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BOHLER

TO BE OR NOT TO BE

FRANK BOHLER

3-4-99

BACK IN 1961 WHEN JEANNE AND I FIRST CAME TO LYNCHBURG, WE WERE IMPRESSED BY THE GENERAL QUALITY OF LIFE IN LYNCHBURG, AND THE LASTING EFFECT IT HAD ON ITS CITIZENS. THERE WERE COLLEGES, HANDSOME RESIDENTIAL SECTIONS, GOOD SCHOOLS, AND A BUS LINE. THE PEOPLE WERE MORE THAN FRIENDLY: THEY WERE GRACIOUS, CHARMING AND HOSPITABLE. THE INDUSTRIAL MAKE-UP BETWEEN FOUNDRIES, PAPER, GE, B&W, C.B. FLEET, SHOES, PACKAGING, BANKING AND HOSPITALS, ALL SIGNALLED AN ORDERLY, PROSPEROUS CITY THAT WAS NOT ONLY TAKING CARE OF ITS NEEDS, BUT STRIVING TO IMPROVE ITS LOT IN THE SCHEME OF THINGS FOR THE FUTURE.

ON ONE OCCASION, WHILE VISITING RICHMOND, I HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK WITH THE PRESIDENT OF A. H. ROBINS. WHEN HE FOUND OUT I WAS FROM LYNCHBURG, HE TOLD ME THAT AS A YOUNG MAN HE AND HIS FRIENDS LOVED TO GO TO LYNCHBURG BECAUSE THE GIRLS WERE SO BEAUTIFUL AND THE TOWN WAS A FUN PLACE TO BE. HE RAVED ABOUT THE CITY AS IF IT WERE A RARE JEWEL. ON ANOTHER OCCASION, WHILE SPEAKING WITH THE PRESIDENT OF SHENANDOAH LIFE IN ROANOKE (NAME DROPPING), HE SAID THAT HE AND HIS FRIENDS LOVED TO GO TO LYNCHBURG FOR PARTIES AND HE ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT LYNCHBURG WAS A STEP HIGHER SOCIALLY AND MORE ARISTOCRATIC THAN ROANOKE. INTERESTING, I THOUGHT SOMEWHAT THE SAME FEELING JEANNE AND I HAVE HAD ABOUT LYNCHBURG, AND STILL FEEL, AFTER 38 YEARS OF LIVING HERE.

THIRTY-EIGHT YEARS HAVE PASSED FOR ME AND WITH IT HAS COME MANY CHANGES. WE LOST MOST OF DOWNTOWN RETAILING, ALONG WITH THEATRES, MOVIES, AND RESTAURANTS. IT WAS SAD TO SEE MANY BUILDINGS ON CHURCH, MAIN, COMMERCE AND JEFFERSON STREETS STANDING IDLE AND FORLORN. IT WAS BLAMED ON LACK OF PARKING, OLD NON-FUNCTIONAL BUILDINGS AND A SHIFT IN POPULAR DEMANDS OF THE PUBLIC FOR SHOPPING PLAZAS AND MALLS. GRADUALLY, THROUGH THE LEADERSHIP OF MANY -- PEOPLE LIKE GEORGE STEWART, BILL JAMERSON, CENTRAL FIDELITY BANK AND CRESTAR -- MAJOR CHANGES WERE MADE THAT ENCOURAGED AND INSPIRED OTHERS TO THINK AND PLAN AND BUILD FOR THE FUTURE. ONE SERIOUS QUESTION HAS TO BE ANSWERED, HOWEVER. WHERE IN YOUR MIND IS LYNCHBURG? WHEN YOU THINK OF LYNCHBURG, DO YOU THINK OF THE MALL, THE PLAZA, BOONSBORO SHOPPING CENTER, OR DO YOU THINK OF DOWNTOWN?? AS A PEOPLE, WE HAVE TO COME TO A CONCLUSION SOONER OR LATER THAT LYNCHBURG IN THE MIND'S EYE IS DOWNTOWN.

RECENTLY YOU HAVE WITNESSED MAJOR CHANGES DEVELOPING DOWNTOWN.

