

"The Demise of the Vaudeville Show"

Carroll County Times article for 5 September 1999

By Jay A. Graybeal

The rise of the American motion picture industry paralleled the demise of the vaudeville show. The trend caught the attention of H. P. Gorsuch, editor of this newspaper, and he devoted a large part of his "First Page Editorial" of August 19, 1932 to the subject:

"In recent years moving pictures have in a large measure, pushed the old-time, numerous and popular vaudeville performances off the stage. In some of the picture theatres a few vaudeville acts are put on between the pictures, but theatres devoting, as they used to, a varied vaudeville program, from start to finish, 'from soup to nuts,' are rare. Our taste may be depraved, but we always enjoyed a good vaudeville show, a lot more than when caught in a "movie" program, with pictures of the type that are so often shown at the present time. Especially ones of horrible crimes, of suggestive, vicious, unchaste lewdness, or of silly sickening, overdrawn love affairs, that make you feel sea sick.

We have not attended many vaudeville shows the past few years, but when the Maryland and even 'The Bridge' specialized in that class of entertainment we often spent our money for a paste board of admission.

The jokes were as a rule a motley lot, some new and clever, others medium, and a great many, either shady and not distantly related to humor, with some so old they were covered with cobwebs and growing whiskers. Of course we frequently heard the old mother-in-law and other old favorite jokes with vaudeville stars. Another popular joke subject was the 'hayseed,' the stupid, simple country folks, especially the unsophisticated, ignorant country boys and girls.

Whenever we heard one of these jokes we longed for an over-ripe egg or vegetables to slam at the would-be-wit who was attempting to ridicule and poke fun at the finest people in the world. People with more good common sense, practical intelligence, finer character than a very large percentage of city dwellers.

The country girls may not be so dolled up, or have as expensive evening gowns as their city cousins, but they are not 'Dumb Doras' by any means, and the smart city chap who thinks they are will have an awakening. To illustrate, here are a couple of stories.

A young city chap was spending his vacation in the country. One evening he was walking along the road with the attractive daughter of a farmer. They stopped to look at a fine herd of cattle grazing in a pasture field. The young man saw a cow and a calf rubbing noses together. Edging up to the girl he said: 'such a loving sight makes me want to do the same thing.' 'Go ahead,' said the girl. 'You will fit in well for the calf's part and the cow is Pa's and he won't care.'

Story No. 2: A conceited, dapper city salesman was traveling in a beautiful car and it broke down in front of Zeke Cole's farmhouse.

The garage man, a short distance down the road was called. He said it would take about two hours to fix the car. The city chap had seen Zeke's pretty daughter, watering the flowers and he decided he would rather wait there than at the garage. He was soon helping the girl carry the water. Zeke was

old-fashioned and still preferred the horse and buggy to the automobile, and when he drove in after a trip to the country store he tied the horse to a post outside the yard the salesman proposed they take a little buggy ride, and she consented. He drove off on a rough back road, the old wheezy horse stumbled over a rock and toppled over stone dead. Thinking to take advantage of the apparent opportunity, he turned to the girl by his side and stated boldly that he intended to kiss her right there and then.

'Kiss!' she queried. 'What is a kiss?'

'Don't you know what a kiss is?' he asked.

'No,' she replied.

'Well,' he said, 'a kiss will put new life into you.'

'Oh,' she exclaimed, with sudden enlightenment. 'Fine! Kiss the dead horse and put new life into him so we can get home.'

Then the girl he thought so dumb jumped out of the buggy and with rapid pace started to walk home, calling back in derision, 'hurry up, kiss the horse and put new life into him so you can drive 'Dad's' buggy home.'

We country folks have no 85-story skyscraper, no subway or elevated railroads, no stock exchange, no 'White Way' and no lot of other things the large cities have. But we have the towering mountains, the rolling hills, the fertile valleys, the shady forests, the clear sparkling streams, and live close to nature and the things that build sturdy bodies, healthy brains, good character, and the vaudeville dispenser, the over smart city chap who ridicules and jeers at us is a nut and real 'Dumb Dora.'

Mr. Gorsuch's editorial was likely spurred by a motion picture that was being filmed at the time in Carroll County. The film was produced by National Productions and featured local talent and scenes, beginning with the Westminster Nursery, and was to be shown at the Opera House in Westminster. The writer would be happy to hear from anyone who recalls the film.

Photo caption: American theaters, such as the New State in Westminster photographed in c.1923, often offered vaudeville performances in addition to motion pictures. Historical Society of Carroll County collection.