

**Eureka's Early Modern Theatres: The
Examination of Local Theatres Between
1904-1906**

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Arts and entertainment in Eureka, California had been a big and popular part of the everyday lives of the people living in Eureka, especially during the early 1900s. From its settlement to today, the arts and entertainment industry was dominated by Hollywood and their motion pictures, which were and still are, shown in theatres around the world. Around the beginning of the 1900s, before silent moving pictures became motion pictures, theatres often showed plays and various acts to entertain the public. These dramatic or “legitimate” plays as well as vaudeville acts, were main sources of entertainment in Eureka in the early 1900s, especially during 1904-1906, which offered hundreds of people in Eureka dramatic and comedic entertainment. With the case of Eureka theatres, four stood out the most between 1904-1906, with all of them performing vaudeville acts and dramatic plays and a few showing moving pictures. The theatres: The Ingomar, E Street, Girton, and Margarita all were in operation between 1904-1906. Some of these theatres became very successful, while others closed sooner than expected. Only one of these theatres though, can be labeled the most successful in Eureka between 1904-1906, but before determining the best playhouse, the history of Eureka, along with the history of dramatic plays and vaudeville acts need to be explained.

Eureka was considered one of the last cities to be organized in Humboldt County, with Warnersville (Trinidad), being the first, then following Humboldt City, Bucksport, and Union (Arcata) shortly after. Founded May 9th 1850 by James T. Ryan and twenty-four people which came to be known as the Eureka Party, the city began with a slow start.¹ In 1853, when Ulysses Grant arrived in Eureka, the city was described as a, “Depression which almost threatened extermination” with a small population of 400 people.² By 1904 though, Eureka had the highest

¹ *Susie Baker Fountain Papers* (Vol. 57), (Arcata, CA: Humboldt State University, 1967), 407.

² *Susie Baker Fountain Papers* (Vol. 56), 423.

population in Humboldt County with the total population being 20,000 people and had a high export of a thriving lumber industry.³

With no main road to Eureka, the only way to get to the isolated city was by going through the Humboldt Bay on a steamer.⁴ Along with being the principal shipping point in the county, Eureka was also known for its lumber, as lumber was a main export for profit in Eureka. Since Eureka was so isolated in its early development, the only way to export lumber was by steamers such as *The Corona*.⁵

When people of Eureka were not working trying to build their industrial city, they had a lot of time on their hands, and in turn, needed to be entertained. Saloons were the main source of entertainment before local theatres arrived in Eureka. When Ulysses Grant was stationed in Eureka in the early 1850s, he would often go to these saloons, as there were no other attractions around to entertain the local people.⁶ It can be assumed that the people of Eureka were wanting a different source of recreation other than getting inebriated and conversing with other drunk individuals. Because of the constant drinking and lack of other entertainment in Eureka, an alternative form of recreation soon came to be dramatic plays and vaudeville acts, which turned out to be a great success within the isolated city of Eureka.⁷

³ *Susie Baker Fountain Papers* (Vol. 57), 407.

⁴ Leigh Irvine, *History of Humboldt County, California: With Illustrations Descriptive of Its Scenery, Farms, Residences, Public Buildings, Factories, Hotels, Business Houses, Schools, Churches. Etc., from Original Drawings, Including Biographical Sketches*, (The California Traveler: 1970), 161.

⁵ Rand Herbert *The Historical Development of Interior Sections of Humboldt and Mendocino Counties : A Documentary Report Prepared for United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Ukiah District*, (Davis, Ca.: California-Pacific Research Associates, 1979), 90.

⁶ *Susie Baker Fountain Papers* (Vol. 56), 423.

⁷ Leigh Irvine, *History of Humboldt County, California: With Leading Men and Women of the County who have been Identified with it Growth and Development from the Early Days to the Present*, (Los Angeles, Ca: Historic Record Company, 1915), 55.

Vaudeville plays were first introduced to the United States during the Industrial Revolution. The roots of vaudeville acts derived from Europe, originally called “variety.” These “variety” troupes would travel from multiple towns and villages to put on shows for the community. The only downside was that “variety” was considered unsuitable for the upper class and tended to perform and cater to the middle and lower classes of Europe. “Variety” though, soon came to the United States and soon changed its name to Vaudeville, a French term for popular satirical songs, which ended up flourishing in the 1800s.⁸ Actor, playwright, and author, Edwin Milton Royle mentions the “Americanism” of vaudeville and how it was able to thrive, saying, “I think vaudeville is very American. It touches us and our lives at many places. It appeals to the businessman, who drops in for a half hour on his way home... and to the individual who wants to be diverted but doesn’t want to think or feel.”⁹

Vaudeville flourished in the United States, attracting bigger audiences than dramatic plays, which were also called legitimate plays. Vaudeville was also more popular than any other form of entertainment during its time of flourishing and by the 1900s, vaudeville was labeled the, “King of Entertainment.”¹⁰ One of the reasons why vaudeville in the United States was so successful was because of the variety of acts that the actors and actresses performed. Such performances included: magic, juggling, tap dancing, mind reading, illustrated songs and monologues. Another reason for the success of vaudeville was that troupe directors were able to become modern, while at the same time also maintaining their old vaudeville style. When moving pictures were created, vaudeville troupes took advantage of the silent films and showed

⁸ Charles W. Stein, *American Vaudeville As Seen By Its Contemporaries*, (New York: Knopf, 1984), xi.

⁹ Stein, *American Vaudeville*, 33.

¹⁰ John E. Dimeglio, *Vaudeville USA*, (Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1973), 11-12.

them in between acts, further giving the audience consistent entertainment. Ads and play reviews in the *Humboldt Daily Standard* throughout 1904-1906 consistently mention silent films being shown in between acts at theatres such as Girton's Theatre and the E Street Theatre.¹¹ Even though vaudeville was surpassing every other form of entertainment in the late 1800s and through the twentieth century, dramatic plays (better known as legitimate dramas) also came to be another form of popular entertainment in the United States, offering Americans more drama and acting rather than the funny, entertaining stunts and tricks that vaudeville offered.

