

Corinth Entertainment

On Saturday nights I like to take Nita out on the town. Sometimes it's out to the movies on Harper or occasionally we roll a few frames over at the bowling alley. Thursdays we are tapping our toes at "Pickin' on the Square" down at the courthouse and we're big fans of the players at the Corinth Theater Arts.

The point is there is plenty of good entertainment in Corinth and there always has been. This goes for the Civil War days, too. A soldier with time on his hands could always find something to see or do downtown. A good place to start was the local paper, The Corinth Chanticleer, that strived to keep its readers abreast of all the options in town.

"The Corinth Theater is now the accepted place of amusement of the city. It is conveniently located on Union Square opposite the Tishomingo House. This institution is owned by Benjamin and Shaw, who have engaged some of the best talent in the country, who are nightly drawing crowded houses. Tom Cony – Sharpe – Hastings – Sallie Thayer – Kate Taylor and Little Flora, supported by a numerous troupe of auxiliaries, would give satisfactory entertainment in any city of the Union."

"Little Flora" Cony was packing the seats with her "Enfield Rifle Dance," whatever that was. Tom Cony, her husband, brother or father, was also a draw who had been pulling in big crowds at Chicago, St. Louis and Memphis before making his way to Corinth. Tom was a clown and kept them rolling in the aisles with his trademark act of "Jocko, the Brazilian Ape." Sallie Thayer was a dancer though the Chanticleer admitted, "as we don't understand French we have forgotten the name of it."

The editor/publisher of the paper, Private Charles Hildreth, was a big fan and frequent patron of the Corinth Theater. As a consequence they received glowing reviews in the Chanticleer. "This fashionable place of entertainment is crowded nightly. The popular troupe under the direction of Mr. Hann has finished the first week of their engagement with unbounded success. Mr. Hann is a first class performer and has shown much taste in the selection of his company. Miss Nellie Lewis has been out-doing herself lately, and her fair sylph-like form as it hovers 'twixt earth and air in the maze of 'the many twinkling feet,' has almost divested

her admirers of their sober senses, - Nellie is, besides being a graceful danseuse, a good general performer, and though as yet, quite young, promises to be an ornament to the stage. The late appearance of the pretty little form of Miss Helen Howe upon the stage causes a new flutter among the susceptible, - and her winning ways and coquettish glances, cause immense palpitations in the vicinity of a fellow's pocket watch. Miss Howe has been sick for some time, but the bloom of health is fast returning to her cheek. Messrs. Landers, Marble and Matthews are all good performers, and combine a variety of talent. We "respectfully request" that Miss Nellie Lewis will favor her numerous admirers with a ballad now and then, as the few notes she warbled forth the other night in the play of the "Dumb Belle," convinced us that there is "music in her soule," and if she will allow it to breathe its soft accents through her mouth, there will be "music in the air."

Of course the Corinth Theater wasn't the only show in town. Beiders' brought in big crowds as well and they also received a sparkling write-up in the paper. "Beiders's Pavilion Novelties have been giving entertainments in our city for some time, with apparent success, though up to going to press we have had little opportunity of judging their merits. They have a large troupe, and are drawing crowded houses. Mr. Sparks and his wife who is better known in this city as Emma Winthrop, came in on yesterday's train and will appear soon. Emma is a great favorite in Corinth, as we know her numerous friends and will be glad to welcome her back. The celebrated Mr. Salisbury and family have engaged, which is of itself, enough to ensure success. His little daughter is a trump, and should study for the legitimate drama, as she gives evidence of talent. We should be glad to speak of the troupe and their performance, in detail, but want of space prevents until next issue."

Another option was the Corinth Music Hall but apparently their acts were of a lower caliber and ticket sales were falling off. The proprietors sold the building to a fellow who planned to operate a store but "the show must go on" and the Music Hall reopened under a tent.

There was even an early version of Pickin' on the Square. "Our Post Band have received their new silver instruments, and are nightly enlivening the city with their spirited music. Their leader, Jim Porter, is a fine musician, and his selections are from the best music of the day."

As you would expect, there were other forms of entertainment that mother would not approve of. There was a racetrack, billiard parlors, a bowling alley, and any number of saloons.

Corporal J. E. Carraway of the 19th Louisiana Infantry told how some of the men in his company returned from a visit to such an establishment. “Our Irish comrades were found to be almost to a man drinking or drunk, and I can assure you it took means more foul than persuasion to quiet them. The question, ‘where did you get your whiskey?’ was asked one after the other. Not until a late hour the following day were the facts ascertained. The saloon men, upon closing their doors, let the barrels and casks remain in the same position which they had occupied while in use. These positions were known to the patrons of the saloon, and at a dark hour and in the stillness of the night these dear lovers of the overjoyful stealthily crawled under the floor of the saloon, with camp kettles and with a brace and bit, and bored through the floor and into the barrel, and the barrel having in it rather more than the kettles would hold, they undertook to drink the overflow and save the kettles for future use. The overflow being enough to make all hands drunk, drunk, drunk.”

But not all the saloons were the notorious gin houses you might expect. The Secession Saloon is a case in point and ran the following ad in the paper: “Ice Cream and Soda Water. The undersigned would respectfully announce to the citizens and soldiers of Corinth and vicinity, that he has located himself at the Secession Saloon, where he will, at any moment, be pleased to serve his customers with Ice Cream, Soda-Water, Cakes, and everything usually kept in establishments of this kind. E. H. Chapin.”

Then, as now, there was always something to do in Corinth.