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Entertainment in Kingston, 1816-1837

Michel S. Beaulieu

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See table of contents

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Article abstract

Upper Canadians were avid participants in "entertainment." They took part as spectators and participants in a wide variety of activities that, on one level, provided an opportunity for leisure and social interaction. However, for historians, the type and dialogue surrounding them also played another, somewhat more significant, role. As this paper argues, the many forms of public and private amusement available in Kingston, Ontario, between 1815 and 1837 provide a barometer of the social and political atmosphere of the town.

"Not that I lov'd Fleas less, but that I lov'd England more,"

Entertainment in Kingston, 1816-1837

by Michel S. Beaulieu

In Act III, Scene 2 of William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Brutus tries to console and explain to the throngs of angry Romans demanding to know why he and others assassinated their beloved emperor, when he states that "Not that I Lov'd Caesar less, but that I lov'd Rome more."[1] Over three centuries later, an unknown thespian reacting to condemnations of traveling theatrical groups by the conservative and religious newspaper the *Religious Advocate*, commented somewhat tongue and cheek that, "Not that I lov'd Fleas less, but that I lov'd England more."[2] In isolation, this play on one of Shakespeare's most famous lines might seem odd, but in the context of early Upper Canadian society it was an apt and accurate commentary on the nature of amusements and spectatorship during the period.

Viewed as a metaphor, this flea was a reflection and statement on early public and private amusements in Kingston during the first decades of the nineteenth century.[3] American historian Bruce C. Daniels, for instance, argues that entertainments are "manifestations of a society's core identity" and are particular "social constructions shaped by specific physical circumstances, values, and history."[4] Likewise, S.E. Wilmer suggests that, like all forms of public amusement, theatre "influence[s] the process of representing and challenging notions of national identity... [and] can act as a public forum in which the audience scrutinizes and evaluates political rhetoric and assesses the validity of representations of national identity."[5] Likewise, in his 1984 speech to the Empire Club of Toronto on that city's social scene in 1834, historian J.M.S.

[1] *Julius Caesar* (III, ii, 22)

[2] *Kingston Gazette and Religious Advocate*, 16 October 1829.

[3] For a humourous nineteenth-century history, see L. Bertolotto, *The history of the flea: with notes, observations, and amusing anecdotes* (New York: Printed by John Axford, 1876) and his *Signor Bertolotto's extraordinary exhibition of the industrious fleas* (London: E.&J. Thomas, 185?).

[4] Bruce C. Daniels, *Puritans at Play: Leisure and Recreation in Colonial New England* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1995), ix.

[5] S.E. Wilmer, *Theatre, Society and the Nation: Staging American Identities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1-2.

Abstract

Upper Canadians were avid participants in "entertainment." They took part as spectators and participants in a wide variety of activities that, on one level, provided an opportunity for leisure and social interaction. However, for historians, the type and dialogue surrounding them also played another, somewhat more significant, role. As this paper argues, the many forms of public and private amusement available in Kingston, Ontario, between 1815 and 1837 provide a barometer of the social and political atmosphere of the town.

***Résumé:** Les habitants du Haut-Canada aimaient beaucoup se divertir. Spectateurs ou participants, ils prenaient part à une variété d'activités qui leur permettaient de se détendre comme de se rencontrer socialement. Pour les historiens, cependant, les genres et les formes de ces divertissements, présentent un autre aspect, un aspect plus significatif. Dans cet essai, nous voulons montrer que les types de divertissements publics et privés que l'on pouvait rencontrer à Kingston, de 1815 à 1837, peuvent aussi servir de baromètre pour mesurer l'atmosphère sociale et politique de la ville.*

Careless made sure to point out that

> Theatre is popular also, if of doubtful quality; it is usually presented by travelling actors to well-lubricated, rowdy audiences in hotel ballrooms, at City Hall, or even in tents. Sometimes the stage offers Shakespeare; but also, as at the Steamboat Hotel in October, it may be 'The Extraordinary Exhibition of the Industrious Fleas', or, in a tent behind the jail in July, a mighty presentation of the Battles of Waterloo and New Orleans - with extra charge to see the boa constrictor.[6]

This paper is about the many forms of public and private amusement available in Kingston, Ontario, between 1816 and 1837 and argues that these activities provide a barometer of the social and political atmosphere of the town.

Entertainments, both public and private, provided a means of empowerment for the spectator, actor, or audience members. This equally applied to the Kingston elite, well-off merchants who sought to imitate British aristocrats, and to the working class who at once scorned the upper class but also attempted to emulate them. Even the most cursory examination of entertainment in the Kingston newspapers during the first decades of the nineteenth century demonstrates that amusements were both shaped by the society which surrounded them and provided a venue through which elite and non-elite could express to a degree their individual and collective empowerment.

Two examples serve to illustrate this idea. The first is how theatrical entertainment, the most studied of all public amusements available to Kingstonians at the time, first reflected the cultural values

[6] J.M.S. Careless, The Life of a New City: Toronto, 1834," in *The Empire Club of Canada Addresses* (Toronto: The Empire Club Foundation, 1984), 285-97. Available online at http://speeches.empireclub.org/details.asp?r=vs&ID=61777&number=1

"The Extraordinry Exhibit of Industrious Fleas" as advertised in the British Whig *(23 Sept. 1835, 2) was not inexpensive. The price for an average worker and one child to attend would have amounted to roughly two-sevenths of his entire daily wages.*

held by the elite and later the morality debates of the late 1820s and 1830s. The second example focuses on other forms of public amusement and how they reflected the nineteenth century fascination with science, nature, and the sublime.

It is important to first recognise that in early nineteenth-century Kingston, the "public" of "public amusements" owed more to the "publicity" it received in local papers than perhaps in its openness to all classes of society.[7] Mary Elizabeth Smith, for example, argues in her examination of theatre in Saint John between 1789 and 1900 that "the tone of reviews generally reflects the education and tastes of the class whose money and influence chiefly supported the theatre and who considered itself responsible to mould public taste."[8] Such responsibility was only felt by the "few educated and articulate leaders of Upper Canada," whom Jane Errington states, "were both conscious of and concerned about the colony's social, political, and economic development and about its relationship to the world outside its boundaries."[9]

This notion is equally applicable to the Kingston newspapers.[10] For example, considering John Macaulay's relationship with the elite in Kingston and his close ties to John Strachan and Archdeacon G.O. Stuart, the *Kingston Chronicle* under his editorship (1818-1823) was decidedly inclined to present Tory views and thoughts, something which continued after he sold the paper in 1823.[11] It

[7] This is in contrast to the state of "public amusements" in the late nineteenth century United States. David Nasaw, for example, argues that "the world of 'public' amusements was, in its 'publicity,' its accessibility, and its 'wide-openness.'" See David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 2.

[8] Mary Elizabeth Smith, *Too Soon the Curtain Fell: A History of Theatre in Saint John 1789-1900* (Fredericton: Brunswick Press, 1981), x.

[9] Jane Errington, *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada: A Developing Colonial Ideology* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987), 5.

[10] See, for example, S.F. Wise's discussion of John Macaulay's editorship of the *Kingston Chronicle* in "John Macaulay: Tory for All Seasons," in Gerald Tulchinsky, ed., *To Preserve and Defend: Essays on Kingston in the Nineteenth Century* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1976): 188-96.