Legitimate dramas, meaning "spoken drama," can be traced back to the era of the Middle Ages, but came to the United States in the 1600s, and did not become popular until the mid-1700s. These plays focused more on the acting skills of the troupe, mainly giving performances pertaining to comedy and drama rather than having their own specific talent like that of vaudeville. Legitimate dramas were first prohibited when introduced to the New England colonies because they contradicted the Bible. Dramas became more popular during the Revolutionary War, as they were a form of entertainment for the soldiers when they weren't fighting in battle.¹²

Legitimate dramas soon migrated out West, along with the rest of the developing United States, because of the Licensing Act of 1737 which controlled and censored dramatic plays in the East.¹³ Unable to express their creativity and artistry, actors and actresses decided to migrate where the laws of the land were yet-to-be made, out West. This migration proved to be

¹¹ "Advertisement" *The Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, December 22, 1905.

¹² Vera Roberts, *On Stage - A History of Theatre*. 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 234.

¹³ Glynne Wickham, *A History of the Theatre*. 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 168.

successful, because by the beginning of the twentieth century, more than 5,000 legitimate plays were in operation around the United States, most of them being located in Western states.¹⁴

This push out West eventually made it to Northern California, then to Eureka. It is mentioned that legitimate plays were largely aimed at the upper class, but the theatres in Eureka that offered both legitimate dramas as well as vaudeville acts were aimed at all social classes in the community, not just the elite. One such theatre to offer reasonable prices to the people of Eureka in the early 1900s was one of the first vaudeville playhouses to open up in Eureka, the E Street Theatre.

The E Street Theatre was located between 3rd and 4th street in Eureka and was opened to the public in late October, 1904. The small 80x25 foot building was bought by Perry Girton and C.V. Hickling.¹⁵ The small theatre that Girton and Hickling bought was worth \$3,000 and was able to seat 250 people. Although the seats were rough, plank boards, the low cost of admission compensated. According to one of the first playbills advertising for the E Street Theatre, a customer only had to pay ten cents for admission, compared to a ten dollar movie ticket one paid to go see a film in the 21st Century.¹⁶ For only a small admission, a local patron could escape reality and enjoy an hour and a half of entertainment.¹⁷

Not much is said about the theatre's grand opening, but *The Humboldt Daily Standard* mentioned the E Street Theatre and its popularity about a week after its opening with the headline, "Theater Is Popular" stating that the people of Eureka were getting around to the idea of a good vaudeville show as attendance was continuing to rise each night.¹⁸ The rise of

¹⁴ Roberts, *On Stage*, 400.

¹⁵ Tom E. Murray, *Movie Theatres of Humboldt County: The First Century* (Eureka, CA: Murray, 1992), 11.

¹⁶ "Advertisement," *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, October 31, 1904.

¹⁷ "Brief Mention," *Humboldt Daily Standard*, November 2, 1904.

¹⁸ "Brief Mention," *Humboldt Daily Standard*, November 2, 1904.

attendance would continue through the end of the year. The only competition was the well-known Ingomar Theatre located on the Carson block, which was considered, "The Leading Theatre" of Eureka before the turn of the century.¹⁹

Coming into 1905, the E Street Theatre looked to be a promising little playhouse. *The Humboldt Daily Standard* continued to praise the theatre as the audiences were pleased with the new program, saying that manager C.V. Hickling, made no mistake in securing multiple troupes.²⁰ At least that's what was said on paper, because two months later, Hickling sold the theatre to Messrs. Hurtig, and Alfred Richter. Apparently Hickling was determined to get rid of the playhouse for some time, which begs the question, why did Hickling decided to open up the E Street Theatre five months earlier in the first place? The change of ownership, though, was a hopeful and positive sign for local theatergoers, as the paper noted both Hurtig (first name never given) and Richter, "have had experience in the amusement business, especially Mt. Hurtig, who has managed a number of large attractions in the East."²¹ The trade of ownership was the right decision, as two days later, Hickling had left Eureka because of multiple unpaid bills that he owed for newspaper advertising.²² Regardless of the outcome of Hickling's situation, the E Street Theatre remained in operation and was looking at a brighter future.

The E Street Theatre and its new proprietors went on to to make their playhouse a top contender again. Hurtig immediately traveled to San Francisco from the Humboldt Bay by the steamer, *The Corona*, in search of talent to bring back to Eureka while Richter searched for local entertainers.²³ Soon after Hurtig came back with some performers, rays of hope started to shine

¹⁹ "Advertisement" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, December 28, 1904.

²⁰ "Splendid Bill at E Street Theater" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, January 10, 1905, 5.

²¹ "E Street Theater Has Changed Hands" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, March 2, 1905.

²² "Hickling's Deal in Vaudeville" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, March 4, 1905.

²³ "To Establish Vaudeville Circuit" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, March 6, 1905.

on the theatre. In May 1905, the E Street Theatre made history by being the first establishment in town to allow the public to attend entertainment on a Sunday evening.²⁴ This gave the community a greater opportunity to see shows they may have missed during the week. Along with opening the theatre on Sunday nights, the E Street Theatre soon began to grow a fan base, with people being turned away (due to a high turnout) for the first time in the summer of 1905. A few months later, Hurtig lost interest of the theatre, and decided to leave the business, making Al Richter sole proprietor of the theatre.²⁵ Richter though, was motivated to make his playhouse successful, and from Hurtig's departure, until 1906, the E Street Theatre thrived to its fullest potential, bringing in great vaudeville shows, some more memorable and popular than others.

