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Date 20-9-89

Interviewer R Melville

A HISTORY OF THE deGLORION FAMILY
AND THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN LIVE THEATRE IN NEWCASTLE

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One of the first theatrical performances in Newcastle was held in the early 1830's in the hospital room attached to the stockade of the old Customs House. The Court House, on the corner of Hunter and Nelson Streets, was also used for concerts and vaudeville. (1)

In 1882, the Ladies of the Grand Opera prompted Mr. J. Coffin, the manager of the Commercial Hotel, to convert a barnlike structure at the back of the Rosemary Melville

Newcastle with the first permanent theatre, the original Victoria Theatre and was situated on the corner of Thursday, 10.00 a.m.
Hart and Hunter Streets. Theatre companies would come from Sydney by steamer, perform in Newcastle, then proceed to

Maitland. This theatre was destroyed by fire in 1884. In 1889 a larger hall also in Hart Street was converted into the first Theatre Royal, which accommodated 400 people. It was the recognized playhouse of the city until the opening of the New Victoria in 1874, when its popularity declined and in 1877 it became an American bowling saloon. (2)

The New Victoria Theatre opened in Perkins Street on April 17, 1876. It was of cast-iron construction, with seating consisting of Austrian chairs on battens, a pit with

A HISTORY OF THE deGLORION FAMILY

AND THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN LIVE THEATRE IN NEWCASTLE

One of the first theatrical performances in Newcastle was held in the early 1850's in the hospital room attached to the stockade of the old Customs House. The Court House, on the corner of Hunter and Bolton Streets, was also used for concerts and vaudeville. (1)

In 1852, the inadequacy of these venues prompted Mr. J. Croft, the licensee of the Commercial Hotel, to convert a barn-like structure at the back of the hotel to provide Newcastle with its first permanent theatre. This was the original Victoria Theatre and was situated on the corner of Watt and Hunter Streets. Theatre companies would come from Sydney by steamer, perform in Newcastle, then proceed to Maitland. This theatre was destroyed by fire in 1859. In 1859 a former hay store in Watt Street was converted into the first Theatre Royal, which accommodated 400 people. It was the recognised playhouse of the city until the opening of the New Victoria in 1876, when its popularity declined and in 1877 it became an American bowling saloon. (2)

The New Victoria theatre opened in Perkins Street on April 17, 1876. It was of galvanised iron construction, with seating consisting of Austrian chairs on battens, a pit with

alternate rising and fixed forms and Austrian chairs in the dress circle. William deGlorion was the first manager, a position he held until about 1885. He was a popular and respected member of the theatrical profession and the city and, together with his family, frequently gave his services in aid of local charities. Later on, his brother, Edwin also acted as manager of the Victoria theatre.

The deGlorion family had settled in Newcastle in 1876 after enjoying a distinguished career as flying trapeze artists. Two brothers, Edwin and William Wynne, together with a young Irish girl named Lolo, left London to perform in Paris, where they adopted the name "deGlorion", which they felt was a better stage name, and would also please their father, who did not approve of their vagabond lifestyle. The Brothers deGlorion and Lolo then travelled extensively throughout Europe, India, China and the United States. They arrived in Sydney in 1875 where they performed and were involved in several business ventures before forming a company known as Lolo and deGlorion's Comedy Minstrel and Athletic Combination, which travelled throughout Australia with great success. In 1876 the Company came to Newcastle where it disbanded after a successful season at the Theatre Royal.(3)

According to Mr. William deGlorion Jr., the old galvanised iron Victoria theatre was demolished in 1891 and the New

Victoria was erected in its place. The new theatre had stalls and a dress circle and a family circle, with three boxes on either side. The acoustics were particularly good in the new theatre, and when it was remodelled in 1906 to bring it into line with the best theatres in Australia, the contract specified that the dome was not to be altered in order to preserve its acoustic quality.

The deGlorion family's involvement with the Victoria Theatre continued when Edwin's son, William, began working as a programme boy at the age of 11. He worked as a ticket seller before being promoted to Assistant Gasman on the stage staff, eventually rising to the position of Stage Manager. Gas and limelight provided the only source of stage lighting, and the smell of escaping gas, with the odour of the glue and paint of the scenery, cigars and perfume combined to create a smell unique to the theatre.

The scenery and sets used in the theatre were elaborate and considerable physical effort was required in order to execute scene changes. In the big pantomimes there could be up to 50 cloths to be pulled up by hand as the show progressed.

Visual effects were spectacular, including live horses on stage and a 60ft. x 6ft. x 6ft. tank of water into which a bushranger dived. (4) A device similar to a moving walkway was used in the production of a horse-racing drama.