YOU, OF COURSE, KNOW AND APPRECIATE THE FIRST COLONY BUILDING, GE ASSURANCE INSURANCE, THE ~~NEW~~ HOLIDAY INN FACILITY, AND EARLIER, THE CENTRAL FIDELITY BUILDING. THESE WERE ALL MAJOR COMMITMENTS TO DOWNTOWN. THERE ARE MANY OTHER SMALLER -- AND NOT SO SMALL -- ONES THAT HAVE COLLECTIVELY HELPED TO IMPROVE THE DOWNTOWN AREA. LET US LOOK AT LOWER MAIN STREET - FARMER'S MARKET, THE RESURGENCE OF RESTAURANTS SUCH AS PERCIVAL'S ISLE, ANTIQUE STORES, ETC - THAT HAVE DRAMATICALLY DRESSED UP THAT END OF TOWN. THE CITY PURCHASED PERCIVAL'S ISLAND FROM THE RAILROAD AND HAS DEVELOPED PROGRAMS AND OUTINGS FROM THAT

AREA (CONCERTS, FAIRS, BATEAU RACES, ETC.). ALONG WITH THESE ACCOMPLISHMENTS, WE ARE NOW DEVELOPING "AMAZEMENT SQUARE", A CHILDREN'S ART AND LEARNING CENTER, AND ACROSS THE STREET, THE NEW RIVERVIEWS ART BUILDING (FORMERLY THE OLD C & T BUILDING) DESIGNED TO HOUSE AND DEVELOP CREATIVE ART IN THE CITY. THESE LAST TWO PROJECTS ARE ALREADY PARTIALLY FUNDED AND IN STAGES OF COMPLETION. NOT TO BE FORGOTTEN IS THE OLD COURT HOUSE AND POINT OF HONOR WHICH HAVE IMPROVED OUR QUALITY OF LIFE.

THERE IS STILL A DESIRE AND PLANNING FOR MAKING THE RIVERFRONT ATTRACTIVE AND USEFUL FOR FAMILY OUTINGS AND HIKING. A SIMILAR PROJECT WAS DONE IN COLUMBUS, GA. AND TRANSFORMED THIS OLD SOUTHERN TOWN INTO A CHARMING AND USEFUL AREA WHICH INCLUDES CONCERTS, BOAT TRIPS ON THE CHATAHOOCHEE RIVER, HIKING, BIKING, PICNICS, ETC. OCCASIONALLY IT STILL FLOODS, BUT IS DESIGNED TO SHED THE WATER. AS A RESULT OF THIS PROJECT, THE OLYMPIC WOMEN'S SOFTBALL COMPETITION WAS HELD IN COLUMBUS, AND BROUGHT THOUSANDS IN FOR THE EVENTS. IT WAS GOOD FOR THE ENTIRE CITY. HOPEFULLY, SOMETHING SIMILAR WILL TAKE PLACE ON THE JAMES !!! IT WOULD BE VERY EXCITING AND ADD MUCH TO OUR ENJOYMENT OF THE RIVERFRONT.

RECENTLY JEANNE AND I VISITED SALZBURG, AUSTRIA DURING THE MOZART MUSIC FESTIVAL MONTH (AUGUST). OF COURSE MOZART WAS BORN THERE AND SPENT HIS FORMATIVE YEARS CREATING BEAUTIFUL MUSIC. THE TOWN REMINDS ME OF LYNCHBURG. IT IS ABOUT THE SIZE OF LYNCHBURG, MAYBE SMALLER, A RIVER FLOWS THROUGH THE TOWN, IT HAS BEAUTIFUL

MOUNTAINS IN THE BACKGROUND, AND A NUMBER OF CASTLES ON THE HILLS ABOVE THE RIVER. YOU MAY REMEMBER THAT "SOUND OF MUSIC" WITH JULIE ANDREWS WAS FILMED THERE, AND THE SIGHTS SHOWN IN THE MOVIE ARE STILL THERE TO BEHOLD. WHILE ENJOYING MOZART CONCERTS, PLAYS, MARIONETTE SHOWS, WALTZES, CONCERTS, ETC., IT OCCURRED TO ME THAT LYNCHBURG HAS A VERY SIMILAR TOPOGRAPHY AND A LOVE FOR ARTS OF ALL KINDS, AND IF CAREFULLY DIRECTED, COULD HAVE ITS OWN "WEEK OF THE ARTS"....."LYNCHBURG ART & MUSIC FESTIVAL". IT COULD INCLUDE VISUAL ART, MUSIC, CLASSICAL, JAZZ, BLUES, COUNTRY, MODERN, ETC. WANT TO COME??

