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**“The Citadel on Stage:
The Rise and Decline of Garrison Theatre in Halifax”**

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
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ABSTRACT

The Citadel on Stage: The Rise and Decline of Garrison Theatre in Halifax

by Alex Boutilier

This thesis traces theatre and other entertainments provided by French explorers and British military contingents stationed at garrisons in Annapolis Royal, Fort Anne, and Halifax, Nova Scotia, from 1606 to 1906. The narrative argues that politics, religion, and economics were involved in the social and cultural aspects of theatre and spectacle performed by garrison officers and men during that time. However, the main focus is the rise and decline of the garrison theatrical tradition in Halifax, from 1773 to 1874, in order to understand why the officers and men of the British military produced and acted in stage plays; why the men found it necessary to play the women's parts, and how the female actors were selected; why the repertoire of the garrison amateurs consisted mainly of comedy and farce; and what caused the decline and eventual grand finale of garrison theatre in Halifax.

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Prelude

The central topic of the following thesis, “The Citadel on Stage: The Rise and Decline of Garrison Theatre in Halifax”, is the garrison theatrical tradition. The thesis focuses mainly on theatre produced and performed by the officers and men of the British army and navy stationed in Halifax during the years 1773-1874. Overall I look at garrison theatre from its beginnings on board British naval vessels, to its rise and decline in Halifax; covering a period of over 300 years. Throughout the work I inquire into, and search for answers to why the officers and men of the British military produced and acted in stage plays; why the men found it necessary to play the women’s parts, and how the female actors were selected; why the repertoire of the garrison amateurs consisted mainly of comedy and farce; and, most importantly, what caused the decline and eventual grand finale of garrison theatre in Halifax?

Seeking answers to these questions, I probe into the conventions of honor and gentility that coexisted with the magnificent insouciance inherent in the character of the culture of the British military officers in that era. I look at the spectacles and drama taking place in the city of Halifax itself during the 102 year period I focus on, and consider the financial problems and difficulties which exasperated professional troupes from the United States who up until confederation, at different times, interacted with the garrison amateurs. I also take a brief look at garrison theatre in Annapolis Royal, as well as in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia to show how the main venue eventually became Halifax. In addition, I scan amateur acting companies in Halifax from 1846 onward, as well as other spheres of entertainment in the mid 1800’s, all of which contributed to the decline of garrison theatre.

Besides other entertainments and theatres, there were additional influences at play that gave rise to, and also caused the decline of garrison theatre: the British colonial institutions of politics, religion, and economics that dominated in Halifax until 1867. I examine these institutions to show how their exclusive privileges gave them control of the Nova Scotia environment, and how these privileges eventually brought about conflict and resistance to change, which ironically gave rise to change.

The history of theatre is social history, and the social scene was influenced by economic conditions, political activities, and religious persuasion. But the scope of social history includes all classes of society, and the attitudes, behavior, and culture of those societies. Therefore, as my narrative unfolds I generalize on two classes, the privileged elite and the working poor, who made up Halifax society during most of the garrison era. Both of these classes were responsible for the gradual changes taking place in society; changes that brought about the emergence and intrusion of a different society, the end of an era, and the demise of the garrison theatrical tradition.

These things being so, it seemed to me best to tell the story as life is acted out on stage; that is to say by a series of scenes divided by intervals of time. As I have arranged the text in chronological sequence there will be a good deal in common between one scene and the next. Since the method, then, is to present the thesis as a drama there will be a prologue, and the scenes will be staged in three acts, followed by an afterpiece and an epilogue.

The prologue offers a brief history of garrison theatre from its constrained beginnings on board British naval vessels and merchant ships sometime in the late sixteenth century; and its entrance in British fortifications in the first half of the

eighteenth. The first act, “The Citadel on Stage”, includes the years 1749 to 1789; and surveys the geographical, political, and religious stages of that period, and their connection with the garrison stage; as well as the privileged society who patronized the military actors. It also takes a brief look at British garrison theatre in New England during the years 1777-1782, along with the influx of loyalists in 1783; and the return of garrison theatre to Halifax in 1788. The second act “The Rise of Garrison Theatre in Halifax” covers the years 1789-1830. Theatre’s rise is examined along with the expansion of religion and politics, and the growth of commerce. The architecture and location of the large country homes and estates of the rich are scrutinized in order to better understand the attitude and behavior of those who lived in them. The rise of garrison theatre in Halifax did not happen in a vacuum; it was organized by military officers who issued advance subscriptions to private performances attended by elite society; and who sold tickets to public performances at different times. Garrison theatre was patronized by politicians and high-ranking officials, and sanctioned by the Church of England. Public spectacles, as part of the drama and entertainment in colonial Halifax are also discussed, along with how they served to bring the two classes together at significant events. The theatrical genres of comedy and farce, the repertoire of the garrison amateurs, are reviewed, and the relationship between the military and professional companies from the United States are examined.

The Third Act, “The Decline of Garrison Theatre in Halifax”, spans the years 1830-1874, and looks at the ebb of the garrison theatrical tradition during those years. This was caused by tensions between the military and a new literate public that was emerging; all of which was exacerbated by an old unbending conservative society.

Politics, religion, the press, and the Citadel itself were all under reconstruction at this time; Halifax was in a state of flux until mid-century. However, as well-to-do citizens were creating a new social order and relative economic stability they saw the restoration of garrison theatre; but in a reduced and retroactive condition, clinging to past repertoire while sharing the stage with other amateur groups from Halifax, and professionals from the United States. During the 1850's and 60's there was an economic boom in Halifax: concomitant with this growth was the importation of new forms of entertainment to compete with live theatre. Shortly after confederation these entertainments contributed to the demise of garrison theatre; it lost its local color and faded from the Halifax stage. The changes brought about by confederation were political; but it also marked a cultural watershed between the old regime and the new. Cultural colonialism persisted for many years after confederation, and in some respects is still with us today. Time-honored traditions are hard to break.

The afterpiece reviews the years after confederation up until 1906. Political, economic, and social changes, combined with a growing population during those years generated a public with a desire for a wide variety of entertainments. The Academy of Music opened in January, 1877, and attracted repertory and opera companies. In that same year the city of Halifax built an ornate bandstand in the Public Gardens and arranged weekly concerts by the excellent bands of garrison regiments and visiting warships, as well as civic orchestral groups. Spectator sports, such as baseball and cricket, as well as minstrel shows, circuses, and other outdoor amusements drew large Halifax audiences. The genre of comedy was out of fashion; it had been performed to the point of monotony. The epilogue summarizes and considers the premises set forth in this

thesis in order to provide logical answers to the questions posed in the first paragraph of this introduction.

As far as I can ascertain no major work has been done on the garrison theatrical tradition in Halifax. Therefore I believe this thesis to be innovative. Although I came across four previous MA theses on theatre in Halifax, each of these deal with a different time period, or else were not relevant to my research. The first, *Leisure as a Contested Terrain in Late 19th Century Halifax*, by Beverly Williams, (1991), can be found at the Patrick Power Library, Saint Mary's University. In it, Williams devotes a chapter to theatre. These thirty pages deal mostly with professional theatre and its effect on the culture and society of Halifax during the latter part of the 19th. century; but she does give brief mention of garrison theatre during the 1850's. A second thesis, *Materials for a History of the Theatre in Early Halifax*, by Sidney M. Oland, (1966), is located in Special Collections of The Killam Library at Dalhousie University. This thesis covers the period 1749 to 1829. In the first 60 pages Oland presents a statement of his sources and a summary of his findings which include a running commentary on the main body of the treatise. The bulk of the work follows: Oland calls it a "Calendar"; it is a complete list of plays, their authors, their patrons, the dates they were performed, the acting company whether professional or amateur, and any other relevant information concerning the particular play. Three indexes are included at the end. Oland's thesis is a very important and informative timeline. The third thesis, *Theatre in Halifax 1850-1880*, by Janet A. Maybee, is also located in Special Collections at Dalhousie University. In her abstract, Maybee writes, "The central feature is the calendar, a chronological listing of plays performed in Halifax during these thirty years. Entries indicate, in addition to play titles,

the theatre, company, cast when available, and relevant newspaper references” (1). She also mentions that her thesis was “designed as a bibliographical guide for the writer of a projected history of Nova Scotia theatre, perhaps to be incorporated eventually into a complete Canadian survey” (2). The fourth, *The Post-Confederation Theatres of Halifax*”, by J. Linden Best, (1972), can be found at the University of New Brunswick. However, Best’s work would not serve as a source of information for my pre-Confederation research. As for the other three theses mentioned, I had already uncovered most of the relevant information included in these works during my research of primary and secondary sources over the past two years. A search was also made through the archives of the Halifax Citadel, and the Cambridge Military Library, for any records of garrison theatrical productions, but none were found. Besides internet web-sites, my secondary sources are articles and books written by historians and scholars such as Judith Fingard, Patrick O’Neill, Yashdip Bains, T.B. Akins, and Thomas Raddall, among others. My primary sources are newspaper accounts, including letters to the editor, as well as diaries, letters, documents, and records obtained from the Public Archives of Nova Scotia.

However, after collecting and studying all the accounts, and analysing the garrison theatrical tradition as well as the rationale behind the beliefs and customs of the Halifax colonial society, generalizations and inductions had to be made in order to explain the behavior and attitude of that society. These generalizations are based on a small number of particular instances, and are assumed to be typical, but should not be viewed as facts of the complicated truth. Writing about the past is like visiting a distant country and trying to understand a vastly different culture in which a people speak a

strange language, and think and act in unfamiliar ways. But the social historian's task is even more difficult than the traveler's, for he or she cannot speak to the dead: the compiler can only interpret the remains which they have left, and these remains are not always what one would like to have.

Until 1841 the municipal government in Halifax was an oligarchy: it was government by a small group of appointed magistrates and elected officials concerned almost exclusively with upper class interests. The motives of this upper class are comprehensible only if one remembers they belonged to a world of ideas quite different from this day and age; a world in which exclusion needed no extra justification. Understanding them requires an effort of the imagination, and one must remember that a high proportion of the finances sent over from the mother country (England) to manage the economy of Halifax was controlled by these appointees and the military; and that the upper-class and merchants became wealthy from government patronage.

One must also bear in mind that these people of high rank and good fortune spent their money chiefly on personal splendour and entertainment; and that spiritual and intellectual life were controlled by the Church of England which played a part in the economic exploitation, and tried to impose its system of beliefs on the entire population of Nova Scotia by whatever means at hand (for more on the Church of England one should read Judith Fingard's *The Anglican Design in Loyalist Nova Scotia, 1783-1816*. London: SPCK, 1972). As well, all matters of significance, business, and due process were mediated upon within the framework of an elaborate, subtle, and deeply rooted conservatism, and orthodoxy. All that being said, there is no reason whatsoever to suppose that the pre-Victorian, and Victorian society of Halifax differed in any essential

characteristics from us. They were, so far as is known, neither more nor less intelligent, grasping, or pious than people are today. But they had, and the distinction is important, some very different customs and ideas. What follows, then, after manually piecing together all the research, is one student's attempt to analyse and narrate the garrison theatrical tradition in Halifax.

Prologue

A Brief History of Garrison Theatre

A ship carrying troops is in fact a garrison, and in the days of wooden ships the deck was much like a stage. Below-decks was structurally parallel to a theatre's 'cellerage', a ship's hatch resembled a trap door, and a forecastle was remarkably similar to a tiring house façade. The upper decks were open to the weather, dependent on sunlight for illumination, just as the wooden stages in England in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Theatrical troops on sailing ships also depended on communal effort as did troupes of acting companies; and comedy and farce were cast the same, with men playing the women's parts as a natural convention.

Theatre on board ships has a mystical resonance; like a castle surrounded by a moat. It began in some early but not yet identified time. Sailors have probably performed song and dance routines on board ships at sea for hundreds of years prior to 1583. However, they were their own audience, there were no other witnesses, and the performances were not recorded in ships logs. But in 1583, Edward Haies, Sir Humphrey Gilbert's Rear Admiral, wrote an account of his expedition to Newfoundland with the explorer. In his report Haies writes they had on board the ships, "music in good variety, not omitting the least toyes, as Morris dancers, hobby horse, and may like conceits" He states that the reason for having these entertainments on board was "for solace of our people", and "allurement of the savages, whom we intended to winne by all faire means possible" (8). The revels provided by the morris dancers and antique buskers were forerunners of the garrison theatrical tradition which involved the crew as cast.

The first recorded instance of a theatrical performance by the crew of a British merchant ship was in 1607. The ship was the *Red Dragon*, owned by the legendary East India Company, and its commander was a Captain Keeling. In 1607 while the ship was docked in Sierra Leone Keeling made several entries in his diary in which he writes that on September 5th “We gave the Tragedie of Hamlett”, and on September 30th “... where my companions acted King Richard the Second”. The rationale stated by Captain Keeling was “... to keep my people from idleness and unlawful games ...” (Brown 142). In what was known as Royal Arctic Theatre plays were performed by the officers and crews of ships wintering in the Canadian arctic between 1819 and 1876 (Gardner, 476-77). These performances, of course, were for their own entertainment, and for the relief of boredom, as well as to cure homesickness. And plays were performed on board British naval vessels anchored in Halifax harbour during the first half of the 19th century, and up until 1869. However, these plays were performed to entertain the local gentry.

In *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre*, Rewa states “The first record of a garrison performance in Canada is the elaborate nautical pageant, Marc LESCARBOT’s *Le Theatre De Neptune* EN [sic] La Nouvelle-France in November 1606” (222). In fact the genesis of theatre in Canada was the play *Neptune*. Richardson, in her introduction to the *Theatre of Neptune in New France* writes that Marc Lescarbot, a young lawyer, was left in charge of the newly arrived French colonists during September and October of 1606 while Sieur de Poutrincourt was on a voyage down the coast. These colonists, along with some French Catholic missionaries, were quartered, or garrisoned, at the “Habitation”, a frail wooden fort on the banks of the Annapolis River at Port Royal, New France, present day Nova Scotia. Lescarbot’s drama was

staged at the mouth of the river on November 14th, 1606 to welcome Sieur de Poutrincourt as he returned (ix, x, xx). It was performed by the colonists, and although none of them were soldiers, it was, as Rewa states, “a Garrison Performance”.

The play itself was a masque, and it celebrated the arrival of French culture in the New World and established a new mythology of French and aboriginal relations, and it is widely considered to be the first North American theatrical production. Commenting on its theme Richardson points out, “... and to harvest in New France the riches of the beaver skins, to colonize, and to baptize in the name of Christ, the background of the mask is woven” (xv). She also suggests “That the playwright sensed a more fashionable interest across the sea in the palace of the Louvre The mask itself gives internal evidence”, and, “Present in spirit, were the honorable merchants ... living in Rochelle” (xii). Lines in the play, such as the one spoken by Neptune to Sieur de Poutrincourt, “That you may here establish a wide realm for France” (LesCarbot 19) speak of French aspirations to power; the power of control over the natural resources of the New World. So one could argue, if one is cynical enough, that the platform of Neptune gave the players the sea room needed to maneuver in order to conceal the politics behind the mask of friendship. But one may also assume that both the missionaries and their new aboriginal acquaintances thought it a pretty good show.

The prologue over, Nova Scotians had to wait a long time for the first act. Neptune’s trident was left floating on the Annapolis Basin for 127 years before it was picked up by Britannia who brought the myth ashore at Fort Anne where, according to O’Neill, “...*The Recruiting Officer* was produced on 20 January 1733 by the officers of the garrison to mark the birthday of Frederick, Prince of Wales”. He also writes that ten

years later a translated script of Moliere's *Le Misanthrope* was performed on January 20, 1744 at Fort Anne to celebrate Frederick's birthday, and again on January 20, 1748, a play was produced to honor the Prince of Wales birthday. (The Birthplace 1). Frederick was a great patron of the arts in England, and presumably he was the spirit of Britannia's stage at Fort Anne. But spirits are intangible elements that fade over time, and plays can be staged anywhere, so "over the years the garrison at Fort Anne was decreased in favor of the new citadel fortifications, and Halifax became the centre for theatre in Nova Scotia. The birthplace of French and English language theatre in Canada, however, occurred on the Annapolis Basin" (O'Neill, The Birthplace 1).

Act I

The Citadel on Stage

Scene 1

From the founding of Halifax in 1749, and up until the time of Confederation, Citadel Hill with its elevated height was the stage around which British institutions revolved; and the British Military took centre stage. The government was, and intended to remain, a self-perpetuating colonial oligarchy; the Church of England, with its British Christian dogma was assumed to be the true faith of the new colony, and the social system was stiffly stratified. In the years that followed, with the construction of its fortifications and garrison, and a strong army and navy presence, the Citadel became a symbol of the British military belief system and culture. Their belief system was often revealed in political ceremonies and spectacles, putting on shows of strength in the form of parades, complete with marching bands, as well as mock battles for dramatic effects: the theatre of war. All of these dramatics were designed to give the spectators a display of England's strength and power. Part of their culture was providing entertainment such as private and public band concerts; song and dance routines; skits and recitations; social evenings, and live theatre for their own, as well as the entertainment of the gentry.

