond likely did appear at the St. Charles on those three nights, along with a subsequent performance at Caldwell’s Mobile theatre.182 Whether or not Diamond was truly behind the report, his deferred and shifting movements around the South provided effective fodder for his own promotion. It appears, then, that after Diamond’s debut at the St. Charles in late January, he made an excursion to Vicksburg, crossing paths with Smith and the equestrians, and making it back to New Orleans in time to complete an additional run there with Caldwell. Although Smith does not recount the incident, it would not have been out of character for him to try to intercept Diamond; during the period, Ludlow and Smith often tried to poach performers from competitors like Caldwell, even while upholding their own regional “non-compete” stipulation. And, in light of the debacle with the equestrians, Smith would have been on the lookout for other opportunities, and especially one that would irk Caldwell and Barnum.

Despite the challenges of traveling during the 1840s, touring offered the possibility of running into colleagues or of making a new professional connection; in a period when most theatrical business was conducted through correspondence, which was often unreliable and lent itself to misunderstandings, spontaneous face-to-face encounters were extremely valuable.183

181 *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 10 February, 1841.
183 See Henkin, *The Postal Age*.
According to Barnum, Diamond had a habit of disappearing, which makes the dancer’s alleged encounter with Smith in Vicksburg more convincing. Following the performance at Caldwell’s Mobile theatre, Barnum wrote to inform Ludlow and Smith, along with Fogg and Stickney, that Diamond had “absconded” after having “overdrawn the money due to him to the amount of $95 and has during the last week expended a hundred dollars in Brothels and other haunts of Dissipation and vice.” Barnum explicitly cautioned his colleagues “against employing or in any manner harboring him on penalty of the law,” as Diamond was “lawfully under an unfulfilled contract bound to me by his guardian.” Barnum even admitted to taking a particular steamship from Mobile to New Orleans in order to “prevent a person in your company from tempering [sic] with Master D. and attempting to seduce him from my employ.” Further attempting to preclude any competitors from engaging Diamond, Barnum vowed to publish a notice of the dancer’s poor conduct in the New Orleans papers.

Where Diamond went when he abandoned Barnum in late February is unknown, and unsurprisingly, I have found no evidence confirming Barnum’s allegations. However, Diamond’s desertions and defections, rather than expressions of his poor character or recklessness, may have been efforts to capitalize off the flexible conventions of touring as a popular entertainer. Indeed, Diamond seems to have had the commercial shrewdness to get himself to Vicksburg for a one-night engagement organized by Smith, an event that was quickly noticed by the local newspapers. By accusing Diamond of breaking a contract and engaging in a vice-ridden underworld, Barnum fends off the conclusion that Diamond’s behavior may have been the result of his own professional acumen. In addition, although independent popular entertainers adhered

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184 Barnum to Smith, 3 March, 1841, Box 4, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
185 Barnum to Ludlow & Smith, Fogg & Stickney, 27 February, 1841, Box 4, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
to more flexible contracts and business policies than theatrical companies, Barnum attempts to find recourse in the “official,” intractable rules of the law, perhaps in defiance against the very flexibility that he had used to his own advantage while traveling with Diamond, Jenkins, and Lynch earlier that year. Barnum’s letter also implicates the dancer’s age and maturity. Although Barnum had aimed to trade on Diamond’s youthful appearance and the appeal of a dance prodigy, the showman surely also appreciated the diminutive moniker’s suggestion of the dancer’s subservient position. However, Master Diamond behaved with a great deal more independence than Barnum desired. The dancer was evidently capable not only of negotiating with other managers, but also of buying tickets for travel and making decisions about which steamboat to take. After Diamond’s supposed rebellion, Barnum neither depicts the performer as a “lad”186 nor as a self-directed adult, but as an irresponsible adolescent who can be easily seduced by those wishing to take advantage of his talents. Barnum also expresses widespread assumptions about minstrelsy’s illegitimacy and cultural milieu. Scholars have most often contextualized minstrelsy within the male sporting fraternity of working class neighborhoods like New York’s Five Points, described by Dale Cockrell as “a culture of fisticuffs, riotous drinking, gambling, general rowdiness…not at all like that of the middle or elite classes,” of “social activities that were unacceptable to those who operated the court system.”187 The subculture most frequently associated with minstrelsy served to legitimize Barnum’s charges of Diamond’s criminality. However, while minstrelsy was undoubtedly popular within districts like the Five Points, it was clearly also popular among the broadly middle-class theatregoers in New Orleans and other urban centers. Although Barnum was eager to usher Diamond into the

187 Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder*, 70.
legitimate theatre of New Orleans, once the dancer turned against him, Barnum was quick to circumscribe minstrelsy within its “proper” depraved cultural milieu.

Despite Barnum’s antipathy toward both his colleagues and Diamond, the New York showman quickly set aside his feelings for the sake of potential profit. A few days after his previous letter, Barnum wrote to Smith again, his threatening tone much diminished and pleased that Diamond had “come to his senses” and returned to him, and hoping to secure an engagement at the American. Barnum, betraying little loyalty to Caldwell, proposed that Smith use Diamond to compete directly with the St. Charles. Caldwell was currently presenting the popular Viennese danseuse Fanny Elssler, an attraction for which Ludlow and Smith had unsuccessfully competed. Barnum, always ready with a promotional scheme, suggested that Diamond might not only perform during the same week as Elssler, but also that he impersonate her dances on the very nights that she was performing at the rival theatre; Diamond had presented dances “a la Elssler” during previous engagements in New York, and impersonating famous performers was clearly a strong current within antebellum popular culture. Although Ludlow recounts Diamond’s performances at the American in his memoir, evidence suggests otherwise. Despite ample newspaper coverage of theatre listings during this period, the purported performance is absent from available newspapers and from Ludlow and Smith’s extant correspondence.

By mid-March, it seemed that Master Diamond had disappeared from Barnum for good. Left without any performers to engage, the entrepreneur departed the South for New York. However, Barnum was not entirely rid of the business with Diamond. On March 30th he arrived in Pittsburgh to learn that someone was performing at the Museum in that city under the name of “Master Diamond.” Claiming to have visited the performance incognito, Barnum discovered that

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188 Barnum to Smith, 4 March, 1841, Box 4, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
189 Ludlow, Dramatic Life as I Found It, 533.
it was Francis Lynch performing under the management of Jenkins; the two performers who had fled from the travelling showman earlier that year were now operating on their own, increasing their earnings by eliminating Barnum’s share. Ever-skilled at crafting a good story, Barnum reports that he arrested Jenkins, Jenkins arrested Barnum for a supposedly false and unrelated claim, and both were released from prison at exactly the same moment.\(^{190}\) Of course, with such an array of potential Master Diamonds on the scene that spring, it is unknown which performer Barnum actually saw playing in Pittsburgh.

Diamond’s most recent defection from Barnum seems to have been the result of an arrangement with Ludlow and Smith—perhaps negotiated with Smith in Vicksburg—\textit{or} with Fogg and Stickney. A few days after Barnum acknowledged Diamond’s disappearance—not only to Ludlow and Smith but also to the circus managers—Matt Field, Ludlow’s son-in-law and a longtime member of his company, wrote to his wife Cornelia that “Fogg & Stickney have got Diamond with them up the river, and no doubt they are flourishing likewise.”\(^{191}\) It is unclear whether Diamond’s journey with the circus managers was orchestrated by \textit{or} against Ludlow and Smith, since at some point that spring, Fogg and Stickney broke their contract with the managers, violating the requirement that they would only play in New Orleans or St. Louis under Ludlow and Smith’s management. By the beginning of May, the circus managers had set up a tent in New Orleans, “within a stones throw” of the American. Echoing Barnum’s reaction to Diamond’s disappearances, Ludlow and Smith took legal action against the entertainers who had wronged them, but, as soon as Fogg and Stickney discovered they were likely to be imprisoned


\(^{191}\) Matt Field to Cornelia Field, 16 March, 1841, Box 2, Ludlow-Field-Maury Family Papers, Missouri History Museum.
for disobeying an injunction against them, they “absconded,” which was evidently a popular tactic of the day. Smith offers a play-by-play of the incident in his diary:

I see the tent of Fogg & Stickney is struck—and they are off for St. Louis in the boat which carries this package!!! I can’t get the contract out of the court to-day, but will send it immediately—but if you think it is worth while to try to stop them, you can swear to the facts & have contract to show afterwards. If I were you, I would put the Govr. In possession of the facts of the case…I am sick—sick of dealing with rogues.  

Like Barnum, Ludlow and Smith failed in their attempt to use the law to pin down elusive performers. However in this case, not only did Fogg and Stickney desert Ludlow and Smith, but they also took Diamond with them. Smith was determined to stop “the d—d slippery set” from interfering with their St. Louis season, but if he couldn’t stop them en route, at least he would get some revenge, advising Ludlow to try to “see Diamond the instant he arrives,” in order to “get him on some terms.”

The following day, Smith had a new addition to this plan. Rather than try to halt Fogg and Stickney’s progress or intercept Diamond, he endeavored to compete directly with the circus company’s entertainment offerings. Apparently, either Fogg, Stickney, and Diamond had to travel separately from the equestrian troupe, or Smith decided to hire his own team of horsemen, since he instructed Ludlow, “To send up the Equestrians immediately without stopping on the way…to close for 3 nights for the purpose of making the circle, & preparing for the horses. With force enough, the alteration can easily be made in 3 days—and by that time, the troupe will arrive.” Ludlow and Smith’s outrageous plan apparently worked. Soon after Fogg and Stickney’s arrival in St. Louis, the theatre managers temporarily transformed their theatre into a

192 Sol Smith Diary, 3 May, 1841, Box 6, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
193 Smith to Ludlow, 2 May, 1841, Box 1, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
194 Smith to Ludlow, 3 May, 1841, Box 1, S.F. Smith Papers, Missouri History Museum.
circus venue and launched a series of equestrian performances. Smith was eager to play the game of theatrical mobility and interception, but his plan was more than a personal vendetta against Fogg and Stickney; it was also a business strategy, and Smith knew from past experience that if a circus was in town, it was sure to compete with the St. Louis theatre. The ad hoc circus seems to have had some measure of success, since by July, Ludlow and Smith’s assembled group of equestrians was touring the South, along with none other than Master Diamond.

* * *

James Cook’s research on the careers of John Diamond and African American minstrel performer William Henry Lane complicates Diamond’s whereabouts in the fall of 1841 even further, and casts an enormous shadow of doubt over his already questionable movements around the country that year. According to Cook, in 1840, while managing New York’s Vauxhall Gardens, Barnum began promoting Lane. The showman’s deception of his audience was twofold: not only did he present the black dance sensation in blackface, leading local reporters to assume Lane was white, but he also promoted Lane as John Diamond. By 1844, Lane, now as “Master Juba,” and Diamond were drawing crowds and substantial monetary rewards by competing in dance matches against one another at venues such as New York’s Bowery Amphitheater. Moreover, as Cook speculates, “Diamond and Lane may have even conceived of the original contest together—as a money-making gimmick to benefit both parties.” While he does not discuss Diamond’s performances in the South and West, Cook establishes a timeline in which Barnum commenced his relationship with Lane just a few months before arriving with Diamond in New Orleans. By examining Barnum and Diamond’s movements and deceptions...

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195 Matt Field to Noah Ludlow, 14 May, 1841, Box 2, Ludlow-Field-Maury Family Papers, Missouri History Museum.
outside the Northeast, I introduce several new possibilities into Cook’s narrative. Could Barnum have been promoting Lane-as-Diamond slightly earlier than Cook posits, in the winter and spring of 1841? Or perhaps either the “dark individual” involved in Smith’s “splendiferous humbug” or the dancer hoping to challenge Diamond by renting Ludlow and Smith’s St. Louis theatre, was in fact William Henry Lane?

During the fall of that year, newspaper sightings of John Diamond are similarly equivocal. In August and September, he was reportedly playing with Jenkins in New York, at both Vauxhall Gardens and the Chatham, and by November 27th, he was advertised as playing for Ludlow and Smith at the American, along with the equestrians. However, advertisements place Diamond back in New York on the 29th, making an engagement in New Orleans just two nights prior physically impossible.197 Acknowledging the confusion over the dancer’s whereabouts that fall, the New York Tribune announced on November 30th that “The real Master Diamond has returned, and performed here [at the Bowery Amphitheatre] last night with great applause,” and a few days later the Dramatic Mirror advised the managers of New York’s Vauxhall Gardens “to withdraw such a humbug as this Master Diamond.”198 That week, however, more scandalous reports about Diamond began circulating in newspapers from New York to New Orleans: “Master Diamond, well known as an enacter of negro characters, has been committed to jail in New Orleans, for ‘stabbing with intent to kill’ Mr. James Barron of that city.

He inflicted three wounds upon him with a penknife for some fancied insult at a hall.”

Echoing Barnum’s accusations earlier that year, it seems that Diamond’s “abscondings” often coincided with reports of licentious and immoral behavior. The *Times-Picayune* published the piece on December 15th, along with an article reprinted from the *Boston Post*: “We rather think this will be news to Master Diamond. He concluded an engagement at Harrington’s Museum in this city last Saturday.” The *Picayune* summed up the contradictory articles this way: “The sum and substance of the business is, friend Post, your Master Diamond has hooked the name of the Master Diamond in our calaboose.”

The New Orleans reporter acknowledged that one city’s Master Diamond often differed from another’s, and that a performer’s movements in one city reverberated nationally through expanding networks of antebellum print culture. The minstrel performer’s (or performers’) activities in the South and West heightened interest from critics and spectators in New York and Boston, the northeastern cultural centers. Audiences and journalists were less concerned with detecting the “real” dancer than they were with getting in on the hoax. As a commercial strategy, artful deception did not invite audiences to detect the difference between counterfeit and illusion, truth and representation, but to delight in the “blurring of these aesthetic and moral categories.”

Referring specifically to “a commercial industry that forced William Henry Lane to imitate ‘himself,’” Cook argues that “[w]hat also needs to be acknowledged…is the enormous market savvy expressed through these stylistic reversals.” The episodes in 1841 involving

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199 *Albany Evening Journal*, 30 November, 1841; *New York Dramatic Mirror and Literary Companion* 1.17 (Dec. 4, 1841): 134; *Connecticut Courant* (Hartford), 4 December, 1841; *Albany Argus*, 7 December, 1841; *Centinel of Freedom* (Newark), 7 December, 1841.

200 *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 15 December, 1841.

201 Cook, *The Arts of Deception*, 16.

202 Cook, “Dancing Across the Color Line.”
Diamond, Barnum, Fogg and Stickney, and Ludlow and Smith, are part of this larger story of geographic and professional mobility within antebellum popular culture; absconding, disappearing, following, and intercepting constituted strategic industry maneuvers that reflected the tenuous cultural hierarchy of the period. Barnum, Ludlow, and Smith all recognized their audiences’ desire for circus and minstrelsy, and moved from one city to another, arranged impromptu tours, or changed itineraries mid-course, in order to engage popular entertainers; however, rather than treat these peripatetic performers as business partners or independent agents, they characterized them as pawns to be seized or captured. Although Barnum, Ludlow, and Smith repeatedly engaged in precisely the same tactics of mobility and interception as Diamond, Fogg and Stickney, the former group repeatedly denounced the latter as slippery, untrustworthy, and even disposed to criminal conduct; the managers’ disavowal of the instability of their own cultural authority was their brand of artful deception. Barnum, Ludlow, and Smith wanted to have it both ways: to capitalize off audiences’ desire for popular entertainers, while persistently dismissing those performers as dependent, unprofessional, and duplicitous. Moreover, while Diamond, Fogg, and Stickney’s behavior has generated ample documentation from Barnum and Smith about the events in the South in 1841, I have found no evidence describing these occurrences from the perspectives of the popular entertainers, an imbalance in the historical record that serves to heighten their elusiveness. However, by not only reading individual instances, but also patterns of circulation—recurrent and well-timed disappearances and abscondings—Diamond, Fogg and Stickney appear to have employed geographic movements strategically, rather than capriciously.

While it is impossible to distinguish with certainty the “real” Master Diamond from the counterfeits, more important is how Diamond represents the possibilities inherent in antebellum
geographic movements, and how performers, spectators, and critics relished and capitalized off
the dancer’s ambiguity. Artful deception was not only about pleasure; it was also about capital—
both economic and cultural. Diamond’s movements and desertions—and those of his
impersonators and imitators—may have secured him additional engagements and therefore
higher earnings. Importantly, they also got his name in the papers. Performers’ physical
movements encouraged publicity and interest far removed from the sites of visiting
engagements, facilitating what Joseph Roach defines as celebrity: the circulation of an
individual’s name or image independent of his or her own person.\(^{203}\) Nineteenth-century star
status was also what Tracy Davis identifies as a kind of “brand name;”\(^ {204}\) as a popular
entertainer, Master Diamond could not acquire the “official” star position of a leading
“legitimate” actor like Edwin Forrest or Junius Brutus Booth, but he could use the exigencies of
being an itinerant minstrel performer to secure his own brand. Whether or not all of the
movements attributed to Master Diamond were in fact the “real” John Diamond, reports of his
circulation and debates over his legitimacy reified the performer’s celebrity, the Master Diamond
brand name.

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Ludlow and Smith’s debates with Booth and Forrest over contracts and scheduling, Eliza
Petrie’s tenuous star power as a local stock actress, and Master Diamond’s absconding and
counterfeiting, all illustrate that, under the star system, some performers experienced increased

\(^{203}\) Roach, “Emergence of the American Actor,” in The Cambridge History of the American
Theatre, ed. Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

\(^{204}\) Davis, The Economics of the British Stage, 339. On nineteenth-century celebrity, also see
First, “The Mechanics of Renown”; David Haven Blake, Walt Whitman and the Culture of
American Celebrity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Marcus, “The Theatrical
Scrapbook.”
geographical and social mobility that could be often be converted into economic and cultural capital. At the same time, performers’ movements were the subjects of complex negotiations with employers, and sometimes with audiences and competing entertainers, suggesting that touring, whether as a major star, a popular entertainer, or a stock actor, was a potentially threatening demonstration of an actor’s professional agency and cultural position.

Correspondence over Booth and Forrest’s itineraries and contracts concerned more than logistics, but rather the extent of their celebrity. The petition to keep Petrie in Mobile reflected her homegrown fame, but also the potential threat she posed to her male managers and audiences by traveling to the Northeast and exceeding her local renown. And, whether or not all of the movements attributed to Master Diamond were in fact the “real” John Diamond, reports of his circulation and debates over his legitimacy reified the performer’s celebrity, the Master Diamond brand. Even though the star system imposed particular conventions and standards of fame, because it required stars to travel amid unreliable conditions, the system also underwrote the instability and uncertainty of antebellum celebrity. “Stars” were inherently elusive and potentially deceptive figures, in part, because they could capitalize on their heightened mobility, or not. The stories discussed in this chapter represent the histories that may be found within the gaps in the performance record—in emerging circuits in the West and South, in negotiations and petitions, in engagements that were delayed or deferred—involving the movements of “real” and illusory “stars.”
Everyday Life on the Road: Touring as Generator of Artifacts

Figure 2.1
Railroad map of the northeastern United States, published by DeBow (1851). Temperance lecturer John B. Gough was based in Worcester, Massachusetts, while actor-singer Thomas A’Becket was based in Philadelphia. Each performer toured consistently throughout the antebellum period, primarily through New York, Massachusetts, Philadelphia, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Washington D.C.
Figure 2.2

*Norman’s Chart of the Lower Mississippi* (1858), published by Benjamin Moore Norman. The map depicts the Mississippi River from Natchez, Mississippi to New Orleans, Louisiana, one of the routes taken by musical conductor Anthony Reiff, Jr. during his 1854 southern tour with the Pyne and Harrison Opera Company.
In this chapter, I examine the role of performers’ diaries within the culture and economy of mid-nineteenth-century theatrical touring. While numerous scholars of the period have studied the diaries of famous and ordinary people as literary texts or as historical evidence of social practices, few theatre scholars have focused on the rich possibilities of performers’ diaries; these texts have much to reveal about early American theatre culture, and particularly about touring. Not only do diaries serve as evidence of performers’ daily lives on the road, they are also indicative of how accounting and recording practices were instrumental to touring itself.

I examine diaries written by three understudied theatrical figures: actor and singer Thomas A’Becket (1808-90, diaries 1844-1890), temperance lecturer John B. Gough (1817-86, diaries 1843-85), and musician and conductor Anthony Reiff, Jr. (1830?-1916, diary Jan-May 1856). These texts are representative of some of the general patterns of recording found in antebellum theatrical diaries, but they also specifically highlight touring practices. Following the lead of Amy Hughes and Naomi Stubbs, whose forthcoming study examines the diary written by actor Harry Watkins, I use diaries as a window into the rhythms of performers’ everyday lives. I also purposefully consider diaries written by figures who did not become famous or who have been relatively neglected by theatre scholars, as opposed to those written by stars like William Charles Macready and Fanny Kemble. Although the diaries that form the core of this chapter were written by men, literary scholars such as Rebecca Steinitz and Margo Culley have

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demonstrated that diary keeping flourished among nineteenth-century women, and it is likely that women working in the antebellum theatre (other than Kemble) wrote diaries; however, I have been unable to locate a diary from the period by an under-studied actress or woman manager who toured.

The three diaries that I examine offer useful contrasts in both touring and diary keeping practices. Before the age of centralized booking agencies, actor Thomas A’Becket and temperance lecturer John B. Gough each used his diary as a business log, recording data that was essential to the practical demands of executing his professional activities. As records that favor

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207 Other extant antebellum theatrical diaries include those by Noah Ludlow, Sol Smith, and Ludlow and Smith company member Mat Field (all held at the Missouri History Museum and Library), and by actor Charles Pope. See J. Alan Hammack and Charles Roehr Pope, “An American Actor’s Diary: 1858,” Educational Theatre Journal 7.4 (Dec., 1955), 324-37; Catherine Clinton, ed., Fanny Kemble’s Journals (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); William Toynbee, ed., The Diaries of William Charles Macready 1833-1851 (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912). See Amy Hughes and Naomi Stubbs forthcoming A Player and a Gentleman: The Diary of Harry Watkins, Nineteenth-Century American Actor, as well as Hughes’ forthcoming monograph, An Actor’s Tale; Theater, Culture, and Everyday Life in Nineteenth-Century America. Many performers published memoirs or autobiographies, but these were written for publication, often in retrospect, and were different from diaries. For examples of memoirs, see William B. Wood, Personal Recollections of the Stage (Philadelphia: Henry Carey Baid, 1855); Anna Cora Mowatt, Autobiography of an Actress, or Eight Years on the Stage (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1854). Although I have been unable to locate antebellum diaries written by women performers, many actresses wrote numerous letters documenting their touring activities. See Charlotte Cushman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; Anna Dickinson Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. Actress Clara Morris wrote a diary during the post-Civil War period that documents touring practices in the era of combination companies. See Barbara Wallace Grossman, A Spectacle of Suffering: Clara Morris on the American Stage (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009). For another example from the late-nineteenth century, see Dora Knowlton Thompson Ranous, Diary of a Daly Débutante: Passages from the Journal of a Member of Augustin Daly’s Famous Company of Players (New York: Duffield & Co., 1910).
routines and quantifiable data, A’Becket’s and Gough’s diaries literally accounted for time, money, and travel— itineraries, travel expenses, lodgings, and performance venues. While the theatre was an unpredictable industry and cultural critics often challenged the social status of performers, A’Becket and Gough’s diaries possess a great amount of order and consistency. Musical conductor Anthony Reiff’s diary is a departure from A’Becket’s and Gough’s and did not function as a business record. However, through his diary, Reiff also gestured toward his public, professional persona within the theatre industry, ironically by ignoring or disavowing his tour with the Pyne and Harrison Opera Company as “work,” and instead presenting his travels as leisurely tourism within his native country. By continually calling attention to the differences between his home city of New York and the southern and western locales that he visited, Reiff used his diary to affirm his position as an American, northeastern, respectable (male) performer.

The three diaries that I examine were private in the sense that their authors were likely the only people who ever read or saw them. However, I argue that these texts were intended for both personal, private use, and for more public purposes. In their edited volume of essays about diaries, literature scholars Suzanne Bunkers and Cynthia Huff argue that, “Because diaries have often been classified as private texts, they challenge us to question the boundaries between the public and the private.”

A’Becket, Gough, and Reiff each used his diary to organize his career and develop his professional identity. The diaries impacted the way that each man viewed himself within the industry and thus the way he presented himself to employers, colleagues, and audiences; diary-keeping contributed to each man’s accumulation of economic and cultural capital and to his professional advancement. Performers like A’Becket, Gough, and Reiff, who

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traveled frequently and whose careers were unpredictable, wrote in diaries in order to make their careers legible both to themselves and to their publics.

Accounting for their Whereabouts and for Themselves

Scholars who have studied nineteenth-century diaries have primarily approached them as literary artifacts, examining volumes filled with narrative prose as windows into the interior lives of both famous and ordinary people. However, most middling nineteenth-century Americans—including Thomas A’Becket and John B. Gough—became diarists not by filling blank books with introspection or reflection, but by purchasing the cheap, mass-produced “pocket diaries” that became popular in the U.S. during the 1830s. Part of the explosion of mass-produced print, which included newspapers, autograph books, account ledgers, and commonplace books, pocket diaries varied in their design, but shared certain essential features: they were published annually, provided pages divided for daily diary entries, and included several pages of front matter, such as time tables, calendars, or currency conversation charts, pages that were once the exclusive content of the pocket diary’s predecessor, the almanac. By mid-century, publishers of pocket diaries typically divided the pages into three sections, offering space for three entries or days per page.

Although pocket diaries resemble contemporary daily planners in their appearance, they were rarely used to note upcoming appointments or engagements, but rather, to record events retrospectively as they passed. As Molly McCarthy claims, and as evidenced by A’Becket’s and Gough’s diary collections, these portable volumes “rested on the needs of a population in search of ways to manage their time and money.” Middling Americans, “caught in a widening web of economic exchanges that required more regimented accounting tools,” kept pocket diaries as a
way to engage with the exigencies of a burgeoning market culture. While filling the pages of blank books required extensive leisure time and perhaps literary aspirations, portable pocket diaries were targeted at middling Americans: at clerks, mill workers, and housewives. The ubiquity of advertisements for pocket diaries in newspapers during the 1840s and 1850s attests to their popularity. In addition, newspapers often featured notices about “lost diaries,” with diary owners offering monetary rewards to the finder. “$5 Reward,” advertised one such notice, “Lost at Laura Keene’s Theatre, on Tuesday evening, 18th inst., a pocket diary, of no value to anyone but the owner.”

The physical characteristics of pocket diaries encouraged writers to interact with them in specific ways; they thus functioned as what Robin Bernstein calls “scriptive things,” or artifacts that issued forth certain historically located lived behaviors. The small size of pocket diaries, usually about four by six inches, invited their users to bring the volumes with them to work or while traveling. Each page was divided into at least three sections, prompting writers to record a small amount of information on a daily basis, rather than in conjunction with a noteworthy event, and to maintain a certain level of regularity and order over time. By “scripting” dailiness and portability, diaries may have also encouraged more abstract characteristics in their owners, such as reliability and trustworthiness.

Thomas Augst argues that diaries were especially critical to the social and cultural world of young professional men in nineteenth-century America, that by writing in pocket diaries, clerks “sought to acquire the moral authority that they hoped would follow from a judicious

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accounting of their lives.” An 1853 article from the Washington D.C. *Daily Evening Star*, which reprinted a 1797 letter from George Washington to his adopted son, echoed this sentiment. In the letter, Washington recommended that “You might derive advantages from a short diary recorded in a book of the occurrences which happen to you, or within your sphere.” “Trifling as this may appear at first view,” he wrote, “by carefully preserving these it would give you more satisfaction in the retrospective view than what you conceive at present.” The reporter observed that Washington’s “advice would not be out of place with the young men of the present day.”

Evidently, young performers also used diaries to bolster their professional position, and Augst’s argument resonates strongly with the texts that I examine in this chapter. Some diaries kept by performers offer evidence of the complex economy of theatrical touring, and of how ostensibly “private” accounting was intricately linked to “public” aspects of the industry, such as a performer’s cultural legitimacy and the relationship between personal recordkeeping and promotion.

**The “Repetitious Dailiness” of a Performer’s Diary: The Case of Thomas A’Becket**

After leaving England in 1837 at the age of twenty-nine, actor-singer Thomas A’Becket established a home base with his wife in Philadelphia, where he continually performed with the prominent Philadelphia stock companies—the Walnut Street, Chestnut Street, and Arch Street theatres. The details of A’Becket’s career before emigrating to the United States are uncertain, but it is likely that he had performed professionally in England, since he began acting, as well as...

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teaching flute, piano, and bass, immediately upon arriving in Philadelphia. As shown by his diaries, A’Becket’s career was not limited to the Philadelphia companies, and he utilized travel as one item in his repertoire of strategies for sustaining a life in the theatre. Work with local companies was sporadic, and a renewed contract, even with managers with whom he established long-term relationships, was never guaranteed. Consequently, A’Becket continually sought out engagements in other cities. Between stock company stints in Philadelphia and elsewhere, along with occasional touring engagements, for a “resident” stock actor, A’Becket spent a great deal of time away from home.

For over two decades, A’Becket kept diaries as a system of daily accounting. A close reading of several of these volumes conveys the performer’s patterns of movement, his everyday routines on the road, and the style and kinds of information he chose to document. A’Becket’s 1844 volume, the earliest of those extant, begins with the thirty-six year old performer already on tour in the South with the Seguin opera troupe, the most popular English company of the period. Due to his singing, composing, and flute and piano-playing skills, A’Becket often supplemented his engagements in Philadelphia by touring for several months at a time with opera companies; although combination theatrical companies would not become the standard until after the Civil War, since the early 1840s, opera troupes, like solo visiting stars, operated as touring rather than stationary enterprises. Augst claims that young men’s diaries “frequently begin as travel journals, recording a first voyage from home in search of work.” While I cannot determine when A’Becket began recording in a diary, the earliest volume that survives (1844)

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215 For more on the Seguins, see Preston, *Opera on the Road*, chap. 1, 2, and 5.
shows that the habit developed relatively early, perhaps as a way to help navigate a new professional world in a new country.

