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## THE BEGINNINGS OF THE PROFESSIONAL THEATRE IN TEXAS

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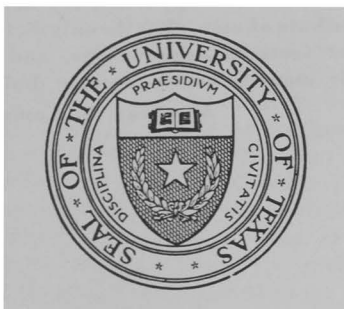
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**PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY FOUR TIMES A MONTH AND ENTERED AS  
SECOND-CLASS MATTER AT THE POSTOFFICE AT AUSTIN, TEXAS,  
UNDER THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912**

The benefits of education and of useful knowledge, generally diffused through a community, are essential to the preservation of a free government.

Sam Houston

Cultivated mind is the guardian genius of Democracy, and while guided and controlled by virtue, the noblest attribute of man. It is the only dictator that freemen acknowledge, and the only security which freemen desire.

Mirabeau B. Lamar



## THE BEGINNINGS OF THE PROFESSIONAL THEATRE IN TEXAS<sup>1</sup>

The first extant reference to theatrical activities in Houston, the capital of the new Republic which had been organized in 1836, is a notice printed April 4, 1837, in the sixty-fourth number of the *Houston Telegraph and Texas Register*. It is headed "Houston Theatre," dated from Columbia, March 28, 1837, and signed "G. L. Lyons."

The public are respectfully informed, that the subscriber intends opening a New Theatre, in the city of Houston, on or about the first of May. Being convinced that a well regulated Theatre, is always a benefit to any community; and believing that the liberality of the citizens of Texas will support the Drama, he proposes to open the first temple dedicated to the dramatic muse in Texas. The subscriber having been, during many years, engaged in the most respectable Theatres in the United States; (late from the St. Charles

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<sup>1</sup>A good deal of the material in this paper has already been used in two magazine articles: "The Theatre in Texas Before the Civil War" by Lota M. Spell, *The Texas Monthly*, V, 291-301 (April, 1930); and "The Theatre in the Republic of Texas" by William R. Hogan, *Southwest Review*, XIX, 374-401 (July, 1934). Two unpublished University of Texas M.A. theses also deal to some extent with a part of the material: *Literary Trends as Indicated in Texas Newspapers, 1836-1846* by Paul Morgan (1926) and *Social Life in the Republic of Texas, 1836-1845* by Louise Cezeaux (1933). The present paper represents a rereading for the years which it covers of the existing newspaper files in Austin and Houston of the *Telegraph and Texas Register* and the *Morning Star*. For preliminary assistance with the material in Houston I am indebted to my friend Mr. William McCarthy, Senior Assistant in the Rare Book Collections of the University. To the old and new material found in the papers I have added any additional material in the four discussions just noted and also a small amount of other new material. This paper is the first attempt to deal solely with the first theatrical activities in Houston. In writing it I may have missed or failed to use to best advantage certain newspaper items. I may have overlooked other extant material which would help complete the picture. Further playbills, and perhaps references to the theatres in manuscript letters and diaries will probably turn up. Such material may increase our knowledge of the early Houston theatres, but it will probably not alter in any fundamental way our conception of the first professional theatrical activities in Texas, as I have attempted to sketch them here.

Theatre, in New Orleans,) and being well acquainted with the Drama in all its various forms, as well as the most talented actors in the country, pledges himself to bring out a good company.

"If we fail we fail."

But being confident that he will not fail, he is determined to open the above Theatre, and should he receive that liberal encouragement, for which this new country is characteristic, he will establish the Drama permanently in the republic of Texas.

As there is considerable expense in bringing out a company, and some risk in establishing the Drama in a new country, while it is an object in which the citizens of Texas are interested, the subscriber proposes that all those who contribute towards erecting the building, shall receive a season ticket, or the amount of their contributions in tickets, at the opening of the Theatre. A season ticket will also be given for the best opening address.

This notice was once reprinted, in the *Telegraph* for April 11.<sup>2</sup> According to Hogan, Lyons carried this project so far as to engage a company in the United States, all but two members of which died when the boat in which the company was coming to Texas was wrecked.<sup>3</sup>

On May 26, 1838, the *Telegraph* printed a news item which is the preface to the second episode in the establishment of the theatre in Houston.

The Theatre.—We rejoice to learn that an excellent Theatre will soon be established in this city. Mr. J. Carlos has recently erected for this purpose, a convenient building which he is fitting up in a

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<sup>2</sup>B. H. Carroll in his *Standard History of Houston, Texas*, states that "one month and two days after Texas declared her independence" Lyons issued a long announcement that he was going to open a theatre at Harrisburg about May 1, 1836, but that the capture of the city by Santa Anna in April put an end to his plans. An article in the *Houston Post-Dispatch*, June 30, 1929, repeated this, crediting it "to old records of the city." The story seems to be no more than a confused version of what happened in 1837; it is barely possible, however, that Lyons had proposed a theatre for Harrisburg before he made his plans to open one in Houston.

<sup>3</sup>J. W. Schmitz writes in *Thus They Lived* that Lyons was playing at the St. Charles Theatre when his proposal was printed. Mrs. Spell says that he returned to the United States and formed a company which sailed from New York to Texas, all but two members of which were lost when the vessel capsized in a gale.

remarkably neat and handsome style. A respectable Theatrical corps is expected in the Columbia on her return from New Orleans.

G. L. Lyons was the first man to propose to bring the drama to Houston. John Carlos, according to Hogan a local merchant, was the second. Lyons' plans came to nothing. Carlos' ambitions led him to fit up a large room as a theatre, to build a theatre, to engage in one theatrical season in association with an outsider, a professional man of the theatre, Corri, and to attempt another season independent of Corri, in his own theatre. But all this resulted in a poor kind of success. In July, 1839, Carlos was offering his theatre and all that went with it for rent or sale cheap. The third name in the history of early Houston theatrical activities is that of Henri F. Corri,<sup>4</sup> at first Carlos' associate, then his rival, and finally his successor.

It very likely occurred to Carlos and Corri about the same time that to bring the drama to the new Republic of Texas would be both praiseworthy and profitable. Each seems to have gone about it in his own way, unknowing of the other. In Houston, Carlos decided to make a large room in one of his buildings, perhaps a building originally intended to be a store or warehouse, into a rough sort of theatre,<sup>5</sup> doubtless expecting, as he had a right to, that it would be used by some amateur thespian group or by itinerant entertainers or travelling theatrical troupes, hoping, probably, with an eye to his own profit, that even such a theatre as he was making might tempt a permanent company from the States to settle in the capital of the new Republic. If such a thing happened, and the venture was profitable, he was ready, apparently, to build a real theatre. There is no reason to believe that Carlos fitted up his theatre because he had already made, or was engaged in making, arrangements to bring a theatrical company from the States

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<sup>4</sup>His name was undoubtedly "Henri," but this is frequently printed "Henry."

<sup>5</sup>But Mrs. Looscan had it from her mother that the building was a hotel. See footnote 9.

to Texas. In many ways what he was undertaking seems to have been a shot in the dark.

In New Orleans, Corri had evidently been struck with the idea that the capital of the new Republic was virgin territory awaiting theatrical enterprise.<sup>6</sup> He must have cherished the hope that by being the first there, the man who brought the drama to Texas, he might acquire a sort of theatrical monopoly, and make excellent profits. So he hastened to spend a good deal of his own money hiring a company and with it left by boat for Houston, expecting to arrange for a place to perform, and other details, when he arrived. He hired his company for a year, paid their passages from the States, and even advanced money to some of them.

When I first engaged the Company, I did not know there was any person of the name of Carlos in Texas, but brought the whole corps with the intention of risking my little savings in trying to establish the Drama in this Republic. On my arrival I found a Mr. Carlos here, who had a room I thought might answer the above purpose till I could get a regular Theatre built. I offered to rent said room but could not get it on any other terms except giving half the profits; to this I consented, offering at the same time, to go into partnership in the large Theatre, but Mr. Carlos's answer was, he did not like going into partnership with any one . . . On my arrival, finding living &c. more expensive than I anticipated, I (without being solicited,) not only raised their [the company's] salaries, but made them all a present of a benefit each, which by their engagements they were not entitled to . . .<sup>7</sup>

On May 30 the *Telegraph* reported that Corri's company had just arrived; the town was soon covered with play-bills.<sup>8</sup>

We trust the enterprise and perseverance they have displayed in establishing the drama in our Republic, will be rewarded by the

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<sup>6</sup>According to Mrs. Spell, Corri, manager of the Camp Street Theatre, New Orleans, found himself out of a job when the joint manager of the St. Charles and the Camp Street theatres closed the latter after an unprofitable season.

<sup>7</sup>*Telegraph*, August 18.

<sup>8</sup>"The Reminiscences of Mrs. Dilue Harris. III," *The Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association*, VII, 217.



liberal patronage of a generous and enlightened public. This being the first attempt to establish a Theatre in the city, they will necessarily encounter a thousand difficulties unknown to cities where exhibitions of the kind have been made common; we can assure them however that every allowance will be made on the part of our citizens, that the candid and impartial can require.

The Houston Theatre opened for its first performances on Monday evening, June 11.<sup>9</sup> The *Telegraph* for June 9 contained a brief item indicating the nature of the night's entertainment, but fortunately there still exists in the Masonic Library at Waco a playbill for the evening.<sup>10</sup> It appears from this that the opening of the Theatre had been delayed: the scenery had been damaged on its trip to Texas from the States, and the orchestra had not yet arrived from Mobile. The bill refers to "the Managers"; Carlos recited an opening address; the company joined in singing a new national Texian anthem, especially written for the occasion by Corri; Corri acted in both the play and the farce, *The Hunchback* and *The Dumb Belle*.<sup>11</sup> The evening was, in fact, something of an event. The New Orleans *Weekly Picayune*, June 25, 1838, recorded the cast, because "this may hereafter be considered an epoch in the 'History of the Drama,' " and this notice was copied by the New York *Mirror*, July 28.

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<sup>9</sup>In the *Houston Chronicle*, May 26, 1929, Mrs. Adele B. Looscan recounted as a personal recollection of her mother, Mrs. Mary J. Briscoe, that "the performance was given in a hotel owned by Major B. F. Smith, situated on the site of the Hutchins House, now occupied by a part of the Southern Pacific office building at Main and Franklin." The building, however, was probably where Mrs. Dilue Harris remembered it, the present site of the First National Bank, 201 Main, at the corner of Franklin. See below, page 13, and footnote 27.

<sup>10</sup>See Appendix A.

<sup>11</sup>A story has been several times recounted which involves the confusion of this play and its first performance with another play, *The Dumb Girl of Genoa*. According to the story, *The Dumb Girl of Genoa* was on one occasion so badly performed that Carlos was tried and convicted of having killed the play, and was then condemned to be hung in effigy from the limb of a tall pine tree that grew in front of the theatre.

The *Telegraph's Advertising Sheet* for June 11 listed the members of the company, and contained statements to the public by both Corri and Carlos. Carlos, in his notice, declared that he had

. . . made arrangements with Mr. Corri, who has recently arrived in this city with a corps Dramatic hailing from different Theatres of the United States. What their merits are, I know not: a judicious public will encourage modest merit be it never so humble. And if they do not succeed the *Drama* must, for it has

"Since first in Athens dawned the drama's day,  
All climes, and ages, have confessed its sway."

I need not add here, that according to my opportunities and means, I have done all that could be expected, many necessary articles pertaining to an establishment such as mine are still wanting.

The tone of Corri's notice perhaps suggests the lack of agreement between the two men.