The self-assurance of the ruling oligarchy was displayed in the customs and time-honoured traditions, social activities, spectacles, and entertainments they indulged in from the outset at the Great Pontac Inn on the corner of Duke and Water Streets, which was built sometime prior to 1754. In his documentary *History of Halifax City*, Dr. T.B. Akins, writing of the ceremony surrounding the swearing in of Jonathan Belcher as Chief Justice on October 14th, 1754, gives a graphic illustration:

At the commencement of Michaelmas Term, the following ceremonies and processions were observed, the first of the kind ever seen in Nova Scotia. On the first day of Michaelmas Term, the Chief Justice walked from the Governor's house honoured by the presence of His Excellency Charles Lawrence, Esq., Lieutenant Governor, and accompanied by the Honourable The Members of H. M. Council, proceeded by the Provost Marshall, the Judge's tipstaff, and other civil officers, the gentlemen of the bar attending in their gowns, and walking in procession to the long room at Pontach's, where an elegant breakfast was provided, where the Chief Justice in his scarlet robes, was received and complimented in the politest manner, by a great number of gentlemen and ladies, and officers of the army. Breakfast being over, they proceeded with the commission before them to church (44-5)

Religion was obviously their anchor; albeit one can easily draw an analogy here between politics and theatre: ceremonies, processions, and military parades became part of the pattern of life in Halifax. Though it may be ungracious to say so, the parading of the mace, the speaker's wig and gown, and the other details by which the Halifax House of Assembly gravely imitated His Majesty's high court of parliament at Westminster is what gave the small top layer of society in Halifax the most gratifying allusion to pomp and solemnity of the mother country. Like theatre, power and authority were staged. "The Great Pontac was the principal hotel in 1754" (Mullane, *Old Inns* 1), and after the grand spectacle on October 14th it would have acquired the greatness its name implies. It was

“Here the officers of the garrison and fleet and the merchant aristocracy of Halifax entertained each other with dinners, routs, and balls” (Raddall 52). And it was here that live theatre was introduced in Halifax in 1768 by a professional company from New England. With regard to garrison theatre there are only assumptions that the military put on plays prior to the 1770’s. They may have performed in private homes to entertain the Halifax elite, or in the garrison itself for their own amusement.

However, there are no extant documents confirming this. One can only speculate on the long delay. Perhaps they postponed cultivating the finer arts because they were performing other more momentous duties. These duties, for the first few years, included besieging, and hacking and hewing down the thick forest, and changing the landscape in order to build block houses, stockades, dwellings, a town site, and a spiritual stronghold they called St. Paul’s, as well as the fortifications atop Citadel Hill: the stage was under construction. Then, in 1755, caring little for the verdict of history, their attention focused on the expulsion of the French settlers from Acadia; and the year 1756 marked the beginning of the Seven Years War with France, in which the militia at Halifax were completely involved.

Halifax was originally planned, and its citadel fortifications built, as a defense and security for New England against attack by the French at Louisbourg. The society of Halifax, from its inception, was made up of a defensive implantation of British Military and colonials who dominated the rest of Nova Scotia. As the first two decades of the colony deliberately marched past they would behold the immigration of a small minority of people from different ethnic groups, such as Germans and other Europeans who were either appointed, absorbed by, or assimilated into the culture of the British colonial

system. There would also be an influx of so-called pre-loyalists, or planters, from New England. The city of Halifax itself is a peninsula, jutting out like a stage into the Atlantic Ocean. In its early years of population growth it was fortified by blockhouses along a stretch from the Northwest Arm to the Bedford Basin. This peninsularity, along with the importation of British culture probably helped produce the insularity of the military, social, and political hierarchy who held sway over the cultural institutions and the government for almost a century. The imported British culture was institutional. The colonials brought their religion, education, politics, economics, and the press, as well as their architecture. These institutions represented the collective behaviour and thought of the sociocentric elite class of Halifax; it was the spirit of their time.

Scene 2

The 1760's saw the "... creation of an elected House of Assembly, a legislative body largely brought into being to assure the incoming planters that they would have those civil rights they had grown up with in New England. In practice, however, the assembly served Halifax rather than outport interests" (Fingard 19). Representative government was not responsible government. "The census of 1767 shows a little over 3,000 people", and "Few of the townsfolk had any reason to love or even to respect their local government, for the assembly had little real power and in any case it was usually filled with merchants of the upper class. There were civil laws, certainly, but the real rule was a kind of perpetual martial law imposed by the succession of military governors and their obedient councils" (Raddall 69-70). These were the official class, and "From the first the official class was in a favored position." They were men of breeding, educated, with good income paid from the imperial treasury which allowed them to support their

pretensions and indulge their tastes; and they could always be relied upon to patronize intellectual activity. Above these officials were the more transient lieutenant-governors, military and naval officers, and distinguished visitors, all of whom were gentlemen. It was largely due to these transients that puritan Nova Scotia owed her early theatrical entertainments” (Harvey 113-4). There was little or no middle class in Halifax during this time. “The crust of its society was the governor and a coterie of time serving officials appointed by himself or from London, together with a fawning group of merchants grown rich from army and navy contracts” (Raddall 69). The poor, or working class had to survive without any help from the government; managing, on a steady diet of fish and corn, to keep their ribs from growing too prominent. Many of them lived hit or miss on the economic fringes, making a tenuous living from muscle power, while others survived on public charity. “Life among the lower orders of the town featured a chronic struggle for survival, which some people lost”; and “Beggars faced whipping and then incarceration” (Fingard, Halifax, 20).

This struggle for survival was caused, in part, by an economic structure that was top-heavy and toploftical; as a consequence the poor people at the bottom of the structure lived in grief and despair. One of the symptoms of despair is hard drinking, and booze was always flowing in Halifax, especially rum. When Sutherland read that in 1757 an Irish visitor by the name of John Knox said that the wooden and jerry-built houses of Halifax hung like seats in a theatre, he wrote the addendum; “And as in a theatre, obtaining and providing entertainment seemed to dominate activity in town. Grog shops, both licensed and illicit, along with brothels, abounded ...” (Fingard, Halifax 17). When people live in marginal or worse living conditions they consume alcohol as if to confirm

the worst things traditionally laid to their charge, and this causes them to be generally disliked. The consumption of alcohol was indulged in by nearly every member of society, including the military, in Halifax at that time. But a number of the self-intoxicated hypocritical rich believed that the poor who got a bit tiddly in public were a corrupting influence; that somehow they were tainted, but wealth was not. This was self-righteous bluenosery.

Scene 3

Scene two renders a compact view of the garrison colonial structure and attitudes of society during the first forty years after the foundation of Halifax: aristocrats and plebeians, bureaucrats and merchants, soldiers and sailors, rich and poor. This was the society that was on hand to greet the American Company of Comedians, “The first professional company to appear in Canada”, who arrived in Halifax from North Carolina in August of 1768 and performed in what most sources suggest was the Pontac Inn. The company was also known as Mr. Mills and Henry Giffard’s Company (O’Neill, Theatre 388). There is some confusion as to the date of their first production. Fergusson reports that the American Company acted in Halifax “as early as September 1768”, and he cites his information as coming from the *Nova-Scotia Gazette* of September 1, and September 15 (422). However, Bains contradicts this stating, “C. Bruce Fergusson noted two performances of this company in his study of early theatricals in Halifax, but since he had access to only two issues of the *Nova-Scotia Gazette* for 1 and 15 September 1768, he could not narrate the full story” (The American Company 240). In fact Halifax’s known theatre history begins on August 26, 1768. The edition of the *Nova-Scotia Gazette* dated August 25 includes an announcement which informs the public that Mills would open his

season with John Home's *Douglas*, followed by Garricks' *Miss in her Teens* on August 26. But more importantly, the announcement states these plays would be performed "At the THEATRE in Halifax". This vague reference implies that the building was well known, and that plays had been put on there for some time. It does seem probable that the 'THEATRE' was located in the Great Pontac Inn. Raddall's description is that it was "named after Pontack's Club in London", and it was there that "the officers of the garrison and fleet and the merchant aristocracy of Halifax entertained each other with dinners, routs, and balls" (52). So the Pontac, apparently, was a social club in which the upper class could rub elbows, scrape acquaintance, and cement relationships.

The reason for Mills' troupe coming to Halifax is not clear. Fergusson claims they were called the "Company of Comedians from London" when they arrived in New England from London in the mid-1700's, but they later cut England's apron strings and changed their name to "The American Company" because of anti-British sentiment (422). So in all likelihood theatre would have languished because of political unrest in the American colonies, especially in the north where the playhouse was fiercely condemned, if not actually forbidden by the inhibiting puritan attitude. The American Company, then, presumably felt at ease with the British colonial society of Halifax; and they probably felt at home at the Pontac Inn where they gimcracked up "a stage in the assembly room of Pontac Inn, and performed twice a week for ten weeks" (Bains, *The American Company* 240). They ended their stint on October 28th and left for Philadelphia (Fergusson 423). Their engagement may have been cut short because most of the garrison troops were sent to Boston at the end of September to help quell the unrest there; "Halifax itself was left

with little more than a corporal's guard" (Raddall 72), so their theatre audience would have been drastically diminished.

There were other inns, as well as coffee houses, in Halifax during the second half of the eighteenth century, all of which provided entertainment and accommodation. These were much like the old roadside tavern kind of hotel common in New England where the room clerk performed his or her function in the bar room. To name a few: there was the Split Crow, the Jerusalem Coffee House, the British Coffee House, the Crown Coffee house, and the Wolfe Inn; but the Great Pontac was the pivot around which theatre revolved, and 1768 was the pivotal year.

Scene 4

Theatre usually provokes a moral reaction: the true puritan, or moralist, condemns people-pleasures because these types of amusements are not uplifting, and do not contribute to the greater glory of God. Compared to New England at that time, with its political unrest and puritan condemnation of the theatre, religion in Halifax was more earthly, and the moral attitude concerning pleasure seemed to gravitate from the political realm. Consider the tone of a letter to the editor of the *Nova-Scotia Gazette* on August 11, 1768 by someone signing "Anti-Thespis". Before the American Troupe had even arrived the writer felt it his or her "indispensable duty to warn the community against whatever may be detrimental to it"; that plays were "particularly destructive of industry among the lowest class of people". And referring to Halifax's dependence on England's exchequer for stability he emphasized "how ill it will sound in England to have it said that Players are not only admitted but encouraged in the young Province, which still continues to be supported by an annual parliamentary grant, or in other words, by

national charity; and which, on the present prospect of things, is like to become poorer before it becomes richer". Aware that the military would patronize the theatre, the writer subtly warns that "the Gentlemen in the King's Service do not expect, nor indeed wish, to be indulged in A Pleasure injurious to the Colony". Anti-Thespis concludes by stating that the acting of plays "will impoverish and give an idle turn to the most useful Part of the People; ruin our servants, be a reflection on us among our Neighbours, and be of Disservice to us in England". In the same issue the dissonance in the tone of Anti-Thespis was adjusted by one 'Theatricus' who argued that "every great, wise, and polite government, has ever with the Rise and Progress of the Arts, encouraged, and maintained Theatrical Amusements; and that for these Political reasons, as they give entertaining Pictures of the ridiculous of Mankind, convey a useful lesson of Morality, and are an instructive School for Oratory". After reading Anti-Thespis' remark about "The lowest class of people" Theatricus countered with "it is not from the Poor that the playhouse either desires or expects encouragement", and goes on to say that those who are already immoral "cannot be suspected of becoming worse, by seeing vice punished and degraded, virtue applauded, and rewarded" (*Nova-Scotia Gazette*, 11 August 1768).

Reactions like these, some approving and some condemning the morality of the drama, appeared in successive issues of the *Nova-Scotia Gazette*, even after the talk of the town left. So one can see that from the very first the theatre was considered a stage for political propaganda. However, there was no sense of political morality that might beset the acting of plays, and no undue consequences. The upper class, the merchants, and the militia favoured and patronized theatre. It could not be politicized: Thalia and

Melpomene governed. Obviously it is more advantageous to moralize after a misfortune has taken place.

After a 4 ½ year intermission, and 25 years after the founding of Halifax, the garrison amateurs finally moved part of their cast from the parade square to the Playhouse. On April 10, 1773, the *Nova-Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle* published an announcement stating that “two plays, *The Suspicious Husband* and *The Citizen*” would be presented on April 23rd “by the gentlemen of the army and navy, for the benefit of the poor”. This is the earliest documentation of garrison theatre in Halifax, and in it is established what would be the continuing rationale for garrison performances: charity. Military theatre’s ongoing repertoire of comedy and farce is also confirmed in the plays selected. As a result, “English plays produced by garrison served as models for many of the initial efforts of indigenous playwrights” (Rewa 223). This could be what inspired an anonymous author, in Halifax in 1774, to write a play advertised in the *Nova-Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle* on February 1, 1774 as, “*Acadius; or, Love in a Calm*, a play in three acts, to be staged by garrison performers, for the benefit of late sufferers of fire”. The play remains anonymous, and the text is no longer extant; however, a long abstract of the first two acts appeared in the same newspaper on April 12th of 1774, and this partial synopsis indicates that it was a romantic comedy. It is likely that *Acadius; or, Love in a Calm* was the first English language play written in Canada.

Scene 5

There is no mention of any performances, garrison or professional, being staged in Halifax during the next ten years. Military duties probably took precedence over theatrical efforts. Again, in 1770 Britain was forced to send troops from Halifax to

Boston to protect customs officials. And after the battle of Concord and Lexington, Massachusetts, in April 1775, King George III declared the New England colonies to be in open rebellion. In 1776 all His Majesty's forces in Nova Scotia were sent to Boston under the command of General Sir William Howe. Then, "As the British government, realized the gravity of the war in America ... from 1778 to 1781 a whole brigade of Scottish troops was stationed at Halifax, using the base for descents upon the coast of New England". (Raddall 77-86). At intervals the troops would return to base at Halifax for orders, supplies, and repairs, and then return to their appointed theatre of action, so most of the time Halifax was left virtually undefended. This would explain the absence of garrison theatre during that time. As for professional theatre, Malone notes that the new continental congress in New England passed a resolution in 1774 that discountenanced and discouraged "every Species of Extravagance ... Plays, and other expensive Diversions and Entertainments" and that "a second resolution which suppressed theatrical entertainments was reported in the *Philadelphia Journal* on 12 October 1778". She also quotes Seilhamer: "There is some reason to believe that the latter of these two resolutions was due to a disposition on the part of the American officers at Philadelphia to imitate the British Military Thespians" (62). In light of this statement it would not be an overgeneralization to say that plays were banned because American actors, professional and amateur, would be emulating the characters and culture of the mother country: the American patriots were blocking all ties with England in order to give the new nation time to pursue its own cultural expression. But, Malone writes, "The most significant, or at least the most completely recorded, theatrical activity by military companies occurred during the Revolutionary War years", and as for British

cultural expression General John Burgoyne put on plays regularly in 1775 in Boston, at the converted Faneuil Hall where “One of these plays, *The Blockade of Boston*, a farce attributed to Burgoyne, was presented by his troops on 8 January 1776” (58); and if one can judge a play by its title it is easy to grin at the cultural capriciousness that was probably barefacedly portrayed. For all that, a year later, “by January 1777, the British Army had left Boston to occupy New York”, where, almost immediately “the New York military actors opened the first of six seasons at the theatre in John St. on 25 January 1777” She also notes that there was one female actor, and “Other female roles were often played by young subalterns, British officers under the rank of Captain” (58-9). This is significant because it was unusual for women to appear on stage with garrison officers at that time; female roles were always performed by young subalterns. Possibly the female actor was the wife of one of the officers.

However, in spite of Halifax’s empty garrison, its civilian population during this decade was growing. Refugees from Boston had been drifting into Halifax since 1773, but the greatest influx, perhaps 20,000 Loyalists, arrived on the shores of Nova Scotia beginning in the spring of 1783. McKinnon maintains that “During 1783-84 great numbers crowded into Halifax, Shelburne, and Annapolis ... “ (30). Prior to coming to Nova Scotia most of these Loyalists had been in New York City since 1778 waiting in anticipation for their exodus to Nova Scotia. Raddall professes that “in the spring of 1776 General Howe withdrew to Halifax with his army and fleet, abandoning Boston and apparently the whole royal cause in the rebellious thirteen colonies”, but it was all a ruse. They stayed at the citadel for a couple of months and then departed for Manhattan in mid-summer (78-80). Brown states that “In September 1776, General Sir William Howe’s

troops took possession of New York City”, and thereafter New York was completely in British hands from 1778 until 1783. So “with 15000 British soldiers the city became a garrison town” (Howe’s Strolling Company, 30-31).

Howe’s officers were so closely associated with the theatre that one of the actors, a Captain Thomas Stanley, who had acted under Burgoyne in Boston in 1775, dubbed them “Howe’s Strolling Company”, hence the title of Brown’s article. In it he writes that Howe re-opened the John Street Theatre; and that he was “greatly concerned about the morale and comfort of his troops”. Plays were put on by the officers of the garrison “for the charitable purpose of relieving the widows and orphans of the sailors and soldiers who have fallen in support of the constitutional rights of Great Britain in America”. The theatre opened on January 25, 1777, with Fielding’s *Tom Thumb*, and Brown also lists the 15 performances given in the 1777 season, noting that “The audiences were reasonably large”. Howe was removed to Philadelphia in September of that year and “Dramatic performances began to be planned as soon as the city was fortified.” The Southwark Theatre on South Street, built in 1766 by The American Company ... stood ready to accommodate Howe’s Strolling Players. Altogether thirteen performances seem to have been given by Howe’s officers in Philadelphia in 1778”. Howe was criticized by other officers and biographers for his love of luxury and entertainment, which included the faro table, the dancing assembly, concerts, fine dining, and live theatre. He and his officers enjoyed the most comfortable life possible. They thought the war to be a farce. Some believed this weakened British resolve. Howe resigned as Commander of the British Forces in April 1778 after Burgoyne surrendered at Saratoga. He then exited the great

American stage and returned to England (30-43). He seems to have grown much too big for his breeches.