[11] For background on Strachan, Macaulay, and Stuart, see G.M. Craig, "John Strachan," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* vol. IX, 751-66; A.J. Anderson, "George Okill Stuart," *Dictionary of Canadian Biog-*

would stand to reason that the public amusements advertised in this paper during its various incarnations, and also in its later rival, the *British Whig*, do not represent the entirety of social events in Kingston between 1816 and 1837. Evidence suggests that many elites such as Macaulay, who controlled the means and methods of information dissemination, would suppress certain kinds of entertainment that might represent a threat to the moral and political order of the town and colony.

Cost was one factor determining who attended social events. The price for an average worker and one child to witness the flea circus described above would have amounted to roughly two-sevenths of his entire daily wages.[12] When essentials such as lodgings, food, and the occasional pint are factored in, entertainment represented a substantial amount of real income. Whereas amusements such as a flea circus may have been affordable for mechanics, events such as amateur theatre productions, which could cost in excess of 2s 6d, or a subscription ball, where the cost could be as high as 8£, became prohibitive. As such, audiences were hardly as heterogeneous or reflective of all those living in Kingston and its environs, as the very presence of "boxes" for those who could afford them and "the pit" for the mechanics would seem to suggest. Yet, the mere presence of segregated spaces is an indication that, regardless of how the information was disseminated, members of different classes embraced the various forms of entertainment.

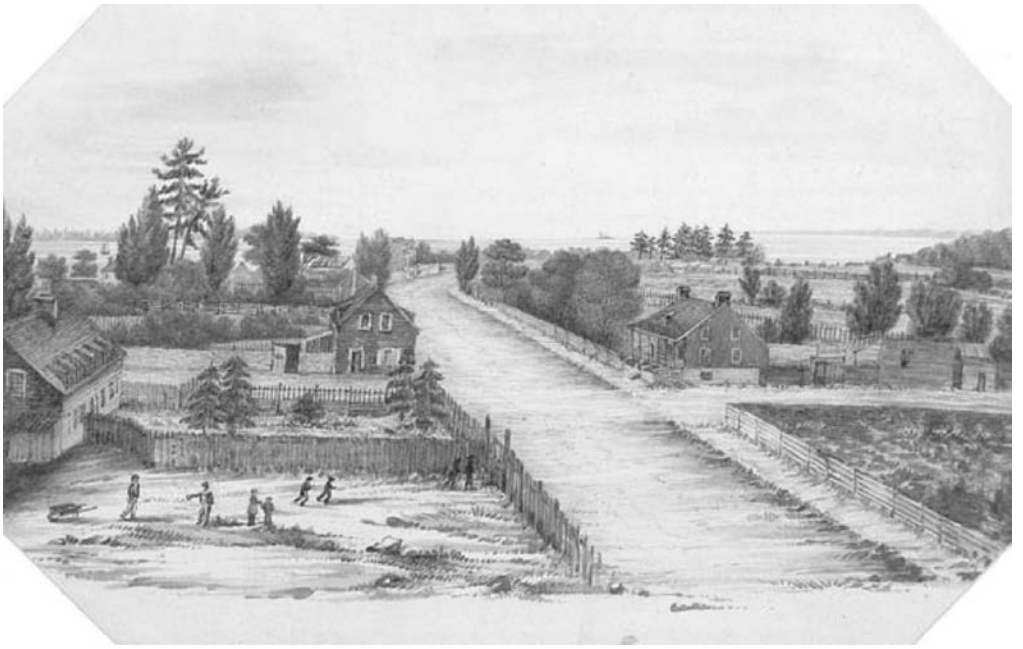
Cost clearly circumscribed how publicly accessible amusements were as did the choice of venue. While the flea circus could be held in a reasonably accessible and recently vacated store, the majority of entertainments advertised in local papers were held in hotels frequented or, as in the case of Walker's Hotel, owned by many of Kingston's most influential citizens.[13] Many establishments, such as Moore's Coffee House and Walker's Hotel, also doubled as churches and Masonic Lodges, serving the same clientele as they did for the various public amusements that appeared in town. Mechanics and other "non-elites" would have sought entertainment elsewhere in the many taverns that could be found throughout the Bay of Quinte region. The work of Julia Roberts, for example, clearly suggests that greater class interaction occurred in taverns, but certain establishments in early nineteenth century Kingston, as evident from the activities that occurred within them, catered to specific social groups.[14]

raphy vol. IX, 770-71; and Robert Lochiel Fraser, "John Macaulay," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* vol. VIII, 513-22.

[12] This estimate is based on what G.P. de T. Glazebrook suggests was a carpenter's average daily wage of seven shillings and nine pence (Halifax currency) in 1815. See his *Life in Ontario: A Social History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 67.

[13] Walker's Hotel was owned, for example, by Edward Walker a friend of John Macaulay and notable member of the local Anglican Church. See Kathyrn M. Bindon, "Kingston A Social History 1785-1830," (PhD diss., Queen's University, 1979), 638-39.

[14] For class interaction in taverns, see Julia Robert's recent articles "Harry Jones and His Cronies



View to the South along King Street from the R. D. Cartwright House, Kingston, Ontario. ca. 1833/ 1834, Harriet Cartwright fonds [graphic material] (R10492-0-6-E), c002753k.

Clearly, the many "public performances" advertised in the pages of the Kingston papers were intended for a select, but not always clearly defined, audience. They were intended for those who belonged, to borrow from Julia Roberts, within a broad group variously called the "colonial elite," the "emerging bourgeoisie," "Victorian Ontario's urban middle class," or the "pre-industrial middle class." It was a group known at the time, and since, as "the respectability."[15] In Kingston, those with the surnames Macaulay, Cartwright, Herchmer, and Kirby predominated this select group. However, to be in the upper echelons of Kingston society, or to be referred to as gentlemen, was not precisely the same as in Europe. Strictly speaking, the Kingston elite were not "gentlemen" in the English sense of the word, but rather they were from loyalist families established as merchants and petite bourgeoisie during and after the American Revolution. An Upper Canadian gentlemen was, according to R.D. Gidney and W.P.J. Millar, best explained by the following statement from the *Upper Canadian Law Journal*: "we do not

in the Taverns of Kingston, Canada West," *Ontario History* 95:1 (Spring 2003): 1-21 and "A Mixed Assemblage of Persons': Race and Tavern Space in Upper Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 83:1 (March 2002), 1-28.

[15] Roberts, "Harry Jones," 2-3. Roberts recommends for "respectable," Peter A. Russell, *Attitudes to Social Structure and Mobility in Upper Canada, 1815-1840: "Here We Are Laird Ourselves"* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1990). See also her article that appears in this volume.

mean merely a gentleman by birth, a man who has ancestors, but a gentleman by *cultivation, in mind, manners, and feelings*."[16]

However, despite signs that their town was becoming more than a garrison, many Kingstonians still saw themselves as British subjects and looked to England for their social and cultural standards.[17] Few believed that adequate domestic cultural activities existed in Upper Canada to sustain their pretentions to gentility. One essayist in 1819, for example, argued that public entertainment was so scarce he had hardly anything to write about:

> Everyone must be aware that the limited theatre in Upper Canada, affords narrow scope for the exertions of an essayist. The actors upon its stage are neither numerous enough to display a variety of characters, nor sufficiently distinguished to communicate interest and effect to the parts they do perform... The domestic events and relations of this province, when detailed, will scarcely fill one column of a weekly newspaper. The habits and manners of its people present little variety, and as far as improvement, seem neither to advance nor retrograde. Retrospection creates no pleasure, because the past is destitute of interest, and anticipation becomes painful, from the difficulty experienced in conceiving what will be produced in the future.[18]

As elsewhere in British North America, in the first decades of the nineteenth century Kingstonians who desired appropriate amusement looked to the military garrison.[19]

Towns such as Kingston "boasted officers from 'home' [who] could claim a direct line to the latest fashions in conversation, culture, and respectable behaviour."[20] The arrival of British officers was viewed as "an exciting edition to existing social life in the community."[21] As Edwin Guillet argues, "the presence of government officials, officers of the army and navy, and gentlemen gave a higher tone to social life than was usually found elsewhere during the early period of settlement."[22] In addition, whereas Mary

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[16] *Upper Canada Law Journal* 1 (September 1855), 163 quoted in R.D. Gidney and W.P.J. Millar, *Professional Gentlemen: The Professions in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 206-07. [Emphasis added]

[17] John W. Spurr, "Garrison and Community, 1815-1870," in Tulchinsky, *To Preserve and Defend*, 103. See also Leslie O'Dell, "Amateurs of the Regiment, 1815-1870," in Anne Saddlemyer, ed., *Early Stages: Theatre in Ontario 1800-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 53.