Mr. Corri has much pleasure in announcing to the inhabitants and visitors of Houston, that at a great expense he has succeeded in securing the following talented Theatrical Company, who will have the honor of appearing so soon as arrangements can be made for a Theatre. Mr. C. begs to assure his patrons that no expense or pains shall be spared to render the announcements worthy their patronage, and it will be the greatest pride of his life to say in after years that he has been the founder of the *legitimate drama* in the *glorious Republic of Texas*.

On June 16 the *Telegraph* reported that the night the Theatre had opened it was packed, that many were unable to obtain seats, that some apparently could not even get inside it.

. . . the remarkable forbearing disposition, that was shown by the audience for these pioneers of the drama . . . has not in the least degree been required, as the actors have exceeded the expectations of their most sanguine friends. It must be exceedingly gratifying to every true friend of the drama, to behold its infancy in our country attended by such favorable auspices.

This success continued. Years later Mrs. Dilue Harris still remembered that "the first theatrical company to come to Texas . . . not only ran the young people wild, but the

old people were not much better.”<sup>12</sup> During the second week of the season *The Stranger*, *Therese*, *The Rent Day*, *The Maid of Munster*, and *The Robber's Wife* “were performed in a style that would have gained applause even upon the stage of the principal cities of the United States.”<sup>13</sup>

A fortnight later the dissension between Carlos and Corri had come to a head. Carlos wanted a large theatre, a theatre in a separate theatre building. But so did Corri; in fact, he had come to Houston expecting to build himself a theatre after his arrival. Corri was willing to go into partnership with Carlos to build the large theatre, but this Carlos refused; he didn't want a partner. Corri, consequently, determined to pursue his original plans alone.

Mr. Carlos . . . proposed to me to raise the salaries . . . he told me that I should lose by keeping the Theatre open longer than a few weeks, but by raising their [the company's] salaries I should then be able to cancel their engagements, and leave them here in a strange country . . . He was at the time offering Mrs. Barker, and in fact, nearly all the members of the Company engagements, if they would leave me and join him . . . <sup>14</sup>

On July 7 the *Telegraph* contained a news item stating that Carlos in a few weeks intended to begin erecting (his fellow citizens were invited to join with him in the undertaking) “a large and beautiful Theatre upon a scale commensurate with the liberal patronage of the citizens of Texas. The location of the building will be on Main street, directly opposite the Capitol.” Having failed in the attempt to lure Corri's actors away from him, he apparently decided to make a trip to the States between the closing of the Theatre and the opening of his own new theatre to engage himself a company. Mrs. Spell says he set out for the States in August.

The same paper contained a notice by Corri saying that he had purchased a lot, on which he intended to erect at a cost of about \$13,000 a spacious theatre to be opened with

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<sup>12</sup>“The Reminiscences of Mrs. Dilue Harris. III,” *loc. cit.* p. 217.

<sup>13</sup>*Telegraph*, June 23.

<sup>14</sup>*Telegraph*, August 18.

a winter season "at the meeting of Congress" under his own sole management, "with the whole strength of the present Company, and several powerful additions."

Mr. Corri avails himself of this opportunity of informing his friends and patrons that the whole Theatrical corps now here was engaged and brought out to Texas at his (Mr. C.) sole expense and risk, and that they are all under engagement with him for one year. He consequently has the honor of being the original founder of the Drama in this rising and glorious Republic.

Weekly the *Telegraph's Advertising Sheet* contained a notice of Corri's proposed theatre, with the paragraph: "Those who may desire to become purchasers of stock in the New Theatre, are requested to make early application to Mr. Corri, as there are only six \$500 shares remaining unsold." Corri proposed to spend about \$15,000 on the theatre, the money to be raised by the sale of thirty \$500 shares. Books of subscription to the capital stock were to be open until September 12 at Messrs. League & Co.'s. Corri asked for ten per cent in advance, the rest on call.

The New Orleans *Weekly Picayune* commented, July 30, 1838: "Mr. Corri talks of erecting a new theatre at Houston, to open in November. Carlos is also projecting one. Two theatres for Houston! My eyes!"

Available newspaper files are not complete, but it is likely that Corri's group did not enjoy a particularly happy summer. On July 24 Barker, one of the company, theatrically committed suicide.

He died from the effects of Laudnum, of which he drank nearly a gill in presence of his wife, saying at the time to her "I drink this to thee!" Immediately afterwards, he laid down and fell into a lethargic sleep. After an hour had elapsed, Mrs. Barker became alarmed at his appearance, and sent for a physician, but the poison had done its work; every effort was made to resuscitate him, but in vain.<sup>15</sup>

Mrs. Dilue Harris has recorded an interesting aftermath of the suicide:

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<sup>15</sup>*Telegraph*, July 28.



Mrs. Barker went home sick, Mrs. Hubbard refused to act again, and Mr. Barker took an overdose of laudanum and died, leaving his family destitute, the mother sick, with three small children, in an open house without a fireplace or stove. As soon as the people buried the corpse, there was a meeting to find means to help Mrs. Barker. The gamblers gave money freely, but it was impossible to get a good house. Gen. Sam Houston came to the rescue, and said that the destitute family could have the president's mansion and that he would board. The family was moved into the mansion till Mrs. B. was able to travel to her friends.<sup>16</sup>

Carlos' benefit was set for the last night of the season. He wanted the play to be *The Apostate*, but Mrs. Barker maintained that she could not learn the part of Florinda in time. This led to a rumor that the company had refused

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<sup>16</sup>"The Reminiscences of Mrs. Dilue Harris, III," *loc. cit.*, p. 219. Houston was very likely keenly interested in theatrical activities in the capital, and may have been a pretty regular attendant at the Theatre. He can hardly have lost in twenty years all the interest he displayed in the drama as a member of the Nashville Thespian Society in 1818. N. M. Ludlow has told in *Dramatic Life As I Found It* (St. Louis, 1880) how a group of young gentlemen in Nashville became interested in August, 1818, in forming an amateur theatrical company, with Ludlow as director and manager. He agreed on the condition that they abide by his decisions in assigning them parts. In the first play performed by the group Houston had the part of Glenalvon in Home's *Douglas*. His declamation and action, Ludlow says, was not equal to his appearance. (His height has been variously estimated from six feet two to six feet six; in 1818 he must have weighed about two hundred pounds.) In a later performance of the Society he played the part of Chevalier St. Franc in *The Point of Honor*, and, against his will, the part of a drunken porter in the concluding farce, *We Fly by Night*. Arrayed in his costume and make-up, he was so disturbed he swore he would not go on the stage. "Look here, Ludlow, if the people hiss me tonight, I'll shoot you tomorrow." Ludlow, however, had tipped off the audience, who applauded so loudly that Houston suspected he was being ridiculed. Ludlow's comment is that Houston really did play the part admirably, better, in fact, than any professional actor he had ever seen perform it. Ludlow's observation of Houston as a member of this theatrical society (Andrew Jackson was an honorary member) led him to observe that although few supposed Houston had any comic humor in his composition, "yet I never met with a man who had a keener sense of the ridiculous, or a quicker eye to discover it, nor one who could more readily assume the ludicrous or the sublime."

to play for his benefit. What actually took place in the Theatre that night is unknown, but sometime during the evening Carlos made a long and presumably angry speech, in which, one may guess, he blamed the difficulties of the Houston Theatre on Corri, related the history of the establishment of the drama in Houston in a version favorable to the part he had played in it, stated, we know, in his own defence, that he had been urging Corri to raise the salaries of the company, and must have concluded with an invitation to the public to join him in his new enterprise if they wanted to support the drama as it should be supported in the glorious Republic.

The effects of this benefit led Corri to publish a long Card in the *Telegraph*, August 18.<sup>17</sup>

I, Henry Corri, beg to return my most sincere thanks to the citizens of Houston for their kind and liberal patronage since my arrival with the Company, and particularly for the very fashionable and crowded House which attended my benefit. The Company have also requested me to return their heartfelt thanks for the manifold kindness they have received in this their new home. It is a duty I owe to myself and the ladies and gentlemen of the Corps Dramatique, to confute the reports which have been circulated with the evident intention of injuring those who are striving by honest industry to contribute to the amusement of the public, and to gain a livelihood for themselves and families.—It was reported that the Company refused to play for Mr. Carlos' Benefit. This is a gross falsehood; not one member ever refused to play. Then it was said that Mrs. Barker refused; she never did, but merely said she could not possibly study the part of Florinda in the *Apostate*—either to do it or herself justice, but at the same moment offering to play any other part he (Mr. Carlos) might fix upon; in fact, so far from refusing, the whole Company broke the established rules of all Theatres, and played for the one night, throwing up the salary for the remaining five nights. Mr. Jackson also got up from a sick bed on purpose to play on the said evening; this, I should say, does not look like refusing to play.

The Card continued with passages already quoted above, and similar material, and concluded:

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<sup>17</sup>It was reprinted August 25.

The undersigned are testimony that every word of the above is truth.

Emma Barker	James Boulton
Henrietta Vogt	H. Sargent
Francis Hubbard	Jas. S. Ormund
G. W. Chambers	Alex. Jackson
A. S. Newton	

Some time in October Corri began a winter season, although not in his new theatre. After Carlos' benefit it is likely that Carlos and Corri severed their business relationship. Corri, however, seems to have retained the use of the Theatre.

Mr. Corri has recently been making great exertions to render the Houston theatre worthy of public patronage. We have been pleased to notice that in the selection of his pieces, he has an eye to those having a tendency to mend the morals of his patrons. The crowds who have lately flocked to his evening entertainments, prove that he is well rewarded for his indefatigable perseverance.<sup>18</sup>

Mrs. Dilue Harris has left us an interesting description of what happened in Corri's Theatre one evening in October:

School opened with Mrs. Robertson as teacher. President Houston had been absent in October visiting Nacogdoches. On his return the citizens arranged to give him a grand reception and banquet. The Milam Guards were to meet the president at Green's Bayou. As they marched out they came by the school house. The soldiers were a fine body of men; their uniforms were white with blue trimming. Captain Shea was in command. There were but a few girls in school. None of us was over fifteen years old, but we all had sweethearts among the Milam Guards. Soon after they left town rain began falling, and when they returned in the evening they were a sorry sight, wet and muddy, their uniforms ruined, and the president's clothing not much better. The reception was a failure, there being no ladies at the banquet.

The school teacher, Mrs. Robertson, and pupils had received complimentary tickets to the theatre that evening, as had also the president, his staff and the Milam Guards . . . We were all at the school house before dark. From there we marched to the theatre, where the First National Bank now [1899] stands. The front seats were

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<sup>18</sup>*Telegraph*, November 10.

reserved for ladies and the school children, the next seats for the president, his staff, and the Milam Guards. The school arrived early, found the reserved seats occupied, and was accordingly seated in the second seats. There was considerable confusion, as the house was crowded. As the president and escort entered the orchestra played "Hail to the Chief," but there were no seats vacant to accommodate them. The stage manager, Mr. Curry, came out and requested the men in front, who were gamblers and their friends, to give up the seats. This they refused to do. Then the manager called for the police to put them out. They became enraged, and drawing weapons, threatened to shoot. The sheriff called upon the soldiers to arrest and disarm them. It looked as if there would be bloodshed, gamblers on one side, soldiers on the other, women and children between, everybody talking, women and children crying. The president got on a seat, commanded the peace, asked those in front to be seated, ordered the soldiers to stack arms, and said that he and the ladies and children would take back seats. This appeared to shame the gamblers. One man acted as spokesman and said that if their money was returned they would leave the house, as they had no desire to discommode the ladies. He said that they would have left the house at first if the police had not been called. After the gamblers left, the evening passed very pleasantly. The president addressed the audience, particularly the children, as the term for which he was elected president would close soon.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>"The Reminiscences of Mrs. Dilue Harris. III," *loc. cit.*, p. 218-219. Marquis James in his biography of Houston has quoted and used this passage by Mrs. Harris as the nucleus of the following inaccurate and composite account of the materials he had gathered about the early Houston theatre:

"Sam Houston returned to his capital in the rain alone. Cannon boomed across the prairie at his approach and an escort of the Milam Guards, the flower of the Army (possessing uniforms), galloped to meet the President. An epoch-making evening would now be complete.