There were various types of acts that can be included in a vaudeville show. The first show presented at the E Street Theatre consisted of multiple and various acts, such as an organ pipe trick, Irish comedy and dancing, illustrated songs, farces and moving pictures.²⁶ Some other notable acts that were performed at the E Street Theatre consisted of: ventriloquism, acrobatics, black face comedy, monologues, juggling, music and a variety of other performances that entertained the audience.²⁷ Some of the most popular acts that attracted the Eureka people were magic shows. One of the popular shows that got plenty of press coverage in the *Humboldt Daily Standard* during the early 1900s for the E Street Theatre was none other than Raymond the Magician.

Raymond the Magician arrived in Eureka mid-August 1905. Only known as, "Raymond the Magician," Raymond arrived around the same time as Al Richter became the sole proprietor

²⁴ "Theater Bills Please People" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, May 19, 1905

²⁵ "New Faces for E Street" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, August 17, 1905.

²⁶ "Advertisement" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, October 31, 1904.

²⁷ "Various Playbills" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, 1905.

of the E Street Theatre.²⁸ Richter wasted no time in trying to find a troupe that has never been seen in Eureka, and quickly found the “Handcuff King.” The mindreading magician and his troupe performed at the E Street Theatre and the rest of Humboldt County from August 19th to September 20th, 1905.²⁹ Getting out of handcuffs and complicated knots were Raymond’s specialty, but he also did mechanical magic as well as blindfolded himself to find hidden objects. Such acts made the people of Eureka eager to see the magician, and people were turned away nightly to see Raymond and his magic. It was Raymond’s last performance, though, that turned away the most people in the two weeks that the “Handcuff King” was at the E Street Theatre. Six hundred people were turned away, not able to see Raymond’s last performance, where he would uncuff himself without any assistance in front of his audience.³⁰ Even though a large number of people were not able to see his last performance, Richter saw the positive effect that magicians had on his sales, so he was able to book another magician to amaze the Eureka public at the E Street Theatre, The Great “Tatum.”

“Tatum” landed in Eureka shortly after Raymond’s departure, and performed at the E Street Theatre from October 9th to October 23rd, 1905.³¹ Tatum, also a magician, was considered “The World’s Greatest Mind Reader” and his work was that similar to Raymond. Tatum’s performances packed playhouses in San Francisco before he arrived to Eureka, which labeled him as one of the best magicians in America.³²

Although Tatum only performed at the E Street Theatre for a short time, his presence was well received by the community in Eureka, as they were drawn to performances involving magic

²⁸ “New Faces for E Street Theatre” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, August 17, 1905.

²⁹ “Last Night of the Raymonds” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, September 20, 1905.

³⁰ “Wanted to Be a Handcuff King” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, August 31, 1905.

³¹ “E Street Theatre” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, October 24, 1905.

³² “Tatum at the E Street Theatre” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, October 11, 1905.

and telepathy. Tatum would perform his tricks completely blindfolded for the entire performance, with an assistant helping him on stage. In one of his performances, he shoots a 22 caliber rifle on stage blindfolded and hits his target bull's eye, which amazed his audience.³³ When Tatum left the E Street Theatre, the people of Eureka still had the magic fever, and after Tatum concluded his performance, manager Richter swiftly booked one of the most famous magicians to have set foot in the E Street Theatre, Albini.

According to the *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Albini was considered one of the greatest magicians in the entire United States, being well known all over the country as well as some cities in Europe for his, "Hindoo Magic" that has tricked the audience for years.³⁴ Albini's debut at the E Street Theatre was November 2, 1905 and was highly praised. Albini was considered the king of all magicians to set foot in the little playhouse. His method of success consists of not only his unique "Hindoo" magic, but also not having anyone allowed behind the stage during his performance. His tricks were also being performed in plain sight.³⁵

Considered one of the most skillful magicians yet presented to a Eureka audience, Albini made cards, eggs, and other articles vanish and reappear. He also knew many other "magicians' secrets," and exploited those tricks before he left the E Street Theatre, one being Raymond the Magician's handcuff trick.³⁶ Before Albini closed his two week engagement at the E Street Theatre, he revealed his slate and cabinet tricks. Even though he may have broken the magician's code, both Albini and manager Richter profited greatly from the magician performing

³³ "New Bills at Vaudeville" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, October 13, 1905.

³⁴ "Albini at E Street" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, October 31, 1905.

³⁵ "Albini the Great Deserves Name" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, November 3, 1905.

³⁶ "Will Expose the Handcuff Trick" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, November 13, 1905.

and exposing his tricks, further giving the E Street Theatre even more success and a name for itself.³⁷

Despite its cheap price of ten cents for admission, and its major success in getting excellent shows such as Raymond, Tatum, and Albin, in 1906 manager Richter sold the E Street Theatre on “the very best authority.” The front page of the Humboldt Daily Standard mentions that Charles C. Pyle, the manager of the Margarita Fischer Company had bought the playhouse and decided to expand the theatre for an even better experience for the average theatre goer.³⁸ Other playhouses were competing for the top spot for best theatre in town from 1904-1906, one of them being the Girton Theatre.

The Girton Theatre, located in between Second and Third Street on E Street, was adjoined with the Bank of Eureka. The Girton Theatre was another popular playhouse, and was owned by Perry Girton.³⁹ He opened the theatre to the public in 1905, with the ten cent show of the E Street Theatre, and the popular yet often closed Ingomar Theatre as the only other competition. Girton had the help of E.G. Pluke to help him build his theatre while he traveled to San Francisco to collect scenery and furniture for his upcoming performance/grand opening.⁴⁰ The proposed, “finest and best appointed little theatre in the county,”⁴¹ had a modern frame build to it, unlike many of Eureka’s “Victorian” style buildings. From the outside, the theatre had the illusion that it was larger than it looked from inside, but ended up being three offices adjoining the theatre. The playhouse seated a little over 600 people, with 368 on the main floor, and 180 people on the balcony. Unlike the E Street Theatre, which was described to have wooden planks

³⁷ “Old and New Bills At E St. Theatre” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, November 16, 1905.

³⁸ “Al Richter Has Sold Playhouse” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, February 24, 1906.