The theatre was a popular form of entertainment for all the Novocastrians, from the wealthy, aristocratic Wood family who were accorded the honour of a red carpet, to the miners who would come from miles around to see their favourite actress Maggie Moore, in a play called "Struck Oil".

The Victoria was the focal point of Perkins Street, which used to be the central part of Newcastle. On Melbourne Cup Day the bookies would set up tables and umbrellas in the street. The results would come through in morse code to the Post Office, where a messenger would be waiting in a trap and pony to relay the message to the bookies.

Many of the young Newcastle men enjoyed working, in an amateur capacity, as stage hands in the theatre. Local people, including children, acted as "supers" in crowd scenes. They owned their own little make-up boxes, and would arrive at the theatre long before the show began to apply their make-up before the professionals arrived.

Throughout the 1920's and 1930's, the motion picture industry flourished and "picture palaces" appeared in almost every suburb and township in the area, providing an alternative source of entertainment for the inhabitants of the city. The Victoria Theatre became primarily a cinema, but retained its capacity and equipment for live performances until it closed

in March, 1966. (5) Although it is now a clothing store, the old curtain remains and the stage has been incorporated into the layout of the shop. The dress circle and the dome, which is sadly deteriorating markedly, are still visible. Unfortunately, part of the upper floor is unsound and lacks lighting, making a closer inspection of this area impossible. An amateur group which donates the proceeds of each season to the deGlorion family's traditional involvement with the theatre was continued when William's daughter, Del, became co-producer for the Gilbert and Sullivan Players in 1956 with Geoffrey Solomon, a Newcastle dentist. When he moved away from Newcastle, in 1970, Del became producer. Her association with the Gilbert and Sullivan Players lasted for 23 years. Del learned a great deal from her father who, in his capacity as stage manager, usually worked in the prompt corner, from where he was able to observe the stage movements of all the actors. Del also learned much from Mrs. Katie Hunter, a professional producer who came from Sydney and knew the traditional movements from the original productions. Newcastle theatregoers have always enthusiastically supported Gilbert and Sullivan operas. The first presentation of "Patience" in Newcastle in 1883 came only two years after the opera was first produced in London. It was performed at the Victoria Theatre and featured a "stupendous cataract of real water culminating in a handsome lake in midstage" (6)

The Gilbert and Sullivan Players was formed in 1951 and their first production was "The Mikado", which was performed in the Cathedral Hall. The producer was John Laman and the performers were mainly members of the Cathedral choir and church.(7) Subsequent performances have been held at the City Hall, the Roxy Theatre and the Hunter Theatre. They are an amateur group which donates the proceeds of each season to local charities. For many years the Company travelled to Tamworth to support the Tamworth Gilbert and Sullivan Society, and they once travelled to Scones to perform. One of the first charities to benefit was the T.P.I. Association. Money was raised to help build T.P.I. House in Scott Street, which became the permanent venue for rehearsals for the Company. In 1988 T.P.I. House was demolished and its occupants relocated in the Frederick Ash Building, which has now become the home of the Gilbert and Sullivan Players.

Although she has officially retired, Del's wide experience and generous nature combine to make this difficult. Her skills are still in demand and she has travelled to Gosford and Maitland to produce shows, continuing the deGloriion family's long and distinguished association with live theatre in Newcastle.

FOOTNOTES

1. Wilfred James Goold, The Growth of Newcastle, Newcastle, (no publication date given)
2. Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate, September, 1972.
3. Ibid, 15th April, 1898.
4. Ibid, 14th November, 1959.
5. Ibid, 16th May, 1970.
6. Ibid, 4th May, 1968.
7. Ibid, 18th April, 1970

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Goold, Wilfred James, The Growth of Newcastle, Newcastle (no publication date given)

Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate, various dates.

Unpublished Documents

Memoirs of Mr. W. deGlorion

Taped interview with Del deGlorion, 6th September, 1989.

SUMMARY

A HISTORY OF THE deGLORION FAMILY

THEir AND THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN LIVE THEATRE IN NEWCASTLE

Newcastle since 1870 when the Flying deGlorions performed their world-renowned lampoon act at the Theatre Royal. Shortly afterwards William and Edith deGlorion settled in Newcastle and began an association with the theatre which was to be INTERVIEW WITH DEL deGLORION - 6TH SEPTEMBER, 1989

William became the first manager of the Victoria theatre, a position later filled by his brother, Edwin. Edith's son, William, began working in the Victoria theatre at a young age to help support the family. He rose to the position of Stage Manager and was the first secretary for the Theatrical Employees Union in Newcastle. Edith's daughter, Del, continued the family tradition when she became involved with production work for the Comedy Players and the Gilbert and Sullivan Society.

