

# A CIRCUS GOING UP

Helen McCann White

**T**HE NEW Great Australian Circus lay in camp in February, 1877, at Mount Clemens, Michigan, a city of mineral springs soon to become a winter haven for circus people. The Great Australian had two round-top canvases, 65 horses, and 21 wagons; it had "the finest ring-horses, the finest band-chariot, the finest wagons, paraphernalia and trappings of any circus in the West." The wagons were painted red, green, and gold, and the most elegant was the expensive, new, imported "Golden Chariot of Cleopatra."<sup>1</sup>

There is reason to believe that the circus was "New" and "Australian" in name only. Owned by three men of Jackson, Michigan, the Great Australian Circus had emerged from the Great Pacific Show, an enterprise closed in Illinois the previous year by poor attendance and four weeks of rain. It then moved to Mount Clemens, was placed under the management of William H. Dwyer, and renamed — apparently to evoke the glamour of far-off places. The "Great" in its name was no measure of its size; rather it was merely an ordinary circus-language superlative.<sup>2</sup>

On February 17 Dwyer announced in the *New York Clipper*, a show-business publication, that the Great Australian was ready to hire in "all branches of circus business." Personnel required were agents; masters of canvas, wardrobe, transportation, and stables; music and equestrian directors; a chief of the brigade to distribute posters; a "layer out" who assigned employees to hotel rooms; ushers, various assistants, and officials; and such performers as riders, leapers, vaulters, jugglers, gymnasts, clowns, and side-show artists. Lest anyone interested in joining the company harbor inflated notions

<sup>1</sup>This article is a slightly altered version of a chapter in Ms. White's forthcoming book, *Tale of a Comet and Other Stories*, to be published in early 1984 by the MHS Press.

Unless otherwise indicated, details on the organization and operation of circuses were drawn from the columns of the *New York Clipper*, especially its annual circus supplements of March 31, 1866, April 8, 1871, April 13, 1872, and April 18, 1874. See also Donald E. Worrell, Jr., "Mount Clemens's fabulous bath era," in *Chronicle* (Ann Arbor, Mich.), Summer, 1978, p. 4; *Clipper*, February 15, April 14, 1877.

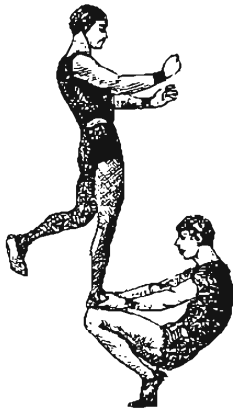
<sup>2</sup>*Clipper*, February 17, 1877. On the Great Pacific Show, see Stuart Thayer, "Joseph E. Warner — Pioneer of the Three Tent Circus," in *Bandwagon*, January–February, 1970, p. 23; *Clipper*, January 22, February 19, July 8, 15, 1876. Files of *Bandwagon* and *Bannerline* (below) were consulted in Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin.

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about prospective earnings. Dwyer warned that salaries "must be low." He promised, however, that pay would be "sure" — an important consideration to any performer who had been stranded, hungry and penniless, when a circus had closed, or "gone up," on the sawdust trail. Indeed, another unrelated Great Australian Circus, one of four by that name known to have existed during this period, had been disbanded in New England in 1870 after a dispute between its proprietors.<sup>3</sup>

By the middle of April, 1877, Dwyer's company was fairly well organized for the tenting season. More than 40 officers, workers, and performers were named in a roster published in the *Clipper* on April 14. The entire company was said to include 80 persons, 14 of whom were band musicians. Not all those listed on the roster had actually signed contracts, and some never did. David Castello, for example, a 17-year-old bareback rider later to achieve fame in the circus world, joined P. T. Barnum instead. Dwyer explained that he had been dealing with Castello's agent and, fully expecting the young man to sign, had billed him as a star performer. Now, said Dwyer, he needed another male equestrian.<sup>4</sup>

All who had agreed to join the Great Australian were asked to report at Mount Clemens on May 9. A day or so later the circus performed there and then began its summer tour. It was scheduled to "show" around the Great Lakes, traveling on the company's propeller boat. Billed to tour lumbering and mining towns on Lake Superior



and in Michigan, the circus proceeded by boat as far west as Duluth, Minnesota. From there it turned southward, traveling by rail, if advance billing may be trusted, in a train composed of ten flatcars, five boxcars, two passenger coaches, and a Pullman palace drawing-room car. Hopes were high for a profitable season.<sup>5</sup>

Bills posted in Duluth a few days before the Great Australian Circus arrived announced that it would give one performance on Monday, July 16. Three days before the big event, the *Duluth Daily Tribune* observed that local boys eagerly looked forward to the show. "Almost any of them are just now willing to do chores, if by so

doing, they can earn the necessary 'quarter.'" The *Duluth Minnesotian-Herald* predicted on the same day that the circus would "please the children both great and small" and "take the small change out of town." Neither paper had more to say about the circus or its performance, perhaps because the management failed to buy advertising space. After the performance in Duluth the entire circus outfit — performers, wagons, horses, musical instruments, jacks, ladders, stake pullers, tents, banners, flagstuffs, and much, much more — was loaded onto cars of the St. Paul and Duluth Railroad, and the whole shebang headed south to Rush City in Chisago County.

The *Rush City Post* carried advance word (but no advertising) that the circus was coming and would show in that city on the 17th. As a community service, editor and publisher Hial P. Robie gave the coming event a respectable amount of publicity in his paper of July 13. On page one Robie called the Great Australian one of the best circuses traveling, remarking that it was the first ever to stop between St. Paul and Duluth.

A man with an "in-born capacity to see the fitness of things," the 26-year-old Robie wore two hats, which makes his testimony about the Great Australian Circus worth repeating. Under one hat he was a fighting editor with an independent mind, bright and contentious, eloquent and opinionated. In his desk drawer he kept a cheese knife and "one of Colt's best" in case he had to defend himself against an irate reader. Wearing his second hat, Robie was a justice of the peace. By day or night, as the need arose, he dropped his editorial and publishing duties to convene the local justice court. In his twin capacities Robie was to learn much about the Great Australian Circus.<sup>6</sup>

On July 13, 1877, Robie said that the circus was good, clean fun for the whole family and that attendance at a performance would provide "the pleasantest time for the money ever spent in Rush City." He reported that the company was "composed of 30 talented artists and 25 beautiful horses and ponies, everything new and in its splendor." Although in numbers of people and horses the circus seemed considerably smaller than it had been

<sup>3</sup>Other "Australian" circuses were mentioned in *Clipper*, June 4, 18, 25, July 9, 16, 1870, October 26, 1872, June 16, 30, August 11, 1883. Many circuses were forced to close for various reasons; for others "gone up" in Minnesota, see *Clipper*, September 10, 17, 1870, July 10, 1875, July 6, 1878.

<sup>4</sup>See also *Clipper*, April 28, 1877. On Castello (1860-1922), whose real name was Loughlin, see *Bannerline*, February 1, 1963, p. 6, March 5, 1968, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup>*Clipper*, February 17, April 14, 28, 1877.