The first page of the 1844 diary is pre-printed from the publisher, Hymen Lipmen: “Daily Register for the Use of Private Families and Persons of Business, Containing a blank for every day in the year, for the record of interesting occurrences and future engagements.”

Every time A’Becket opened his diary, he, like the numerous young male clerks that form the core of Augst’s study, was assured that he was a “person of business” with a wealth of “interesting daily occurrences” and worthwhile future plans. The data that the performer records during the week of January 15th, which began while in Mobile, is representative of A’Becket’s documentation of his professional identity over the next two decades and is typical of the kinds of accounting practices found in pocket diaries:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mon, Jan. 15th</td>
<td>Refused to play without my/ Weeks Salary, wrote a letter/ to Mueller. Got my Saly.&amp; Played Basil &amp; Mercury / in Olympic Revels/ Paid Board 5$ Washing 1$/ Fine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues, January 16th</td>
<td>Played Flavio/ Employed Copying/ Wrote Negro Song for the Virginia Minstrels/ Fine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed, Jan. 17th</td>
<td>Rec’d [Received] letters from Wife 43 cts saying/ she had not recd. cheque/ Answered letters 25 cts/ Play’d Alidoro/ Seguin paid me Bill 22.81/ Emp’d [Employed] Copying Fine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thurs, Jan. 18th</td>
<td>Rec’d letter informing me Wife/ had received Cheque 43 cts/ Answered letter/ Played Bourdon and sang in Concert for Muellers Ben./ Exchanged notes for gold at 5 percent discount/ Cloudy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fri, January 19th</td>
<td>Bought a cap 1$ Paid Board/ 28.86- Lost black silk gloves/ Paid Washing 50 cts Carriage/ of trunk 20 cts/ Left Mobile in Steam Boat/ Creole/ Weather moderate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

217 A’Becket Family Diaries and Prompt Books, Series 1, Box 1, NYPL. Hereafter, dates for individual diaries will be cited parenthetically.
Figures 2.3 and 2.4
Pages from Thomas A’Becket’s 1844 diary.
A’Becket Family Diaries and Prompt Books, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts
Although quotidian, these entries offer important information about the actor’s daily rhythms and routines, particularly while touring. Probably at the end of each day, A’Becket recorded the parts he played; in this case, he performed secondary roles in Gioachino Rossini’s opera *Cinderella* (Alidoro), in Adolphe Adam’s opera-comique *The Postillion of Longumeau* (Bourdon), and in J.R. Planché’s extravaganza *Olympic Revels* (Basil and Mercury). He also participated in a concert. The entries demonstrate A’Becket’s versatility as an actor; the baritone was able to perform singing roles in serious and comic operas, as well as in extravaganzas or burlesques. He also performed non-singing roles in tragedies and comedies. Yet, while A’Becket was an adaptable performer, he never played the lead. That year, he played a total of 89 different roles, including the following Shakespeare characters, which indicate his level as a stock actor: a Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet*, Polonius in *Hamlet*, Hecate in *Macbeth*, and the Duke in *Merchant of Venice*.

A’Becket also documented the money he spent and earned, his departure and arrival times, the steamboats he boarded, and the boarding houses in which he stayed. He records letters sent and received, such as one from his wife on the 18th to inform him that she had received a check. Throughout his diaries, A’Becket frequently records sending money to his wife in Philadelphia while he was away from home. Mrs. A’Becket was an actress and singer as well, and while the couple sometimes performed in joint engagements in their home city, they never toured together; in 1844, A’Becket’s wife probably needed to stay at home with their one-year old son, Thomas. At the end of each entry, A’Becket also records the weather; that week it ranged from fine to cloudy. On the surface, these daily entries are rather banal, revealing little of A’Becket’s personality or interior life. However, as I will demonstrate, the significance of
A’Becket’s diary lies not in the substance of one particular entry or another, but in what scholar Laurel Thacher Ulrich characterizes as diarykeeping’s “exhaustive, repetitious dailliness.”

One major reason for A’Becket to relentlessly record events that had already taken place was to account for his money. Especially while touring, the actor’s salary was an issue of perpetual confusion and concern, and he often records refusing to play without receiving payment. On January 25th 1844, he records his weekly salary of $20, which is likely what he was paid during the previous weeks of the Seguin tour. However, he also frequently records receiving payments of other bills for copying, writing music, or teaching. On January 17th, he received $22.81 from Seguin for copying work, and on February 6th he received $19.50, also for copying scripts, from Mr. Shrival, another actor who performed with the Seguins. On January 27th, A’Becket “signed an agreement to receive 2/3 salary for 3 or 4 weeks.” It is unclear why he received a temporary pay cut—perhaps the Seguins were short on funds—but on February 12th he was indeed paid the reduced sum of $13.33. A’Becket often notes when he received his “complete” or “full” salary, suggesting that receipt of the entire sum was not guaranteed. The schedule of pay was also inconsistent, and A’Becket could not, for example, rely on receiving his salary on a particular day of the week. During this period, economic transactions between performers and managers were fluid. Depending on the current financial state of the company, managers (including Noah Ludlow and Sol Smith) often borrowed directly from performers’ salaries and then reimbursed them later.

Despite this unpredictable system of payment, A’Becket was faced with expenses on tour that added to those at home, including lodging, the carriage of his trunk, and steamboat fare,

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219 Preston, *Opera on the Road*, 327, n. 3.
which was $5 between Mobile and New Orleans (18 February), a quarter of his weekly pay. In addition, touring performers were responsible for furnishing their own stage wardrobes, and A’Becket accounts for a great deal of time and money spent adding to, mending, and cleaning his garments. Inconsistent pay coupled with the costs of travel made timely receipt of A’Becket’s salary a recurring issue, and jotting down when he got paid in his diary could allow the actor to stay apprised of his budget and to remember if he got paid at all. The diary was also useful for noting changes in contracts, which apparently could occur mid-tour. On February 19th, the performer renewed his contract with Seguin for “10$ per week and travelling paid to Phila.” From that point on, although A’Becket tracks his arrivals, departures, and lodgings, he does not record transportation costs. Clearly, a salary cut was worth having travel expenses covered by the managers. Promptly after accepting the new offer and freed from the exorbitant cost of shipping his trunk home, A’Becket “Shipped chest on board the ship Chandler Price for Phila” (19 February).

Although A’Becket presumably went on tour with the Seguins due to the income he would earn by performing, during the week of January 15th, he notes tasks other than acting or singing for which he got paid, such as prompt book copying for the Seguins—he finished the script of Postillion on the 21st—and song writing for the Virginia Minstrel Troupe (16 January). That A’Becket composed both minstrel and opera songs throughout his career is evidence of scholar William Mahar’s claim that, during the antebellum period, blackface minstrelsy and opera were closely linked cultural forms. Blackface burlesques of popular operas and operatic scenes, as well as comic adaptations of works from the legitimate theatrical repertory, were frequently performed by minstrel troupes. And theatres often housed mixed bill performances
that included opera and separately-booked minstrel acts.\textsuperscript{220} A’Becket’s commitment to Seguin did not stop him from negotiating side gigs with minstrel companies as well as with other parties; for example, on February 13\textsuperscript{th}, he “Wrote music of Calderon for Kirby who sails for England to day, promised to pay me on his return.” It seems that A’Becket composed music for the actor Hudson Kirby, who had performed with A’Becket at the Chestnut during the early 1840s before moving to England to play at the Olympic and other minor London theatres.\textsuperscript{221} It is uncertain whether Kirby delivered on his promise, and clearly the unreliable system of pay did not only apply to acting salaries. However, A’Becket was willing to take the risk for additional income.

Whether at home or away, the actor-singer’s willingness to travel was only one strategy of stringing together a theatrical career, and he took on a variety of professional roles within the theatre in order to make a living. While in Montgomery, Alabama on February 29\textsuperscript{th}, en route from the South to Philadelphia, he “prepared” and “made out concert bills,” and on March 1\textsuperscript{st}, in Macon, Georgia, he “took programmes to the printer.” Once he returned to Philadelphia in mid-March, while beginning rehearsals for the operas \textit{Anna Bolena} and \textit{Massaniello} at the Chestnut Street Theatre, he continued to copy scripts and compose songs for the local companies, as well as for the Virginia Minstrels and the New Orleans Serenaders (another minstrel troupe).

Throughout A’Becket’s diaries, he records composing and copying for several companies and giving flute lessons and tuning pianos for various Philadelphia residents. A’Becket’s numerous jobs furthered his need for accurate accounting in his diaries, since he had to track not only erratic schedules of payment, but also multiple sources of income.


\textsuperscript{221} Brown, \textit{History of the American Stage}, 207-208.
In addition to money spent and earned, the people that A’Becket recorded meeting, calling upon, and corresponding with were also a measure of how he spent his time—and of his professional position. The actor frequently used his diary to note his social interactions while touring. He records the sending and receiving of letters to and from managers, as well as his exchanges with his wife and children at home in Philadelphia. He often records meeting or running into other actors and managers on the road. On March 3rd, while in Charleston, he “saw fellow actors “Messrs. Wallack, Simons, Sprague, Charles & Wife, Pemberton, & several others.” On February 20th, 1844 while traveling from New Orleans to Mobile on the steamboat Fashion, he notes that actor “T[homas] Placide [is] on board.” And onboard the New Era from Mobile to Montgomery, he met actors “Barber & Emerson” from Charleston (22 February). A’Becket was particularly quick to note the arrivals and departures of stars, and specifically his interactions with the more renowned members of the profession. While playing a summer engagement in Montreal, he recorded that he “rec’d compliment from Mr. Macready for playing Polonius,” (18 July) and on his benefit night, he noted that “[Joshua] Sillsby [sic] played for me” (2 August). Developing a professional network was yet another way of becoming a legitimate “person of business” who kept a pocket diary.

Accounting for time, money, and business interactions was essential for an actor with a career that was both geographically and metaphorically mobile. Not only was A’Becket willing to move from city to city, but he also frequently moved from job to job and from theatre to theatre while he was in Philadelphia. In 1844, he records numerous correspondences and meetings with Ethelbert Marshall, who was managing both the Walnut Street and the Chestnut Street Theatres, and with William Burton at the Arch Street Theatre. He composed music and copied scripts for Burton and secured several acting engagements with Marshall. Only a few
days after returning from the southern tour with the Seguins, A’Becket recorded the receipt of a contract with Marshall of “20 dollars per week for self and wife during the opera season,” (22 March) which began in April. However, on May 20th, he notes that he negotiated with Marshall again for “Opera at Chestnut St. at 14$ for self and wife,” for which he began rehearsals on May 22nd. The $14 per week salary may have been a revision to the earlier $20 per week contract or a new agreement for one specific show. That month, he negotiated yet another contract with Marshall for the winter season of $9 per week (17 May). If $9 was the going rate for A’Becket’s individual salary without his wife, it seems that he made slightly less performing at home than he did on tour with the Seguins, where he ultimately received $10 per week including his travel expenses. It is unclear whether Marshall typically hired performers by show, by season, or some combination of the two; regardless, A’Becket, like most stock actors, had to arrange new contracts each season, and secured multiple contracts that spring.

For stock actors like A’Becket, being left without guaranteed year-round employment at the Walnut and having constantly to negotiate various contracts was, on the one hand, an undesirable situation. However, on the other hand, this gave him the flexibility to travel and coordinate with managers outside Philadelphia, occurrences that he tracked in his diary. On May 22nd, the day that he booked an engagement for a single opera for himself and his wife at the Chestnut, A’Becket met with a man named Mr. Rodney, presumably the manager of the Holliday Street Theatre in Baltimore, and “signed articles to go to Montreal at 14$ per week & third clear Benefit.” It is likely that this seven-week engagement, A’Becket’s second away from home in 1844, was with a set of actors from the Holliday. During this period of economic boom and

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222 In his memoir, long-time Philadelphia actor-manager Francis Courtney Wemyss mentions “Mr. Rodney” as the manager of Baltimore’s Holliday Street Theatre in 1844. See Wemyss, Twenty-Six Years of the Life of an Actor and Manager (New York: Burgess, Stringer & Co., 1846), 394.
bust, many resident company managers, including Ludlow and Smith, augmented their earnings by renting theatres in neighboring cities and sending a portion of their company to perform there. Indeed, these ventures were one way of establishing early regional circuits.

During his stay in Montreal A’Becket records his usual details of what he earned and spent, parts he played, letters he wrote and posted, and people he met. For example, on July 2nd, he noted receiving only half his salary, visiting the post office and receiving no letters, taking his boots to be repaired, receiving a letter at the theatre from his wife, paying his board, rehearsing the play *The Wife* in the afternoon and attending the theatre to see *The Amateurs Commit Murder* in the evening. On the 3rd, he rehearsed *The Wife*, posted letters, studied at home, played Antonio (in *The Wife*) and Mr. Melton223 in the evening, and stayed up until daylight writing parts of *Pizarro* for the orchestra. Although A’Becket’s whereabouts and professional activities were varied and inconsistent, his patterns of accounting remained steady whether he was on tour with the Seguins in the South in 1844, performing in Baltimore in 1845, performing at home in Philadelphia in 1848, or touring in southeastern Pennsylvania in 1853. Wherever his career took him, he managed to maintain the routine of recording in a diary, a daily practice that provided a sense of order to his fragmented and shifting professional life.

Part of the logic behind A’Becket’s diary—his reasons for recording particular kinds of information—becomes clear at the end of each year, when he tabulates year-end totals for the number of roles played, the amount of money he spent on clothing, and his total income; in some years, he includes a more exhaustive list of expenses. Noting how much he earned or spent each day in his diary enabled A’Becket to quantify that data at year’s end easily. Since his income

223 The role of “Mr. Melton” is not included in the list of roles played at the end of the 1844 diary, and I cannot determine the play in which this character appears. A’Becket may have forgotten to add it to the list.
came from various sources, these calculations yielded information that could be useful both for future reference and for tracking outstanding bills or payments owed to him. In 1844, A’Becket earned $180.75 from touring, $207.03 from acting at home, and $133.72 from side jobs, such as composing, copying, and teaching. While he made more money from resident acting than from either of the other two categories, he earned the majority of his income from touring and side jobs combined; physical and professional mobility were clearly essential to his making a living. However, A’Becket’s diary was more than an account book, and his year-end data also enabled him to assess his career in less objective or numerical terms. Surely the actor considered the number of roles he played in a given year relative to perceptions of theatrical success or compared his earnings to his own financial aspirations. Moreover, the completion of the annual diary, the quantity and consistency of the entries that were visible at year’s end, served as evidence for A’Becket of his professional efforts and achievements. Augst argues that a clerk’s diary was a tool for “taking stock of his life,” to “compare his ‘situation’ and ‘place’ against normative expectations for self-development that were both material and moral.”

Although an individual entry in one of A’Becket’s diaries may appear trivial, by taking stock at year’s end, the performer sought, in Augst’s words, to make his “tentative movements add up to something, to account for the value” of his career.

Diary-keeping was also a way for A’Becket to chart the broader significance of time passing. He did not only take stock at year’s end, but daily, through the very act of writing in his diary. On February 10th, 1844, while touring with the Seguins, he wrote “4 months since I left Philadelphia.” And on May 28th, it had been “one year since I relinquished drinking spirits wine or malt liquors.” The following year, on May 4th, he recorded that it had been “8 years since I left

224 Augst, *The Clerk’s Tale*, 54.
225 Ibid., 22.
England,” an event that he continued to note annually. On August 8th, 1846, while playing at the
Walnut and doing other odd jobs, he wrote that it was “the hardest weeks work since entering the
profession.” For A’Becket, writing in a diary was a practical means of keeping track of daily
business activities, but it also served a deeper purpose of measuring the significance of his days.
As a reporter for the Wheeling Daily Intelligencer wrote, “Most every one at twenty years of age
would give considerable for a diary in which there should be one fact of their lives noted down
for every day of the five years past; at thirty they would give a great deal more, and at fifty the
pleasure as well as the value of such retrospection no man can estimate.”

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A’Becket’s varied and uneven career, with stints in Philadelphia stock companies
punctuated by engagements away from home, continued in much the same manner over the
following two decades. However, over time, A’Becket was able to leverage his arsenal of career
strategies—including his diary accounting practices—into increased financial stability and
professional responsibility. A’Becket’s earnings in 1848, when the actor was forty years old,
suggest an upswing in his professional success from four years prior. That year, he earned
$636.93 from acting at home and on tour, more than twice what he earned from performing in
1844. During the summers of 1853 and 1856, while employed by the Walnut Street Theatre
under Marshall’s management,227 A’Becket took several short trips with the company to
Reading, Pennsylvania, where they performed Uncle Tom’s Cabin and other pieces. Although
much of the patterns from the earlier diaries persist, such as recording his salary, boarding
houses, scripts copied, and the music lessons he gave while in Reading, subtle changes suggest

226 Daily Intelligencer, Wheeling, VA., 9 December, 1863.
227 Mari Kathleen Fielder, “[Third] Walnut Street Theatre Company,” American Theatre
that, during this venture, A’Becket began to take a more active role in the enterprise of regional touring. Rather than traveling with part of a company when needed, or filling in as a supporting performer with opera troupes or other stock companies, the actor functioned as an informal company road manager or stage manager.

Events in A’Becket’s personal life likely had an impact on his professional activities. On Sunday, December 6th, 1850, the actor recorded the death of his wife, “this ending 11 years & 1 months happiness.” In 1856, A’Becket begins to record dining and sleeping at “Gz,” and in December 1857, he remarried. However, in the years following his first wife’s passing, A’Becket was the primary caretaker for his three children, Thomas, Mary Ann (born 1845) and James (born 1847). Although the actor does not record payments for childcare or house cleaning, his wife’s death probably created new family expenses. During the 1850s, it is likely that A’Becket felt increased financial pressure, and took advantage of professional opportunities that might augment his earnings, like touring.

Upon arriving in Reading on July 7th, 1853, A’Becket records immediately going to “Odd fellows Hall,” where, rather than just participate in rehearsals, he “commenced fitting it up.” On July 8th, he was “Employed all day at Hall working very hard unpacked boxes,” and on the 9th he “worked at hall fitting up stage,” which was “not fitted until within half an hour” of opening night. Apparently, A’Becket played a pivotal role in readying the theatre for the company’s engagement. On July 26th, he “resolved not to play, but get up Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” again suggesting again that his position within the company had become more than secondary stock actor. On July 30th, A’Becket “paid Comp[any] their boarding expenses,” and “paid all bills,” before heading back to Philadelphia the following day. Further evidence of his managerial position and his investment in the company during the Reading engagement, the actor does not
record his own salary, but the house receipts, which amounted to around $45.00 on most nights, but sometimes reached double that figure, and on July 18th, “the best night [of] the season,” amounted to $101.48. A’Becket seemed to be more valuable as a manager or company administrator than as an actor; when he took own benefit in Reading on August 11th, house receipts totaled only $48.12, a mediocre night in comparison to the benefits of more prominent members of the company, such as Mrs. Bowers, whose performance on August 8th grossed $94.00. During the five-week engagement in Reading, A’Becket took weekly trips back to Philadelphia, traveling the 63 miles to stay for one night or sometimes just a few hours, before returning to Reading. Although he does not record details of his short trips home to Philadelphia, he probably went to visit his wife and children as well as to communicate directly with the Walnut Street managers and keep them apprised of business in Reading. A’Becket was responsible for settling matters at the close of the engagement as well; on August 15th he was “employed stripping hall,” and on the following day he “settled board & every thing,” before leaving Reading at 9 pm. The day after he returned, on December 22nd, A’Becket “heard that I was to go to Washington” in a similar capacity as the engagement in Reading, for which he left on December 31st.

In the summer of 1857, A’Becket traveled with a set of actors from the Walnut, including his thirteen-year-old son Thomas, to Trenton, New Jersey, a 33-mile train ride from Philadelphia. The previous fall, he performed with the company in Philadelphia for a salary of $22 per week and benefits shared after $200, (25 June, 1856). The two dollar increase since 1844, plus the sharing plan for his benefit, suggests that A’Becket’s position in the company had risen over that twelve year period. As with the engagements in Reading, he went to Trenton in advance of the company’s arrival to settle business matters and prepare the theatre. However, in this case,
A’Becket’s level of responsibility can be confirmed by sources other than his own diary. Before performances began on June 27th, a circular was distributed “To the Trenton Public,” notifying them that “The undersigned having leased the Trenton Atheneum For a Limited Period, Propose giving a Series of Entertainments Composed of Plays and Farces…We will have the active co-operation of our associates of the Walnut Street Theatre Company…We hope that we may be found worthy of your liberal patronage.”228 The document is signed T. A’Becket and L.R. Shewell, Lessees of the Theatre, and contemporaneous advertisements show that A’Becket served as acting manager while Shewell was the stage manager. In this case, the visit was not centered on a particular star, but on the presence of a noted Philadelphia stock company; for smaller east coast cities like Trenton, the arrival of a company from one of the three prominent cultural cities was an event worth noting in the press.

As part of his responsibilities, A’Becket went to Trenton on Friday, June 12th, staying temporarily to “to Engage the Theatre.” On June 18th, he again “got things ready to go to Trenton,” and “engaged company.” On the 26th, the “company mostly arrived,” and A’Becket “got boarding for them” and “prepared for opening.” On the 27th, he was “set[ting] things in order, worked very hard, went to Rhl [rehearsal], was very busy all day.” The company opened with All That Glitters and the farce, The Toodles, the “house not near our expectation,” with receipts totaling only $26.72. Advertisements for the debut prominently displayed A’Becket’s name in large letters at the top as lessee and acting manager. As the summer went on, receipts were sporadic, ranging from a high of $70.50 to a low of just $13.12 on June 29th. In addition to managing, A’Becket usually performed a role in the evening’s production; in the cast list, he was typically the third or fourth listed male character (29, 30 June; Broadside 10 July). However, on

July 1st, for a production of *Still Waters Run Deep*, he is listed first, as Mr. Potter. On several evenings, he also performed a flute solo in between the play and the concluding farce (1 and 7 July).

Being the lessee and acting manager provided A’Becket with opportunities for promotion that he did not usually have as a regular stock actor. His name was printed on every advertisement and, probably not coincidentally, he took his own benefit on a coveted date, July 4th evening, a holiday that was also promoted as the “Last Night of the Walnut St. Theatre Co. of Philadelphia.” Of course, two days later, in typical nineteenth-century fashion, the company was announced “FOR ONE WEEK MORE.”

In his role as acting manager, A’Becket received a second complimentary benefit during the remainder of the engagement, on July 7th. Even though A’Becket records that, on July 13th, he “delivered key of theatre, paid all bills and left Trenton, without loss or gain,” the endeavor was indicative of his rising professional responsibility in the subsequent years. The mediocre season may have been due to the lack of stars or a sign of a weakening economy, rather than of a failing company. On August 26th, A’Becket recorded that “all the banks stopped specie payments, Terrible panic in the City,” and at the end of that year of national financial hardship, records that he “Left the profession and the city of Philadelphia.” Nonetheless, at the end of 1857, A’Becket wrote that, in savings, he possessed a little over one thousand dollars, twice as much money as his earnings in 1844. He noted nearly $300 in cash in the bank, and $400 from a building that he owned in Philadelphia. Since his tour with the Seguins thirteen years prior, A’Becket had not only achieved more professional responsibility, but also had become more financially stable.

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While A’Becket’s diaries from the years 1858-1860 are no longer extant, the 1861 volume shows that his professed departures from the theatre and from Philadelphia, if they occurred at all, were only temporary. That year, we find A’Becket playing at Sanford’s Opera House, a Philadelphia-based minstrel company. The routines in his diary are much the same as before, consistently recording money earned and lost, roles played, and composing, copying, and teaching jobs. However, during this year, A’Becket undertook a more extensive tour with a portion of the company, acting as a manager or agent for Sanford. Rather than performing in a regional satellite city of Philadelphia like Reading or Trenton, A’Becket facilitated the company’s movement from city to city; he was not simply responsible for setting up the company in one new location, but for doing so in frequently changing locales. On the 17th, upon arriving in Lebanon, Pennsylvania via Reading, he records that he “Eng’d hall” and “posted bills.” The following day he “put advertisements in Newspapers,” before taking the train to Harrisburg Pennsylvania, where he stayed at the Franklin House. On the 21st he placed an “advertisement in [the] paper” in Harrisburg. While a season-long engagement allowed companies to advertise themselves by their prolonged presence in a new city, a tour with multiple short stops required extensive promotion to alert audiences of the company’s arrival or departure. Based on audience reception and travel conditions, A’Becket would often alter the itinerary while en route. On May 24th, after playing in Harrisburg for a few days, he wrote, “House not so good, don’t think we shall go to Pittsburgh.” It is unclear exactly how disappointing returns in one city was related to poor reception in another. Regardless, it is clear that A’Becket was charged with monitoring the stops on the tour in order to assess upcoming travel plans, and for corresponding with Sanford about venue changes and expenses (25 May). On May 26th, A’Becket left with the company from Harrisburg for Pittsburgh, where he stayed
for a few days before meeting up with Sanford. The two men departed on June 7th for Philadelphia via Altoona, Harrisburg, and Lancaster.

While managing company expenses, performing, and corresponding daily with Sanford (who was usually in Philadelphia), A’Becket also used this tour as an opportunity to bolster his reputation as a composer. On May 14th, after he “prepared [his] trunk” for the journey he “sold permit to print 5000 songs…for 5.50.” By June 7th, he records having sold a total of forty-four songs. The precise nature of the permit system for printing songs is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it seems that A’Becket arranged to have a set of his own songs printed to take with him before the tour. Indeed, many copies of sheet music written by A’Becket are still extant, and several were printed in 1861, such as “The Pennsylvania Battle Cry” and “Our country right or wrong,” seemingly to coincide with the beginning of the Civil War. The pieces of extant sheet music previously mentioned feature the following note about the composer: “by T. A’Becket, author of ‘Columbia, the gem of the ocean.’ Sung nightly at Sanford’s; can be had at the door.” “Columbia” was also reprinted in 1861. There is some debate about whether A’Becket actually wrote that song, but he seems to have leveraged his success performing it at Sanford’s in Philadelphia toward composing and selling his own music. It is likely that A’Becket wanted to capitalize on the new interest in the tune prompted by the Civil War and hoped to use the tour with Sanford to reach new regional markets for sheet music.

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232 Ibid.
That year, A’Becket continued to spend an increasing amount of time touring with troupes from Sanford’s company. He carefully tracked the related itineraries in his diary. On July 8th, after one month at home in Philadelphia, he departed for Wilmington, Delaware where the company played for one night and stayed at the Indian Queen hotel. The following day, he records travelling to Newcastle, Delaware by rail and staying at the Delaware House. On July 10th, the company went by boat to the Jersey Shore, where they played to $26 in house receipts and “went out serenading.” They departed for Salem, New Jersey on the 11th, stopping in Fort Delaware on the way, where they played to a “pretty good house” and stayed at the Mansion House. As usual, A’Becket’s payment fluctuated from week to week depending on his shifting responsibilities and on Sanford’s available funds; perhaps surprisingly, the system of pay seems just as unpredictable as when A’Becket toured with the Seguins seventeen years prior. In mid-July, A’Becket records that he received $20 from Sanford “5 for services this week, 5 to balance last week and 10 off account.” He does not record receiving a consistent salary, suggesting that he operated as the company’s acting manager, a position that usually received a flat fee that included a salary and some addition. If he was indeed paid a flat fee, he would not get a weekly increment, and was entitled to ask for some of his money any time he wanted it, with a final settlement at the end of the season. Even if other company members went short, the acting manager’s fee always got paid. A’Becket arrived in Philadelphia on July 12th, where he once again began his home routines of giving lessons, copying, attending to his wardrobe, and composing music.

By December 16th, A’Becket was on the road again with the minstrel company; this time, Sanford joined him for the majority of the tour throughout eastern Pennsylvania. They first went

234 Correspondence with Judith Milhous, 29 October, 2014.
to Harrisburg via Scranton. A’Becket remarked that the house was “pretty good,” and left the next day for Pittston, where he stayed at the Eagle Hotel. According to A’Becket, the town was “dirty, with coal dust & straggling venison,” the “‘House’ was so so,” the “audience dull.” The following day, the men left for Wilkes Barre via Kingston, and stayed at Steele’s Hotel. Although A’Becket found it to be a “clean little town, “ the ‘House’” was again “but so so.” After two nights in that city, A’Becket records packing up his trunk for Northumberland, then by stage to Lawrenceburg, where the house receipts were $75, seemingly a successful stop. That night they returned to Harrisburg, where they were put up at the Hess Hotel. A’Becket was paid $20 and spent most of his time in the city purchasing items for his wardrobe and finishing music for a pantomime. Although he did not perform, he attended the theatre and apparently contributed to decisions about tour venues and locations; on the 27th, he “went to look at new Opera house” in Harrisburg, where the company finished out the year before heading home to Philadelphia for the winter season. Perhaps A’Becket was scouting venues for a more extended stay in Harrisburg during the following year.235 At the end of 1861, A’Becket does not record his own income and expenses, but those of the minstrel company. Rather than use his diary to account for his personal and dispersed sources of income, as he did in the 1840s, he uses it to manage the funds of one consistent theatrical venture. By the early 1860s, A’Becket’s career had become more predictable and less fragmented than it was in the 1840s, but the actor continued to employ touring and diarykeeping as ways to keep track of a career in a mercurial industry.

A’Becket’s improved professional responsibility continued to coincide with increased movement away from Philadelphia and unrelenting daily diary entries; by 1865, at fifty-seven, he was performing with Wood’s company in Chicago. While his diary was, of course, not the

235 If A’Becket wrote a diary for the year 1862, it is no longer extant.
sole source of his professional advancement, it was certainly one tool in his repertoire of professional strategies. Recording information about arrivals and departures, lodgings, and income served a practical function, allowing A’Becket to keep track of schedules and money that were unpredictable and inconsistent. His diligent accounting system facilitated professional order amid a constantly changing and varied work schedule. It also helped the actor develop skills in record keeping and organization that were likely attractive to company managers. To Marshall and Sanford, the facts and figures A’Becket recorded in his diaries probably helped solidify the impression that he had an overview of what was happening within their business enterprises.