Due to Del's knowledge of production as Rosemary Melville to her by her father, she often acted as Open Foundation Australian History while in Sydney she managed the production of the professional Thursday, 10.00 a.m. She was born (with Edith a professional) 21st September, 1989 from Sydney and knew the traditional movements from the original shows.

SUMMARY

The deGlorion family has been involved in live theatre in Newcastle since 1876 when the Flying deGlorions performed their world-renowned trapeze act at the Theatre Royal. Shortly afterwards, William and Edwin deGlorion settled in Newcastle and began an association with the theatre which was to be continued by the next two generations.

William became the first manager of the Victoria theatre, a position later filled by his brother, Edwin. Edwin's son, William, began working in the Victoria theatre at eleven years of age to help support the family. He rose to the position of Stage Manager and was the first secretary for the Theatrical Employees Union in Newcastle. William's daughter, Del, continued the family tradition when she became involved with production work for the Comedy Players and the Gilbert and Sullivan Society.

Much of Del's knowledge of production details was passed on to her by her father, who often acted as prompter and was able to observe the movements of the professional actors. She also learnt much from a professional producer who came from Sydney, and knew the traditional movements from the original shows.

The old Victoria theatre was a corrugated iron building, which was demolished to make way for the new Victoria, which was renowned for its good acoustics. This asset was protected when the contract for remodelling the theatre specified that the dome was not to be altered. Before the advent of electricity, limelight and gas were used for stage lighting. The Victoria had the benefit of the best limelight plant in Australia. The odour of escaping gas, glue and paint of the scenery, cigars and perfume, provided the theatre with a characteristic aroma.

Elaborate scenery and mechanical equipment provided theatregoers with realistic effects, including live horses running on a moving footpath, with moving scenery to give the impression of a horserace, and a dramatic imitation of a big bushfire, achieved by blowing coloured papers, and the use of smoke effects.

Local people derived much pleasure from the theatre, both by attending and by active involvement. Many young men became amateur stagehands, and other people, including children, acted as "supers" in the crowd scenes.

Travelling shows came to Newcastle from Sydney and performed in tents which were pitched on vacant blocks around the city. Often the performers would parade through town, accompanied

by a band, prior to staging a performance.

The deGlorion family was associated with theatre at a time when it was an accepted and popular form of entertainment for people from all walks of life. Live theatre must now compete with cinemas, television and home videos for box office sales. However, there is still a demand for live theatre in Newcastle, as witnessed by a number of successful theatre companies and consistently successful Gilbert and Sullivan seasons.

INTERVIEW WITH MISS A. (DEL) DeGLORION

6th September, 1989

My name is Rosemary Melville and I am interviewing Del deGlorion at her home in Parnell Place. Del's family has been involved in live theatre in Newcastle for many years.

DEL, PERHAPS WE COULD BEGIN BY TALKING ABOUT YOUR GRANDFATHER.

Grandpa deGlorion and his elder brother were flying trapeze artists and they had a young lady with them called Lolo. I am not sure of her proper name. She was a young Irish girl. They came from London and they were very athletic and used to go to gymnasiums and do a lot of swimming and Uncle Bill got the idea of forming this flying trapeze act and they ran away from home. Their father, of course, was naturally very, very upset about this because that vagabond life wasn't thought very highly of and he didn't want his name connected with it in any way. Later on, when they were in France, somebody there suggested that they take the name deGlorion as a professional name, so to please their father and also because it was better for the theatre they took the name deGlorion.

Grandpa met a very nice little Irish girl and he mentioned to his brother that he thought she had possibilities to develop into a good little flying trapeze artist with them so he introduced her to his brother and uncle Bill married her in a

very short space of time. So that was the Brothers deGlorion and Lolo.

They travelled all over the world. In Paris they used to do three shows a night. They would have a carriage waiting for them, a brougham I think you called it, to take them from one theatre to another. They travelled all over Europe, then India, China and then went to the United States for a couple of years. They performed for Barnham and Bailey. Grandpa had a big fall in New York. In the theatres they used to rig the trapezes up above the audience and he was merrily flying around and he fell, but he bounced on to the galleries and it broke his fall so he didn't suffer a bad injury. It was very bad to have a fall in those days because the top notch flying trapeze artists didn't use nets. You weren't in the first grade if you used a net. So eventually they landed in Australia and, very sadly, Uncle Bill and Lolo parted. She married a gentleman in Newcastle who was a portrait artist, or painter, a Mr. Waterhouse. I think some of his painting are in Tattersal's Club, racehorses. They moved to Melbourne and she wasn't allowed to ever mention that she was ever in a flying trapeze act. My grandmother and my mother visited her when they were going to England just before the First World War, a year or two before, and she had all her photographs hidden in the family album, tucked under others.