<sup>6</sup>On Robie, see *Chisago County Post* (Rush City), January 13, 1875; this paper became the *Rush City Post* in 1877. See also *North Branch Review*, July 29, 1892, *Rush City Post*, June 9, 1882; U.S. manuscript census schedules, 1880, Rush City, Chisago County.

described in the *April Clipper*, its quality was impressive still.

Eight lady performers included women of undoubted talent. The Leopold sisters, for example, were "without peers" in the new specialty of performing "upon the swing trapeze, bars, and rings, executing the most terrific leaps from bar to bar, of sixty feet." More superlatives described Eva Albertina, who made a "perilous leap for life in mid air, from the extreme top of the tent to a perpendicular rope hanging at a distance of 50 feet." Equally marvelous were the "surprising accomplishments" of Mademoiselle Lavina Brockway on her "famous educated horse," and Mademoiselle Christine, whose forte was parlor gymnastics. "Madame Gosh," who was not mentioned by the *Post*, was a tightrope dancer who achieved fleeting fame outside the ring a short time later.<sup>7</sup>

Most remarkable of all the women athletes, and one of the best known, was Mademoiselle Annie (Annette) Worland. This "young and beautiful" lady, who performed "graceful feats" of what Robie called "exqu Coastrianism" was expected to appear in a "wonderful performance of walking forward and backward blindfolded on the tight rope without the aid of a balance pole." This feat had never been attempted by any other lady, Robie

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<sup>7</sup>The quotations here and below are from the *Rush City Post*, July 13, 1877. A number of male performers named Leopold and three women — Blanche and Geraldine, gymnasts, and Minnie, a rider — were mentioned in *Clipper*, June 18, November 26, 1870, June 15, 1872, April 18, 1874, April 17, 1875, July 15, 1882. A rider, "Grace" Brockway, Mlle. Christine, and Eva Albertina were referred to in *Clipper*, March 31, 1877. On Worland, below, and her husband, Stewart L. Davis, a ringmaster and equestrian director, see *Clipper*, February 3, March 31, December 24, 1877, April 19, 1884, February 7, 1885.

<sup>8</sup>On Edward G. Holland (1853–1959) and other members of this circus family, see *Clipper*, March 10, July 1, 1876; *Bannerline*, January 1, 1965, p. 2–4. Fields is mentioned in *Rush City Post*, July 17, 1877, nothing more is known about him. On Sands, a famous name in circus history, see Marian Murray, *Circus! From Rome to Ringling*, 139–141, 167 (Westport, Conn., 1956).

<sup>9</sup>On Quillin (1849–1925), here and below, see Leon Smith, "Notes on Smith and Quillin Families"; Agnes Hill, "Quillin Family Genealogy Chart"; author's interview with Dean Anderson, February 1, 1978; Carl E. Moore to author, February 12, March 20, 1978; Agnes Hill to author, January 20, 1979 — all in author's possession. Quillin's advertisements appeared on the want-ad page of the *Clipper*, March 8, November 22, 1873, February 28, 1874, September 4, December 18, 1875, March 4, April 1, 1876, February 17, 1877. Quillin's contract and testimony are in Great Australian Circus Company, Case File 412A, Chisago County District Court records, Minnesota State Archives, MHS (hereafter cited by file number and plaintiff's name). For more on clowns' roles and duties, see Murray, *Circus!*, 301–309; *Clipper*, April 19, 1873; interview with Robert L. Parkinson, historian, Circus World Museum, May 19, 1983, notes in author's possession.



LEM QUILLIN in North Branch about 1889

said. At one o'clock on Tuesday, July 17, before the regular circus performance, Miss Worland would give a free exhibition. She would make "a startling ascension from the ground, to the top of the tent, on a small wire rope."

Although Robie believed the Royal Imperial Brass Band of 14 pieces was alone worth a trip to town, he named only a handful of men performers. No one had bothered to tell him that David Castello "late of Russia" (he was actually a native of North Carolina), the "champion somersault bareback rider," was not present. Ed Holland of the famous Wisconsin circus family was expected to entertain viewers by "packing himself into a 24 x 30 inch box." Professor Sands and his son would perform acts of "posturing, tumbling and leaping." Clown Joseph Fields was billed as the "joker and fun maker of the world." The *Post* admitted that it did not mention "many other performers of remarkable note."<sup>8</sup>

Among those overlooked and soon to be known in Chisago County was lithe, red-haired Lemuel A. Quillin, a "First Clown." Quillin was 28 in 1877 and not a newcomer to the circus profession. He had been advertising his talents as "the great American Clown and Shakespearean Jester" for at least three years. After traveling with J. W. Couch & Company's "Colossal Museum, Menagerie and Globe Circus" in 1873, he proclaimed that he was also a "Tumbler, Leaper and Champion Gymnast." By the spring of 1874 he was billing himself as one of the "funniest and happiest clowns"; at the end of 1875, as he looked toward a new season, he advertised again. "Here I am," he trumpeted, "Comic Clown and Vocalist, also Leaper and Champion Gymnast." Just before joining the Great Australian in 1877, Quillin called himself a "Great American Jester, Comic Clown and Vocalist."<sup>9</sup>

Quillin came from Syracuse in Meigs County, Ohio, a river town frequently visited by circuses. It is not known when he first became a performer or how he learned the trade. Lem and his younger brother Lauren, or Lorenzo as he became known, were both men of many talents. Lauren's grandnephew remembered him "standing still jumping up in the air and flip flopping backwards and landing on his feet straight up with his body." He could also "throw his neck out of joint" and make his head "flop like a dead chicken." Of Lemuel, the younger brother would only say, "He was a dusey."

Answering the *Clipper* call, Lemuel left brothers, sisters, parents, wife Anna, and baby daughter Lulu to sign a contract on March 31, 1877, with the Great Australian Circus Company. By its terms he agreed to make himself "generally [sic] useful in the capacity of Clown & Player in Concert" for the sum of \$25 "payable Weekly at the Expiration of each and every Week." Two months later, when the Great Australian Circus reached Minnesota, Quillin had received little of his salary.<sup>10</sup>

Not another word appeared in the *Post* about the circus performance. No eyewitness described the daring deeds under the tent, or the acrobatic clown in his gay red, orange, pink, and yellow costume with black buttons. No one memorialized in print the joys of consuming peanuts, popcorn, gingerbread, or pink lemonade. No one remembered what tunes the band discoursed in sweet harmony, or recalled the raucous cries of the candy butcher and side-show barker, the popping of balloons, the squeaking of whistles. The day was soon over, the tents struck, the wagons loaded. The Great Australian company then proceeded southward to the north branch of the Sunrise River. To the audience, all had seemed normal bustle and order. Behind the curtains and inside the wagons, however, trouble was brewing.