A’Becket’s 1844 diary served as measure of his own productivity, but by 1853, the annual volumes were used to record company accounts and touring schedules. By 1848, he had stopped recording the meticulous lists of the supporting roles he played, suggesting that this information no longer informed the way he saw himself as an actor. While A’Becket’s name was the last one listed in advertisements for the Walnut Street Theatre Company in 1845 and 1848, in 1851, a reporter for the Philadelphia Inquirer noted that he, along with four other actors, performed “in the leading parts.” And in 1852, an article in the same paper announced that, at his benefit, the actor “may count upon a large muster of his friends, to-night, as they owe him a return for the amusement he has afforded them.” Even though A’Becket’s diary entries may initially seem mundane, their cumulativeness and repetition were both evidence and instrument of a growing career. Although A’Becket never became a famous actor, his work acting and touring with the Walnut Street Theatre company enabled him to develop a local reputation in Philadelphia. In 1856, a reporter in that city called him “a very deserving actor” that “his friends

know how to appreciate,” and by the late 1860s, many more were familiar with him as the composer of “the great national anthem, ‘Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean.’ By taking stock in his diary, A’Becket made all that he had done legible to himself—and to theatre historians. If theatre scholars measured A’Becket’s professional life only according to his number of leading roles or his income from resident company acting, they would fail to understand the fragmented character of his career and his system of managing it (or would overlook the actor entirely). However, by examining A’Becket’s diaries, I aim to highlight his varied talents and professional ingenuity—resources that many ordinary performers relied upon to sustain a theatrical career.

The Performer’s Diary as Moral and Commercial Enterprise: The Case of John B. Gough

Thomas A’Becket charted his daily activities in order to create order from the vicissitudes of an unpredictable and mobile career. However, the actor maintained his connection to Philadelphia as a home base and toured primarily to nearby satellite cities. John B. Gough, on the other hand, can be characterized as a truly itinerant performer. A reformed drunkard, Gough began his public speaking activities in 1843. As a temperance lecturer, he was perpetually on the move, spending no more than a few days in one location before moving on to the next; ultimately, Gough used this mobility, along with his charisma and powerful performance style—he had a striking voice and the ability to imitate characters—to become one of the most prominent temperance celebrities of the nineteenth century.

237 Philadelphia Inquirer, 17 June, 1856.
238 “Theatre,” The Patriot, Harrisburg, PA, 16 April, 1869.
239 Before he became a lecturer, Gough worked for a brief time as an actor at the Franklin Theatre in New York City and the Lion Theatre in Boston, activities that Gough viewed as indicative of his level of moral depravity as a drunkard. John B. Gough, An Autobiography by John B. Gough (Boston: Published by and for the Author, 1845), 28-31. Amy Hughes finds it “difficult to ascertain whether Gough’s disavowals of the theater were genuine or strategic. In
Like A’Becket, Gough diligently kept pocket journals from the start of his public lecturing activities in 1843. He used either small blank books or pre-fabricated pocket journals like A’Becket’s. However, when Gough used blank books, he wrote the date on the left hand side and a corresponding entry on the right, generating a structure by hand that mimicked that of the pre-printed mass-market diaries. Since his first extant diary in 1843, written at age twenty-six, Gough recorded information that he would go on to include, with varying consistency, in his subsequent thirty-seven diaries (through 1885): the locations he visited, the number of names he signed to the temperance pledge, the amount of money he was paid, and the miles he traveled. While he kept discernable patterns in his pocket diaries, he was not rigid in his accounting. In his 1843 diary, for example, he sometimes notes his mileage, but, for many of his daily entries, either forgot to record that information or felt it was irrelevant. In his 1845 diary, his attention to his fees lapsed, but that year he was especially diligent about the number of people he got to sign the pledge. Despite inconsistencies from year to year, without fail, Gough recorded where he went every day and a few details about that engagement, whether it was the number of signatures, the pay, the venue, or a note about his reception. Gough’s first week on tour in 1845 was typical, and the lecturer accounted not only for his movement from city to city, but also for his interactions with and reception from the local community in each location.

Thursday, January 2nd
Boston—Benefit given to me at the Marlboro Chapel, Gov Briggs & Lieu. Gov [Reid] present. Admittance 12 ½ cents. Received nett [sic] 150 Dollars.

Friday, January 3rd
Started for New York en route for Philadelphia by the way of Norwich and Steamer Worcester. Intoxicating liquor sold on Board the Boat.

critiquing the theater, he may have been attempting to buttress his own persona as a respectable and trustworthy man... It seems that he was ambivalent, even conflicted, about performing.” Hughes, Spectacles of Reform, 74.
Since Gough was constantly on the move, keeping track of this information certainly served a practical function. During the antebellum period, public lecturing was a decentralized endeavor, operated by local reform societies and organizations. At the beginning of Gough’s career, “lyceum” was used to denote the practice of public speaking; this umbrella term included a variety of activities and venues, such as speeches, dramatic readings, magic lantern slide shows, and debates in halls, churches, theatres, and local societies. By the 1860s, “The Lyceum” referred to an increasingly centralized institution. Scholar Angela Ray characterizes the history of the changing lyceum in the nineteenth century as “a process of expansion, diffusion, and eventual commercialization.” After the Civil War, “lyceum bureaus,” rather than local organizations, booked speakers for multiple venues or entire circuits. In the 1840s and 1850s, Gough’s tours, like those of touring theatrical stars, were usually piecemeal endeavors, with discreet engagements arranged for Gough at local temperance societies, churches, or lecture halls. At times Gough’s colleagues in the temperance cause, such as Reverend John Marsh and Cyrus Morse, arranged segments of Gough’s tours, but typically the speaker booked his own engagements. Since Gough was on tour for at least three fourths of the year, he scheduled certain

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240 John B. Gough Diary, Box 1, Vol. 2, John B. Gough Papers, AAS.
appearances while already on the road and often records changes in his schedule and itineraries due to inclement weather or travel mishaps.

For Gough, meticulously recording the cities, venues, clergymen, and societies he visited allowed him to keep track of itineraries that often changed quickly and were booked while on the road, as well as to record details that could serve as references for future engagements, since he returned to many of the same locations throughout his career. He stopped frequently in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York, making notes on the venues or reception in those cities useful for planning future engagements. In 1843, he visited Randolph, Massachusetts on October 18th, but only stayed one night, writing that “the treatment I rec. here was disgraceful & I left.”

Although this city was a convenient stop between Dorchester and Boylston, cities nearby his home in Boston that he re-visited often, after 1843, he no longer records visiting Randolph.

Other venues became regular stops on his lecture tours. While in Philadelphia in January, 1846, he spoke at the Chinese Museum as well as at Reverend Chambers’ Church. When he returned in early June, he spoke again at the museum in addition to several churches and in December, he visited the museum yet again, along with Franklin Hall. It seems likely that Gough used his diaries to ascertain which cities or venues to revisit—like Philadelphia’s Chinese Museum, which yielded nearly $200 during his December 1846 visit alone—and ones to avoid, like Randolph.

Since Gough toured during a period when temperance reform operated according to local societies and informal networks, his social interactions with community leaders were critical to his success. Gough used his diary to keep track of his reform network. On January 10th, 1845,

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242 John B. Gough Diary, Box 1, Vol. 1, John B. Gough Papers, AAS.
243 John B. Gough Diary, Box 1, Vol. 2, John B. Gough Papers, AAS.
244 John B. Gough Diary, Box 1, Vol. 3, John B. Gough Papers, AAS.
while in Philadelphia, he records that he “did not speak this eve accepted an invitation and spent the evening at Mrs. Wilsons met Rev Mr. Barnes & family very much delighted with the visit.” And the following day, he rested, but “took tea with Mr. Jewett & Mr. Robinson and spent a pleasant eve at Mr. Reeds.” Although he sometimes stayed at boarding houses or hotels, he more frequently was “put up” by local temperance activists. On January 4th, he stayed with Mrs. Dickinson in Philadelphia. On February 25th, while in Alexandria, Virginia, he “staid at Mr. Jamison’s House,” and on March 13th he stayed at Deacon Sewell’s in Washington, DC. Although these social visits did not yield signatures or fees, they were central to Gough’s professional achievements.  

While A’Becket’s diary entries sometimes wander into thoughts that had no direct bearing on his career, Gough almost exclusively used his pocket diaries to record information that was professionally relevant. Gough chose to collect data that rigorously tracked his success as a reformer—spatially, monetarily, and socially. While Gough encountered more costly and frequent travel expenses than A’Becket, the lecturer does not use his diary to record money spent. Instead, he only records what he was paid. And while A’Becket tracks his accumulation of “things” in order keep account of his budget, Gough only mentions items that he was given as gifts, signs of a strong reception by a local community. For example, after speaking at Philadelphia’s Chinese Museum on March 25th, 1845, he wrote that a local clergyman “presented me with a silver vase from the Ladies Temperance Union.”

A’Becket and Gough both quantified the data in their diaries, but the multi-step process of the lecturer’s accounting system suggests that his journals were intended for more public purposes than A’Becket’s. Gough used his small pocket diaries to account for his movements,

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245 John B. Gough Diary, Box 1, Vol. 2, John B. Gough Papers, AAS.
246 Ibid.
his time, and his earnings while on tour, but he also copied much of this information into larger, more durable, polished notebooks either while on the road or during periods of “resting and recruiting” at home in Boston. A comparison between Gough’s pocket diary from March 5th through March 13th, 1845, and his notebook from the same period, reveals the general differences between these two texts. In the pocket diary, Gough wrote:

**Wednesday, March 5**
went to Richmond and spoke in the eve at the Presbyterian Church—much interest felt, the house well filled

**Thursday, March 6**
Richmond, spoke in the first Baptist Church the interest increasing the house very full and many names added

**Friday, March 7**
Richmond—spoke in the afternoon at the Episcopal Church to the Ladies in the eve at the Methodist Church both very full 150 names

**Saturday, March 8**
Richmond—held a meeting for children in the 2 Baptist Church a great concourse I am staying at Mr. Cranes

**Sunday, March 9**
Richmond, spoke for the colored people in the morning at the African Church in the eve to young men exclusively at the Centenerey Church

**Monday, March 10**
Richmond—spoke in the afternoon to the children at the 2 Baptist in the eve at Dn. [Deacon] Plummers Presbyterian the audiences very large

**Tuesday, March 11**
Richmond—Held a farewell meeting at the first Baptist Church the house crowded to suffocation, 260 names added

**Wednesday, March 12**
went to Alexandria and spoke at Lyceum Hall, house very full Tickets 12½ cents, gave me 60 dollars for the sons of Temperance

**Thursday, March 13**
went to Washington, and spoke at the Baptist Church E street had the best meeting we have held in this city, staid at Dn Sewells—247

In this case, Gough used his pocket diary to account for quantifiable information: that he obtained 150 signatures to the pledge after speaking at the Richmond’s Episcopal and Methodist churches on March 7th, 260 signatures on March 11th, and a donation of sixty dollars to the Sons of Temperance, a prominent reform organization, on March 12th. However, Gough does not include details about his own personal payment or the miles traveled; as mentioned previously,

247 Ibid.
Gough’s pocket diaries are somewhat inconsistent, accounting for different details depending on the entry or diary year. In the above excerpt above from Gough’s 1845 diary, his accounting for measurable information is sporadic, but he is consistently attentive to the details regarding his venues and audiences—such as noting that he spoke for “the children” in Richmond on March 8\textsuperscript{th} and for “the colored people” of that city on March 9\textsuperscript{th}. He assesses his audiences as well; on the 11\textsuperscript{th} the church in Richmond was “crowded to suffocation,” while the meeting two days later at Washington’s Baptist Church was “the best meeting we have held in this city.”

In his larger notebook, Gough distills and orders the records from his pocket diary into columns, minimizing narrative commentary and highlighting ostensibly objective information. The pocket diaries are comprised of messily written notes or fragmented prose, while the notebooks contain data neatly ordered into columns designated for the date, the location, the miles traveled, the number of signatures, payment received, and brief notes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Miles</th>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Payment</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, Mar 5</td>
<td>Richmond, VA</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>spent my</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, Mar 6</td>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td>time at J.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday, Mar 7</td>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>156</td>
<td></td>
<td>Crane’s was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday, Mar 8</td>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>215.00</td>
<td>much pleased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday, Mar 9</td>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>242</td>
<td></td>
<td>with my first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Mar 10</td>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>250</td>
<td></td>
<td>visit to the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, Mar 11</td>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>266</td>
<td></td>
<td>Old Dominion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, Mar 12</td>
<td>Alexandria, DC</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>60.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, Mar 13</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
<td>30.00\textsuperscript{248}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gough probably transferred the information from his pocket diaries into his notebooks, in part, to have a backup record, in case the pocket diary was lost or damaged. These inexpensive small books, with soft leather covers that easily wore down and thin paper pages, were designed for portability rather than longevity, while Gough’s larger notebooks contain hard bound covers and denser, ruled pages, clearly intended to have more staying power. Indeed, within both Gough’s and A’Becket’s collections of pocket diaries, some have missing covers or torn pages, and

\textsuperscript{248} Octavo Journal, Vol. 6, John B. Gough Papers, AAS.
diaries for several years are missing, suggesting that they did not stand the test of time. Importantly, Gough did not copy the pocket diaries to the notebooks word for word; instead, he translated a narrative, fragmented account into data.

The purpose of Gough’s recordkeeping system becomes clearer in light of his role as a temperance lecturer. As an advocate of temperance, Gough was engaged in a specific kind of accounting that was both public and private. Historian Molly McCarthy notes that pocket diaries, with their emphasis on accounting for money and time, also “call to mind the persistent metaphor of ‘keeping account,’ a phrase most associated with the Protestant tradition of diary keeping that called up on the faithful to keep a daily account that tracked their spiritual progress toward salvation.” Although the format of pocket diaries, with a focus on structured, minimal daily accounting, indicates that their manufacturers intended for the volumes to be tools in the emerging market economy, rather than measures of spiritual growth, for Gough, the boundary between the two was ambiguous. Pocket diaries responded to what McCarthy calls a “cultural imperative to ‘redeem the time’ in a pervasive drive for self-improvement.” Although such aspirations were generally “more secular than spiritual,” as an advocate of temperance, Gough’s professional identity was inextricable from his moral character and his personal experience. Indeed, Gough’s diaries not only served as a practical means of charting his speaking engagements, but also as an instrument of his sobriety. Gough, more than most traditional “performers,” used his diary to, in Augst’s terms, give his “movements in market culture moral shape and direction.”

Because of the institutional framework of the antebellum temperance movement, Gough’s personal salvation as a reformed drunkard was intimately tied to his commercial

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success as a touring lecturer. Gough was initiated into the cause through the Washingtonians, a temperance society that centered on the strategy of moral suasion, or the sharing of alcoholics’ reformations through temperance. At temperance meetings, each drunkard was invited to sign the temperance pledge and to deliver what was referred to as his “experience story.” Early in the nineteenth century, temperance leaders consisted of respectable community leaders who attempted to instill the values of temperance—moderate drinking—through religious teachings. With the rise of the Washingtonians, the temperance cause shifted from the province of religious men and social elites who lectured on the evils of drinking, but who were not alcoholics, to reformed inebriates who could speak about their own personal experience. As opposed to earlier temperance supporters, the Washingtonians advocated teetotalism or total abstinence.251

Gough’s lecturing career commenced when he attended a temperance meeting in 1843 and was invited to share his own experience story, one that began to circulate widely once he began touring. According to theatre historians John Frick and Jeffrey Mason, the dramatic stories of personal experience shared by reformed drunkards were similar in tone and structure to contemporary melodrama, and contributed to the rise of temperance melodrama as genre.252

Although Gough’s relationship with the Washingtonians became strained in later years, after he made an off-handed disparaging comment about them during a lecture—his career would always be defined by his personal experience, by what Amy Hughes calls “the affective power of


confession.”\textsuperscript{253} As cultural historian Thomas Augst writes, “Gough acquired remarkable celebrity as a performer by carrying his story among an array of spaces, networks, and media that were rapidly reshaping education and leisure in antebellum America.”\textsuperscript{254}

Gough’s celebrity was thus grounded not only his oft-noted charisma and theatrical style of speaking but also in the public’s curiosity over the moral status of a reformed drunkard. As Hughes explains, “Gough’s offstage life—especially his ability to model the temperance pledge’s efficacy through his personal conduct—constituted a critical component of his persona. His reputation hinged on his daily adherence to middle-class norms despite his nightly conjuring of the old ghost.” In Gough’s lectures, and in the experience speech in general, audiences thrilled to the sensational paradox of “the saved man portray[ing] the fallen man.”\textsuperscript{255} Since Gough’s personal collapse and subsequent salvation became the core of his public persona, both his fans and his detractors were intrigued by the possibility of a sudden fall from temperance; how could they know if Gough was truly reformed?\textsuperscript{256} Gough’s diaries would become central to these debates over the visibility of his moral character.

In April 1843, five months after he signed the temperance pledge and began lecturing, Gough suffered his first public relapse. He confessed the experience, taking full responsibility, at a temperance meeting in Boston on April 20\textsuperscript{th} and was met with support from the movement’s leaders. However, at that point, Gough’s career had just begun, and the incident garnered

\textsuperscript{253} Hughes, Spectacles of Reform, 70.
\textsuperscript{255} Hughes, Spectacles of Reform, 72.
\textsuperscript{256} Perhaps the public’s fascination with a figure like Gough was part of the broader public interest in personal narratives from society’s underworld. Cultural historian Ann Fabian argues that, during the antebellum period, at the same time that print culture spread information about refinement, American readers became fascinated with personal narratives written by criminals, beggars, and slaves. See Ann Fabian, The Unvarnished Truth: Personal Narratives in Nineteenth-Century America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
minimal attention in the press. By 1845, the year of Gough’s second public relapse, the lecturer was an undeniably famous, established figure within the temperance cause; the incident immediately became a public scandal. On September 5th, following a series of lectures in Massachusetts—in Westboro, Springfield, Blandford, and Westfield—Gough arrived in New York City. When he failed to appear for his engagements or contact his wife, reports began to circulate about the lecturer’s “mysterious disappearance.” On the 11th, Gough was “discovered” by journalists Enoch Camp and George Wilkes, founders of the National Police Gazette, at a brothel on Walker Street suffering from a case of the delirium tremens, the most severe, violent form of alcohol withdrawal.

The press was preoccupied with the lecturer’s whereabouts leading up to the day he vanished, and several papers printed detailed accounts of his movements prior to September 5th: “Mr. Gough left Boston on Monday of last week,” one reporter wrote. “He passed the night at Westboro, and arrived at Springfield on the following day. On Wednesday he attended the Mass Temperance Meeting at Blandford…On Thursday afternoon and evening he lectured at Westfield, and on Friday morning took the cars at Springfield for Hartford and New York…”

On September 12th, Camp and Wilkes, clearly with an agenda to censure Gough, published a piece that was characteristic of their paper’s sensational stories about crime and scandal. According to the editors, Gough explained that he had encountered a man on the street who claimed to be an old acquaintance. The man invited Gough to drink soda water at a bar near Broadway, and, out of politeness and goodwill, Gough accepted. Soon after drinking what he believed to be soda water, Gough became disoriented and confused; he claimed that he was

257 Unidentified newspaper clipping, September 1845, Folio 2 scrapbook, John B. Gough Papers, AAS.
258 Unidentified newspaper clipping, Folio 2 scrapbook, John B. Gough Papers, AAS.
poisoned. Camp and Wilkes argued that the drunkard’s story could not be trusted, that he lied in order to cover up his deliberate violation of the pledge of temperance, and that he was responsible for his own fall into intoxication. Camp and Wilkes’ exposé launched an extended newspaper campaign against Gough and sparked a heated debate in the press about his role in the relapse. According to Hughes, the media’s fascination with the relapse hinged on the same spectacular contradictions about Gough that had attracted crowds to his lectures. “The raucous public discourse about Gough’s relapse confirms that the sensational drunkard, in both oratory and melodrama, derived its capital from the slippage between storied/past and actual/present future.”

For many journalists, the lecturer’s moral standing was directly tied to the transparency of his movements. One paper attributed “the deep veil of mystery” surrounding the incident to “the true answer of the simple question, ‘Where was John B. Gough?’” And when Gough published his confession on September 22nd, after weeks of conjecture and attacks in the press, he began by giving a detailed timeline of his movements leading up to his arrival in New York: “I was to be in Montreal on the 11th int. I agreed to meet my wife and a gentleman who was to accompany us to…Albany, on Monday evening.” When he arrived in New York “at 6 or half-past 6 on Friday, the 5th,” he offered a play-by-play account of his time. “[I] left my baggage with a porter on board the boat, to bring after me, and walked to the Croton Hotel. I took tea, my baggage arrived, I procured a room, went into it, arranged my dress, told them there that I was going to Brooklyn, and might not return that night.” Once he left his hotel at “about half past 7 or 8,” to purchase a “watch-guard” at the “store of Messrs. Saxton & Miles,” he was “accosted by a

259 See clippings in Folio 2 scrapbook, John B. Papers, AAS.
260 Hughes, Spectacles of Reform, 80.
261 “John B. Gough and the Mysteries of Drinking,” September 1845, Folio 2 scrapbook, Gough B. Papers, AAS.
man” who claimed to know Gough from when they had worked in the same book binding shop, before Gough’s turn to lecturing. Although he did not recall the man, Gough accepted his invitation to have a glass of soda water at a shop on Chatham Street. Gough had “no suspicions,” and “did not take particular notice of what kind of a shop it was.” Soon after the man left, Gough began to feel a

warm sensation about the lungs and chest, with unusual exhilaration—and, for the first time, I began to suspect that it was not all right….I do now know that I ever felt so strangely in my life before…During this time, I went into a grocery store and got some brandy—I do not know where, nor when I became after a little while bewildered and stupid, and had wandered, I did not know where, when I saw a woman dressed in black. I either accosted her, or she accosted me—it is immaterial which, as I was in such a state, that I should not have waited to think who it was. I do not remember what I said; but she told some gentleman who went to make inquiries, that I asked her if she could give me a night’s lodging, or tell me where I could procure one, as I was without friends, &c.

According to Gough, the mysterious woman took him to the house on Walker Street where he was later found. He could “remember nothing distinctly that passed during the whole time, till I was taken away, except that I drank; but what I drank, or how much, or how often, I know nothing…The time that I spent in that place seems to me like a horrible dream—a nightmare.”

When Camp entered the house, Gough, unsuspecting of Camp’s editorial agenda, “felt as if relief had come.”

The Police Gazette and the New York Herald led the charge for Gough’s self-directed demise. The Boston Atlas warned against the possibility of “humbug ‘confessions’ ” while the Boston

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262 “Statement of John B. Gough,” unidentified newspaper, Folio 2, John B. Gough Papers, AAS.
Figure 2.5
Gough’s Octavo Journal from 5 September, 1845, the day of his relapse. He writes that he “was poisoned and kept from my friends, see my statement.”
John B. Gough Papers, American Antiquarian Society.
Sun claimed that Gough’s statement was perhaps “a forgery.” A pamphlet circulated with alleged statements from people who interacted with Gough during his drunken spell, claiming that he was disoriented and asked them for wine and brandy. However, many other publications defended Gough’s account. A reporter for the Gardiner Fountain insisted that “Mr. Gough’s fall was accidental, unpremeditated, and guiltless.” A writer for the Hartford Courant argued that his statement “bears on its face the marks of truth,” due to the lecturer’s willingness to publicize “his previous movements” and “the particular account of the time, place, and manner in which the scheme for destroying his usefulness was put into execution.” Another journalist characterized Gough’s statement as “regarded as true and satisfactory by those who know most about him and his circumstances,” and several papers published statements by Gough’s friends and temperance colleagues that corroborated the lecturer’s account of his whereabouts. The narrative of Gough’s week in New York circulated rapidly, acquiring new details and inconsistencies as it spread. One paper accurately summed up the press coverage this way:

One version of the story is that he was “drugged” with liquor and laudanum in a glass of mineral water given him by a pretended friend, and thus made both drunk and crazy. Another version is that he voluntarily yielded to the insatiable cravings of his old appetite, having previously destroyed his self-control by the habitual use of opium. Which version is true, we know not.

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263 Clipping, Boston Atlas, September 1845. Clipping, Boston Sun, September 1845. Both in Folio 2, Gough B. Papers, AAS.
264 “A minute and authentic narrative of the conduct and conversation of John B. Gough during each day of his late absence, as related by the inmates of the house at which he stopped,” (New York: Lewis C. Donald, 1845), Collection of Miscellaneous Pamphlets, AAS.
266 “Gough’s Statement,” unidentified newspaper, September 1845, Folio 2, Gough B. Papers, AAS.
267 “John B. Gough,” unidentified newspaper, September 1845, Folio 2, Gough B. Papers, AAS.
Gough’s setback in the fall of 1845 did little to damage his career; instead, it became a publicity coup for Gough and the temperance cause. However, over a month after the incident and still determined to slander Gough, Camp and Wilkes published a second exposé in *The Police Gazette* that intended to cast doubt over his trustworthiness and his whereabouts beyond the relapse. According to their new report, the week of September 5th was not the first time Gough had encountered the mysterious woman or the brothel on Walker Street. “About six or seven weeks previous to the 6th September,” Gough had “accosted” that very woman and insisted on “accompany[ing] her home.” She refused, but offered to take him somewhere else—to “the same house in Walker Street.” Although “nothing further of criminal nature took place,” Camp and Wilkes contended that, by omitting this event, Gough compromised the credibility of his account of the September relapse. The journalists also claimed that the relapse was not an anomaly, and that Gough had been found intoxicated in Worcester eighteen months before the September 1845 episode.268

On December 20th, Gough published a response to these new accusations. To the charge that he visited the brothel on Walker Street prior to September 5th, Gough offered the following information:

I say, first, that I can show, in a manner which the editors of the Gazette little suspected, where I have been, with whom, where slept, and what I have done, every day and night that I have been in New York since May 15th, 1843. I can do this, because from that date I have kept a regular diary of all the places I have visited, where I have spoken, whom I have met, what I received, with whom I stopped, &c. I therefore only ask any day to be named that I have been in New York, since May 15th, 1843, and I will produce as respectable witnesses as can be found, to prove where I went, what I did, and where I took my night’s rest.

268 “Exposure of John B. Gough,” *National Police Gazette*, October 1845, Folio 2, Gough B. Papers, AAS.
Gough vowed to “now prove” that Camp and Wilkes’ allegation of his previous encounter was “a base, malignant, and unqualified falsehood,” by describing his whereabouts:

I was in New York and vicinity during a part of last March and April, in company with my wife; and during the whole time, from the 28th of March of the 25th of April, our home was at Mr. George Hurlbut’s in Brooklyn. I did not visit New York again, until I passed through on my way to Baltimore on the 1st of July, in company with my friend Mr. [Cyrus] Morse. We returned to New York on the 18th of the same month…If my accusers choose to shift time, I am willing, and equally prepared to show my acts and my whereabouts in New York at any time since May, 1844.

To the accusation that Gough had become intoxicated in Worcester over a year before the September 1845 relapse, Gough asserted that,

I was in Worcester on the 27th of March, 1844, and was not again there, nor at any town in Worcester county, until July 29th. I have been in Worcester, as I find by my note book, on the following days: April 17th, 1843, when I re-signed the pledge—4th and 31st of July—Aug. 7th—Sept. 21st, of 1843; also, on March 27th, July 27th, Oct. 31st, Nov. 12, in 1844—and Feb. 3d, of 1845; since which time, I solemnly declare I have never violated it, until Sept 5th, 1845.”

Clearly Gough’s detailed accounting system did more than allow him to chart his daily activities, itineraries, and speaking engagements in order to reference that information for future tours; it facilitated the tracking of his own sobriety by documenting his time and involvement in the temperance cause. However, as the 1845 relapse evidences, Gough’s journals also gave him an alibi to use against his opponents. Although it its unknown whether Gough anticipated that the diary would serve such a purpose, he understood that the respectability and credibility that his profession demanded were manifested by the visibility of his movements on the lecture circuit, as well as by the authenticity of his own personal experience. Gough understood that diaries could be perceived as artifacts of legitimization and authentication. Several newspaper articles

269 “Statement of John B. Gough in Reply to the Attacks Upon Him by the New York National Police Gazette,” unidentified newspaper, ca. 20 December 1845, Folio 2, Gough B. Papers, AAS.
from the period present diaries as means of identification. One piece announced the discovery of the body of an unknown man in New Orleans. “In his pocket were found a letter and a pocket diary which told his story…The pocket-diary disclosed who and what he was.” Another article noted that a diary “has been picked up in the street, and now is in the finder’s possession, awaiting an owner.” Based on the contents of the diary, “it appears that the loser was a ‘medical man.’”

Gough understood that his diaries could operate in a similar manner, as a counter exposure to the scandal about his relapse. Gough’s journals corroborated his public image as a reformed drunkard—the linchpin of both his celebrity and his spiritual progress—and insisted upon the truth of his own experience story.

Rather than damage Gough’s reputation, the proliferation of press coverage prompted by the 1845 relapse intensified the lecturer’s fame and served as a catalyst for the temperance movement. “[E]very argument which can be drawn from his case will be a new laurel for temperance,” a reporter for the Boston Sun wrote. Gough’s brief absence from lecturing following the relapse also provided opportunities for more wide-reaching touring and mobility. He made a much-publicized return to the lecture circuit at Boston’s Faneuil Hall, where he approached the lectern “amid the most gratifying and hearty applause.” The Boston Star printed that “he was greeted by round after round of applause,” and that “it seemed natural for him to be there, but that he could not appear before his temperance friends as a criminal.” He claimed that, rather than feeling a personal need to clear his name after the scandal, “public considerations had determined him again to lecture.” Nonetheless, the relapse seemed to provide

271 “J.B. Gough Again,” Boston Sun, ca. December 1845, Folio 2, John B. Gough Papers, AAS.
272 Clipping, Boston Evening Journal, ca. 4 December, 1845, Folio 2, John B. Gough Papers, AAS.
273 Clipping from the Boston Star, ca. 4 December, 1845, Folio 2, John B. Gough Papers, AAS.
the impetus for a more far-flung tour. When Gough spoke at the Tremont Temple a month later, he delivered a “farewell address” and announced his departure for the South “for the purpose of improving his health.” It is unclear whether Gough sought distance from the scandal and the Northeast for his own wellbeing, or wanted to capitalize on the attention from the press to extend his national reputation. Regardless of the reason behind the tour, it gave newspapers reason to write about Gough even as the relapse story dissipated. In mid-January 1846, while Gough was speaking in New York, the Boston Star wrote, “We observe that Mr. Gough, as he progresses South, continues to receive the most gratifying proofs of the confidence reposed in his integrity and honest purpose. His course is more like that of some distinguished benefactor, than the debased character which a few would make him.” By the time Gough reached Virginia, he could say with confidence, in a letter printed in the Massachusetts Cataract, that “you have probably seen accounts in the papers of my movements.”