Grandfather and his brother, although they were very good flying trapeze artists, they were very bad businessmen. They landed in Australia, which was very good in those days, with about £10,000 each. They were £100 a week artists which was very good pay in those days. They took a hotel in Sydney and went bust, then they did another business and went bust, then they came back to Newcastle where they had performed at the old Theatre Royal, I think it was. They liked Newcastle and Uncle Bill became the first manager of the old Victoria Theatre. He relinquished that position about 1885. Later on, my Grandfather, Edwin deGlorion became the manager of the Victoria Theatre.

My Dad started in the theatrical business as programme boy. He was the eldest of a family of twelve, I think two of them had died, two little girls had died and poor Grandad, although he was a good scholar, had to leave school at 11 to go to work to help support the family.

He started as a programme boy. The programmes were free of charge. Then he was promoted to selling books of the opera and handing out opera glasses at 1/- for the night. The patrons would leave the glasses on the seats and Dad would collect them in the morning, after the performance. After that he rose to be a ticket seller and he received 2/6d a night for taking tickets but when he was promoted to being a seller he got 3/4d a night.

He travelled from that position to the backstage. His next rise was assistant gasman on the stage staff. In those days there was only gas used on the stage for lighting.

Electricity was only in its infancy then. Dad said that they had a very good man, a Mr. Thomas Gore, and he was the proprietor of the acknowledged best limelight plant in Australia, all theatres included, so the Victoria had the best limelight plant. Now, I'll tell you something funny about that. There was an actor, I don't know if it was George Rignold, but he used to come with all the old dramas and he was an actor manager, a very good actor and a very good manager but he always wanted the limelight on him. Dad said he would be acting away, and he would say, "Homb, you cannot take you daughter from me, (put the bloody limelight on me!)" He would edge over to the side of the stage, he always wanted the limelight on him. This play, I don't know what the name of it was, but Dad said they were in a big tunnel and the poor heroine was tied across the railway tracks, or something, and he got her up, the train was thundering, you could hear train and he was pulling bricks out of the side to get it and he just got the bricks out and all the time was saying "Put the bloody limelight on me" and Dad said it was very, very funny. He was a very good actor all the same.

Dad said his earliest recollections of the Victoria Theatre,

and in those days it was only a corrugated iron building with stalls, they had Austrian chairs on battens and then the pit behind had alternate rising and fixed forms and the dress circle had Austrian chairs as well. Dad's earliest recollection was Bland Holt's production of "The World" and then it was Bland Holt's company again in "A Run of Luck", a horse racing drama and Dad said it was marvellous, the effects. It was a sensation like a big racing drama and they would have revolving, like the footpaths that you walk on now and you don't have to walk. A revolving stage I suppose. The horses would be galloping on it but the stage would be going in the other direction. The scenery behind would be moving so it gave the impression that the horses were racing. He said they used to get some wonderful effects. There was a big one called "The Ruling Passion" It was a sensational drama. It showed a big balloon rising up from the ground and then it went up into the clouds. It was beginning to lose height and the ballast was being thrown overboard, then the balloon sank into the raging sea. He said they got all those effects. It was amazing. They would move the scenery so that it looked as though the balloon was going up and coming down. I remember, I think it was "The Squatter's Daughter", he told me about the the big bushfire, the effects in that. They had all coloured papers at the end. They would blow them up and you would see all little flames coming up the back and then they would get higher and higher

and they would get smoke effects. He said they would get the effect of a big bushfire. They had some wonderful effects in those days. I'm digressing.

KEEP GOING, IT'S WONDERFUL.

His next recollection was of Maggy Moore as Lizzy Stauffell and J.C. Williamson as John Stauffell. They brought this play out from America. They bought it from somebody over there. It became a great sensation in Australia. I suppose it was the most favourite play of any. Dad said the miners would come for miles to see Maggy Moore. They all adored her. One night he said to the manager, the Saturday night was always crowded at the theatre, "Don't you think it would be better to put "Struck Oil" on on Saturday night instead of the week night?" He said "No, my boy, Saturday night they'll come and look at anything, it doesn't matter what's on, but it takes a good play to bring them out of a week night, so we'll keep "Struck Oil" for that because they will come anywhere to see Maggie Moore.