[18] "Domestic Relations," *Kingston Chronicle* 5 March 1819, 3.

[19] For information on the presence of the military in Kingston see George F.G. Stanley, "Kingston and the Defense of British North America," in Tulchinsky, *To Preserve and Defend*, 83-103. Kingston's role before and after the war of 1812 is explored in a number of articles in *Historic Kingston*. See, for example, J.W. Spurr, "The Kingston Gazette, The War of 1812, and Fortress Kingston," *Historic Kingston*, no. 17 (1968), J.M. Hitsman, "Kingston and the War of 1812," *Historic Kingston*, 15 (1966). Monographs include, but are not limited to, G.F.G. Stanley and R.A. Preston, *A Short History of Kingston as a Military and Naval Centre* (Kingston, 1950) and John Dendy's B.A. Thesis on the "Fortification of Kingston, 1790-1850, Documents, Plans, and Commentary" (Royal Military College, 1960).

[20] Leslie O'Dell, "Amateurs of the Regiment, 1815-1870," in Saddlemyer, *Early Stages*, 53.

[21] *Ibid*., 54.

[22] Edwin Guillet, *Early Life in Upper Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), 169.

Smith demonstrates that the proliferation of amateur theatre in New Brunswick was the result of a desire by "the colonists for a cultural life of the kind they had left behind in New England," for the elite in Kingston the amateur productions provided a tie to the propriety and class they aspired to in view of their station within the town. However, unlike New Brunswick, those in Kingston measured their activities by comparison to London, England.[23]

Between 1816 and 1817, the Kingston Amateur Theatre, consisting of members of the 70th Regiment and other military personnel, provided Kingston with its first two seasons of consistent public entertainment. Organised in late 1815, "they were granted the use of a former brewery purchased by the Navy during the War for use as an auxiliary naval hospital."[24] The Brewery, as it became known, hosted 28 plays and 29 farces during its two years of existence.[25] The participation of John Macaulay as ticket agent clearly indicates elite support of the garrison's activities; however, little information beyond the names of plays performed can be gleaned from local newspapers. Material in the *Quebec Mercury*, though, does confirm that while local gentlemen in Kingston may have covered some of the group's production costs and were enthusiastic spectators, few if any actually performed.[26]

What the Kingston Amateur Theatre did provide for the residents of Kingston was a cultural link to Britain. All performances consisted of comedies, dramas, and farces that were standard to army theatrical groups throughout the empire. Performed were plays such as "Who Wants a Guinea?," "The Busy Body," "The Way to Get Married," "Raising Wind," "Speed the Plough," "A Cure for Heart Ache," "The Poor Solider," and "John Bull or An English Man's Fireside."[27] In most productions, respect for authority and solid British virtues were underlying themes that also reflected an attempt by the garrison commanders to "reinforce the dominance of British Culture," as "the loyalties of Kingstonians after the War of 1812 were not wholeheartedly with the British officials."[28]

A typical evening consisted of a

[23] Smith, *Too Soon the Curtain Fell*, 1.

[24] Spurr, "Theatre in Kingston," 37.

[25] John Hall, "The Growth of Music in Kingston," *Historic Kingston* 45 (1997), 77-78.

[26] Natalie Rewa, "Garrison and Amateur Theatricals in Quebec City and Kingston during the British Regime," (PhD Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1988), 269. Rewa provides a typed transcript of a play-bill published in the *Quebec Mercury* on 30 January 1816. She further suggests in her footnote to this item that, the publication of the cast list in the Quebec newspaper indicates that "communications between the military headquarters and the garrison was frequent."

[27] See advertisements for these plays in the *Kingston Gazette* for 1816: 9 & 23 November, 3 August, 1 June, 6 & 20 April, and 10 & 24 February.

[28] Rewa, "Garrison and Amateur Theatricals," 275. For further discussion on the mixed loyalties of Kingstonians, see Jane Errington, "Friends and Foes: The Kingston Elite and the War of 1812 – A Case Study in Ambivalence," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 20:1 (Spring 1985), 58-79 and Kathyrn M. Bindon, "Kingston: A Social History, 1785-1830," (PhD diss., Queen's University, 1979).

drama or comedy accompanied by one or two short farces. Doors opened at six, performances commenced at seven. Those who purchased tickets were assigned boxes, and, as an 1817 advertisement clearly indicates, "every person going to the Amateur Theatre, will go to the Box for which their Tickets are numbered: those who act contrary to this rule, will be subject themselves to be removed."[29] Such division of the audience not only suggests a class divide, but also hints of inappropriate behaviour. Such concern was well placed. For instance, one theatre goer in 1816 commented on the inappropriate and lewd behaviour he had witnessed at an amateur performance and suggested a possible solution:

> On Monday evening last I attended the Theatre, when I could not but observe the impertinence of a few gentlemen, who seemed to take particular pleasure on staring the ladies out of countenance. I would not be amiss that the manager of this edifice should adopt some plan, or throw out such hints as would preserve order and decorum within its walls. The indecorous customs of staring should be checked by branding the offender, or offenders, with the word Public Nuisance, on the forehead for the first offense, and for the second, they should be forthwith transported for life, to prevent a third digression. Gentlemen wearing spectacles should not be allowed to enter the Theatre without giving security for their good behaviour.[30]

Issues of morality and the desire of the elite to improve society were also reflected in the activities of the Kingston Amateur Theatre. Composed of the wives of notable Kingstonians such as John Kirby, the Female Benevolent Society (later the Compassionate Society) was integrally linked to early theatrical amusements. Often the beneficiary of the proceeds from performances, they were involved in assisting the poor and indigent as well upholding the elite vision of the community.[31] For example, the *Gazette* reported on 15 March 1817 that proceeds from one night's performance would go "for the benefit of the relations of those who fell at the Glorious Battle of Waterloo."[32] This would at first seem curious as Kingston or other parts of Upper Canada had veterans worthy of charity; however, such displays of British loyalty were intended to reinforce and maintain imperial direction. This first attempt at staging plays ended with the reassignment of the 70th regiment in November 1820, with the proceeds and equipment being donated to the Female Benevolent Society.[33]

While the amateurs from the regiments helped fulfill the desire of many in Kingston for entertainment, they reserved their highest praise and enthusiasm for the professional companies that sporadically came to town. However, here too the military and town elite had quite a bit of influence over what was performed. Garrison and regimental commanders

[29] *Kingston Chronicle* 12 April 1817, 3.

[30] *Kingston Gazette* 2 November 1816. Emphasis in original.