In the months following the scandal, Gough became even more adept at using his journals and his movements as fodder for his own promotion. In his first autobiography, which was published at the end of 1845 and chronicled his life through January of that year, he utilized material from his diaries and notebooks as evidence of his early success. Describing the beginning of his lecturing career in 1843, he wrote: “My time was now almost entirely employed in lecturing on the temperance cause…I visited, about this time, in succession, the towns of Grafton, Webster, Leicester, Milbury, West Boylston, Berlin, Bolton, Upton, Hopkinton, and

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274 “Mr. Gough at the Temple,” Boston Star, ca. 2 January 1846. Gough’s farewell address was also announced in the Boston Whig and Boston Journal. All in Folio 2, Gough B. Papers, AAS.  
275 Clipping from the Boston Star, ca. January 1846, Folio 2, Gough B. Papers, AAS.  
276 “From Mr. J.B. Gough in Virginia,” Massachusetts Cataract, ca. 14 February, 1846, Folio 2, John B. Gough Papers, AAS.
Mendon, together with many other places in Worcester county.”

He was also able to account for the following more recent activities:

I find, from notes which I have kept every day since I commenced the work of temperance reform, that, from the 15th of May, 1843, to the 1st of January, 1845, I travelled more than twelve thousand miles, by land and water; delivered six hundred and five public addresses, in churches, halls, public buildings, and in the open air, one hundred and ten of which were in the city of Boston alone; and obtained thirty-one thousand seven hundred and sixty signatures to the total abstinence pledge.

Even in his autobiography, a form used because of its appearance of unmediated truthfulness, Gough cites his diaries as evidence of his own narrative. As a reformed drunkard, Gough anticipated critics who would accuse him of being unreliable or dishonest. He used his diaries to prove his credibility to the public, and perhaps to himself as well.

When Gough headed south in January 1846, he recorded the following information in his notebook:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Miles</th>
<th>Days</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Jan 26</td>
<td>Princeton, NJ</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, Jan 27</td>
<td>Philadelphia, PA</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Friday, Jan 30</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday, Jan 31</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday, Feb 1</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
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<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Feb 2</td>
<td>Baltimore, MD</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, Feb 3</td>
<td>Annapolis</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, Feb 4</td>
<td>Annapolis</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, Feb 5</td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday, Feb 6</td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday, Feb 7</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday, Feb 8</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, Feb 9</td>
<td>Richmond, VA</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, Feb 10</td>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, Feb 11</td>
<td>Manchester, VA</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

506 16 438 170.0

278 Ibid., 115.
279 Octavo Vol. 6, Gough B. Papers, AAS.
That same information ended up finding its way into newspapers. On February 14th, while Gough was in Fluvanna County, Virginia, a letter to his friend and fellow temperance advocate Jesse Goodrich appeared in the *Massachusetts Cataract*:

You have probably seen in the accounts in the papers of my movements. I spoke in New York, and Brooklyn as you know. I addressed the students at Princeton on Monday, the 26th January. We staid at Professor Henry’s. On Tuesday I spoke at the Chinese Museum in Philadelphia, to a very large audience, on Wednesday at the same place for the benefit of the poor at 25 cents admission, on Thursday at the Rev. John Chamber’s church. We obtained 160 names to the pledge…I intended to have left Philadelphia on Saturday, but I received an invitation to address the students of the medical colleges…I arrived at Baltimore on Monday, the 2d of February, and spoke at Annapolis before the Legislature on the next eve, and on Wednesday eve at the Methodist Church in the same city…I spoke at Washington city on Saturday, and Sunday evenings…I spoke in Richmond on Tuesday and Thursday and in Manchester on Wednesday, and am now in this quiet retreat…”

Clearly, the details from the letter to Goodrich were based on the information from Gough’s diary. Whether or not Gough facilitated the printing of the letter, he did not include personal information, but rather details that he wished to be made public. While in Fredericksburg, Virginia in April, a similar kind of letter appeared in the local paper: “I have been to Petersburgh, Norfolk, and some few other places. I presume you have heard of my visit to Lynchburg, we had a glorious time there, 1145 signed the pledge, a great interest was excited, many ladies of respectability and fashion united in the great enterprise. I staid in Petersburgh a week, and about 1200 signed the pledge.”

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280 “From Mr. J.B. Gough in Virginia,” ca. 14 February, 1846, Massachusetts *Cataract*, Folio 2, Gough B. Papers, AAS.
282 “Mr. Gough: Extract from a letter received in this city, from Mr. Gough dated Fredericksburgh, Va., April 21, 1845,” unidentified newspaper, Folio 2, Gough B. Papers, AAS.
Gough accounted for his movements, signatures, fees, and details about the places he lectured, for a mix of public and private and purposes. He used his pocket diaries while on the road, to practically account for his touring activities and record information that could be useful for future engagements. He also carefully copied information from his diaries, transforming these notes into clear, precise, data that could easily be recounted to the press as evidence of his success and enticement for potential audiences. Although the 1845 relapse provided fuel for Gough’s critics, it ultimately served as a boon for the temperance cause, and solidified the utility—both moral and commercial—of Gough’s diarykeeping. Gough used his diary to insist upon his own experience story, a narrative that was crucial both for his personal salvation through temperance and his reform celebrity.

The Traveling Performer as Tourist: The Case of Anthony Reiff

“Travelling with the Pyne and Harrison Opera Co.” is printed in large capital letters on the first page of musician and conductor Anthony Reiff, Jr.’s 1856 journal. Unlike A’Becket’s and Gough’s diaries, which interweave travel into the repetitive patterns of daily accounting, Reiff’s diary explicitly documents a five-month tour through the South and West with the English opera company. Even though the twenty-six year old Reiff began the diary because of a specific tour, aside from passing references to concerts, copying songs, or receiving his salary, the text reveals little of the professional impetus behind his travels. In fact, throughout his daily entries, the musician explicitly disavows work altogether. Whereas A’Becket and Gough use their diaries to insist upon themselves as professional men of business, Reiff, a consummate wiseacre, generates a narrative focused on leisure and adventure. A pianist, violinist, and conductor, Reiff was the eldest son of respected New York musician and vice-president of the
American Musical Fund Society, Anthony Reiff, Sr. The younger Reiff began his career at twenty years old, in 1850, in the orchestra that accompanied Jenny Lind in her concerts at New York’s Castle Garden. He may have felt a sense of comfort and entitlement in the industry because of his father, whose reputation and connections were undoubtedly advantageous. In 1852, Reiff, Jr. became the leader of the orchestra for New York’s National Theatre, followed by an engagement at the Bowery Theatre in the same capacity from 1854 through September 1855. The tour with the Pyne and Harrison troupe, which ran from December 1855 through May 1856, was Reiff’s first professional experience away from New York.283

Founded in 1853 by English star vocalists Louisa Pyne and William Harrison, the Pyne and Harrison Company made its American debut at New York’s Broadway Theatre on October 9th, 1854. As opera historian Katherine Preston demonstrates, by that time, opera was already a crucial component of the American theatre and an accepted component of the theatrical repertory. Since the 1830s, American theatregoers could enjoy frequent appearances by English opera troupes and companies, but they also began to develop a taste for foreign-language opera, resulting in an influx of visiting European companies. During the 1850s, the American musical press, along with theatre audiences, debated the merits of foreign language opera versus opera performed in English. The opera repertory in Europe and America consisted largely of Italian opera—Bellini, Donizetti, Rossini—and included few English language operas; many critics and spectators viewed companies that performed Italian operas in the original language as superior in skill and sophistication to English companies like the Pyne and Harrison that performed foreign

language works in translations and adaptations.\textsuperscript{284} While some critics charged English opera companies with being hackneyed or second-rate, many theatregoers in fact resisted the influence of Italian opera in the U.S., Preston explains that, “Despite a seemingly insatiable hunger to see and hear European musical ‘stars’ (instrumental as well as vocal) and a desire to be ‘cultured,’ educated, genteel, and—above all—fashionable, many middle-class Americans were at the same time staunch adherents of the principles of egalitarianism. They resented anything that smacked of Old World aristocratic (or New World upper-class) snobbery.” Consequently, perhaps because of or in spite of their Englishness, many critics and spectators celebrated the Pyne and Harrison Company’s abilities, and particularly the vocal power of its star Louisa Pyne. That Pyne and Harrison repeatedly advertised the operas they performed as “without abridgment or curtailment,” “complete,” and “with the original music,” suggests that they aimed to counter claims that their English language performances were inferior to those in the original Italian.\textsuperscript{285}

During their first year in the U.S., the Pyne and Harrison troupe’s performances were limited almost exclusively to the large east coast cities—New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. However, in early November, 1855, they closed an engagement at Niblo’s and announced plans to travel south for the winter for a six-month tour, their first departure from the East Coast. For this venture, Harrison and Pyne engaged four singers who had performed with them at Niblo’s and four newcomers, along with an agent, singer William Brough, to travel to different cities a few days in advance of the company to make arrangements at the local theatre and advertise the upcoming performances (as A’Becket did with his regional touring ventures). Finally, Harrison

\textsuperscript{284} Preston, \textit{Opera on the Road}, 282.
\textsuperscript{285} Ibid., 258, 288.
and Pyne employed Anthony Reiff, Jr., then the conductor of the Bowery Theatre orchestra, to serve as musical director and conductor for the company during the tour.²⁸⁶

The surviving portion of Reiff’s diary begins in early January 1856, with the troupe’s arrival in rural Kentucky, and includes daily entries through late April, when the company reached Richmond, Virginia. Throughout the journal, instead of accounting for time and money spent in the service of his career, Reiff chronicles the seemingly endless amount of free time he had while on tour, in between his opera rehearsals and performances. Indeed, when Reiff does mention the theatre, he usually describes his attendance as an audience member, rather than as a musician or conductor. He records brief impressions of performances in cities such as Cincinnati, Natchez, New Orleans, and Washington, DC, but records little about his own engagements.²⁸⁷ While in Baltimore, he notes briefly that he “Rehearsed with Mrs. Chapman,” but quickly moves on to describing his evening as a spectator at the Holliday Street Theatre, where he saw “Forrest play Virginius—what I saw of it he does exceedingly well” (10 April).²⁸⁸

For Reiff, touring is marked by the freedom to wander and explore new sites and locations, rather than by overt connotations of professional success. He used his diary to depict days spent roaming and reflecting, filling his time with leisure and spontaneity, rather than to attest to his productivity. The steamboats on which Reiff traveled regularly made brief stops ashore, and some passengers chose to remain on board the marooned steamer—especially when they arrived at remote frontier locales. While in Kentucky and Indiana, Reiff wrote that the ship’s “Engineer says he never thinks of going into [town] without his revolver” (15 January).

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 261-65.
²⁸⁷ Anthony Reiff Journal, 23 January and 3 April, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Library. Hereafter, dates will be cited parenthetically.
²⁸⁸ Reiff doesn’t elaborate on this statement, but he seems to imply that he either had a seat in the upper balcony with an insufficient view of the performance, or that he came late to the show.
However, Reiff never missed an opportunity to go ashore and explore the environs. His entry from New Orleans on February 13th, was typical:

A most enchanting day…I arose about ten and sallied forth for a walk—went up Conception St. –out of Town—towards the suburbs—all the houses have pretty low yards before them—at the end of the Town—which ends suddenly—is a very pretty Pine Wood—through I went—but not without getting muddy—for it is a perfect swamp—all sorts of dank weeds growing—which are peculiar to the South—the Wood is almost half mile long—it took me nearly an hour to get through it—and not only my Boots but my Pants were in an awful plight.

The passage, and Reiff’s diary in general, is in keeping with contemporary travel literature, which, according to scholar Larzer Ziff, was some of the best selling literature in the nineteenth-century United States. Since the post-revolutionary era, narratives such as John Ledyard’s *A Journal of Captain Cook’s Last Voyage to the Pacific Ocean and in Quest of a North-West Passage* (1783), J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) and William Bartram’s *Travels* (1791) suggested that travel was an essential part of the American national character.

During the antebellum period, innovations in transportation produced a surge in travel and travel writing, including widely read books by Frances Trollope, Harriet Martineau, and Bayard Taylor, as well as countless articles in newspapers and periodicals. As scholar Jeffrey Alan Melton claims, by mid-century, “the interest in both tourism and travel literature had evolved into an outright phenomenon.” Historian Will Mackintosh associates the proliferation of travel literature with the commodification of travel, in which travel shifted from a process of local, improvised negotiations to a series of commercial, coordinated transactions; travel became

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“available for purchase in the marketplace.” 291 John Cox, in his study of narratives of travel through the antebellum South, contends that early American travel texts posited that, unlike Europeans, “Americans are free to travel widely, both geographically and socially, so travel serves as an indication of Americanness. However, the travel in which Americans participate further broadens their views and provides them with a variety of perspectives that together form the American character, so travel not only serves as an indication of American freedom but also creates the freedom that Americans enjoy.” 292

In his diary, Anthony Reiff embraced contemporary attitudes toward travel as constitutive of American freedom and national identity. By taking the time to pause and elaborate on his impressions of various cities and towns, Reiff presents himself as more of a tourist than a performer traveling for work. He wrote of the city of Paducah, Kentucky, where he arrived on January 14th: “It is in ‘McCracken County’ about 4500 inhabitants—looks quite like a City—situated at the mouth of the Tennessee River.” In the spring, he remarked upon the “fine levee,” and “good looking Hotel” in Wheeling, Virginia, and observed that its landscape was “something similar to Cincinnati;” according to Reiff, the mid-Atlantic city was not a major attraction, since its “Suspension bridge” was “the most notable thing about the place.” He often drew small maps or pictures, as if trying to enable a distant reader to visualize a particular location, as he did on April 1st in his account of Louisville: “In Louisville the streets are somewhat as follows—the Levee running East & West—then Main St (principal Business St.) the Market St. (with three Markets…all sorts of common stores—on Market days the streets are lined with

291 Mackintosh, “‘Ticketed Through’: The Commodification of Travel in the Nineteenth Century,” 81.
Farmers...Stand &c. then Jefferson St (wide as 14th St. in N.Y.) a promenading street for the Louisville Belles” (April 9th).

Reiff’s detailed descriptions resemble those from mid-century travel narratives by Bayard Taylor or commercial guidebooks published by Appleton & Co. and Lippincott, Grambo, & Co. These texts were expected to educate readers with their abundance of facts—heights, weights, distances, populations, and temperatures. In fact, it is possible that the touring musician copied some of his facts and figures from local guidebooks. In Taylor’s The Lands of the Saracen, published less than a year after Reiff’s tour, the noted travel writer describes a platform by giving its dimensions, the number of composite stones and their dimensions. As Melton explains, “It is hardly likely that Taylor carried with him a measuring tape; however, he clearly recognized that his readers wanted this specific information, even if cribbed from a guidebook or local guide.” Like Taylor, Reiff could have consulted any number of guidebooks published during the 1850s, such as Description of 100 Cities and Large Towns in America, which included maps and described Louisville as a city “intersected by broad and pleasant streets, parallel with the river, crossed at right angles by other streets and alleys…The public buildings are numerous, and commensurate with the importance and prosperity of Louisville, including banks, churches, hospitals, jails, a city-hall, and courthouse...” According to Appleton’s Southern and Western Travellers’ Guide, Wheeling was “surrounded by bold and precipitous hills, which are generally

293 See Frances Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americas, 1832 (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2003); Eliza R. Steele, A Summer Journey in the West (New York: John S. Taylor and Co., 1841); James Silk Buckingham, America, Historical Statistic, Descriptive (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841).
294 Melton, Mark Twain, Travel Books, and Tourism, 31.
covered with a fine verdure….These hills are so near the river as to leave rather a small area for the town; it therefore extends itself along the bank of the river north and south, and is about two miles in length….It contains several handsome public and private buildings, churches &c.296

Reiff, like contemporary guidebook authors, described the physical appearance of the cities and towns he visited with a “you are there” approach, detailing the layout of streets and the locations of particular buildings.

Reiff may have been inspired by guidebooks that encouraged their readers to become amateur travel writers. The preface to The Traveller’s and Tourist’s Guide Through the United States of America (1854) asked that travelers “confer a great favour upon the author, by forwarding to him, under cover to the publishers, any information they may obtain from personal observation.”297 Whether or not Reiff actually copied material from local guidebooks, his descriptive passages take on a similar tone of an informed, well-traveled expert, often contextualizing or making comparisons between the locations he visited. By the time he reached Vicksburg, Mississippi in March, he alleged to have a thorough understanding of theatre buildings in the region. He characterized the city’s Varieties Theatre as “very pretty,” but with a “very badly painted Curtain” and “no perspective,” features that he found “so common to all Western and Southern—in fact the South Western & Southern—because they are not so either in Pittsburg or Cincinnati” (31 March).


In keeping with his diary’s emphasis on leisure, as well as with mid-century romanticized accounts of travel, Reiff described travel mishaps that were typical of the period—missed train connections, insufficient train seating, and ice, storms, and fires on board steamboats—with a tone of amusement, rather than fear or frustration. He seemed to view even dangerous travel situations as opportunities for excitement and engaging storytelling. Early in the tour, the Pyne and Harrison company faced extreme ice on the Ohio River: “The Ice a Foot thick! Some place in narrow passes, it was piled up three & four feet!” The conditions terrified the majority of the steamer’s passengers, but Reiff was unfazed. “I stood on the extreme Bow of the vessel—thinking what we would have for supper—‘Where ignorance is bliss, ‘tis folly to be wise.’ Twas so with me, I did not fear any danger” (12 January). On February 26th the steamboat headed into a serious storm, causing the ship’s smokestacks to emit sparks. “Many of the passengers were very frightened,” and the ship was “in imminent danger” of blowing up. Reiff was slightly nervous, but “only momentarily, for I thought [the fire] would get put out somehow.” Fortunately, Reiff was correct, and the fire was extinguished. Throughout his journals, Reiff presents himself as free to wander wherever he chooses, as receptive to the adventures of travel and invincible to its potential complications.

Reiff’s accounts of his adventures were not simply amusing or benign, but opportunities to call attention to the differences between cosmopolitan New York and more “primitive” or “foreign” southern and western locales. Melton points out that one of the main purposes of travel and travel writing during the antebellum period was “to increase one’s appreciation not of the world but of home,” and scholar John F. Sears explains that, “if one pole of nineteenth-century
tourist experience was a romanticized nature, the other was an idealized home.” Rather than describe this idealized home directly, Reiff denigrates many of the towns and cities he visits in contrast to New York City. In an episode entitled “Scenes from the Back Woods,” Reiff writes of his journey through small towns in Henderson County, Kentucky, where he encountered numerous “rough looking people” ashore (14 January). He poked fun at the difference begin these “rough” surroundings and his home city of New York: “It seems as if we were like ‘Arctic Express’ Ice Bound—visiting the Natives Ashore—we were completely cut off from all communication in the World—nothing but Ice one side and Forest on the other—Many jokes were crack’d at night—Some will ask where you are going to spend the evening—one suggests the Opera, another Niblo’s.” Reiff and his colleagues clearly took pleasure in identifying with the theatre culture of New York City and viewed the small southern towns they encountered as uncultured backwaters. Throughout his diary, Reiff characterizes most of the towns and cities in the West and South as chaotic, wild, and removed from civilization. Reiff was even disgusted by certain major cities with burgeoning theatre scenes; he found Mobile, for example, to be “a miserable dirty hole” (11 February).

While travelling from Wheeling, Virginia (later West Virginia) to Baltimore, Reiff noted an abundance of “Rude Cabins” “on the steep sides of a hill on the banks of a stream.” According to the musician, “the very children belonging to these Cabins, seem to partake of the wildness of these houses—and no wonder for they are completely shut out from the world” (9 April). And riding the Ohio and Mississippi Railroad from Louisville to Cincinnati, Reiff derisively described one undeveloped “village” as filled with “general ‘debris’,” one store, and three houses.” However, Reiff was also aware that the country and the economy of theatrical

touring were rapidly changing: “Yet this may be the commencement of a large town…in 25 years I might be giving a Concert here” (4 April). Throughout Reiff’s travels, he was quick to identify himself as a New Yorker or “Gothamite” in contrast to the locals. On the trip up the Ohio from Cincinnati to Wheeling, Reiff observed that the opera company stood out among the rest of the passengers, who were “mostly a rough looking set—western all over.” Reiff noted humorously that “[Joseph] Stratton’s dignified mustache, [Henry] Horncastle’s portly form, and my impudent manner—combined with the fact that we were more fastidious and give more trouble than any one else,” “established the fact that we were the people!” (7 April). The crux of Reiff’s joke is unclear, but it seems that the musician was referring to himself and his colleagues as “the ranking people” or “the most important people,” humorously calling attention to the contrast between their apparent gentility and the plebian, rough Westerners on board.

Even Reiff’s positive impressions of some of the major western and southern cities reveal a tone of cultural superiority. While in New Orleans for a two-week engagement, Reiff visited City hall, the French cemetery, parks, churches, and outdoor markets, and was continuously struck by the city’s foreign character. One day, while walking towards the River, he “found a Negro guide who showed us about.” The man was raised in Virginia, but “when he spoke of his native city, “he said America as if this was some foreign place” (28 January). Reiff was astounded at the “quite funny” names of the streets in the French Quarter, and amazed that “children in this part of the City speak French as if it was their native language—and English an acquired one” (24 January). The New Yorker pointed out various customs in New Orleans that differed from those in the Northeast, such as the level of noise and confusion in the public market (27 January). He found the style of the horse-drawn carriages “stranger to me than it would be to a European” (22 January), and called the streetlamps “very peculiar” (28 January).
He remarked that the office of the *Times-Picayune*, the city’s major newspaper, felt more like a saloon than a newspaper office, a “very common thing in the South and would be a wonder in the North” (8 February). Reiff encountered a synagogue and witnessed a service that “was very curious to me being the first Jewish ceremony I have ever seen.” The clergyman’s “common street hat gave him a very singular if not a comical appearance” (15 February). Reiff remarked that the opera house in New Orleans “looked like anything but an ‘American’ Theatre.” Unlike theatres in New York, the private boxes had windows that could be shut and “some of the Ushers were Negroes—but all spoke beautiful French.” He observed that New Orleans’ Gaiety Theatre was “not as wide as Niblo’s but about as deep,” had “good seats,” and was “well lighted.” However, he was flabbergasted at the audience’s warm reception to a presentation of a Tableau Vivant of the Crucifixion. He claimed that in “New York—with all its wickedness—[the performance] would be hissed off the stage” (23 January). While in New Orleans, Reiff was particularly struck by the presence of African Americans in the city. Typical of his attitude toward slavery, which he presents throughout the diary as a curiosity, he describes meeting a “very interesting slave” who “wanted to play my fiddle” (11 February), and seeing “perfect specimens of Southern negroes” (13 February).

Although Reiff identified as a Gothamite and disparaged Southerners and Westerners, he sometimes emphasized his status as an American. National pride and critique of foreign places was typical of American travel writing during the period; however, scholars primarily identify this contradiction in narratives by Americans who traveled abroad, rather than within their home country. Reiff’s mixed attitudes towards his fellow countrymen were display during an incident that occurred on board a steamer traveling from Missouri to Tennessee. Reiff accidentally took a seat that belonged to another passenger, a colonel from California. The colonel, a self-
proclaimed New Yorker by birth, mistook Reiff for an Englishman and insulted him for not understanding “the Customs in this Country.” Reiff was incensed that someone who lived in California had questioned his Americanness, suggesting that for Reiff, being American meant residing in the Northeast. Ironically, each man insisted upon the same claim to American identity through New York birth, but the exchange escalated into a full-blown fight in which Harrison and Brough had to intervene to save Reiff from being shot. According to Reiff, the Colonel “was too big for me to pummel and being a graduate of West Point I thought possibly a better shot [than I]—as I have not fired a Pistol Six times in my life” (15 January).

According to Reiff’s diary, arguments and violence were frequent occurrences on the Pyne and Harrison Company’s tour. Even though the conductor describes numerous stops on their route as primitive, foreign, or culturally inferior to the Northeast, his diary accounts for events that were far from a paragon of order or respectability. On January 14th, after arriving in Cairo, Illinois and going ashore, Reiff “discovered a Man lying… in his blood, having only a few minutes before been Murdered—supposed shot. Reiff learned that the man had been killed in a row at a “low Tavern” nearby. Reiff and his party “wanted to go in like Bucks” and attack the perpetrator, “but it fizzled out.” “It is said that no one’s life is safe at Cairo.” And while at supper at a boarding house in Washington, DC, on April 16th, a fellow lodger was insulted by Americans and specifically threatened Reiff, resulting in the two getting into a physical fight; Mrs. O’Bryan, the proprietor of the boarding house, threw herself in between them, lashing out at the man for having “insulted her boarders and herself by continually speaking ill of Americans.” On the one hand, Reiff presents himself in his diary as a New Yorker who is well versed in the culture and sophistication of the metropolis; on the other hand, he willingly engages in mythic notions of the South and West as wild and dangerous. For Reiff, perhaps his status or
appearance as an urban, respectable northeasterner gave him license, as an outsider, to
temporarily participate in rough and tumble encounters that arose while on tour. As recorded in
his diary, Reiff could debase the South and West and culturally inferior, while also engaging in
the very southern and western stereotypes that he supposedly ridiculed.

Whether performing involved more time and effort than Reiff lets on, at least in his diary, he gives the impression that touring was primarily about traveling rather than work. Perhaps the professional and economic stakes of the southern tour were relatively low for Reiff, who had no family to support, a well-connected father in the music industry, and a network of colleagues to go home to in New York. Reiff does not use his diary to present order or success like A’Becket and Gough, but he did use the journal to legitimize himself professionally in a different manner. Not simply an employee or any given performer teetering on the border of professional respectability, Reiff depicts himself as a cultural authority, a “Gothamite” who possesses knowledge about every location he visits, who has the time and wherewithal to roam freely wherever and whenever he chooses. Reiff was not part of the company’s cadre of stars; he and the other secondary members usually stayed in boardinghouses and lesser steamboat state rooms, while the principal vocalists stayed in first-class hotels, better-equipped state rooms, and got to choose train seats first, sometimes leaving none for performers like Reiff.299 However, in his diary, Reiff presents himself with bravado, as an important, knowledgeable traveler. By omitting detailed information about the tour, such as his earnings or scheduling challenges, he disavows economic or professional need or vulnerability and implies his own success.

299 Local guidebooks commented on the overcrowding of trains and steamboats, and the likelihood of passengers not securing a seat or berth. Nonetheless, the fact that other company members got first dibs on seats suggests that Reiff was not a priority in the company. Williams, *Appletons’ Southern and Western Travellers’ Guide*, 9.
Although Reiff’s diary did not legitimize his professional activities through accounting or numerical tabulations, it legitimized Reiff—to some, a “mere” musician and conductor who was no more famous than Thomas A’Becket, or the less talented scion of a musician father—as an expert in all things cultural and social. In addition, professional experience outside of New York may have both strengthened Reiff’s identification as a superior Gothamite and his confidence in his own abilities, independent from his father’s. The self-assurance that Reiff exuded in his diary while away from New York may have also translated into later professional achievements. His work with the Pyne and Harrison company seems to have been a success; upon returning to New York, he was hired by another English opera troupe led by Frederick Lyster and Rosalie Durand to tour the Far West and Australia (1858-63). In the 1860s, he continued as musical director of numerous itinerant opera companies, including the Campbell & Castle, Clara Kellogg, and Teresa Parepa-Rose English opera troupes, and the Maretzek and Maguire Italian opera companies.³⁰⁰

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While it is impossible to generalize about the functions of performers’ diaries, the volumes kept by A’Becket, Gough, and Reiff suggest, during the antebellum period, that many performers used the emerging form of commercial print to engage in the growing commercial theatre industry. Daily diary entries, rather than operating as a means of private reflection, served as links to a theatre culture that was becoming increasingly geographically dispersed. For touring performers, diaries could accommodate the exigencies of a mobile and fragmented career (A’Becket), respond to public scandals that spread rapidly across distances (Gough), or solidify a performer’s perceived cultural authority in new locales (Reiff). For all three men, the diary

served not simply as a device to record information or events, but as a means of actively producing a certain professional identity. A’Becket’s diaries helped the actor see himself as more than a secondary stock actor; Gough’s diaries served to corroborate his public moral position as an advocate of temperance; and Reiff’s journals aimed to advance the musician’s perceptions of himself as a prominent New York performer and traveler, regardless of his actual level of fame or prestige. During the antebellum period, before lecturing or legitimate theatrical tours operated according to national circuits and centralized institutions, touring performers used their diaries to engage in the inconsistent and uneven business practices of the entertainment (and reform) industry.
The Geography of Theatre Culture in California: Touring as Component of Regional Identity

Figure 3.1
Map of gold rush era California from Mitchell’s New Universal Atlas (Philadelphia: Charles Desilver, 1857). The map shows the principal destinations for performers who visited the state in 1849 and the early 1850s: the major port city of San Francisco and the supply centers of Sacramento City, Marysville, and Stockton, as well as the mining settlements scattered between them.
In this chapter, I analyze the new market for entertainment culture that developed in San Francisco and in the Nevada territory during the California gold rush era. To some extent, California’s theatre culture and related touring patterns were similar to the circuits established in other regions in the colonial period and early nineteenth century. By organizing companies and cultivating local audiences, northeastern theatre entrepreneurs who settled in the West in 1849 and the early 1850s, such as Thomas Maguire and “Dr.” D.G. Robinson, followed in the tradition of the Hallams on the Eastern Seaboard, Samuel Drake in the Ohio Valley, and Noah Ludlow, Sol Smith, and James Caldwell in the Gulf Plains.\footnote{Douglass McDermott takes this position in “Touring Patterns in California’s Theatrical Frontier 1849-1859,” \textit{Theatre Survey} 1.1 (May 1974): 19.}

However, even though California’s entertainment scene was shaped by eastern entrepreneurs who emulated certain aspects of the theatre with which they were familiar, theatre in California was more than a duplication of the eastern model; its geographic and cultural conditions were specific and complex. Following Brian Roberts’ cultural history of the gold rush, I argue that the character of California’s theatre culture was not the rebellious antithesis of the East, nor a replica of its conventions; rather, it oscillated (both by entrepreneurs’ choice and by necessity) between emulative aspects and departures from eastern culture. Drawing upon diaries, newspapers, passenger lists, and census data, Roberts dispels the myth that the gold rush was created by anti-bourgeois, working-class, unattached men. Instead, he demonstrates that the gold rush rebellion \textit{against} certain middle-class values was carried out precisely \textit{by} middle class individuals. Most forty-niners were respectable men of means who were able to afford the prohibitively costly journey west; travel expenses amounted to an easterner’s average yearly earnings. They joined the rush not only to seek gold, but also to try to escape the restrictions of middling polite society and the market conventions of eastern commercial life; of course, once in
California, forty-niners had to negotiate their actual experiences with the imagined binaries of the civilized East and the adventurous West. And, while the population in California was made up primarily of men, the local culture was shaped by the communication between miners and their wives, mothers, and sisters in the East—by the negotiations between men and women, rather than solely the actions of men in the West.