In his article, “British Military Theatre in New York in 1778”, Brown states that “Sir Henry Clinton succeeded William Howe as Commander in Chief”, and that entertainments of all kinds, including theatre, continued. He writes that Howe’s folly of putting on plays for the divertissement of idle soldiers in the name of charity was turned into a business by Clinton; while Burgoyne, in Boston, produced plays “in a spirit of offence to New England sentiment”. Brown lists the many plays performed, along with the gate receipts, at the Theatre Royal (formerly The John Street Theatre) in New York during the 1778-79 season. Clinton sailed south in December, 1779, and besieged and captured Charleston on May 12, 1779, and returned to New York in June. Clinton was made a scapegoat for the loss of the American colonies, and was relieved of his command on March 26, 1782. Lieutenant-General Guy Carleton took over in May, and Clinton returned to England in disgrace. In the meantime his theatre business was managed by Colonel Guy Johnson, and Captain Gerrard Laurence until 1783. A large number of Clinton’s soldiers, however, remained in New York amusing themselves; and theatre-going habits were maintained during the war (44-55). By this time they didn’t have to think fast anyway.

The point here is to show that that Burgoyne, Howe, and Clinton, through theatre, kept up the spirit and morale of the Loyalists who later came to Nova Scotia; and it is also to draw attention to the fact that the British military thespians put on plays in garrison towns up and down the Atlantic seaboard, and no matter how deep the water, or how hot the fire, the show went on. It was traditional, and the hand of tradition is heavy.

Undoubtedly crews and casts, along with settings and props working together to spread British culture were mightier than the sword, or artillery fire. The American rebel powers-to-be seemed to have feared live theatre more than real gunpowder.

Scene 6

The Americans and the British signed a preliminary peace treaty on November 30th, 1782; and they signed a final treaty, known as the Peace of Paris, on September 10th, 1783. In the spring of 1783 hubris yielded to humility and the mass movement began; and in the summer it was in full swing, with ships outfitted by the British and loaded with refugees coming from New York to Nova Scotia, and returning for more. Carleton was in charge of the evacuation, and when it ended in November he returned to England with plenty of laurels to rest on. He was raised to the peerage and became Lord Dorchester.

Raddall writes that “By November more than twenty-five thousand refugees were in Nova Scotia, half of whom landed at Halifax. On their heels came a great part of the British army” (95). Halifax’s Citadel was now the only British garrison on the Atlantic seaboard. For the next few years, Halifax was clogged with the culturally crippled as the new immigrants began the delicate process of picking up the pieces. With no accommodations in an overcrowded town, and not enough food to go around, along with heartbreak and reduced self-respect, it was a desperate situation for these newcomers; most of who were from the poor and middling classes. On top of all this “The town swarmed with discharged soldiers and sailors dissolute in the sudden let down after eight hard years of war” (Raddall 96), into which many of them had been coerced by press gangs as early as 1774 (Akins 74). “In contrast with this vast misery ... flourished the gay life of the army and naval officers, the wealthier Loyalists, the prosperous

contractors, ship owners and others who had made money out of the war” (Raddall 96).

Although there were no theatrical productions in Halifax during the long and troublesome interruption caused by the American Revolutionary War, Akins mentions that it was customary, during the years 1780-86, to have subscription assemblies, public balls, and entertainments at Sutherland’s Coffee House, or the Pontac Inn; usually every fortnight. Levees and parties were given at Government House on all public holidays (78, 84). All of this gaiety, of course, was for the amusement of the affluent strata and the upper crust of society, and they paid no heed to what others thought of the way they lived or acted; there was a definite dichotomy in the cultural heritage. However, as it turned out, the Loyalists were a rich extra-dividend to Nova Scotia; they were the right sort of raw material.

Scene 7

By the year 1785 the confusion had settled out and things were mostly routine again in Halifax. It was into this old habitual scene that William Moore, a touring professional actor, arrived. At the end of May an advertisement appeared in the *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle* announcing, “By permission of his excellency the Governor/In the assembly room at Pontac/ This present evening May 31st, 1785/ Will be presented/ a Comic, Sentimental, Dramatic Entertainment called/ Fashionable Raillery/ selected from the LECTURE on HEADS and HEARTS/ from the productions of Garrick, Otway, and dramatic poems:/ with proper scenery and apparatus/ Regularly arranged in four parts/ by WILLIAM MOORE, comedian”. The announcement also states where to purchase tickets, and that the play will begin at 7:30pm. One week later, on Tuesday, June 7th, the same advertisement appeared in the weekly newspaper announcing “The last

night but one” for “Fashionable Raillery” and that the “evening’s entertainment will conclude with POETICAL VISION, called THE COURT OF MOMUS, on June 8th, 1785”. Momus, of course, is the Greek god of ridicule, and in this act Moore gave satirical readings and imitations of *Dramatis Personae* from well known plays. Moore gave another performance on Friday evening June 15th, and this one included “After the Lecture”, “an eulogy on free masonry”. He must have been gifted in dramatic sleight of hand and adept at handling the clumsy old soliloquy for he “enjoyed a successful stay in Halifax”, after which he “embarked for Quebec ...” (Jewitt 445). “In 1786 Nova Scotia came under the Vice-regal rule of Sir Guy Carleton, newly created Governor General of Canada ...”, and when he “came to visit Halifax in this year there was a round of festivities in his honor. He was the darling of the Loyalists. There were balls, dinners, and card parties; there were receptions at Government house, at the Pontac, at ...”. A week prior to Carleton’s visit, “Halifax had received its first royal guest, Prince William of the Royal Navy” (Raddall 101). The prominence of these two distinguished visitors probably put much more emphasis on the festivities. However, more important to history than the celebrations was the fact that the Prince, shortly after arriving, went on shenanigans and formed a close relationship with a “young subaltern of the garrison named Dyott, who in his more sober moments kept a diary. This remarkable document survives and gives us a picture not only of Prince William but of the raffish life led by many an officer of the Halifax garrison in the gilded squalor which followed the American War” (Raddall 102). Dyott was also involved later with garrison theatrical productions.

Scene 8

As regards live theatre during this time, Jewitt writes that “The inauguration of drama in Halifax” began when the “gentlemen” of the garrison presented Richard Cumberland’s *The West Indian* on or around the 14th of March, 1787 in “the large assembly room of the Pontac Hotel.” But Jewitt does not name his source. He refers only to his source as “the notice” (445), so his information cannot be supported or contradicted. In any event the officers of the garrison were back on stage in 1788. An entry in Dyott’s diary reads “1788-dec.16. School for Scandal/ Officers of the Garrison & Fleet/ Female parts by two young boys of the town” (60). These officers had, in 1787, according to Jewitt, “united to form a theatrical society. The primary object of this society, as stated in their Agreement or Constitution, was the relief of the poor during the bitter Nova Scotia winter. All profits after the expenses of the performances had been covered, were handed over to the church wardens for distribution.” This was the last article of their agreement (445, 448). In all likelihood the society included some members of “Burgoyne’s officer-actors” from Boston, as well as “Howe’s Strolling Company” and “Clinton’s Military Thespians” of New York. There was no stopping the show once it started; it was if they had been rehearsing in their quarters at the Citadel since 1783: for just two weeks later the *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle* announces “Theatre Pontac/ This evening, the 30th instant, will be performed *The Guardian* (a dramatic entertainment in two acts.) / to which will be added/ *The Lying Valet*/ a farce./ Between the pieces will be introduced/ a favourite hunting song/ the characters by gentlemen of the town”. The advertisement then gives the price of 3 shillings, and states that the doors open at 6 and that the proceeds will go to charity. And

in the same newspaper on January 6th, 1779 there is an advertisement informing the public that at the Theatre Pontac, “Positively for the last time/ tomorrow evening, the 7th instant will/ be performed/ *The Guardian*/ by the gentlemen of the town.” In addition there is another advertisement stating that at the “Theatre Pontac, / for public charity/ on Tuesday next, the 13th instant, will be performed/ *The Merchant of Venice*/ with the farce of/ LETHÉ/ the characters by gentlemen of the navy, army and town”. These were probably the last plays performed at the Pontac. On Feb. 26th, 1779, the officers of the garrison “Theatrical Society” brought the metaphor downtown and put the Citadel on stage in their “New Grand Theatre” on Argyle Street; where they performed in the comedy *The Merchant of Venice*, and also a farce called *The Citizen* (*Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle*, 24 Feb.1789).

Act II

The Rise of Garrison Theatre in Halifax

Scene 1

The rise of garrison theatre began when the officers of the British army and navy united to form a theatrical society, and then built the New Grand Theatre, which served Halifax for over twenty years. The official beginning of the garrison amateur tradition in Halifax was ushered in when the curtain rose at the New Grand on February 26th, 1789, with a performance of *The Merchant of Venice*. That same year, forty years after the founding of the town, the curtain also rose on some of the institutions that would use reason to bring about change in the social and cultural life of Nova Scotia. Thirty-seven years earlier, on March 23, 1752 the *Nova Scotia Gazette* was first published; and it changed ownership and names at least five times until 1843. But in 1789 the Loyalist John Howe began publishing the *Nova Scotia Magazine* in hopes that it would “diffuse a taste for British literature”, as well as encourage gentlemen to speculate on natural history, topography, and agricultural technique (Harvey, 107-8). This was timely because “the first agricultural society was formed in Halifax in the year 1789” (Akins 96). As for religion, Harvey states; “From the beginning of British occupation, the Church of England had been assumed to be the established church of the colony”, and Loyalist clergymen who had founded a bishopric in 1787, with Charles Inglis as its first bishop, “petitioned the government to save the youth of Nova Scotia from the seminaries of the United States”. This resulted in the establishment of King’s College in 1789; and the Halifax Academy also began its career in that year. Concerning politics, Harvey writes that the Loyalists exploited their loyalty until they were prominent in the House of

Assembly, as well as almost controlling the Executive Council. However, he notes the inequality in the distribution of power in politics was caused by the Loyalist “contemporary fear of democracy”. “They sought stability, not progress”, and under the Loyalist Governor Wentworth “They were willing to strengthen the Executive against the Assembly by every possible sanction, political, social, and religious”; in so doing they ironically “set in motion forces that they could not control” (105-7).

On the world scene the French Revolution began in 1789. This would impel Britain into war with France in 1793, and as a direct consequence, over the next twenty-two years trans-atlantic currents would mark, economically, the high times and low times in Halifax, as the unrest and revolution in America had done between 1763 and 1783. Harvey, of course, had the advantage of hindsight in scanning the years 1749 to 1835. He writes a convincing essay on an “Intellectual Awakening” that he says took place during the years 1812 to 1835. Undoubtedly King’s College and the Halifax Academy turned out some learned scholars, but Harvey’s emphasis is on commerce and industry. He credits the rich merchants of that time with bringing pressure on local officials to remodel economic or political systems; which was in their own best interest anyway, for in colonial economies the merchant was usually king of the trough. He writes, “Agriculture, fishing, lumbering, and shipbuilding forged ahead; and the minds of the young Nova Scotians were quickened both by economic rivalry and the literature of knowledge that was written about their province and its industries” (116); but what was really needed was an intelligible progressive economy, not one controlled by merchants. The only mention of the arts is that the official class in Halifax enjoyed books, pictures, expensive furniture, and theatrical attainments; and he also notes the friction that existed

between town and country. As for the sciences he states that libraries had been established; the hope being “to light the path of scientific research”, and that local periodicals printed literary and scientific lectures (116, 119). Literature and literacy are intimately related, though neither necessarily implies the other.

In his essay Harvey writes of the ways and means that Nova Scotians could use to get themselves out of their economic rut, and he says the Loyalists “made definite contributions to the cultural improvement and intellectual awakening of Nova Scotia ...” (105). But there was also a cultural numbness: he does not mention that press gangs operated as late as February and March of 1814; that the accused were still sentenced to punishment disproportionate to their crime; that thieves were publicly whipped up until 1820; and in that same year Mr. William Wilkie of Halifax, who was found guilty of publishing a pamphlet charging the magistrates of the town with malpractices (which was probably true), was sentenced to two years imprisonment with hard labour in the house of correction (Akins, 162,195,207). Even though Nova Scotians were awakening, they were still not immune to vested authority; they had no real power, and their representatives could do nothing more than criticize. The power lay in the hands of the Lieutenant-Governor and his ‘Council of Twelve’ who could sweep aside any rural meddling.

By 1812 most of the civilian population of Halifax had been born there, or were recent immigrants. They were genuine proletarians, having neither reserve resources nor any family on the old farm, or in fish harbour hamlets, for refuge when times were bad; and they customarily were. What this economically disadvantaged class really needed was intellectual muscle; they had survival to think about. However, they were resilient enough to survive the scorns and whips of their world, and the wrongs of the oppressor.

These proletarians were never totally passive, they were always active – they too were historical actors with their own dynamics, distinctive customs and ideologies, and ways of extracting compensations from the socio-political system of that period (T.W. Acheson draws attention to the intervening actions and human agency of the lower class in his book *Saint John: The Making of a Colonial Urban Community*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985. And Judith Fingard writes of the survival skills and culture of the “underclass” in *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax*, Porters Lake: Pottersfield Press, 1989.) From 1749, and for a hundred years, the problem in Nova Scotia was that there were no sociodynamics to produce change in society: DeCompte’s and Marx’s ideas of sociology and equality would not be debated until the middle of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, political change eventually took place when the ruling oligarchy was finally abolished, but the change was slow, gradual, and wearisome: The efficacy of the council’s broom did not wear out until 1848.

Scene 2

However, some changes did begin in Nova Scotia in 1789; the appointment of Bishop Inglis as head of the Church of England, schools of higher learning, an agricultural college, expansion of the publishing industry; and of course, with the opening of the New Grand Theatre in Halifax, the town it was showing signs of sophistication. In the following years the materials of good living, fashions, and the standard repertoire of plays imported from England would make Halifax, in all things cultural, British. It is significant that theatre, like writing, is not only a product of, it is also a producer of culture.

Fortunately, Lieutenant William Dyott (1761-1846), who kept a diary from the age of 20 until the year before he died, was stationed in Halifax in 1789, and in an entry dated Feb. 28th of that year he states, “The officers and garrison fitted up a new theatre. On the 26th it opened with *The Merchant of Venice*. It was as complete a thing for the size I ever saw. Boxes, and a first and second pit, the plays were very entertaining, and some of the characters were vastly well supported”. From newspaper advertisements it appears that the interior layout of the New Grand resembled a typical English playhouse of the Georgian period. The cheapest seats in the house, probably plain benches, were in the ‘pit’, the central area of the main floor immediately in front of a large stage. Along the back and side walls of the auditorium were the boxes, raised several feet above the level of the pit, but separated from it by a rail and known as the gallery. These were the most expensive seats. The *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle* of January 26th, 1789, posts the admission fees: “ Five shillings in the boxes, three in the first pit, two in the second pit.” Apparently there were two pits, one behind the other, as Dyott mentioned. Another entry in his diary roughly seven weeks later on April 16th reads, “We continued our plays at the new theatre to crowded audiences through the winter. They went off remarkably well. We collected 400 [pounds], almost the whole of which was expended on the house. Closed in June” (61-2). The New Grand apparently had seating for 500, and its busiest months were March and April, then closing until December. An evening’s entertainment usually consisted of a prologue; a short poem in blank verse, followed by the main piece; a comedy, then the after piece; a farce, and it would conclude with an epilogue; usually a short speech addressed to the audience commenting on what they had just witnessed, so that there would be no

misunderstanding. Sometimes there would be songs between the main piece and the afterpiece, and even between each act. Hunting songs were a favorite, as advertised in the *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle* of January 6th, 1789. The modern analogue would be an audience at Neptune Theatre seeing Mr. John Hamm give a recitation on the evils of gambling, followed by the comedy *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change*, followed by scenes from the rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar*, interspersed with Buddy Whasisname and the Other Fella singing “We’re off to the Country to Murder the Duck”, and Rita McNeil giving her rendition of “It’s a workin’ man, I am”, and concluding with an epilogue by Bette MacDonald, dressed in men’s clothing, explaining why the night’s entertainment ‘went madly off in all directions’. But the equivalent did not strike those early colonials as incongruous. It was not until the 1850’s that theatre managers and producers began to understand that a well-acted main production could stand on its own two feet. And one must not discount the capacity of charity as a crutch for bad acting.

The New Grand Theatre became the centre of activity in Halifax from 1789 to 1814. It changed names at least four times during its heyday, becoming the New Theatre, then Halifax Theatre, and finally Theatre Royal; probably in honor of its greatest patron H.R.H. Prince Edward, Duke of Kent. However, the performances at the New Theatre were considered mainly entertainment and consequently there were no reviews. Of all the aspects of colonial Halifax up until *circa* 1846, that resists generalization, is the fact that the local papers never commented on the acting of the garrison amateurs, and very rarely on the scenery, costumes, or music. Although it is impossible to assess the acting styles, the papers did carry very brief comments on some performances, such as, “The

characters were in general supported with much propriety” (*Halifax Journal*, January 1, 1795). This seems to have been the standard comment, as it is reiterated time after time. Included with these short notes are remarks on attendance, so one at least has a glimpse at the size of the audience. For instance the *Halifax Journal* of January 1st, 1795 also states, “On 30 December 1794, the Halifax Theatre [New Grand] opened for the season to a very crowded and brilliant audience”, and in the same journal on February 26th, 1795: “On 25 February 1795 the Halifax Theatre held the most crowded audience we ever remember to have seen.” The *Weekly Chronicle* and other papers also record extremely high attendance right up until the theatre closed in 1814. Ostensibly they imitated the mother country’s social conventions with self-conscious zeal.