[31] For more information on John Kirby and his wife, see Kathryn Bindon, "Kingston," 438-42.

[32] *Kingston Gazette* 15 March 1817, 3.

[33] Spurr, "Theatre in Kingston, 1816-1870", 39. See also *Kingston Chronicle* 11 November 1820, 3.

were frequently the ones who extended their patronage to visiting professional troupes.[34] On such occasions the elite in Kingston turned out in large numbers as no one wanted to miss out on these important social opportunities, as discussed in the papers by Jane Errington and Julia Roberts that also appear in this volume. Additionally, the continued participation of the Female Benevolent Society and of John Macaulay as ticket agent suggests an ongoing interest, if not an active participation, in theatrical performances.

The first professional actor to arrive was a Mr. Kennedy in June 1818. Although primarily performing "singing and recitation," the *Kingston Gazette* commented that, "his intention is, if Amateurs enough volunteer after the first night, to get up some performances for charitable purposes... for the indigent emigrants, and the poor generally." [35] The *Gazette* anticipated seeing "our Theatre graced with a numerous assemblage of beauty and fashion in the boxes, and the Pit thronged by worthy Mechanics." [36] Again implicit in this statement are the composition of audiences and the conscious separation of classes based on fiduciary and social position. All in attendance would have been exposed to repertoire similar to that of the garrison amateurs.

Another theatrical company managed by a Mr. and Mrs. Williams performed an average of two plays a week between October 1818 and May 1819. While most of their performances also contained the same farces and dramas residents of Kingston had already seen during the previous two years, they were the first to include selections from the works of William Shakespeare. The Williams used their connections to the growing touring theatrical groups to attract other performers to Kingston. For example, in February 1819 Mr. and Mrs. F. Brown of the Theatres Royal, London and Dublin, and of the Boston Theatre presented Shakespeare's *Othello*. While the lead role was played by Mr. F. Brown, the role of Desdomona was undertaken by Mrs. Williams.[37] A similar arrangement seems to have existed during the March 1819 performances of Mr. Carpenter and Miss Moore of the Theatres New York and Charleston, and late of the Montreal Theatre.

Typically coming from Montreal or New York, performances were at the mercy of the poor travelling conditions in Upper Canada. For example, a performance of a Miss Denny at the Kingston Theatre on 16 April 1819 was postponed because of the "roads being impassable from Montreal to Kingston."[38] Such had been the build up to her performance that those who had purchased tickets were notified, in the hope "that the public will not withhold their patronage," and that "no trouble or expense has

[34] Spurr, "Theatre in Kingston, 1816-1870", 37.

[35] *Kingston Gazette* 9 June 1818, 3.

[36] *Ibid*.

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] *Kingston Gazette* 16 April 1819, 3.

Street Leading to the barracks at Kingston, Upper Canada. Watercolour by James Pattison Cockburn. W.H. Coverdale Collection of Canadiana, Manoir Richelieu collection (R3908-0-0-E), 1829. LAC Acc. No. 1970-188-971.

been spared on the part of the manager, to procure a respectable company."[39] Interestingly, it appears that for whatever reason the manager of the Kingston Theatre expected that his word would not be taken despite "regrets as much as the public"; ticket holders who doubted that Miss Denny had ever been booked were encouraged to see at Mr. Moore's Coffee House "the *Original Letters* of her engagement, and the cause of her not coming."[40] Professional theatre, though, seems to have disappeared following the William's May 1819 benefit for the Kingston Compassionate Society.[41]

Most historians have argued that with the departure of Mr. and Mrs. Williams in 1819, public amusements, considered synonymous with organised theatre, deserted Kingston until September 1826. Clearly, for the lower classes the existence of a multitude of taverns throughout the region does not reflect this assessment. In addition, while a survey of Kingston newspapers generally supports the claim that no theatrical performances occurred, some exceptions have been found. For example, the *Kingston Chronicle* reported in September 1822 the arrival of a Mr. Mathews from New York and expressed the hope that he would perform.[42] A Mr. Pemberton provided dramatic readings, poetry, and stories in the winter of 1824 and 1825.[43] In November of 1824 Mr. Archibald's Company of Comedians was reported to have set up in the former gar-

[39] *Kingston Gazette* 16 April 1819, 3.

[40] *Ibid.*

[41] See the *Kingston Gazette* 20 October 1818, 3; 22 January 1819, 3; and 5 February 1819, 3.

[42] *Kingston Chronicle* 13 September 1822, 3.

[43] *Kingston Chronicle* 12 November 1824, 3; 24 December 1824, 3; and 29 April 1825, 3.

rison theatre.[44] Unfortunately, aside from reviews of Pemberton's stories, nothing more is known about these performances.

The announcement on 10 October 1829 that amateur and professional theatre would once again return to Kingston sparked a vicious debate about morality and propriety in the newspapers of the town. Whereas the first instances of amateur theatre in the region can be viewed as manifestations of a discourse of the Kingston public with the British polity, the second become a vehicle for debates on community morals and values. The forsaking of such amusements by "polite society" throughout the English-speaking world were based, historian Mary Smith argues, on the theatre's increasing role as "a gathering place for the middle and lower classes."[45] Also complicating the reestablishment of theatre was a growing enthusiasm for Methodism in Upper Canada and an increasing emphasis by members of other denominations, such as the Anglican Bishop John Strachan, on restraining "selfish passions and appetites." In this case, the changing political and religious nature of the colony, and the heated discussions occurring at the government level, also found voice in the selection of amusements and debates surrounding them in Kingston.[46]

Regardless, the *Kingston Chronicle* "took great pleasure in informing its readers" that the amateurs of the 79th Cameron Highlanders, by permission of Colonel Douglass, were "fitting up the building in rear of Mrs. Walker's Hotel, for a Theatre – to be opened, we understand, early in November."[47] The group let the *Chronicle* know that after the £30 incurred for construction of the theatre had been recouped, proceeds would hence be donated to "benevolent purposes."[48] The *Chronicle* clearly suggested that the level of culture associated with theatre was sorely missed: "it does no small degree of credit to any corps that the men should be capable of affording this species of intellectual amusement to the public."[49]

Not all were inclined to agree with the *Chronicle's* assessment. The Methodist-oriented *Kingston Gazette and Religious Advocate* led the anti-theatre attack soon after the renewal of garrison performances by the 79th Highlanders. In a fashion, the presence of the renewed theatrical performances provided a rallying point for more fervent religious fundamentalists. Both the performance and the *Kingston Chronicle*'s favourable review were assailed for their "licentiousness and vice":

> It is to me a matter of surprise, that theatrical performances, should be countenanced by

[44] *Kingston Chronicle* 5 November 1824, 2.

[45] Smith, *Too Soon the Curtain Fell*, 38

[46] See William Westfall, *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), 22-23.

[47] *Kingston Chronicle* 10 October 1829, 2.

[48] *Kingston Chronicle* 10 October 1829, 2.

[49] *Kingston Chronicle* 14 November 1829, 2.

> one from whom better things are expected, being as he is, an Elder of the Kirk of Scotland; yet notwithstanding this, he comes forward and tells us that the efforts made by those persons towards erecting a Play-house, or as the great and good Archbishop Tillostson designed it, the "Devil's Chapel," nursery of "licentiousness and vice," are praiseworthy; and moreover congratulates the good people of Kingston upon the Auspicious Event! Can it be said to be an auspicious event to the morals and wellbeing of society? No. But an auspicious circumstance to those, who are not, as may be inferred from their predilection for such amusements, the servants of the Most High, but the servants of him, who goeth about seeking him whom he may devour.[50]

Unperturbed, the Amateurs of the 79th Highlanders performed their first show, Sir Walter Scott's "Rob Roy," to crowded audiences each night.[51] This performance continued regularly between November 1829 and July 1830.