SOME 18 miles south of Rush City at North Branch, A. A. Beckett, assistant manager of the circus, had made arrangements for the company to stop a week or so to "recruit up" both animals and employees in the small railroad town. He reserved accommodations at several places, among them John J. F. Swenson's hotel and Benjamin Wilkes's boardinghouse. Wilkes also agreed to keep some of the circus horses at a stable across the road from his house. Beckett's financial arrangements with Wilkes are not known, but he contracted with Swenson to feed from 9 to 19 circus people for a week at 13½ cents a meal. If the company stayed longer than a week, the rate would go up to 16 cents.<sup>11</sup>

"JJF" Swenson, one of the first businessmen of North Branch, also kept a saloon and a general store, which in the next few weeks met other needs of the circus people. At 29, Swenson was successful and well traveled. Born in Östergötland, Sweden, he had come to America with his parents in 1850. After landing in New Orleans, the family, with three children, including two-year-old John, became stranded without funds in St. Louis, where a boy and a baby girl died of cholera. Pastor Gustaf Unonius, touched by the family's plight, persuaded Jenny Lind, the Swedish singer, to help pay the Swensons' way to Minnesota. Anders F. Swenson, John's father, was

<sup>10</sup> Lulu was born on September 26, 1876, see death certificate, St. Paul, May 24, 1950, in St. Paul Bureau of Health, Division of Vital Statistics. Quillin's costume, below, is described in Elizabeth J. (Mrs. Lemuel C.) Quillin to author, May 21, 1980, in author's possession.

<sup>11</sup> *Rush City Post*, August 3, 1877. The expression to "recruit up" was a common one of the period, meaning to renew or replenish health and vitality. On the hotel's contract, see Swenson, Civil File 416A, for the little that is known of Wilkes's arrangements, see Alva S. Titus, Civil File 422A.



A DUSTY view of Main Street in North Branch, photographed by Bloom Brothers of Minneapolis for the North Branch Mercantile Company, about 1910

among the earliest of the many Swedes who settled in the Chisago Lakes area. He became the proprietor of Center City, which in 1876 was named the seat of Chisago County.<sup>12</sup>

Until John reached the age of 19, he worked on nearby farms. Then he left Minnesota and traveled to New York, Panama, and the West Coast. During the two years of his absence, he accumulated enough money to launch a business career when he returned to Chisago County. First he ran a general store in Center City, but he soon moved to the new railroad town of North Branch. By 1877 he was married, the father of two children, and the second largest taxpayer in Branch Township.

Benjamin Wilkes, like Swenson, reached North Branch almost immediately after the town was established in 1870. A New Yorker, Wilkes was a canny, hard-working man with an enterprising wife. The two lived in a comfortable house where Chloe Wilkes took in boarders; her husband kept a stable and blacksmith shop across the road. Mrs. Wilkes later expanded her business into a full-scale hotel, but in 1877 it was still an unpretentious boardinghouse.<sup>13</sup>

When the circus came to town, Swenson and the Wilkeses thought they could make an honest penny or so, but they were not prepared for what happened. Well into the second week of the Great Australian occupation, the *Post* of August 3, 1877, reported that the ravenous boarders threatened to eat North Branch residents "out of house and home." In that rustic environment there was little to do but eat. Opportunities for amusement were available in St. Paul about 40 miles away, but few circus employees had money for the train fare. They had not been paid for weeks. Soon they became restive, pestering manager Dwyer with requests for money.

Dwyer stalled for a few days and then told his employees that he was going to St. Paul to get some cash so he could pay them. The trusting souls let him go off



aboard the train. Madame Gosh, his favorite among the tightrope ladies, quietly slipped away after him. Together they vamoosed, and that was the last seen of the two in North Branch and Chisago County.

Some facts about Dwyer then became public knowledge. It was reported that when he started the season with the circus company, his wife was traveling with him, but he did not pay much attention to her. Thrown as he was in constant contact with women of "distinguished proportions and marked physique," Dwyer had been unable to resist their charms. He was fascinated in particular by Madame Gosh. Somewhere on the trail between Mount Clemens and North Branch, Dwyer's behavior became unendurable to his wife, a "high spirited lady who knew her rights." Deciding that her husband's case was hopeless, she left him and went home to Mount Clemens. Thus the traveling Dwyer was free to dally undisturbed with the tightrope dancer.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, Dwyer had furthered his long-range plans by putting aside a substantial amount of money from the circus receipts. When he left North Branch before the end of July, he took with him \$7,000—a sum gathered probably not only from admission fees but also from the management's share of the profits from candy and other concession sales. (At 25 cents a ticket that amount would have represented the income from the sale of 28,000 tickets!) The *St. Paul Pioneer Press* of August 17 later inferred that Dwyer did not see how he could pay his employees without giving up a large part of the \$7,000. So, "thinking a bird in the hand was worth two in the bush," he took the money and the dancer and, said the *Post* of August 10, headed "for the sunny south."

When it dawned on the citizenry of North Branch and the circus members that Dwyer and the tightrope dancer were not coming back, trouble erupted "all along

<sup>12</sup>On North Branch, platted in 1870, and on Swenson (1848–1926), see Helen M. White, "North Branch Celebrates 100 Years," in *Dalles Visitor* (Taylors Falls), 1981, p. 1, 4, 25, for more on Swenson, here and below, see also *Rush City Post*, August 16, 1878, November 28, 1890; A. E. Strand, comp. and ed., *A History of the Swedish-Americans of Minnesota*, 384–386 (Chicago, 1910); U.S. manuscript census schedules, 1880, North Branch, Chisago County. Unonius, pastor of St. Ansgarius, a Scandinavian Protestant Episcopal church in Chicago, was well known in Sweden for his writings about America. The Swenson story appears in Nils W. Olsson, *A Pioneer in Northwest America, 1841–1858; The Memoirs of Gustaf Unonius*, 2:227 (Minneapolis, 1960).

<sup>13</sup>Here and two paragraphs below, see *Rush City Post*, August 3, 10, 1877, November 28, 1890. On Wilkes, see U.S. manuscript census schedules, 1880, North Branch.

<sup>14</sup>*St. Paul and Minneapolis Pioneer Press*, August 7, 1877.



the line." Some of the circus people remembered that the previous year the Great Pacific Show had collapsed in Illinois and its employees were forced to settle for wages of 37 cents on the dollar. The Great Australian Company members wanted more than 37 per cent of what was due them.<sup>15</sup>

Swenson and Wilkes wanted more too, and they were the first to enter claims against the company. Eight performers followed suit. The complainants enlisted the help of Lewis D. Dent, a Rush City lawyer, and his associate B. C. Newport. Dent, who happened to be in North Branch on other business, took them all to Rush City to Robie, the justice of the peace, who put their cases on the court calendar. Robie also gave County Sheriff John Shaleen writs of attachment enabling him to hold circus property to cover delinquent wages and other debts incurred by the company.

Sheriff Shaleen, in his often thankless job as a public servant, was at times underestimated even by his constituents. Some said he had not gone to college, that his penmanship was "wre[t]ched," his spelling errors "gross and frequent," and his knowledge of mathematics "limited." It was true that he had only a grammar-school education and that in drawing up inventories of the circus property he misspelled the word wagon as "waggan." But English was, after all, his second language. A bilingual Swede, Shaleen was a member of a talented immigrant family. Robie and others defended him; they contended that he was an able man, that he knew the law, and that he was a "perfectly competent" public official.