THE CAPSTONE FOR ALL DOWNTOWN MAY WELL BE THE ACADEMY THEATER. IT REPRESENTS BOTH AN OPPORTUNITY AND A CHALLENGE. THE OPPORTUNITY IS TO RECONSTRUCT A HISTORICALLY BEAUTIFUL BUILDING; TO DEVISE A MODERN-DAY PROGRAM THAT WILL BE BENEFICIAL TO THE CITY AND ITS CITIZENS AND THE CHALLENGE WILL BE TO RAISE THE NECESSARY CASH TO PAY FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION. AS YOU RECALL, THE BUILDING WAS CLOSED FOR 35 YEARS --- OWNED BY CHARLOTTESVILLE PEOPLE, AND ONLY WHEN THE CITY THREATENED TO RUN A ROAD THROUGH THE MIDDLE OF IT, WAS IT RAISED TO A RALLYING CALL OF ART LOVERS AND HISTORIANS TO "SAVE THE ACADEMY"!! THE YEAR WAS 1975. SINCE THAT TIME, IT HAS BEEN DESIGNATED A HISTORIC LANDMARK AND TREASURE, AND HAS HAD A VARIETY OF REGIONAL AND LOCAL PEOPLE SERVING ON ITS BOARD. SOME OF YOU IN THIS ROOM HAVE ALL PUT YOUR BEST EFFORTS INTO THE ACADEMY. WITH YOUR INDULGENCE, I WANT TO SPEND THE REMAINING TIME IN TELLING YOU A LITTLE ABOUT THE HISTORY OF THE ACADEMY AND THE PRESENT EFFORTS TO MAKE THE "CURTAIN GO UP".

WE OWE THE START OF THE ACADEMY TO A MOST ENERGETIC AND SUCCESSFUL LYNCHBURG BUSINESSMAN BY THE NAME OF RICHARD D. APPERSON (ANYONE RELATED?). MR. APPERSON WAS PRESIDENT OF THE LYNCHBURG TRACTION AND LIGHT COMPANY AND OPERATOR OF THE STREET CAR SYSTEM AND THE POWER COMPANY PROVIDING LIGHTS THROUGHOUT THE CITY. THE YEAR WAS 1905 (THE SAME YEAR OLD DOMINION BECAME INCORPORATED BY DAVID HUGH DILLARD). THE PROPERTY AT 6th & MAIN WAS CONSTRUCTED IN LESS THAN SEVEN MONTHS. THE ACADEMY ARCHITECTS WERE EDWARD D. FRYE AND AUBREY CHESTERMAN OF LYNCHBURG. THESE GENTLEMEN ALSO DESIGNED A WING AT THE STATE CAPITOL BUILDING. THE COST OF THE ORIGINAL STRUCTURE WAS \$45,000 AND IS DESCRIBED AS "A FINE EXAMPLE OF THE BEAUX ART STYLE, A DERIVATIVE OF CLASSICAL THINKING AND POPULAR IN EUROPE IN THE 18th CENTURY AFTER THE BAROQUE PERIOD". THE DESIGN TECHNIQUE IS THE SAME AS USED IN THE GREAT EUROPEAN THEATERS OF THE DAY, CHARACTERIZED BY A HIGHLY DECORATED FLORID STYLE OF ORNAMENTATION WITH CURVED LINES AND OFTEN WITH PIERCED SHELLWORK. THE ACADEMY IS A A THREE-STORY STRUCTURE AND BASIC MATERIALS ARE BRICK AND STUCCO. "THE INTERIOR IS DECORATED IN THE ROCOCO STYLE, AND IN SURPRISINGLY GOOD CONDITION. THE FINE QUALITY FRESCO WORK SURVIVES. THE COLOR SCHEME IS GREEN, GOLD AND IVORY. THERE ARE EXAMPLES OF CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY - SEVERAL WINGED CHILDREN, THE "THREE GRACES" - AGLAIA, EUPHROSYNE AND THALIA. THERE IS A GREAT DEAL OF HANDSOME PLASTER WORK AND PAINTED PANELS THROUGHOUT THE THEATER. THE THEATER CONSISTS OF A GROUND FLOOR SEATING AREA, TWO BALCONIES, SIX BOXES, BASEMENT AREA, LOBBY AND LIVING AREA. THE GROUND FLOOR SEATING (ORCHESTRA) CONSISTED OF 560