The *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle*, which was published every Tuesday, advertised the performance for that same night, or the Tuesday next, and on occasion it named Wednesday as the play night. Sometimes the announcements would contain appeals or instructions for the audience; and from these one can get a closer look and speculate about these cultivated personages who attended the garrison amateur performances. For example on March 3rd, only one week after the New Grand opened, the “*Gazette*” printed an announcement stating that the gentlemen of the army and navy would present the comedy *The Beaux Stratagem* on March 10th; and what is interesting is that it contained the following appeal to the fashion conscious ladies who would be attending: “It is particularly requested the ladies will dress/ their heads as low as possible, as otherwise the persons/ sitting behind cannot have a sight of the stage.” Obviously there was no elevation of seats in the theatre, and the ladies were eagerly copying the fashions of London and Paris. Commenting on this Raddall remarks, “In short time this

admonition was needless, for the fashion in hairdressing, like every other mode, was changed by the wind from Europe” (107). One can assume the ladies were in attendance to be seen as well as to see the play. The announcement continued with the entreaty, “The ladies and gentlemen are desired to give directions to their servants when they come to take them/ from the theatre, to have their horses heads towards/ the parade [square].” This implies social standing and sufficient wealth to maintain private carriages, and obviously the management did not wish to see the conveyances horsing off in every direction causing accidents for which they could be held responsible. In the next advertisement, for the *School for Scandal*, on March 17th, these requests were dropped. On January 4th, 1791 an advertisement in the *Royal Gazette* promised “Good fires will also be kept, by a person employed for that purpose”, and from time to time there would be similar and repetitive announcements such as, “Every attention will be paid to render the theatre as comfortable as possible”, and “Great care is being taken to make the House warm and convenient since the last night of performance”. Undoubtedly the New Grand had excessive ventilation, and in the cold Nova Scotia winter one would have been well advised to go early in order to get a seat by the stove.

At times the newspapers would give notice of a garrison performance and state that it was a subscription night. These were usually held two nights after a public performance. From the beginning the garrison theatrical society raised money by selling subscriptions, or shares, to pay for the costs of production, which also included the creation and maintenance of a theatre. O’Neill suggests “That the Grand Theatre on Argyle Street, which opened on 26 February 1789, the Garrison Amateur Theatre, which opened in 1815-16, the Theatre Royal on Queen Street, which opened in 1846, and the

1860 theatre in the Dockyard Loft were probably all financed by military subscription”.

He explains the way the scheme worked was that “a committee would be selected to organize and administer a season of plays. An initial subscription would be made upon all officers to raise the money needed to begin production, such subscription being a mandatory donation assessed on all officers and based upon their rank and regiment”.

The local gentry who assisted in productions could also subscribe to a series of plays.

There was an admission fee which went to charity, and only the subscribers, or as O’Neill says, “The proper people”, were “allowed to purchase as many tickets for each production as they wished”. The military officers would then invite as many friends as they had tickets, to a performance. “Subscription theatricals, funded and organized by the military were undertaken in part to repay the entertainment offered to the officers by the citizens of Halifax” (Halifax 154-6).

Scene 3

The entertainments referred to were levees, or public receptions, held at Government House for the genteel; and dinners and balls, hosted by the merchant elite, and distinguished societies that were in full swing in Halifax in the 1790’s. There was an English Society, a German Society, The Charitable Irish Society, and the Halifax Marine Society among others. These societies held meetings and assemblies for social purposes and recreation at the various taverns and Inns of Halifax, such as the Pontac and Mrs. Sutherland’s Coffee House, every fortnight. Akins writes, “The national societies dined together, and levees were held and parties given at Government House on all public holidays”, and “It was customary at this period to celebrate the Royal birthdays and almost all public holidays by a levee at Government House, a review of the troops in

garrison on the common, and occasionally a public ball ... This custom continued in Halifax until about the year 1844 or 1845 ..." (84, 89). Sutherland notes that "In 1794 the North British Society invited Prince Edward and Governor Wentworth to their annual dinner. After three weeks of costly preparation some 200 members and guests, accompanied by two military bands, sat down for a meal and toasts which persisted until one in the morning", and he remarks, "Self-indulgent debauchery would prevail among the local gentry for another generation" (Fingard 35). One gathers from the writings of diverse yet indiscriminate historians that the local gentry took the garrison officers on sleigh rides, picnic and chowder parties, hunting and fishing sorties, bibulous dinners, and even cockfighting all during their occupation, and that there was always much consumption of alcohol. So it seems the revels and subscriptions were reciprocal favors; but the officers also enjoyed the sensuous pleasure of performing on stage. However, from the very beginning, and up until 1906, with the possible exception of the years between 1834 and 1845, Haligonians had been enchanted by the British military; and Citadel Hill with its constantly changing cast of characters and renowned tosspots; Captains and Princes; ships and mystique; and parades, drums, and tootly music.

The New Grand was up and running in April 1792 when the Loyalist John Wentworth began his sixteen year tenure as Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia. "He had resided in Halifax for seven or eight years, having held the office of Ranger of Woods and Forests, and had been Governor of New Hampshire" (Akins 103). His appointment as Lord and Master would open "the liveliest and gaudiest era in the history of Halifax". Lord and Lady Wentworth, being full of colonial charm, hosted many levees, private dinners, and balls; and they were also patrons of the theatre (Raddall 105,111).

But the highlight of the decade took place on May 10th, 1794, when His Royal Highness Prince Edward, now Commander in Chief of Nova Scotia, and his mistress, Madam Julie de St. Laurent arrived in Halifax under a 21 gun salute (Akins 107). Raddall writes that the Prince was a stout patron of church and theatre (115). He also had a penchant and a talent for landscape enhancement and architectural design. The first improvement he made was to Fort George, or Citadel Hill, itself. “He cut off the whole top of the hill to a depth of fifteen feet, using the displaced earth and stone to fill hollows in the slope. Upon the plateau thus created he built a rectangular earthen fort with four bastions, all surrounded by a wide ditch ten feet deep ...” (116). So, like the government, Citadel Hill was firmly entrenched. On the north flank the Prince built “a roomy and handsome wooden mansion with a wide Corinthian portico facing the common, and a stretch of well-kept gardens running down the slope to Cogswell Street”. Quoting Piers, Raddall writes that this mansion was the scene of many formal levees, stately dinner parties, and gay balls attended by gallant army and navy officers, loyal colonial officials and gentry of the town (119). From the portico the Prince and his guests would have had pleasing prospects of the Halifax landscape, as well as the harbour. The view from its eastern windows, on the other side, provided a coign of vantage to North Barrack Square, where the Prince could see the gallows, and watch the floggings of the deserters he had reined in: the theatre of punishment. Apparently his talons were equally as sharp as his talents; he had no tolerance for deserters, murderers, or thieves.

In any event, with these innovations, one could say that Prince Edward set the stage for the cultural expression of Halifax. Cultural landscape is always charged with implications of social power, status, and shared cultural values. The most important

aspect of cultural landscape is the architectural landscape, which is equally charged with social and cultural beliefs. The Prince's architecture is distinguished by its character as well as its location, and he obviously loved the classical Palladian style, for his legacy can be seen in the Garrison, or Old Town Clock; the round music pavilion on the Bedford Basin; the Martello Towers, with their round bulk, in Point Pleasant Park and the Northwest Arm; and St. George's Round Church with its rotunda is a reverend example. The result of all this architectural eccentricity is that though it does not look particularly English, it looks like nothing else; it is a symbol and monument to the culture of Halifax. Accompanying all these imposing structures was his country retreat, Prince's Lodge, which had a wide view of the Bedford Basin; and this, as well as his Mansion on Citadel Hill, probably set a precedent for the merchant elite and genteel residents of Halifax. They had all the tokens of respectability, and all the material things of good living: fine china and silverware, and elegant furniture, all imported from England. It was probably vanity-gratifying to procure such things where one's fashions and one's religious doctrines also came from. And they were obviously steeped in the art of rhetoric, but in order to improve, or obtain a higher social standing, it was necessary that they acquire a residence with a lofty view of the surrounding landscape in order to show high breeding, or to be cast in the same mold so to speak, as the owners of the grand estates in England at the time. The Chateau would be a statement of who they were; and in it they would be insulated against society's problems.

Scene 4

Halifax itself was founded and laid out on a system which followed the English principles necessary to the establishment of a "Genteel" town, with public spaces for

churches, a parade square, and Government House. Raddall writes that in the late 1760's the garrison engineer, Colonel Spry "had carved a farm estate for himself out of the woods beyond the Northwest Arm", and that Lord Campbell and other "Halifax Fashionables" made Windsor their summer resort (73). Writing of the early post loyalist years Raddall points out that Lieutenant Governor Fanning built a house at Point Pleasant and surrounded it with gardens, and that "The wealthy merchant Hartshorne and others built fine homes and entertained lavishly"(99). As well, Lieutenant Governor Wentworth and his wife "built a summer residence on a Preston hilltop, commanding a magnificent view of lakes and streams and rolling wooded hills"; and here they entertained royally (122). Lieutenant Governor Wentworth also built a "Vice-Regal Palace" on Lower Hollis Street. This mansion was destined to become a lasting feature of Halifax public architecture, and it came to be called Government House. "The building reflects a combination of John Wentworth's ego and the prosperity Halifax enjoyed early in the 19th century" (Fingard 37-8). Commenting on the merchants during the 1820's Harvey writes "... while accumulating wealth and influence, they built new homes, imitated the official classes in acquiring country residences, and commenced their career as patrons of literature and the arts" (116). In *The Country and the City* Raymond Williams includes a chapter entitled "Pleasing Prospects" in which he states the trend of the aristocrats in England during that era was to build huge angular mansions, with surrounding gardens, on elevated heights to give "Pleasing Prospects", or vistas, stretching out into the distance, in which the spectator was in the centre; him or herself, as well as the mansion being held up to view (120-6). They wanted to see as well as be seen. Psychologically,

perhaps these spectator landlords felt their intellectual and cultural level was elevated in this emulation of the British aristocracy. This phenomenon still exists today.

All this is notable because the elite were patrons of the theatre, and like their architecture they attended plays to see and be seen. As audience they would be in close harmony with each other; and diked out in the latest fashions they would attract notice with a view to enhancing their prestige. So theatre was a social stage. Theatre was also a political stage. Writing of the period between 1820 and 1860 Francis suggests "... theatrical evenings, had an obvious underlying function for the participants. The governor and other notables could use the formal social occasions to gain adherents, to persuade, to conciliate, to manipulate, and to disarm" (143). A valid analogy is often made between the political system and the theatre, both being a presentation involving major and minor actors, front and backstage behaviour, rules governing interaction of the players, dramatic and allusive communication.

Plays have a religious ancestry; the Christian church in England is often credited with the rebirth of western theatre. Scenic representation in the form of pictures and statuary was already present inside, and sometime in the mid-thirteenth century the tropes were taken out of the choir and turned into short playlets which were staged in front of the high altar. However, as time passed the playlets became longer and more complicated evolving into mystery, miracle, and morality plays. Finally they were moved outdoors to the churchyard or town square, and eventually put in the hands of the trade guilds who provided the money and personnel needed to produce the plays: much the same as the British military who financed garrison theatre through subscription.

During the rise of garrison theatre the strait-laced and well-placed attended church services to worship God while listening to the preachers deliver eloquent metaphors from the pulpit; and to be seen. All formal ceremonies performed in the swearing-in of an appointed public official ended in church services, and thereafter the mayors and magistrates were acknowledged with the honorific title “His Worship” in recognition that they were worthy of high office. God was a shaping ingredient of the colony, and the church provided cultural cohesion. But there were dissenters, such as the Methodists and Evangelists who had a chronic dread of bishops and prayer books, and conventional Church of England ways. To counter this Bishop Inglis responded in several ways; one of which was making the church’s presence known, as Condon says, “at major public events” including “theatre performances” (Buckner and Reid 195), both public and subscription. Sometimes a church warden or high ranking official would be sent to give a short sermon, or prologue, before the play began. These poems communicated the feelings of the church and the poet, and contained weepy pieties about the poor, and praised the garrison officers as pillars of society. One was preserved by being published in the *Royal Gazette* of March 7th, 1809. It was included in a commentary on the *Merchant of Venice* which had been “represented in a very handsome style, at the Theatre Royal, by gentlemen of the navy and army, for the benefit of the poor of this town”. The prologue for this benefit performance was written by Sir Alexander Croke, an interim Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia, and read by Major Tucker on February 28th, 1809. Ponder the lines:

... chilling, as it past
 Through the bare forest, roared the northern blast:
 See, in yon cot, which scarce excludes the cold,
 A wretched female, widowed, sick, and old;
 Her naked infants shivering round her bed,
 Half famished ask, but ask in vain, for bread
 No more a mother's bosom brings relief,
 She checks each fond request, with looks of grief.
 No father's care the wonted aid supplies,
 No fostering friend to close those dying eyes.
 On every side are sights of anguish seen
 And numb'd Despair broods o'er the silent scene.
 But when, at your command, Want disappears,
 Fall'n Hope revives, and misery dries her tears:
 Whilst Gratitude ascends to Mercy's throne,
 And smiling infants call a blessing down,
 Ye nobly act the part of Heaven assign'd,
 Friends, fathers, guardians, of distress'd of mankind.

One could argue that *noblesse oblige*, the elaborate conceit that privilege entails responsibility, was the reason the gentlemen of the army and navy put on benefit performances. In any event charity sanctified theatre as an eligible subject for patronage, and the subscribers and patrons could show their unselfish regard for the poor, even if

some were hiding behind the mask of altruism. The press as an institution did print brief commentaries on benefit performances, but little in the way of reviews. However, theatre advertisements did state whether there was one specific patron, otherwise they began with “By permission of His Excellency the Governor”. But from 1794 to 1798 the announcements continued with “and under the Patronage of His Royal Highness Prince Edward” and of course, in 1799 when His royal rank changed they read “and under the Patronage of His Royal Highness the Duke of Kent”. By this time the New Grand was called Theatre Royal in His honour. It is also significant that all newspaper advertisements for garrison performances up until 1814 included the subscript which prays *Vivant Rex et Regina*: these words imposed themselves on the consciousness of readers and audience as symbol and synonym of British imperialism.

“Prince Edward, who was commandant of the garrison, appears to have patronized almost all public entertainments in the town. He dined with the national societies, and honored the balls given by Governor Wentworth with his presence. His manners were affable, and he was, in consequence, quite popular with all classes in the town” (Akins 114). The other side of his character, according to Raddall, was that “he had too great a sense of his own importance, he had no sense of the value of money, and he had not a spark of humanity in dealing with his soldiers” (115). Nonetheless with all his building, and repairs and reconstruction of defenses, money was plentiful and Halifax was in a prosperous state and enjoying the boom. So in spite of his faults, and in spite of the “press gangs” that “harried the town” between 1796 and 1800 to force men to serve in the army and navy (Raddall 126), Haligonians probably looked the other way because they did not wish to look a gift horse too hard in the mouth. What they did look at and

fancy was spectacle, whether of the living or of the dead. However, most citizens, hat in hand, who witnessed the tragic public spectacles of hanging and flogging became palled at these scenes.

Akins gives a long and detailed description of the ceremony of the funeral of Governor Lawrence which took place on the 24th or October, 1760 (61). Thirty-one years later on the 25th of November 1791, the same impressive spectacle of the funeral of Governor Parr took place. Akins writes:

The procession moved from Government House to St. Paul's Church, in the Following order: - All the lodges of the Freemasons, (His Excellency having been the Grand Master,) the 20th regiment as the firing party, the Church Wardens, the Physicians of deceased, the Clergy, the Bishop, the body covered by a pall adorned by eight escutcheons, Pall-bearers, Hon. A. Brymer, Major Boyd, the Commissioner of the Dockyard, the Admiral, the Hon. S.S. Blowers, Hon. Thomas Cochran, Major Rawlinson, the General, the relatives and servants of deceased, particular friends, the Sheriff of the county, members of Council, viz., Morris, Bulkeley and Newton, Judges Brenton and Hutchinson, the Treasurer of the Province, the Speaker of the House of Assembly, Custos of the county and Justice Binney, Magistrates of the town, the bar, staff of the army, officers of the navy and army, officers of the militia, gentlemen of the town, and the whole garrison all under arms, lining the streets. Minute guns were fired by the men-of-war in the harbor and by the Royal Artillery, during the

procession. The service was performed by the Bishop, Dr. Charles Inglis, and the body was buried under the middle aisle (101).

These sumptuous and highly theatrical funerals were the kind in which garrison colonial societies excelled. Even in their final exit the Governors and high-ranking officials wished to be seen and saluted amid the dead hush of the spectators lining the streets. As for the living souls, probably the longest-running spectacle was the salute and march past before relieving guard every morning on the Grand Parade. “The band usually played for half an hour before the ceremony of inspecting the guards commenced. At sunset and at gunfire, at eight o’clock in the evening, the drum and fife proceeded from the town clock, in Barrack Street, to Government House or the General’s quarters, and back again to the barracks”. This custom began with the founding of Halifax “and was partly kept up until about the year 1845. Guard mounting on the Parade at 10 o’clock in the morning during summer continued until Governor LeMarchant left Halifax in 1856” (Akins 208). Seeing this drama take place would have been captivating to an audience of Halifax citizens and visitors alike.

