

**Today in Columbus History, November 1, 1838**, the *Columbus Sentinel & Herald* ran a short theatre review mentioning that “Julius Caesar” had its last performance to a packed house (and the troupe was headed for Montgomery next). Also playing was “Dead Shot,” “the laughable afterpiece,” which sounded slapstick (just what you might need to see after a Shakespearian tragedy). Although Columbus author and preservationist Clason Kyle has covered the history of Columbus theatre thoroughly in his book, *In Order of Appearance*, I want to remind TICH readers of a few early details.

When most people think of historic Columbus theatre, the Springer Opera House, which opened in 1871, immediately comes to mind. However, stage acting had already been in Columbus from its founding more than four decades earlier. In 1828, John H. Martin writes, “A theater was ‘erected’ for the purpose and opened for a short engagement as early as July of this year, and we find the performances of the company highly complimented.” (13) That Martin put quotes around the word “erected” might hint that the building was not quite the Globe. He also dismisses early Columbus stage drama by adding, “But we suppose the Columbus theatre-goers of that day were hardly so critical or discriminating as those of the present time, and there was some difference between the rough unsuitable hall in which the performance was given and Springer’s Opera House with its fine scenery and luxurious furnishing.” (13) Martin’s history was published in 1874, three years after the Springer opened, so he knew the future of theatre in Columbus.

THEATRE.

This establishment closed on Monday evening, with the play of Julius Cæsar, with the following cast: Mr. Addams as Brutus, Mr. Forbes as Mark Antony, Mr. Brown as Cassius, and Mrs. Addams as Portia. The house was of course crowded to overflowing, and Mr. Hart, the Manager, whose benefit it was, had really a bumper, as he usually does.

We much regretted the indisposition which prevented Mrs. Addams from playing the part of Louisa Lovetrick, in the laughable afterpiece of a ‘Dead Shot.’ The part, however, was sustained with admirable spirit and accuracy, by Mrs. Hart, while Hart, as Mr. Timid, kept the house in a perfect roar with his comicalities. The company open the Montgomery Theatre to-night.

**THEATRE.**

**SOL SMITH**  
AND HIS  
**DRAMATIC COMPANY.**

**M**R. Sol Smith respectfully announces to the ladies and gentlemen of Columbus and its vicinity, that a temporary Theatre will be fitted up in this place, which will be opened on *Thursday evening next, May 24th*, with a fashionable Comedy and popular Farce. For particulars respecting the performances and the locality of the Theatre, see bills.  
May 19--1--1t

The next mention of performances I find in Georgia Historic Newspapers is in May of 1832. Sol Smith, an experienced theatre manager and actor, Kyle notes, hoped to develop a Georgia theatre “circuit” that included Columbus. Kyle tells us that a new theatre house was built by Asa Bates in “three-and-a-half days.” (11) The fledgling town, still dotted with log cabins surrounded by muddy streets, was on the way to becoming a model city, according to the *Enquirer*: “We have three churches, a theatre, a book store, and a circulating library, and last, but not least, a handsome public garden, now in successful operation.” Martin quotes the *Enquirer* for August 4, 1832.

**Captions**

[top] *Columbus Sentinel & Herald*, November 1, 1837.

[above] *Columbus Enquirer*, May, 1837.

[below] *Columbus Enquirer*, February 2, 1833.

[bottom] *Columbus Enquirer*, February 22, 1853.

The next year, 1833, “Sol Smith, with his theatrical troupe, again entertained the citizens, in his own theatre, which, with the lot on which it stood (No. 147) and several other lots, were offered for sale by him in April.” (Martin, 44) It looks as though Smith, despite the *Enquirer's* editorial cheerleading for the theatre (due in large part to the friendship between Smith and *Enquirer* publisher Mirabeau B. Lamar), was moving on to other projects, apparently because the opportunity to make money on the rising value of the property was too good to pass up, according to Kyle (14). A May advertisement appeals directly “To Speculators.” As Kyle goes on, Smith left the theatre business and became a lawyer (maybe in that way not really leaving the theatre business).

Exeunt Sol Smith and his troupe. However, that was not the final curtain for playacting in Columbus. By 1837, “A ‘new and fashionable’ theatre opened in October. It was on Crawford street, in the rear of McIntosh Hall, was 40 x 80 feet in area of hall, and capable of accommodating about 400 persons,” Martin (87) tells us. Almost a decade later, “the old theatre” just escaped destruction in “The Great Fire” of October 9, 1846. (Martin vol. 2, 10) The *Enquirer* referred to the not-quite-ten-year-old building as “old.” (Had the theatre had fallen out of use?) For more details on the fire itself, see the rest of the detailed description in the *Columbus Enquirer*, October 14, 1846, p. 2 (Georgia Historic Newspapers.)

Four later, “[Columbus city] Alderman Brooks announced that a “house of ill fame” had opened in the old theatre building on Crawford Street (Martin, 42). There’s undoubtedly more to that story. However, on February 19, 1853, the same building finally succumbed to flames: “The fire originated in the Theatre building, and was believed to have been the work of an incendiary.” (66)

But stage plays had not been expunged from the city. By 1855, Martin tells us, “Among the public entertainments of this spring were well contested races over the Chattahoochee course, and a series of theatrical performances by Mr. W. H. Crisp’s Company.” (82)

By the time the Springer Opera House opened on February 21, 1871, Columbus had already had a long thespian history, and, as Clason Kyle elaborates, would have much more to come.

#### — Rachel Dobson

*Our weekly snippets of Columbus history are usually based on a few days 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.*

## SOURCES

Mary Jane Galer, *Columbus, Ga., Lists of People, 1828-1852 and Sexton's Reports to 1866* ([Columbus, Ga.]: Iberian Publ., 2000).

Georgia Historic Newspapers (GALILEO), <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.

F. Clason Kyle, *In Order of Appearance – Chronicling 135 Years on America's Most Celebrated Stage* (Columbus, Ga.: Communicorp, Inc., 2006).

John Martin, compiler, *Columbus, Geo. From Its Selection as a "Trading Town" in 1827 to Its Partial Destruction by Wilson's Raid, in 1856. History – Incident – Personality*, (1874).

[https://archive.org/details/bub\\_gb\\_YPQxAQAAMAAJ](https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_YPQxAQAAMAAJ) [Internet Archive]

**THEATRE.**  
Sol. Smith is still affording instruction and amusement to the lovers of the Drama in this town. Considering the limited population of Columbus, and the necessary engagements of its citizens, we think the merits of his Dramatic corps are highly appreciated and liberally rewarded. We doubt whether any company in the United States, enlivening our inland villages, combines as much talent for tragic and comic acting, or is as unexceptional in every respect as Old Sol's.  
The Company performs this evening for the last time in Columbus for several months probably.

*Columbus Enquirer*, February 9, 1833. More of MBL's cheerleading for the theatre.

**To Speculators.**  
**Valuable Town Property**  
**FOR SALE!!!**  
**LOTS** No 19, 20, 75 and 147, in the town of Columbus. No 19, 20 and 75, (an acre and a half,) are exactly opposite the BRIDGE now building, and it is proposed to open a Street 40 feet wide through them. On these lots are several good **BUILDINGS**. No 147 is the Theatre lot.  
The whole of the above property is offered for sale. I expect to visit Columbus in the course of a few weeks—in the mean time persons wishing to purchase, are referred to Mr. Kivlin, who will afford any information in his power. Terms, half cash—the other half, a years credit secured by mortgage on the property.  
April 27—49—3t **SOL. SMITH.**

*Columbus Enquirer*, May 11, 1846, front page.