³⁹ *Polk's Eureka and Humboldt County Directory 1905-1906* (San Francisco, CA: R.L. Polk & Co, 1906), 118.

⁴⁰ “Brief Mention” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, May 8, 1905

⁴¹ “New Vaudeville House assured” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, April 17, 1905.

for seats, Girton specifically made his seats designed for comfort, as well as having the auditorium arranged for the best possible acoustics.⁴² The comfortable seats and the excellent acoustics, along with its new “modern” look, made the grand opening of the Girton Theatre a success.

Considered at the time, “One of the largest and best appointed places of the kind on the northern coast of the state,” Girton’s Theatre was ready to be opened to the public Saturday, July 1st 1905, with Perry Girton as proprietor and manager, George Stanley as the stage director, Miss Houda as the musical director, and the treasurer, Anna Raymond. Specifically focusing on vaudeville acts, the grand opening was one of excitement. With only a ten cent admission (like the E Street Theatre), customers had to be turned away because of the lack of space and simply hope to get into the next show as the theatre goers had to comply with the capacity rules and regulations of the local fire ordinances. With so many people being turned away on opening night for both shows, it made Girton’s Theatre’s opening night successful.⁴³

The Girton Theatre continued to rise in popularity, as they were drawing huge crowds daily, constantly turning people away for both the matinee and evening performances.⁴⁴ In 1906, crowds were able to have the pleasure to watch Girton’s main company, the Girton Stock Company, perform various vaudeville acts and dramatic plays on a nightly basis. One of the reasons the Girton Stock Company was so successful was the fact that they had plenty of local talent to work with, like for example, Arthur Boyce, who was an entertainer and Illustrated singer and also a member of the Girton Stock Company. Boyce should be mentioned because

⁴² “New Vaudeville House assured” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, April 17, 1905.

⁴³ “Girton Theatre Opens Saturday” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, June 29, 1905.

⁴⁴ “Girton Draws Big Crowds” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, July 6, 1905.

prior to joining the Girton Stock Company, he was a member of the E Street Company and performed at the E Street Theatre before its closure.⁴⁵

Another example was that Girton's Theatre had the pleasure to allow one or more of its own directors to perform daily. George Stanley, the stage director, performed illustrated songs on a weekly basis as well as Miss Houda, who performed piano solos.⁴⁶ Sometimes even Perry Girton himself would join the Stock Company and perform in various acts.⁴⁷ Along with locals: Stanley, Houda and the Girton Stock Company, other companies such as the famous Margarita Fisher Company traveled and performed on Perry Girton's grand stage as well as forever changing the future of theatrical plays in Eureka.

Miss Margarita Fisher and her company debuted at the Girton Theatre December 30th, 1905, performing a melo-drama titled "Blue Grass Derby." It was supposedly a big bill, as it was also the first ever dramatic play to be shown at the Girton Theatre. The prices too show that the Margarita Fischer Company was a successful troupe, as admission for evening shows were as high as thirty five cents, twenty five cents higher than the original price.⁴⁸

The Margarita Fischer Company performed at the Girton Theatre for 5 weeks, giving the Eureka community much to look forward to when it came to entertainment. Performing at the Ingomar in earlier engagements, the people of Eureka were already familiar with Miss Fischer and her company, so Miss Fischer decided to give back to the people of Eureka. One such example was bringing fourteen local Hoopa tribe children to one of her performances, with front row seats. The children were also mentioned at the end of the show by Margarita herself.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ "Advertisement" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, December 1, 1904.

⁴⁶ "Dog and Pony Circus" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, September 1, 1905.

⁴⁷ "Trilby at the Girton Theatre" *Humboldt Daily Standard*. Eureka, June 27, 1906.

⁴⁸ "Fischer Co. at Girton's Tonight" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, December 30, 1905.

⁴⁹ "Indian Children Enjoy Girton's" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, January 30, 1906.

Another example of Miss Fischer's giving nature occurred when she gave away a Shetland pony on the last matinee of their engagement at the Theatre. Gestures such as this had the people of Eureka flock to the Girton Theatre, constantly having people being turned away nightly in hopes of being a part of Margarita's charity.⁵⁰

It should be mentioned that around the same time that the Margarita Fischer Company departed Girton's Theatre, Charles Pyle, the Margarita manager, bought the E Street Theatre from Alfred Richter which helped put Perry Girton's playhouse as a top contender for best theatre. With their departure on March 10th, Perry Girton quickly booked another troupe.⁵¹ This eventually lead to the local talent in Eureka rallying together to create the Girton Stock Company to be performed at Girton's Theatre.

The Girton Stock Company first performed at Girton's Theatre May 25, 1906, which consisted of five acts. This local vaudeville troupe had notable local entertainers such as Pietro Sosso, Arthur Boyce, and Miss Auda Due, all whom have performed at least once at another playhouse in Eureka.⁵² The Girton Stock Company quickly gained popularity in Eureka, as the first performance was performed in front of a packed house. The Company became popular to the point where Perry Girton had gotten a telegram from a previous performer at the theatre, Maxie Mitchell, asking if Girton needed any new material for his playhouse. Girton respectfully declines her offer, but instead, offered Mitchell to join his Stock Company.⁵³

Perry Girton and the Girton Theatre, along with his own troupe, had much success throughout 1904-1906. Around the time when Girton's Theatre was thriving, another theatre emerged to try to take the spot for best theatre. The old E Street Theatre was renovated into a

⁵⁰ "La Belle Marie at Girton Theatre" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, January 11, 1906.

⁵¹ "Attractions at the Theatres" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, February 21, 1906.

⁵² "New Bills at the Theatres" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, July 30, 1906.

⁵³ "Sappho Tonight at Girton's" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, June 6, 1906.

more modern theatre, a playhouse that was supposed to make other theatres in Eureka obsolete at the time. That playhouse was the Margarita Theatre.