A little while after that, Dad said the Victoria was demolished and the New Victoria was erected in its place, with stalls and a dress circle and a family circle and three boxes on either side. I can just remember that. I made my appearance first there. There was a very nice man called

Frank Reece and he was married to a girl who used to be in the ballet with her two other sisters, there was Katie, Rose and Georgie. I just can't think of their surname. They were in the ballets. They used to tell me funny things that happened when they were on the stage. Georgie was a real clip. She was very funny. She told me one day, "We were only little girls, only about fourteen and fifteen, and she said in Sydney J.C. Williamson directed everything. He was very strict. He would never let the little ballet girls go out between the matinee and the night show. He always gave them a meat pie and an apple and they had to stay in the theatre. She said during a production they had to march up the back and then come down a whole lot of steps, leading down, right across the stage. They had to be Chinese. They all had to come down with their fingers up, little tripping steps, like they used to do (acts), Ching-Chong-Chinaman kind of steps and she said instead of her coming down like that she came down like an old Chinaman. boom-de boom-de boom (acts) and he said, "Stop the show! White (that was their surname)-get back there and come down again". She said, "My heart stopped beating; so I went up to the top of the stairs and came down again ching-chong-Chinaman, very daintily", and he said "No, get up there and come down like you did before". So she got up again and came down like the old Chinaman, wobbling from side to side. He said, "Now you girls, all get up there and come down the same way".

Q. WHAT ABOUT SOME OF THE PEOPLE WHO CAME TO THE THEATRE?

What was the name of the brewery people?

WOOD.

Mr. Wood, who married Jessie They were the aristocrats. Dad said they would literally put red carpets down for them. Mr. Wood was a very big man so they used to put a big seat there for him. Dad said it used to be terribly funny. Everybody would come to the theatre and they always dressed up in their evening frocks. They looked lovely. The boys up in the gallery, when they came down, would say "Ahhhhhhhhh". Cries of admiration, just put on. The boys in the gallery used to have a wonderful time. Poor old Uncle George worked up in the gallery and he would have to go along and say "Right, move along, squeeze another couple in. There were no backs on the seats. You just sat up, (well, it was like that down in Sydney. I remember the old Her Majesty's, you would just go and sit on wooden benches with a bit of backing at the back, no padding) You'd sit there and they'd say "Move up".

The theatre was Dad and his mates' playground. Dad gradually worked his way up until he was stage manager. In those days, (it's just like the amateur theatres now) they

didn't pay the stage hands, they all worked for the love of it. All the local boys, there was big Tom Teale, Rangey Morris and then there was a big fellow, Dad met him and asked him to come along and help, called Louie Shacht. He became the first head mechanist for Sir Benjamin Fuller. I remember when a lovely show was on in Sydney, about 25 years ago, it was one of Ivor Novello's and he was the head mechanist there. My uncle had gone down to live in Sydney and he said "Do come and give us a hand with the show" and Uncle Jack (All Dad's brothers worked in the theatre, backstage) They used to have big melodramas. They would have 12 sets and scenes.

By this time Dad was courting Mum. Mum said, "I could always go to the theatre but I could never see the end of it because I had to be home at 9 o'clock. She used to get home later because Dad said he couldn't take her home until after interval. There was always a big scene after interval so they would set the big scene at interval and Dad would go - "Come on, Nell" and Mum would have to come out of the theatre and he would run her all over King Street, up to Watt Street. Her sisters would be upset if it was after half past nine. "Oh, Nellie" She never came to any harm.

WHAT ABOUT THE TRAVELLING SHOWS THAT CAME TO NEWCASTLE?

Oh, the travelling shows. Yes, of course. There was George Sorlie. He was a wonderful man. He had a beautiful voice. He used to bring shows. I think it was Mr. Sorlie, Dad told me, when he first came they used to march the big band down the street and he would throw the baton right up in the air and twirl it around and catch it. He was wonderful at that. I'm almost sure that was Mr. Sorlie. The little travelling shows used to come with "Robbery under Arms" and all those and "East Lynne" and there was one that used to come in Telford Street, on the vacant allotment between the Pacific Hotel and Tyrrell House. They used to have them there. I remember I saw "Robbery Under Arms" there with Dad.

WERE THESE IN THE OPEN?

No, no, tent shows. There was a young lightning sketch artist on, very good, Don Nicholl. He became one of the leading comedians for J.C. Williamsons after that. He was very good. He came back later on. Mr. Stanley Grant used to be the manager for Williamsons and bring all the travelling shows out. I remember I was about 14 or 15. They did "Flora Dora" and "Gypsy Love" and that lovely one, George Bernard Shaw's book, "Chocolate Soldier". I remember Don Nichol was the comedian and he took the lead in "Chocolate Soldier". Oh! He was a heart-throb. All the girls fell in love with him. His wife was in the chorus and I remember Mr. Grant saying

that they had just lost their little baby, she had just died. I think she was about two year old.