"The occasion was the Republic's salutation to the beaux arts in the form of the first professional theatrical performance under the Lone Star. The President was a few minutes late, but still in time for the state dinner to the cast. He ate in his wet clothes and a little doll actress from Baltimore confessed a difficulty in keeping her eyes on her plate.

"Meantime the hall where the performance was to be held was filling up. The young ladies of Mrs. Robertson's fashionable boarding school were to have front seats, but when they arrived these places were occupied. The girls were marshaled into other chairs and from this point of vantage Dilrue Rose witnessed the entrance of the



Carlos' Houston Theatre, at the City Exchange, Main Street, opened for a winter season later than Carlos had expected, on Monday, January 21, 1839, with a company largely made up of new members from the States.<sup>20</sup> The advertisement for the opening night in the *Telegraph*, January 19, named Carlos as proprietor, and listed the actors, "a respectable and talented company . . . for the production of the drama in all its moral tendency." The doors opened at 6:45; the performance began at 7:15. Tickets were \$2. New pieces by the orchestra were promised, and a new song, "The Texan Star." The play was *Charles the Second*, followed by a farce, *The Secret*.

The company was apparently a fairly good one. The *Telegraph*, February 6, noted the embarrassment of the actresses, but thought the actors played their parts remarkably well, and was agreeably surprised at the improvements, since the last season, in scenery and stage furniture.

The great exertions and the sacrifices which Mr. Carlos has made to establish the drama in the Republic, entitles him to the gratitude of our citizens; and we rejoice that the company which he recently engaged, have shown themselves to be well worthy of public patronage.

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President and staff to the strains of *Hail the Chief*. But all of the seats were taken. The stage manager . . .

"So the curtain rose upon 'Sheridan Knowles Comedy *The Hunchback*,' the performance concluding 'with a farce entitled a *Dumb Belle*, or *I'm Perfection*.'

"After the show a player named Mr. Barker took a dose of laudanum for his nerves. It killed him, thus terminating the engagement. Tears blurred the borrowed bloom on the cheeks of the little troupier from Baltimore, who declared herself a widow, with two fatherless babies at home. The consolation of Mrs. Barker became a national matter. Her husband was given a fine funeral. The gamblers raised a purse of gold for the orphans, and General Houston placed the Executive Mansion at the bereaved artist's disposal until a vessel sailed for New Orleans." From *The Raven* by Marquis James, copyright 1929, used by special permission of the publishers, the Bobbs-Merrill Company.

<sup>20</sup>The *Telegraph*, January 2, had reported, "The Steam-boat Rufus Putnam arrived at the landing in this city this morning, with a large number of passengers, from N. Orleans. . . . Mr. John Carlos and the Theatrical corps engaged by him at New York, are on board."

On February 13 the *Telegraph* printed a long letter signed "S," "one of the nightly visitors at this [Carlos'] little temple . . . gotten up in a neat and splendid style," commenting in some detail on each member of the company. "S" found the acting "generally very good," but warned Mrs. Melville that good looks were not alone enough for an actress, told her that she was not properly costumed, stated that the two Misses were improving, and reported happily a rumor that new actresses were engaged. In the same paper another correspondent, "E," showed himself less satisfied with the company.<sup>21</sup> To find fault with the ladies would be uncourteous, he said, though to praise their acting would not be truth, and one doesn't expect first rate acting from such a company as Carlos', to whom Shakespeare's plays are new, but, he added, the actors should learn their parts, instead of relying on the prompter or Lewellen to help them out.

Lewellen seems to have been the first star; he apparently began his engagement on February 11, when he performed the part of Richard III before a crowded house. He was still playing at the Theatre on February 22. The only other early Texas playbill<sup>22</sup> that I know of is for this night; it is now in the Theatre Collection of Harvard University. The next star was Forbes, the tragedian.

A comedian, Henry J. Finn, began an engagement of a week or a little more on March 13. His benefit may have marked the end of the season proper at the Houston Theatre. Charles H. Eaton apparently expected but did not get an engagement at the Theatre from March 25 on. On March 27 Finn began at the Theatre for a few nights an entertainment "comprising a Lecture illustrative of *Astronomy*, and other subjects of a novel and interesting character; which are calculated to improve, refine, and please the juvenile members of the community."<sup>23</sup>

During March there seems to have been talk of the possible production at one of the theatres of an original five

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<sup>21</sup>See Appendix F for these two criticisms.

<sup>22</sup>See Appendix A.

<sup>23</sup>*Telegraph*, March 27.

act tragedy by a Houstonian, *The Milesian*. This play, which apparently existed in manuscript, dealt with ill-starred and fatal love against a background of Irish-English dissension in mid-Eighteenth century Ireland. The complicated synopsis printed in the *Telegraph* on March 6<sup>24</sup> reveals the hand of a literary amateur with some appreciation for theatrically effective bits he has seen in the theatre. There is no evidence that the play was ever produced; in fact, from the synopsis one would think it must have been unsuitable for production.

On April 8 Carlos seems to have closed the Houston Theatre out of deference to Eaton's benefit at Corri's. There was a benefit at the Theatre for Lewellen on April 11, for Miss Hamblin on April 9 and April 19, for Codet on April 15, for Eaton on April 18. Gerard, "the Texian Magician,"<sup>25</sup> was performing at the Theatre towards the end of April. There was a complimentary benefit to Madame Thielman on July 15, when fifteen citizens, in a signed statement printed in the *Star*, July 11, urged her to take up residence. The bill was *The Loan of a Lover*, *Raising the Wind*, and *Bombastes Furioso*. This may have been the last occasion on which the Houston Theatre opened its doors. In the *Star* for July 31<sup>26</sup> Carlos printed a notice headed "Theatrical Property for Sale" indicating that he was done with the drama in Houston.

I will sell my Theatrical Furniture low for cash—or my own notes—consisting of Scenery, Drop Curtains, Dramatic Library, Wardrobe, Lamps, Stage properties, cushioned Benches, &c. &c. If the purchaser wishes, I will rent the Theatre for six or twelve months, on liberal terms.

On February 13, 1839, Corri took a benefit performance, probably at the old Houston Theatre. The *Telegraph* commented that day:

Those of our citizens who remember the period when he first appeared with his little "corps dramatique" upon the first stage that

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<sup>24</sup>See Appendix B.

<sup>25</sup>*Star*, April 27.

<sup>26</sup>Reprinted at least seven times.

had been erected in this Republic, and dedicated to the mimic muse, will duly appreciate his claims to public patronage, and be reminded of his favorite song, "Should auld acquaintance be forgot?"

Less than two weeks later Corri's New Theatre in Market Square<sup>27</sup> opened, on February 25. One of the actors delivered a verse address written by Judge Henry Thompson.<sup>28</sup> "The array of Histrionic talent, in this instance had never before been equalled in this Republic."<sup>29</sup> The audience, the *Telegraph* reported, was probably the largest and most respectable ever assembled in Houston on such an occasion. The play was *The School for Scandal*.

On March 27 John R. Scott played Iago to the Othello of Charles H. Eaton, who was still in the city. By April 8 (when Eaton had a benefit, during which he performed "his celebrated imitations of Forrest, Booth, Kean, Kemble, Adams, Pelby, Macready, Vandenhoff, Mason, Old Jack Barnes, Daddy Rice the celebrated Jim Crow"<sup>30</sup>) the three Barneses—Old Jack, his wife, and his daughter Charlotte—had left Corri's, and a Master Burke (hardly Master; he was almost twenty), whose specialty was Irish parts, had arrived to stay a week. He seems to have been a great success. On April 20 the well-known Mrs. Barker had a benefit, the play being *Romeo and Juliet*.<sup>31</sup> On April 22

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<sup>27</sup>B. H. Carroll's statement in his *Standard History of Houston, Texas*, "The first theatre was on the site now [1912] occupied by Henke's [Henke & Pillot's] store between Louisiana and Milam Streets on Congress Avenue," probably refers to the location of this New Theatre.

<sup>28</sup>See Appendix E.

<sup>29</sup>*Telegraph*, February 27.

<sup>30</sup>*Star*, April 8.

<sup>31</sup>The *Star*, April 20, printed the following communication: "Mrs. Barker should be encouraged. She is a widow, and has several little children dependent upon her for support. She is a Texian—a *bona fide* citizen of our republic—and above all, she has remained with the citizens of this place, and played unremittingly, and sustained the principal characters in the *cast*, since the first appearance of the drama amongst us. We, then, should pay at least some attention to those who have so long contributed to our amusement, in preference to those who remain with us so short a time. We should encourage Texian talent."



Waldron took a farewell benefit, "it being his intention to retire from the profession,"<sup>32</sup> the proceeds of which he shared with one of the actresses, Miss Caroline Melville. The chief play of the evening was *Macbeth*, "acted for the first time in Texas."<sup>33</sup> Four days later H. L. Waldron was married to Miss Caroline L. Coles (Miss Melville's real name?) "both of the Corps Dramatique of this City."<sup>34</sup>

Towards the end of April Lewellen began an engagement which included several equestrian dramas. An advertisement in the *Star*, printed several days beginning April 23, called for sixty young men to assist in the forthcoming spectacle of *Mazeppa*. Trouble arose when Corri himself wrote and sent to the *Star* an editorial puff for this play.

The above *Editorial Puff* was written by Mr. Corri, the manager of the Theatre, about whom the dubious *we* is made to be so very solicitous! With this simple explanation, the public will be enabled to place a correct estimate of the degree of influence this Mr. 'We' ought to exert to induce them to "*reward the Manager*." However much we may be in want of editorial matter to fill the columns of our paper, we shall at all times decline the honor of being made, to wish this, that, or the other thing success; this or that individual to be rewarded without first *knowing* something about it. We embrace this occasion, the first that has been offered, to say distinctly, that the *Editorial Columns* of our paper cannot be occupied by others for any purpose, much less for that of *puffing* every private undertaking that may be brought before the public. At the same time, however, we would not be thought remiss in calling public attention to every enterprise that may seem worthy of such notice.<sup>35</sup>

No advertisement of the play appeared in the *Star* that day, but the difficulty was soon smoothed over, for on April 29 the *Star* was urging its readers not to be "backward in remunerating the manager for the expense he has incurred in endeavoring to cater successfully for their taste."

At the benefit of Miss Hamblin an Indian drama, *Conan-chiotah*, was performed, in which she played the part of

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<sup>32</sup>*Star*, April 22.

<sup>33</sup>*Star*, April 22.

<sup>34</sup>*Star*, April 26.

<sup>35</sup>*Star*, April 27.

Addaletta. The *Star* reported on May 4 that in *The Cataract of the Ganges* she

. . . sustains the part of Zamiul, and in it ascends on horseback at speed, a waterfall almost perpendicular from the stage to the extreme height of the theatre, a feat which has seldom been attempted by any female, and one which we would rather hear of than witness when performed by any one in whom we took an interest.

Madam Thielman at her benefit on May 8 had, the *Star* said, the best house of the season.

A paragraph in the *Star*, April 19, reported :

The *resident* population of Houston according to the census lately taken, is 2073—males, 1620, females, 453 . . . On the 1st of March, 1837, there were perhaps two log houses and ten inhabitants, where now are hundreds of buildings, neat and comfortable, large stores well filled with the conveniences, and many of the luxuries of life, fine hotels offering accommodations for a hundred of boarders, and two theatres in successful operation . . .

Edward Stiff stated in *The Texan Emigrant* (Cincinnati, 1840) that in 1839 Houston contained 382 houses, perhaps about three thousand people generally, among these not more than forty "females," and that "The public buildings in Houston, consist of a market house, an arsenal, court-house, jail, two small theatres, the president's house, and the capitol or state house." Stiff recorded in his book his experiences at one of the theatres in Houston one evening in 1839.