The Margarita Theatre was one of the more successful theatres to have been built in Eureka in the middle of the first decade in the 1900s. Replacing the old E Street Theatre around mid-June 1906, the Margarita Theatre was set to be one of the top playhouses on the coast of California, and possibly the whole state. With an entire cost of \$7500, managers Charles C. Pyle and Frank C. Parker revamped the old E Street Theatre into the new upgraded Margarita Theatre. The theatre had a Mission Style feeling, with arches in the front that provided entrance doors and ticket booths. The large auditorium seated 800 people, 450 being on the ground level, and 350 in the balcony, which ran around an arch on both sides of the auditorium. Some other notable renovations included a much wider stage, a ladies retiring room with their own personal lady attendant, and a smoking room. Surely Pyle and Parker wanted to create the best possible atmosphere for their audience, as they even put in the effort to put just as many electric lights on the front sign than in the rest of the theatre altogether. The building was also renovated by adding telephones, picture machines and buzzers. Even with all of these new additions to the Margarita Theatre, Pyle and Parker had a hard time maintaining success within its first couple of months after its grand opening.⁵⁴

To begin with the name of the theatre, "Margarita" was not the first name the building held. In an article, the *Humboldt Daily Standard* reported that a woman named Katherine Brown had won the contest for naming the newly bought theatre by the Margarita Fischer Companies manager, Charles Pyle. The article states that there were over 300 suggestions as to what to name the new theatre (one of them being Margarita). The winner, Miss Brown, decided to name

⁵⁴ "Margarita New Theatre" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, June 14, 1906.

it the “The Theatre Marguerite.”⁵⁵ For unknown reasons, the Theatre Marguerite never did become the name of the playhouse, and was instead renamed Theatre Margarita.

The grand opening of the Margarita Theatre was Thursday June 14th, 1906. Miss Fischer and the Margarita Fischer Company opened with the play, “Under Two Flags.” The grand opening received positive reviews in the *Humboldt Daily Standard*, calling it one of the prettiest theatres on the coast. People were standing in the aisles just to watch the play and many fellow patrons were unfortunate and had to be turned away. Even though many people were turned away, notable people such as acting Mayor, W.L. Lambor as well as the City Council showed up for the grand opening of what would be known as, “The most complete and best appointed theaters on the coast, and assuredly the best of its size in the state.”⁵⁶

Although the theatre received popular reception by the community, the Margarita had to shut down in less than two months, as the star of the Company, Miss Fischer, collapsed during a performance which was caused by overworking herself.⁵⁷ This ultimately resulted in Miss Fischer herself retiring from dramatic plays altogether and the Margarita Theatre was shut down immediately. Not soon after its closure though, managers Parker and Pyle decided to reopen the theatre under the new name “Theatre Majestic.”⁵⁸ Not much was said about the sudden change of the theatre name, though it can be assumed that it involved Miss Fischer’s collapse and departure from her own company. The new playhouse was expected to have a bright future, offering and focusing on high vaudeville acts instead of dramatic plays. Unfortunately, Theatre Majestic was quickly shut down in less than a month.⁵⁹ Managers Parker and Pyle decided to

⁵⁵ “The Theatre Marguerite” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, April 19, 1906.

⁵⁶ “The Margarita Formally Opened” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, June 15, 1906.

⁵⁷ “Fischer Company Closed Its Season” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, July 9, 1906.

⁵⁸ “Advertisement” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, July 19, 1906.

⁵⁹ “Theatre Majestic Opens Saturday” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, July 19, 1906.

sell Theatre Majestic to A. R. Thorpe and Josh Vansant, with George Wiley as manager. As stated in the Humboldt Daily Standard, the Theatre Majestic was anything but majestic, so Thorpe and Vansant decided to open the theatre back up and revert back to the original name, the Margarita Theatre.⁶⁰

Even though the Margarita Theatre got off to a rocky start, the little playhouse was able to become one of the most successful theatres in the first decade of the 1900s as well as the first half of the 20th Century. Manager Wiley, being in the theatre business prior to obtaining the playhouse, made sure that he booked good stock companies that had a history of putting on fine shows in Eureka. One notable stock company that should be noted that Manager Wiley did not book was Miss Fischer's Company, as they performed on the Margarita stage when the playhouse was still owned by Parker and Pyle. Some other notable stock companies that came to perform on the Margarita stage were the Sosso Stock Company, and the Margarita Stock Company.

As previously mentioned, the Margarita Fischer Company debuted the grand opening of the Margarita Theatre, which came with success and positive reviews in the *Humboldt Daily Standard*. It was also previously mentioned that Miss Fischer and her company only performed for two months before Miss Fischer collapsed on stage, forcing the company to close for the season, then for good at the playhouse. This ultimately led to Margarita Fischer to retire from acting altogether, but not without controversy between her and the management of the Margarita Theatre.

Kate Fischer, Margarita's mother, wrote a statement regarding her daughter and how she was treated within her own company. Mrs. Fischer claims that the managers of the

⁶⁰ "Reopening of the Margarita" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, August 4, 1906.

company/theatre were the ultimate cause of Miss Fischer's illness and collapse on stage. She claimed that Parker and Pyle gave Fischer whatever sum of money they sought fit when it came to payments, which consisted mainly of a minimal payment or even no payment at all. This put much strain on Miss Fischer, as she was extremely exhausted to the point that she needed to take restoratives to finish her performances. At the end of Mrs. Fischer's statement, she claims that she only wants to inform the public about the poor management that is at the Margarita Theatre and how the nineteen year old Margarita Fischer was overworked and overtired because she was performing twice a night, every night.⁶¹

This controversy soon subsided and ultimately led to the Margarita Theatre's name change to Theatre Majestic, and did not open back up officially under its original name until August 20th 1906.⁶² After the official reopening, the Margarita Theatre remained open for the rest of the decade, competing with as well as showing motion pictures, and also competing against one of the oldest theatres that remained open at the time, the Ingomar Theatre.