SEATS. THE FIRST BALCONY OR GALLERY CONTAINED 420 SEATS. THE SECOND BALCONY (PEANUT GALLERY) CONTAINED 320 SEATS. THERE WERE SIX BOXES, 3 ON EACH SIDE, HOLDING ROUGHLY 10 PEOPLE EACH (60) (SINCE REMOVED) FOR A TOTAL OF 1,360 SEATS. THIS COMPARES WITH

E. C. GLASS HIGH SCHOOL 1,000

FINE ARTS CENTER 500

R.-M. W. C. 300

LYBG. COLLEGE 287

THE ACOUSTICS OF THE BUILDING WERE SUPERIOR AND HAVE BEEN OFTEN PRAISED. SAMUEL H. FRANKLIN, JR., WHO ATTENDED THE THEATER AS A CHILD, SAID THAT HIS COUSIN, METROPOLITAN OPERA STAR RICARDO MARTIN, STATED THAT THE ACADEMY HAD THE BEST ACOUSTICS OF ANY THEATER IN THE COUNTRY. MARTIN, WHOSE REAL NAME WAS HUGH WHITFIELD MARTIN, WAS UNDERSTUDY FOR CARUSO, AND APPEARED IN OPERA IN BOTH THE U. S. AND EUROPE. THERE ARE 15 EXITS IN THE BUILDING, ALLOWING FOR A QUICK EXIT IN CASE OF FIRE. THERE WERE LARGE EXITS ON EACH SIDE OF THE STAGE FOR PLAYERS. THE STAGE AREA (PROSCENIUM) WAS 35 FEET WIDE, 35 FEET HIGH AND 35 FEET DEEP. EACH WING IS 16 FEET WIDE. INTERESTING, THE NAME CUTLER HAMMER IS ON THE SWITCHBOARD. THIS COMPANY IS STILL VERY MUCH IN THE BUSINESS OF MAKING ELECTRICAL CONTROLS.

FOR THE RECORD, OTHERS JOINING MR. APPERSON IN HIS ENDEAVOR WERE JOHN P. HORSLEY, O. B. BARKER, R. S. OGLESBY, W. J. D. BELL, N. M. SACKETT, C. W. SCOTT, J. GORDON PAYNE, AND CHARLES E. HEALD. THE CORPORATION SOLD STOCK TO THE ABOVE AND

WITH A BANK LOAN OF \$17,500 THE PROJECT WAS LAUNCHED. THE BANK LOAN WAS PAID COMPLETELY ON SEPTEMBER 11, 1911.