The president [Lamar]<sup>36</sup> had been some time absent from the city, and preparations were made for a welcome reception by getting up

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<sup>36</sup>Like Houston, the second President of Texas had more than a casual interest in the theatre. My colleague, Professor Philip Graham, has pointed out to me that Solomon Smith, of some fame and importance as a comedian and theatre manager in the thirties, forties, and fifties, dedicated his first book, *Theatrical Apprenticeship*, (Philadelphia, 1846) to Lamar: "Encouraged by a recollection of the kindly feelings with which I believe myself to have been regarded by you while we were traversing together the fertile plains and piny woods of Georgia—you as a candidate for Congress on your own hook, and I as leader of a chosen band of Thespians—when you, *in search of excitement*, delivered speeches on the then all-absorbing subject of

a grand spree . . . The president entered the town escorted by the Milam guards, whose white pantaloons were in strange contrast with the torrents of rain descending, and the half leg deep mud in the streets . . . For two days . . . revelry was kept up, amid the beating of drums, firing of guns, cutting of throats and a confusion of tongues, and on the second night the guards escorted the President to the Theatre, and at the earnest solicitation of Colonel —— I was induced to help him gallant a pair of ladies to witness the performance of *Belvidere*. The orchestra was discoursing sweet sounds when a peal of three cheers proclaimed the arrival of the President and suit which was speedily followed by a hissing, the discharge of pistols, the glistening of Bowie-knives, while many a knight proclaimed his prowess by a volley of profanity, some levelled at the President, some at the Mayor, some at the police; when at length all seemed exhausted, the field of battle was examined and three reported wounded; killed none.

On May 13 the *Star* complained about the wretched performance of *A Day After the Wedding*:

If he cannot perform a piece announced in the bills, let him skip it, and proceed to the next. We do not wish to be bored any longer with this piece. But as often as it has been performed, they still do it badly.

On May 8 the *Star* had suggested "the propriety of keeping the 'green curtain' raised at least half the time during the evening," pointing out that it was tedious to sit out long half hours between the acts of a piece and still longer periods between pieces, and asked that performances end by eleven rather than by twelve or one, a complaint that the *Star* returned to on May 17:

. . . we would suggest to Mr. Corri the propriety of commencing the performance at an earlier hour, and having the rehearsals *in the morning*, so that the patience of the audience may not be exhausted by the tedious intervals between the acts and pieces. Under the present arrangement, the audience become perfectly exhausted before the commencement of the afterpiece.

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Nullification, and I, *in search of 'the dimes,'* acted plays in newly-built theatres . . ." and that an article in the *Galveston Daily News* for April 10, 1885, states that in 1846 Lamar was a very regular attendant at a Galveston theatre.

At Mrs. Debar's benefit on May 20 the house was crowded to overflowing; one feature of it was the celebrated drunken conflict between her husband and Archer, "which was received on the night of its first representation with shouts of applause, and surpasses any thing of the kind that has yet been attempted on our boards, and is well worth of itself alone, the price of admission."<sup>37</sup> Mrs. Henry Lewis began an engagement on May 21; she was rebuked four days later by a correspondent of the *Star*, "Goethe," for "that tasteless exhibition denominated Dancing in Cachuca." "Does Mrs. Lewis play Hamlet?" he asked. She was soon joined by her husband and her little daughter, La Petite Bertha, and her engagement extended. Bertha, who was a great success, had a benefit on June 3.

On June 6 the well-known Mrs. Sarah Barker married Mr. John Hoffman,<sup>38</sup> proprietor of the Octagon saloon on Congress Street, about a square from the Capitol. The ceremony was performed by the Reverend William Y. Allen, who mentioned it in his "Reminiscences,"<sup>39</sup> and added,

. . . Tom Hoffman married a handsome play actress, whose husband had committed suicide. He was a drunkard. Tom had me to perform the marriage ceremony. His bride, an English woman, desired the Episcopal service, at least the ring part of it. I complied, but got no marriage fee. His wife staid with him about six weeks, made him give her a thousand dollars that she might go to England for her young son. She returned to the States, but not to Texas nor to Tom. Married a man in Georgia, who sued for a divorce when he learned that she still had a husband in Texas.

On June 11 at the benefit of Chambers, reported by the *Star* to be a good dancer and a member of the pioneer dramatic corps, the play advertised was *The Fall of the Alamo*.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>*Star*, May 20.

<sup>38</sup>The *Telegraph* for June 5 and June 12 announced the marriage. (The *Star* on April 11 reported the death of an infant son of Mrs. Barker, Augustus Tomkins Barker.)

<sup>39</sup>"Allen's Reminiscences of Texas, II," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XVIII, 290.

<sup>40</sup>Both of Hogan's references to this play seem to be to its 1845 performances. The *Telegraph* for July 23 and the *Star* for July 25,

The season apparently ended July 3.

In the editorial columns of the *Star*, June 18, appeared the following note: "It is a source of much astonishment, and of considerable severe comment upon the religious character of our city, that while we have a theatre, a court house, a jail, and even a capitol in Houston, we have not a single Church." The *Star* for July 10 contained a notice by the secretary, P. Gray, of the Houston Young Men's Society that there would be a meeting of the Society that evening in the Senate Chambers at half past eight at which the question, "Have theatres an immoral tendency?" would be discussed by the first class.

In the *Star* for August 2 Corri printed the following notice attested by a justice of the peace to be "a true extract from the books of the theatre, kept by the book keeper."

Henry Corri's account of receipts and expenses since opening New Theatre.—Whereas persons having circulated various reports, with the evident intention of injuring my reputation, I have thought it advisable to publish the following statement, in order to vindicate my own character. I have all my books and receipts ready for any person's inspection.

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1845, in noticing the benefit of Newton for July 26 state that "his desire to please will be evinced by the production of a national piece—"The Storming of the Alamo," written by an officer of the revolution, now an esteemed resident among us." The same play, presumably, was acted on August 27, *The Fall of the Alamo; or, The Death of Colonel Crockett*. Some other plays dealing with the disaster at the Alamo which happen to have come to my attention are: *The Fall of the Alamo* by Francis Nona, New York, 1879; *The Capture of the Alamo* by Hiram H. McLane, San Antonio, 1886; act II of *From Gonzales to San Jacinto* by I. M. E. Blandin, Houston, 1897; "Fall of the Alamo," a one act play in *Westward the Course of Empire* by Mary M. Griffith, Austin, 1925; "Death Comes to the Alamo" by Franklin Y. Martin, Dallas, 1935; "The Messenger of Defeat," a one act play in *Dramas of Daring Deeds Depicting Texas History* by Bessie L. D. Roselle, San Antonio, 1936; and episode III of *Texas, The Land of the Strong* by Ilanon Moon, Austin, 1936.

Amount of receipts from February 25 to July 3th, gross receipts .....	28713.50
Amount of cash paid out from Feb. 25 to July 8th	
Shares of benefits and cash paid to stars .....	11003.09
Expense of stock company with lights and sundry other expenses (\$150 per night from Feb. 25th to July 8th) .....	17400.00
Receipts on file and books .....	5089.25
Expenses .....	34492.34
Receipts .....	28713.50
Balance paid out over and above the receipts .....	5778.04

The *Star* reported on August 6 that part of the theatrical company had gone down to Galveston. It must have been a fairly encouraging venture, for about the middle of September Corri published a proposal in the *Galvestonian* (apparently very similar to the one printed in the *Telegraph* during the summer and fall of 1838) to erect a theatre in Galveston. "If his statement of his receipts and expenditures, published a short time since, is correct," the *Star* commented on September 17, "we should imagine that it would have much influence in deterring individuals from taking stock."

In a notice in the *Star* and in the *Telegraph* first printed August 7, Corri stated that the Theatre was closed for the rest of the summer, but that he hoped to begin a winter season about the second week in September with "the additional company and the novelties which he is actively engaged in procuring." August 24 another notice began to appear. Corri announced the receipt of flattering letters from the States, enabling him to promise new plays, stars, and a galaxy of talent.

. . . every novelty that can be obtained will be presented in quick succession. The interior of the Theatre will be entirely remodeled having Private Boxes fitted up elegantly for the accommodation of families. The gallery will be entirely abolished and a most *rigid* police engaged to enforce the strictest order in the Theatre. The season to commence about the middle of September. A limited number of Free Admissions for the Season may be procured on application at the Box Office.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup>These changes are partly explained by a comment in the *Star*, September 17, as designed to avoid "the unpleasant scrambling for seats, of which so much complaint was made last season."

A list of those owing city taxes, printed in the *Star*, September 7, shows Carlos owing \$104; Corri, \$116.25.

The *Star* suggested to Corri on October 2 "the propriety of relieving the venerable pair of figures which have so long stood guard in the proscenium of his theatre—perhaps not in his theatre alone, for to judge from their appearance, they may have served in half the theatres of the United States, during the last half century."

The season opened October 3, a postponement from October 1, blamed on the indisposition of a portion of the company, but "too early to warrant him in expecting crowded houses";<sup>42</sup> the Columbia, moreover, which was to bring some new actors to supplement the old stock company, had not yet arrived. Corri now called his theatre the Houston Theatre. Admission to the parquette was \$2, to the private boxes \$3, which the *Star* criticized as too high. "The individual who finds that to treat himself and wife to a theatre ticket will cost him six dollars—a whole day's wages for a mechanic—will be very apt to stay at home."<sup>43</sup> In less than a week the prices were lowered, apparently to \$2, with children half price. The doors opened at six thirty; the performances began at seven.

Look to it, ladies and gentlemen of the profession. We shall keep a watchful eye upon you this season; and will not let you escape so easily as you did the last. You have had time enough to wear off the rough edges; and we shall not allow you to err with impunity. Above all things, pray do not, as you used so frequently to do last winter—appear on the stage with *dirty boots and shoes*. They destroy the whole effect of a beautiful dress, and an interesting piece—that is notice number *one*.<sup>44</sup>

On October 7 the ladies were especially invited to observe the improvements in the building. ". . . the whole world

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<sup>42</sup>*Telegraph*, October 2. "From his untiring exertions in catering for the public amusement, he deserves to be well patronized, and we have no doubt as the season advances, and the times become a little more easy in money matters, he will be amply remunerated."

<sup>43</sup>*Star*, September 20.

<sup>44</sup>*Star*, October 1.



is more or less under the influence and control of the ladies; Mr. C. assures us that he has long since come to that conclusion."<sup>45</sup> "He has either a good deal of nerve with some talent, or a vast quantity of assurance," the *Star* remarked, October 8, of a gentleman of Houston who was to act the part of Damon that night; "otherwise he would not have undertaken to represent so difficult a character." It must have been a surprising performance. The actress who was to play Calanthe became ill, so Mrs. Hubbard played that part as well as her own, Hermion.

A long communication in the *Star*, October 12, signed "Natz,"<sup>46</sup> discussed the whole company, giving it little praise, aside from Mr. and Mrs. Hubbard and Mr. Kirkland. "In the female department, the deficiency of strength is positively shameful." The communication was undoubtedly partly responsible for the immediate closing of the Theatre. An advertisement in the *Star*, October 14, announced a closing for a few nights due to the nonarrival of the new members of the company and the prevalent sickness in the city, which had incapacitated some of the actors. A benefit for the company was announced for the following Wednesday. An editorial in the same paper was much franker:

We understand that the Theatre is closed for the present, on account of the indisposition of some of the company—or else the indisposition of the people to attend and see good pieces murdered. As a real friend of the proprietor we must suggest to him that the forbearance of our citizens will not last forever, and that he must not anticipate the same indulgence he received last session.

Late in October, when Corri heard of the great Mobile fire which had occurred earlier in the month, he offered the use of the Theatre for a benefit performance for the sufferers, the proceeds to be used to relieve their distress.

