

Cultural Changes in Davenport

When I grew up in Davenport the city still had two well-defined cultural elements: the American, which derived from the westward movement of families from New England, New York, and Ohio, and the German, which represented immigrant groups that began coming before the Civil War and arrived in large numbers during the 1865-1890 period. The American-born were well established east of Brady Street and included some of the more affluent merchants and professional men; the later arrivals occupied the hill district west of Main Street, and the West End as far as Rockingham Road. There were still a few veterans of the German risings of 1848 and 1866 hobbling about; they must have been pretty venerable by the time I became old enough to hear about them. They were outnumbered by veterans of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871, who had left their native shores immediately after the war, and who were followed by thousands of younger Germans who wished to avoid military service.

It is difficult today to comprehend the aversion many Germans of that time had to universal service, which Prussia had forced on the newly-as-

sembled empire. While much of the huge emigration was prompted by the desire to find a better living in America, the fear of losing two (later three) years out of a man's working life was an important incentive. Young men who fled to the United States before they could be called up sometimes faced a certain frustration when they became prosperous. For Germany made military service a condition of citizenship and for a long time refused to recognize naturalization in other countries as binding. When a German-born naturalized American voyaged to Germany to visit his aged parents, he was unmolested if he had completed his military service. But if he had never served, he was confronted by the local authorities, who asked him to report for military duty or leave the country within a number of hours. As a boy I heard of two Davenport citizens who were shown the gate when they visited their birthplace.

The veterans of 1870-1871 were in their twenties when they reached Davenport, and hence averaged a decade younger than the veterans of the Civil War, who held most of the government jobs. These Germans were known as *Krieger* (Warriors). The *Krieger Verein* was an organization of lively middle-aged men who marched in all the important parades, held an annual masked ball, and were vocal on all issues that touched their interests, particularly the tax on beer.

As a boy I was captivated by battles of long

ago and loved to hear veterans talk about them. I soon learned that men who had a part in them had little comprehension of the sweep of events described in schoolbooks. One of my favorites was a veteran of the Franco-Prussian War who lived in Walcott, and who, because of a relationship on my mother's side, was called Uncle John. John had served in the artillery at Worth, Spicheren, and Gravelotte. I used to prod him to talk about his battles, and he would tell me how he swabbed the gun barrel, lifted the round shot out of the caisson, and put cotton in his ears to deaden the shock of a volley. But when I asked him about the movement of armies he was mum. I read up on Gravelotte and went into a long discussion of how the armies maneuvered, and John nodded his head in cautious acquiescence. I realized later that his limited knowledge was typical of what the average soldier sees.

Many of these veterans were still alive in 1914. They suffered sentimentally when Germany went to war, but their sympathies were mixed. Few had a kind word for the Kaiser, whom they considered a blunderer. Their sons, who had no memories of foreign battles, fought courageously as American-born citizens. The second generation married freely with the sons and daughters of immigrants from other European countries, forgot the German they had heard in their fathers' homes, finding English sufficient for their needs.

Our Germans came chiefly from Schleswig-Holstein, where *Plattdeutsch* was the popular tongue. This they carried into their business life in Davenport. Nevertheless, polite German (*Hochdeutsch*) was used in proceedings of societies and on formal occasions, with the exception of meetings of the *Claus Groth Gilde*. Davenport also had citizens who had come from Bavaria, Saxony, and the Rheinland, and who spoke other dialects but understood *Platt*.

At times animated conversations would be carried on in West End stores by a customer speaking German and the storekeeper answering in *Platt*. It used to be said that a salesman could not expect to sell goods to farmers of Scott County unless he could talk the dialect. Although German is a highly inflected language, *Platt* is crude and borrows words from everywhere; in this it is like Pennsylvania Dutch. In Davenport men speaking English would occasionally use a word or phrase in *Platt* to make an amusing point, much as comedians today will drop into Yiddish.

I found *Platt* of use when I began to read Dutch and the Scandinavian languages. Thomas Mann was proficient in *Plattdeutsch*, but Hendrik van Loon was the only man with whom I ever talked it in the East. When later I traveled in Schleswig-Holstein, I found German was the formal language there as it had been in Davenport, and *Platt* was looked upon as a folk dialect and

ignored by many. Actually it is older than the German now in use, for it belongs to the Frisian group that has supplied important elements to the languages of northern Europe, including English.

With Davenport in mind, I have been able to observe how quickly and effectively Americanization is accomplished. My parents' generation lived conscious of its European background; mine was only partially so, whereas the next generation, now come to maturity, is quite oblivious to foreign beginnings. In my boyhood I became familiar with a great number of place-names abroad because my parents and their friends had a practice of identifying families of Davenport and Scott County by adding whence they had come. A farmer in Blue Grass would be from Heide; a man in Durant would be from Brunsbüttel; a West End grocer hailed from Hamburg; and so on. Thus my boyish mind became familiar with a whole foreign geography. This had an interesting result. When in Schleswig-Holstein and Denmark, I found various names of railroad stations quite familiar and often met at some milkstop a name buried deep in my memory, which now suddenly evoked recognition.

One of the major cultural advances of our time lies in the tremendous growth of musical appreciation and performance. The hours given to music in the Davenport public schools early in this century were devoted chiefly to singing. Instru-

mental lessons were given privately. Numerous girls thumped Chopin and Scharwenka at an upright piano, and many a lad like myself lugged a black varnished violin case.