Roberts also asserts that gold rush culture was constructed as much by representations and perceptions as it was by actual events. “The West,” Roberts claims, “became real through the power of invention.” Indeed, California’s identity and culture were shaped both by the lived experiences of people who went west to participate in the gold rush, and by accounts of gold rush life printed in newspapers, private diaries, and letters sent to relatives back home. “The gold rush was a blend of imagination and action: an event framed as much by perspectives in the East as adventures in the West. From the first stirrings in the East, many observers envisioned this relationship as a gendered dialogue.”

By examining touring practices and industry conventions in San Francisco and in the interior, along with the way that the region’s gendered social life impacted its entertainment culture, I demonstrate that, like the gold rush in which it was situated, California’s theatre culture was a hybrid phenomenon of eastern imitations and western adaptations; it was shaped by practical, everyday realities—material conditions and geographic parameters—as well as by

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representations of theatrical activities that were printed and circulated in newspapers. The economy of theatrical touring in California was composed of contradictions and reflects the broader struggle for the region to create its cultural identity. California theatre culture trafficked in contradictory practices and representations—of bourgeois respectability, of eastern conventions and standards of taste, of myths of California as the land of promise and progress, the land of freedom and rebellion, and the land of humbug.

In this chapter, I begin by charting the activities of California’s first professional theatre company, Sacramento’s Eagle Theatre, in the fall and winter of 1849-50. Faced with challenges in terms of venues, casting, and repertoire, the Eagle company had to adapt to the material conditions of entertainment in California, while also negotiating the mythic expectations imposed upon the West by both local and national critics. I use California’s first professional theatre company as a template for exploring the challenges faced and adaptations made by performers and theatrical entrepreneurs through the early 1850s. I examine the touring activities of lesser-known California actresses, Sarah Kirby and Caroline Chapman, and demonstrate how touring in the West departed from industry conventions in the East and was both culturally and economically connected to gold prospecting commerce. Finally, I turn to the social geography of California, with a focus on San Francisco, and explore how women performers and managers, namely Catherine Hayes with the support of P.T. Barnum, were able to leverage the gendered conditions and mythic perceptions of the West to advance their careers. For women performers and managers, California offered particular opportunities for professional reinvention.

The same environmental and economic conditions that made producing theatre challenging in the West have generated certain challenges for the theatre historian. Because of fires and floods in San Francisco and the interior, little evidence from the gold rush era has
survived. I rely primarily on extant local newspapers, namely the *Alta California* (well preserved from 1849 through the 1880s), as well as eastern reprints with California datelines. I also employ a limited number of playbills, lettersheets, and diaries held at California archives. Geography looms large in my analysis, in part, because of the dearth of other kinds of evidence. The social geographies produced by the relationship between San Francisco and the interior, and by the physical configuration of San Francisco’s entertainment district, shaped regional theatre business practices and touring conventions. The relationship between California and the East, evidenced by newspapers and expanding networks of print, also contributed to mythic perceptions of the West that, in turn, shaped perceptions of its theatre culture.

**Imagination and Event in Sacramento’s Eagle Theatre**

Just a few months after forty-niners began to travel to California in search of gold, newspapers took an interest in the region’s potential new theatre culture. Theatre entrepreneurs were certainly included in the influx of emigrants who took the six-month journey west, and by August of 1849, one newspaper could confidently declare that “musicians and actors [were] going to California.” The California press reported that several theatre entrepreneurs were organizing joint-stock companies in San Francisco; one journalist was “pleased to find that so many influential and respectable citizens have taken an interest” in the city’s theatre. A month later, a letter from prospective San Francisco theatre manager W.A. Buffum proclaimed that an

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304 *Weekly Ohio State Journal*, Columbus, 1 August, 1849. In 1849, there were two routes to California: a sea voyage from New York around the tip of South America to San Diego or San Francisco, or via the overland Oregon-California Trail in covered wagons. Both took about six months. By 1850, the Panama Railway, built across the Isthmus of Panama to speed up travel to California, helped to cut several months off the voyage around South America. See [http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/immigration/goldrush.html](http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/immigration/goldrush.html).

305 *Weekly Alta California*, San Francisco, 9 August, 1849.
agent was departing from California, to bring back “immediately an Operatic Ballet, and Dramatic company,” and that another group of actors was “now on the way from Sydney, Australia.” According to another article, New York actor Augustus Fenno was planning to open a theatre on Portsmouth Square, in the heart of San Francisco’s emerging commercial center, and was travelling throughout the country to secure “a full, efficient, and talented ‘Corps Dramatique.’” Hoping that the region’s theatre culture would not be imported wholesale and would possess its own regional character, one reporter expressed a desire for “native talent,” and a playhouse built of “California wood.” Although emigration to California from the East had only just begun, he lamented that, “the want of a place of intellectual amusement [in California] has been long felt.”

The interest in a new entertainment market in California was not limited to the western press. That fall, newspapers across the country, in New York, Boston, and New Orleans, noted Fenno’s intent to engage a company “for a new theater now erecting in San Francisco.” In October, the *New York Sun* published a notice that a Mr. Corbyn, a theatrical agent based in New York, had been appointed to handle business in the United States for London’s Drury Lane theatre. He had received a letter from the would-be manager in San Francisco, Mr. Buffum, announcing that his new theatre, the “Californian,” would be completed in November and “that a person is *en route* to this city to engage a first-rate stock company, and as many *stars* as possible.

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307 Ibid.
309 This must be William Corbyn, who announced the opening of his “Dramatic and Music Agency” in April, 1847. See “Corbyn’s Dramatic and Musical Agency,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 23 April, 1847. Corbyn appears to have handled some of the negotiations between P.T. Barnum and Ludlow and Smith in relation to Jenny Lind’s 1850-51 tour. See W. Corbyn to Ludlow and Smith, 14 December, 1850, Ludlow-Field-Maury Family Papers, Missouri History Museum.
It will be curious if San Francisco proves a better stock and star market than London.” The same piece was reprinted weeks later in a Placerville, California paper, the *Placer Times.*

Just as forty-niners and eastern residents had high expectations for the fortunes promised by the gold rush, theatre professionals on both coasts mused that San Francisco might prove to be a theatrical center equivalent to New York or London. However, the overtures and expectations puffed by journalists and theatre entrepreneurs were out of proportion with the theatrical activities that actually took place in 1849. Fenno never secured a company or theatre and Buffum never went on to open the Californian. Whether the potential managers were bluffing or their intended plans fell through, Buffum’s letter alone, surely written not only for Corbyn but also with a potential newspaper readership in mind, served an important purpose. It encouraged readers and theatre professionals on both coasts to perceive California theatre as an extension of the gold rush boom, as a new market for opportunity and profit. Regardless of what California theatre would become, theatre entrepreneurs actively encouraged northeastern readers and theatre professionals to think that San Francisco was primed to be a theatrical center and was already equipped to compete in terms of the standard model of the industry, the star system.

As early newspaper coverage of California demonstrates, by the time the first professional theatre activities took place in the state, eastern readers were attuned to the goings-on out west due to the pervasive antebellum culture of reprinting. Since the 1830s, both mass-produced urban dailies and small-scale urban weeklies gathered news through a system of newspaper exchanges; a law allowed newspapers sent between printers to travel free of postage through the mails. The same articles would appear in papers such as the *New York Tribune,* the *Connecticut Courant,* and the *Alta California,* with credit usually given to the publication of

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310 *New York Sun,* 16 October, 1849.
origin. As Meredith L. McGill explains in her study of this phenomenon, although New York, Boston, and Philadelphia each claimed to be the center of national culture, “the hallmark of the antebellum literary marketplace was its decentralization.”\textsuperscript{312} The pervasiveness of reprinted texts, according to McGill, “created a near-simultaneity that was crucial to the imagination of the federal form of the nation.” Yet, while newspaper exchanges insured that the same articles were accessible to readers across the country, varied geographic contexts along with differences in the timing of circulation generated local and specific readings.\textsuperscript{313}

Newspapers were central to California and its theatre’s self-promotion and identity. Following President James Polk’s outgoing address to Congress on December 5, 1848, which claimed that the abundance of gold deposits on the West Coast was “‘corroborated by authentic reports,’” articles from California began appearing regularly in eastern newspapers. These reports were “often lifted word for word from western sources and without thought of corroboration, sometimes side-by-side with warnings against gold baubles and filthy lucre.”\textsuperscript{314} Almost a year before Polk’s announcement, an article printed in the \textit{New York Herald} noted that, in order to keep their readers informed about what was happening in California, it would publish selections from that new region’s publications. The journalist described the rapid creation of newspapers “on the remote western boundary of our empire” as a testament “to the progress and advancement of our people in that distant region.” According to this writer, the two major papers in San Francisco were “fully equal to many in New York, Boston, or Philadelphia papers…they are even superior to not a few of those nearer home.”\textsuperscript{315} Frank Marryat, an Englishman who participated in the rush, was impressed by the abundance of reading and writing that took place

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{312} Meredith L. McGill, \textit{American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting 1834-1853}, 1.
\item \textsuperscript{313} Ibid., 107-108.
\item \textsuperscript{314} Roberts, \textit{American Alchemy}, 20.
\item \textsuperscript{315} \textit{New York Herald}, 12 January, 1848.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
in California. Even in 1849, he cited the existence of seven newspapers in San Francisco, with additional “weekly sheets” in practically every mining town.\(^{316}\)

The Eagle Theatre emerged within this context of imagined expectation produced through expanding networks of print culture and lived, local limitations; these tensions came to characterize theatre culture in California during the period. Despite publicized notices about potential playhouses and theatre companies in San Francisco, the proprietors of California’s first professional theatre, known only as Mr. Hubbard and Mr. Brown, and its manager J.B. Price, opened their venture in Sacramento, the most populous mining town of the interior, to a would-be theatre audience of about 2000 transient residents. Perhaps they selected Sacramento rather than San Francisco because they wanted a playhouse in close proximity to miners, who would have ample money and free time to spend on leisure. The entrepreneurs built the theatre as an addition to the Round Tent Saloon, and the playhouse shared a common back wall with the popular drinking and gambling establishment. The Round Tent was also the central location in Sacramento for miners to exchange gold dust and nuggets for US coins. Eagle company member John McCabe wrote that the Round Tent was “occupied day and night, and fully occupied too, with monte and other gambling tables.” By connecting the theatre with the saloon, the management likely hoped to capitalize on the patronage of an established public gathering place. As an early historian of California theatre asserted, “it was in the saloons and gambling houses…that the first professional entertainment blossomed.”\(^{317}\)


The Sacramento theatre entrepreneurs emulated the promotional tactics of the East, with advance notice about “a temple devoted to the Drama,” to build interest. Described by newspapers as an “elegant establishment,” “30 feet front and 95 deep, capable of accommodating 800 persons,” the playhouse was actually a rather crude structure consisting of a wood frame, canvas sides and a tin roof, and a hard-packed dirt floor. Seats were rough backless boards, possibly sitting atop tree stumps or packing crates. Singer and lecturer Stephen Massett, who attended performances at the Eagle, humorously acknowledged the theatre’s roughshod appearance when he referred to it as “the pasteboard Temple of the Muses.”

The flimsy playhouse was typical of the “tent and board city” of Sacramento, and fine building materials in the region were scarce. However, although the Eagle was a modest structure, it was not cheap to construct; according to one company member, due to the exorbitant price of lumber for framework and seats, the structure cost about $75,000. Relative to the East, tickets were also expensive, starting at two dollars. The cost of tickets and building materials was representative of the broader economy of the gold rush, in which gold and finance capitalism resulted in the rapid influx and circulation of large sums of money. Although many prospectors did not make a great fortune from mining, business entrepreneurs who went to California were able to take advantage of the reduced competition coupled with a quickly growing population and could earn substantial profits. While the cost of living was higher in California than in the

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318 Weekly Alta California, Sept. 27, 1849.
319 Ibid., Weekly Alta California, 4 October, 1849. Also see web.csrmf.org.
320 Stephen Massett, Drifting About, Or What Jeems Pipes of Pipesville Saw and Did (New York: Carleton Publisher, 1863), 135.
321 John Herbert McCabe Diary 1849-1882, California State University Sacramento Special Collections.
322 For example, lodging house bunks cost six to twenty-six dollars per week and hotel rooms cost twenty-five to two-hundred and fifty dollars per week. JoAnn Levy, They Saw the Elephant: Women in the California Gold Rush (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 62.
East and the expense of the journey west was out of reach for the majority of easterners, California offered opportunities for higher earnings and less competition. During the period, actors could earn two or three times what could be earned in Boston, New York, or Charleston.\(^{323}\)

Despite the Eagle’s small size and its attachment to a saloon, the management adopted price structures and divisions that emulated the “first class” theatres in New York and Boston, with a rough gallery comprising the “box tier” or “dress circle,” which sat about two hundred persons at three dollars each, and the pit, which accommodated about three hundred people at two dollars per ticket.\(^{324}\) The Eagle entrepreneurs thus offered an attenuated version of the theatrical segmentation that was taking place in New York, where theatres were divided into three sections with correlating ticket prices.\(^{325}\) It seems that the Eagle aimed to accommodate yet divide a mixed class audience—or at least to appear to be doing so. Theatregoers with tickets to the pit entered through the Round Tent Saloon, and according to one observer, on stormy nights, those seated there “had the pleasure of enjoying a ‘fresh water bath’ for some money,” since rainwater collected on the benches.\(^{326}\) Admission to the box tier gallery offered access that avoided the barroom, through an outdoor ladder staircase next to the main entrance. However, this separation was somewhat superficial, since tickets to both sections had to be procured at the saloon. Although it is unlikely that there was a marked difference between the mix of people in


\(^{324}\) John Herbert McCabe Diary.


\(^{326}\) Massett, *Drifting About*, 135.
the pit versus the box tier, the division lent the Eagle an air of legitimacy and perhaps gave descriptions of it as “a respectable place of amusement” more credibility.\(^{327}\)

The first performance at the Eagle took place on September 25\(^{th}\) and consisted of a group of minstrel performers from Stockton. Minstrel troupes and singers had performed in the area before the Eagle was established, probably because concerts were less expensive and required fewer performers than the mounting of full-scale theatrical productions.\(^{328}\) However, the debut proved to be a false start; the troupe was not well received and performed for only one night. A journalist pointed out “many defects” in the performance, and the managers quickly announced that the minstrels would depart, but that the theatre would soon offer a new attraction: a group of actors from the New Zealand and a “magnificent brass band” under the direction of V. Bonce, “of the Park Theatre, New York,” the bastion of northeastern refinement and respectability. The announcement was rather premature, and it took several weeks for the company to arrive. In the interim, the theatre shut its doors for what would be the first of many temporary closures.\(^{329}\)

The Eagle theatrical company finally made its debut on October 16\(^{th}\) with a group of eight actors and one actress. Six had already worked in professional theatres outside of California: leading man J.B. Atwater, Henry and Mrs. Ray, recently arrived from Australia, Charles B. Price, H.F. Daly, John McCabe, and comic singer and comedian Tench Fairchild. Two company members, Jack Harris and A.W. Wright, were inexperienced amateurs and former soldiers. It is not surprising that the company was small; as Buffum’s and Fenno’s failed ventures in San Francisco demonstrate, to assemble a company in California was and remained a challenge for managers. There were still relatively few performers in the region, and, although

\(^{327}\) Placer Times, 17 November, 1849.

\(^{328}\) John Herbert McCabe Diary.

\(^{329}\) Weekly Alta California, 27 September, 1849; 4 October, 1849.
newspaper reports claimed that in October, twenty-eight vessels were en route from the East to California,\textsuperscript{330} the journey took ample time and money, and California could not instantly produce a community of performers.

Despite newspapers’ allusions to the promise of a capable group of actors and musicians with a New York pedigree, audiences and critics found the Eagle company lacking in skill and experience. An article in the \textit{Placer Times} noted “good attendance on the evenings of performances during the week” and suggested that the company’s strong efforts were not yielding successful results: “The company is much improved and every effort is made and every acquisition secured to please the patrons of the house.”\textsuperscript{331} The press pointed out that the company suffered from a dearth of performers, and especially actresses. “Another actress to assist Mrs. Ray would be an advantage. With one or more of an equal versatility of talent, the female part of the performances would be creditably sustained.”\textsuperscript{332}

Stephen Massett and writer Bayard Taylor attended the Eagle together when the company presented \textit{The Spectre of the Forest} in concert with a five-person orchestra. According to accounts by both men, the performance did not live up to their expectations. Massett found the company unprepared, with the “orchestra” consisting of only a fiddle, a “big drum, and a triangle, that served the double purpose of ringing the boarders to their meals at the restaurant next door.” He also criticized Mrs. Ray’s performance, and especially her imperfect pronunciation, citing one speech in which she denounced the “the cold humbraces of a artless willain!” In the concluding widely-known sentimental drama, \textit{Tragedy of Douglass}, Massett noted sarcastically that the actor playing the principal character of Norval, perhaps one of the

\textsuperscript{331} \textit{Placer Times}, 27 October, 1849; \textit{Newark Daily Advertiser}, 14 January, 1850.
\textsuperscript{332} \textit{Placer Times}, 17 November, 1849.
two without any prior professional acting experience, was not a real actor at all, but “a gentleman who had been unfortunate at the diggings, and had only recently found out the proper channel in which to display his genius.” In a major speech, the actor needed the prompter’s assistance at every line, and, even then, went on to bungle practically every word.  

Taylor found the stage design and costumes for *The Spectre of the Forrest* amateurish:

“The interest of the play is carried to an awful height by the appearance of two spectres, clad in mutilated tent-covers, and holding spermaceti candles in their hands.” Like Massett, he was particularly critical of Mrs. Ray’s performance. At one point,

Mrs. Ray rushes in and throws herself into an attitude in the middle of the stage: why she does it, no one can tell. This movement, which she repeats several times in the course of the three acts, has no connection to the tragedy; it is evidently introduced for the purpose of showing the audience that there is, actually a female performer. The miners, to whom the sight of a woman is not a frequent occurrence, are delighted with these passages and applaud vehemently.

The California population was overwhelmingly male, and while most of the audience members were miners, women were certainly outnumbered but present. In late November, one newspaper described a “fashionable house” “graced by quite a number of fine looking well-costumed ladies, the sight of whom was somewhat revivifying.” And, because there was markedly less competition among actresses than in the East, second or third-tier actresses could command large salaries. According to newspaper accounts, the widely criticized Mrs. Ray, received two hundred dollars per week for her performances at the Eagle Theatre, an excessive sum for a stock actor.

The now-forgotten Mrs. Ray exemplified the many women who sought opportunities in California. As historian JoAnn Levy writes in her history of women in the gold rush,

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335 *Placer Times*, 20 November, 1849.
“California’s gold seduced thousands of women. They could and did cook for it, sew for it, clean, iron, wash, dance, pour drinks, or do whatever was required and returned the most…Women were often in business for themselves and earning as much, and often more, than the average miner.”\textsuperscript{337}

The Eagle struggled to find material to suit a limited company and theatre space. McCabe recorded in his diary that,

The disadvantages under which the company rested were terrible. There was little wardrobe, and few books…Every play produced had to be so altered as to require one lady only, and much of our time was taken up by writing out our pieces from memory. We, on one occasion, thought ourselves lucky in being able to purchase a copy of the farce of ‘Box and Cox,’ for an ounce of gold dust.

On the night of Taylor and Massett’s visit, the company performed ∗The Tragedy of Douglass,∗ but later that week performed ∗Charles the Second,∗ a comedy, along with a song and a pantomime. As opposed to the tragedy, journalists deemed the mixed bill “infinitely better suited to the Eagle Theatre stage, the company, and the play-going public of Sacramento City.” One journalist advised that tragedies no longer be performed at the Eagle, “where everybody goes for the laugh,” and deemed it inappropriate to produce “a heavy tragedy on a small stage.” According to this critic, “Far better adapted to this stage and company—which, so far as it goes, is really good—are petite comedies, burlesques, and farces.”\textsuperscript{338} The managers seemed to take the journalists’ advice to heart and produced no more tragedies, instead offering domestic comedies such as John Tobin’s ∗The Honeymoon∗ and Sheridan Knowles’ ∗The Wife,∗ as well as, more surprisingly, pieces that would seem to require a fair amount of spectacle, such as ∗The Bandit Chief∗ and the nautical play, ∗Beacon of Death.∗\textsuperscript{339} Perhaps the mix of comedies about domestic life

\textsuperscript{337} Levy, ∗They Saw the Elephant,∗ 93.
\textsuperscript{338} Placer Times, Nov. 17, 1849.
\textsuperscript{339} Weekly Alta California, 6 December, 1849 and 29 December, 1849.
and fantastical dramas of adventure suited the audience, which consisted largely of miners who were probably missing their families back home, yet who were also eagerly engaged in their new adventures. Even though, as McCabe notes, the company suffered from a scarcity of scripts and most needed to be adapted, domestic comedies provided more leading roles for the company’s only actress, Mrs. Ray.

The Eagle struggled to consistently produce theatrical fare. After offering performances three times a week through October, the theatre closed in early November for several weeks and reopened on the 17th under the new management of company member John B. Atwater. In December it closed for yet another week in consequence of a storm. One historian interpreted this schedule to mean that during the fall, the theatre went through four bankruptcies. Despite these difficulties, newspaper coverage continued to paint the picture of a theatre that was improving and representative of the city’s progress, even if such descriptions betrayed the company’s underlying inadequacies. These articles were reprinted weeks later in newspapers throughout the country. Indicating wavering attendance, one journalist suggested that patronizing the Eagle was local residents’ civic duty and professed to believe that the managers “deserve the patronage of the theatre-going public for building such a comfortable and well-arranged house.” The journalist implied that the nascent theatre in California should be judged by different standards than that of the established Northeast, and that the venue was in fact “all

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340 Taylor, Eldorado, 276.
341 Placer Times, 17 November, 1849.
342 Weekly Alta California, 29 December, 1849.
we may look for ‘under the circumstances.’” Of the performances in late November, one journalist identified “many imperfections,” but had “no doubt [they] will be corrected after a few representations.” A few weeks later, this sentiment was echoed by another journalist, who announced “a marked improvement in the performances” even though audiences were not as large “as the indefatigable exertion of the managers deserve,” and the company was still deficient in performing comedies. “A low comedian is sadly needed at this house,” one critic wrote, “as a theatre without fun is almost as bad as a circus without a clown.” Despite the negative reviews, the Eagle’s managers may have been complicit in local journalists’ professed optimism for the future and emphasis on improvement; during the period, managers often coordinated with the press to produce complimentary pieces that would encourage attendance. Nonetheless, while critics and audiences in Sacramento felt that the city “deserved” a well-patronized theatre, the Eagle’s performances consistently seemed to fall short.

A flood in January destroyed the Eagle and ended the company’s run in Sacramento. Yet rather than disband, the actors decided to relocate to San Francisco. The press advised readers in San Francisco not to judge the company too harshly, to give the manager “a kind reception” and “patronage which his industry and enterprise deserves.” The writer “confidently promise[d] a successful season” in San Francisco, as long as the “company possesses any merit and he exercises any tact in management.” By January 9th, a new building was erected on Washington Street to be fitted up as a theatre. Newspapers quickly began publishing articles in anticipation of the performance of the first professional company in San Francisco. One reporter acknowledged

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345 *Placer Times*, 17 November, 1849.
346 *Placer Times*, 20 November, 1849.
347 *Weekly Alta California*, 16 December, 1849.
348 *Weekly Alta California*, 29 December, 1849.
349 *Daily Alta California*, 7 January, 1850.
that “the necessity of places of public amusement is daily becoming more apparent,” but worried that the crowded, disordered commercial district of San Francisco, filled with saloons, boarding houses, and restaurants, would fail to attract patrons. “The bad state of the streets may perhaps be a draw back for the present, and operate against ‘crowded houses.’” The journalist also advised the manager to avoid tragedies and offer pieces “of a light and agreeable character.” Clearly aware of the problems the Eagle faced in Sacramento, the reporter offered the consolation that even managers in New York and Philadelphia had managed to succeed with mediocre actors. “An inferior company, if properly managed, can work together and produce a more favorable impression than one of superior artistic merit. This has been clearly proven in the instances of [William] Mitchell and [William] Burton.”

On January 16, the Eagle opened in San Francisco with Sheridan Knowles’s The Wife and scenes from Charles the Second as an afterpiece. Tickets cost three dollars. However, the managers were not able to effectively gauge public interest and the capacity of the house. The critic for the Alta noted that he “should have had much to say of the general performance,” but, due to the crowds, had to stand at the back of the theatre, from which “we could only hear that the ‘show’ was ‘going on.’ As for seeing that was out of the question…The manager cannot hope to give satisfaction, unless he can manage to seat his audience, and present to the back seats as well as the front a view of the stage.” Although the theatre was apparently packed on opening night, the Eagle could not attract consistent theatregoers. On January 25th, just one week after opening, the Alta announced that the company “rang down the curtain” the previous night, “the public patronage not being sufficient to warrant them in continuing open.” John McCabe, one of the actors in the company, noted in his diary that the company’s treasurer, Mr. Mattinson, had

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350 Daily Alta California, 9 January, 1850.
351 Daily Alta California, 18 January, 1850.
squandered the company’s earnings in a nearby saloon. The actor recorded, “‘No Salary,’ he having lost the entire week’s receipts at monte.”

Although the Eagle was an early instance of California theatre, the problems that it encountered—inclement weather, high rents, an insufficient number of actors, and perhaps unrealistic public expectations—persisted in California’s early theatre history. According to one journalist, the Eagle’s failure could not have been avoided:

Actors cannot afford to live in California for a simple living, and they have therefore determined upon a final bow to the public…We regret that the first effort to establish the drama should not have proved profitable, but the company could expect little else. None of them were professional people, or at all events, had fretted but a very brief hour upon the stage, and certainly not in the same line of business which they were here compelled to assume…The company labored also under many difficulties of an insurmountable character from the limited number of performers, and having only female, compelling many pieces to be ‘cut’ unmercifully.

The writer implied that even actors with talent would be defeated by the lack of a theatre tradition in the West. In order to improve, actors required “a familiarity with the boards of a regular theatre, among old professionals,” neither of which could be found in the nascent theatre culture of California. However, just as the Eagle adapted to the local theatrical conditions—by adapting familiar pieces to suit a small and unbalanced company, by changing locations to avert certain challenges, and perhaps by tactically employing the press, theatre entrepreneurs and actors in the early 1850s would harness the region’s limitations strategically and with varying degrees of success.

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352 John Herbert McCabe Diary.
353 Daily Alta California, 25 January, 1850.
Adapting to Geographic Limitations and Modifying the Star-Stock Model

With the arrival of more actors and managers in San Francisco in 1850 and 1851, the conditions for theatre in California were, to some extent, more favorable than they had been for the Eagle in 1849. However, frequent fires and floods and a relatively small pool of local performers continued to vex the region’s entertainment industry. The first four theatres built in San Francisco in 1850—Washington Hall, Rowe’s Amphitheatre, the National Theatre, and the Phoenix Exchange—were all destroyed by fires within six months.\(^{354}\) During the early 1850s, there were usually at least four theatres running in San Francisco at any given time, but most venues came and went. As actor John McCabe noted in his diary, during this time “theatres were very precarious possessions.”\(^{355}\)

During the early 1850s, the two entrepreneurs who were able to make a lasting impression and establish San Francisco as a viable city for theatre business were “Dr.” D.G. Robinson, a New Englander, and Thomas Maguire from New York. Both Robinson and Maguire arrived in San Francisco in 1849 without any prior experience in theatre. Maguire, an ex-cabdriver and hotelkeeper, became the proprietor of the Parker House Saloon, while Robinson purchased a local drugstore. Apparently more interested in commercial real estate than in art, each man envisioned the establishment of a theatre in San Francisco, which could yield exorbitant rents from lessees and/or high ticket prices from patrons, as a potential profit-making venture. In July of 1850, Robinson opened the Dramatic Museum in San Francisco on California Street, and in October, Maguire opened the first Jenny Lind Theatre on the floor above the Parker House Saloon. Both theatres were destroyed in the fire of May 5, 1851. Maguire quickly


\(^{355}\) John McCabe Diary.
rebuilt a second, and, due to another fire, a third Jenny Lind Theatre on Portsmouth Square, which opened on October 4, 1851 with *All That Glitters is Not Gold*. The company consisted of eight men and seven women, including Mrs. Woodward, Mr. and Mrs. Junius Brutus Booth, Jr., and Fred Kent. After several failed attempts at establishing theatres due to fires, Robinson erected a theatre to rival Maguire’s, the American, on land that he acquired on Sansome Street, three blocks from the Jenny Lind. On October 20th, the American company, which included James Stark, George Chapman, Miss Mary Chapman, and Clara Rivers, made its debut with Anna Cora Mowatt’s *Armand; or, The Peer and the Peasant*. Until 1852, Maguire and Robinson competed for the growing population of actors in the region and offered performances that included a mix of familiar pieces from the eastern repertoire and new “local” plays, along with circus acts, minstrel shows, and concerts.

