

I Remember Old Tuscaloosa

By Fred Maxwell

We called them "tent shows" but the proper name for them was "Summer Stock Shows."

These shows usually came to Tuscaloosa in the Summertime, erected their own tent and usually stayed one week. Some of the casts gave one play for three days and then another for the next three days while some companies had a repertoire that permitted a new show each night for the week.

The tents were totally enclosed so that the Summer heat was intense. Veteran audiences always brought a palmetto fan along to help alleviate the situation.

These shows were seldom classed as drama or melodrama but were more frequently called "tearjerkers"

as some of the titles indicate.

"Ten Nights in a Barroom" well lent itself to pathos and sympathy. When the little girl entered the saloon about the seventh night and cried "Father, dear father, come home with me now" and father asked for just one more drink the entire audience was ready to throw the bum out. By this time the palmetto fans were working overtime.

In these show it did not take a connoisseur to recognize the hero, heroine, villain or the stern parent. "East Lynn" was considered a masterpiece and I believe was given far more often than any other show. It contains all the pathos, sympathy, anger and resentment that an audience could take. When the stern father threw his

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wayward daughter and her fatherless child out the front door into the snow and told her never to return again, some palmetto fans stopped stone still while others were working overtime. More than half of the audience had tears in their eyes. Everybody felt soory for the poor girl.

I do not remember when these "tent shows" ceased coming to Tuscaloosa. I do read in some magazines today

that "summer stock" shows are very popular. Usually an old barn is used as an opera house for the entire summer season. The actors, for the most part, do the converting of the barn and make the scenery and costumes themselves.

I feel that if a "summer stock" show came to Tuscaloosa today that I would be compelled to go regardless of the billing.