

Today in Columbus History:

On December 19, 1875, the amateur production of *The Mistletoe Bough* at the Springer Opera House prompted two stories and an ad in the local papers. The *Columbus Daily Times* story entitled "A Genuine Treat" and the *Columbus Daily Enquirer* story entitled "Worthy of Patronage" told of the next day's Christmas-themed show.

In the past, ghost stories were more popular at Christmas. Dicken's *A Christmas Carol* is one example. The song *The Most Wonderful Time of the Year* mentions them with the line "There'll be scary ghost stories and tales of the glories of Christmases long, long ago."

According to Wikipedia, the legend of the Mistletoe Bough was an English folktale that several old mansions and estates claim as their own. In the story, a bride, tired of dancing on her wedding night, suggests a game of hide and seek with her guests. She hides in an old oak chest in the attic but becomes trapped. No one can find her, and she dies, unable to escape. Many years later, the new owner of the house discovers her body as a skeleton wearing a wedding dress and crowned with a mistletoe bough when they find the chest and break it open.

Samuel Rogers first published the legend of the Mistletoe Bough in the poem "Ginerva" in his 1823 book *Italy*. This led to a play by Charles Somerset and a song by Thomas Bayly and Henry Bishop in the 1830's. By the 1860's, it was one of the most popular songs in the England. The British Film Institute (BFI) has a short, silent version of the story filmed in 1904 and you can find several recordings of the song on the Internet, as well.

After successfully establishing the Memorial Day holiday, the Ladies Memorial Association staged the play as a fund raiser for their latest project, a monument to the local soldiers killed in the Civil War. The play preceded a "Monumental Festival" at the Perry House and two days later, the cast appeared at the festival in their costumes. These events represented the beginning of the fund raising for the project in earnest. The ladies collected more donations for these efforts than from the previous eight years, combined. By May of 1878, the project was fully funded.

Mrs. Tyng produced the play while G. Gunby Jordan managed the stage. Mrs. J.B. Shipp sang the title song and Rose Hill sang the comic song "Young Widow." Several local musicians provided the music including Mrs. Battle, Professor Chase and Madame Ballini. The cast included Dora Flournoy as the bride, Ginerva; Willis Holstead as her new husband Lovell and Kate Frazer as her mother, the Baroness. The play also included thirty children dancing around the May Pole.

The players also included Col. W. L. Salisbury as the Baron, the bride's father, who also supervised the rehearsals. Less than three years later, Salisbury was murdered at the Seale, Alabama train station while boarding a train for Columbus in April 1878 (see my TICH post for April 21, 2021). A few weeks after his death, the citizens of Columbus voted on a location for the new monument. The shocking crime made him a sentimental favorite, and the park named in his honor won the vote.

Compiled by Daniel A. Bellware, Muscogee Genealogical Society

Clipping from Georgia Historic Newspapers (GALILEO).

Our weekly snippets of Columbus history are usually based on a few days-worth of searching through the most popular sources for Muscogee County history. Meant to inspire readers to explore more about Columbus history, they are not exhaustive dissertations on the topic and may contain mistakes. If you have corrections or additional information, feel free to share them with the group.

ONE NIGHT ONLY!
Benefit of the **Memorial Society.**
A Cause Appealing to Your Generosity.
An Entertainment **Worthy Your Patronage.**
SPRINGER'S OPERA HOUSE.
Monday Evening, Dec. 20th.
FULL ORCHESTRA ON THIS OCCASION.

The thrilling pantomime in five acts,
"The Mistletoe Bough,"
founded upon Rogers' celebrated poem,
GINERVA.

Accompanied with song and appropriate music, and introducing the graceful **MINUET** by the troupe, and the
Bewitching May-Pole Dance by 30 Children

PART SECOND.
COMIC SONG: "THE YOUNG WIDOW."
The whole to conclude with the splendid selection,
"SCENE AND PRAYER—Der Freischutz."

Prices in strict accordance with the times—
A mission, 50 cents; Reserved Seats, 75 cents.
Tickets for sale at W. J. Chaffin's Book Store.

From the *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, December 19, 1875, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.



The Mistletoe Bough by William Oliver (1823-1901) <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/mistletoe-bough-35332gh>

A Genuine Treat.

When our plucky women undertake anything they know no such word as "fail." Through the indefatigable energy of one the most gifted daughters of our city, our people will, on Monday evening, hear an entertainment far exceeding in excellence most amateur performances. Rodgers' sad and thrilling poem of "Ginerva" has been set to music, and we all know it in the beautiful song, "The Mistletoe Bough." On Monday night this story will be acted in pantomime by a troupe consisting of our most beautiful and talented ladies, and a very splendid selection of young men. The song will be rendered—as she only can do it—by Mrs. J. B. Shipp, whose voice is strangely sweet, and whose articulation is perfect.

The costumes are elegant, the scenery beautiful, the dances perfectly rendered. One of our leading bankers, whose wonderful success in the management of the Public School Entertainment has made him a name as a manager, has superintended the rehearsals, which bespeaks a good show.

The comic song sung by a fairy little miss, is highly spoken of.

The "Scene and Prayer der Freischutz" will be alone worth the price of admission.

A full orchestra will be present.

The advertisement in another column gives particulars. The low price of admission—(tickets at Chaffin's)—alone will secure a big house, which the entertainment richly deserves.

Article from the *Columbus Daily Times*, December 19, 1875, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.



Photo of Col. W.L. Salisbury courtesy of Historic Columbus Foundation.

WORTHY OF PATRONAGE.

A SPLENDID EXHIBITION BY OUR AMATEURS.

Ignoring the cause for which it is given, and which alone would secure a ruoming house on Monday night, we can conscientiously recommend the "Mistletoe Bough" exhibition as one entirely worthy of patronage. Our ladies, God bless them, have, as usual, succeeded in getting up a splendid affair. All of us remember the sad story of the beautiful bride Ginerva, as told by Rogers. Her bridal feast, her girlish prank in hiding from her lover, the chest and its fatal spring fastening, the search—fruitless and vain, the weeks of anxiety, the years of gloom, the old oak chest in the attic—its removal after years have flown, the discovery of a ring and a necklace—showing it to have been her tomb. This will be acted in pantomime, accompanied by appropriate music and the descriptive song, the "Mistletoe Bough." Such a splendid selection has been made in the arrangement of the characters, so perfect has been the training, that the affair can only be a success. The sweetest voice in the city will warble the "Mistletoe Bough." The comic song, "Young Widow," is a peerless production, they say, and the "scene and prayer" will be rendered by a perfectly trained songstress of Rose Hill. The entertainment having been under the immediate supervision of a gifted woman; who knows what a good show is, is sufficient guarantee of success. See advertisement for particulars, and remember that the house should be crowded, and will be.

Article from the *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, December 19, 1875,
<https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.

The mistletoe hung in the castle hall.
The holly branch shone on the old oak wall;
And the baron's retainers were blithe and gay,
And keeping their Christmas holiday.

The baron beheld with a father's pride
His beautiful child, young Lovell's bride;
While she with her bright eyes seemed to be
The star of the goodly company.
Oh, the mistletoe bough — oh, the mistletoe bough.

"The Mistletoe Bough" = ballad about lady locked in a chest (Thomas Haynes Bayly, Henry Bishop)

Song with lyrics from YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhEM0GEH9Lw>



The Mistletoe Bough (1904) - short version | BFI National Archive

Screen grab from the silent film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Io1HkQ2hNA8>