However, the majority of the public did not share the opinion of the *Religious Advocate*, as another amateur company, consisting of the officers of the garrison, was formed in November 1829 to further "relieve the tedium of our winter evenings."[52] Soon named the Naval and Military Theatrical Amateurs, their first performance on the 14 December was to be William Shakespeare's tragedy *Julius Caesar*.[53] It was announced afterwards that the disposing of profits, in excess of £12, would be to the benefit of the town and benevolent societies. The company hoped that their activities would be "renewed early in the ensuing year, and that arrangements are making for the greater accommodation of the public by the possible erection of a permanent theatre." The opening address preceding "Julius Caesar" clearly hoped that the success of the 79th Highlanders and the Naval and Military Amateurs "have now opened the way for us to cultivate the peaceful Muses."[54]

Shortly before this performance, another letter to the *Chronicle* in support of the theatre appeared. Much longer than the previous, it went further in its condemnation of Miles and the *Religious Advocate*. To support his argument, the writer invoked the names and words of some of the most popular and notable figures in English literature:

> Edward Young, the author of "the Night Thoughts" (that *Christian* song, the source of so much delight to the "good and wise" since his time) wrote for the stage, thought it no sin to attend a stage play, and did not scruple to offer as a gift, to society for the propagation of the gospel, what that pious body made no scruple receive... He is generally esteemed to have been a *good and wise* man."[55]

Miles was challenged to deny that writers such as Young and Samuel Johnston, whose piety and moralistic writings and plays were used as supporting evidence,

[50] *Kingston Gazette and Religious Advocate* 16 October 1829.

[51] *Kingston Chronicle* 21 November 1829, 2.

[52] *Kingston Chronicle* 28 November 1829, 2.

[53] *Ibid.*

[54] *Kingston Chronicle* 19 December 1829, 2.

[55] *Kingston Chronicle* 5 December 1829, 2. Emphasis in original.

"were as capable of judging of the stage, as Miles' correspondents, and if they saw that the good effected bore no proportion to the concomitant evils of the Theatre, it is scarcely credible they should have acted as they have done." The letter ended with words of encouragement to the soldiers of the garrison.[56]

In September 1836, the 24th Regiment, which had replaced the 79th, transferred over to Mr. S. Dyke's Company their property, scenery, wardrobe, after their "last and only" performance at the Commercial Hotel while in North America.[57] While the amateur companies once again departed, the theatres and hotels remained open. In addition, musical concerts, balls, dinners, and occasional exhibitions of curiosities or entire menageries frequented Kingston. Despite the lengthy and often nasty attack by anti-theatre advocates, eventually it was an epidemic that was responsible for the disruption of all forms of public entertainment in Kingston during the 1830s. It should be noted, though, that is was not caused by the flea.

Between 1832 and 1836 two waves of cholera swept through Kingston. Disseminated through ports, it was a common occurrence in the nineteenth century for vessels to be quarantined until an inspection had occurred. As many travelling entertainers relied on this form of transportation this, coupled with the frequent closure of local taverns, hotels, and theatres, effectively stopped public entertainment for a number of years.[58] It was not until April 1837 that, "to relieve the gloom and tediousness of a dull Canadian Winter," according to the *British Whig*, "a few gentlemen formed themselves into an Amateur Company" and performed in Meagher's Hall.[59] Calling themselves the Kingston Dramatic Amateurs and buoyed by the success of their first performance, they engaged the Ball Room of the Commercial Hotel with a plan to put on one show a week for the month of April. All proceeds would be donated to a variety of charitable societies in the town.[60]

To the surprise and delight of the editor of the *Kingston Chronicle and Gazette*, the editor of the *British Whig* undertook the lead role in both the comedy "the Rising Wind" and the burlesque opera, "Bombates Furioso." He was accompanied by an unnamed individual who it was hoped would become a fixture in the

[56] *Ibid.*

[57] *Kingston Chronicle & Gazette* 3 September 1836, 3.

[58] For period commentary see Walter Riddell's *Diary of Voyage from Scotland to Canada in 1833 and Story of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Coburg, Ontario* (Toronto: Associated Printer's Limited, 1932), 9. For more on the frequent cholera outbreaks in Upper and Lower Canada, see Geoffrey Bilson, *A Darkened House: Cholera in Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), and C.M. Godfrey, *The Cholera Epidemic in Upper Canada, 1832-1866* (Toronto: Secombe House, 1968). Most recently, Bruce Curtis has written on the cholera scare of 1866 and the way it has been written about by scholars. See "Social Investment in Medical Forms: The 1866 Cholera Scare and Beyond," *The Canadian Historical Review* 81:3 (September 2000), 349-79.

[59] *British Whig* 30 March 1837, 3.

[60] *Ibid.*

local theatre scene:

> the crowded audience of the last Theatrical representation which took place at the Commercial Hotel, tested his acquirements and being now about to locate in this town, it is to be hoped, with the assistance of similar talent, which it now appears can be mustered in Kingston, a Dramatic Spirit may be aroused that will help to dispel the lethargic state of into which we have too long sunk.[61]

Unfortunately, it appears that the remaining performances were not well attended despite reaching a standard that "would not disgrace the London Metropolitan Theatre."[62] The *British Whig* 9 May 1837 published the Dramatic Society's receipts as "having advertised their performance for the purpose of aiding various Charitable Funds, and the receipts having fallen short of their expectations, have ordered their Treasurer to publish the following account of the receipts."[63] While garnering £33-4-2, the society's expenditures exceeded this amount by £11-7-3 despite some refusing to "accept any remuneration for personal services." Disgusted, the editor of the *Whig* admonished his readers when he declared: "So much for charity!" The failure of the production can also be attributed to the shifting attitudes among the Kingston elite during this time.

Contrary to standard interpretations, theatre was not the only form, nor the most successful, of public amusement available to Kingstonians between 1816 and 1837.[64] In addition to the multitude of amusements, often backed by the elite, that could be found in the region's many taverns (legal and illegal), notices, commentaries, and editorials in local newspapers attest to the variety of other forms of public entertainment readily available. In 1810, for example, the Kingston Assembly was formed. Intent on reinforcing British cultural attitudes, it followed, like other assemblies in Upper Canada, the English model "of evening gatherings offering usually, or perhaps always, dancing; light chat; and no doubt whist."[65] Managers were elected yearly from amongst the "gentlemen" in Kingston and they were responsible for organizing the events and securing a proper venue. It is known that at various times, notable "Tories" such as John Macaulay, John Kirby, and J.S. Cartwright acted as Assembly secretaries and organisers.[66]

A person's position within the community dictated his membership, his position within the Assembly, and even the

[61] *Kingston Chronicle & Gazette* 1 April 1837, 3.

[62] *Kingston Chronicle & Gazette* 22 April 1837, 3.

[63] *British Whig* 9 May 1837, 3.

[64] Some, such as Gerald Tulchinksy, have argued that "despite the many advantages Kingston was never a cultural or artistic centre during the nineteenth century. Theatre was limited mainly to amateur productions, many of them staged by army officers; there was little music except for military band concerts and church organ recitals." Tulchinsky, *To Preserve and Defend*, 12.

[65] Glazebrook, *Life in Ontario*, 61.