During the last days of July and the first part of August, the sheriff listed and attached enough circus property to cover the claims of the suing employees and the bills of the two businessmen. The employees claimed amounts based on wages due at a weekly rate of \$15 for tumblers and leapers, \$18 for the aerialist, and \$25 for Quillin, the first clown. None had received as much as half, some even less, of what was owed them.<sup>16</sup>

For the benefit of tumblers Arthur Buckles and W. L. Merrick, the sheriff attached the "Band Waggan" and three sets of jacks (the supports placed under tiers of seats) — 42 each of small, medium, and large jacks. Shaleen listed 15 items in the writ of attachment filed for leaper and tumbler S. R. Romer; included were band coats, caps and plumes, flagstuffs, saddles, a bass drum, banners, wagon lights, and the "Ticket Waggan." For Joseph Bignon, another tumbler and leaper, a third wagon was attached, as well as a "water-tank heater," an iron plane, a stake puller, and a ladder. Two gray horses were held for assistant manager Beckett and for "Signor Montanio," the "arial trapheaze" artist, one spotted stallion, and one sorrel horse. A dark horse, a bay, and two saddles were attached for the claim of J. J. F. Swenson. The water wagon was claimed for Lem Quillin's overdue wages, but R. L. (Gus) Warner, a representative and

agent of J. E. Warner, said that the wagon was owned by the latter and asked that it be released to him. The sheriff complied. Shaleen then called on some of the circus men to help him guard the attached property until their cases were heard in court.

SO THERE they were and there they stayed, the whole of the Great Australian Circus Company — less two — stranded, penniless, and more or less hungry, among the pastures, oak trees, prairie chickens, and other occupants of North Branch. As the circus boys waited for justice to be done, some of them took an additional precaution to protect the property from vandalism and other dangers. They removed and secreted all the nuts and bolts from the wagons.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Here and two paragraphs below, see *Rush City Post*, August 10, 17, 1877; *Pioneer Press*, August 7, 1877. On Dent, see U.S. manuscript census schedules, 1880, Nessel Township, Chisago County; *Rush City Post*, December 26, 1890. On Shaleen (1835-1901), Chisago County sheriff from 1870 to 1877, see *Chisago County Courier* (Lindstrom), November 2, 1901, p. 1, and *Chisago County Press* (Lindstrom), May 25, 1944, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Here and below, see Arthur Buckles (Beckles, Bickels), W. L. Merrick, Charles L. Mayatt (Mayett), S. R. Romer, Montanio, Swenson, Bignon, and Beckett, Case Files 410A, 411A, 413-418A, respectively. Warner's statement appeared in Quillin, Case File 412A. He was "master of horses" for J. E. Warner's Circus in 1873, according to *Clipper*, April 19, 1873.

<sup>17</sup> The timetable of events outlined here and seven paragraphs below was based upon documents in Case Files 410-418A, which sometimes varied from the recitals given in the *Rush City Post*, August 3, 10, 17, 1877, and *Pioneer Press*, August 7, 1877. The St. Paul law firm was headed by Cushman K. Davis, who served as governor of Minnesota in 1874-75. On O'Brien, see *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, August 28, 1922, p. 1.

### THE FATEFUL contract, spelling out Quillin's obligations and weekly recompense

**GENERAL CONTRACT**

**The Great Australian Circus Company**

W. H. DWYER,  
W. J. SIMPSON,

Director and Manager,  
General Agent.

Article of Agreement made and entered into this 31 day of March, 1877 between  
W. H. DWYER, (Manager of the Great Australian Circus) of the first part and Lem Quillin  
of the second part, the said Lem Quillin does hereby agree to  
be employed by the said W. H. Dwyer as a clown in the said circus and will generally perform in the capacity  
of a clown in the said circus for the season of 1877. In consideration  
thereof the said W. H. Dwyer is to pay the said Lem Quillin the sum of \$25 per  
week for the said clown at the expiration of each and every week

Signed in presence of  
L. J. Milled  
Wm. L. Williams Witness

L. H. Dwyer  
Lem Quillin



After someone notified the proprietors of the circus at Jackson, Michigan, that they were being sued, John S. Hurd, one owner, hastened to St. Paul, where he engaged the firm of Davis, O'Brien and Wilson to defend the company. Two attorneys, Christopher Dillon O'Brien and E. Stone Gorman, took on the owners' cases. They in turn hired a county lawyer, Alexander Young of North Branch, to assist them.

Friday, August 3, was a day of activity in circus affairs. The "high-toned dignitaries," Hurd and Gorman, had taken the train to Rush City. Joined by Alexander Young, they climbed the stairs to justice court in Robie's office on the second floor of the Emigrant Building. The *Post* had gone to press for the week, and Robie was free to give his undivided attention to the matters before the court. After Shaleen served Hurd with the necessary papers, Robie heard the first circus case.

Early the following day, Saturday, St. Paul lawyer O'Brien, accompanied by a Ramsey County deputy sheriff, stepped off the train at North Branch bent on urgent business, to be described later. Sheriff Shaleen had also gone to North Branch and was at or near the circus corral. At the same time, plaintiffs and defendants gathered in court in Rush City for the second day of the trials. Robie's docket was so crowded that he was forced to schedule cases into the evening.

The Wilkes case had been heard when attorney Gorman began to feel thirsty. Fishing around in his pocket, he pulled out a 50-cent piece, turned to Lem Quillin, who was not busy at the moment, and asked him to go to a nearby saloon and bring back 50 cents' worth of lager beer. While Quillin was gone, Gorman handed a bundle of papers to attorney Young and told him to take them into the adjoining room and prepare an answer to the next case on the docket, because he (Gorman) was "busy."

Editor Robie described what happened next. About the time the beer arrived, Gorman took advantage of the lull in the proceedings to go downstairs. Robie, too,

stepped out for a short time. When the latter returned, he made the startling discovery that some of the court's papers were not where they had been when he left. Where were they? Lawyer Dent remarked helpfully that Young must have them. Young, who was about to leave the room, denied that he had any papers except Gorman's. Robie was not impressed; he ordered that Young, who had reached the hall, be surrounded and searched. When Young's "old fur cap" and long-tailed, 16-year-old overcoat were "investigated and shook," pleadings, attachment papers, affidavits, bonds, and writs tumbled out "thick and fast." In fact, the county lawyer had "stolen everything" relating to the Great Australian Circus Company lawsuits except the docket and the court itself.

After the papers were retrieved, order was somehow restored, and one after another the cases came to trial. The last of the day, that of aerial artist Montanio, was heard at 8:00 Saturday evening. By then Hurd and his attorneys were well aware of the temper of the court. Sometime over the weekend Hurd and Gorman returned to St. Paul and Young to North Branch.