OPENING NIGHT (FEBRUARY 1, 1905) MUST HAVE BEEN A SPECTACULAR SHOW FOR LYNCHBURG. MR. APPERSON (WHERE DID HE LIVE?) HAD A FORMAL DINNER PARTY AT HIS HOUSE, FOLLOWED BY SPECIAL TROLLEY CARS TO TAKE THE GUESTS TO THE PLAY, "SHOW GIRL", STARRING STELLA MAYHEW. TICKETS SOLD FOR \$10.00 AND THE PROCEEDS WERE USED TO PAY FOR THE INTERIOR DECORATIONS. IT WAS A FULL HOUSE. THE PERFORMANCE BROUGHT AN ENTHUSIASTIC REVIEW. SHOW GIRL WAS DESCRIBED AS "A JOLLY BIT OF TOMFOOLERY WITH AN ELEMENT OF LOVE, ROMANCE, COMIC SITUATIONS AND COMPLICATIONS". A SPECIAL POINT WAS MADE ABOUT HOW THE PLAY WAS "FREE OF VULGARITY". ^{//} VULGARITY ^{//} AND SHOW GIRL WERE "HAPPILY STRANGERS, GREATLY TO THE SATISFACTION OF THE REFINED CLASS OF THEATER GOERS". MISS MAYHEW EARNED \$500.00 A WEEK FOR HER PERFORMANCE. PERFORMANCES STARTED IN SEPTEMBER AND STOPPED ABOUT JUNE 1. *there were 5 performances a week -* REMEMBER, THERE WAS NO AIR CONDITIONING. THIS WAS FOLLOWED BY A SERIES OF WONDERFUL PLAYS AND STARS, INCLUDING GEORGE M. COHEN, SARAH BERNHARDT, PADEREWSKI, PAVLOVA, EVELYN NESBIT, MARY PICKFORD, OTIS SKINNER, SIR JOHNSON-FORBES ROBERTSON (FOREMOST SHAKESPERIAN ACTOR OF HIS TIME), JOHN PHILIP SOUSA, WALTER DAMROSE & NEW YORK SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA, WILLIAM S. HART (THE VIRGINIAN), JOHN DREW (DISTINGUISHED ^{ACTOR AND} UNCLE TO ALL THE BARRYMORES), FRITZ KREISLER, ALMA GLUCK, AND EFREM ZIMBALIST, SR., WILL RODGERS, EUBIE BLAKE (BLACK) ^{MUSICIAN} COMEDIAN BERT LAHR, LON CHANEY, BILL TILDEN (TENNIS STAR), CHAUNCEY ALCOTT, TYRONE POWER, SR., SYDNEY GREENSTREET AND PAUL WHITEMAN AND

HIS ORCHESTRA, ETHEL BARRYMORE, LILLIAN RUSSELL, SISSIERETTA JONES (BLACK PATTI), MAUDE ADAMS, AND ISADORA DUNCAN.

PLAYS THAT YOU MAY HAVE HEARD OF INCLUDED: CHARLES DICKENS "THE SIMPLE LIFE", THE HARVESTER, ZIEGFELD FOLLIES, HUMAN HEARTS, A DOLL'S HOUSE, VIRGINIUS (ROME), MARK OF ZORRO, A MOTHER'S HEART, SIGN OF THE CROSS (ROME-NERO RULE), PHANTOM OF THE OPERA, COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO, THE DUEL, ZAYA, ONE WOMAN, PYGMALION, WHEN KNIGHTHOOD WAS IN FLOWER, CHECKERS, DUBARRY, EAST LYNNE (POOR PLAY - SEE CRITIC'S NOTES), THE HONOR OF THE FAMILY (RACIAL PURITY), A KENTUCKY FEUD, THE RIGHT OF WAY, THE STAMPEDE, SINS OF THE FATHER, BEN HUR, THE FLOWER OF THE RANCH, THE ROUND UP, POLLY OF THE CIRCUS, THE TRAIL OF THE LONESOME PINE, JULIUS CAESAR, NOT TONIGHT, JOSEPHINE, THE MIKADO, AND H.M.S. PINAFORE. THE LAST STAGE PLAY WAS FEBRUARY 11, 1925 - "FOOT LOOSE". - A LARGE DOSE OF SHAKSPEARIAN PLAYS
Romeo & Juliet, ~~Antony & Cleopatra~~ Hamlet

THE ACADEMY ORCHESTRA OF APPROXIMATELY SEVEN MUSICIANS WAS UNDER THE DIRECTION OF PROFESSOR GUSTAV A. GUENTER, WHO FOR MANY YEARS WAS A MEMBER OF THE R-M.W.C. MUSIC FACULTY. THE ORCHESTRA PLAYED FOR BOTH LOCALLY-PRODUCED AND TOURING SHOWS, AND OFTEN AUGMENTED THE ENSEMBLES OF COMPANIES WHICH BROUGHT THEIR OWN MUSICIANS.

TRAGEDY STRUCK THE ACADEMY AT 9:15 IN THE MORNING OF APRIL 20, 1911, WHEN A FIRE WAS NOTICED BY MR. CORBIN SHIELD AND HIS FAMILY (THE RESIDENT MANAGER THAT LIVED ON THE SECOND FLOOR).