I remember Kate Howard who used to write her own shows. She used to bring shows. She was so nice. The last recollection I had she was sitting in our front room and she said "Oh, Mr. deGlorion, (in those days nobody called you by your first name) I'm bringing a show up to Newcastle, a tent show, and she said you've got a hoarding next door to the Trades Hall. She said, "Could you knock the middle out of your hoarding so that it could be my entrance?" and he said, "Certainly", I had to laugh, they had just built that hoarding a fortnight before. Dad and his brother had built what they called a deluxe hoarding with fancywork on it, and everything, and they knocked the middle out because they admired this lady so much. (laughter). She told me, while I was there, she said there was no actors equity and she used to take tent shows outback. She said this time they went broke and she had her company and they had no money so she went to the hotel, to the owner of the local hotel and she said "Would you send my company back to Sydney and I'll work with you and pay it back?" She said "I worked for him for two years to pay the debt. They were very good in those days. Mr. Sorley came once in the depression and it was absolutely dreadful. It used to be the same when Williamsons used to come up. There would be about 15 in the stalls. Hardly anybody. They

couldn't afford to come. Dad was so upset about Mr. Sorlie. It was such a bad season. He had done a lot of bill posting for him and he didn't send him an account. He said "Oh, the poor devil, what a bad season". About six months later, a cheque came in the mail from Mr. Sorl thanking him for his forbearance. He paid. They were wonderful people in those days. Very honourable.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST EXPERIENCE IN THE THEATRE?

Oh, my first experience. Oh, I went off that! Mr. Reece, Frank Reece, brought a show up. He was married to Katie White, one of the ballet girls. I was a cranky baby and Mum used to pay a little girl to look after me, to take me for walks. She landed up at the matinee performance (Dad put her in for nothing) and I'm there, and Mr. Reece said, "Oh, we've forgotten about a prop for the baby", the baby that they had to argue about all through the show, or the last act. Dad said, "Well, my little baby's out there." He said "That's right, Willie," (they always called Dad "Willie") "get your little baby." Dad said just at the final scene when they had been talking about the baby in the cot, they stuck me in the cot and they lifted a proper little baby out. The theatre went "Ohhhhh" "Oh, he said, that's wonderful, Willie, you can bring her down every performance." Dad said "No, not on your life." So that was my debut.

SO YOU WEREN'T VERY OLD.

No, I don't remember it.

The next I remember, I was learning dancing from Mrs. Clark-Hawkes. Madam Clark-Hawkes. I think all the old timers would remember her. All the kids used to learn dancing from her. I don't know how she taught them because it was such a little room up in the top of Palings, where Kessie Fraser had her studio. There would be all these kids, and they were doing plies. I didn't now they were plies because I was so little. I thought they all looked like potplants. (acts, laughter)

The recollection came of that wonderful actor. Some said he wasn't such a good actor but I think he was wonderful. A Shakesperian man. He sent to Mrs. Hawkes, for the fairies in "A Midsummer Night's Dream". I was there and he said "Has anybody done any theatrical work - anybody been in any plays? I was going to say, "I've been in an eisteddford" and Mrs. Hawkes piped up and said, "Baby was Topsy in 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'." So she was Peasblossom. I was Mustard Seed. There was a very good little actress played Puck. She went onto international fame afterwards. I think her name was Ley. I always remember, they told us what to do. He said "What's your name?" and I said "Mustard Seed". Then I had to say "What's your will?" and he'd say "Nothing

Monsieur Mustard Seed but to help Peasblossom scrrrrratch my back". I remember years after, Ken Mantle was playing Bottom and he said "Nothing, Monsieur Mustard Seed but to help Peasblossom scratch my back." I said "No, no, no, - it isn't "scratch my back, it's scrrrrrrratch my back". I remembered it from when I was about five or six years old. (laughter)

I've got so much I could tell you and I'm not telling you anything.

WHAT ABOUT GILBERT AND SULLIVAN?

John Laman came to me one day, I was in the old Choral Society, in the ballet and John Laman was in that with Leah Morris and dear old Mrs. Katie Hunter used to come up. She was a professional producer. That's where I learnt a lot. I used to listen to everything she said. Dad said "You listen to her, Del, because there is nothing she doesn't know". She knew all the traditional bits and pieces of the old musical comedies like "The Quaker Girl" and "The Country Girl" and "The Belle of New York". She knew all the traditional movements they did in the original show. I used to hang on her words and watch everything she did. The other one who taught me a lot was my dad. We'd go to the theatre and he would say "Now watch this entrance, Del, now you must make a

good entrance and when you are leaving the stage you work up to your exit. You never finish in the middle of the stage and then walk off." He would point out all these good points to me.

SO HE PRODUCED AS WELL?