None of them appeared on Monday, August 6, when Robie reconvened court at 9:00 A.M. The plaintiffs, their attorney, and the justice waited an hour for the defendants to appear. When they had not arrived on the morning train, Robie concluded that they would not come and carried on without them. He heard the cases of Beckett, Buckles, Merrick, Bignon, and Quillin. Words were not minced. Robie found that facts supported the claims of the local businessmen and the circus personnel. Accordingly he ordered the proprietors of the Great Australian Company to pay what the plaintiffs wanted, plus costs. Before the night was over, local events tended to support Robie's conclusion that the circus employees were honorable people who deserved favorable verdicts.

Frank Johnson, a circus member who had been a witness in some of the court cases, although he did not himself sue the company, stayed in Rush City the night of August 6. About 12:30 A.M. he heard the cry, "Fire!" Hastily getting up, he followed the sound and saw flames at the home of S. C. Norton, the station agent. When Norton discovered the fire, he quickly "seized" his wife and child from bed and helped them through a window to safety. He himself went out, only to return immediately to rescue a vest in which he kept a watch, a pocketbook, some money, and some railroad papers. Only after leaving the burning house a second time did he remember his sleeping sister Cora, alone upstairs.<sup>18</sup>

By then others had gathered, and before Norton could return for his sister, he saw a strange man carrying her downstairs. When she awakened to find the room and hallway full of smoke, she had "presence of mind enough to put a bed quilt around her head." Starting for the stairs, "she was met by a man who was going up to

<sup>18</sup> On Johnson, here and below, see *Rush City Post*, August 10, 1877. Johnson testified for Buckles, Merrick, and Bignon; Case Files 410A, 411A, 417A.



assist her down. She was nearly suffocated and exhausted and ready to fall, when she was caught up in the strong arms of her rescuer and carried down." The young hero was Frank Johnson of the Great Australian Circus Company, who had been "one of the first at the fire."

MEANWHILE on Saturday, August 4, lawyer O'Brien and the Ramsey County deputy sheriff had arrived at North Branch with one purpose in mind. While O'Brien's colleagues were doing battle in court in Rush City, he and the deputy prepared to claim the circus property and take it to St. Paul for safekeeping. For a time Sheriff Shaleen, who was on guard at the corral with the well-muscled circus employees, thwarted O'Brien. Shaleen knew that O'Brien had no right to take the attached property without proper bonds, accepted and approved by the court, and he stood firm. Besides, the resourceful circus men had removed "all the nuts, bolts and screws" so that none of the rolling stock could roll.<sup>19</sup>

O'Brien, confronted with this frustrating situation, fell back to talk over strategy with the St. Paul deputy. As a result, the deputy retraced his steps to the spot and took the next train south. O'Brien stayed around to keep an eye on the company property and to argue, parley, reason, and try in various other ways to soften the resistance of the sheriff and the circus boys. Shaleen remained unmoved. The circus men were belligerent, "browbeating" and "blackguarding" poor O'Brien almost to exhaustion. They threatened to send whoever touched the circus property on a long and unrewarding journey to "where the brimstone was deep."

The deputy, back in St. Paul, soon rounded up a *posse comitatus*. In other words, the *Pioneer Press* explained, he got together "enough men to capture, overwhelm and defeat the circus men who appeared to be a desperate crowd." The posse of 20 good men and true included a formidable Irishman named Pat O'Regan and "other warriors of like prowess." The deputy and the posse piled onto a chartered train and steamed northward to North Branch.

As the day wore on and O'Brien's patience evaporated, he detected the puffing smoke of an engine heralding the arrival of the train bringing his deliverance. At once he began to breathe more freely, according to the *Pioneer Press* version of events. When the train stopped at the North Branch depot, the St. Paul task force scrambled out and hurried to the circus corral. At once the *posse comitatus* spread out and "each one stood up by the side of a circus man, ready if the circus man made a movement to drop him."

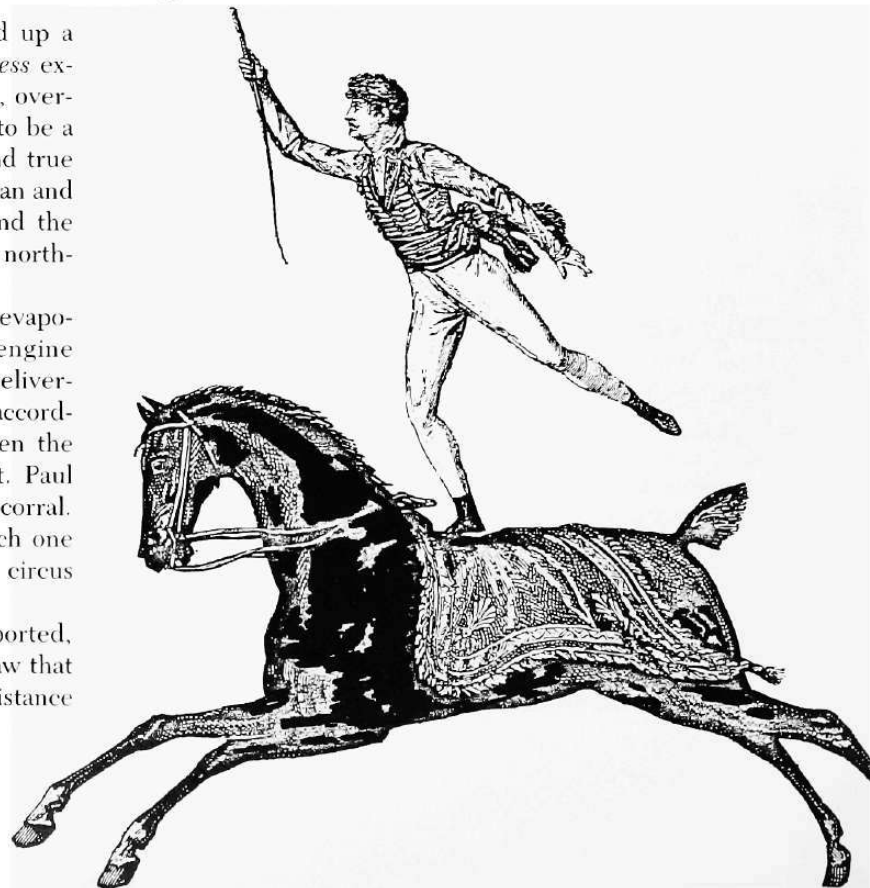
Against this force, the St. Paul newspaper reported, the Chisago County sheriff and the circus men saw that they were outnumbered and overpowered. Resistance

CHRISTOPHER  
D. O'Brien,  
later mayor of  
St. Paul, about  
1885



was useless and "they wilted." Without further interference O'Brien, the deputy, and the Irish tough boys searched out the nuts, bolts, and screws and put the wagons in running order. They took all the equipment and loaded it on the train. No one revealed how or where they found the hardware. The deed was done, however, and the train steamed and chugged south again

<sup>19</sup> Descriptions here and in the following 13 paragraphs were drawn from *Pioneer Press*, August 7, 15, and *Rush City Post*, August 3, 10, 17, 1877. See also *Taylor's Falls Journal*, August 10, 17, 1877.



taking circus property, O'Brien, the Ramsey County delegation, and perhaps some members of the company who had not filed suits to St. Paul in triumph. All was over but the complaining — the complaining of the posse, unhappy because its members had wanted a good fight. That there had been none "was what hurt," said the *Pioneer Press*.