It was perhaps the prevalent sickness that carried off Little Bobby Farrell. The *Star* for December 3, in an advertisement and an editorial, announced a benefit for his

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<sup>45</sup>*Star*, October 7.

<sup>46</sup>See Appendix F.

widow, destitute and recently ill, and his orphan son, to enable them to join her relations in the States. On the fifth a communication by "Natz" in the *Star* sourly stated that the full house which had come determined to enjoy the evening had not been entirely disappointed. Boulton's music was apparently particularly good, and Madame Thielman the "bright particular star" of the evening, but one of the characters in *The Swiss Cottage* had appeared on the stage drunk. The other pieces performed were *The Prize* and *Bombastes Furioso*. On December 17 Madame Thielman gave an entertainment of songs and recitations in the Senate Chamber, assisted by Jackson, an amateur or two, and perhaps other members of the company.

The Theatre opened again on December 17, but with an incomplete company, and the orchestra had not yet arrived.<sup>47</sup> Performances were announced to begin at seven thirty; admission was \$2.50 for a box seat, \$2 for the parquette, children \$1. The bill advertised was *The Blue Devils*, *Turn Out*, and *The Rival Lovers*. The *Star* noticed the opening, on the eighteenth, with a hortatory paragraph:

Mr. Corri, manager of the Theatre at this place, has again opened his house for the amusement of the public. We have not yet paid him a visit, and hence can say nothing about the force of the company. Nothing affords us more pleasure than to witness good acting. The exhibitions of the stage, under proper arrangements, can be made instructive and useful. Unfortunately both directors and actors forget that in expression and conduct they frequently outrage the delicacy and morals of their spectators. This should be avoided most carefully. Our friend Corri, who has struggled through many difficulties to the introduction of a corps theatrical, and the erection of an edifice, truly handsome, should now be careful to suffer none of the common, low, vulgar comedies, replete with the most vulgar "entendres" that are so often served up, to the mortification of the boxes, and the uproarious applause of the galleries. And above all, he should prevent the uproar occasioned by low ruffians, who, by their boisterous and unmannerly conduct, have driven ladies from the theatre, disgusted with every thing they saw or heard, and dreading to return, lest the same low blackguardism should again be repeated.

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<sup>47</sup>On December 28 the *Star* advertised the overture to *Il Tancred* by the "orchestra, who have now arrived."

Attend to these things, Manager Corri, and we trust that a public grateful for the efforts you have made to contribute to their amusement, will give you full houses.

The Theatre was closed on Christmas day.

On January 17 the *Star* blamed the great negligence of some of the company in learning their parts for the thin houses. Corri offered on January 21, January 29, February 3, and February 7 to reserve box seats free of charge for the ladies. On January 30 the *Star* printed a letter signed "E. S." commenting on the company.<sup>48</sup> Sutherland, from the National Theatre in New York, who had been starring, "E. S." thought a perfect and total failure, much inferior to Heckle of the company. For the company itself, however, he had few good words. Corri should, he thought, add to it for his own interest another lady and a good leading actor. With the exception of Heckle, Newton, Armstrong, and Madame Thielman, not one of them could get an engagement anywhere else.

An indisposition of Madame Thielman closed the Theatre on at least two Saturday nights in February. February 5 and 7 were ladies invitation nights.<sup>49</sup> On February 6 a Captain Robertson volunteered his services and made his first appearance in Texas. On February 10 a nautical drama, *My Charming Polly; or, Lucky and Unlucky Days*, advertised as a great success in New York, was performed. The *Star* praised it on February 12 as superior to anything at the Theatre in three months, and performed better than anything seen there for a long time.

On February 13 Mr. and Mrs. Lewis began an engagement. An editorial note in the *Star* on the fifteenth congratulated the public "on the acquisition which these persons bring to the amusements of this city. The powers of Mrs. Lewis, in almost any character—her tact, render her the most desirable actress we could have on our stage."

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<sup>48</sup>See Appendix F.

<sup>49</sup>February 5, Wednesday, was so inclement that the ladies couldn't come; there may have been no performance.

Corri especially invited General Houston to attend the Theatre that night. Her engagement was advertised to end with a benefit on February 19, but the manager straightway announced the engagement of her daughter, La Petite Bertha, announced to be only six and a half. At her own benefit, February 26, Little Bertha played six different characters. That day's *Star*, calling her a miracle, advised its readers it would be a serious loss not to see her, and commented on her correct reading, her appropriate action, and her graceful and finished movements on the stage.<sup>50</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Lewis were then reengaged, and, a few days after their benefit (Mrs. Lewis appeared in "her most powerful and attractive character—The Wife"<sup>51</sup>) Mrs. Lewis and her daughter consented to a final engagement while Mr. Lewis was absent on business in Galveston.<sup>52</sup> The Theatre was closed March 5 in preparation for the melodrama to be produced the next night, *The Miller and His Men*.

On March 11 Corri took a benefit, at which all the Lewises appeared, with a crowded, cheering, enthusiastic audience.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>On February 27 the *Star* printed the following paragraph. I quote it here, correctly dated, only because it has received undue attention in some of the previous accounts of the early Houston theatre: "There was a report in town a day or two since, that one of the actors of the Theatre, was bitten by a mad dog; if there were any hope that this report were true, we would advise Mr. Corri to get up some new play, in which this actor could perform his part *naturally*,—Hamlet, for instance, or Othello, or even old King Lear, would do admirably. We fear however this news is too good to be true, as it is said by 'old settlers,' that a mad dog has never been seen in Texas."

<sup>51</sup>*Star*, March 4.

<sup>52</sup>One feature of the engagement of the Lewises seems to have been Mrs. Lewis' dancing. On March 10, for example, the *Star* reported that she would do a medley dance "Illustrating the styles of *French, Scotch, German, English, Russian and Spanish*, the latter with Castanets."

<sup>53</sup>T. Allston Brown, in his *History of the American Stage*, New York, 1870, states: "In 1849, Mr. Lewis having applied for and received a divorce, Mrs. L. went to San Antonio, Texas, where she died about the year 1854."

"Mr. Corri will in the course of the evening explain his intentions, before and since coming to Texas, as the Pioneer of the Drama, and what course he intends to pursue . . . hoping that the patronage of his fellow citizens will encourage him to pursue his plans—which are to elevate the Drama in the Republic of Texas."<sup>54</sup> The speech, on the difficulties and embarrassments of establishing the drama in Texas, was received with great applause. He seems to have promised an entirely new company for his next season, announced some sort of arrangement with Mr. Lewis, and promised to spare no expense or labor to elevate the drama to a standard high enough to be an honor to the country. This benefit was advertised as the last night of the season, but the Theatre was open on March 14, when Newton received a benefit. Soon after that Madame Thielman went down to Galveston and opened a theatre there, possibly assisted by other members of the company.

The Theatre opened again on April 11 for a benefit to Jackson, followed by a benefit for Corri on April 16. These two performances must have met with considerable public enthusiasm, enough so, at any rate, that Corri reopened the Theatre for a few evenings, "in compliance with the numerous requests made by patrons of the Drama."<sup>55</sup> May 4 seems to have been an especially gala evening, the company being supplemented by six amateurs.

The *Star* reported on May 12 that a thespian corps of gentlemen amateurs had been organized to perform for a few nights during the summer for the benefit of the indigent sick. The first appearance of the Houston Dramatic Association, preceded by an address written for the occasion by John N. O. Smith,<sup>56</sup> was on May 28 in *Pizarro* and *The Lottery Ticket*. Possibly President Lamar was there; he had been invited and a "seat has been tendered him by the Committee of Management every night of the performance

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<sup>54</sup>*Star*, March 11.

<sup>55</sup>*Star*, April 23.

<sup>56</sup>See Appendix E.

while he shall remain in town.”<sup>57</sup> The *Star* that day approved the undertaking, and two days later reported that the first appearance of the dozen or twenty gentlemen of the city before an audience of “beautiful ladies and sensible men” had been “as creditable as their motives were philanthropical.” The program was repeated with a new farce, *The Spectre Bridegroom*, on June 4. On June 9 the Newton family—Mrs. Newton, Old Paddy Newton, and Young Pat—received a benefit on the grounds that all their savings had been stolen which were to support them during the summer.<sup>58</sup> The plays were *The Golden Farmer* and *The Illustrious Stranger*. On June 27 the Association performed *William Tell*, *The Spectre Bridegroom*, and two extravaganzas, “Jim Brown” and “Sitting on a Rail.”

By June 30 the amateurs were at work on the “splendid MS. Indian Melo-Drama, as played throughout the United States upwards of 200 nights.”<sup>59</sup> July 14 was set by the society to be a complimentary benefit to Corri,

In testimony of their thanks for the gratuitous use of his Theatre; also his strenuous exertions to forward the designs of the Society. It is a well known fact, that Mr. Corri, in establishing the drama in Houston, has met with many disappointments and heavy losses, through all of which he struggles with untiring zeal, ever true to the cause. It is, therefore, hoped that the public will come forward, *en masse*, and give him a crowded house.<sup>60</sup>

For some reason, however, there was a postponement of the benefit to July 21, when *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Masquerade* were performed, and Mr. Corri danced La Sylphide in imitation of Madame Celeste.

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<sup>57</sup>*Star*, May 28.

<sup>58</sup>Perhaps this was an imitation of what may have been an unexpectedly successful benefit for Boulton on May 21, when the *Star* said that he “has had the misfortune to be robbed of all the money which he had saved for support in summer quarters, and now appeals to the public in the way of a Benefit.”

<sup>59</sup>*Star*, July 11.

<sup>60</sup>*Star*, July 11.

On July 25 the Theatre was open with a variety of entertainments. General and Mrs. Houston were especially invited; ladies were invited to occupy seats reserved free of charge. *Oh Hush!* and a portion of *Othello* were performed. There were songs, recitations, dances, and imitations. Mr. Corri danced the Cachuca in imitation of Mrs. Lewis, and there was a congratulatory address on internal improvements, occasioned by the event of the day, the laying the corner stone of the Houston and Brazos Railroad. That same afternoon the Theatre had been crowded to hear an eloquent address by Major James Reily, the conclusion of the formal celebration over the beginning of the railroad. Heckle, returned from some sort of military service, received a benefit on August 8. The *Star* reported on November 24 that Corri and Snell had opened a "Finish," apparently a small saloon, in the left wing of the Theatre.

On occasional evenings in January and February, 1841, the Theatre was open. It was open January 1 for a benefit to Corri. It was open January 15, the program being "A Laughable, Local, Electioneering sketch, called, The Mayor of———," followed by the farce, *A Race for a Dinner*. The *Star* commented on January 14 that Corri "intends to 'cover the case' of the late and the coming election . . . Corri is bringing the drama back to the ancient Grecian model—living personages being made the characters of the night." The play, apparently acted largely by Houston amateurs, was undoubtedly full of local allusions. The *Star* gave as some of the characters of the play: Andrew Heeltan, Roger Bighigh, Individual Dick, Babco Snuffle, Free Voters, Doubtful Voters, Contested Voters. At the end of the month, January 30, a shorter, similar piece was acted, advertised as "a new MS. Interlude, entitled Great Election Contest. By a Down-Easter." This was preceded by *Luke the Laborer* and followed by *A Race for a Dinner*.

On February 6 W. Snell received a benefit at the Theatre. The program was *Luke the Laborer* followed by *A Man About Town*. On the thirteenth, part of *The Stranger* was performed followed by *Family Jars*. Corri took a benefit on February 27; the program was scenes from *Richard III*,



part of *The Revenge*, and *The Roof Scrambler*. Finally, on May 15, Whipple received a benefit, the program being part of *The Iron Chest*, a scene from *William Tell*, and *A Race for a Dinner*.

During the second week in March Snell opened the Theatre, apparently for three nights, to "administer the Laughing Gas or Protoxide of Nitrogen."