No, he was very observant. He used to be in the prompt corner most of the time, being the stage manager. Before that there was George Rignold, all those actors, and he used to watch them and take notice of what they were doing, and he would pass it on to me.

Anyhow, John Laman came and he had the John Laman Gilbert and Sullivan Society. He wanted me to do the gavotte and cachucha for "The Gondoliers". So that's how I came to get into the Gilbert and Sullivan Society. John wasn't very well at the time and I think we were doing "Yeomen of the Guard" and he said "Del, I don't feel up to it. Will you produce "Yeomen of the Guard". I said "Oh, John" - I felt it was presumption on my part. I said "I'll tell you what to do-you give me the script and I'll work it out and do it, but you take charge. He said "Allright", so we did it like that. We did "Yeomen of the Guard" like that, we did "Iolanthe" like that. He just gave me carte blanche to do what I liked and then we worked it out between us. Then he left and Geoff

Solomon was made producer. Geoff said he would take it on as long as he had me and he had Elaine Boyd and Ron Bovis (business director) and Johnny Botterill. As long as he had us there he would take it on. I was the Assistant Producer then. Geoff was very good - he wouldn't have that. He said "No, you're the Co-Producer." Some people like all the limelight and some don't, but Geoff was very, very good that way. When Geoff moved away I became the producer. I was with Gilbert and Sullivan for 23 years and I don't think I missed a rehearsal.

THEY DONATE THEIR PROCEEDS TO CHARITY?

Yes. Then I retired, but it's hard to retire because people kept asking me to go back. I went down to Gosford. I enjoyed that. I did "Gondoliers" again. I love "The Gondoliers". Then Twink Story asked me to go up to Maitland.

Wally Carroll, who was in the Gilbert and Sullivan, a very talented boy, started The Comedy Players. Then he went and joined Williamsons and so after a while I became producer of The Comedy Players. We did "The New Moon" and "Carousel" and "Gypsy Love", good old "Gypsy Love".

DO THEY DONATE TO CHARITY AS WELL?

Oh yes, they donated to charity. That kept going for quite a long while. Marjorie Biggins took over after I left. If you were in the Choral Society you didn't go near Colin Chapman's (laughter) There was great rivalry. There was only the two, but after a while John Laman's company formed, and the the different ones. There were too many companies and not enough players, so they started interchanging and that broke down a lot of barriers.

SO YOU WERE DOING COMEDY PLAYERS AND GILBERT AND SULLIVAN AT THE SAME TIME?

Yes, I used to do two productions a year. Gilbert and Sullivan and Comedy Players.

THAT WAS BUSY.

Yes, I was on the go all the while.

WHAT CHANGES HAVE YOU SEEN IN THE THEATRE SINCE YOU WERE YOUNG?..... SETS AREN'T AS COMPLICATED NOW, ARE THEY?

No, that's right. The scenery used to be really beautiful. Dad said when Mr. Williamson was in charge of J.C. Williamsons he used to bring up sets for the smaller theatres that were duplicates of the big sets they had for the big

theatres. He said that everything he had was perfect. Dad said the transformation scenes, especially in the big pantomimes, were wonderful. They changed in front of you. But, you see, they do that now and they think it's new, but it's not. Dad said that they had the scenery up there, they must have revolved it round somehow, he said they called them tranformation scenes. and the scenery changed in the view. Now they say they fly the scenery. It should be flied, because it was going up to the flies. It wasn't being flown. Oh, that's what they say now - they say "the scenery's flown". It was really "flied" because it went up to the flies. right up the top. They flied the scenery and brought the other scenery down.

My poor old Dad, he said the theatre had a smell of its own, the smell of the escaping gas from the various well-plugs on the stage and odour of the glue and the paint of the scenery. Then you'd smell the cigars and the perfume. It had a smell of its own. I'll tell you something funny. There was a great big fellow, they used to call him "Battle-axe". He was one of the local boys who used to come and help at the theatre. He was a bit dumb. I think there was an article in the paper by Mr. Ruggero - he must have been talking about the same person. There was a great big drama on with a court scene and the judge was up in the box. The gas footlights went out, so Dad said to this fellow, "Get those footlights

alight again as soon as possible.", meaning when the scenes changed. But he went with a taper going clomp, clomp, clomp, across the stage lighting each one separately. Dad said how you used to light the lights going right around the auditorium was, you would just light one, they would switch the gas on, or whatever they did, and it would just go br-r-r r-r-r-r----- They would light one gas thing and it would go right the way around, the little gas jets would light. But this man went along with this(taper), and the judge, it must have been this George Rignold again, was saying "Get off the bloody stage." Interval came, and he was looking for Dad. Dad dodged him, dodged him all through and there was this big bit of scenery with a door. Dad went through and bumped straight into him. He said he's never heard a man who could use so many different swear words. (Laughter)