THE CIVIL confrontation between circus employees and circus owners now began to assume a broader dimension. Back and forth the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* and the *Rush City Post* traded insults, arraying high-toned city slickers from Ramsey County against Chisago County hicks. The *Pioneer Press* championed Irishmen, city lawyers learned in the law, rich property owners, property rights, and public officials who kept regular office hours. The *Post* supported Swedes and New Yorkers, rural lawyers learned in the law (with the exception of Alex Young), downtrodden wage earners, and public officials who had a comparatively relaxed attitude toward office hours. Virtue, intelligence, and good horse sense, the *Post* expounded, lay at the northern end of a 60-mile train ride from St. Paul to Rush City.

Editor-justice Robie righteously put the opposition in its place. Whom was the *Pioneer Press* trying to fool? Did it think for one minute that millionaires from Jackson, Michigan, and a rowdy bunch of Irishmen from St. Paul could put anything over on a Swedish sheriff, a Yankee justice, and a handful of talented and wronged circus performers? Fearlessly he offered his readers his version of the truth. The circus employees had not been paid; they had appropriately and legally sued the company for back pay. In the employees' behalf the court had issued legal writs of attachment on company property. Sheriff Shaleen, with the kind assistance of the circus people, was guarding the property under attachment

when O'Brien and his posse tried illegally with threats and Irish shillelaghs to take it away. They were properly repulsed. Shaleen "did not scare worth a cent," and his cause was just. In order to obtain the release of the property, O'Brien was forced to give bond for the Great Australian Circus Company in the amount of \$4,000 — twice the sum of the suits pending in court. Then only, after the bonds had been signed and delivered to Justice Robie and accepted by him, was the circus property released by the sheriff. Whereupon editor Robie, who was not a "wilter," sarcastically offered three cheers for O'Brien and his fighting men.

When circus proprietor Hurd learned in St. Paul that Justice Robie's decisions had all gone against the circus company, he and his attorneys made plans to appeal to the district court, which was to meet in October. The company would try to bring in Dwyer, the manager, as a witness; perhaps there would also be time to attempt out-of-court settlements with the suing employees. The company and its attorneys, in order to appeal, had to file notices with the justice at Rush City. Robie was in his office on August 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8, but he had no inkling that the company wished to appeal, he said later. On Thursday, August 9, after he had put the *Post* well on the way to publication, he took the morning train to Duluth on business, returning on Saturday.

While he was gone the circus company representatives arrived at Rush City and went to Robie's office. The doors were closed, the records not accessible. No knowledgeable person could be found to help them file their appeals. To the company people only one explanation was possible. Robie had "run away" to keep them from filing. Since they were not without other legal remedies, they returned to St. Paul and went as soon as possible to the Ramsey County Courthouse. Doors were open *there* and accommodating people were on duty, ready to help them, crowed the *Pioneer Press*.

The superior court of Ramsey County issued a writ of mandamus ordering Robie to appear in his office so John S. Hurd could file the company's appeals. It was alleged in the writ that Robie had "absconded" and "conspired" with the employees' attorneys to cheat and defraud Hurd of his rights and had "hidden" the court records so Hurd could not discover the dates of the judgments or the amounts of money the circus company was required to pay. Of course the *Pioneer Press* did not mention that if the company officials had attended the court sessions held in Rush City on Monday, they would have had that information.

The writ of mandamus was mailed to Rush City, where Robie found it August 9 when he returned from Duluth. Now it was his turn to speak — through the columns of the *Post*. The allegations in the mandamus were a lot of nonsense, he wrote on August 17. The "allegator" (Hurd), although he came from Michigan,

**HIS SHERIFF**  
days over, state  
senator John  
Shaleen posed  
for this official  
portrait in 1883.



"was a (blank) [sic] little mistaken." The Ramsey County newspaper apparently took its law from "last year's almanac or Blackberries commentary." Point by point, the editor-justice expounded the law pertaining to the circus cases, concluding that the judgments against Hurd and his company were all lawfully rendered. Next time, Robie suggested, the *Pioneer Press* and the "allegators" should mix a little truth with their mandamus.

Robie admitted that he was not in his office when the "allegators" came to call and asked whether a justice of the peace was required to stay in his office 365 days a year. If called out of town, should he leave his docket on the sidewalk or in his office with the door unlocked for "anybody and everybody to erase[,] change, mutilate or steal?" He had once favored such an open administration of justice, but his recent experience with Gorman and Young in the circus cases had been disillusioning. The sight of those pleadings, attachments, affidavits, bonds, and writs tumbling from Young's coat and hat, as though he were a country post office, had persuaded the justice to be less trusting. He was now keeping court records under lock and key. "But if we ever play lawyer," he concluded, "and want to appeal from a judgment where the justice resides 60 miles from us, we will write or telegraph to the justice that we will be at his office on such a day, to appeal certain cases, and if this had been done in this case they would have found us in our office."

By this time the circus affair was generating more traffic on the St. Paul and Duluth line between Rush City, North Branch, and St. Paul. First, Robie and the circus employees' lawyers boarded the train for St. Paul with the court docket and other papers relating to the claims cases. They went to the Ramsey County Courthouse to answer the questions raised by the mandamus. They explained why Robie had not been in his office, why he had gone to Duluth, and why he had put the court records in a safe place while he was away. It was further pointed out, in simple English, that the circus company had until August 17 to file its appeals. Robie and friends were unable to find Hurd or his attorneys in St. Paul. Nevertheless they went home rejoicing, having billed the circus company \$100 for travel costs. Of the trip Robie wrote, "we have not fully made up our mind as to whether the joke was on Mr. Hurd or the mandamus."

Robie, back at his editorial desk, urged the *Pioneer Press* to please "give us a rest," and to "sing the forty-eleventh hymn, and Pat O'Regan pass around the saucer, to be followed by music by the Rush City band." Enough was enough! The legal sparring ended for awhile. Robie allowed the company to file its appeals in the eight cases, and the matter passed out of the jurisdiction of his court.

Nevertheless Robie continued reporting on the stranded circus people. A number of them found part-



time work on farms and in the wheat fields. Harvesting had just begun, the crop was immense, and the *Post* reported on August 3 that hired hands were "worth from \$1.50 to \$2.00 per day, and the demand for labor is good." Some performers, under the direction of Signor Montanio, traveled about the county giving entertainments, while others went to St. Paul in search of more interesting activities.