On March 22 the first of a series of grand masquerade and fancy dress balls was held in the Theatre. There were others on March 27, April 3, April 10, April 14, April 17, April 24, May 5, May 12, May 20, and May 29. In general, dancing at these balls seems to have begun at eight; admission was \$1 a couple (or \$4 or \$5 Texas money); ladies were not admitted without escorts; dresses and masks could be rented at the theatre for about \$1 (or \$5 Texas money) a costume; strict order prevailed, no one being allowed to carry firearms or knives, a police being assisted by a committee of gentlemen acting as managers to insure respectability and good order.

The last of these masquerades, a "Grand Fandango and Fancy Ball," was advertised as Corri's benefit and "positively the last Entertainment this Summer, as Mr. Corri leaves for the States the next Boat, to make arrangements for a Company next Winter."<sup>61</sup> The Theatre, however, did not reopen in 1841, and apparently remained closed during 1842. Corri's departure for the United States (he must at least have left Houston; otherwise there would certainly be some records of further balls or scattered entertainments at the Theatre) in the spring of 1841 may be taken as marking the end of the first chapter in the history of the professional theatre in Houston and in Texas.

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<sup>61</sup>*Star*, May 29.

## APPENDIX A

### THE TWO PLAYBILLS

It is, of course, impracticable to try to reproduce in a transcription the spacing and variety of type fonts used in the bills. The following transcriptions do not look at all like the bills, but so far as the words on the bills go, they are faithful.

#### I. THE WACO PLAYBILL

Theatre. The Public are respectfully informed that the Scenery, which was materially injured in the voyage from the United States, having been repaired by Messrs. Chambers & Jackson, the Company will have the honor of making their appearance on Monday Evening, June 11, 1838; When will be presented Sheridan Knowles' celebrated Comedy of The Hunchback. Master Walter, Mr. Barker. Sir Thomas Clifford, Mr. Corri; Lord Tinsel, Mr. Jackson. Master Wilford, Mr. Ormond. Modus, Mr. Sargent. Fathom, Mr. Newton. Master Heartwell, Mr. Chambers. Stephen, Mr. Horn. Julia, Mrs. Barker. Helen, Mrs. Hubbard. Previous to the Comedy, Mr. Carlos will recite An Opening Address. After which the whole Company will sing A New National Texian Anthem, Written expressly for the occasion by Mr. Corri. The Whole to Conclude with the Popular Farce of the Dumb Belle, or I'm Perfection. Mr. Manvers, Mr. Jackson. Vivian, Mr. Corri. O'Smirk, Mr. Newton. James, Mr. Chambers. Eliza, [The Dumb Belle,) Mrs. Barker. Mary, Miss Vogt. The members of the Orchestra having not yet arrived from Mobile, the Managers request the kind indulgence of their patrons for a few days. [hand] Doors open at 7 1-2 o'clock. Performance to commence at 8 precisely. Application for seats either for the season or by the night, to be made at the Office between the hours of 10 A.M. and 1 P.M.: and from 4 till 6 P.M. Admission, \$2 each [Telegraph [rest of line illegible: and Register?]

#### II. THE HARVARD PLAYBILL

Houston Theatre, City Exchange, Main-st. Continued Novelty! Washington's Birth-Day. "Hail Sons of Liberty." Third night of the Drama of The Floating Beacon, with Damon and Pythias. Mr. Lewellen as Damon. Mr. Waldron as Pythias. Friday Evening, Feb. 22, Will be presented the 3d, 4th and 5th acts of Damon and Pythias, Or, the test of

Friendship!|Damon, Mr. Lewellen,|Pythias, Mr. Waldron,|  
Dionisius, Mr. Foster,|Procles, Mr. Heckle,|Damocles, Mr.  
Bowden,|Lucullus, Mr. Codet,|Officer, Mr. Evans,|Guards,  
&c.|Calanthe, Mrs. Melville,|Hermion, Miss Melville,|Arria,  
Miss Sutton.|After the Play,|National Song, "The Texian  
Star," Mr. Barker.|Grotesque Dance, Mr. Codet,|Comic  
Song, Mr. Jackson.|The whole will conclude with, for the  
third time in this|city, the nautical drama of the|Floating|  
Beacon|Or, Norwegian Wreckers.|Angerstoff (Captain of  
the Beacon,) Mr. Waldron,|Frederick, A Foundling in  
search of his Parents, Mr. Lewellen,|Weignstadt, (An old  
Fisherman) Mr. Foster,|Maurice, Ormloff, Companions of  
Angerstoff and confined in the Beacon, Mr. Bowden, Mr.  
Jackson, [two lines]|1st Sailor, Mr. Barker,|Jack Junk,  
(Boatswain of the Eagle sloop of war) Mr. Bob Farrell,|  
Sailors, Soldiers, Lasses, &c. By Auxiliaries,|Mariette, Mrs.  
Melville,|Christine, Miss Melville.|Programme, Incidents,  
&c.| Act 1st, Scene 1st,| [the rest of the program has been  
torn off]

## APPENDIX B

### THE MILESIAN

“‘The Milesian’—A Play in five acts—*By a Citizen of Houston.*” *Telegraph and Texas Register*, March 6, 1839.

We learn that a new play under the above title will soon be exhibited upon the stage of one of our Theatres. We have been enabled as yet to bestow only a cursory glance over its several acts; but from this partial and hasty examination, we could readily discover the traces of much talent and literary ability. We have therefore, no doubt that it will be received with general approbation. With such histrionic talents as have been displayed by Miss Barnes, Mr. Forbes, and other actors and actresses, who have recently appeared on our stage, it must necessarily succeed. The following is a brief outline of the plot, as hastily sketched for publication:

The scene of the play is supposed to be laid in Ireland, during the rebellion of 1741, when the inhabitants rose to expel the English, who had been sent over to colonize portions of the Island, with a view to reconcile its natives to the government of England. The play itself is founded upon certain incidents connected with the event in question. The family of Walsingham are among the number of the “new comers”—and, while returning from an excursion into the interior of the Island, an incident occurs, which brings Clarence Fitzgerald and Almeida (the hero and heroine of the piece) into each others presence for the first time, and under circumstances of peril to the lady, which have the effect of enhancing those feelings with which, from that moment, each becomes inspired for the other. Almeida, however, is the betrothed of an English officer of the name of Clarrington, whose regiment is stationed in the island, and who—though from motives of interest favored by the mother, is any thing but a favorite with the daughter—the discovery of whose passion for Clarence, occasions a deadly enmity between the two candidates for the lady’s hand—which is not lessened by the circumstance of the Milesian’s (Fitzgerald’s) knowledge of the secret of Clarrington’s birth, who is the natural son of Mahon, a Catholic Priest. This priest, it further appears, is the only person living (lady Walsington excepted) who is privy to the fact of the murder, many years before, by the head of the Walsingham family, of the father of Clarence—whereby he became

possessed of his large fortunes, leaving his two sons, Clarence and Raymond Fitzgerald, despoiled of their inheritance. Lady Walsingham and Mahon are therefore both anxious to bring about the marriage of Clarington with Almeida, though from different motives—the mother hoping by that means to seal forever the lips of the priest, touching the murder—and he himself with a view to secure for his son the large fortunes of the heroine. The latter, however, cherishes a passion for Fitzgerald, which is proof against arguments and threats combined, until as a last and desperate alternative—the mother reveals to her the secret of her father's guilt, and urges the union with Clarington as the only means of keeping a knowledge of it from the world. This, conjoined with Clarington's threat to expose the political plot in which Fitzgerald is engaged, and thereby jeopardise her life, completely overwhelms Almeida—and she resigns herself to the fatal marriage, as to her grave! She subsequently discovers the original amour in which Clarington is implicated, and which, with singular effrontery, he attempts to fix upon Clarence, in the hope of weaning from him the affection of Almeida. This so shocks and disgusts the latter, that she takes a vow never to give or to receive the rights of marriage, as the wife of Clarington. Despairing of possessing her, he at length forms the fiendish determination to destroy her—which he does by means of poison! He then—partly influenced by remorse, and partly by a desire of enjoying his triumph over Clarence, invites the latter to an interview, in which he reveals what he has done, and challenges him to avenge her death. They accordingly fight—and Clarington is slain. Fitzgerald then hastens back to the Castle, where he arrives just in time to receive a last embrace from Almeida, whose mind unhinged by the drug that had been administered to her, recovers just sufficient to enable her to recognize her lover, in whose arms she expires! This, briefly as we have been able to sketch it, is the plot of the "Milesian."

## APPENDIX C

### LISTS OF SOME OF THE PEOPLE ASSOCIATED WITH THE THEATRICAL COMPANIES

These lists are unsatisfactory and unavoidably more or less inaccurate. Every person named, however, was somehow and presumably for at least a short time connected with one of the companies. I have done my best not to list stars and amateurs or other volunteers.

#### I

Carlos and Corri's season, June 11, 1838, to about mid-August, 1838

Proprietor: John Carlos

Stage manager: Henri Corri, of the New Orleans (St. Charles) and Mobile Theatres

Leader of the orchestra: James Boulton (misprinted "Bottom" in the *Telegraph*, June 11) of New Orleans

Costumer: Madame Dirossa of New Orleans

Messrs.: Barker, of the New Orleans (St. Charles) and Mobile Theatres; Horn, of the Mobile and New Orleans Theatres; Francis Hubbard; Alex. Jackson, of the New York (the Bowery Theatre?) and Boston Theatres; A. S. Newton, of the Tremont Theatre, Boston; Jas. S. Ormond, of the Philadelphia Theatre; H. Sargent, of the Mobile Theatre; G. W. Chambers, principal dancer at the Mobile Theatre.

Mesdames: Emma Barker, of the New Orleans (St. Charles), Mobile and London Theatres; Hubbard, of the New Orleans (Camp Street) and Mobile Theatres; Thielman, of the New Orleans (St. Charles) Theatre.

Miss Henrietta Vogt of the New York and Mobile Theatres.

#### II

Corri's season, October and November, 1838.

#### III

Carlos' season, January 21, 1839, to the end of March, 1839, at the Houston Theatre, City Exchange, Main Street

Proprietor: John Carlos

Stage manager: Robert Farrell (a native of Houston?)

Messrs. : Anderson, Barker, Bowden, Codet, Evans, Foster, Heckle, Jackson, H. L. Waldron

Mesdames : Barker, Melville

Misses : Hamblin, Melville, Sutton

IV

Corri's season, February 25, 1839, to July 3, 1839, at the New Theatre, Market Square

Proprietor (and stage manager?) : Henri Corri

Stage manager (?) : Anderson

Leader of the orchestra : Boulton

Messrs. : Anderson, Archer, John Barnes, Bennie, Chambers, (Ben?) Debar, Eaton, Farrell, Forbes, Foster, Hubbard, Jackson, Plumer, Sargent

Mesdames : Barnes, Barker, Bennie, Davis, Debar, Hubbard, Thielman

Misses : Charlotte Barnes, Hamblin

V

Corri's season, October 3, 1839, to about October 14, 1839, at the Houston Theatre (the New Theatre), Market Square

Proprietor and stage manager : Henri Corri

Stage manager : W. E. Anderton (possibly a misprint for Anderson)

Composer and musical director : Boulton

Messrs. : Armstrong, Chambers, Davis, Evans, Hubbard, Kirkland

Mrs. Hubbard

VI

Corri's season, December 17, 1839, to mid-April, 1840, at the Houston Theatre, Market Square

Proprietor and stage manager : Henri Corri

Stage manager (?) : Anderson

Musical director : Boulton

Messrs. : Anderson, Armstrong, Chambers, Heckle, Jackson, Newton

Madame Thielman

Miss Newton



## VII

Corri's season, April and May, 1840, at the Houston Theatre

Proprietor and stage manager: Henri Corri

Musical director: Boulton

Messrs.: Jackson, Newton, Jeff Wright

Mesdames: Newton, Thielman

## APPENDIX D

### LISTS OF THE PLAYS ADVERTISED TO BE PRODUCED OR OTHERWISE NOTED AS PRODUCED

Dates given are the dates on which the plays were acted. These lists are as complete as my research has made possible, but they are not, of course, anywhere near complete lists of all the plays produced in Houston in 1838, 1839, and 1840, and some of the dates may be inaccurate.