[66] These individuals were also related by various marriages of family members and shared ties to the local and colonial government. John Kirby, for example, was the executor of the estate of John Macaulay's father and John Solomon Cartwright was at one time married to Macaulay's sister Sarah.

location of meetings which typically occurred between November and April, and for the first number of years were held in Walker's Hotel (later the Kingston Hotel). It appears that the most common types of entertainment organised by the Kingston Assembly were balls, levees, and dinners. Events were intended, contrary to the public notices that appeared in the paper, for a select group, though often invitations were also extended to the gentlemen of the army and navy, whose attendance ensured an aristocratic presence. A letter published in the *Chronicle* in 1814, for example, demonstrates the pleasure that was derived by the upper classes by such gatherings: "The Gentlemen of the Army and Navy take this opportunity of returning their most sincere thanks to the ladies of Kingston and its vicinity for their kind support to the amusements of the winter, at the same time most sincerely hope that we may dance to a better tune in the summer."[67] Assemblies occurred annually from 1810 to well past 1844 and proceeds often went to the charitable organisations in which the wives of Assembly organizers or themselves were involved.[68]

Aside from those organised by the Kingston Assembly, officers of the garrison, the lieutenant-governor, fraternal organisations, and a host of prominent individuals also consistently held balls and dinners between 1816 and 1837. These were often organised to celebrate such events as the King's Birthday, New Year's Day, St. Patrick's Day, St. George's Day, and the arrival of notable figures like the lieutenant-governor. Typically balls were organised like the one held in celebration of the return in June 1816 of Sir Frederick Robinson, future Prime Minister of Britain (1827):

> The Ball and supper room were fancifully decorated with arches formed of green boughs, with Flags and Transparencies. Dancing soon commenced and continued until 1 o'clock, when the whole sat down to an elegant supper. After supper dancing continued until an *early* hour when all departed pleased with the pains taken to render the evening pleasant.[69]

While newspapers published dozens of notices for these events each year, commentaries tended to focus on the decorations, toasts given, and those in attendance.[70] However, most often the success of an event was gauged by the class of those who attended. For example, the St. Patrick's Dinner held in Walker's Hotel on 17 March 1818 was considered a success as "amongst the company were a number of highly respectable English and Scotch Gentlemen, as friends, who greatly

[67] *Kingston Gazette* 15 March 1814, 2.

[68] For example, John Kirby's wife was throughout most of her adult life a prominent member of the Female Benevolent Society and Kirby himself belonged to the Committee on the Means of Supporting Paupers in Kingston, two organizations that benefited from event proceeds.

[69] *Kingston Gazette* 15 June 1816, 3.

[70] One letter to the editor of the *Chronicle* about the Irish celebrations of George IV's coronation teased readers when it described the dinner: "as to the festive board itself, even did my gastronomic talents allow me; it would not be considerate for those who did not partake, to go into detail of the luxury displayed." (*Kingston Chronicle* 21 December 1821, 3)

added to the enjoyment of the evening."[71] Similarly, a ball held at the Royal Hotel in December 1821 in honour of the coronation of George IV was notable as it "called together all the beauty and fashion which the combined forces of the Military, Navy and Citizens could muster."[72] For an event held in 1835, toasts made mention to both the King and, interestingly, John Macaulay and the hydraulic improvements of Kingston.[73]

Politics, class, and gender also played significant roles in balls and dinners. While the content of toasts gave some indication of social mores and those who were important within the community, the titles of events also mimicked the current concerns of the elite. A ball scheduled to be held at the Commercial Hotel on 19 May 1836 caused some controversy, according to the *Kingston Chronicle and Gazette,* because it had "individually and prematurely been nominated the "Constitutional Ball." [74] With the growing prominence of the Radical Reformers and William Lyon Mackenzie and a concern by the Tories over the increasing political unrest in Upper Canada, the subscribers, many themselves members of the governing elite, changed the name to the properly loyal and Anglican "Whitmonday Ball."[75] It was also decided that the ball would be postponed until "*Monday the 22d instant*," as "any political distinction tending to prevent the attendance of any respectable person is uncalled for."[76]

Who or what was respectable was sometimes difficult to comprehend. For women, balls played an important role in establishing and reaffirming their place within society. While typically formal calling, according to Jane Errington, was an elite woman's introduction into her new society, attendance at balls and parties reaffirmed and further "set the parameters of her public life, which," Errington argues, "would prevail as long as her husband maintained his position or the family remained in the community."[77] For example, as a minister's wife, Harriett Dobbs Cartwright would have been expected to receive and return calls "as well as attend public functions such as balls and parties."[78] The gravity of making a mistake,

[71] *Kingston Gazette* 24 March 1818, 3.

[72] *Kingston Chronicle* 14 December 1821, 3.

[73] *Kingston Chronicle and Gazette* 18 March 1835, 3.

[74] *Kingston Chronicle and Gazette* 14 May 1836, 3.

[75] For a discussion on the political unrest in Upper Canada in the 1830s, see Aileen Dunham, *Political Unrest in Upper Canada, 1815-1836* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963). See also Jane Errington's discussion of the development of colonial ideology in her *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill Queen's Press, 1987).

[76] *Kingston Chronicle and Gazette* 14 May 1836, 3.

[77] Jane Errington , *Wives and Mothers, School Mistresses and Scullery Maids: Working Women in Upper Canada, 1790-1840* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 163-64. See also her article in this volume. For more on social visiting see also Katherine Mary Jean McKenna, "The Life of Anne Murray Powell, 1755-1849: A 'Case Study' of the Position of Women in Early Upper Canadian Elite Society" (PhD dissertation, Queen's University, 1987), 131-36.

[78] For further discussion see Susan Jill MacMicken, "'To Honour and Serve Him' The Early Life of

however, such as offending the wrong person, had far reaching ramifications.

When the local hotels were not hosting balls and theatrical performances, or patronage was not forthcoming to attract these forms of public amusement, a variety of exhibitions were brought in to increase business. These exhibitions reflected a subtler transformation occurring in the English-speaking world since the eighteenth century. According to Patricia Jasen, "the emergence of the 'picturesque' and the 'sublime' as major aesthetic categories" led to "a new appreciation of natural phenomenon, which in earlier times had been generally regarded as unpleasantly frightening, unattractive, or even demonic."[79] This belief, according to Robert A. Stafford, also belonged to the same cultural milieu as science and technology, which was reflected in the nation's urge for exploration and Empire.[80] One result of this, he suggests, was that "Britain's literate middle class demonstrated a seemingly insatiable appetite for exploration narratives."[81] This manifested itself in a growing tourist industry and the proliferation of zoos and natural exhibitions.[82]

For those living in Kingston, the frequent exhibitions that appeared throughout the mid-1800s provided an outlet for this curiosity of the unknown and appetite for science. Following Karl Mannheim's notion that "ideology must be located in actual social practices," Janet M. Davis' argues for instance, that the circus is a way to understand ideological processes.[83] American colonial menageries, "provided audiences with glimpses of faraway places long before the exhibition of foreign people became a standard part of the circus."[84]

Harriet Dobbs Cartwright, 1808-1843" (Master's Thesis, Queen's University, 1994), 98. Harriett Cartwright actually tried to avoid such social engagements, preferring instead to remain at home. See, for example, Harriet Dobbs Cartwright to Miss McNaughton, 19 August 1833 and Harriet Dobbs Cartwright to Maria Sophia Dobbs, 8 December 1834 in the Cartwright Family Papers, Harriett Dobbs Cartwright fonds, Queen's Archives.

[79] Patricia Jasen's introduction to *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario 1790-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 7 and 9.