With the establishment of the American and the Jenny Lind, “edifices calculated for the production of every description of piece in the range of the drama,” and of “construction as to render them safe against fire,” theatre became central to the city’s geography, culture, and everyday life. An illustrated map of San Francisco in 1851 attested to Maguire and Robinson’s influence; the Jenny Lind and the American Theatre are depicted among ten prominent city institutions, including the Post Office, City Hall, the Hospital, and the Prison. San Francisco could boast of two buildings devoted to theatrical entertainment that included legitimate drama.

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357 The Maguire-Robinson rivalry came to an end in late 1852, when Robinson gave up his lease at the American and Maguire sold the Jenny Lind to the city to be converted in a City Hall. Maguire remained a dominant force in the region through the 1860s. See ibid, 12.
358 *Daily Alta California*, October, 1851.
359 Map of San Francisco, Kemble Special Collections, Box 1, Folder 34, California Historical Society.
Figure 3.2
Map of San Francisco (c. 1851). The Jenny Lind and the American Theatres are featured as major city sites, along with the Post Office, the Custom House, and the City Hall.
Kemble Special Collections, California Historical Society.
Figure 3.3
1852 Playbill for the Jenny Lind Theatre. Notice that the headlining star is not a well-known name.
Collections of the California Historical Society.
Unlike the majority of the city’s theatrical venues, which were housed in floors of multi-purpose buildings or halls, these larger, expensive, elegant playhouses gave the city local and national prestige. Geographically situated in the San Francisco’s commercial center, the two playhouses were physical demonstrations that theatre was part of the city’s burgeoning capitalist enterprise. Articles from the *Alta* that were reprinted in Boston, New York, and other cities, described the new theatres in California as a sign of the region’s progress. “You have doubtless heard enough of the unparalleled growth of the city…Streets, handsomely planked,…filled with the costliest furniture and goods, spacious concert halls, theatres, and buildings that would adorn the streets of the oldest Atlantic city…We have places of amusement, the Jenny Lind Theatre,’ managed by Mr. [James] Stark, of Boston celebrity.” With San Francisco now in possession of theatres that resembled the “first class” theatres of New York and Boston, critics in California could look back at the era of the Eagle Theatre, just a few years earlier, as evidence of how much the region’s theatre culture had developed. In November 1851, one journalist observed that “the days of canvas tents and wooden shanties have departed,” compared to the current moment, when “all the refinements and luxuries of life have been introduced here on the Pacific shores…and when two magnificent buildings devoted to the drama have arisen amongst us.”

Although the sustained presence of Maguire and Robinson provided the city with a steady stream of theatre buildings and lent the appearance of some level of respectability, order, and continuity to San Francisco’s entertainment scene, the frequent destruction and rebuilding of their playhouses made it difficult for them to fill their theatres with complete companies, hire theatre personnel, and offer consistent seasons. In his comprehensive study of American theatre

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361 “The Drama in San Francisco,” *Daily Alta California*, 1 November, 1851.
companies, Weldon Durham does not provide a single entry for California until the year 1869.\textsuperscript{362} As demonstrated by the Eagle Company as well as by performances at the American and the Jenny Lind, there were certainly companies in the state; Durham’s omission stems from the fact that no resident company in the region remained intact for longer than a year. One journalist complained that theatres could not operate on a “successful and enduring basis” due to the fact that “good companies have broken up, and the divided and discordant elements scattered far and wide, beyond the possibility of re-union.”\textsuperscript{363} When managers could not procure acting companies, they often presented concerts, circuses, dances, or variety shows, rather than plays. On many occasions, due to erratic companies or last minute crises, managers failed to organize an evening of entertainment and had to temporarily close their doors.

An article printed in the \textit{Alta California} in the fall of 1851 described the mix of challenges and opportunities that actors and entrepreneurs like Maguire and Robinson faced in California. On the one hand, the journalist suggested that emigration by performers was on the rise: “We learn that in addition to the members of the theatrical profession who have recently arrived in this city from the Atlantic States, a number of others intend soon paying a visit to California.” Indeed, the promise of higher salaries and less competition in California made the long and costly journey worthwhile for certain entertainers. However, the journalist went on to describe the challenges and inadequacies of theatre conditions in the region:

\begin{quote}
All of the companies are deficient in representatives of several ‘lines.’ Old men, eccentric, low and light comedians, are sadly wanting; and in the female department, there is a very great paucity of talent and a lack of numbers. Scarcely a piece—tragedy, comedy, or face—can be properly cast...[W]ith some few exceptions, we have had no actors nor actresses of acknowledged merit, and the majority of our theatrical performers have donned the insignia of their profession for the first time before California audiences...Long before this we should have
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{362} Durham, \textit{American Theatre Companies 1749-1887}, 145.
\textsuperscript{363} \textit{Daily Alta California}, 6 June, 1852.
had an abundance of really excellent dramatic talent from the east, had there not been so much uncertainty attending a speculative voyage to the Pacific, and the expenses in case of a failure so great as to deter nearly all from attempting the trip.

According to the author, California was not an attractive destination for visiting stars. The actors who did make the trip were inexperienced and the pool of theatre professionals was too small for managers to properly cast pieces; moreover, the voyage was too prohibitively costly for most performers. The article also suggests that the conditions of theatre in California did not live up to the allure and promise of the West that initially drew performers and entrepreneurs to the region: “[Actors] have heard that theatricals were successful, and have perhaps seen in our newspapers paragraphs advising them to come here, but they have also seen that our theatres have all been small, and that again and again they have been laid in ashes.”

At the same time, despite such difficulties, the journalist implies that entrepreneurs were beginning to adapt more readily to California’s environment. Importantly, he notes that more theatres were being constructed outside of San Francisco in towns and cities of the interior. As a result, actors would no longer “be compelled to depend upon one theatre or on one city for an opportunity of appearing before the public and sustaining themselves.” \(^{364}\) In addition to the Jenny Lind and the American, the writer points out that “In Sacramento City there is now one very pretty theatre, and will soon be another, and in almost every city of any promise there are similar edifices.” The increasing number of theatres accessible from San Francisco would enable performers who were “barely receiving sufficient [incomes] to insure them a living and keep them in necessary theatrical properties upon the Atlantic side,” to “command here handsome salaries, and that without crippling the treasury and depriving the Management of any share of the profits.”

\(^{364}\) *Daily Alta California*, 1 October, 1851. The subsequent three quotations are from the same article.
As the journalist suggests, the growth of theatres in the interior—the establishment of a contained touring circuit—was critical to actors and entrepreneurs overcoming industry challenges due to environmental factors and a limited and scattered population. The theatre market in California developed to accommodate the spatial organization of its population, and theatre professionals who succeeded in the region adapted to its erratic conditions by using movements to their advantage. In 1849 and the early 1850s, during the height of the gold rush, San Francisco was undoubtedly the region’s commercial center and the major supply center for the region’s mining industry; it is not surprising that Maguire and Robinson chose to open their ventures in that city. Two of the three migration routes to California (by ship around Cape Horn, or by ship and land across the Isthmus of Panama) deposited emigrants and visitors in the port of San Francisco, right near the city’s developing entertainment district. In 1850, approximately 20,000 people lived in San Francisco, as opposed to 5,000 in Sacramento.365

However, while San Francisco was inarguably the region’s first major metropolis, during the early 1850s, that city’s pool of performers and theatregoers could only support a handful of theatres, and even those managers struggled to present entertainments on a nightly basis. The compilers of an early history of the region, *The Annals of San Francisco*, wrote that “the whole population was constantly moving.”366 Miners and people working in jobs supported by the mining industry, including cooks, boarding house managers, and saloonkeepers, traveled frequently between San Francisco, the mining towns, and the cities of the interior, such as Sacramento, Stockton, and Marysville. Forty-niner Alfred Doten, whose diary chronicles the everyday experiences of gold rush life, frequently traveled between mining camps, as well as

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between the interior and San Francisco. By 1852, over half of the state’s people lived outside of San Francisco and were scattered over 200 settlements in the interior of the state.

Theatre entrepreneurs were aware of the mobility within the region. A few months after Maguire and Robinson established their first ventures in San Francisco, Sacramento became host to two theatres—the Tehama and the Pacific. Small canvas and wood theatres similar in structure and size to the Eagle also sprang up in Marysville, Stockton, Sonora, and other towns. In 1852, when Robinson opened a second American Theatre, he chose to construct the playhouse in Sacramento. Although touring circuits comprised of theatrical hubs in major cities with smaller theaters in surrounding towns had developed all over the country, the competition for and among performers in California and the peripatetic nature of being a resident actor in the region was unique. Typically, within the star-stock system, stock actors were able to make a living by performing in cities with resident companies—by remaining within one city as visiting stars cycled through. However, in California, it was an economic necessity for local actors, along with stars, to tour the towns and cities of the interior. Entire theatre companies often toured, disbanded, and reorganized in the attempt to find audiences. San Francisco and the neighboring supply towns competed for actors and for local prestige; the Sacramento and San Francisco newspapers often engaged in a playful rivalry over which city’s theatre was superior.

With the spread of theatre culture to the interior, it became imbricated in the larger gold rush economy. In supply towns like Stockton and Sacramento, which provided easy access to an array of mining settlements, miners made up a large portion of the theatergoing audience; in remote mining communities like Hangtown and Downieville, the audience was predominately

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368 McDermott, “Touring Patterns on California’s Theatrical Frontier,” 21.
gold prospectors. Stories circulated of miners showing their appreciation for visiting performers by showering them with the fruits of their daily labors; these tales, likely exaggerated, contributed to the mythic character of gold rush culture. Forty-niner John David Borthwick described a performance in Downieville where miners bestowed upon the leading lady “a purse containing 500 dollars worth of gold specimens,” with additional gold pieces thrown to her onstage.\(^{369}\) In late 1852, when Caroline Chapman appeared at Sonora’s Phoenix Theatre, she was supposedly escorted to the playhouse by one thousand miners. And when she performed at the mining town of Columbia, she was bombarded with buckskin sacks of gold tossed upon the stage by her admirers.\(^{370}\) Actors also sometimes became temporary prospectors and received ample attention from the press for doing so. When actor Andrew Jackson Neafie visited California, he “washed two ounces of gold dust from a single pan of earth,” from a claim at Iowa Hill. The reporter, referring humorously to Neafie’s failed engagement, affirmed, “though the people here may not appreciate him as an actor, they will be willing to admit him to the more exalted position of a good miner.”\(^{371}\) And during Lola Montez’s 1852-53 visit to the state, the notorious performer purchased an interest in the Empire Mine in Grass Valley and offered her cottage as a meeting place for the mine’s wealthy investors.\(^{372}\)

The reciprocity between the gold industry and the theatre sometimes worked in unexpected ways, and forty-niners who journeyed to California in search of their mining fortunes sometimes ended up working in the theatre. In December 1850, six months after arriving in the West to seek a gold-mining fortune, J.L. Akerman recorded in his diary that he was residing in

\(^{370}\) Levy, *They Saw the Elephant*, 134.
\(^{371}\) “From California,” *Albany Journal*, 7 June, 1855.
\(^{372}\) Levy, *They Saw the Elephant*, 135.
San Francisco, employed “by Dr. D.G. Robinson in the American Theatre at a salary of fifty dollars per week.”

Frustrated by mining’s unpredictable and inconsistent earnings, Akerman initially worked as a scene painter for productions such as The Iron Chest, Fortune’s Frolic, The Day After the Wedding, and My Sister Kate, but quickly acquired other responsibilities. In mid-1851 he wrote, “I have served in almost every capacity” of the theatre business “until I finally arrived to the situation of Prompter—I understand pretty well all the tricks traps &c. attached to the stage.” Indeed, Akerman had to have an extensive knowledge of the theatre business in order to work as the prompter, who was responsible for prompting as well as stage managing. He was a very important member of the company, often with an assistant and even a clerk, and was the means of providing continuity in the repertory system.

While Akerman hoped that the theatre would provide him with a more stable income, he soon realized that theatrical salaries in California were no more reliable than gold mining. “I do not like to work for nothing at any business,” Akerman wrote, “and during the time that I have been engaged…I have not received my salary more than half of the time.” Consequently, Akerman began to alternate theatrical engagements in scene painting, prompting, and construction, with prospecting trips, sometimes combining the two efforts. Following his engagement at the American, he went to the mining settlement of Downieville to pan for gold and “to paint scenery for the theatre which is building there.” In October 1851, he obtained a job “to paint the scenery for the Theatre and to upholster paint and paper at Fred’s Alta Saloon—

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373 J.L. Akerman Journal, 26 December, 1850, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley. During the week of 12 December, Alfred Doten recorded that he earned seventy-five dollars, the ‘best digging pay I have had yet,’” suggesting that theatre salaries were more consistently lucrative than mining. See The Journals of Alfred Doten, 1:136.
374 J.L. Akerman Journal, 10 January, 1851; n.d., 1851.
375 Ibid., n.d., 1851.
376 Ibid.
also the job to paint a small stock of scenery for the Nevada Theatre.”

And on December 1st, he made the leap from painter and prompter to actor, taking an engagement at the theatre in Nevada City for fifty dollars per week for “scene painter, carpenter, prompter, and some light parts on the stage.”

Akerman’s narrative, which ends in February 1852 while back at the American as a prompter, is representative of the many forty-niners who did not find great success in gold digging and sought opportunities in other areas of California’s growing commercial market, one of which was entertainment culture. While individuals like Akerman did not appear in newspapers or leave public records of their theatrical activities, their work was integral to the overlapping gold rush and theatre economies. In the early 1850s, with theatres popping up in practically every mining settlement, gold miners not only functioned as ready-made audiences, but also as potential employees in the emergent theatre industry.

The press often framed the spread of California theatre to the interior as an extension of the region’s progress, with one journalist noting that “all the prominent mining points in the mountains, where settlements have grown up, have been visited by traveling companies of players. Places most difficult of access have been penetrated, mountains scaled, rivers crossed.”

However, visitors and the local press also expressed surprise at the decent quality of theatrical fare and audiences in the mining settlements of the interior, perhaps betraying eastern biases. While in California with the Lyster and Durant opera company, musician, conductor, and all around rabble-rouser Anthony Reiff described an audience in Marysville that “seemed dreadful,” “very few ladies, not many in the town,” “mostly miners,” “nearly all in their shirt sleeves…slacked hats, pants stuck in the tops of their boots.” However, his initial impressions

377 Ibid., 3 October, 1851.
378 Ibid., 1 December, 1851.
379 Ibid., 1 February, 1852.
380 Daily Alta California, 15 September, 1851.
were challenged when “they paid down their $2 and one dollars a seat, without mincing.” Reiff was surprised that “many were educated men—sat attentively thro’ the performance.” In Timbuctoo, a town so remote that “no stage ran here—must either get a horse or ‘tramp’ into the place,” the men who attended the theatre from the surrounding mines were “a rough dressed audience.” Reiff expected them to be unsophisticated ruffians, but to his dismay, “they were attentive and seemed to like the show,” which was Child of the Regiment. Descriptions of theatre culture in the mining towns mirrored the contradictory characterizations of the region in general. At times, visitors remarked upon the discomforts and lack of refinement in California; at others, they emphasized the region’s surprising level of sophistication and development.

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Visiting performers as well as full companies who arrived in California would typically play an engagement of no more than a few weeks in San Francisco before departing for a tour of the interior. They would often go straight from San Francisco to Sacramento, a journey that took eight and a half hours by steamship and cost five to eight dollars; occasionally they stopped in between at Stockton. After performances in Sacramento, performers would travel via stagecoach along one of two routes: to Marysville or Stockton and then back to San Francisco, or on a tour of the mining camps, in which they returned to San Francisco via Sacramento, sometimes also stopping en route in Marysville or Stockton.

Brief summaries of the careers of several eastern actors who became local favorites in California illustrate the way performers and managers used professional and geographic mobility

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381 Anthony Reiff Papers, 15 August, 1859, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.
382 Ibid., 4 September, 1859.
383 See Levy, They Saw the Elephant, 60-75.
384 Borthwick, Three Years in California, 97.
between San Francisco and the interior to adapt to the region’s conditions. Sarah Kirby and James Stark, actor-managers who came to California from New York in early 1850, were particularly mobile and sustained careers in the West by moving constantly between the two major supply towns of San Francisco and Sacramento. The two actors, who married in 1851, earned recognition as “pioneers of the California stage” and “old favorites of our [California] theatre-going public,” for being some of the first actors to reside in the region for a sustained period.\(^3\)

In early 1850, Kirby arrived in San Francisco from New York with her then-husband J.B. Wingerd. On February 21\(^{st}\), she debuted at Rowe’s Amphitheatre on Kearny between California and Sacramento streets, appearing in Bulwer-Lytton’s *The Lady of Lyons.*\(^3\) Her engagement was part of the manager’s attempt to introduce legitimate drama to a venue that had previously focused on circus and popular entertainment. In March, after disagreements with Rowe and perhaps with the hope of performing at a theatre that focused more on serious plays, she left that company to manage her own troupe at Sacramento’s Tehama Theatre with J.B. Atwater, formerly of the Eagle Theatre, thus becoming the first woman manager in California.\(^3\) The troupe was comprised of Tench Fairchild and H.F. Daly from the Eagle, along with numerous performers who were new to the region: Mr. and Mrs. John Hambleton, recently arrived from Australia, Mr. and Mrs. Francis Nesbitt Mc Cron, W.S. Fury, Sophie Edwin, Mrs. Lynes, and Mr. Alexander. According to theatre historian Jane Kathleen Curry, the company’s presentation of

\(^3\)Foster, *Annals of the San Francisco Stage,* 60.
\(^3\)According to Curry, California’s “promising conditions resulted in a greater concentration of women theatre manager than in any previous period in American history.” See Jane Kathleen Curry, *Nineteenth-Century American Women Theatre Managers* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 36.
plays such as Othello, Richard III, The Rent Day, The Iron Chest, and The Wife, along with farces, indicated “their intention to make their theatre a serious, respectable enterprise.”

Despite early reports that Kirby was earning “ample remuneration for her efforts as manager,” once the Pacific Theatre opened in Sacramento in April, the Tehama was unable to compete and closed on May 27th. In July, in attempt to strengthen their company, Atwater traveled east to search for more actors, costumes, and scripts. In the meantime, Kirby acted through August in a company led by Charles Thorne, another newly arrived easterner, at Sacramento’s Tehama.

During the summer, Kirby received news that Atwater would not return from the East. Still determined to assemble and manage her own troupe, she left Sacramento for San Francisco in order to try to recruit actors for a new company; Thorne assumed management at the Pacific. Not finding enough performers in San Francisco, Kirby hired numerous actors from Thorne’s rival company, including recent eastern transplant and noted tragedian, James Stark, the best-known actor thus far to travel to California. Because of the small pool of performers in California, it was not unusual for managers to try to poach performers from the few other local companies. On September 9th, Stark joined Kirby as co-manager of the Tehama, but a cholera threat cut the season short after only two months. Subsequently, Kirby and Stark moved their company to San Francisco to take over the lease at Maguire’s Jenny Lind theatre. Of Kirby and Stark’s departure from the Tehama, a Sacramento journalist wrote to San Francisco theatregoers, “Stark and his dramatic company are much missed up here, and while we cannot but be pleased with their success, must hope that you will not monopolise them.”

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388 Ibid., 36.
391 Gagey, The San Francisco Stage, 27.
392 Daily Alta California, 15 December, 1850.
companies and distribution of performers throughout the region meant that one city’s theatrical success was often at the expense of another’s. At San Francisco’s Jenny Lind, Kirby and Stark’s company played somewhat consistently, but with several temporary closures due to remodeling and to the deaths of both Kirby’s husband and company member Mrs. Hambleton.393

In February 1851, Kirby and Stark took their San Francisco company back to the interior, perhaps because their lease with Maguire expired. While preparing to open the Tehama Theatre, they played a series of engagements in Stockton.394 Attempting to manage theatrical ventures in the state’s two preeminent cities, they also announced plans for the erection of a new and larger theatre for a second company in San Francisco. However, the environmental conditions in California, along with the region’s limited and mobile population, made it difficult for managers to establish businesses in multiple cities simultaneously. In March, Kirby and Stark re-opened the Tehama, but their nearly completed playhouse in San Francisco was destroyed by a fire. After marrying in June, the actor-managers spent the summer playing in Sacramento, with occasional tours to other cities in the interior, such as Marysville and Stockton.395 Kirby and Stark closed their season at the Tehama on August 14th and the company disbanded.

By October, the couple had joined a company from Robinson’s American Theatre that was performing in Sacramento, remaining there one month before joining Junius Brutus Booth, Jr.’s company in San Francisco at the third Jenny Lind.396 An article in the *Sacramento Daily Union* covering California performers was titled “Movements of Theatricals” and indicated that actors like Kirby and Stark were constantly traveling within the region. The couple remained

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396 “Mr. and Mrs. Stark,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, 6 November, 1851; “Movements of Theatricals,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, 15 November, 1851.
with Booth for a full year—their longest stint with one company—before defecting in January 1852 to perform at San Francisco’s new Adelphi Theatre. They played there through March, but in late April acquired the lease of the American Theatre and once again organized a company. In June, James Stark went east while Sarah continued at the American. By early 1853, the couple had departed for a tour for Australia. When they returned to San Francisco one year later, the conditions in the region had shifted. With an increased number of actors and more competition, they were unable to resume their status as local favorites.

Like Kirby and Stark, Caroline Chapman found success as a California “old favorite”397 through regional touring. However, Chapman exploited different routes. Rather than anchoring her theatrical activities in San Francisco and Sacramento, she made a name for herself by extending her tours to newly established audiences in the smaller mining towns of the interior. Chapman made her California debut on February 28, 1852 with Robinson’s American Theatre company in Sacramento. Advertisements heralded the actress’s regional debut as the “First Appearance in California of Miss Caroline Chapman, of the Olympic Theatre, New York.” Chapman played the female lead in The Hunchback.398 By late March, the actress had left Sacramento to perform at Maguire’s Jenny Lind in a company that was supporting visiting star Junius Brutus Booth Sr., the most renowned star actor to visit the region. Although Chapman had already debuted in Sacramento, San Francisco newspapers still announced her appearance at the Jenny Lind as the “First night in California of Miss Caroline Chapman, Formerly of Burton’s Theatre New York.”399 Local reporters called Chapman “an actress of no little celebrity” “who

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398 Ibid.
justly enjoys a great reputation.” At the Jenny Lind, Chapman sang and performed in both tragedies and comedies, but was more warmly received in the latter. By July, one journalist declared that Caroline and her brother William “have become great favorites within our community.” She appeared in local pieces such as the farce titled A Trip to California, which served to bolster her association with the region.

On August 19th through September 1852, Maguire closed the Jenny Lind, and his entire company, including Booth, traveled to perform in Sacramento. By November, Chapman had left Maguire’s company and was appearing in the mining settlement of Columbia at the Broadway Theatre, where she remained until the end of the year. In Columbia, the actress was supported by a small troupe of local actors and was the clear headliner or star. In December 1852, she traveled to nearby Sonora, where she played the Phoenix Theatre for one month; she and her brother were billed as the “leading actors,” and were “greeted with a crowded house and the performances went off to the satisfaction of all.” She then returned for another brief stint at Maguire’s San Francisco theatre. During the next four years, Chapman alternated San Francisco engagements with tours of the interior that often took her to remote mining settlements and established her as a “great favorite” in Stockton, Marysville, and Sonora. These tours occupied her from mid-October to mid-December 1853; January-June 1854; January 1855-August 1856 (with the exception of one week at Maguire’s San Francisco Theatre in September 1855); January-May 1857; and September and October 1857.

400 “Theatrical,” Daily Alta California, 24 March, 1852; “Jenny Lind Theatre,” Daily Alta California, 1 April, 1852.
402 “Sonora Correspondence,” Daily Alta California, 18 February, 1853.
403 Marysville Daily Herald, 5 October, 1852; See also “Miss Chapman in Stockton,” 24 November, 1853.
While Kirby and Stark moved between the roles of actors and managers, and traveled frequently between San Francisco and Sacramento, Chapman’s professional flexibility depended more on her status as an actress and on extended tours of the interior. In California, she functioned as a headlining local star, as a resident stock company member, and as a traveling company member. At her 1852 debuts at the Sacramento American Theatre and at the Jenny Lind, she was new to local audiences and was therefore billed as a visiting star from New York’s Olympic Theatre. However, when she supported Junius Brutus Booth, Sr., both as a resident actress at the Jenny Lind and with the traveling company, there was no question about who was the preeminent eastern performer. And while Maguire and his associates organized that tour, in the smaller ventures to more remote mining settlements, Chapman and her brother functioned as both leading actors and troupe managers.

As Kirby, Stark, and Chapman’s careers demonstrate, California’s theatrical culture did not replicate the star-stock model that dominated in the Northeast, the South, and the Midwest. Rather, the theatre business operated as a hybrid system of resident and traveling companies. The population and theatrical scene in California shifted so frequently that few theatres housed the same company, and few companies remained unchanged, for more than a season. Although some established “stars” visited the region, not enough made the journey for fluctuating resident companies to be able to rely on their presence to consistently draw audiences. When stars did come, they either arrived with companies in tow or joined a local troupe for a tour of the interior; this was evidenced by Frank Chanfrau in Spring, 1852, James Murdoch and Catherine Sinclair in October 1853, Edwin Booth in November 1853, Mr. and Mrs. Barney Williams in 1854-55 and Julia Dean in 1856-57.\footnote{Gagey, The San Francisco Stage, Chap. 2.} Local companies would arrange to support visiting stars in San
Francisco and nearby cities such as Sacramento, Stockton, and Marysville; however, resident companies, like those organized by Kirby and Stark, would also arrange to tour both with and without visiting stars. Once stars or troupes departed from a given venue, local actors and managers had to reassemble quickly and adapt to changed circumstances.

The press presented the differences between the industry infrastructure in California and the rest of the country in contradictory ways. Some journalists applauded actors who came to California as pioneers who had abandoned both the greed and the stability that the star system offered to performers in the rest of the country. One writer described Sarah Kirby’s position this way: “The fact that she is here in California…with none of the appliances of the starring system to advance and make prominent her claims, may avail somewhat to retard their recognition.”

In November of 1851, one journalist remarked that Sacramento manager Charles Thorne’s efforts to make engagements with visiting performers “seems to foreshadow the establishment of a new system by which an exclusive and localized stock company will be hereafter superceded by reciprocal and more brilliant [visiting] attractions. It is a great relief for a theatergoing community to witness a round of characters delineated by different leading performers.” The writer described the star system as an unfamiliar phenomenon that, while possibly on the horizon, was not the standard practice for California theatres.

However, other reporters, perhaps aspirationally, presented the region’s theatre as just another iteration of the eastern star system. Echoing debates that were taking place in cities such as New York and Philadelphia, the local press frequently complained about the exorbitant salaries demanded by eastern stars in California, even though such visitors were in fact few in number. One journalist recommended to local managers, “Let the stars go hang; secure good

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405 “Theatrical,” Placer Times, 24 April, 1850.
406 Sacramento Daily Union, 6 November, 1851.
working companies, produce a succession of new and attractive pieces in a proper manner, and success is certain.” The reporter seemed unaware that such advice was incompatible with the practical conditions of California theatre culture. A reporter for the Sacramento Daily Union criticized the stars who visited California as inferior in caliber to those of the East Coast: “Many of those who come to this country [California] from the States as ‘stars’ have only been competent there to fill ‘stock actor’s’ positions respectably.” Another journalist postulated that San Francisco companies were overly dependent on stars and recommended that managers there focus on organizing cohesive and skilled resident companies, like those of Philadelphia manager William Burton and New York manager William Mitchell. The reporter ignored the fact that entrepreneurs in California simply did not have the pool of actors or stable theatergoing publics that northeastern managers could draw upon. While disputes about the star system were removed from the practical realities of the theatre business in California, engaging in such debates suggested the region’s membership in a kind of national theatre culture.

**Capitalizing on the Myth of The Absent or Ideal Woman in California: Thomas Maguire’s Jenny Lind Theatre and Catherine Hayes’s California Tour**

In addition to its physical geography and population, California theatre culture was also the product of the region’s complicated social and gendered environment. Through the summer and fall of 1849, the harbormaster of San Francisco counted 22,086 passengers arriving by sea, of which only 309 were women. According to the 1850 census, the population of the new state was over 92% male, and in many mining camps it was 97% male or higher. Due to the dearth of

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407 *Alta California*, 1 October, 1851.
408 *Sacramento Daily Union*, 4 April, 1850.
409 *Daily Alta California*, 9 January, 1850.
women in California coupled with the frenzied gold industry, the region was experienced and imagined as “a place of masculine excess and violent competition.”410 Two early chroniclers of San Francisco observed that the fact that “the vast majority of inhabitants were adult males,” “tended to give a peculiar character to the aspect of the place and habits of the people.”411 Despite numerous depictions of California as a land of promise and opportunity, and although the majority of the forty-niners were respectable and middle class, many observers envisioned the state “as a place of vulgar men, immodest women, and immoral behaviors.” 412

The conditions and perceptions of California’s commercial amusement culture were embroiled in the region’s reputation as a site of masculine excess and permissiveness. During the 1850s, theatres in San Francisco were located in the city’s commercial center near the waterfront; although this district contained the city’s major public institutions—the post office, the telegraph, the hospital—it was also home to what historian Barbara Berglund describes as a “burgeoning culture of saloons and prostitutes.”413 Indeed, many California theatres, such as the Eagle Theatre and the first Jenny Lind, were built as adjuncts to saloons. San Francisco’s “new promiscuous urban public sphere,” populated by mostly male emigrants of diverse classes and races, and filled with boarding houses, hotels, restaurants, and several theatres, seemed to epitomize the masculine world of commerce and competition, one that was deficient in domestic feminine refinement. According to Annals authors Soulé, Gihon, and Nisbet, by 1850 “The social and moral state of general society [in San Francisco] had…improved but little…Crime was increasing, and the boldness and number of the criminals became very alarming. All manner

410 Roberts, American Alchemy, 226.
412 Roberts, American Alchemy, 37.
413 Barbara Berglund, Making San Francisco American: Cultural Frontiers in the Urban West, 1846-1906 (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2007), 59.
of burglaries, robberies and thefts were of daily occurrence. So were personal assaults of an aggravated nature; while murders were repeatedly taking place.”