#### I

Carlos and Corri's season, June 11, 1838, to about mid-August, 1838

The Dumb Belle 6/11  
The Dumb Girl of Genoa  
The Hunchback 6/11  
The Maid of Munster between 6/18 and 6/23  
The Rent Day  
The Robber's Wife  
The Stranger  
Therese

#### II

Corri's season, October and November, 1838

#### III

Carlos' season, January 21, 1839, to the end of March, 1839, at the Houston Theatre, City Exchange, Main Street

Black Eyed Susan c.2/3  
Charles the Second 1/19 sometime before 2/23  
Damon and Pythias 2/22  
The Floating Beacon 2/22  
Othello 2/12  
Richard the Third 2/11  
The Secret 1/19  
Virginius  
William Tell

#### IV

Corri's season, February 25, 1839, to July 3, 1839, at the New Theatre, Market Square

Adelgitha 4/8  
 The Adopted Child 3/27  
 The Cataract of the Ganges 5/4  
 Catching an Heiress 5/11  
 Charles the Second 5/13  
 Conancheotah c.5/3 5/6  
 The Day After the Wedding c.5/11 several other times  
 The Fall of the Alamo 6/11  
 The French Spy 5/24  
 The Green Eyed Monster 5/11  
 The Irish Ambassador 4/10 4/17  
 Irish Traits 4/10  
 The Irish Tutor 4/10  
 The Lady of Lyons 5/4  
 The Loan of a Lover 4/22  
 Macbeth 4/22  
 Mateo Falcone 5/7  
 Mazeppa 4/25  
 The Mummy 4/8  
 My Aunt 4/22  
 Othello 3/27  
 The Pirate Husband (?)  
 Pizarro 5/7  
 The Poor Soldier 4/20  
 Romeo and Juliet 4/20  
 Rory O'Moore 4/17  
 The School for Scandal 2/25  
 Timour the Tartar 4/29 c.5/3  
 Tom Thumb 5/24  
 Valentine and Orson 5/13  
 Vol-au-Vent 5/13  
 William Tell 6/3  
 The Wandering Boys 6/3  
 The Youthful Queen 5/28 5/30

## V

Corri's season, October 3, 1839, to about October 14, 1839, at the Houston Theatre (the New Theatre), Market Square

The Blind Boy 10/7  
 Damon and Pythias 10/8  
 The Golden Farmer 10/10 10/12  
 High Life Below Stairs 10/3  
 The Romp 10/10 10/12  
 The Soldier's Daughter 10/3

## VI

Corri's season, December 17, 1839, to mid-April, 1840,  
at the Houston Theatre, Market Square

The Actress of All Work 12/24 12/28  
The Barrack Room 1/7 3/6  
The Bashful Man 12/21  
The Benevolent Tar 3/4  
The Blind Boy (?)  
The Blue Devils 12/17 12/20 1/7  
Catching an Heiress 1/17 1/29 3/2 3/11  
Charles II 1/16  
Charming Polly 2/10 2/11 2/12  
Damon and Pythias (?)  
A Day After the Wedding 3/9  
A Day in Paris 1/20 1/21 1/25 1/31  
The Dead Shot 12/30  
Don Juan 2/19  
Douglas 2/24 3/9  
The Dutch Broters 1/29  
Fazio 2/14  
The Five Mowbrays 2/29  
The French Spy 2/26  
The Greek Wife 1/27 1/30 2/14  
How to Rule a Wife 1/25  
The Hunchback 2/13  
Hunting a Turtle 12/30  
A Husband and Wife 3/7 12/28  
The Hypocrite 12/21  
The Irish Tutor 1/15 2/5 2/7 3/14  
The Jealous Wife 2/27 2/28  
The Lady and the Devil 12/21  
The Lady of Lyons 2/15 2/18  
The Loan of a Lover 1/15 2/5 2/7 2/21  
The Lottery Ticket 1/30 2/4 2/11  
Love 2/27 3/2  
The Love Chase 2/19  
Lovers' Quarrels 1/24  
The Lying Valet 1/21 1/27 3/2  
Maid or Wife 1/22 1/24  
A Man About Town 12/24  
The Married Bachelor 2/3  
The Masquerade Ball 3/14  
Mateo Falcone 3/10  
The Miller and His Men 3/6  
No Song, No Supper 2/3 2/20  
Oh Hush! 3/14

Oliver Twist 2/21 2/22  
 P. P. 1/31 2/3  
 Perfection 1/20 2/12  
 Peter Punctulio 1/24 1/25  
 The Poor Soldier 2/6  
 The Prize (?)  
 Raising the Wind 12/28 1/17  
 The Rival Lovers 12/17 12/20  
 The Rival Pages 2/5 2/7 2/24 1/20  
 St. Patrick's Day 1/7  
 The Spectre Bridegroom 1/16  
 The Stranger 2/28  
 Taming the Shrew 12/24  
 Timour the Tartar 3/2  
 Tom Noddy's Secret 1/30 1/31 2/4 2/10 2/18 2/29  
 Tom Thumb 2/22 2/25 2/29  
 Touch and Take 2/4 2/6  
 The Two Gregories 2/13  
 Turn Out 12/17 12/20  
 Turning the Tables 12/30  
 The Wife 3/4  
 William Tell 3/7 3/10  
 The Young Widow 1/15 1/22 2/15 2/25  
 The Youthful Queen 2/20 2/25 3/11

## VII

Corri's season, April and May, 1840, at the Houston Theatre

La Bayadere (a scene) 5/11  
 A Day in Paris 4/23 4/25  
 The Duel 5/11  
 The Dutch Brothers 4/24  
 Family Jars 5/21  
 The Golden Farmer 6/9  
 The Hole in the Wall 5/21  
 Oh Hush! 5/4  
 The Illustrious Stranger 6/9  
 The Lady and Devil 4/24  
 The Mistake 5/4  
 The Mountain Sylph (a scene) 5/4  
 The Swiss Cottage 4/23 4/25 5/11  
 The Weathercock 5/21

## APPENDIX E

### SOME SPECIMENS OF OCCASIONAL THEATRICAL VERSE

#### I

"The following Address, written by Judge Thompson, was spoken by Mr. Forbes, on the opening of the New Theatre, Market-Square." *Telegraph and Texas Register*, February 27, 1839.

Friends of the Histrionic art,  
Where wakes the fervor of the heart,  
We greet you, one and all to-night  
With gratitude and gay delight,  
Too deep for friendship to express  
In notes of feeble thankfulness.

O! Who'd believe where yet is heard  
The screaming of the frightened bird,  
That Taste hath reared a classic dome  
Where Genius shall delight to come?  
Where joy shall beam from ev'ry eye,  
And virtue's ensign wave on high;  
Where Beauty in her lovely sheen  
Shall radiate the lovely scene,  
And will, at evening's gentle hour  
Mingle her philosophic power:  
A Temple where the Bard shall prove,  
The sanctity of woman's love;  
And bid unhallowed passion cease,  
Beneath the "Olive Branch" of Peace.  
Yes—now where late the forest stood,  
In nature's wildest solitude,  
Where all was but a Prairie sod,  
Which human foot but seldom trod—  
We hail the Drama's spotless page,  
And breathe its pathos from the stage,  
In scenes so wrought with light and shade,  
That conscience turns from guilt dismay'd:  
These are the lessons we diffuse,  
In living lustre from the muse.

Blest be the hour, that star of morn,  
Like Mars arose to light us on,  
Beneath whose gleam the fearless came  
To find a home—to win a name:  
To spurn the coward Tyrant's laws,  
“*And draw his sword in freedom's cause,*”  
Nor sheathe it till the strife is o'er,  
And Despotism be no more;  
For, if again our soil shall know  
The footstep of the vengeful foe,  
“*Goliad and Alamo*” shall be,  
The war-cry of the bold and free.

And Patrons, be it ours the while,  
To win your all-approving smile,  
To aid the virgin Drama's cause,  
And merit friendship's warm applause;  
And all that purity can bring  
Shall glitter from the muse's wing;  
And light and learning from the stage,  
The soul of innocence engage.  
Here Fancy on her airy plume  
Shall every sombre scene illume,  
And weave a song of magic art  
In soothing whispers to the heart;  
And mimic Tragedy shall rise  
To call the tear-drop from your eyes;  
And sportive mirth around you play,  
To chase Melpomene away.  
Yes, friends beloved—refinement here,  
Shall empire in affection's tear;  
And feeling—gentleness and grace,  
The power of irony efface—  
While lucid hope shall gild the way,  
To cheer the lonely path *we* stray.

But now adieu—till we meet again  
In laughter's merry, sportive vein  
Shall meet with sprightly song and glee  
And sparkling wit's festivity:  
For Sheridan's undying light  
Will gleam on you, dear friends to-night,  
To win the throb oft won before;  
And now farewell—*my* lay is o'er.



II

"Farewell Address, *Spoken by Miss Charlotte Barnes, at her Benefit.* By John W. Eldredge [the editor of the *Morning Star*]." *Morning Star*, April 9, 1839.

Kind friends, my task is done—no, not quite done;  
A part remains, the last, the saddest one,  
To say farewell—farewell—the *mimic* scene is o'er,  
The feelings I display are feigned no more;  
But nature's self assumes her proper part,  
And bids me speak the dictates of my heart—  
A heart that knows no change, but once imprest  
With friendship's signet, bids the image rest.  
How sad, that e'en amidst earth's gayest scene,  
Where skies are bright, and fields seem ever green;  
When friends to friends real happiness impart,  
The chilling thought steals in, *that we must part*;  
And like the frost upon the flow'et's bloom,  
Blasts our bright hopes, and steals their bright perfume.  
When by the general impulse led, I came  
To see the altar on which Freedom's flame  
Had been rekindled with a new-born light,  
Warm was my welcome, and your smiles were bright:  
And while within the compass of the stage  
I've shown the manners of the by-gone age,  
You have attended, and with one accord  
Your approbation was my sure reward.  
If aught has been displeasing—we'll forgive,  
And let the memory of our *friendship* only live.  
To tell you all I owe, words are too poor,  
I give my heart-felt thanks—I *have* no more;—  
And the assurance that in after days,  
When faithful fancy this bright scene portrays,  
My heart shall then recall the friends left here,  
And urge the tribute of a sigh—a tear.  
The hour has come—we part—oh there's a spell  
In that sad, bitter word, *Farewell—Farewell!*  
That makes us linger while 'tis spoken,  
And lingering, linger still—*Farewell, 'tis broken!*

III

"Address, Written for the occasion, and delivered at the first performance of the Houston Dramatic Association, May 28, 1840, by Jno. N. O. Smith." *Morning Star*, June 2, 1840.

Patrons and Friends! ye who assembled throng  
To-night this Temple of the Muse and Song,  
Greeting with smiles our efforts here to gain  
Relief for suffering, wretchedness and pain:—  
Friends of the Drama! ye so prompt to cheer  
The infant effort in its young career,  
To you we look—say with us you accord,  
Give your approval, our rich, priz'd reward!