Little Kilkenny, the youngest clown, found free board and room 14 miles northwest of North Branch at Cambridge in nearby Isanti County. There he stole a watch; he was arrested, tried, and given 30 days in jail. Pleading for mercy, Kilkenny said, "You know how it 'tis yourself [,] Mr. Justice. I was dead broke and the old watch was only worth \$1, anyhow. Make it ten days [,] Mr. Justice." The justice was unsympathetic, but the rest of Cambridge tried to atone for his cruelty. "Just now," Robie wrote in the *Post* of August 17, "the jail is the most inviting place in Cambridge, and crowds go there daily, the ladies with loads of flowers, cakes, pies and nick nacks [sic] for the little fellow, while he shows his appreciation of their kindness by singing songs[,] turning sommersalts [sic] standing on his head &c."

When the summer was over, Little Kilkenny disappeared from public notice, and most of the other circus people seem to have left the area. Bignon, Montanio, Merrick, Meyett, Buckles, Romer, and Beckett — all but one of those who had brought suit — apparently settled their claims out of court. Robie thought "that Mr. Hurd, the principal defendant bought off the balance of the boys, for a small part of their indebtedness to prevent them from appearing against him." It is presumed that many of the employees who had not sued went on with the owners, returned to their homes, or found other employment.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *Rush City Post*, October 26, 1877; Quillin and Swenson, Case Files 412A, 416A.

Of the original complainants only Quillin and Swenson refused to settle. They retained additional legal counsel, hiring James and Ira Castle of Stillwater to aid their defense. Three other circus men remained in Chisago County to see what luck Quillin would have when the appeal was heard. Wilkes made some mutually satisfactory agreement with the company and dropped his suit.<sup>21</sup>

DISTRICT COURT met in the middle of October at Center City. The new, two-story frame Chisago County Courthouse was situated near the end of Main Street on a peninsula in a jewellike setting of green grass and trees then in autumn colors, surrounded on three sides by a lake. The *Taylors Falls Journal* remarked on October 19: "This is court week at Center City. That burg is lively, lively as a cricket. We never saw so many people assembled there. They came from all parts of the County, and are from all walks of life. The well dressed and stylish St. Paul and Stillwater Lawyers, and the Chisago county farmers met together to gull and be gulled. Judge [Francis M.] Crosby looked his best, and rules with becoming dignity." The *Journal* editor did not believe in quarreling and did not like lawsuits, but he concluded, "We still hold . . . that if one smites you on the right cheek, it is your duty to 'give it to him' on the left."

<sup>21</sup> Wilkes information is in Titus, Case File 422A. On Judge Crosby (1830-1910), below, see MHS Scrapbooks, 59:96.

<sup>22</sup> Quillin and Swenson, Case Files 412A, 416A.

<sup>23</sup> Here and five paragraphs below, see *Rush City Post*, October 26, 1877, October 18, 1878; Downs (whose name may have actually been Edward J. Devine) and Whelan (Whallen) and Wagner (latter two combined), Case Files 421A, 496A. "Whalen," a gymnast, was mentioned in *Clipper*, March 31, 1877; no information was located on the other two men. For a summary of court costs, see Quillin, Case File 412A.

Some brief details of the arguments in the Swenson and Quillin cases were reported in the *Post*, but only the sketchiest of notes in the court records indicate the company's defense. Hurd and R. E. Emmons, the two circus owners who appeared in court, tried to convince the judge and jury that they were not responsible for the actual operation of the circus, having turned over the management to Dwyer. Their attorneys argued that it was necessary to have Dwyer's testimony. Emmons said he had heard that the ex-manager was in Detroit, but a search failed to locate him there. Just before leaving Jackson to attend the trial, Emmons had learned that Dwyer was traveling with the Fair Brothers circus; there had not been time to trace him farther. Hurd and Emmons then requested and were granted a continuance of the cases until the next term of district court to allow them time to find Dwyer.<sup>22</sup>

Now came a new development. Lem Quillin decided that the limited amount of money he would receive from the company was not enough, particularly if a settlement were delayed and more legal fees incurred. He therefore began a new suit for a larger sum. The three other circus members who had been looking on — Thomas J. Whelan, Charles Wagner, and Edwin (or Edward) J. Downs — all decided to sue for their back wages. The lawyers Castle and Dent were suddenly so busy making up new sets of papers to serve on the company that Robie, who was present to report the proceedings and to participate in a suit of his own, gave them a hand.<sup>23</sup>

When Hurd and Emmons realized that they were about to be sued again, they hurriedly "buttoned their coats" and left the courthouse. Not pausing to enjoy the beautiful view, they began walking toward Wyoming, the nearest station on the St. Paul and Duluth railroad line. O'Brien and Gorman, observing that the company men had gone, also departed, hitched up their team of horses, and went after their clients to give them a lift.

While the lawyers and Robie worked on the papers, Lem Quillin, who had been sworn in as a deputy sheriff, prepared his horse for travel. As soon as some of the papers were readied and thrust into his hands, he leaped on the horse and galloped down the road toward Wyoming. Two miles out of Center City, Quillin stopped the "Jackson millionaires" and served the papers.

Back at the courthouse, the last papers were finished and given to a waiting constable. He in turn mounted a horse and set out. So it was that on a mid-October Indian-summer afternoon, an unusual number of travelers plodded, ran, galloped, or otherwise proceeded from Center City toward Wyoming. Like Quillin, the fast-riding constable overtook Hurd and Emmons and served the remaining papers before they and their attorneys reached the railroad station. The train then took the men from Jackson, Michigan, out of the lives of Chisago County residents.

THE CHISAGO County Courthouse, about 1880



Neither returned to Minnesota when the great Australian Circus suit was continued a year later in district court at Stillwater. Instead Darlin B. Lincoln, the third of the circus owners, represented the company. In that court session, the jury's decision favored Quillin and his friends, but for some reason, not clearly stated in the transcripts of the case, Lincoln was not considered liable for the company's debts, and there were more delays in the final settlement. At last the bonds posted by attorneys O'Brien and Gorman were forfeited to pay for court costs; goods and merchandise were sold; and services rendered long before were in some measure recompensed.

THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN Circus Company had "gone up," and its eventful encounter with the people of Minnesota soon faded from local memory. No record has been found of what finally happened to the circus. Some of its performers who rose to greater professional heights were named in later issues of the *Clipper*, but the Great Australian Circus of 1877 was not mentioned there again. In all probability it underwent another metamorphosis, to emerge with a new name under new owners, another manager, and certainly another first clown.