Scene 5

Reading the documents and viewing the paintings made during the late 1700’s and early 1800’s one gets the impression that everyone was wearing a costume. From miserable rags to military regalia the people of Halifax were all actors making entrances and exits; the atmosphere of theatre was everywhere. In the early 1790’s fashion changed, and women, opting for comfort, began emulating the free styles of Paris and London. They cut their hair shorter, and came forth in one-piece gowns of light muslin

cut very low, and divided into skirt and bodice by a ribbon tied just below the all but naked breasts (see picture of Alicia Uniacke on page 31 of *Halifax The First 250 Years*). As well, the ladies “slipped about in flat soft shoes tied sandal-fashion up the ankle”. The gentlemen went “a step further in their own discomfort, clasping their legs in skintight breeches, stifling themselves in a multiplicity of waistcoats and in coats with enormous collars and enormous tails, and choking themselves with prodigious cravats. And men of fashion were wearing hats cocked high at front and back. The older generation clung to its ways, and as late as 1820, when trousers had come into vogue, elderly gentlemen could be seen ... in buckled shoes, stockings, breeches, embroidered waistcoats, huge square-cut coats, and wigs” (Raddall 108), as if to display their antique deference or respectability.

Very little has been documented on the apparel of the poorer classes, laborers and servants, prior to 1820. One can only imagine the tattered appearance of these citizens on the streets of Halifax in ragged hand-me-downs and old discarded military coats and caps, enacting their lives as a type of ongoing dramatic exhibition as they mingled among the upper classes, soldiers and sailors, government officials and merchants, foreigners, and rustics from the country. Like stock characters in a farce they would have looked as if their purpose was to purge the hard hearts of the upper class, offset the serious day to day business of the merchants and politicians, relax the tension, and even bring laughter to the mask-like austere faces with important matters to attend to. But these unfortunates would have produced both comedy and tragedy. On the one hand they would have reminded some of a well-known colonel attacked by diarrhea caused by a spell of drinking the night before; on the other they would remind some that the gods could also

melt their wings. And, of course, there was the cultural cringe that went with it; the poor were mistrusted, even feared, a thing often most inhumanely expressed. To the artist they would have looked like grotesque impersonations; like reflections in a distorted mirror, not unlike the garrison officers who disguised themselves as women in the comedies they presented at Theatre Royal. The rich and the poor, then, decked out in artful disguises, would have turned the streets of Halifax into stages, presenting passing shows of spectators and spectacle, and audience and actors. A flaneur would have observed the theatre of public life.

Another spectacle that all citizens, rich and poor, participated in was illumination. On the arrival of visiting royalty, or after the news of success in wars, all Halifax celebrated with illumination. Akins writes that in 1759, after the news of the victory of the siege of Quebec, “The town was illuminated and fireworks bonfires and other public entertainments lasted several days”, and on the 15th of January 1780, “The town was illuminated ... for the success of the British troops in Georgia”. The town was illuminated on the 25th of November, 1798, after reports of Nelson’s victory at the Nile arrived in Halifax. On May 22nd, 1814 when word arrived of the fall of Napoleon Bonaparte “The event was celebrated by a military review with salutes, and the whole town was illuminated in the evening, and a military band performed.” And when news arrived on the 3rd of August, 1815, of the triumph of the Battle of Waterloo “The town was illuminated in honor of the victory, and the inhabitants kept up their rejoicings till a late hour in the evening” (59, 78, 122, 162, 169). Apparently the inhabitants kept lighted candles in their windows all night as well; perhaps to symbolize that the darkness of war had ended. The inhabitants also lit candles when Royal Personages visited. On October

10th, 1786, Prince William Henry arrived in Halifax, and even though he “expressed a desire that all display should be laid aside, the people illuminated their dwellings, and by 8 o’clock the whole town was lighted and the streets crowded with people.” The Prince was back in Halifax on July 3rd, 1787, and the same contagious enthusiasm took place, “and a brilliant illumination of the town” (89, 90). The Prince represented the preservation of peace; and there was always the strange phenomenon in colonial times that when royalty visited class differences were briefly cast aside. In any event these celebrations were emotional. It is impossible to overestimate the thirst for spectacle among Haligonians during the garrison years.

Scene 6

The Church thought it unrighteous for a congregation of people to sit side by side in an unlighted auditorium, so candles, and later oil lamps, illuminated the inside of Theatre Royal and focused attention on the audience as well as the actors. Lights inside playhouses were not turned down until the 1870’s, after the garrison theatrical era. The audience was there to see as well as to be seen. The plays they saw were almost always English comedies and farces. In that era of Georgian drama, or comedy of manners, the garrison amateurs produced comedies such as Hoadley’s *The Suspicious Husband*; Sheridan’s *School for Scandal*; Farquar’s *The Beaux Stratagem*; Garrick’s *The Guardian*; Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*; and Cibber’s *The Provok’d Husband*. These comedies would always be followed by a farce with tell-tale titles like *The Lying Valet* by David Garrick; *High Life Above Stairs* by David Garrick; *Wags of Windsor* by George Colman; *The Devil to Pay* by John Mottley; *The Mock Doctor* by Fielding; and *The*

Village Lawyer by William MacCready. These are just a few of many British standbys put on by the military officers stationed in Halifax between 1773 and 1874.

Comedy of Manners, or High Comedy, is mostly concerned with the amorous intrigues of witty and sophisticated members of an aristocratic society; the actions of those who imitate the manners of that society overlap the audience's anticipation for the joke to come, which, when it does come causes much raillery and laughter. Farce, or low comedy, on the other hand, presents ludicrously exaggerated events played by stock characters – the cuckold, the miser, the stutterer, the hunchback, the foreigner – who appear as comic, intellectually challenged, or mocking figures according to the differing emotional attitudes they arouse in spectators of a particular culture. Indeed some critics have argued that the comedies are more serious than the tragedies, in that their scope of reference is socially more communal. For the genteel, comedy and farce offered escape from the frustrations and anxieties caused by self-interest, and provided the necessary catharsis for those who were homesick for England. And the garrison officers who acted enjoyed the prestige and popular esteem of the genteel society of Halifax. Subscription theatre was class conscious; and the higher rank of the military on stage was reflected in the social hierarchy of the audience, and vice versa. The costuming of most plays in contemporary dress added to the mirror effect, since people off stage looked very much like those on stage. This reflection rendered them participants as well as spectators, and it also established and reaffirmed the identity of genteel society as being well-bred. However, the plays focused on the pretentiousness and conceit of that identity; and the actors themselves probably appealed to the audiences' sense of the ridiculous, for the female parts were always played by male officers. These officers were usually young

subalterns; and the irony is that on stage they could compete with higher officers for public notice. Humour usually takes the edge off everything. But at the same time the officers playing male roles probably made the hearts of the ringleted and ambitious young women skip a beat. Although concerned with amorous intrigues; in comedy of manners there were no passionate embraces, and very little slap and tickle, so the military could maintain its dignity.

Military training at that time was designed to inculcate the notion that women were by no means equal to men; and it was also a period dominated by pulpits, politics, and power. This is part of the reason why the officers played the women's parts in garrison theatre. The very notion of a woman acting on stage would have been objectionable to most people; society itself put women under repressive taboos and austere attitudes. The social sentiment and conceit up until the end of the Victorian era was that women acting in drama were exhibiting their true personality and independence, and being independent was a short step from being promiscuous. Audiences had a tendency to associate the character in a play with the character of the actress. If a woman played the part of a concubine, or of a prostitute, it would be unwomanly, and leave a taint on the character of all women, which would not be morally acceptable. While the male-dominated and social sentiments for the unwritten rule barring women from acting in garrison productions must be taken seriously, the religious reason that pious expression would strengthen religious belief must also be considered. From time to time unmarried actresses from the United States would appear with professional troupes on the stages of Halifax, and to avoid the tawdry connotation of promiscuity they would use the honorific title of "Mrs." so the audience would recognize them as being chaperoned.

Use of that designated right may be seen in the list of visiting male and female actors performing at Theatre Royal in 1798, they include: “Mrs. Munto, Mrs. Pierce, Mrs. Spencer, Marriott and his wife, Salenka and his wife, James Ormsby and his wife, Martin, and Woodroffe” (Bains, *The New Grand* 11). All casts between 1788 and 1797 are credited as officers of the garrison or gentlemen of the town, and during those years the garrison theatrical society was altruistically losing money. So in the fall of 1797 the society hired a professional manager from Boston, by the name of “Charles Stewart Powell, who directed its affairs until his death in 1810. Powell’s wife and two daughters supported the company in female roles” (Bains, *The New Grand* 9). Whether Powell took over completely or worked under the direction of the theatrical society is not known; but he depended on the support of the garrison amateurs for most of the males, and he also had the support of Prince Edward.

Powell’s first show at Theatre Royal was popular entertainment rather than drama. The newspaper announcement gives the date of performance, “on 8 November 1797”, and states that it was under the patronage of H.R.H. the Duke of Kent and His Excellency the Governor”. What is interesting however is the programme itself, which reads: “Will be Presented,/ An Olio/ or/ Attic Evening’s Entertainment./ Composed of the Sublime, the Pathetic, the Hu-/ morous, and the Musical./ Part I./ A Prologue Written for the occasion./ A Lecture on Hearts, compiled from the/ works of the late celebrated George Alexander/ Stevens./ Consisting of/ A Royal Heart, A Usurer’s Heart/ A Tender Heart, the Heart of an Amiable Woman/ The Heart of a Sailor/ The Heart of An Old Maid, The Heart of a Miser/ The Heart of a Soldier/ These Hearts with their proper Emblems,/ will be exhibited to the Audience elegantly paint-/ed by an eminent Artist./

After the Lecture, a Song,/ “The Gallant Soldier Born to Arms.”/ Part II./ The Three warnings from Mrs. Thrale./ A military Fragment (to be read) Pratt./ After which a Hornpipe./ Part III./ Satan’s Address to the Sun. – Milton./ A dissertation on Jealousy, describing its different/ effects on the Spaniard, The Italian,/ the French-/man, the Dutchman, and the Englishman./ The whole to conclude with an Epilogue to be/ spoken in the Character of Harlequin, who/ will leap through the Jaws of a Fiery Dra-/gon./ (Royal Gazette 7 November 1797). Besides its appeal to a wide variety of tastes it is interesting because it seems to be heralding in the concert hall entertainments which would become popular in the latter half of the nineteenth century contributing to the fall of garrison theatre. Between that first show and September 1800 Powell put on over thirty variety performances, some of which were highly exaggerated in column long newspaper advertisements. Undoubtedly he would have depended on military bands for music. To satisfy the more discriminating tastes he sometimes put on an opera such as John Burgoyne’s *Richard Coeur de Lion* (Royal Gazette 13 Feb. 1798), or a tragedy like Thomas Franklin’s *Matilda* (Royal Gazette 11 March 1800). These plays were always followed by the customary farce, which is somewhat incongruous. The stage would have been too small, and the equipment and props too limited to produce huge Shakespearean productions. Comedy and farce only required painted canvas backdrops, and very little in the way of props. From time to time Powell put on benefit concerts such as the one for his fellow actor Mr. Marriott on June 18th, 1800. The comedy *Cheap Living* by Reynolds was followed by Jodrell’s farce *Seeing is Believing* (Royal Gazette 17 June 1800). This was also the last performance in Halifax under the patronage of His Royal Highness, Duke of Kent. He departed Halifax on August 4th, 1800, under full military ceremony,

with troops lining the streets surrounded by crowds of onlookers. However, the unsympathetic martinet left behind orders for the execution of eleven soldiers, deserters all. Eight were reprieved and three hanged on August 7th, only three days after his departure. This “Produced a disagreeable impression of His Royal Highness in the minds of the people of Halifax, who had just taken leave of him with so much kind feeling” (Akins 131-2). He was no great soul.

Scene 7

Nevertheless, Halifax was in its most carefree phase, and Citadel Hill was pregnant with economic significance, when the Prince was there. So most of the population could afford the usual two shillings to see a garrison performance. All members of Halifax society lived in an oral world in which the spoken word was central. They regularly went to church to hear the parson preach, and to see the proverbial pictures worth a thousand words. They sometimes listened to politicians speak, and watched the acting out of politics and political ethics. The newspapers published the shipping news and articles for sale by the local merchants, as well as some public notices and late news of the world. There would sometimes be a short article on a political or scientific topic, but most people could not read or write. And the ones that could read only had half the story: there is a continuity between the written text and the visual. For example, one studies theory in an agricultural college, but he or she does not understand it until they put it into practice and visually connect. Book learning does not necessarily imply intelligence. There had always been various “small private schools” for children of the elite (Raddall 162), but the poor received no tutoring until Walter Bromley, under the patronage of the Duke of Kent, established the Acadian School in 1814 (Raddall 151).

And there were no libraries in Halifax until the early 1820's. The poor and uneducated lived in economic conditions over which they had no control. In her book, *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax*, historian Judith Fingard analyses the 'underclass' and their conditions during the 1860's and 70's, stating that "For the destitute, drunken and dependent, the quality of city life improved but little in the nineteenth century." She also remarks that "The city did not seem to have changed much from the 1790's ..." (19, 25). But the lag of 80 years of neglect was not so easily overcome, as Fingard so skillfully points out.

However, the main purpose of attending plays, besides the overweening pretentiousness of the upper class, was to see and to hear. Plays are not meant to be read; they are meant to be acted, and communicated orally to an audience. The lack of education of most of the audience did not mean they were not able to think and form their own opinions about the spectacle of snobbery and incongruity in the sniffish attitudes of the upper crust in the impersonations in the high comedy they were observing. Acting itself is a form of snobbery, and the analytical minds among the unschooled spectators would have been quickened with contempt for the impersonations of the one-dimensional characters in ludicrous situations in farce. Low comedy would not have penetrated their funny-bones: theatre unwittingly became an educational system.

The result being that keen eyes and ears would contemplate and judge, and come up with heightened perceptions of what was taking place in the oral and visual world of their own culturally tortured class. In other words, it was the rise of garrison theatre, and the public spectacles of whipping, hanging, political ceremonies, and tactless displays of the heavy-handed military dragoons when pressing men into the King's service, that

brought about an awareness which culminated in the highly theatrical court room drama of Joseph Howe on a charge of libel, wherein he presented the facts and caught the rotting consciences of the Halifax magistrates, in 1835; ending in the first major victory for a free press in Canada. What was true of the theatre, was true of politics.

Scene 8

After the Prince bid his *adieux* theatre carried on sporadically in Halifax until 1817. The 1800-1801 season at Theatre Royal began on September 3rd with one of Powell's programs which read "By Permission of His Excellency Sir John Wentworth, and Lieut. General Boyer, a concert, vocal and instrumental" The advertisement continued with a very lengthy discourse on the opening night's entertainment. On September 10th Powell gave "a miscellaneous entertainment. Interspersed with a variety of comic songs, with the Evening Brush for Rubbing off the Rust of Care". But on September 19th the "Gentlemen of the Army" performed "The Celebrated Opera of the Mountaineers", by George Coleman. (*Royal Gazette*, Sept. 2, 9, 16, 1800).

Subsequent to the September 19th garrison performance no more announcements for theatre appear in the newspapers until March 14th, 1805, when the *Nova Scotia Royal Gazette* carried an advertisement for the *Tragedy of Tamerlane*, by Nicholas Rowe, to be performed on March 19th "by the Gentlemen of the Garrison." No explanation can be found for this interruption of stage drama, or lack of newspaper advertisements, unless Powell turned to hand-bill advertising, none of which survive, in order to cut costs. This may be ascertained from short notices, appearing in the newspapers from time to time until 1810, that end with, "which will be expressed in hand-bills of the day". Apparently Powell began printing his long exaggerated accounts of entertainments on leaflets, to be

publicly circulated. It could not have been easy for Powell to live on the income from his dramatics. This can be seen in the *Weekly Chronicle* of April 5th, 1806, which advertises George Colman's comedy *The Poor Gentleman*, and his farce *The Wags of Windsor* to be performed at Theatre Royal; "Characters by Gentlemen of the Garrison" on April 15th "For the benefit of Mr. Powell". Again one reads in the *Weekly Chronicle* of November 6th, 1807 that Colman's *The Heir at Law*, followed by O'Keefe's farce *The Poor Soldier* would be staged by "Gentlemen of the Garrison", "For the benefit of Mr. Powell". It seems the garrison amateurs had to prop up Mr. Powell at various stages of his time in Halifax. However, the Halifax newspapers reveal almost nothing about his dealings with the garrison or with the public. But he must have had difficulty making ends meet; "He conducted a dancing academy to supplement his income", and "[a]nother of Powells methods to increase his income and to explore the market was to travel to Saint John, New Brunswick, and to perform there with his company" (Bains, *The New Grand* 14).

The progress of theatre in Halifax parallels the rise and decline of the economy; a condition which varied in response to many external events. So if there was no theatre between September 1800 and March 1805, it could have been caused by the economic situation. Raddall paints a very bleak picture of Halifax during those years, stating that "the fleet was withdrawn, the garrison reduced", and that "Halifax was full of discharged and penniless soldiers and seamen", and most of the population wondered "whence their next shilling was to come". In contrast to this drastic predicament he writes that "The well-salaried officials and the war-enriched merchants and speculators still managed to do themselves well" (132-9), mostly from the economic guerilla war at sea by His Majesty's Nova Scotia privateers.