THE LYNCHBURG FIRE COMPANY RESPONDED QUICKLY, BUT LOSSES WERE ESTIMATED AT \$40,000. THERE WAS IMMEDIATE SPECULATION WHETHER THE THEATER WOULD BE REBUILT. MR. APPERSON WAS IN ARIZONA RECUPERATING FROM TUBERCULOSIS THAT WOULD TAKE HIS LIFE WITHIN 2 YEARS. ON OCTOBER 11, 1911, IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT THE STOCK OWNED BY MR. APPERSON HAD BEEN PURCHASED BY C. M. GUGGENHEIMER, F. H. ALMOND, AND D. B. RYLAND. COMMITTEES WERE FORMED FROM STOCK OWNERSHIP, INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING MEN: C. G. CRADDOCK, H. M. SACKETT, R. T. WATTS, J. D. OWEN, WALKER PETTYJOHN, G. H. WILKINS, R. P. BOYES, ERNEST WILLIAMS, S. H. FRANKLIN, J. O. WATTS, R. O. HORTON, F. L. KNIGHT, W. R. WINFREE, G. E. VAUGHAN, W. H. MILLER, C. S. ADAMS, LEON GOODMAN, AND B. F. KIRKPATRICK. PRESIDENT GUGGENHEIMER WAS QUOTED IN THE PRESS, "I WANT YOU TO HAMMER HOME THE FACT THAT LYNCHBURG IS GOING TO HAVE A NEW THEATER. IT IS GOING TO BE OPERATIONAL NEXT FALL, AND THE COMMITTEE IN CHARGE OF THIS MATTER IS GOING TO BUILD IT."

MR. C. K. HOWELL OF RICHMOND WAS THE ARCHITECT FOR THE REVISED PLANS. HE WAS ALSO THE ARCHITECT OF THE EMPIRE THEATER IN RICHMOND. J.M.B. LEWIS OF LYNCHBURG WAS ASSOCIATE ARCHITECT AND THE CONSTRUCTION WORK PERFORMED BY ATKINSON & CO. OF RICHMOND. IT WAS REBUILT IN LESS THAN SIX MONTHS !!! THE FIRST PERFORMANCE ON DECEMBER 11, 1912 FEATURED "FINISHING FANNY" - PRICES RANGED FROM 50¢ TO \$1.50. ON DECEMBER 13, THE FORMAL OPENING BENEFIT, PRICED AT \$5.00 FOR THE BEST SEATS, FEATURED JOHN DREW IN "THE PERPLEXED HUSBAND", A DAVID FROHMAN PRODUCTION- CHARLES FROHMAN N&D - W'VACO. GREAT GRANDSON DAVID AND BROTHER DANNY LIVED IN SUFFOLK AREA.

BY 1925 MOST OF LEGITIMATE THEATER WAS OVER, AND MOVIES HAD THE LEAD. FILMS WERE SHOWN IN THE ACADEMY FROM 1925 TO 1934. ALSO, THERE WERE DANCE, REVIEWS, LOCAL TALENT SHOWS, AND VARIETY ENTERTAINMENT. EMMA ADAMS, A LOCAL POPULAR IMPRESSARIO, BROUGHT A NUMBER OF CONCERTS, ARTISTS, OPERAS AND BALLETS FROM 1910 - 1932. IN 1934, THE ACADEMY WAS PURCHASED BY SAMUEL W. CRAVER (CHARLOTTE, NC) AND J. F. FALLS. THEREAFTER, IT WAS CALLED THE ACADEMY THEATER AND USED AS SUCH UNTIL 1958. FROM THAT TIME UNTIL THE PRESENT, THE THEATER WAS CLOSED AND OPENED OCCASIONALLY FOR A SPECIAL PERFORMANCE.

ROBIN WOODS MOTHER HAD RECITALS THERE

ONE INTERESTING FACT ABOUT THE THEATER IS THAT IT HAD A VERY SMALL MAIN LOBBY, AND AS SUCH, AT INTERMISSION MANY OF THE GUESTS CROSSED THE STREET TO NEARBY BARS SUCH AS "HAPPY BILLY'S" AND D. P. MORRISON'S. BELLS WERE INSTALLED IN THE BARS, AND OPERATED BY THE STAGE MANAGER FROM THE THEATER TO NOTIFY THE PEOPLE THAT THE PLAY WAS ABOUT TO RESUME....A VERY CONSIDERATE GESTURE !!