One of the last theatres to be mentioned as a popular dramatic theatre in the first decade of the 1900s was one of the oldest theatres to stay standing in Eureka. The Ingomar Theatre was built by a well-known Eureka pioneer, William Carson. Carson was a businessman, as he was a proprietor of the Dolbeer and Carson Lumber Company, as well as the President for the local Bank of Eureka. In the late 1800s, he decided to enter the dramatic theatre business.⁶³ In April 1892, Carson was able to purchase a piece of land on the corner of Third and "F" street (better known as the Carson Block) so he could build his playhouse.⁶⁴ Carson ended up spending

⁶¹ "Mrs. Fischer's Statement" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, July 10, 1906.

⁶² "Margarita Reopens Tonight" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, August 20, 1906.

⁶³ Mary Lou Humphries. Beryl Carrico, Leona Mackley, Pat Lewis, and Karen Campbell Hendricks, *Early Members of the Humboldt County, California Pioneer Society : As Taken from the Original Membership Book* (2009), 94.

⁶⁴ *Polk's Eureka and Humboldt County Directory 1903-1904* (San Francisco, CA: R.L. Polk &

around \$130,000 for the building and theatre, showing the local people of Eureka that he was willing to spend large amounts of money for the community so that they can have extraordinary entertainment in a remote, isolated part of the state/country. This entertainment, would come to the public in late December of that same year for its grand opening.⁶⁵

Being able to seat 837 people, the Ingomar Theatre was unlike anything the people of Eureka had seen before.⁶⁶ The interior was unique in its own way, with the size of the stage being 30 x 25 feet, and a combination architectural design of Greek and Byzantine styles.⁶⁷ With the interior colors being green and gold, Carson had three trap doors on stage, an addition that took a more modern approach to theatre building. Carson also sought out help from all over the country to build the Ingomar Theatre. For example, all of the scenery and stage paraphernalia was made by some of the most prominent artists of the time in Chicago.⁶⁸

Even though the Ingomar Theatre was built in 1892, the playhouse remained popular throughout the 1890s as well as into the first decade of the 20th century. What is interesting about the Ingomar Theatre was that it was different from the rest of the theatres in Eureka as it was not open all of the time. Sporadically throughout the year, the Ingomar Theatre would host companies to perform at their little playhouse. Even though these shows were not frequent and often were last minute, the community of Eureka was able to rely on William Carson in at least having great shows that were performed during the holidays. During the holidays from 1903 to 1905, one of the companies that Carson booked frequently was the Elleford Company, as they

Co, 1904), 85.

⁶⁵ Frank Bernard Bettendorf, *Dramatic Activities of the Humboldt Bay Area 1880-1912*, (Los Angeles, 1963), 40.

⁶⁶ *Susie Baker Fountain Papers* (Vol. 64), 269.

⁶⁷ Bettendorf, *Dramatic Activities of the Humboldt Bay Area*, 40.

⁶⁸ Lenny Escarda, *The Ingomar Theatre*, (1959), 7-9.

were a popular stock company in Eureka.⁶⁹ One of the reasons that can be assumed as to why the Ingomar Theatre was not always open, was because of the wealth William Carson had, and he did not have to worry about making payments on his property every month because of his wealth. Because of his net worth, Carson was able to extend his usefulness and used the playhouse for the community. One example of Carson giving back to Eureka with his playhouse was that of holding the graduation ceremony at the Ingomar for Eureka High School for thirty graduates every year.⁷⁰

Other notable things that William Carson did between 1904-1906 that helped him give back to the community through the Ingomar Theatre included giving the local Sequoia Yacht Club a chance to perform a minstrel show to raise money for their club. Another gesture Carson did was to give a benefit performance for Miss Margarita Fischer after her collapse on stage shortly after her playhouse, the Margarita Theatre, opened. These gestures that Carson gave to his community were some of many reasons why his theatre remained opened and remained successful, especially during 1904-1906.

Besides offering Eureka High School a place to hold graduations every May/June, William Carson also offered his theatre to local clubs, such as the Sequoia Yacht Club. The Yacht Club wanted to raise funds toward promoting aquatic sports in Eureka, and was willing to search all over the city for the best amateur talent to have the best possible turnout at their shows so they could raise money.⁷¹ Even though the Yacht Club performed for only two nights, the turnout was very high, as admission prices were only 25, 50, and 75 cents.⁷² Both nights the Yacht Club brought large audiences to the Ingomar Theatre, bringing in, "A neat little sum from

⁶⁹ Bettendorf. *Dramatic Activities of the Humboldt Bay Area*, 120-130.

⁷⁰ "High School Graduations" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, May 26, 1906.

⁷¹ "The Yacht Club to go Into Cork" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, January 17, 1905.

⁷² "Playbill" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, February 6, 1905.

their venture.”⁷³ Another benefit performance William Carson put on was for the Eureka notable, Miss Margarita Fischer.

Because of Fischer’s collapse on her own stage at the Margarita Theatre in 1906, the community quickly came together to her aid, with the Ingomar Theatre giving a, “Grand Testimonial Benefit” performance.⁷⁴ With moving pictures and local talent from Girton’s Theatre and his stock company, the people of Eureka came together for an exciting performance for the talented Margarita Fischer. The performance turned out to be a success, with the performance being, “The Convict’s Daughter,” many fans of Miss Fischer showed up to show their support of their favorite local actress. Although it was a great performance, it also was the last time anyone in Eureka was going to be able to see Miss Fischer herself be on stage, as she departed soon afterward.⁷⁵

It should be mentioned that during this time of success with vaudeville acts and dramatic plays in Eureka, along with the rise of moving pictures, a major event would happen in San Francisco that would shake the entire state of California and put entertainment on hold for a brief period of time, especially in Eureka, in the spring of 1906. The San Francisco earthquake occurred in the early morning of April 18, 1906. The magnitude of the quake was around 7.8, shaking the entire northern coast of California. Although the quake was massive, the *Humboldt Daily Standard* read on the front page, “Shaken By An Earthquake” a headline that does not put to scale the damage that was actually done in San Francisco.⁷⁶ The next day though, the front page read, “The Metropolis In Ruins!” and “Terrible Losses of Life.”⁷⁷ All of the theatres in

⁷³ “Yacht Club Minstrels” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, February 20, 1905.