[80] See Robert A. Stafford, "Scientific Exploration and Empire," in Andrew Porter, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 14-319.

[81] *Ibid*., 318.

[82] Niagara was a popular destination for tourists and emigrants to Upper Canada and was the subject of number panoramic exhibitions in Britain in the nineteenth century. See, for example, John M. Duncan's *Travels through the United States and Canada in 1818 and 1819* (Glasgow, 1823), 38; John Melish's *Travels through the United States of America in the Years 1806 and 1807, and 1809, 1810 and 1811... and Travels through Various Parts of Britain, Ireland, and Canada, with Corrections and Improvements till 1815* (Belfast, 1816), 491; George Heriot, *Travels through the Canadas, Containing a Description of the Picturesque Scenery on Some of the Rivers and Lakes* (London, 1807), 159; Anon, *A Summer Month; or Recollections of a Visit to the Falls of Niagara and the Lakes* (Philadelphia, 1823), 2; M. Smith, *A Geographical View of the Province of Upper Canada... Containing a Complete description of Niagara Falls* (1813); and Thomas Fowler's *The Journal of a Tour through British America to the Falls of Niagara* (Aberdeen, 1832).

[83] Janet M. Davis, *The Circus Age: Culture and Society under the American Big Top* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), xiii.

[84] Davis, *The Circus Age, 17*.

Early each spring, wandering caravans would arrive from the East carrying with them extensive collections of wild animals. According to Edwin Guillet they were "usually American in origin" and "among the first commercialized amusements to tour Upper Canada."[85] At first, many exhibitions of natural curiosities typically featured only one or two creatures, elephants being the most popular.[86] However as the century progressed they became increasingly larger and more exotic. As in the United States, these exhibitions were often held in land adjacent to hotels or, according to Stuart Thayer, "any public venue where animals could be hidden from curious, non-paying spectators."[87] In Kingston, they were held on land adjacent to the same venues that hosted theatrical presentations and were frequented by the elite and non-elite alike.

Upon its arrival in September 1826, Blanchard's Circus, one of the larger to have frequented Kingston, [88] informed newspapers that it intended to erect what it called an amphitheatre to perform in the town at least two months each year.[89] However, after establishing a temporary theatre on the grounds of Moore's Mansion Hotel, it failed to materialize into a permanent venue due to a lack of sustained success.[90] Blanchard left commenting that he hoped to return "at some future period better prepared than at present to contribute to their amusement."[91]Another exhibition, the "Grand Caravan," appeared for three days in July 1828 at the Mansion House Hotel. Adults could gain admittance for 1s 3d and children under twelve paid 7d.[92] A canal boat from Oswego advertised in April 1830 "several live animals which are well worthy the attention of those fond of viewing natural curiosities." For seven pence half-penny the residents of Kingston were informed that they could see for themselves a 4000 pound ox which could have a cow walk under its belly, a Bull with a leg and foot growing out its neck, two bears, and "a few squirrels of a particular kind, and a nest of beautiful white mice." [93] Much larger was the "American Menagerie" which arrived in May 1832 and, the *Kingston Chronicle* commented, was "certainly an amusing and highly instructive exhibition, and worthy of public patronage."[94] Opposite the Court House, Gregory Crane and Co. "Unprecedented Menagerie" arrived in May 1834. For three days

[85] Guillet, *Early Life in Upper Canada, 199*.

[86] *Kingston Chronicle* 2 June 1819, 2.

[87] Stuart Thayer, *Travelling Showmen: The American Circus before the Civil War* (Detroit: Astely and Ricketts, 1997), 2.

[88] *Kingston Chronicle* 14 July 1826, 2.

[89] *Kingston Chronicle* 8 September 1826.

[90] Rewa, "Garrison and Amateur Theatricals," 280.

[91] *Kingston Chronicle* 15 September 1826.

[92] *Kingston Chronicle* 26 July 1828, 3.

[93] *Kingston Chronicle* 4 December 1830, 3.

[94] *Kingston Chronicle* 25 May 1832, 3.

residents of Kingston were treated to an extensive collection of wild animals that included a "Great White, or Polar Bear... only to be found in the frozen regions of the North... seldom or ever seen further south than Newfoundland."[95]

In April 1834, a circus simply entitled the "Kingston Circus" opened and featured horsemanship demonstrations accompanied by songs and brief farces enacted by clowns.[96] A menagerie and aviary reputed to be from the Zoological Institute of New York arrived in Kingston in June 1835 claiming to have a pavilion "100 feet in diameter, and sufficient enough for 4000 spectators."[97] They advertised that their exhibition, to be located at the rear of St. George's Church and the Court House, embraced "the subjects of natural history as exhibited at that popular and fashionable place of resort, during the winter of 1834-5." Exhibited were a collection of snakes, an elephant, white pelicans, lions, and a number of birds from around the world. Unfortunately, unlike in York, none of the exhibitions that came to Kingston claimed to possess a live unicorn, possibly because they had become extinct by that time.[98]

In July 1836, the Boston Arena Company came to Kingston. One of the larger circuses and menageries to visit Kingston during the period, its advertisements reveal the attempt by promoters to use demonstrations of moral virtue to attract audiences. Figuring largely were assurances that specific accommodations were being made for women. [99] In addition, not wanting to raise the ire of local critics such as those who in 1816 had openly criticised theatres for allowing men to ogle women, patrons were assured that "the strictest attention will be paid to gentility and neither a word nor action introduced that can offend the most susceptible mind; but such amusements selected as cannot fail to instruct as well as divert the genteel classes of society."[100] Yet, many went to these amusements unable to resist Upper Canada's growing fascination with nature and science.

As a result of communication developments in Upper Canada such as canal construction and railway building, menageries and circuses were not the only types of exhibitions that frequented Kingston. Greeting crowded audiences throughout the year were everything from sleight-of-hand artists such as those associated with Ledgerdemain and Company to Ventriloquists.[101] One of the earliest examples occurred in April 1812. Again, advertised prices clearly indicate a segregation of the audiences. For 2s 6d for front seats, or 1s

[95] *Ibid.*

[96] *British Whig* 15 April 1834, 3

[97] *British Whig* 26 June 1835, 3

[98] See Gerald Lenton-Young, "Variety Theatre," in Saddlemyer, *Early Stages*, 171.

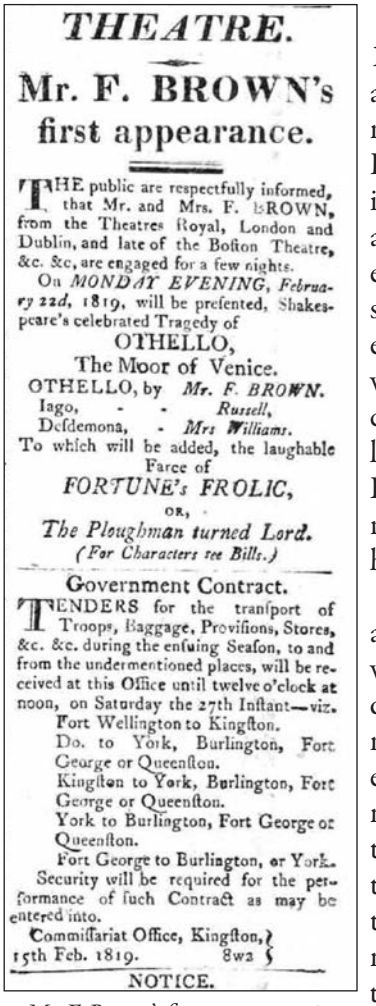
[99] *Kingston Chronicle and Gazette* 20 July 1836, 3.