My Aunty Shirley was a good child actress. She used to take all the parts. There was "Little Willy", in "East Lind" Dad said all the kids in Perkins Street had their make-up boxes and they'd come down and be supers - they'd come on for the crowd scenes. They'd get the local people. Everybody who lived in Perkins Street had a little make up box. He said they'd arrive about six o'clock to put their make-up on and the the professionals would come in half an hour before the show. There was another little girl, the girl of Tresize, I've forgotten what her name was, she was playing, another

little girl's part. Aunty Shirley had a big part. This little girl had a minor part. She had to say "We don't speak to you, your father killed a man." That was her big line. Her poor old father had a few too many one night and he was saying "My God, I'll live to see the day my daughter is a star". So whenever I was going off to ballet with my suitcase full of little ballet dresses, for the old Choral Society or anything, Dad would always say, "My God, I'll live to see the day my daughter is a star". (laughter) We had a lot of fun. What did you ask me?

WHAT CHANGES HAVE YOU SEEN IN THE THEATRE?

Oh, what changes.

THE PEOPLE. THERE AREN'T AS MANY PEOPLE COME TO THE THEATRE

Oh, when I was a little girl the Gilbert and Sullivan always had a good house. There was Mr. Slapovsky. The first one I saw. He was the conductor, and his daughter was in the chorus. I think Strella Wilson was the soprano, Bernard Manning...

WERE THESE AT THE VICTORIA?

Yes, at the Victoria. They always did good. And Venia

Delottie used to come around selling her souvenir programmes. She acted with the great Howard Vernon. He was my dad's favourite Gilbert and Sullivan actor. He was absolutely marvellous, Dad said. He was so restrained. He took all the comedian parts but he said he could just lift an eyebrow and he'd get more laughs than all the funny business around the place. She used to come round selling this (shows programme) Mum was sitting with Mrs. Grant, she was the manager's wife, and she said "I don't think Mrs. Grant needs one of those." I was sitting across the aisle. She said "Oh, Mrs. Grant". She disappeared and the next thing, Mr. Slapovsky came out. It was nice. I felt really important, although I wasn't sitting with them, that my mother was sitting with a lady that the conductor knew. Reflected glory.

The biggest change I saw was when I went down to Sydney, Mum and I, a few years ago and they had on at the Tivoli June Bronhill in "The Merry Widow" and on at, I think it was the Empire - it was burnt out - it's called Her Majesty's now, up near the railway station. I think it was there that they had "My Fair Lady". We went into Palings to book and Mum said "I'd like two seats for "The Belle of New York" please and the girl said "The Belle of New York!" and I said, "My mother means "The Merry Widow". The same vintage. (laughter). I always remember Dad said "What was the show like, Nell, what was "My Fair Lady" like?" She said "Oh, the scenery was

wonderful." but she liked "The Merry Widow" better.
(laughter)

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY? I THINK YOU'VE
DONE VERY WELL.

Do you think so?

OH, YES.

Poor old Grandpa was the manager after Grandpa (Uncle Bill)
and then the theatre was rebuilt. I remember Dad used to go
off to work at the theatre when I was a little girl and come
back at night time. My brother was always crying, wanted to
go with him.

Oh, this is interesting too. As I said, all the local boys
used to come and work backstage for nothing, but then they
brought in the Union, Theatrical Employees Union. My dad was
the first secretary for that, but it was an honorary
position. He wasn't a very good secretary for the union
because he said he was no sooner made secretary than there
was a matinee starting and he got a telegram from Sydney -
call everybody out on strike. The theatre always came first
with Dad. Every time I went to a show Dad would say "What
was the house like? Were there many people there?" It was

always for the people putting the show on. So he looked at the note, getting the show ready, so he put the telegram in his pocket and went on with the show. Then at half past three another telegram came - Strike over, call the men back.
(laughter)

The old Victoria, in the olden days, used to be, Perkins Street used to be the central part of Newcastle. On Melbourne Cup day the bookies would be there with their umbrellas and their betting. They used to get the results on the morse code at the Post Office, then a man would get in his little trap and pony and ride down and give them the results. The theatre was always the centre of Perkins Street.

YES, WELL, IT'S A SHOP NOW.

Yes, it's heartbreaking. The acoustics were wonderful there. I remember, I've sat right up in the back. The projection box used to stick out a bit and then there were about three rows of about four seats and I've sat right in the back row there and heard every word. Dad said when they altered the theatre it was in the contract they were not to alter the dome at the top because of the acoustics. Great shame they had to close it down.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.