Nonetheless, the story of the Halifax stage began again in 1805, and continued through 1813 when the theatrical society and the garrison players finally deserted Theatre Royal. The plays during those years were presented on a somewhat irregular basis, and the society resumed the former practice, begun in 1797, of putting on benefit performances; the proceeds of which went to a fellow actor who was in need of financial assistance. Benefits had been put on for the manager, Mr. Powell, in 1806 and 1807, and one reads in the *Weekly Chronicle* dated March 1st, 1811 that Mrs. Centilivre's "comedy *A Woman Keeps a Secret*, followed by "George Colmans "farce *We Fly by Night* will be performed by officers of the garrison, at Theatre Royal, for the benefit of the Miss Powells". Mrs. Powell and her two daughters had parts in the farce. And on May 1st, 1811 the *Nova Scotia Royal Gazette* gives notice that a benefit will be held at Theatre Royal "For Mrs. Powell and her daughters", the performances to be Colman's "comedy *The Poor Gentleman*", as well as Colman's farce, *Matrimony*". The titles of the plays are somewhat ironic as Mr. Powell had passed away the year before. According to most sources Mrs. Powell and her daughters suffered severe hardship after the death of Mr. Powell; but they were professional actresses and they continued to support the theatrical society, and act alongside the garrison amateurs, as shown in newspaper advertisements, up until 1820. This draws attention to the characteristic conceit prevalent among the garrison amateurs that made it unbefitting an officer to perform alongside an amateur actress. Perhaps they thought of themselves as professional.

Most of the plays by the garrison amateurs at Theatre Royal from 1805 to 1813 were benefits, or for charity. On July 24th, 29th, and on August 5th, 1806 the "gentlemen of the garrison" performed the comedy *Lovers Vows*, and the farce *Wags of Windsor*, "for

the benefit of the sufferers by the late destructive fires” (Weekly Chronicle 19 July 1806). The *Nova Scotia Royal Gazette* of May 23, 1809 states that “The officers of the garrison, will perform, for the relief of the widows and children of the soldiers who fell at the capture of Martinique” The *Nova Scotia Royal Gazette* of June 19th, 1811 carries a notice that the performances of June 25th will be “for the benefit of the theatre”. One can only suppose that the proceeds would go towards refurbishing Theatre Royal. The same paper, on July 17th, 1811, gives notice that “The officers of the garrison” will perform “on July 23rd for the benefit of a respectable family in distress, the favorite comedy of *Speed the Plough* ..., to which will be added the farce of *A Wife at her Wits End*”. Again the titles are apt, and one has to wonder if the theatrical society selected plays to suit the crisis. During those early years of the 19th century there were entertainments and variety shows at other venues, such as the Free Mason’s Hall, or at one of the many coffee houses of the time. For instance the *Weekly Chronicle* of February 8th, 1811, advertises that a Mr. Adams “intends offering a theatrical exhibition, at the British Coffee House ... to consist of readings and recitations, comic and sentimental ...” on February 13th. It could be that Mr. Adams did not read with much expression or drama, or perhaps his audience consisted of people with short attention spans, for on March 26th, just seven weeks later, the garrison amateurs put on a benefit show for Mr. Adams (*Nova Scotia Royal Gazette* 20 March 1811).

The New Grand Theatre (Theatre Royal) was the centre of activity from 1789 to 1813, and nearly all the plays performed by the garrison officers were for charitable purposes of one kind or another. Between 1805 and 1813 most newspaper advertisements for garrison performances end with “The receipts of the house will be

applied to a charitable purpose.” Although there seems to have been a scarcity of plays at Theatre Royal and other venues during this time some scholars, whose opinions are worthy of respect, state that the officers could have put on performances in the homes of the gentry, or in Government House, and that they may have performed in their own barracks, as a pastime. In any event, the love of acting in plays, or dilettantism, is what made the cast and crew of the theatrical society a separate entity of the military: a dramatic corps. They were men of honour, and they had a soul and a social conscience; a sense of responsibility for the problems and injustices of the colonial society of Halifax; a *noblesse oblige*. They saw the poverty around them and tried to remedy the suffering and grief of the poorer class in the one way they knew, by taking from the rich and giving to the poor. It was more ingenuous than ingenious. The garrison amateurs were transients, the posting in Halifax for the majority of these officers was temporary, and while they served out their interminable term they took advantage of, and enjoyed the benefit and prestige of rubbing elbows with the upper class.

However, the last advertised performance at Theatre Royal appeared in the *Weekly Chronicle* of September 17th, 1813 for “The tragedy of *The Noble Shepherd*/ Written by the reverend John Home/ .../ To conclude with the much admired entertainment, called/ *The Mad Actor*”, by George Colman, on September 21st. The announcement also states that “A military band will attend the theatre,” but it does not give the cast, professional or amateur. What is interesting is the addendum, “The public are respectfully informed that the theatre is now under repair, and that every exertion will be made, to tender it comfortable for the reception of the public”. Apparently the repairs never did benefit theatre audiences, for as it turned out the performances of September

21st were the last at Theatre Royal. Akins writes that on January 13th, 1814 Walter Bromley established the Acadian School for Poor Children in the old theatre building on Argyle Street (158). The building now became a place of textbook learning.

Scene 9

On June 18th, 1812, the United States senate approved a declaration of war against Britain, which ended on December 24th, 1814, with the Treaty of Ghent. Akins writes that, with Halifax being the headquarters of the British naval force, the port became very boisterous with the presence of large army and navy contingents coming from and going to American ports. Fortunes were made, money was plentiful, and festivities of all kinds prevailed. Subscription assemblies at Mason Hall were kept up during the winter under the management of Lieutenant-Colonel Robertson, of the Garrison. “Dinner parties at Government House, and balls and levies on state days, with frequent rejoicings ... of the success of the British armies, both in Europe and in America, completed the round of Halifax festivities” (153-4). He goes on to say that at any one time there were eight or ten thousand soldiers living side by side with less than ten thousand inhabitants. So, by 1813, in contrast to the high-life of the upper class, “The upper streets were full of brothels; grog shops and dancing houses were to be seen in almost every part of the town. The upper street along the base of Citadel Hill was known as “knock him down” street in consequence of the number of affrays and even murders committed there. The streets of this part of town presented continually the disgusting sight of abandoned females of the lowest class in a state of drunkenness, bare headed, without shoes, and in the most filthy and abominable condition” (158). War usually brings about social change; a change in customs, institutions, and culture of a society. But on the whole, besides making the rich

richer, it seems the only good for Halifax brought about by the war of 1812, was that the revenue collected at Castine, Maine, by the British authorities while they occupied that territory, went towards the building of Dalhousie College. “Soon after the peace the prosperity of Halifax began to wane” (Akins 173). So there would have been a great need for charity.

The theatrical society officially ended its occupancy of the building on Argyle Street and handed it over to Walter Bromley, for whatever reason, in January 1814. In the conclusion to his paper “The New Grand Theatre” Bains claims, “next year [1815] the theatrical society moved to the amateur theatre across from the Liverpool wharf near Jacob Street; in the fall of 1816 Nova Scotia got a second theatre – the Fairbanks Wharf Theatre. In these two structures amateur and professional troupes maintained the tradition set by Charles Stewart Powell” (17). The exact location of the amateur theatre is stated in an advertisement in the *Weekly Chronicle* dated September 18th, 1818 which reads, “Places to be taken and tickets had of Mrs. Charnock’s [Benefit], at Mr. Polegreen’s Upper Water Street, next to the Amateur Theatre”. In the same paper dated January 1st, 1819, an advertisement begins, “Halifax Theatre. Fairbanks Wharf”. So one can ascertain they are one and the same.

It should be pointed out here that all productions by the garrison amateurs while Prince Edward was in Halifax were advertised as being, “Under the patronage of His Royal Highness Prince Edward, and His Excellency Lieutenant-Governor, Sir John Wentworth”. After the Prince left in 1800 the advertisements read “Under the patronage of”, or “By permission of, His Excellency Lieutenant Governor ...”. The announcements sometimes state the Lieutenant-Governor and his Lady, as in “Under the patronage of His

Excellency Sir George and Lady Prevost” (*Nova Scotia Royal Gazette* 23 May 1809).

During the term of George Ramsay, Earl of Dalhousie (Oct., 1816 – June, 1820) there are only two newspaper advertisements for the garrison amateur theatre which state the Earl of Dalhousie as patron; one on April 11th, and one on May 2nd, 1817; and both appear in the *Weekly Chronicle*. There is one “Under the patronage of the Countess of Dalhousie” in the *Weekly Chronicle* of May 28th, 1819. The Countess’ name is also given as patron of a play and a farce by the “Gentlemen Amateurs” at “Halifax Theatre, Fairbanks Wharf ... for the benefit of Mrs. Powell and her daughters” (*Weekly Chronicle* 1 Jan. 1819). The play was the tragedy *Venice Preserved*, and a larger stage was probably needed. So for the period between March 19th, 1817, and October 29th, 1819, there are only four advertisements for garrison amateur performances as opposed to more than forty for professional theatre at the Fairbanks Wharf Theatre.

The only explanation for the few and far between newspaper announcements for the amateur theatre is that the garrison theatrical society provided subscription theatre only, during this time, and there would have been no need to advertise since the tickets would have all been sold to the members. The scant few plays that were advertised were for the public in general. The garrison amateurs did put on the odd benefit performance during the Earl of Dalhousie’s tenure of command, but the majority of their plays were for charity. Indeed, reflecting on subscription theatre for charitable purposes, the editor of the *Weekly Chronicle* wrote:

The pittance thus expended, was scarcely felt by the affluent; and the pleasing reflection, that the sums so raised were applied to the general

benefit of the town, by giving employment, in many instances, to the industrious – relief to the indigent – and, occasionally, dissipating, for a few hours, the gloom of a tedious winter, was gratefully acknowledged by all parties (1 Dec.1820)

Scene 10

From time to time a precursor of the garrison theatrical tradition; one of His Majesty's ships with a dramatic corps on board, would sail into Halifax harbour anxious to entertain, and be entertained. The crew and cast would transform their decks into stages, and using Halifax as a backdrop they would provide some of the most glittering social evenings of the era. Many of these shipboard performances are recorded in newspaper advertisements between 1852 and 1869. Newspapers in the early 1800's featured shipping news; not ship's theatre. However, there is evidence of at least one ship; the H.M.S. Leander, which had brought mail from Bermuda, whose company put on a performance while docked in Halifax in 1817. In her biography of *Charles Philip Yorke, Fourth Earl of Hardwicke*, Lady Biddulph of Ledbury includes a letter dated July 10th, 1817, from C.P. Yorke to his father which reads in part:

We are now just on the point of sailing for Shelburne with Ld. And Lady Dalhousie, and I fancy I shall be absent about ten days. The Jane has not yet arrived, so I am still a mid, not a captain, but expect her hourly. Last Monday we mids of the Leander gave a grand entertainment to the inhabitants of Halifax and officers of the fleet; a play, ball, and supper, which went off remarkably well. The Iron Chest was the play; the Wags

of Windsor the farce. I did not perform being steward of the supper, but merely spoke the prologue.

Yorke goes on to make the pithy remark, “The girls of Halifax are pretty, generally speaking, and certainly rather ladylike in their manners, but not very accomplished, but there is one thing very formidable in their structure, which is tremendous hoofs, so that a kick from one of them would make you keep your bed for a week” (23). One has to wonder if it was the lack of accomplishment or the tremendous hoofs that prevented the girls of Halifax from getting parts in garrison performances.

Besides putting on public and subscription performances the garrison amateurs were also involved in shoring up professional theatre: they sometimes acted alongside the professionals, and, when needed, military bands provided music. In addition, advertisements show that there were at least two occasions when the professional company performed in the amateur theatre (*Weekly Chronicle*, Sept. 18, Oct. 2, 1818). From information gleaned on the state of the Fairbanks Wharf building there is a possibility it could have been under repair at that time. Specifically, in the fall of 1816, Addison B. Price brought a professional acting company to Halifax and they set up in a building on Fairbanks Wharf they simply named “Halifax Theatre”, often referred to as “Theatre”. From the very beginning it is apparent they worked the benefit system: all the profits from a performance went to one or two of the actors. Nearly all of their advertisements begin with “Halifax Theatre /Mr. Price’s benefit”, or “Theatre/ for the benefit of Mr. Blake and Master Charnock”; until each actor working with Price had a benefit night, and then the series would begin again for whoever was with the company at

the time. The troupe performed in Halifax for three seasons, and they presented a wide variety of tragedies, comedies, farces, comic operas, interludes, melodramas, pantomimes, and dramatic poems.

However, after the first few performances, some discriminating Halifax spectators brandished the sharp sword of criticism. Using pseudonyms such as Veritas, Peeping Tom, Open Tom, Honest Tom, Senex, Juvenis, Philo, and Dramaticus among others, they composed lengthy critiques which they sent to editors of the *Free Press* and the *Acadian Recorder*. The low opinion of Price and company by these patrons ranged from comments on the scenery and costumes to bad acting and staging errors. They exposed incompetent actors who could not remember their lines; they wrote that the company cut the text of some plays; and they denounced the lack of talent among the actors. Letters of praise were few and far between the hue and cry; but on occasion the critics praised the women in the cast for performing better than the men. On a whole the letters would have given Haligonians the impression that they should stay away from these ill-affected productions. It would not be too presumptuous to say that Haligonians by that time were well acquainted with the art and craft of acting, and that they understood the importance of emphasis in conveying the meaning of words or phrases. So, if a troupe billed itself as professional, the public were selfish enough to want their money's worth. On the other stage the garrison amateurs could be forgiven any improvisation because they were amateurs; and amateurs do not perform for a fee, they do it for the love of the game; and any profits go to charity.

Consequently, the ridicule of the sophisticated spectators of Halifax concerning the inability of the professional actors to imitate nature on stage, combined with the

indifference of the performers toward their patrons, caused Price's company to be a laughing stock sending it into an irreversible decline. In order to recoup their losses, bolster attendance, and improve the quality of acting Price decided early in his second season to put on plays two nights a week instead of four. Price also hired a young Halifax native by the name of William Rufus Blake, probably as a drawing card, sometime in 1818. In the *Oxford Companion* O'Neill writes that Blake joined the company and began his professional career in the last season (Theatre 389). However, an announcement in the *Weekly Chronicle* dated April 17th, 1818, gives notice of a benefit for Mr. Blake. Yet the company continued to suffer financial difficulties. Mr. Price left Halifax in the fall of 1818 and a Mr. Betterton took over the management, but the company's fortunes did not get any better, attendance only worsened. Towards the end, the Halifax public seems to have lost interest in this group of performers. The advertisements for plays are phrased in the form of begging. In fact, Mr. Betterton, Mr. Charnock, Mr. Placide, and Mr. Thompson all included notes to their benefits describing the sorry state they were in. On January 22nd, 1819 Mr. Betterton is pleading for a successful benefit since he has sustained a heavy loss in a fire at his lodgings, and that the expenses incurred in maintaining the theatre had placed him in financial difficulties (*Weekly Chronicle*). Pleas such as this continue through April; and what is interesting is that the May and June performances take place in the amateur theatre. Why this was done is not known.

The season ended, for both the garrison amateurs and the professional troupe, in June of 1819. The professionals left Halifax for good, and all signs point to the fact they left in poor circumstances. From the advertisements one can assume that their

performances were too expensive, and perhaps they produced too many plays in what was still a town of 11,000 inhabitants. And they also had a rival, they were competing with the garrison amateurs. With the season over, there is another intermission in the theatres of Halifax. But in all likelihood the officers of the garrison kept on with their practice of subscription performances. This may be determined from a letter published in the *Acadian Recorder* on November 30th, 1822, signed by “A Lover of Plays”, who objects to the closed door policy of subscription theatre by the officers of the garrison. The editor answers with a long reply ending with, “We would have no objection to see a second amateur theatre established which would be open to all classes, but the gentlemen who compose the present, have certainly a right to admit or exclude whatever class of person they think proper”.

Advertisements for public performances at the amateur theatre begin again in April, 1825, and continue sporadically until January, 1829. It is notable that none of the advertisements name a specific patron, but all state that the proceeds will go to charity. The location of this amateur theatre is not given, but it is of interest that a Mr. Thompson’s name appears as the manager; so one could speculate that this is the same Mr. Thompson who acted with the professionals from 1817 to 1819, and that he may have stayed in Halifax. However, in “Theatre in Nova Scotia” O’Neill writes that by the end of the 1820’s “The navy had taken to staging plays on board ships in Halifax harbour. Halifax desperately needed a new theatre”. He goes on to state that “In 1829 the New Theatre opened on Grafton Street”, and even though it was very small it remained open until July 1844 (389).

During the 1820's a cultural evolution was taking place in all of Nova Scotia with the opening of new schools and libraries. Live theatre in Halifax had added that other dimension to the dynamics of intellectual thinking. As for recreation and entertainment, Fergusson states that tennis and cricket were being played in 1821; curling was introduced in the winter of 1825; and yachting was organized and a regatta held in 1826. He continues "By the late 1820's, moreover, samples of geological and mineralogical specimens were to be seen in the garrison library ..." (16). A major local industry began in 1829 with the reconstruction of citadel hill; by this time much of what had been built by the Duke of Kent had fallen into ruins, and this project provided civilian employment for about 30 years (Raddall 168-9). Along with all these evolvments a mixed economy was being developed with the rise of a yeoman/craftsman population, which saw the emergence of a literate middle class. The intrusion of one class into another, combined with social, economic, and political changes in the 1830's and 1840's would eventually bring about the decline of garrison theatre.