The inspiring music of symphonies and concertos was heard rarely; orchestra leaders preferred overtures and selections from operas to hour-long symphonies. Walter Damrosch occasionally brought opera singers on tour; I did not dream that long after, when Doctor Damrosch was a gray patriarch with an unquenchable interest in musical education, I should often sit at luncheon table with him and hear him reminisce about those years. Paderewski played a piano recital at the Burtis Opera House, but made newspaper headlines because he used the Government drawbridge to turn his private railroad car around, so that he could sleep with his head toward the front of the train.

Will Heesch, a pupil of Albert Petersen, was a violin virtuoso whose name I fully expected to see on billboards, but he turned instead to manufacturing. Some of the other young friends who played the violin were Otto Witt, Otto Niemand, Carl Wiggers, Ernest Oberholtzer, Ella Phillips, and Walter Matthey. My instructor at that time was Conrad Friedrichsen, a true artist, with an earnest devotion to the classics, an unsatisfied desire to compose music, and an exasperated intolerance of shoddy performance. He would goad

CULTURAL CHANGES IN DAVENPORT 199

BURTIS OPERA HOUSE
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3rd

WM. A. BRADY'S Immense Musical
Comedy and Rapid-Fire Hit

Foxy Grandpa

Book by R. Melville Baker
Music by Jos. Hart

Direct From Its Six Months' Run in New York City
A STUNNING PRODUCTION

Swell Chorus—New Songs—Pretty
Girls—Catchy Music—Fetching Cos-
tumes—The Tickling Triumph of the
Times Rolling Fat with Fun—Thirty
People.

PRICES: 25c, 50c, 75c and \$1.00

BURTIS OPERA HOUSE
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4th

PRE-EMINENTLY THE BEST
COMPANY ORGANIZED

JOSEPH, JR., AND WILLIAM W.

JEFFERSON

WITH THEIR ALL STAR CAST
IN THE BRILLIANT COMEDY ...

THE RIVALS

HANDSOMELY MOUNTED
BEAUTIFULLY COSTUMED

PRICES: 25c, 50c, 75c, \$1.00 and \$1.50
Carriages 10:45

BURTIS OPERA HOUSE
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5th

HENRY MILLER
... IN ...

The Taming
...of Helen

A MODERN COMEDY IN THREE ACTS
BY RICHARD HARDING DAVIS

PRICES: 25c, 50c, 75c, \$1.00 and \$1.50
Carriages 10:45 ... No Free List

Burtis Opera House, Saturday, Feb. 7
Matinee and Night

HENRY W. SAVAGE presents the Newest Musical
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OF
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By Pixley and Luders, Authors of "King Dodo"

5 Months in Boston 3 Months in Chicago	100 in the Cast 60 Chorus Girls
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A Galaxy of Gorgeously Gowned Girls
Much Music and More Fun

Prices—Matinee 25c, 50c, 75c, \$1.00, \$1.50.
Night 50c, 75c, \$1.00, \$1.50.

Within a space of five days in February, 1903, patrons of the Burtis Opera House in Davenport were entertained by these four outstanding attractions. This was typical of the varied bill of fare offered in these years by the Burtis and other Davenport theaters.

me to practice harder by relating how well Walter Matthey played the *Souvenir de Haydn*. Later Carl Wiggers, Will Westphal, and I formed a violin trio and met at one another's houses in turn. We played Mozart, de Beriot, von Suppé, and other classic composers, but oddly enough, were not familiar with Bach.

We heard about Florizel, but never knew him. He was the gifted son of a Davenport family named Reuter, and when still a child was taken abroad to study the violin. He played one recital in Davenport when still in short pants; I do not recall that he ever came again. As Baron de Reuter he was living in Berlin when the last war closed; he had been given a title by that Queen of Roumania who wrote prose under the name of Carmen Sylva.

Davenport was visited regularly by touring opera companies, including the Aborn; the repertory included melodious popular operas, such as *Carmen*, *Chimes of Normandy*, and *Cavalleria Rusticana*. Grand opera in English came when Henry W. Savage sent a highly competent touring company to present *Il Trovatore* and *Aida* at the Burtis. But most of the musical performances were light opera and musical comedy, with Schumann-Heink in *Love's Lottery* and Anna Held in *The Little Duchess* as exceptional nights in my youthful experiences.

The first motion pictures that came to Daven-

port were, I believe, part of a program demonstrating them at the Burtis Opera House. They were in the form of what we now call a news reel, and consisted of half a dozen or more short subjects. This was repeated so frequently that I have a clear visual memory of the pictures. One depicted the arrival of fire wagons on a busy street, and as the crowd hurried up a boy with a bicycle, wearing a white sweater with a dark stripe across the shoulders, walked conspicuously in front of the camera. I used to wonder who he was. The final subject was the Empire State Express; as soon as it had passed by a group of young people ran on the tracks waving their hands. The pictures had unsteady, flickering light, and after each showing the rewind had to be completed before the next could be shown. I also saw an exhibition, about 1904, of Cinematoscope pictures in color of the coronation procession of Edward VII. The colors were quite realistic but may have been added by hand.

Within a few years the first commercial motion picture theater was installed in a store on Harrison Street above Third. Its equipment comprised a white curtain, picnic chairs, a piano, and the apparatus. The price was five cents, and the performance became "the nickel show." The manager made no money there, but I like to think he moved on to greater fortune with the industry. The most popular film of those early days was, of

course, *The Great Train Robbery*. On Saturday nights it was projected across Main Street to a wall of the brick structure that preceded the present Lane Building. It was shown free because slides advertising Davenport stores were inserted at intervals.

HARRY HANSEN