

Middle-class morality versus music hall mischief

Perhaps the midnight encounter could have been called one of irreconcilable differences between show biz folks and practitioners of middle class morality. The year was 1899, and the place was Bedford.

There was a theater troupe in town, calling itself by the lofty name of the Beggar Prince Opera Company. The Avenue Hotel was full, and one of the performers, Nellie Little (also known as Lewis), took a room at a house owned by "Jap" Malott.

It was the *Bloomington Republican Progress* of Jan. 24 that took some undisguised glee in reprinting an earlier story in the Bedford



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

Mail. Quoted the newspaper, "Mr. Malott was a little suspicious of the girl's appearance and kept a watch on her movements.

Sure enough, she had a young male visitor, and, continued the *Progress/Mail* account, "As Jap isn't running that kind of a house,

he promptly went after the police and returned shortly with Deputy Marshal Payne and Policeman Glover."

Their demand for the door to be unlocked and opened was countered with a feminine request for time enough for her to dress. After cooling their heels for some 15 minutes, the landlord and lawmen were admitted to the room.

What they saw was delicately described by the newspaper. "Both (the occupants) were found with toilets which exhibited haste in the donning, the man's shoes being unbuttoned." When the officers had determined that the pair were un-

married, they were arrested.

The young girl "wept copiously; but when it was found that the landlord and police were inexorable, the girl removed most of her clothing and proceeded to redress in the most deliberate and careful manner, as though for a promenade, oblivious of the presence of men, nearly half an hour being consumed in the operation."

At that point, the manager of the troupe, a man by the name of Wade, tried to intercede. But, as the newspapers explained, the outcome was that "they (the pair) reposed on two luxurious but widely separate cots in different cells in the county jail

till next morning, when they were taken before Mayor Johnson, the girl charged with prostitution and the boy with associating."

It was while they were in court that the authorities learned the girl, who came from Cincinnati, was only 17 years old. Her friend, Malcolm Anderson, 18, was a juggler in the troupe. Apparently, the fine for associating was heavier than prostituting, since he paid \$18 and she, \$13.

It was at that point in the newspaper accounts that the writer or editor chose to moralize a bit. "And-

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