⁷⁴ “Playbill” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, July 19, 1906.

⁷⁵ “The Benefit Was a Grand Success” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, July 21, 1906.

⁷⁶ “Shaken By An Earthquake” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, April 18, 1906.

⁷⁷ “The Metropolis In Ruins!” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, April 19, 1906.

Eureka survived the terrible quake, as they all withstood the aftershocks nicely. It is said specifically that Girton's Theatre, "survived nicely" but because of the quake, people had no interest in going to shows.⁷⁸ The theatres decided to close for the rest of the week, seeing as people are more than likely not attend, but mourn the tragedy that shook their lives. The San Francisco earthquake of 1906 was a devastating event, but it did not stop the people in the entertainment business in California, especially in Eureka during 1904-1906, to keep the community distracted by showing great entertainment around town.

Even though vaudeville acts and dramatic plays were one of the more popular entertainment events that had occurred in Eureka in the early 1900s, there were other forms of entertainment that local community of Eureka were able to enjoy. These included going to the opera house, skating rink, or to watch a local boxing match.

One form of entertainment besides dramatic plays and vaudeville acts that was widely popular in Eureka and Humboldt County were Operas. Gustin's Opera House, managed by Miss Florence Hyde, was an alternative selection of entertainment to choose from. The Opera House offered solo and orchestra concerts, operas and had up to 400 chairs to sit the audience when it opened up late 1904.⁷⁹ Although competing with other local playhouses, Gustin's Opera House was able to maintain steady success during 1904-1906. This can be assumed of the admission price being higher than other entertainment houses in Eureka, being fifty cents for one concert or \$1.50 for season tickets (4 concerts).⁸⁰ At the time the price may have been looked at as expensive, compared to the cheap ten cent E Street Theatre admissions, but the difference can be assumed that the engagements that were going on at Gustin's Opera House were very limited

⁷⁸ Murray, *Movie Theatres of Humboldt County*, 13.

⁷⁹ Murray, *Movie Theatres of Humboldt County*, 11.

⁸⁰ "Advertisement" *Humboldt Daily Standard*. Eureka, January 11, 1905.

compared to the E Street Theatre's change of bill once a week. For example, concerts that were performed at the opera house only performed for two nights and would consist of solo performances from musicians who sang, played the violin, piano, and other instruments.⁸¹

Another difference that can be assumed is that local Eureka people were willing to pay extra money and go see a concert or opera, rather than going back to the theater routinely to go see a dramatic play or vaudeville act. The higher price for an opera also meant people of a higher class can enjoy such engagements, unlike the cheap ten cent theatres, that appeals to all social classes. Other than concerts and operas, other forms of entertainment such as bowling, contests and dancing were also offered at Gustin's Opera House.⁸² Gustin's Opera House was not the only house in Eureka that provided entertainment other than plays and acts, as the Occidental Pavilion and Baird Hall were other options that offered different types of entertainment for local people such as blacksmiths mentioned in *The Humboldt Historian*.⁸³

Located on Second Street, the Occidental Pavilion and Baird Hall offered multiple types of entertainment ranging from concerts to plays. One form of entertainment that stood out above all other entertainment houses in Eureka were boxing matches.⁸⁴ During the middle of the 1900s, motion pictures were on the rise and took on a new form of entertainment. Motion pictures in Eureka were usually shown in between vaudeville acts, showing very short silent film clips. That was until boxing matches were able to be filmed. Once these boxing matches were filmed, they would be sent to theatres across the country for the community to watch. Since theatres such as the Margarita, Girton, and Ingomar only focused on plays and vaudeville acts,

⁸¹ "Advertisement" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, January 11, 1905.

⁸² "Coming Events" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, March 13, 1905.

⁸³ Lorenzo G. Hughes, "'Two Saloons and a Schoolhouse,'" *The Humboldt Historian*, (May/June 1978): 6.

⁸⁴ "Let's Take A Walk Down Second Street," *The Humboldt Historian*, (September/October 1974):1.

other theatres such as the Baird Hall and Occidental Pavilion took the chance to exploit this kind of entertainment to the Eureka public. This turned out to be successful, as “fight pictures” were created and were well received at the Occidental Pavilion. An article in the *Humboldt Daily Standard* gives a description of how successful one of the first fight pictures was back in 1905. Since the moving pictures were silent at the time, there were commentators, or “lecturers” who would give a play by play of the boxing fight. It was also mentioned that in between the rounds, the local marching band would play music to entertain the crowd.⁸⁵

The local people of Eureka also enjoyed going to skating rinks, attending art galleries, and masquerade balls.⁸⁶ The local skating rink was another type of entertainment that the Occidental Pavilion offered to the Eureka public, offering a price of admission of 15 cents, around the same price as going to go see a play, trying to appeal to the youth of Eureka.⁸⁷ Eureka also had a local penny arcade that grew to be popular between 1905 and 1906.⁸⁸ It seemed as though that motion pictures grasped the community of Eureka and the rest of the country the most when it came to entertainment, because as the first decade of the 1900s was coming to an end, dramatic plays, vaudeville acts, and other forms of entertainments seemed to be overshadowed by the new Hollywood pictures, eventually bringing an end to some of the most popular theatres in Humboldt County.

It was already mentioned that the E Street Theatre was shut down and replaced by the new and improved Margarita Theatre in 1906, and that very fate would soon be upon the other theatres in Eureka that thrived between 1904-1906. After the E Street Theatre was torn down and transformed, the next theatre to go under was Girton’s Theatre. Perry Girton sold his theatre

⁸⁵ “Fight Pictures at the Pavilion” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, October 28, 1905.