In Chisago County, Sheriff John Shaleen was elected to the first of two terms as state senator. He also served 12 years as probate judge. Hial Robie later moved to Yankton, South Dakota, where he edited and published a newspaper. J. J. F. Swenson built and operated a sawmill at Almeland, nine miles east of North Branch. The Wilkes family prospered in their joint blacksmithing and hotel businesses, but Mrs. Wilkes eventually divorced her husband.<sup>24</sup>

Clown Quillin stayed in North Branch, but for years the circus fever remained in his blood. On January 19, 1878, he again advertised in the *Clipper*, seeking an engagement as a "Musical Clown, Trick Tumbler, Gymnast, Leaper and Champion Double Somersault thrower over nine horses." A month later his advertisement was altered to read simply "Champion Double Somersault Thrower of the World over nine horses." In the spring Quillin's wife and their little Lulu arrived in North Branch from Syracuse. They became active members of the local Episcopal church, and Lem joined two fraternal orders, the North Star Lodge of the Ancient Order of United Woodmen and the Knights of Pythias. He went into a short-lived business arrangement with a local storekeeper dealing in dry and liquid goods. "For a good square drink of corn or grape juice," the *Post* said, "go to Quillan's [sic]. He keeps also a fine line of cigars and is very obliging."<sup>25</sup>

Three years later the *Clipper* reported that Lem had given a Fourth of July oration followed by a comedy entertainment to "several thousand people" at a celebration sponsored by the Lake Elizabeth boating club in



THE WIFE of Lem Quillin's grandson, clad in the first clown's costume for a party in the 1960s

neighboring Isanti County. His ability as a clown and his skill as a "negro comedian" were highly praised. In May, 1882, a week after Quillin's son Leon was born, the *Post* reported that "Lem Quillan [sic], the double-jointed clown and comedian has left the mercantile business here, and accepted a position in a first-class circus traveling from Chicago to New Mexico. We wish him success and a safe return to gaze upon the young clown he left behind." A year later, calling himself a "Comic Clown and Vocalist" and "the Great American Shakespearian

<sup>24</sup>On Shaleen, see W. J. Toensing, *Minnesota Congressmen, Legislators, and Other Elected State Officials*, 108 (St. Paul, 1971); *Chisago County Courier*, November 2, 1901, p. 1; on Robie, see *Rush City Post*, July 29, 1892; on Wilkes and Swenson, see White, in *Dalles Visitor*, 1981, p. 4, 5.

<sup>25</sup>*Clipper*, January 19, February 23, 1878; *Rush City Post*, February 8, May 31, October 4, 1878; *North Branch Review*, December 16, 1892.



Clown and Comic Singer." Quillin advertised that he was open for engagements for the tenting season.<sup>26</sup>

When no tempting offers came his way, the former clown purchased most of a block in downtown North Branch and expanded into several lines of business. He was postmaster of North Branch during the first Cleveland administration, he operated his grocery and dry-goods store, and he became the proprietor of a hotel. In leisure moments he wrote poetry, umpired baseball games, and hunted deer and bear with other North Branch sportsmen. Although he had said good-bye to the circus world, he was not ready to abandon show business, for in the 1890s he built and managed an opera house.<sup>27</sup>

The ground floor of Quillin's two-story, 26-by-80-foot Opera Hall in North Branch had a storage room, Lem's office, and a "sample room" or bar which sported a nickel slot machine. Upstairs the hall was "finished complete with stage and curtains and all the paraphernalia of a theatre." It had a seating capacity of 600, curtains with scenes painted by "Sasman & Lands of Chicago," and a \$900 piano from the Nathan Ford music store in St. Paul. The *Post* predicted that the "fun loving" Lem would "no doubt give the people many an opportunity of enjoying Shakespeare on his own boards." Notices in the Rush City and North Branch newspapers suggested that the fare tended to light comedy rather than to Shakespeare, but there is no doubt that in its heyday the opera house was a popular place.

Quillin advertised that he would "play all traveling troupes on percentage, or rent the house by the night."

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<sup>26</sup> *Clipper*, July 16, 1881, November 11, 1882, February 17, 1883, *Rush City Post*, May 5, 12, 1882.

<sup>27</sup> For Quillin's property, see Quit Claim Deeds, Lots 1-3, 10-12, Block 6, Chisago County Register of Deeds, Center City, Grantee Index, p. 628. On the Arlington Hotel and Opera Hall, below, see *Rush City Post*, November 28, 1890, January 8, 1892; *North Branch Review*, September 25, 1891, June 17, August 19, 1892, November 30, 1894, January 11, 1895. See also Smith, "Notes on Smith and Quillin Families," 2, 3. Three Quillin poems are published in Thomas W. Herringshaw, *Poets of America*, 754 (Chicago, 1890).

<sup>28</sup> *North Branch Review*, November 20, 27, 1891, April 22, 1892, November 23, 1894, January 4, 11, 18, February 8, April 5, 1895.

<sup>29</sup> *North Branch Review*, January 11, February 8, 1895, March 1, April 5, 1895.

<sup>30</sup> Anderson interview; *North Branch Review*, September 25, 1891.

<sup>31</sup> *North Branch Review*, December 9, 1904, p. 5; Smith, "Notes on Smith and Quillin Families"; St. Paul city directories; author's interviews with Dean Anderson and Mrs. Clayton Anderson, January 21, 1978, notes in author's possession.

Among the groups to appear were the St. Paul Comedy Company, the Kickapoo Indian Medicine Company, Professor W. F. Whittier of Minneapolis, who gave exhibitions of mind reading, and Rush City amateurs performing the comic drama "Broken Fetters." A variety of musical and dancing programs in the Opera Hall provided additional entertainment for North Branch residents of the gay nineties. Local citizens engaged the hall for birthday dances; there were "social" and "soda" hops and fancy balls on St. Patrick's Day, Washington's Birthday, and Thanksgiving Day, as well as a Promenade Concert on Christmas Eve.<sup>28</sup>

Following Opera Hall entertainments Lem often arranged special suppers at his "repaired and newly furnished" Arlington Hotel, where the dining room could serve 100 guests at a time. On one occasion more than 200 "lovers of terpsichore" from nearby towns arrived by special trains to attend a ball and supper at this "popular hostelry." On another evening the Quillins entertained 14 tables of progressive euchre, and Lem, a gracious host, won the booby prize. The hotel, which was said to be the best-equipped house on the St. Paul and Duluth line, catered especially to traveling salesmen, 14 of whom stayed there on one banner night in April, 1895.<sup>29</sup>

Always the showman, Quillin not only sold dry goods and groceries at his "Old Reliable Store" but offered entertainment, too. Someone has recalled that Lem would juggle balls to entertain children. Effie Klicker, who lived near the Quillin home as a small girl in the 1890s, remembered him as a "short, heavy-set" man with red hair and a stomach that "shook when he laughed" who "loved to play with kids." In a typical gesture, he put old wooden "circus horses" in the backyard of the store for kids to play on.<sup>30</sup>

Overextended credit and general hard times forced Quillin out of business at North Branch. For a time he managed a hotel in Hibbing, but by 1906 he and his family had moved to St. Paul, where he became a traveling salesman. During the next 20 years he worked for a number of companies "on the road"; he was still employed, by the McFadden Company of Dubuque, Iowa, selling tea, coffee, and spices when he died in 1925 at age 76. In North Branch his Opera Hall and hotel are gone, but his old house still stands on Sixth Street near Elm, the only tangible reminder of Lem Quillin, first clown of the Great Australian Circus, the first circus to show on the railroad line between St. Paul and Duluth.<sup>31</sup>

THE PICTURE on p. 318 is in the Dallas Public Library, the contract on p. 324 is in the MHS division of archives and manuscripts. All other photographs are from the MHS audio-visual library.





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