Act III

The Decline of Garrison Theatre in Halifax

Scene 1

The decline of garrison theatre in Halifax began shortly after its climax with the opening of Theatre Royal in 1846. In the meantime there is complication during the years 1830-1845 as the story of the garrison theatrical tradition in Halifax unfolds. At the commencement of the 1830's, although there were the humble beginnings of a middle class, all the money was in the hands of the local merchant elite who controlled the economy. There was still a wide chasm between the rich and the poor. "The poor remained the majority in town, and were widely, if unfairly, viewed as being inherently dangerous. Periodic riots, often provoked by clashes between soldiers and slum dwellers fed middle-class fears and long made them hesitant to campaign for liberalization of Halifax's formal power structure. Nevertheless, by the mid-1830's talk of "reform" was coming to dominate public affairs in Nova Scotia's capital". The Church of England "faced growing competition for the hearts and minds of the public" (Fingard, Halifax 53-55). The appointed magistrates had wide and widely exploited powers, and they did not speak about changing the system, they only harangued about means of improving their access to it.

Sir Peregrine Maitland was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia on November 28th, 1828, and he served until Jan 24th, 1834. When he arrived in 1828 Halifax was in the midst of a smallpox epidemic because of unsanitary conditions, but Maitland was painfully religious and more interested in spiritual well-being than in physical health. He "was a moralist ... the gambling, cockfighting, wenching, duelling,

and carousing habits of the garrison and fleet came under his heavy displeasure. He frowned on ostentation as he frowned on sin ... forbade the time-honored pageantry of a garrison parade on the common every Sunday afternoon, and in person fell upon the Sunday market like a wrathful prophet" (Raddall 173). Peregrine lived up to his name as he set the tone and ruled the roost; he was Victorian before the era began. Raddall attributes Maitland's attitude to a "post regency wave of respectability now sweeping over Britain and across the sea. It was reflected in feminine dress". He goes on to say that this ultra modesty lasted seventy years, and that "the female body had gone into hiding and was not to emerge or even reveal its shape for half a century" (173-4). Needless to say Maitland also frowned upon garrison theatre; accordingly there are no advertisements for amateur productions during his tenure.

However, the New Theatre opened in 1829, and it saw the return of Halifax native William Blake in 1831 who managed it until 1833. Apparently the New Theatre was very small, and could not accommodate a very large audience (O'Neill, Theatre 389). But space and privacy was not part of the basic cultural package at that time. In the leaner and meaner dwellings of Halifax people walked through one bedroom to get to another. Rooms at the Inns were slept in by four to six persons, in two beds. And, of course, the garrison quarters, like a ship's, would have been cramped. So the New Theatre probably played to packed houses.

A Mechanics' Institute was officially opened in Halifax on January 11th, 1832. Fergusson writes that "It was an adult education movement, varied in content, providing vocational training and education in the arts and sciences" (Mechanics' Institutes 31). People, "Expert in particular fields, lectured on history, architecture, music, agriculture

— everything from hydraulics to comparative anatomy”. Mechanics’ Institutes were springing up all over Britain, and as a member of the sponsoring committee it was Joseph Howe’s notion that a school such as this would affect working men’s thinking (Raddall 174-5). All this sounds very idealistic; however, in his article, “Science as Spectacle” Hewitt writes about the Mechanics Institute of Saint John, New Brunswick, in the 1830’s and 40’s. He lays bare the fact that lectures on subjects such as phrenology and mesmerism combined with illustrations and noisy audience participation “turned into something of a carnival affair”. His comment is that “the relative priorities had been reversed, putting amusement uppermost and leaving education as nothing more than a useful undercurrent ...” (111-14). Although nothing has been written, it would be safe to say that the lectures in Halifax were never exclusively scientific either; and that a certain segment of Halifax society did attend the lectures which consisted of instruction along with entertainment. Even though there was no acting involved, Haligonians were still good listeners. At that time it was probably rewarding to hear about a thing in congenial company and surroundings than to explore it, or read about it on one’s own. So, in a necessarily watery way the Halifax Mechanics’ Institute probably effected a certain amount of adult education, but its real attraction, with little or no theatre, was social. It was somewhere to go on a cold weeknight besides the regular Thursday prayer meeting. Curiosity, too, would have been satisfied; depending on who the speaker was. Along with the speakers stand, pitcher and tumbler, the Mechanic’s Institute was a prelude to the whole lecture business right down to the present day.

Lieutenant-Governor Maitland went to England in October 1832. He never returned to Nova Scotia, but the legacy of puritan reforms and redresses he left behind

did not prevent the tragedy caused by a cholera epidemic in the summer of 1834. The disease crossed the ocean in emigrant ships, and according to Sutherland when it arrived in port “Halifax’s overcrowding, pervasive filth and polluted water made the town ripe for a disastrous outbreak of infection. Spreading from the docks into the barracks, the poor house and the jail, cholera quickly became a mass killer, fostering panic and flight among people high and low. Cold weather finally ended the calamity” (Fingard 51). In the midst of the epidemic, on July 2nd, Sir Colin Campbell began his command as Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia. Lord and Lady Campbell were patrons of the arts, and under their favoring influence it seems certain that the officers of the garrison staged private theatricals at Government House, as well as in the homes of the gentry. Since these performances were indeed private, little information survives. However, there are two recorded notices of an upper class home theatrical that took place when Lady Campbell created an elaborate stage in Government House. The description of the first performance there was reported in the *Nova Scotia Royal Gazette* on December 7th, 1836:

LADY CAMPBELL was “at home” to a large Party of Government House on Friday evening, and, with the aid of Officers of the Garrison, afforded the company the most rational amusement. At half past eight o’clock the numerous guests assembled, and at nine were conducted by her Ladyship to the splendid Levee Room, in which, at the western end, a Stage was erected, with the necessary curtains and side scenes, and all the paraphernalia of a Theatre. The piece selected was X.Y.Z. – The whole of the characters of which were well sustained, and infinite satisfaction was

given to the audience. After the performance the company retired to partake of another kind of entertainment, equally well got up, in the Banqueting Room. During the time the delighted party were occupied in taking refreshments, all the theatrical apparatus, with the magic of pantomime, was removed, and with the lively Quadrille and gay Waltz, the evening's amusement closed.

A second performance was held at Government House on December 16th with the 34th Regiment performing *The Mayor of Garret* and *The Village Lawyer* (*Nova Scotia Royal Gazette*, Dec. 21st, 1836). A performance by the officers and men on board ship or in the barracks of a garrison, was referred to as a regimental “at home”, in their letters or commentary: presumably because the ship or barracks served as their home away from home. By extension performances put on in private houses became known as “at homes”. When the garrison theatrical tradition faded out after confederation informal gatherings by men of different messes became known as “Smokers”, and they sometimes entertained themselves with songs and skits: this alteration was like a throwback to the very beginnings of the tradition on board ships of the Royal navy.

Scene II

Nonetheless, forces of change were at work in the 1830's. The British institutions of religion, colonial government, and class structure were being altered. The press and politics would both change countenance after the trial of Joseph Howe. Howe was the owner of the *Nova Scotian*, and on New Year's day, 1835, he published an anonymous letter alleging fraud and corruption against certain of the magistrates responsible for

governing Halifax; consequently he was charged with criminal libel. The trial began on March 2nd, and in a curiously marked flavor of showmanship he spoke for over six hours in his own defense. Being of Loyalist stock Howe knew the uses of plain talk and close logic: the next day the jury gave their verdict of not guilty. In the aftermath several magistrates resigned, and the trial became a landmark in Nova Scotia history: it established the principle of freedom of the press in Canada. The stage was set, and in 1841 Halifax was incorporated as a city, to be run by an elected mayor and council.

The attitude of the public toward the military was also being altered at this time. This attitude is complained about in a crankish letter by a Captain Hammond of the Rifle Brigade. In September, 1842, he wrote, "I still continue to think this [Halifax] the stupidest place in all the world; the people are not the least civil to us, and do not seem to shew any desire to become acquainted with us; but what can't be cured must be endured. The shooting is now nearly over, and there is no amusement of any sort" (19). And James Buckingham, who visited Halifax in 1842, made the following comment in his book on colonization in North America:

Here, [Halifax] as at Quebec and Montreal, the military officers mix but little with the general society, on whom they look down as their inferiors in rank. This is, perhaps, no real loss to the community, as the dissipation which unfortunately characterizes military life in most quarters of the world (with some exceptions, of course,) exercise no favorable influence on the manners or, morals of society; though the military themselves might benefit by mixing more with civilians than they usually do (338)

It seems that Halifax was not the only garrison town experiencing a low point in relations between the public and the military during those years. But, at the same time Halifax still had a living memory of military press gangs, public whippings, and hangings that were difficult to blot out. And when the military cast themselves as heavy-handed bullies in “periodic riots” with the downtrodden, pangs of grief and anger would have brought back remembrance of past disgrace; all of which contributed to the low-point. Unfortunately the garrison amateurs would have been tarred with the same pejorative and remembrance: their altruistic character forgotten. Therefore, whether it was the impending danger of disease, bad relations between the citizens and the militia, an underlying puritan ideology, an economic slump, a growing cultural independence, or all of these combined, there was an interruption in public performances in the 1830’s and early 1840’s. Military officers were unwilling to subscribe funds to public theatre when the atmosphere was strained.

Scene III

Nevertheless plays were undoubtedly being performed by the military, and rehearsals kept up during those years, behind the scenes, in preparation for a return engagement. For as soon as tight-handed authority relaxed its hold, and the old childlike subservience had been gotten rid of, the emotional trauma died down. A cultural latitude was developing, and the garrison actors again found favor among the staid members of the population. Indeed, Best writes that “In 1846 there existed a particularly active group, composed mostly of officers and calling itself the Garrison Amateurs, which sought to establish its own theatre”, and that they transformed a large hay barn on Queen Street near Spring Garden Road into Theatre Royal, “also to be called the Garrison

Amateur Theatre and the Spring Garden Theatre. The first night was open to the general public and a second performance, open only to those who had subscribed to the entire season's productions was given two nights later" (521).

The first advertisement appeared in the *Morning Post* on December 2nd, 1846, and it stated that the evening's performance would consist of the single act burletta *The Sentinel*, to be followed by the two-act comedy *You Can't Marry your Grandmother!* On December 5th the same paper gave a long and detailed description of the "New Garrison Theatre", commenting on the deep apron, the proscenium doors, the upholstered seats, the new gas lamps, the bold portrait of the immortal Shakespeare, the private box for His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief, and ending with the compliment, "It says much for the kindness of Military families, in putting forth such efforts to enliven society in our little metropolis". From later advertisements it becomes apparent that the Spring Garden Theatre was called "Theatre Royal" only on nights when the Lieutenant-Governor extended his patronage. In its review the *Sun* gave a somewhat demeaning review ending with the uncomplimentary remark that "The house on Wednesday night was literally cold as a barn" (4 Dec. 1846). Aside from the lack of heat it is obvious that the garrison amateurs had expended a great deal of time and money in their effort to revive stage drama in Halifax. Any profit realized, of course, would have been used to pay for the renovation of the Queen Street barn as well as the initial costs of production. Perhaps this is the reason why none of the advertisements for garrison performances in the late 1840's name a charitable beneficiary. Nevertheless advertisements for garrison theatre continued during 1847, 1848, and 1849. Sometimes the newspapers would attest to the fact that improvements to Theatre Royal were being made regularly. In August 1848, the

Sun announced that the “Amateurs of the Garrison propose to re-open their theatre at Spring Gardens” for another season, and that “A considerable sum has been expended in fitting up the building ... and in the preparation of new scenery and other appliances which may conduce generally to the comfort and amusement of the public” (4 Aug. 1848).

Halifax was incorporated in 1841, but it took 7 more years of stubborn political wrangling before the concept of responsible government in Nova Scotia gained acceptance. The first responsible government in Canada was sworn into office in Halifax on February 2nd, 1848. Accordingly there began a new awareness of freedom, and by 1850 Halifax’s fascination with amateur theatre produced another group calling themselves the City Amateurs, also known as the Mechanic’s Amateurs. This group, along with the amateurs of the 38th Regiment, now shared the stage of Theatre Royal with the garrison amateurs. At the very beginning of the decade, on January 7th, the amateurs of the 38th Regiment put on *The Maid of Genoa*, followed by *The Haunted Inn* at Theatre Royal. The patron was Lieutenant-Colonel J. Campbell (*British Colonist*, January 1st, 1850). And on January 14th the City Amateurs performed *Father and Son*, and *The White Horse of the Peppers*. But what is interesting is that the advertisement states that the “Company includes ... ‘first lady amateur’, Miss Villiers” (*British Colonist*, January 8th, 1850). Two months later, on March 15th, the *Sun* announced that a Mrs. R.C. Williams would perform with the amateurs of the 38th Regiment in *Black-Eyed Susan* on March 18th. On April 6th the *British Colonist* lists her as one of the cast of the amateurs of the 38th Regiment performing at Theatre Royal on April 9th. During the next season a Miss L’Amee played alongside the Mechanics Amateurs in the *Smuggler’s Daughter* on

November 11th (*British Colonist* 5 Nov.1850). “Mechanics Amateurs with Miss L’Amee” appears again in advertisements for Theatre Royal in January and February 1851. (*British Colonist*, 21 Jan. and 6 Feb.1851). Professional actresses from the United States had appeared on Halifax stages in the second half of the 18th and the first half of the 19th century, but now, at the beginning of the second half of the 19th, amateur actresses are treading on the domain of the officers of the garrison.

The Temperance Hall, Starr Street, opened on December 3rd, 1849, but “[u]ntil 1867 touring companies presenting legitimate drama were disqualified, although band concerts, vaudeville entertainments, and minstrel shows were allowed” (Smith, 316). It had been built as a clubhouse for the Sons of Temperance Society, and in her MA Thesis Janet Maybee writes that “Temperance Hall was never designed to serve as a theatre. Aside from the problems of design — a cramped stage, faulty heating, poor acoustics — there were other problems which kept dramatic companies out of Temperance Hall for many years after its opening. The directors were of Presbyterian leanings, and seemingly convinced that abstinence should apply to the theatre as well as the bottle” (XVI). However, various newspapers during August and September of 1852, and 1853, carry advertisements for a troupe performing at the Temperance Hall, and calling itself The Heron Family. The plays they put on include *A Day in Paris*, *The Young Widow*, *The Waterman*, *The Spoiled Child*, and many others. Not much is known about them except that they had a large repertoire; and an advertisement for the plays *Box and Cox*, and *Irish Mesmerism* contains the postscript, “They have performed this program for the Queen” (*British Colonist*, August 31st, 1852). So it is likely they were a professional company; and of course in competition with the garrison amateurs. There was also

competition from new groups appearing on the Halifax scene at this time. On May 19th, 1854, the Chebucto Amateur Theatrical Club performed *The Canadian War* at Theatre Royal (*British Colonist* 18th. May). It becomes obvious that the Garrison Theatrical Society had become more democratic and were now sharing their stage with other amateur groups putting on public performances. But subscription performances were still being held; like an exclusive theatre club where tickets are only sold to members; and the members probably all went to dinner after the show. Although subscription performances were closed to the general public they did raise money for charitable purposes. An extant list of subscribers in 1856 is in the Public Archives of Nova Scotia; this list contains the names of various officers such as Colonel Farquarson and Lord William Kennedy, and leading citizens and dignitaries of the city, such as Premier Young, Mr. Cunard, James Uniacke, and Joseph Howe (Provincial Secretary's Correspondence, Vol. 36, 189).

Scene IV

In times of peace many British regiments were stationed in Halifax, and it appears that in the 1850's some of them bespoke their own dramatic corps made up of either officers or enlisted men, or both. From January, 1850, until May, 1856, there are newspaper advertisements for public performances at Theatre Royal by the amateurs of the 38th Regiment; the amateurs of the 76th Regiment; the Officers of the 97th Regiment; and the Amateurs of the 72nd Regiment, as well as the garrison amateurs. And the sanctioned tradition of plays on board British Navy Ships was still being perpetuated in the 1850's and 60's. In 1852 the sailors of H.M.S. Cumberland at anchor in Halifax harbour gave performances of *Castle Spectre* and *Bombastes Furioso* (*British North*

American 23 Aug.1852). The acting troupe of H.M.S. Devastation presented three plays on board their ship docked in Halifax, from November 1st to November 8th, 1853, as a “Benefit for yellow fever sufferers in Bermuda” (*British Colonist* 1, 3, 8 Nov. 1853).

In 1851 the combined population of Halifax and Dartmouth was a little over 19,000 (Fingard, Halifax 7). And Fingard notes that “Britain’s shift to free trade in the 1840’s and 50’s ... did not diminish the large military presence in Halifax, which sustained a vital portion of the business life of the city” (Halifax 70) thus propping up the economy. Social and political changes had begun in the late 1840’s, and now in the early 1850’s this flourishing shipshape economy provided the means for the majority of Haligonians to enjoy the stimulation of a theatrical production. Theatre as a social and cultural, as well as a charitable institution thrived during the 1850’s.