READING THE NEWSPAPER REVIEWS OF VARIOUS PLAYS WAS GREAT FUN. FOR THE PLAY "SIMPLE LIFE", IT READ IN PART: "THE COMEDY WAS ENJOYED BY A LARGE CROWD AND THE COMPANY WAS ONE OF HIGH MERIT, CONSIDERABLY ABOVE THE AVERAGE COMEDY. THE EXCELLENCE OF THE ENTIRE COMPANY, COUPLED WITH THE CLEVERNESS OF THE PLAY, CONSTANTLY INCREASED THE INTEREST OF THE AUDIENCES, WHICH WAS VERY GENEROUS IN ITS APPLAUSE AND LAUGHTER." TEDDY SANGUINE, LEAD COMEDIAN, WAS GIVEN PRAISE. HE HAD INTRODUCED A NEW "CULT" IN AMERICAN HUMOR AND DID NOT DESCEND TO THE LEVEL OF "CHEAP CLAP-TRAP" AND GRIMACING OF CONTEMPORARY COMEDIANS. HE PLAYED THE ROLE WITH CHARM.

WHEN KNIGHTHOOD WAS IN FLOWER STATED IN PART: "THE AUDIENCE LIKED THE PLAY DUE TO THE STRONG LINES AND NOT THE ACTING. ANNA DAY'S PERFORMANCE WAS "WOEFULLY" LACKING AND SHE APPEARS OVERLY ANXIOUS TO PLEASE HER AUDIENCE. SHE ALLOWS THIS ANXIETY TO BECOME SO NOICEABLE THAT THE PROPER "FINESSE" IS LACKING. THE BEST ACTING WAS DONE BY CHARLES BRANDON IN THE LOVE SCENES."

DU BARRY: THE REVIEW STATED "THE PRODUCTION WAS EXCELLENT AND A CULTURED AND FASHIONABLE AUDIENCE SAW THE PERFORMANCE. MISS CARTER WAS "CHARMING"" AND HAD A "NATURALNESS OF MANNER". SHE WAS DESCRIBED AS PERFECT AS AN ACTRESS, AND HER EQUAL HAS NEVER BEEN SEEN BEFORE. " MISS CARTER CONFESSED THAT DU BARRY WAS THE HARDEST, LONGEST, AND MOST TRYING ROLE SHE HAD EVER ATTEMPTED. IT TOOK NEARLY FOUR MONTHS TO MEMORIZE THE LINES, TEN THOUSAND WORDS.

EAST LYNNE - "IF EVER A POOR PLAY WAS SEEN IN THE CITY, IT WAS AT THE ACADEMY LAST NIGHT WHEN A COMPANY HEADED BY GERTRUDE ARDEN ATTEMPTED TO PLAY EAST LYNNE. THE CAST, FROM BEGINNING TO END, INCLUDING THE STAR, WHICH IS SO IN NAME ONLY, IS THE LIMIT OF WEAKNESS. NOT A SINGLE MEMBER OF THE COMPANY MEASURES UP TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF HIS OR HER PART, AND IN COMPARING THIS ATTRACTION WITH SHOWS USUALLY SEEN AT THE ACADEMY, THE CONTRAST IS SO GREAT THAT IT IS BEYOND IMAGINATION. SUCH PERFORMANCES AS THE ONE LAST NIGHT SHOULD BE CONSIGNED TO OBLIVION AND NEVER BE ALLOWED TO GO OVER THE COUNTRY AND HUMBUG THE PEOPLE." WOW !!! - A P O L O G Y T O A U D I E N C E

FROM WILLIAM CLARK'S THESIS, I LEARNED THE FOLLOWING:

"THE MASSIVE SPECTACULAR "BEN HUR" CAME TO THE ACADEMY ON TWO OCCASIONS, NOVEMBER 11, 1910 AND OCTOBER 15 & 16, 1917. BECAUSE OF LONG RUNS IN LARGE CITIES, THE PRODUCTION WHICH HAD OPENED IN 1899 WAS SLOW TO REACH THE SMALLER CITIES. MANY PREPARATIONS HAD TO BE MADE TO STAGE BEN HUR. MR. COOKE, REPRESENTING KLAW & ERLANGER, WHO OWNED THE RIGHTS TO IT, SAID "TO STAGE BEN HUR, CHANGES MUST BE MADE, AND WE CARRY A LARGE FORCE OF MACHINISTS TO MAKE THE CHANGES." ON OCTOBER 28, THE MACHINISTS CAME TO LYNCHBURG, AND WITHIN ONE WEEK MADE THE TRANSFORMATION. THE RIGGING LEFT WAS DOUBLED IN CARRYING CAPACITY AND THE PAINT FRAME AND SCENE BRIDGE WAS REMOVED ENTIRELY. THE STAGE AND WINGS WERE STRIPPED TO THE BARE WALLS AND THE AREA UNDER THE STAGE WAS OVERHAULED SO A SERIES OF SLIDING TRAPS AND SUB-TRAPS COULD BE INSTALLED. THE SUB-STRUCTURE HAD TO BE ABLE TO SUSTAIN THE WEIGHT OF EIGHT HORSES, TREADMILLS, AND ELECTRICAL MACHINERY USED IN THE CHARIOT RACES. ACCORDING TO ONE NEWSPAPER REPORT, THE CONTRIVANCE USED FOR THE RACE COST \$15,000. THERE WERE 250 PEOPLE IN THE PRODUCTION, WHICH TOOK FOUR 60-FOOT RAILWAY CARS TO CARRY THE PROPERTIES AND 2 STOCK CARS FOR HORSES AND CAMELS.

A CRITIC SAID THAT "THE PRODUCTION LIVED UP TO ADVANCE ACCOUNTS AS A CAPACITY AUDIENCE SAT ENTHRALLED THROUGH THE THREE HOUR PERFORMANCE." THE PLAYERS WERE RICHARD BUHLER AS BEN HUR, ALICE HAYS AS ESTHER, HELEN SINGER AS IRAS, AND ANTHONY ANDIE AS SIMONIDES.

NEEDLESS TO SAY, I WAS MOST SURPRISED TO READ ABOUT MY UNCLE DICK. I NEVER KNEW HIM. I DID KNOW FROM FAMILY DISCUSSION THAT HE OWNED HIS OWN COMPANY AND WAS A VERY SUCCESSFUL ACTOR, PLAYING IN MOST MAJOR CITIES AND ABROAD. IT DID ADD A SPARK OF INTEREST IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT THE ACADEMY.

MISS LIB WILEY, LONG AN ADVOCATE FOR THE ACADEMY, WROTE IN 1968: "THERE SHE SITS WITH COBWEBS HANGING FROM HER CATWALKS, A CHICKERING GRAND PIANO ON THE STAGE, WAITING TO BE PLAYED AND THE EXPECTANCY OF THE THEATER ABOUNDS WITHIN HER WALLS. LIKE A SLEEPING BEAUTY, THE ACADEMY OF MUSIC AWAITS SOME KIND OF LOVING HAND, PERHAPS THE GUARDIAN ANGEL IN HER WINGS, TO REVIVE HER FOR ANOTHER ERA OF CULTURE AND USEFULNESS IN THE COMMUNITY."

TODAY THE ACADEMY HAS A NEW BOARD OF DIRECTORS WHO ARE MOST DETERMINED TO SEE IT ONCE AGAIN OPEN FOR COMMUNITY PURPOSES. THEY HAVE SECURED CERTAIN FUNDS TO ENABLE THEM TO MAKE NECESSARY REPAIRS AND TO ENGAGE OUTSIDE COUNSELORS FOR DETERMINING THE FEASIBILITY OF THE PROJECTS, AFTER CAREFULLY LOOKING AT ALL ASPECTS. TO DATE THE ADVICE HAS BEEN ENCOURAGING, AND ALTHOUGH THE STUDY IS NOT COMPLETE, IT DOES APPEAR THAT A FUND DRIVE WILL SOON BE IN PLACE.

THE ACADEMY THEATER, PERCIVAL'S ISLAND, AMAZEMENT SQUARE, RIVERVIEWS ART BUILDING, LOWER MAIN STREET - THEY REPRESENT A NEW DIMENSION IN A OLD, YET BEAUTIFUL, CITY CALLED LYNCHBURG.

TO BE OR NOT TO BE -- THAT IS THE QUESTION.

THANK YOU.