[100] *Ibid.*

[101] For an example of ventriloquists, see *British Whig* 18 November 1835, 3, *Kingston Chronicle and Gazette* 30 July 1836, 3. Some such as Ledgerdemain and Company also provided private shows in the homes of the wealthy.

3d for the gallery, one could witness at Poncett's Inn "200 extraordinary feats performed, never paralleled in Upper Canada."[102] For those with more refined tastes, or with the pretence to have them, the Mansion House Hotel in 1835 held an exhibition comprised of over 130 paintings featuring the "Principal battles of the Emperor Napoleon." Accompanying it was also a "Musical Arm Chair" which, the notice in the *Chronicle and Gazette* claimed, "played a number of beautiful Airs on sitting down on it." Both could be seen for 1s 3d between 9 o'clock in the morning and 10 at night.[103]

Mechanical devices such as the musical chair tapped into the increasing appetite for science and technology. Oddly, they were sometimes exhibited in relation to the arcane and mystical. Mons. Desage, a Magician, exhibited for the first time in December 1835, his "Philosophical and Mechanical Experiments" at the Commercial Hotel. Despite less than ideal weather, his performances were all well attended. Often highlighted in such performances was the educational nature of what was being offered. It should come as no surprise that lecturers also frequented Kingston to discuss topics ranging from chemistry to history.[104]



THEATRE.

Mr. F. BROWN's first appearance.

THE public are respectfully informed, that Mr. and Mrs. F. BROWN, from the Theatres Royal, London and Dublin, and late of the Boston Theatre, &c. &c, are engaged for a few nights.

On *MONDAY EVENING, February 22d*, 1819, will be prefented, Shakespeare's celebrated Tragedy of

OTHELLO,
The Moor of Venice.

OTHELLO, by *Mr. F. BROWN.*
Iago, - - *Ruſſell,*
Deſdemona, - *Mrs Williams.*

To which will be added, the laughable Farce of

FORTUNE's FROLIC,
OR,
The Ploughman turned Lord.
(For Characters ſee Bills.)

Government Contract.

TENDERS for the tranſport of Troops, Baggage, Proviſions, Stores, &c. &c. during the enſuing Seaſon, to and from the undermentioned places, will be received at this Office until twelve o'clock at noon, on Saturday the 27th Inſtant—viz.

Fort Wellington to Kingſton.
Do. to York, Burlington, Fort George or Queenſton.
Kingſton to York, Burlington, Fort George or Queenſton.
York to Burlington, Fort George or Queenſton.
Fort George to Burlington, or York.

Security will be required for the performance of ſuch Contract as may be entered into.

Commiſſariat Office, Kingſton,
15th Feb. 1819. 8w2

NOTICE.

Mr. F. Brown's first appearance in 'Othello'. Also to be presented 'Fortune's Frolic', Kingston Chronicle 19 Feb. 1819, 3, col. 5

Lectures were public amusements in that they were theatrical in nature, despite also being the most didactic of social events that occurred in the nineteenth century. As in the case of Mr. Jones' September 1831 discourse on the order and system of nature, [105] they reflected the increasing importance of science in Upper Canadian society that, historian Suzanne Zeller's work suggests, was becoming "a dominant mode of thought."[106] Presentations open

[102] *Kingston Gazette* 28 April 1812, 3.

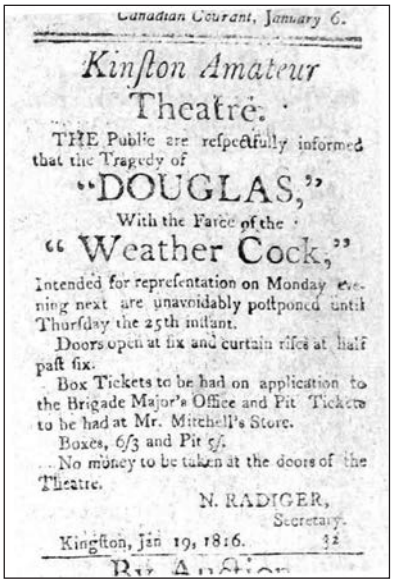
[103] *Kingston Chronicle and Gazette* 17 October 1835, 3.

[104] *Kingston Chronicle and Gazette* 30 December 1835, 3. In this article there is also included a description of one of his "experiments."

[105] For example, see *Kingston Chronicle* 24 September 1831, 2 for an advertisement for a Mr. Jones's lecture on the systems of nature.

[106] **Suzanne Zeller,** *Land of Promise, Promised Land: The Culture of Victorian Science in Canada* (Ottawa: The Canadian Historical Association, 1996), 1. See also Zeller's *Inventing Canada: Early Victorian Science and the Idea of a Transcontinental Nation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

to the general public (as opposed to the private audiences many entertainers also took part in while in town) were often simple attempts by the Kingston Elite to gentrify mechanics and other perceived "lower classes." A Dr. Thomas Howe, for example, attracted attention with his lectures "on the identity and general resurrection of the human body—the connection between religion and learning—the immortality of the soul." The *Kingston Chronicle* even invited the "attention of the sceptical in particular to this opportunity of having their doubts removed, their difficulties overcome, and this subject, from which the whole machinery of moral as well as philosophical world is suspended, conveyed by the most convincing and infallible conclusions to their understanding."[107] Not surprisingly considering the political unrest of the 1830s, politics and notions of governance also were favourite topics for lectures. Mr. Howe's last lecture focussed on "whether that state of society which leads to the formation of great manufacturing establishments, and a large manufacturing population, is favourable to the cause of free and just government."[108]



Canadian Courant, January 6.

Kinſton Amateur Theatre.

THE Public are reſpectfully informed that the Tragedy of

"DOUGLAS,"

With the Farce of the

"Weather Cock,"

Intended for repreſentation on Monday evening next are unavoidably poſtponed until Thurſday the 25th inſtant.

Doors open at ſix and curtain riſes at half paſt ſix.

Box Tickets to be had on application to the Brigade Major's Office and Pit Tickets to be had at Mr. Mitchell's Store.

Boxes, 6/3 and Pit 5/.

No money to be taken at the doors of the Theatre.

N. RADIGER,
Secretary.

Kingſton, Jan 19, 1816. 3t

Two plays at the Kingston Amateur Theatre. Ticket nay be obtained at Mitchell's Store or at the Brigade Major's Office. Kingston Gazette 20 Jan. 1816, 3, col. 4.

Even a cursory examination of "public" amusement in Kingston between 1816 and 1837 can be a lens through which the town's society can be viewed. Theatrical performances and miscellaneous exhibitions are only two examples—many more exist. Amusements and entertainments in Kingston were ripe for social commentary and discourse. In this way, they illustrate the tensions that existed within Upper Canadian society. The year 1837 is both a convenient and natural point to end this discussion. Although Kingston, according to Gerald Tulchinsky, "was safe from the radical turmoil and such attempts to overthrow the government by force of arms as had occurred at Toronto in 1837," [109] the rebellion did cause public amusements to became scarce.[110] When they returned to some level of frequency, Kingston had become both a city and, although temporary, the capital of the United Canadas. The resulting changes in social structure caused public amusements to take on new forms and new meanings.

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[107] *Kingston Chronicle* 19 November 1831, 2.

[108] *Ibid.*

[109] Tulchinsky, *To Preserve and Defend*, 7.

[110] See also Spurr, "Theatre in Kingston, 1816-1870," 46.