Berglund calls the city’s new commercial spaces “cultural frontiers ripe with possibilities for forms of social mixture, general disorder, and bad manners aberrant enough to be regularly remarked upon, sometimes vilified, and periodically celebrated.”  Although anxieties over urbanization and immigration were felt in all cities during the antebellum period, the newness of California society and the amount of wealth concentrated in the region due to gold and finance capitalism heightened concerns over social detection. As Berglund explains, “money emerged as a particularly potent marker of status, at times overshadowing the traditional classifications of people according to class, religion, political affiliation, education attainment, or nationality.” The authors of *The Annals of San Francisco* called the city a place were “the great recognized orders of society were tumbled topsy-turvy.”

In San Francisco, theatre entrepreneurs had to contend with a city that lacked clear spatial and social divisions, and six major fires between 1849 and 1851 made the city’s social geography even more precarious. While critics in New York, New Orleans, and other cities had been debating the moral standing of their cities’ theatres for decades, in San Francisco, the concentration of male emigrants and commercial activity in one small area of the city perhaps incited more ambivalence over the respectability of amusement culture. Theatre historian Mary C. Henderson’s claim about the interdependency between urban geography and theatrical culture in New York was certainly true in San Francisco as well, a place where “The city…created the

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417 Ibid., 19.

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theatre, which in turn became a part of the fabric city life.”\textsuperscript{418} However, in the early 1850s, unlike the eastern cultural centers, San Francisco’s theatres were all located within the city’s single developing commercial district; since the 1820s, New York, for example, had possessed two main entertainment districts situated around the Bowery and the Park theatres. The distance between the Park and the Bowery was not geographically significant, but culturally, it demonstrated theatre entrepreneurs’ attempts (successful to varying degrees) at market segmentation; the Bowery offered fare marketed to a working class, male audience, while the Park aiming to produce more “respectable” fare for an audience that included women and families.\textsuperscript{419}

While individual theatres in New York tried to target their offerings to attract particular audiences, early theatres in San Francisco—both short-lived venues like the Phoenix Exchange and enduring enterprises like the American—offered a mixed bill of concerts, plays, farces, and minstrel shows. Theatres were constantly shifting their offerings, and even their physical structures, in order to present heterogeneous audiences with “a complete theatrical diet.”\textsuperscript{420} The following description of the American Theatre was typical: “The American has undergone some curious transformations, viz., from a theatre to a circus, then back to a theatre, and finally to a mixture of dramatic performances and musical soirees.”\textsuperscript{421} In their efforts to accommodate a mixed audience, managers also harnessed or managed perceptions of the city as a hotbed of excess, immorality, and disorder, and embraced the city’s associations with vice and permissiveness to varying degrees. Thomas Maguire’s commercial strategy was particularly

\textsuperscript{419} Ibid., 54-65.
\textsuperscript{420} Ibid., 50.
\textsuperscript{421} \textit{Daily Alta California}, 1 March, 1853.
effective. Maguire opened his theatre in San Francisco on the second floor of the Parker House Saloon, in close proximity to a space that epitomized the masculine social world of money and excess, but he also chose to name his venue the Jenny Lind, after the ultimate symbol of True Womanhood and feminine grace; she also epitomized the manufactured image of these qualities.

In the fall of 1849, as forty-niners were rushing to California, P.T. Barnum began arranging to bring Swedish soprano Jenny Lind to America, launching an unprecedented promotional campaign that focused more on the singer’s feminine, moral virtues than on her musical skill. Barnum recognized that “very much would depend upon the manner in which she should be brought before the public.” Historian Neil Harris describes the public sentiment that Barnum created as “a tribute to an ideal,” to a paragon of True Womanhood and domestic refinement. According to Bluford Adams, “Barnum framed Lind, and his relation to her, in terms of the middle class’s ideology of gendered spheres. Under Barnum’s management, Lind debuted in New York, and then undertook a tour that included Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Richmond, Charleston, Havana, and New Orleans. She and Barnum parted ways in June of 1851, after Lind had toured the United States for almost ten months. While she remained in the country for another year, her profits were less than they had been under Barnum’s management. The ninety-five concerts that Barnum managed grossed more than $700,000, of which Lind received 176,000; Barnum took more than 500,000 before expenses. Although Barnum had his own agenda in fanning the public fervor over Lind, what he and the press dubbed “Lind-mania,” the showman accurately described the industry that developed around the singer: “Songs, quadrilles and polkas were dedicated to her, and poets sung in her praise. We had

423 Harris, *Humbug*, 121.
424 Adams, *E. Pluribus Barnum*, 43.
Jenny Lind gloves, Jenny Lind bonnets, Jenny Lind riding hats, Jenny Lind shawls, mantillas, robes, chairs, sofas, pianos—in fact, every thing was Jenny Lind."

Lind also signaled the shifting status of opera in the United States. While opera had been integrated into the American theatrical repertoire since the 1820s, during the 1840s, northeastern elites founded exclusive opera associations that organized concerts in halls and houses devoted strictly to opera and directed at those with wealth and social status. These associations emphasized European opera, and especially Italian opera, as the most musically complex and sophisticated. The erection of the Astor Place opera house in 1847 was one of many efforts to separate opera from popular theatre, a development that Katherine Preston describes as part of “the slow but almost insidious expropriation of this musical-theatrical form by the wealthy and elite of American society, and the increasing exclusion from these performances of the other social classes that traditionally had been a normal part of the American theater audience.”

While Lind performed English songs as well as Italian pieces, and while Barnum presented Lind as a figure who would appeal to a cross-class audience, he also leveraged contemporary views of opera as an increasingly elite, respectable form, with Lind’s appearances taking place at “concert halls,” rather than theatres. Many critics viewed the Lind tour as a primer for the American public in good taste, a way to “teach our public what good vocal melody really is.”

In California, Thomas Maguire was eager to take advantage of Lind’s moral reputation and commercial appeal from afar. In spite of San Francisco amusement culture’s social and geographic entanglement with gambling, prostitution, and other vice-ridden activities, newspapers identified Maguire’s new theatre as a paragon of respectability. The third Jenny Lind

427 Preston, *Opera on the Road*, 100.
was an elegant structure, seventy-five feet wide and three-stories in height, with a white sandstone front and brick sides. According to a journalist who attended opening night on October 15th, 1851, “the prevailing color is a light pink, rendered brilliantly and gracefully by gilding most tastefully applied. The style of decoration harmonizes most admirably with the architecture of the interior, which is light and airy…The proscenium boxes are richly decorated.” With the completion of the third Jenny Lind, one reporter wrote that, “San Francisco will possess not only the finest edifice in the State, but the grandest theatrical establishment on the shores of the North Pacific.” Upon the opening of the Jenny Lind, an article in the *Alta* heralded “the Drama” as “one of the helpmates of morality and virtue,” and expressed hope that “it never become in this city the assistant and incentive to vice.” Another journalist called the theatre “one of the best correctives of society, and most efficient instruments of moral reform every instituted in our city.” The appraisal suggested that Maguire’s theatre was hoped to be not simply the antithesis of San Francisco’s disorderly, iniquitous amusement culture, but its antidote.

According to newspapers, Maguire was able to attract the city’s small population of women theatregoers to the Jenny Lind, which offered a “separate entrance made for the accommodation of ladies.” On many occasions, reporters observed the large number of “ladies gracing the dress circle” and remarked upon houses “well filled with ladies.” Pieces published in northeastern cities such as Boston and Hartford described the Jenny Lind’s

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429 “Theatres,” *Daily Alta California*, 15 September, 1851.
430 “The Opening of the Jenny Lind,” *Daily Alta California*, 5 October, 1851.
431 “Theatres,” *Alta California*, 15 September, 1851.
432 “The Drama in San Francisco,” *Daily Alta California*, 1 November, 1851.
433 *Daily Alta California*, 11 December, 1851.
434 *Daily Alta California*, 7 December, 1850.
435 *Daily Alta California*, 15 October, 1851; *Boston Herald*, 18 November, 1851.
436 *Daily Alta California*, 11 July, 1851.
glamorous theatre-going “ladies arrayed…in sparkling jewels” and claimed that the new “first-class” theatre was “hailed with joy by the now arriving crowds who ‘eschew the unwashed.’” Maguire welcomed descriptions of the theatre that placed it on par with those of the Northeast, such as one by a writer for the *Boston Herald* that asserted, “In finish,” the Jenny Lind “would lose nothing by comparison with any theatre in the United States.” For some journalists, the Jenny Lind was a welcome response to the other California theatres; one article scolded the “hombres who frequent what is vulgarly called the pit of the Tehama” in Sacramento for their rowdiness and recommended that they “behave themselves a little better.” Criticizing managers who housed their theatres in saloons, another reporter contended, “a bar room, no matter how elegant or well conducted, is not a suitable place for what should be intended as an intellectual treat, which requires quietude for its enjoyment.” The Jenny Lind and other local theatres, in an act that suggested the maintenance of a respectable environment or efforts at controlling disorder, noted in their advertisements that smoking was forbidden and announced that “An efficient Police has been engaged and strict order will be enforced.”

In California, amid a predominantly masculine culture filled with dubious amusements and temptations, the purity of Jenny Lind’s image held a particular kind of power, and the press frequently commented on local residents’ “enthusiastic and extravagant worshippers of the *ideal* songstress.” Accounts of gold rush life suggest that the appearance of any respectable woman was met with obsessive interest. Humorist Alonzo Delano dramatized this in his 1857 play, in

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440 “Readings and Recitations,” *Daily Alta California*, 14 April, 1851.
441 Playbill, American Theatre, 2 June, 1853, Theatre Ephemera Collection, California Historical Society.
which a married couple, John and Mary Wilson show up at the “Stringtown” mines looking for work; the miners are so stunned by Mary’s presence, that they ask her to give them her petticoat so that they can present it as “proof” of “a live female woman in the mines!” The miner underscores the distinction made in California between “real women” and the prostitutes who were fixtures in the saloons that were so central to gold rush amusement culture. Lind’s persona was especially opposed to the class of women referred to euphemistically as the “fair but frail.” A lithograph entitled “Gambling in the Mines” features an image of an elegant saloon with men gathered around a card table; among the crowd of men, a single woman, undoubtedly a prostitute, sits at the table. Despite the ubiquity and appeal of prostitutes in California, the press often lamented their presence in the region, expressing “regret at the perfect freedom and unseemly manner in which abandoned females…are permitted to display themselves in our public saloons and streets.”

Maguire clearly capitalized on the same amusement-seeking population that frequented gambling saloons and brothels located in and around Portsmouth Square, but he also realized that Lind’s image served to elevate the reputation of San Francisco theatre culture and appear to distance it from saloon life. By invoking Lind’s image, Maguire may have appealed to the many men arriving in California who felt conflicted about the departure from their respectable eastern middle-class lives. Perhaps Maguire took a cue from one of Barnum’s broadsides, which argued that, after witnessing a performance by Lind, “a man could hardly commit a disreputable action

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445 Lithograph, “Gambling in the Mines,” Kemble Special Collections, Box 1, Folder 20, California Historical Society.
446 *Daily Alta California*, 11 September, 1850.
and we have no doubt that many an erring man might be reclaimed,” after hearing Lind’s voice. According to the advertisement, it would remind him of “his childhood home, his mother’s love, his sister’s kiss, and the sinless pleasure of his early days.”

Lind’s image may have also appealed to the women who chose to accompany their husbands on the journey to California, or to women at home in the East reading letters about their husbands’ or sons’ visit to the Jenny Lind Theatre. As Harris explains, “Heroine and male ideal that she was, Jenny posed no threat to the security of hearth and home.”

In other words, Lind’s public image and performance was sexless, which was what society at large though it wanted of women.

The success of Maguire’s theatre was not the only evidence of Lind’s appeal in gold rush-era California. Through newspapers, miners could stay attuned to Lind’s growing fame. On December 1, 1850, Massachusetts native and forty-niner Alfred Doten wrote in his diary, “We got no letters but found papers of the 5th of October, and found much news, the arrival of Jenny Lind &c and the great Jenny Lind excitement at home.”

Josiah Flagg, a gold miner from Philadelphia, wrote that local papers were filled with stories about Jenny Lind and that her portrait decorated the wall of his cabin. Californians could purchase copies of Lind’s image at local daguerreotype studios, such as the one in San Francisco managed by photographer R.H. Vance, located on the corner of Kearny and Commercial streets, just blocks from the city’s theatres.

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447 Qtd. in Harris, *Humbug*, 138.
448 Ibid., 139.
449 *The Journals of Alfred Doten*, 1:79.
image of Maguire’s Jenny Lind Theatre.\textsuperscript{452} In 1850, San Francisco residents could purchase Jenny Lind bedsteads, and by 1853, they could acquire Jenny Lind linen shirts at Woolf’s Shirt Warehouse and buy bread at the Jenny Lind Bakery.\textsuperscript{453}

A broadside from the early 1850s presents Lind as representative of gold rush entertainment culture. The illustration depicts a series of episodes of a miner’s life in California, including a corresponding agent with letters, a company of prospecting miners, and a director of a mining company. One scene features a comic illustration of a mouse-like woman on stage; a sign behind her reads “Admirers of Music,” and an all male audience applauds feverishly in the balcony and in the pit below. The caption reads, “Jenny Lind can be heard every evening for only two vials [of gold] a glass!!”\textsuperscript{454} The humor of the image might stem from the fact that going to a Jenny Lind concert was not a scene from a miner’s life at all. The singer never actually visited the region and only went as far west as New Orleans. Perhaps the image suggests that miners were so desperate for a visit from Lind—or from any respectable woman—that they would go so far as to accept a mouse if it claimed to be the singer. Or, the image may knowingly acknowledge that the fervor over Lind was not due to a real person, but to a fantasy amusingly embodied by this anthropomorphized creature.

Although Barnum’s contract with Lind did not include California on her itinerary, the local press maintained hope that Lind would extend her tour further west. As Lind was traveling the East Coast, and as Maguire was preparing to open the first Jenny Lind theatre, California journalists began reporting a campaign to lure Lind to the state. “The Franciscans are making an

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{452} Kemble Special Collections, California Lettersheet Collection, Box 1, Folder 29, California Historical Society.
\textsuperscript{454} Kemble Special Collections, Box 1, Folder 10, California Historical Society.
\end{footnotesize}
effort to win Jenny Lind to California,” a writer for the California Gazette wrote. “It is proposed to raise by subscription $300,000 as a guarantee that ten Concerts shall realize that sum. Several enterprising gentlemen have subscribed $5,000 each, towards the sum required. It is thought that then Concerts will yield from $400,000 to $500,000, and thus relieve the guarantors from all risk.” Ultimately, the writer thought that risk outweighed the potential profits. “Much as we should like to hear the fair vocalist, we fear that our State is too young to sustain so gigantic a luxury. The $500,000 which Barnum would carry away, we can but poorly spare just now…We believe that prudence and economy is more than ever needed in this country—we feel certain that our past extravagance must be checked, if we could gain the confidence of our distant friends.”455 The writer identifies the public sensation over Lind in California as yet another instance of excessive speculation that should be tempered.

Through the summer of 1851, numerous articles across the country claimed that Barnum was offered exorbitant sums to bring Lind to California. To the offer of half a million dollars to “let her sing a few times at San Francisco,” one journalist reported the following response from Barnum: “ ‘If you would transmute your whole city into one solid diamond, and lay it at my feet as a compensation, I would not risk the health and comfort of the Nightingale by undertaking the tedious and perilous journey.’”456 Others presented a different story, claiming that, in response to the “great efforts” “being made to induce Jenny Lind to visit California,” “Mr. Barnum has intimated that the object may be affected.”457 Another identified the campaign to induce Lind to perform in California as one aspect of the improvement of the state’s moral character. “The large

455 “Jenny Lind in California,” California Gazette, 12 April, 1850.
456 The Times, Hartford CT, 28 December, 1850.
457 Cleveland Plain Dealer, 17 May, 1851; Newark Daily Advertiser, 17 May, 1851; Daily Union, Washington DC, 18 May, 1851; Boston Herald, 19 May, 1851; The Sun, Baltimore, 19 May, 1851; Charleston Courier, 21 May, 1851; Newport Mercury, Newport RI, 24 May, 1851.
emigration this spring of respectable families and females to our shores, have added greatly to the moral and social improvements of society and state. Gambling is fast falling into disrepute all over the state...Efforts are being made to get Jenny Lind to San Francisco, and letters received from Barnum encourage the idea.”

In his memoirs, Barnum does not mention negotiations with managers in California, and I have not found any letters to or from Barnum addressing the topic. One journalist openly expressed the view that announcements about Lind visiting California were nothing but “an extremely pleasant hoax,” and could not “discover in the movements, well-defined plans, wishes, or intentions of the cantatrice, anything that does now, or ever did, form a resemblance to the project named, and which we had long ago thought was an exploded humbug.” Regardless of whether or not Barnum or Lind actually entertained the idea of a visit to California, perhaps the California press realized that speculating about a possible appearance by Lind might help to legitimize the region’s entertainment culture and confirm its status as a viable destination for preeminent stars in national touring circuits. Such perceptions might improve California’s theatre industry—even if its theatrical infrastructure was completely incompatible with the star system.

There are many reasons why Barnum and Lind may have chosen not to include California in their tour. Perhaps Barnum simply realized that he could make significant profits without having to pay for the expensive journey west (he was responsible for all of Lind’s travel expenses). In addition, perhaps he did not find it worthwhile to put effort into cultivating new relationships with entrepreneurs in California when he already had strong ties with managers in Boston, Philadelphia, New Orleans, St. Louis, and other cities who would welcome engagements with the singer. Barnum may have also had reservations about the impact of a visit to California

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458 *California Courier*, 15 April, 1851.
on Lind’s image. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in 1850 that, “Jenny Lind need not go to California. California comes to her,” suggesting that Lind already possessed the purity, naturalness, and innocence associated with a vision of the “untouched” American West. However, while these qualities may have been associated with California’s natural beauty, they did not apply to the region’s entertainment culture. Perhaps Barnum felt that satisfying the region’s seemingly women-starved male audiences with a long-awaited glimpse of Lind was not conducive to the singer’s respectable persona. In the spring of 1851, when Barnum arranged an engagement for Lind at Philadelphia’s National Theatre, the venue sparked concern among Lind’s advisors because, in the past, “it had been used for equestrian and theatrical entertainments.” According to Barnum, although the theatre had been “cleansed and fitted up” for opera, Lind’s counselors would not permit Jenny to sing in what they deemed “an improper place,” and moved the concert to a smaller hall.

If Lind’s advisors were concerned that performing in a theatre that housed mixed entertainments, rather than a concert hall, was indecent, they most certainly would have rejected a proposal to have her sing in theatres in San Francisco, which offered popular entertainments in addition to “legitimate” plays, much less in canvas tented playhouses in the mining camps that were attached to gambling saloons. Even the soprano’s namesake theatre, the Jenny Lind, which often presented equestrian and minstrel acts and was located next to the infamous El Dorado gambling house, would not have met her team’s standards of propriety. Like the debates over burlesque during the 1860s, public concern over decency was often out of proportion with actual performance practices. The entertainments presented in makeshift theatres in the mining camps

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were the same mixed bills performed at legitimate theatres in San Francisco, but, because of their setting and predominately male audiences, critics and the public often viewed them as dubious. At the same time, theatres in mining settlements were different environments than theatres in urban centers, and male spectators may have acted differently toward female performers than they would in a more mixed gender playhouse in San Francisco or Sacramento.

While Lind did not visit California, her idealized image and the press generated by the possibility of a visit to the state was perhaps more useful to the region’s theatre industry than an actual visit by the singer. A year after parting ways with the Swedish soprano, Barnum recognized that there were opportunities to be had in California, not with Lind, but with another soprano vocalist, Irish performer Catherine Hayes. After studying singing in Dublin, Hayes moved to Paris, where she studied with Manual Garcia, who had also trained Lind. During the 1840s, Hayes was engaged as prima donna with Milan’s La Scala theatre, and with the Royal Italian Opera at Covent Garden; she became popular with the London public and in 1849 Queen Victoria invited her to perform at Buckingham Palace. Following the example of Jenny Lind, Hayes undertook an American tour and debuted in New York in the fall of 1851 during the height of Lind-mania. Hayes’s engagements in a variety of eastern cities, including Boston and Philadelphia, were conducted through her agents, Henry Stanford and George Wells.  

Upon Hayes’s arrival in America, newspapers immediately began comparing the less experienced singer to Lind, and listings of Hayes’s east coast performances always followed those of the Swedish soprano. Of her performances in Boston, one critic remarked upon “the evidence desire and purpose to get up another Jenny Lind excitement.”

On January 19th, 1852,

463 Sacramento Daily Union, 5 December, 1851.
the *Alta California* noted that, “Jenny Lind has been singing in Philadelphia to crowded houses,” while “Miss Catherine Hayes has been singing in Baltimore with tolerable success.”464 Newspaper articles rarely described the Irish singer, dubbed the “Swan of Erin,” without mentioning Lind. One journalist noted that although Hayes’s concerts in New York were “well attended, there has been nothing like the excitement, the jam, and the rush there was to hear the Swedish Nightingale” and that Hayes simply “did not awaken the irrepressible enthusiasm which Jenny Lind did.”465 Another reporter claimed that Lind was in fact interested in witnessing the “debut of her fair rival, Miss Catherine Hayes, of whose unequivocal triumph the lady [Lind], who has had such decisive proofs of the good taste and enthusiasm of American audiences, can entertain no doubt whatever.”466 Although Hayes possessed “much artistic finish, quiet elegance and sweetness,” as a singer, many critics felt she lacked the “fire, brilliancy and power” of the more established Lind.467 One reporter observed that Hayes’s voice was “similar, in many respects to Jenny Lind’s,” and even that it was “rather sweet, and even more exquisitely managed in trilling.” But ultimately, the writer had to admit that Hayes’s voice “lacks the depth and fullness and power, with which Jenny was wont to reach the inmost soul of her hearers.”468

While Hayes was performing with moderate success in east coast cities, Barnum arranged with her agents for a California tour of sixty concerts in the fall of 1852. Barnum remained in New York, sending his employee William Avery Bushnell—who had also helped direct the Lind tour—with Hayes.469 Even though Barnum presented the Hayes tour as “what may be termed

465 *Sacramento Daily Union*, 5 December, 1851.
466 “Jenny Lind and Beletti,” *Daily Alta California*, 10 September, 1851.
467 *Sacramento Daily Union*, 5 December, 1851.
468 “From the Atlantic Papers,” *Daily Alta California*, 6 November, 1852.
469 In 1857, when back in England, Hayes married Bushnell; See Walsh, *Catherine Hayes*, 48.
[one of] my ‘side shows,’ or temporary enterprises,“470 as opposed to his main responsibilities at New York’s American Museum, he clearly thought it worthwhile to stake a claim in California’s new entertainment market. With Hayes, Barnum could capitalize on Jenny Lind’s popularity without having to contend with her for local audiences. And although the terms of Lind and Barnum’s split in the summer of 1851 are unclear, Barnum may have resented her departure from his management and deliberately sought to support one of her up-and-coming rivals.

By October of 1852, newspapers across the country began printing notices of Barnum’s new engagement with Hayes, with a plan for her to sail for California with her mother and Bushnell in November. Many journalists frowned upon single women bound for California; accompanied by her mother, the unmarried Hayes would have avoided such scrutiny.471 After the announcement, California newspapers took a different approach to the Lind-Hayes rivalry than the east coast press that had deemed Lind the undeniably superior singer and celebrity. On November 13th, the Daily Alta California offered its local readers a lengthy introduction to the singer who would soon be in their presence. The reporter certainly made comparisons between Hayes and Lind, but rather than cast the “Swan of Erin” as no match for the Swedish Nightingale, he claimed that Hayes’ success “coming as she did on the heels of the great rival Jenny Lind,” attested to the Irish vocalist’s “merits as a vocalist.” He went on to describe the parallels in the two singers’ biographies: both were about the same age, were natives of northern Europe, had undergone similar kinds of training, and had performed in the major theatres of Europe before coming to America. Moreover, both were committed to using their success to support charitable causes, the ultimate expression of True Womanhood. The writer

470 Barnum, The Life of P.T. Barnum, 344.
471 On single women travelers, see Patricia Cline Cohen, “Women at Large: Travel in Antebellum America.” History Today 44.12 (1994): 44-50; Richter, Home on the Rails; Levy, They Saw the Elephant, 47.
acknowledged different vocal styles, but described them in non-judgmental terms, arguing that each singer possessed strengths that the other lacked. The style “of Jenny Lind startles and astounds her listeners, while it has been pronounced cold and deficient in the soul. Catherine Hayes is more pathetic, ravishing and delighting, captivating and subduing the passions and feelings.” Ultimately, the writer placed Hayes firmly on par with Lind. “The furore created by her appearance was but a repetition of the celebrated Lind mania with so entranced all Europe.” According to the reporter, theatregoers in California were anxiously awaiting “the gratification of listening to the matchless notes of the fair cantatrice—the Swan of Erin.”

Indeed, in California, under Barnum’s management from afar and freed from some of the burdensome comparisons to Lind, Hayes was able to achieve greater success than she had on the East Coast. Once she debuted in San Francisco in late November at the American Theatre, newspapers observed that she had “been received with much enthusiasm” and had drawn “immensely crowded house[s]” with “a large attendance of ladies.” One journalist called her first few concerts in San Francisco a “triumph for the distinguished artist.” In fact, while Hayes was on the losing end of a perceived contest with Lind back east, in California, she was often viewed as the respectable, superior rival to other vocalists. In December of 1852, while Hayes was performing at the American Theatre, American vocalist Eliza Biscaccianti was performing in the same city to some harsh reviews. Just as reporters in the East had presented Lind as morally above acknowledging a rivalry with Hayes, critics in San Francisco characterized Hayes as unfazed by competition with Biscaccianti. Of Biscaccianti’s critics, a journalist for the Alta wrote, “It is only to be regretted that Miss Hayes should be placed in the

472 “Miss Catherine Hayes,” Daily Alta California, 14 November, 1852, my emphasis.
473 Daily Alta California, 3 December, 1852.
474 “Musical Theatrical,” Daily Alta California, 13 December, 1852.
475 Ibid.
unfortunate light in which these injudicious efforts to detract from the fame of another for her benefit may, perhaps, present her.”  

During the singers’ overlapping tours to California and, later to Lima, Peru, Biscaccianti was reportedly infuriated that Hayes was singing the same songs from *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Don Pasquale*, and tried to persuade Hayes to refrain from those pieces (she apparently refused). And while Hayes’s east coast appearances were always listed in newspapers second to those of Lind, in California, Hayes’s appearances were usually listed above Biscaccianti’s.

California, where, according to the character of John Wilson in *Live Woman in the Mines*, “women do business on their own account, independent of their husbands,” may have been too unrefined for Jenny Lind. However, the less-famous and exalted Hayes—familiarly called “Kate” by her public—could use the region’s ambivalent attitudes toward respectable entertainment to her advantage. Hayes was more well-known for her signature Irish ballads, but she was also, like Lind, well-versed in pieces from the Italian opera repertory. Although Hayes performed operatic concerts, rather than complete operas, with her arrival, the California press could make a claim to elite entertainment. One journalist announced Hayes’s presence in San Francisco as “a new era in the history of our city, and calculated to cherish and foster a taste for pleasures which many of us enjoyed in our eastern homes, but of which we have been deprived.

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480 One reporter referred to her as “Kate Hayes, as she is familiarly called (somewhat too familiarly, for the people, we should say!)”: “A Season of Music,” *Daily Alta California*, 13 November, 1852.
of here, till recently." A writer for the *Sacramento Daily Union* claimed that the singer’s presence would serve to elevate the region’s entertainment culture: “The advent of Miss Hayes among us will be the means of reinstating and reorganizing the musical taste of our people.” Another declared that, because “the renowned Catherine Hayes is fast speeding to our shores,” “not alone the New Yorkers are to be benefitted by this winter flood of music.” While Hayes could serve as the harbinger of taste and respectability in California, she was also willing to adapt to the theatrical conditions in the region. One journalist explained that audiences in California were fully capable of “enjoying and appreciating luxury” theatrical fare, like opera, but that the industry was subject to certain local, practical limitations: “Though we have no magnificent Temples of the arts, nor halls of science, no elegant opera houses, nor those delightful accompaniments which fashion and refinement delight to weave into the golden hours of winter evening enjoyment in the older States,…we have the promise of comfortable and substantial ‘quarters’ to be devoted to the entertainment of the lovers of song; and, best of all, we have assurance that they will be filled.”