⁸⁶ “The Coming Masque Ball” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, January 19, 1905.

⁸⁷ “Advertisement” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, March 8, 1906.

⁸⁸ “Penny Arcade Growing Popular” *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, May 26, 1905.

to Margarita Theatre owners Vansant and Thorpe in the later part of 1906.⁸⁹ The theatre though, was remained opened under the same name until April 1907, when it was then permanently changed to the Empire Theatre.⁹⁰

After the Girton Theatre was renamed and replaced, the only other theatres remaining were the Margarita and the Ingomar Theatre. Between the two playhouses, the Ingomar was the first to go, with William Carson passing away in 1912, along with his theatre. Even though dramatic plays were not showing at the Ingomar since 1910, The Ingomar continued, even after Carson's death, to offer Eureka High School a graduation ceremony every year.⁹¹ It should be mentioned that besides Carson passing away, another reason the Ingomar closed was due to the rise of motion pictures, as more people seemed to enjoy going to see movies than live plays.⁹²

The Margarita was the last theatre to close down, and its closure was rather unfortunate. In June 1914, the property owner of the estate, Mrs. Helen Rowell, passed away, having said in her will to give the lease of the Margarita to the Pettingill's who ran the Pastime Theatre at the time.⁹³ It is said in *Humboldt Movies* that after the Margarita closed down, it reopened in August under the new name Imperial Theatre, expanding their seating, thus making the Margarita Theatre cease to exist.⁹⁴

The main reasoning for all of these theatres closing was because of the rise of motion pictures, more specifically, Hollywood pictures. When motion pictures were created, it seemed as though dramatic and vaudeville plays became completely obsolete, as people would rather enjoy entertainment watching a screen rather than watching a play in person. Nonetheless,

⁸⁹ "Girton Theatre Changes Hands" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, October 18, 1906.

⁹⁰ "Amusements" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, April 6, 1907.

⁹¹ Escarda, *The Ingomar Theatre*, (1959), 25.

⁹² Bettendorf, *Dramatic Activities of the Humboldt Bay Area*, 111.

⁹³ "Theatre Lease Is In Question" *Humboldt Daily Standard*, Eureka, June 24, 1914.

⁹⁴ Murray, *Movie Theatres of Humboldt County*, 19.

theatres such as the Ingomar, which were strictly legitimate plays, were able to compete with Hollywood motion picture theatres, something that the people of Eureka recognized later in the 20th Century.

Out of all four theatres that were in operation between 1904-1906, there was only one theatre to be remembered and memorialized later in the 20th century. The Ingomar Theatre was able to get renovated in the late 1950s, by the Humboldt Historical Society. The Historical Society wanted to celebrate William Carson and his Theatre before it disappeared forever and turned into a furniture store. So in 1958, from April 8th to the 13th, the Ingomar Theatre opened back up with a limited engagement having the title, "The Final Curtain Call." The week long performance was a success and attracted 3000 people to the last performances at the Ingomar Theatre, showing that the community of Eureka took pride in their city and their historical landmarks.⁹⁵

It is difficult to determine which playhouse was the most successful during the period of 1904-1906, as all of the theatres had flaws and drawbacks during their time of operation. The E Street Theatre was to be believed as a successful theatre, being able to compete with the Ingomar with its great shows and cheap prices, but was sold after only two years in operation to the managers of the Margarita Fischer Company. The Girton Theatre was one of the theatres that also had a short lifespan, but during the time between 1904-1906, Perry Girton was able to book many talented troupes to perform at his playhouse, one being Miss Fischer and the Margarita Fischer Company. Girton also had a lot of local talent that would perform in his vaudeville acts, which was eventually formed into the Girton Stock Company. Overall, the Girton Theatre did

⁹⁵ "The Final Curtain Call." *Humboldt County Historical Society*, 1958. Found in Humboldt Room Pamphlets.

not disappoint the community of Eureka, despite its short life. The Margarita Theatre though seemed like it did disappoint the local people of Eureka.

Despite the Margarita Theatre being the last of the four theatres to close down, between 1904-1906, the playhouse owned by Parker and Pyle struggled to gain momentum, as only two months after its grand opening, it was shut down due to Miss Fischer's illness and soon renamed the Theatre Majestic, only to be renamed back to the Margarita Theatre months later. The theatre ended up maintaining success after the whole fiasco with Miss Fischer and the Theatre Majestic, from 1907 to its closing in 1914, but the inconsistency of the theatre between 1904-1906 cannot go unnoticed.

That leaves the Ingomar Theatre. Despite the fact that there were limited shows throughout the year at the Ingomar, the success it had between 1904 and 1906 was top-tier. Not only did William Carson book successful plays, but he also made his playhouse available to the public. Having the local high schools' graduation at the Ingomar, Carson was able to also allow local talent to perform at the theatre for charity, with the charity performance for Miss Fischer after her collapse on stage as an example. All of these factors, along with being the longest theatre opened at the time, and being the only theatre to be memorialized, shows that the Ingomar Theatre was the most successful theatre in Eureka from 1904-1906.

All of the theatres as previously mentioned, between 1904-1906 were successful in their own way. They were successful because the community continued to come out and watch these dramas or comedy acts. Even though theatres such as Girton and E Street were unfortunate and closed down prematurely, the consistency of good shows and cheap prices kept the people coming back, thus making Girton's Theatre come to a close second as best theatre between 1904-1906 in Eureka. All of these theatres worked hard in providing the best entertainment for

Eureka, but the best playhouse between 1904-1906 was indeed the Ingomar Theatre. Even though it was not opened as often when compared to the other Eureka Theatres, William Carson provided the community a great service, a big enough service to be the only theatre out of all mentioned above to be memorialized by the Humboldt Historical Society and enough for the Ingomar Theatre to be labeled as the best playhouse between 1904-1906.

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