Ladies!—ye too approve! for sure did ne'er  
The voice of woe break forth, and call no tear;  
No sympathetic sigh from woman's heart;  
No quick response to succour the distress'd!—  
*Our* guardian angels be; and, if to-night  
Amidst the mimic scene, some luckless wight,  
Awed by the presence of this bright array,  
(As long-tried vet'rans of the buskin may!)  
Forgetful of the author and himself,—  
Or by the busy, mischief-making elf  
*Cupid* transfixed, struck dumb, should stand to gaze,  
Lost and bewildered, on the dazzling blaze  
Of brilliant beauty beaming from above,  
Oh then, let his sad plight your pity move!  
And when the snarling curs, who sulking sit,  
Aping the airs of "critics in the pit,"  
Discovering some poor subject of offence,  
Turn up their noses,—or display their sense  
By uttering sounds becoming only geese,  
And vent their malice in a native hiss,  
Do *you* but smile, their rancor we'll endure,  
And "our plain answer this,"—we serve the poor!

Ye *scarecrow* Critics! Trembling, we implore  
Your most magnanimous indulgence!—sure,  
That when the *motive* of our toil you scan,  
You'll be as pleas'd, as amiable—as you can;  
Nor stoop to censure, wanting weighty cause,  
Each slight infraction of the Drama's laws.  
Ye we *implore*—dream not because we fear  
The ordeal of your criticisms severe!  
Though 'tis not in your natures to be civil,  
To be at peace with all—with e'en the devil,  
Is prudent counsel; 'tis for this, that we  
Have thrown ourselves upon *your* clemency.

Though we boast not the magic of the art,  
To rouse the feelings or to touch the heart;  
To charm the sense with "witchery of grace;"  
Nor skill the heart's deep sadness to displace,  
We may amuse: and as we willing strive  
A generous end to gain,— 'tis to derive  
Comfort and aid for those, whose hapless lot,  
By fell disease to helpless suffering brought,  
Friendless and poor, neglected and alone,  
Unaided perish, in their new found home:  
If all approve what here we have essay'd,  
Our object's won, and amply we're repaid.

## APPENDIX F

### SOME SPECIMENS OF NEWSPAPER THEATRICAL CRITICISM

#### I

*For the Telegraph.*

#### Theatre—Othello.

Mr. Editor: I was one of those who attended Carlos' theatre last evening, when the above play was performed, I believe, to the very general satisfaction of the audience. Mr. *Lewellen* is decidedly a good actor and played the part of Othello with much credit. Indeed, under the circumstances, he performed far beyond the expectations of those who had witnessed him before, and who were aware of the kind of support he was to receive from the balance of the company. I am not one of those who expect from the company now engaged by Mr. Carlos, what in the large cities of the U. S. would be considered first rate acting; but I think it a reasonable expectation that they will sufficiently study their parts to render it unnecessary to either have them *read* to them by the prompter or repeated to them by those fortunate enough to be able to do so on the stage in the same scene. It is far from being interesting or even edifying to witness such things. The importance of having each part, however small, spoken promptly, all will admit; for without it the effect is destroyed; the meaning of the author lost, and the acting of a good performer entirely thrown away. Such was the case last evening in Othello, which militated greatly against the acting of Mr. Lewellen. He seemed however to understand the character well, and although evidently a new beginner in the line he is playing, was quite at home. His situation was anything but enviable, when, in some of the most affecting scenes it became necessary to abandon his own, and go to the assistance of some stupid or neglectful dolt, in performance of his part. Such a scene is equally as disagreeable to the audience who, although they submit to it silently, do so because they think it the quickest way to get rid of it. I am aware that Shakespeare's plays are new to the company, but they are certainly not the less inexcusable for neglecting to study properly their parts.

These remarks do not apply to all the company; Mr. Wal-dron as Iago, performed his part admirably—I have seen

it acted worse in better theatres, and by those having a far greater reputation. The same might be said of Mr. Foster as Brabantio, and Mr. Heckle as Cassio; all of whom are creditable actors in whatever they undertake.

"Little Bob" Farrell is a great favorite, and does whatever he undertakes in good style. He is very laughable in his low comic characters, but never more so than when he attempts any thing of a different cast.

Of the ladies performance I can say nothing, for to find fault would be uncourteous, and to praise their acting not be truth. *De feminis nil nisi bonum.*

I would enquire of him whose province it is to know, how long he would have the dead lie exposed to the audience after the play is completed. Actors may have many lives to spare, but to lose them for the length of time they did on this occasion, if it did not wear them out entirely, must certainly be somewhat uncomfortable.

E.

—*Telegraph and Texas Register*, February 13, 1839.

## II

*For the Telegraph.*

Carlos's Theatre.

Mr. Editor: As one of the nightly visitors at this little temple, I cannot refrain from making a few remarks. The theatre as you justly remark, is gotten up in a neat and splendid style, alike creditable to its enterprising proprietor and our city. The acting is generally very good, Mr. Waldron as a tragedian, has never been rivalled on our boards, and would be considered an acquisition to any stage. He has all the vigor, energy and pathos necessary to give effect to his acting; those who witnessed his representation of William, in Black eyed Susan will readily admit his pathetic powers; while those who braved the wintry storm, and were fortunate enough to have seen his delineations of Tell and Virginius, will bear testimony to his energetic and vigorous conception of those parts. In genteel comedy he is light, graceful and animated, sometimes too much so. The next on the list is little Bob (not honest Bob, at least not our honest Bob,) Farrell. Humour in its broadest phrase is his, and it is almost impossible to look in his full and jolly face without your risible faculties being called into action. We have known Bob for many long years, and have always

known him as the favorite of all classes. His personifications of Crack, Sam, Savourny, Wormwood, and the Drunken Corporal were true to the life, and has rendered him highly and deservedly popular. Mr. Foster is perhaps the best reader of the company, and with considerable taste, and a commendable one, quotes his author and only him; he was peculiarly happy in his personification of Capt. Copp, in the *Merry Monarch*, (in other respects a failure.) his representations of the old man in his different casts has been very good, by the way we would enquire of the manager why Foster's vocal powers are not oftener called into play, his "werry pecoliar" and negro song, are the best of the season and would bear repetition. Heckle is generally correct in his reading, and is a gentlemanly player. Jackson is an old acquaintance and a deserved favorite. The balance of the actors, Bowden, Evans, Codit and others are tolerable, and with more study and a greater dislike to the prompter, would be considered good. Of the ladies the most that can be said in their favor is that they are very pretty, and that the two Misses are improving. We would respectfully remark to Mrs. Melville that to look well is not the especial forte of an actress; a dress in character is generally as necessary as is the proper reading of the play; the manager should look to this. With one or two good actresses to support the leading characters, this company would be complete, and we would here remark en passant, that such we understand are engaged and will shortly appear, and with their appearance we predict complete success to the Carlists.

S.

—*Telegraph and Texas Register*, February 13, 1839.

### III

*For the Morning Star.*

#### The Theatre.

The patrons of this establishment have been greatly disappointed with regard to the extent of the preparations made for the present season. Notwithstanding the parade made by the manager of a "portion of the old favorites," the corps exhibits a paucity of numbers and a meagerness of talent in its subordinate members, which will sufficiently account for the nightly absence of the large numbers of our citizens who would gladly sustain the Theatre as a place of rational amusement, but who are never at a loss to find

a better use for their time and money than contributing to the support of performers utterly unfit for the variety of characters which they are compelled (it is presumed) to undertake, and many of whom, from their indolence and inattention to their business *off* the stage, become at each performance more and more indebted to the good nature and forbearance of the audience for their continuation *on* it. Of the "old favorites" retained, with the exception of the excellent and respected *Mrs. Hubbard*, and *Mr. Hubbard*, (the latter of whom owing to his severe indisposition I have not had the pleasure of seeing this season) none are, nor ever can be any thing like respectable performers: I would not be understood by this to mean that they do not each possess the requisite *talent* in some degree, but that there are obstacles, whether unavoidable or not, which will ever prevent them from attaining even a mediocre rank in their profession, and which should operate as inducements to them to continue in it only so long as may be necessary for them to engage in more suitable employments: for instance, (to mention two or three) *Mr. Armstrong*, a clever young man, who probably possesses more good sense and judgment than half his compeers, has to contend with a natural defect, which, except in a peculiar line of characters, will always prevent him from becoming a pleasing performer. *Mr. Anderton*, remarkable for nothing but the absurd and unvarying style of his hair, (which reaches almost to his shoulders, completely concealing his ears,) and a delicate, mincing manner, has had opportunities enough of learning the estimation in which he is held as an actor; but it is said, that while on the stage, his vanity and high opinion of himself induces him to set down the occasional plaudits bestowed upon others to his own account;—if so, any thing that could be said here to convince him of his error would be unavailing. Of *Mr. Evans*, I will only say, that if it were possible for him to overcome his apparent attachment to *one* description of spirit, and make himself better acquainted with the spirit of the characters he attempts, he might reasonably hope to succeed as a comedian; but so much of his day light is consumed in any thing else but study, that he is never perfect, and resorts to the villainous practice of *gagging*, which in an ordinary performer, and especially when practiced by *Mr. E.*, is usually of the most vulgar description. Of the qualifications of *Davis*, *Chambers*, and the rest, as *actors*, it is needless to speak here—they are *too* well known.

*Mr. Kirkland*, a gentleman who appears thoroughly to understand his business, is a valuable acquisition to the

stock of "old favorites," and bids fair to become himself a real favorite with our play-goers—that is, provided he will attend to his business, and does not, flattered by encouragement, fall into the same error which sank Corri and his "old favorites" so deeply in their good opinions, viz: that the people of Houston are easily pleased, and willing to put up with any thing in the shape of a theatrical performance.

As the season advances, it is probable that Mr. Corri, (consulting his own interest,) will gratify the expectation of his patrons by engaging stock actors of some merit, in addition to the crowd of supernumeraries now performing. In the female department, the deficiency of strength is positively shameful, and reflects great discredit on the manager, who has had ample time to procure at least one or two *actresses* in addition to Mrs. Hubbard. On the occasion of the *debut* of a gentleman as *Damon*, a few nights since, in consequence of the indisposition of the lady announced in the bills for *Calanthe*, Mrs. Hubbard was under the necessity of *doubling* the characters of *Hermion* and *Calanthe*!—a proceeding unexampled in any corps of regular theatricians.

Natz.

—*Morning Star*, October 12, 1839.

#### IV

*For the Star.*

#### The Drama.

A day or two past the arrival of Mr. Sutherland, from the National Theatre, New York, and of Mr. and Mrs. Newton, was announced, and that they would make their appearance at the Houston theatre. The play going public hailed the announcement with real pleasure, inasmuch as Newton was an old favorite, and one of the pioneers in his business amongst us; and it was to be presumed he had improved by his trip to the north. In him they have not been disappointed; his reception was as flattering as he could desire. Of Mr. Sutherland, high hopes were also entertained; his hailing from the National, (celebrated for the superiority of its stock company,) coupled with the fact that he would appear in Richard the third, drew a tolerable house. To say the audience were disappointed, would not serve to give an idea of his appearance—it was a perfect and total failure, not caused by apprehension on account of his being among strangers, (for the gentleman lacks not



impudence, the best evidence of the assertion being the attempt to play the Crooked Duke.) but from utter ignorance of the proper conceptions of his author. It was hoped that the gentleman had tasked his abilities too much, and that he might possibly sustain himself in lighter pieces; that hope was vain; he appeared, if possible, to be less capable there. Notwithstanding which, Mr. S. has continued to fill the leading characters during his engagement. Mr. Heckle is infinitely his superior, and our wonder is that he is willing thus lightly to be estimated by the management. Of the company generally, it is almost superfluous to speak; Mr. Corri should consult his own interest and procure an addition to his company if he expects success, for with the exception of Madame Thielman, who still continues a favorite, (and what is to be admired, is not in the least spoiled by the applause with which she is ever greeted.) Mr. Heckle who is nightly improving, and would be a respectable actor on any boards; Mr. Newton, of whom we have before spoken, and Mr. Armstrong, who is excellent in his peculiar line, (his brogue is admirable,) there is not one that could procure an engagement in any other place. With one more lady, and a leading actor, Mr. Corri might appeal, (and not in vain,) for a liberal patronage.

E. S.

—*Morning Star*, January 30, 1840.