Although Hayes’s performances were presented as “concerts” with tickets available by subscription, her appearances were not what northeastern operagoers imagined as elite entertainment. During the fall of 1852 in San Francisco, which did not then possess any opera-specific houses, Hayes shared the American Theatre and San Francisco Hall with dramatic companies as well as popular entertainments. Advertisements for the latter unapologetically announced that her concerts would be accompanied by “constant novelty and additional

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481 “Miss Catherine Hayes,” *Daily Alta California*, 13 November, 1852.
482 “San Francisco Correspondence,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, 17 November, 1852.
support[ing]” acts.\textsuperscript{484} When she played in Sacramento in February, her concerts were held at the saloon of the Orleans Hotel, where “her fine voice will sound to much great advantage,”\textsuperscript{485} rather than at a concert hall. And performances in Marysville, Benicia, and Stockton were likely held in saloons or canvas tented structures.\textsuperscript{486} While some reporters described the audiences who went to see Hayes as composed of “the elite of both sexes,” others characterized the theatregoers who supported the vocalist as a “miscellaneous audience.”\textsuperscript{487} And whereas Barnum purposefully kept Lind at a distance from her public and the Lind-mania that surrounded her, offering his reputation for commercial enterprise as a contrast to the singer’s virtuousness,\textsuperscript{488} Hayes seemed comfortable with public attention. On February 11\textsuperscript{th} 1853, Hayes’s appearance in Sacramento corresponded with the region’s commercial spirit, while also validating the city’s level of sophistication. “The ‘Swan of Erin’ took a promenade in company with her mother through the streets of the city on Friday, and stopped in at such places of business or curiosity called her. Arriving at a magnificent jewelry store…they were charmed, as everybody is, at the gorgeous array which flashed upon their astonished vision. Yielding to the pleasurable emotions excited by so grand a display, Miss Hayes exclaimed that the scene ‘surpassed anything of the kind she had witnessed since leaving Paris!’ Here is a compliment not only for the proprietors of the establishment in question, but also for the business tact and enterprise of California at large.”\textsuperscript{489}

To Hayes’s benefit, Barnum was able to successfully replicate some of the promotional devices that he used with the Lind tour. To the California public, these endeavors were novel,

\textsuperscript{484} “Miss Hayes’ Concerts,” \textit{Daily Alta California}, 24 February, 1853.
\textsuperscript{486} “Miss Hayes at Marysville,” \textit{Sacramento Daily Union}, 10 February, 1853; “Our Benicia Correspondence,” \textit{Sacramento Daily Union}, 4 April, 1853.
\textsuperscript{488} Adams, \textit{E Pluribus Barnum}, 44.
\textsuperscript{489} “Complimentary,” \textit{Sacramento Daily Union}, 11 February, 1853.
unprecedented events. He arranged for tickets to the first few of her concerts in late November and early December to be sold at auction. These events, managed by professional auction companies, in this case Theo Payne and Company, garnered much publicity and advertised a performer’s drawing power. At the auction, the first person selected was offered “a single ticket with the buyer’s choice to any seat in the house—a much better arrangement than has yet been offered.” On December 4th, the Alta noted that at the ticket auction for Hayes’s third concert, “a large crowd had collected, and the excitement was great.” “The first ticket, after much competition,” was sold to a butcher and foreman of a fire engine company, “for the enormous sum of One Thousand One Hundred and Twenty-Five Dollars!” Although this was an inarguably large sum for a ticket, such figures did not compare to the auctions held for tickets to see Jenny Lind. After the first Hayes ticket was auctioned off, “the remainder of choice seats were sold at a premium of from five to twenty dollars.” Another auction took place for tickets to her concerts in Sacramento, an event depicted with pride by the city’s local reporters. When bids for the first ticket reached one thousand dollars, “A refreshing smile lit up every countenance—and none more so than the worthy auctioneer, who felt a due portion of pride for the reputation of the city, which he now considered to be in the field of competition with San Francisco.” When the ticket ultimately sold for twelve hundred dollars, “One simultaneous yell arose, for the Bay City was beaten!”

Like Lind and under Barnum’s advisement, Hayes also gave several benefit concerts to support orphanages, events that served to heighten her benevolent and respectable image; letters touting the singer’s generosity, “so characteristic of her country,” appeared frequently in the

490 “Auction Sale Tickets,” Daily Alta California, 3 December, 1852.
491 “The Highest Bid in California!,” Sacramento Daily Union, 8 February, 1853.
local papers. While Hayes’s tour produced nowhere near the national fervor of Lind-mania, the Irish singer garnered enough attention in California to have her portrait advertised along with those of Lind, Commodore Perry, and Lola Montez, at R.H. Vance’s Premium Daguerreotype Gallery near Portsmouth Square. And, in addition to the “Jenny Lind” shirt, local shirtmaker Woolf’s Shirt’s Warehouse offered a linen “Kate Hayes” shirt.

When Hayes departed California in late 1854, after a brief engagement in South America, she was estimated to have taken with her from the two-year tour a total of quarter of a million dollars. During a period when many performers could not sustain consistent careers in California, Hayes was consistently able to fill venues in San Francisco and the interior for a year and a half. Hayes was able to earn more money in California than she did in east coast cities, as well as to emerge from the shadow of Jenny Lind. However, the newspaper coverage of her performances suggests that her success was due to her appealing stage presence, her emotional expression, and her selection of songs, rather than to her exceptional vocal ability. Reporters focused on the pleasure induced by Hayes’s performances, rather than on her technical skill. Writing about a performance of songs from the opera La Sonnambula at the San Francisco Hall, a critic for the Alta found certain pieces “very well done,” but others “entirely beyond Miss Hayes’ power in every respect. Her voice is not equal to the demands of the score.” Writing about Hayes’s performances of songs from Norma, one reporter noted the singer’s limitations; he “confess[ed] we have our doubts of Miss Hayes’ ability to render some of these pieces with that

492 Daily Alta California, 22 January, 1853 and 23 January, 1853.
493 Daily Placer Times and Transcript, 8 February, 1853.
494 San Francisco Evening Journal, 11 October, 1853.
495 Levy, They Saw the Elephant, 124.
496 “Musical-Theatrical,” Daily Alta California, 3 February, 1853.
credit which belongs to most of her other performances in operatic music.” And seeing Lind perform in San Francisco in December 1852, Jenny Megquier, who had accompanied her husband to California and opened a boarding house, wrote, “had a nice time, although she cannot compare with Jenny.” It is not surprising that Hayes struggled with *La Sonnambula* and *Norma*, two famously difficult operas. Even though the Irish vocalist performed opera concerts, singing a selection of individual pieces rather than the complete work, performing songs from both operas back to back was genuinely challenging. Regardless of Hayes’s vocal abilities, audiences in California embraced her, perhaps for the sheer novelty of witnessing operatic performances by a European singer with a respectable biography. The public seemed, for the most part, willing to dismiss Hayes’s shortcomings; one journalist summed up the singer’s reception this way: “We have an indulgent public who on this occasion will be doubly indulgent for the sake of novelty introduced.” The California tour not only served to advance Hayes’s career, but also advanced perceptions of California’s cultural progress by helping to introduce opera to California.

Hayes is just one example of an actress who was able to capitalize on ambivalent attitudes toward the ideal, pure woman in California (or her absence) and on the discourse of respectability. During the early to mid 1850s and in addition to previously mentioned “local favorites” like Caroline Chapman and Sarah Kirby Stark, actresses such as Lola Montez, Catherine Sinclair, Laura Keene, and Matilda Heron found success in the region. Montez’s spider dance attracted audiences night after night, but critics and theatregoers also criticized the performer’s unladylike behavior and used Montez as a kind of foil for commentary about more

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499 Ibid.
respectable local actresses like Caroline Chapman. When Chapman lampooned Lola in a satirical play about the actress, some felt that it was beneath Chapman to impersonate such a dubious figure.\textsuperscript{500} Catherine Sinclair traveled to California in 1853, fresh off the sensational divorce from Edwin Forrest, seeking to support herself and reinvigorate her public image by taking to the stage and to a new state.\textsuperscript{501} While the eastern press depicted Catherine as an actress of passable abilities, in California, journalists likened her triumph and her tenacity to the progress of the state itself.\textsuperscript{502} And, in 1854, after limited theatre experience in London and New York, Laura Keene established herself as an actress and manager in California. Experience in the West could translate to the East, and in 1855 Keene moved back to New York to open Laura Keene’s Varieties and, later Laura Keene’s Theatre, thus becoming the most powerful female manager in the country’s theatrical center.\textsuperscript{503}

The arrival of women performers in the region also gave the California public and the press opportunities to engage in debates about standards of taste and audience behavior that were taking place throughout the country. According to Barbara Berglund, debates over moral reform in the West linked the distant West to the East in the project of nation-making through cultural ordering, described as “a reciprocal relationship that together articulated hegemonic categories of

\textsuperscript{500} Levy, \textit{They Saw the Elephant}, 122-130.
\textsuperscript{501} I have been unable to find evidence that confirms whether or not Sinclair traveled with an agent, manager, or handmaid, but, as a respectable woman who was well connected in New York, it is likely that she did not travel alone. Before making her stage debut in New York in February, 1852, Sinclair was coached for several weeks by actor George Vandenhoff; perhaps he helped facilitate her western tour. See Curry, \textit{Nineteenth-Century American Women Theatre Managers}, 42.
American identity and defined the terms of successful conquest, assimilation, or acculturation.

In California, women performers could engage in a relationship with the local press and culture that was mutually beneficial, enabling the region’s public to participate in national discourses about respectability and to possess a modicum of feminine refinement, while continuing to support local audiences and theatrical conditions that challenged those very ideals.

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California’s theatre culture developed to accommodate the material, geographic conditions in 1849 and the early 1850s—a scattered potential theatergoing population, an unstable set of venues vulnerable to fire and flood, and a small pool of performers, especially actresses. However, managers and performers were able to find success by harnessing, rather than by resisting, these circumstances. They created touring circuits that were compatible with performers and audiences that moved between the interior and San Francisco, and between mining settlements and regional supply towns; performers like Sarah Kirby and Caroline Chapman constantly relocated according to where they could find audiences and theatre buildings. The lack of stable resident companies, as well as an insufficient number of visiting stars, led theatrical entrepreneurs to develop a hybrid model of traveling companies and resident companies; performers who achieved enduring success had to be flexible and to move within the region depending on where they could find work. A small pool of female performers coupled with pay scales that were higher than in the Northeast presented specific opportunities for actresses and female managers, who could capitalize off both the dearth of competition and the obsessive interest in respectable, pure women in public.

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Theatre culture in California was implicated in struggles over the region’s identity as a whole. Through discussions about the theatre, entrepreneurs and the press self-consciously negotiated the region’s relationship both to mythic perceptions of the West and to eastern culture. As a journalist for the *Alta* wrote in 1851, “This is a new country, but it has not been settled by frontiersmen, like most new states. Our people have heard Kean and Macready, Booth and Miss Cushman…They could not and would not patronize and endure more than one infliction of a second or third rate imitation of what some artists have made popular in the east.”\(^{505}\) Performers and managers employed the eastern repertoire and acting styles, and engaged in emulative debates about respectability to their advantage; but they also responded to local conditions and attitudes, and tried to use the theatre strategically as a way to promote and measure the region’s progress. In 1849, the Eagle Theatre company adapted to less-than-ideal conditions—to a limited number of actors and scripts and a tenuous, rudimentary theatre building—at the same time that the press presented the endeavor as legitimate, respectable, and a symbol of cultural progress. Just two years later, critics and theatre professionals dismissed the Eagle as primitive and unrefined, using it as a benchmark to measure California’s cultural advancement and current level of sophistication and development. Managers and performers also resisted or embraced the lived conditions and imagined perceptions of the region as immoral and rebellious to varying degrees. Thomas Maguire capitalized on images of a masculine, vice-ridden amusement culture in San Francisco as an antithesis to his Jenny Lind Theatre, while also benefiting from the patrons of saloons and brothels in the city’s commercial center. In California, Catherine Hayes was transformed from a second-rate Jenny Lind into a local favorite, giving

\(^{505}\) *Daily Alta California*, 14 April, 1851.
California audiences an image of sentimentality and femininity that they longed for while also adapting to theatrical conventions that teetered ambivalently on the edge of respectability.

On the one hand, critics in California presented its theatre as a participant in the star system and thus a member of the national theatre community; on the other hand, performers and managers developed a hybrid system of touring and resident companies to remedy a lack of visiting stars or reliable local companies in the region. Theatre managers like Sarah Kirby, J.B. Atwater, and Doc Robinson tried to fill their houses not by blindly following eastern examples, but by assessing the local conditions and scraping together actors, scripts, and audiences in any way they could. In practice, California’s theatre culture was not simply “imported from the East,” as Edmond Gagey asserts in his standard history of the region’s theatre; San Francisco was not “a theatrical suburb of New York, London, and sometimes Paris.”506 This chapter aims to resist the oversimplification made by a number of historians that in the West, “original achievements disappeared in the flood of made-to-order imitations of eastern and European models.”507 California’s professional theatre culture may have been developed by northeastern entrepreneurs, but its character was premised on adaptation and flexibility rather than merely on imitation.

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506 Gagey, The San Francisco Stage, 3.
Conclusion

In this conclusion, rather than simply repeat an outline of the project, I look ahead at the
time period following this dissertation, at the changes in touring that occurred during and after
the Civil War. I then circle back to the antebellum period and point out the beginning of certain
trends as they appear in the present study. Historians have long recognized the second half of the
nineteenth century as a period of sweeping transformation and upheaval. Major changes included
the shift from a localized agrarian economy to a highly urbanized and industrial one, a revolution
in transportation and communication, rapid imperial expansion, and the dissolution of Victorian
gender roles. John Frick identifies the onset of the Civil War as the beginning of “a time of
radical restructuring in America—an inchoate era marked by a complex, often painful,
transformation from a Victorian world to what we have come to regard as the modern one.”
Alan Trachtenberg characterizes the second half of the nineteenth century as a period of
incorporation; corporate capitalism had existed before the Civil War, but after 1865 it expanded
in scale and geographic reach. Roughly three hundred large corporations gained control of forty
percent of all manufacturing, and the proliferation of railroads, namely the completion of the
transcontinental railroad in 1869, facilitated easier distribution of products across the country and
created a national market for goods.

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Cambridge University Press, 1999), 196. On changes during the Gilded Age, also see Rebecca
Press, 2006) and Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of
509 Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age.*
While most historians focus on the developments in industry and finance during the period known as the “Gilded Age,” Trachtenberg argues that “the deepest changes in these decades of swift and thorough industrialization lay at the level of culture,” meaning “the way of life (values, perceptions patterns of behaviors, pictures of reality of a whole society).”

William Leach echoes this assessment, contending that, following the Civil War “American capitalism began to produce a distinct culture, unconnected to traditional family or community values…It was a secular business and market-oriented culture, with the exchange and circulation of money and goods at the foundation of its aesthetic life and its moral sensibility.”

The American theatre was integral to this process of cultural incorporation and, by the 1860s, the structure of the theatre business began to change significantly. A series of developments contributed to the increasing centralization and standardization of the industry, to what Bruce McConachie calls “theatrical consolidation, rationalization, and commodification.”

First, the repertory system that dominated in the antebellum period, in which a different play was performed each night, began to dissolve. In 1852, a company led by George C. Howard opened *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in Troy, New York. The play, which was adapted by George L. Aiken from the novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe, ran for one hundred performances. The following year, the company performed a run of more than three hundred consecutive shows at New York’s National Theatre. By the end of the 1850s, theatre managers began to realize that producing a major hit for many continuous performances—the long run—could allow them to maximize the profits from their investments. In 1866, the musical extravaganza *The Black Crook* ran for four hundred and seventy-five performances.

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512 Bruce McConachie, “American Theatre in Context,” 175.
performances and grossed $1,000,000 on an initial investment of $24,500.\(^{513}\) And George L. Fox’s pantomime show *Humpty Dumpty* opened in 1867 and ran for 483 performances.\(^{514}\)

At the same time, the structure of the star-stock system began to change. In the 1850s, touring stars, frustrated with the level of support provided by local resident companies, started to tour with their own sets of actors. In order to ensure the quality of their productions, New York-based entrepreneurs began to form entire companies to go on the road. Called “combination companies” because they consisted of a combination of performers as well as scenic design and technical elements in support of a star, these touring theatrical packages initially performed a full repertory of plays. However, by the 1860s, with the advent of the long run and its promise of greater profits, combination companies typically toured a single production.

The precise origins of the traveling combination company are unclear, but historians often credit Dion Boucicault, who produced *The Colleen Bawn* in 1860, with the establishment of the first combination company in London. In the United States, Joseph Jefferson and Charles Wyndham claim to have toured with entire companies in 1868.\(^{515}\) However, as this dissertation has demonstrated, opera companies, including those led by the Seguins and by Pyne and Harrison, as well as circus troupes like Fogg and Stickney’s, had traveled as combinations since the 1840s. And in the wake of the gold rush, entire companies, such as those managed by Sarah Kirby and Thomas Maguire, toured throughout the mining settlements in California. Still, it was not until the 1860s that the combination company, coupled with the long run, began to displace

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the star-stock model. While theatre entrepreneurs managed locally during the antebellum period, remaining present in the city in which their resident company was located, by the 1860s, leading New York theatre impresarios soon realized that it was more profitable to send a complete cast on tour than to manage a local company. The number of first-class stock companies declined from fifty in 1872 to eight in 1880, whereas the number of traveling combinations rose from five in 1872 to nearly a hundred in 1876. By the end of the century, the most famous resident companies, including Augustin Daly’s and Lester Wallack’s in New York and the Walnut Street and Chestnut Street Theatre Companies in Philadelphia, had disbanded.

According to John Frick, the success of several long-running productions revealed the inherent weaknesses of the stock-repertory arrangement. While the sets for resident company productions varied from company to company, because of the nightly change of bill, they were usually inexpensive, built to serve the needs of multiple productions, and easy to change from night to night. With long-running productions, sets no longer needed to serve multiple purposes and scenery became complex and particularized. Stock-repertory companies with modest production styles struggled to compete with more elaborately staged long runs like *The Black Crook* that featured impressive stage tableaux and effects. While the scenic design of touring long-run productions was simplified for the road, producers still needed to retain some of the effect of the original in order to generate interest in seeing the travelling product. In addition, rather than have to adapt to the specializations of a local stock company, traveling combination company managers could select the best actors they could hire from across the country, refine and perfect one single production, and employ specialists in both cast and personnel.

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516 Entire minstrel troupes had also toured since the 1840s at the same time that individual touring minstrel performers like Master Diamond rotated through resident companies.

Overall, combination companies could present more professional, polished, and Thomas
Postlewait argues, more “calculated” productions; “theatre was becoming less a process of
discovering what will appeal and more a plan for inventing the product and creating the
audience.” Combination companies also offered a solution to a challenge that had plagued
stock-repertory companies since their inception: how to continually attract audiences from the
same local pool. While permanently located companies constantly had to lure new stars or novel
acts in order to keep local spectators satisfied, touring combinations had to remain in a location
only long enough to guarantee a profit; they thus minimized their financial risk. Indeed,
according to Peter Davis, the shift from resident stock companies to combinations become
complete with the Panic of 1873; the stock company was particularly vulnerable to even the
slightest economic pressures and was unable to adapt to the economic depression.

It is no coincident that the rise of the combination company also paralleled the expansion
of the American railroads. As this project has demonstrated, during the antebellum period,
touring stars and troupes also relied heavily on the railroads. However, the proliferation of tracks
during the 1850s and 1860s transformed the possibilities of touring and created a new culture of
consumerism. In the 1840s, performers expected the railroads to be unreliable; missed
connections or uncomfortable conditions were part and parcel of the erratic nature of touring.
Indeed, I have argued that this unpredictability, although inconvenient, often served the needs of
both performers and managers. A relatively inefficient system of railroads made performers’
routes less traceable, facilitating Master Diamond’s repeated disappearances from Barnum and
Fogg and Stickney’s departure from Ludlow and Smith. However, managers could also use the

518 Postlewait, “The Hieroglyphic Stage,” 156.
519 Peter Davis, “From Stock to Combination: The Panic of 1873 and Its Effects on the American
nature of antebellum travel to their advantage; even though unreliable transportation was commonplace, Ludlow and Smith used Junius Brutus Booth’s travel difficulties against him when negotiating the star’s contracts.

However, at mid-century, travel conditions, as well as the dynamic between performers and managers, began to change. In 1850, America’s railroads were little more than a fragmented 9,000 miles of track. During the Civil War, this loosely connected set of routes transformed into an efficient network. By 1865, there were 35,000 miles of connected track and by 1880 there were 80,000 miles. With the expansion of connected track around mid-century came what Will Mackintosh calls the “commodification of travel,” in which the lived experiences of travel gradually, partially, and unevenly changed from an improvisational and tedious endeavor into a semi-reliable service to be purchased. Although access to transportation and the experience of travel was profoundly limited by a traveler’s class, race, and gender, “travelers slowly became passengers—consumers of travel rather than producers of travel—and as they began to think about travel as a commodity they invested their experiences with new expectations of affordability, reliability, and convenience.”

The growing network of railroads and the commodification of travel made it possible for managers in the 1860s and 1870s to design more cohesive circuits. While antebellum managers like Noah Ludlow, Sol Smith, Thomas Maguire, and Doc Robinson had also used transportation routes to create circuits, their systems were limited and localized. In addition, even if managers partnered with colleagues in other cities, as Ludlow and Smith did with managers in Cincinnati,

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these antebellum circuits were conceived as equal partnerships. With the rise of combination companies during the Civil War, theatre professionals began to reimagine circuits on a larger scale, with one person with enough wealth or power dictating the policy for the entire circuit. In the 1870s, several circuits developed that reflected this centralization of power: the Mishler Circuit in eastern Pennsylvania, Schwartz’s Wisconsin Theatrical Circuit, Craig’s Kansas-Missouri Circuit, and Harry Greenwall’s Lone Star Circuit. In 1886, B.F. Keith and Edward F. Albee’s vaudeville circuit brought these trends in standardization to the realm of popular entertainments.522

The development of circuits shifted the roles of theatre professionals. In the antebellum period, actor-managers actively maintained their own companies and often owned the theatres in which they performed, usually in partnership with local investors. In the 1870s and 1880s, as a result of pressure from the combination system, most theatre owners disbanded their resident companies and leased their theatres to touring combinations. Actor-managers who had once controlled their own artistic enterprises found themselves as little more than landlords. As Frick puts it, “as the touring combination gained ascendance, the organic link between the manager who produced the productions and the theatre manager, a given in the stock era, disappeared.”523 Manager-capitalists more in the style of Thomas Maguire, who had no artistic inclinations and approached the theatre as solely a profit-making endeavor, became the norm, as opposed to actor-managers in the tradition of Ludlow and Smith. The proliferation of circuits also increased the demand for a new specialized theatrical enterprise, the booking office, with agents who negotiated contracts between circuits and attractions. The booking agent served as a professional

middle-man, brokering arrangements between theatres seeking performers and attractions seeking routes. In addition to booking agencies, the publication of theatrical guides that listed venues and services along different circuits reduced the amount of direct negotiation between performers and managers that had been so crucial to antebellum theatre culture.

With the centralization of power through circuits also came geographic centralization; after the Civil War, New York became both a producing center and the source of a new market for theatre services. As Gerald Berkowitz explains, “The New York repertoire began to dominate the road, or at least be perceived as carrying a certain glamor.” With the decline of repertory booking and the advent of the long run, “the phenomenon of the Broadway hit was created, and plays bearing the glory of New York success became more attractive to regional audiences than locally-produced new works…Indeed, for many producers a New York run was merely a tryout for the far more lucrative tour, the brief prerequisite for being able to advertise a show as ‘Direct from Broadway.’” In addition, during the 1870s, theatre entrepreneurs established businesses that served the theatre industry around the city’s theatre district near Broadway and Union Square; the majority of long run productions were initially produced in New York before they toured, making the area a logical choice for the country’s theatrical service industry. Unlike the stock company, which had traditionally been attached to a particular theatre and produced its own scenery, costumes, and properties on site, the traveling combination possessed no technical staff, shop facilities, or storage. Theatre professionals in New York responded by establishing scenery and costume shops, agents’ offices, and other services needed by touring combination

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524 Although “dramatic agencies” had existed before 1870, they served as little more than clearing houses for talent, offices where managers could list their needs and where actors and actresses could post their photographs on the wall for a small fee. See ibid, 205.

companies. These businesses, along with the theatre buildings themselves and the entire center of the city, gradually moved uptown on the city’s main north-south thoroughfare; the theatre district eventually crossed 42nd Street in 1895.526

Although the theatre business saw increased standardization and centralization during the 1870s and 1880s, the traveling combination introduced its own kind of chaos, and irregular booking practices, double bookings, meetings outdoors, and oral rather than written contracts, were still common. It was not until the creation of the Theatrical Syndicate in 1896 that the industry’s consolidation of power and corporate growth reached its apex. Several entrepreneurs who managed existing theatre circuits joined together to form the Syndicate: Marc Klaw and Abraham Lincoln Erlanger, who owned theatres in the South on the route from Washington to New Orleans and held exclusive booking rights on an additional two hundred theatres; Samuel Nixon and J. Fred Zimmerman of Philadelphia, who controlled major theatres in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Ohio; Al Hayman, who owned or controlled booking for many theatres in the West, including in San Francisco; and the producer manager Charles Frohman, who controlled theatres in New York and Boston. As Postlewait explains, the organizers of the Syndicate, like the new industrial capitalists of the Gilded Age, “attempted, with varying degrees of success, to create networks of business and entertainment that integrated all aspects of the industry into an expansive, unified system of production, distribution, exhibition, and reception. The business task, as the major capitalists were demonstrating, was to gain control of all four aspects of the system.”527

526 Ibid., loc. 102.
527 Postlewait, “The Hieroglyphic Stage,” 160. According to Kim Marra, pre-Syndicate theatre impresarios Augustin Daly and David Belasco were “no less monopolistic of authority within their organizations and “adopted an imperial, conquering style in their management practices and in the architecture and décor of their theatres.” Kim Marra, Strange Duets: Impresarios and
The founders of the Syndicate sought to block out competing producers and to minimize the financial losses that resulted from uncoordinated booking of the country’s premiere theatres. Syndicate members were bound by a contract that established performing conditions, outlined the pooling and division of profits, and required that Syndicate theatres be booked in conjunction with one another. Managers who wished to book their theatres with the Syndicate were also prohibited from booking outside the Syndicate network. In the first two years of operation, the Syndicate more than doubled the theatres it controlled; as a monopoly, it paralleled such developments in the business world as the establishment of the Michigan Salt Association, the National Biscuit Company, and John D. Rockefeller’s Standard Oil Corporation. Although a handful of actors objected to the Syndicate’s artistic control and tried to boycott its theatres, because the organization controlled both theatres and performers and could threaten to withhold one from the other, they were able to compel most professionals to submit to their demands. Although the Syndicate was challenged in 1910 by the Shubert organization, which eventually overtook it, the Shubert monopoly’s practices differed little from its predecessor’s.528

In the era of combination companies, national circuits aided by the railroads, and ultimately, the Syndicate, the theatre became transformed from an array of loosely connected localized endeavors with rotating visiting attractions, to a network of nation-wide touring productions. Although spectators continued to flock to see their favorite star performer, the production itself—the New York hit show—became the nationally distributable product. The 1860s thus mark the beginning of a period that has more in common with the theatre business of today than with that of the antebellum period. Indeed, Postlewait argues that “by the end of the

Actresses in the American Theatre, 1865-1914 (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), xviii.
nineteenth century, performers had carried a shared national culture into almost every village, town, and city. This process of weaving diverse communities together by means of entertainment would culminate in the multimedia world of the present day.”

The competing, improvisational local theatre cultures and economies that shaped the dynamics of antebellum touring had given way to a national system, in which the same New York hit shows were exported to cities and towns across the country. By the mid-twentieth-century, Broadway successes had established one or more touring companies during or after their New York run, a practice that persists today. Although theatre entrepreneurs founded independent theatres outside of New York since the 1920s, and the regional theatre movement remains vital, the New York Broadway hit is still indisputably the commercial center of the national—indeed, the global—theatre economy. As David Savran explains, today

the national identity of theatrical productions is becoming more and more difficult to decide. The identity crisis is especially pronounced in the case of the one theatre form that for generations has been associated with a single New York thoroughfare that for people around the world symbolizes singing and dancing, glamor and dazzle. The form to which Broadway is categorically linked, the Broadway musical, may have circumnavigated the globe countless times, but a national and municipal identity remains embedded in its name. In the twenty-first century, however, this jet-setting genre needs to be analyzed less from an international perspective than a transnational perspective that emphasizes the interconnectedness and the cross-border fluidity of cultures and species of capital.

While the system of touring, transnational, “Broadway-Style” shows that Savran describes is far removed from the period under investigation in this study, theatre professionals since the 1840s have employed touring and circulation to negotiate different forms of capital and to bolster their brands. The paradigms of geography and mobility continue to shape the theatre

529 Postlewait, “The Hieroglyphic Stage,” 150.
business today, albeit in very different ways than they did in the antebellum period, with cities outside of New York struggling to define their independent theatre cultures and at the same time to capitalize off of touring Broadway shows or appearances by megabrand Broadway or Hollywood stars. And, as in the antebellum era, movements that occur on the supposed “margins” of the entertainment business are just as, if not more, important to a contemporary star’s celebrity than his or her artistic achievements. Press tours, in which stars promote a particular project through appearances across the country, are essential to a performer’s success. And tabloids filled with images of jet-setting stars walking through airports, of arrivals and departures, suggest that travel still operates as a sign of or attempt at prestige or glamor, of mobility as an expression of an entertainer’s economic or cultural capital.

Moreover, as I have demonstrated, certain elements of the modern, industrialized commercial theatre industry have their roots in the antebellum period, which saw the formation of entire touring troupes, the presence of real-estate tycoon manager capitalists, the development of circuits, and coordination across regional markets. While the members of the Syndicate established the first large-scale theatrical monopoly and effected unprecedented levels of centralization and incorporation, fifty years earlier, P.T. Barnum had also introduced the theatre industry to a new kind of capitalist maneuvering. Barnum’s acts of humbug and deception, such as his hoaxes involving Master Diamond and Master Juba and the images he manufactured for Jenny Lind and Catherine Hayes, anticipated the image-saturated, celebrity-obsessed mass culture of late-nineteenth century consumer culture and of today. Indeed, part of the goal of my project is to unsettle easy bifurcations between the ostensibly pre-industrial theatre business of antebellum America and the industrialized mass cultural developments of the late-nineteenth century. Part of the character of antebellum theatre culture was this tension and competition
between “illegitimate,” flexible local touring practices and more standardized fixed business procedures.

Nonetheless, before the Civil War, the theatre business was characterized more by local unpredictability than by national standardization. As I have shown, local variations and the decentralization of power enabled both lesser-known performers and renowned stars to compete with one another and with managers for cultural and economic dominance, and to use the milieu of touring as a site of negotiation for the accrual of different forms of capital. The concentration of power and money that drove the Syndicate era made it much more difficult for actors to resist the powers of management, and the new touring conventions diminished the need for actors and managers to build enduring relationships with local communities. Episodes like the Mobile theatregoers’ petition for Eliza Petrie to remain in their city or California entrepreneurs and spectators embracing Catherine Hayes as a reimagined, local Jenny Lind were of a different time. Careers that were sustained by piecemeal touring endeavors (Thomas A’Becket), by fostering ties to local residents or organizations (John Gough), or by deceptive tactics (Master Diamond), are also characteristic of a bygone era in which improvisational, informal touring and business practices could effectively elevate one’s professional position. This dissertation has attended to neglected figures, locations, and events that have been overshadowed by the corporate monopolies and centralized systems of theatrical production that followed, primarily to contribute to our understanding of antebellum American theatre culture, but also to throw these later developments—the theatre culture that we have inherited—into sharper relief.
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