In all probability Theatre Royal, along with all its refurbishment debts, was paid off by mid-1854. In that year the advertisements begin to state that the proceeds were for charity. On July 18th, 1854, the amateurs of the 76th Regiment put on *Inchcape Bell*, and *Box and Cox* at Theatre Royal; “Proceeds for families of soldiers now fighting in the east” (*Morning Journal* 17 July). And the garrison amateurs were back on the boards of Theatre Royal on December 22nd, 1854, performing in *Spectre Bridegroom*, *A Silent Woman*, and *Box and Cox*; “Proceeds to patriotic fund for Russian war widows” (*British Colonist* 19 Dec.). The military would have formed a large portion of the audiences for these performances because they were probably associates of many of the officers and men who were in the Crimea. Britain took part in that war which began on March 28th, 1854, and some regiments from Halifax were deployed there. In commemoration of their engagement there is a rare pre-Confederation Crimean War Memorial Monument located

on the west side of Barrington Street, south of Spring Garden Road. It is known as the Welsford-Parker Memorial, and it was erected in 1860.

The garrison theatrical tradition of Halifax also has a Crimean war connection. In his book of recollections, Lieutenant Frederick Harris D. Vieth, a native of Halifax and an officer in H.M. 63rd Regiment, details his period of encampment near Fort Kinburn, on the road to Sevastopol early in 1856. He recalls that in January and February of that year, just before the end of the war, he and the men of his regiment converted a disused building into a very fair theatre they called the “Symposium”. He writes that each officer was asked for a subscription to defray expenses, and that the stage was fitted with an act drop and some very good scenery. After these arrangements, “There was no lack of actors to choose from for male parts; but for the other sex on the stage it was a more difficult matter, and as young subalterns with smooth faces had to be utilized for the ladies in the pieces, farces were alone attempted” (78-9).

Lieutenant Vieth arrived back in Halifax in June, 1856. He writes of an exciting summer of boat races, of belles, and of picnics on McNab’s Island with the befitting chaperones. But what he enjoyed most were the afternoon “bonnet dances” held once a week on board the flag-ship “Boscawen”. An awning would be spread completely over the ship, and this bonnet sheltered everyone from the hot sun, while on all sides there was a cool breeze off the water. He comments, “Halifax was always noted for its many pretty girls”, and that summer “it brilliantly outshone itself in that respect” (121-22). Vieth seems to have absorbed the social role and behavior appropriate to a British military officer in the Victoria era. The officers of the garrison, and of the navy, did not attend college: they were trained in the regiment or at sea, and most of them were from,

or had connections with upper class British families, and some were sons of royalty. Their self-assurance, even when they were ignorant, was that of men who knew they were to the manor born; their officer status was synonymous with their being gentlemen, whose main concern was to serve the Queen, and uphold British culture and institutions without question.

One can generalize that Lieutenant Vieth's character typifies the garrison officer. He was light-hearted and affectingly theatrical: even his book reads like the script of a play; like both parts of *Henry IV*, a history and a comedy fused together. In it he recalls the autumn of 1856, noting that amateur theatricals were started in the garrison, that he played Mr. Box in the farce *Box and Cox Married and Settled*, which followed the comedy, *Poor Gentlemen*. And as officers and gentlemen who cared nothing for profit, Vieth reports they handed over the proceeds "to the several charitable societies in the city for distribution". The plays he mentions were most likely performed at Theatre Royal, for he reports meeting E.A. Sothern, whose stage name was Douglas Stewart, the actor/manager of a professional company known as Isherwood and Stewart, while rehearsing there one afternoon (124). As manager of his company Sothern must have been at the theatre that afternoon to consider the possibility of staging plays there. According to newspaper reports the naïve crusaders for temperance had prohibited Sothern from performing at Temperance Hall. The Halifax newspapers responded to this with disapproval. The *British Colonist* on June 9th complained of "the low and vile concerts, the illiterate men and squeaking children" countenanced by the directors of Temperance Hall. The *Acadian Recorder*, on July 26th, wrote "that it was rather silly that a large city should depend on the whims of a body of snivelling hypocrites."

Nevertheless, it is obvious that Sothern did see the possibilities, for newspaper advertisements from June 19th to August 7th, 1856 give notices of performances by his company at Theatre Royal. They ended the season on August 8th with Shakespeare's *MacBeth* for the "Benefit of Isherwood, last night of season" (*British Colonist*, August 7th, 1856).

There were no performances at Theatre Royal during the winter of 1856-57. However, on December 3rd the garrison officers put on *High Life Below Stairs* and *Lend Me Five Shillings* (*Acadian Recorder* 2 Dec.). Presumably there was no season that winter because the old building was in a very dilapidated condition and sorely in need of repair. Newspaper reviews during the past few seasons had complained that it was literally cold as a barn, that the lighting was bad, that the seats were too hard, and the *Sun* of June 30th, 1856, called it "Our miserable apology of a theatre". Best writes that in May of 1857 E.A. Sothern arrived to take possession of the theatre for the summer and to begin extensive renovations in preparation for the later arrival of his company to open a dramatic season at Halifax" (524). Yet, considering that the theatre opened a month later, these "extensive renovations" must have been in progress all that winter. That Stewart was in Halifax at Christmas time is confirmed by advertisements in the *British Colonist* on December 13th and 25th, 1856, announcing that he would give readings of Shakespeare, and a lecture "to be accompanied by the band of the 62nd Regiment". In an unpublished work entitled "The Professional Drama of Yesterday in Halifax", Mullane states that in 1846 the hay barn that became Theatre Royal was originally owned by Hunter and Chambers, contractors for forage to the military, and "A few years later the building came into the possession of Michael Power" who "Leased it to Sothern when the

latter came to Halifax”. Mullane does not name his sources, however one can ascertain from the information available that Sothern was the leaseholder of Theatre Royal in May of 1857.

Sothern changed the name to “Lyceum”, and it reopened on June 22nd with the plays “*The Willow Copse*, followed by *The Mummy*. Lyceum (formerly Theatre Royal) E.A. Sothern’s Company” (Acadian Recorder 20 June 1857). Plays were performed on at least 46 nights, according to newspaper advertisements, from June 22nd to August 25th by Sothern’s professionals, sometimes assisted by the garrison amateurs. It can be reasoned that this change of name marked the beginning of the end of the garrison theatrical tradition in Halifax. Specifically, in its review the next day the *British Colonist* affirmed:

“Sothern’s Lyceum” began its career last night. The house was crowded from floor to ceiling, yet such are the excellent arrangements for ventilation, etc., that all was comfort and ease. We cannot compliment Mr. Sothern too highly for the exquisite taste he has displayed in the interior decorations. Everything is chaste, elegant and costly, and in our opinion, as a dramatic temple, it is equal in every respect – except in size – to anything we have seen. There is a perfect absence of the usual vulgar glitter. All being in harmony before and behind the curtain (23 June 1857, 2 Col.3)

Scene V

The fact that Sothern’s plans to lease Theatre Royal were well known may be evinced from an article in the *Presbyterian Witness* which came down on Sothern like the wrath of God. The editor, with moral indignation, warned that “The Theatre is a hangout

for the worst rakes and scamps; it leads straight to the dram shop and thence to utter destruction. All legitimate measures should be used to prevent the opening of a regular theatre in Halifax by a gang of roving Yankees who boast of improvements to trap the unwary innocent” (16 Aug. 1856). On May 16, 1857, just five weeks before Sothern opened, the *Presbyterian Witness* attacked the meaning and art of drama itself, stating “An acted drama is an acted lie: the actor feels no responsibility for anything he says or does onstage, so cannot help but become depraved. Full of false empty displays and trickery, drama corrupts first those who perform, then those who view it. Thus there is no hope of reforming the theatre since its ‘very roots are rotten’.” The editor obviously knew something of drama, for his diatribe sounds like a caricature of the mirror effect between actors and audience in comedy of manners. On May 30th, 1857, the same paper published a long tirade charging immorality; “Association with theatre leads to drink”, and asks, “How can modest women be seen at a theatre?” and ends with “All they want is your money and Satan may have your souls for all they care!” On July 11th the *Witness* again proclaimed a hue and cry against Sothern’s Lyceum which concluded with, “The Puritans of old had their enemies: The Pope, the Devil, and the Spaniard; we have the Pope, the Devil, and E.A. Sothern!” It is apparent that the *Witness* was attacking Sothern’s “gang of roving Yankees”, while being careful not to mention garrison comedy of manners which was performed for charity, or Temperance Hall shows put on to supposedly support moral precepts. The stance of the *Presbyterian Witness* is delineated here to show that there was, in a segment of Halifax society at that time, a distinct puritan element which condemned stage drama and was bent upon its censure.

The *Presbyterian Witness* was established in 1848, and when Temperance Hall opened in 1849 they joined forces in an attempt to control popular theatre culture. They believed certain types of drama were unrealistic and immoral, and they justified their righteous indignation with the conviction was that “association with theatre leads to drink”, thus bringing down their wrath on the audience as well. Even though they attacked and libeled Sothorn personally, their main rallying cry was directed at the audience. And unlike the scant theatre reviews of the early part of the century, newspapers were now publishing critical reports on the acting ability of the performers as well as the animation of the front-of-house audience, and the goings-on in the gallery. When Sothorn made his renovations to Theatre Royal he redesigned the interior and got rid of the “pit”, and in order to expand the seating capacity he installed a gallery along the sides of the auditorium as well as across the back and these furnished the cheapest seats in the house. The best seats were now located in the front-of-house, the central area of the main floor, and were mostly reserved for the middle and upper class patrons who usually made up the majority of the audience. Part of the intention of this arrangement was to separate the classes, the polite society from the riffraff. Nonetheless, the Lyceum could now accommodate about 700. From reports in various newspapers, it seems that drinking and/or drunken sailors on shore leave would sometimes arrive late for a performance, purchase the cheap seats in the gallery, and insult the wealthy patrons and cause a disturbance.

Probably the most extreme disturbance of the century was caused during a benefit performance for the young guest star, Agnes Robertson, on the night of July 17th, 1858 (*British Colonist*). Veith describes what happened when a “group of fifty or sixty blue

jackets [ordinary seamen] of the Flag Ship Indus” came to the Lyceum to see a performance. “They attracted the attention of the audience by their absurd antics quite as much as the acting did on the stage”. Some of them completely filled the front of the gallery, while others had managed to secure seats just beneath the gallery, “and these their friends above frequently regaled from bottles which they lowered down by a cord to them. As soon as the act drop fell, out came the bottles, which one saw raised in every direction”. Between the acts one of the sailors noticed a chum sitting in one of the best seats in front of the orchestra downstairs, and he called out “I say Bill — Bill Jenkins, what are you doin’ down among the swells, eh? You’re a *h’epicure* — you are”, and Bill stood up in his seat and ejaculated angrily, “and you’re a — [pejorative] fool you are. What are ye callin’ me names for?” Bill was quickly visited by a policeman but on promising to be silent was allowed to remain where he was (135-6). This particular night was the exception, but it serves to illustrate that the social atmosphere in Halifax was heavily charged, and needed clearing; and the reform minded temperance movement felt that by censoring drama they would discourage drinking and therefore improve the social climate. Their intentions were honorable, but misplaced; live theatre in itself does not encourage drinking, and the plays themselves were not a social evil. The theatre, for the uninhibited “underclass”, was a place where they could sit in the gallery, look down on the upper classes, and express their resentment with sarcastic remarks in order to expunge their latent prejudices. For the sailors it was also a place to shout indignities at the upper class “swells”, but for them it was done to vent the mutinous feelings they could not exhibit on board ship. Soldiers may have taken part in some of these disturbances, but newspaper accounts, when not specifically citing sailors-on-leave, refer to the audience in

the gallery as “the gods”. In any event these groups of rowdies were there to make their presence known; they too wanted to be seen as well as see, and one is reminded that lights were left on during performances until the mid 1870’s.

After the show the gallery audience would probably congregate in the rough neighborhood known as the “Upper Streets” which, according to Dr. Akins, had been notorious as early as 1812 (158). Fingard writes that in the 1860’s this neighborhood consisted of Barrack Street, just beneath the Citadel, and the upper portions of the intersecting Sackville, Prince, George, Duke, and Buckingham Streets, and was known as “Soldier Town” (17-18). In these upper streets, taverns, grog shops, boarding houses, and brothels functioned autonomously. And it was here that soldiers and sailors could mingle with the equally unfree, such as prostitutes and the marginal segments of society, and drink and hoot, and sing comic songs, and perform mimetic scenarios, and take their bonnets off and dance under the wayward awning of the night. This area was separate and distinct from legitimate theatre and other forms of entertainment. Fingard points out the “division of society into the rough and the respectable”, stating that “[t]he officers enhanced the genteel tone of the urban elite, the enlisted men contributed to the drunkenness and destitution of underclass Halifax” (16). It was in Soldier Town that social evil and human tragedy existed, and it was there that the *Presbyterian Witness* should have been directing its verbal attacks.

Ironically, the puritan outburst and furore of the *Presbyterian Witness* probably gave Sothern the publicity he needed to successfully survive the 1857 summer season. He returned to New York at the end of August but was back in Halifax with a vaudeville troupe early in January, 1858. The *Sun*, on January 13th, announced the “Last

performance by vaudeville troupe, assisted by garrison amateurs in *Swiss Cottage*, tomorrow night". On January 18th the *British Colonist* advertised the "Opening of the regular company". The regular company performed almost every night from January 19th to March 10th when the *Sun* announced "Lyceum, *Sea of Ice*, *Rough Diamond*, last night of season." Apparently the season was ending early because of financial difficulties. According to Vieth it was an extremely cold winter, and attendance dropped dramatically because the Lyceum could not be kept comfortable no matter how much fuel was expended. Consequently, Sothern "found he had a considerable sum on the wrong side of the balance sheet when he closed" (129). His company went back to New York, but he was able to retain Miss Sara Stevens, an accomplished actress. He then requested the patronage of the Earl of Mulgrave, and the assistance of the garrison amateurs in complimentary benefit performances, so that he would be able to pay off his debts (Vieth 126). They offered their services willingly, and on March 13th the *Acadian Recorder* advertised, "Lyceum, *Conjugal Lesson*, and *Heir at Law*. Garrison amateurs with Mr. and Mrs. Sothern and Sara Stevens; benefit to help recoup Sothern's losses. Patron: Earl of Mulgrave". The garrison amateurs also put on benefit shows for Sothern on March 18th. and 22nd. (*British Colonial*) acting alongside the Sotherns and Sara Stevens in *A Loan of a Lover*, *A Roland for an Oliver*, *Betsy Baker*, *Used Up*, *Morning Call*, and *Widow's Victim*. The Sotherns and Stevens were planning to leave for New York before the end of March, but they were otherwise detained: the *British Colonial* of April 1st announced that the garrison amateurs with Sara Stevens and the Sotherns would perform *Captain of the Watch*, *To Paris and Back for \$5*, *Morning Call*, and *Bombastes Furioso* on April 5th as a "final benefit for Sothern, delayed in Halifax because of his son's

illness.” They left shortly after. Vieth recollects, “The newspapers spoke very highly of these performances, and a fair sum of money was netted by Mr. Sothern which recouped him of much of the loss he had sustained by his unprofitable winter season” (128).

Lieutenant Vieth, who had become a sort of comrade-in-acting with Sothern, lists the names of the subalterns in the casts of the twelve benefit plays put on between March 15th and April 5th. They include Lieut. Vieth, Lieut. Bruce, Lieut. Griffiths, Lieut. Ramsbottom, Lieut. Twiston, and Lieut. Fluder, all from the 63rd Regiment; also Lieutenants Hume and Sergeant of the 62nd Regiment. Sara Stevens, Mrs. Sothern, Lieut. Griffiths, Lieut. Hume, and Lieut. Sergeant played the women’s parts (126-8). What all this shows is that British regimental dramatic corps were willing to act voluntarily in any situation, without constraint, in order to uphold the tradition; and that they could attract an audience in the coldest of conditions. Their love of staging plays solely for the entertainment of others hardly needs underlining: twelve plays in 21 days requires a lot of hard work and concentration. But with self-conscious zeal they probably jumped at the chance of expanding their repertoire under the direction of a professional artist like Sothern; their relationship with him would have been mutually beneficial. Vieth writes of his experience with Sothern: “I gained a deal of knowledge of how plays are put upon the professional stage, of professional rehearsals, professional stage management and of the many small matters indescribable here, which go to make up a play as the public finally sees it” (131).

Sothern was back in Halifax with his company in the summer of 1858, and he put on plays in the Lyceum with some assistance from the garrison amateurs between June 23rd and July 30th. There was no winter season in 1858-59. Because of insufficient heat

in the building Haligonians would have lacked the enthusiasm to sit in a theatre that was cold as charity. However, the amateurs of H.M.S. Styx, which was moored in Halifax Harbour, performed *Idiot Witness*, *Boots at the Swan*, and *Kiss in the Dark* at the Lyceum on November 25th and 26th (*British Colonial* 25 Nov.). Sothern returned in the spring of 1859 for the last time. He staged plays at the Lyceum between April 13th and August 10th, but, as Vieth recollects, “It was a disastrous one financially. He ... left the place in debt. But though he never again visited the scene of his many disappointments, he in a short time honorably discharged all his obligations” (140). Sothern went to England, and Lieutenant Vieth’s regiment was transferred to Fredericton, New Brunswick, that summer. He writes that Fredericton was a most enjoyable place, and then he cites one explanation often given for the rationale behind garrison productions: “Dancing and dinner parties, besides invitations to rides, drives and canoeing jaunts put us under many obligations to our kind entertainers, which later on we endeavored to make some return for in the shape of a series of theatricals” (274). Vieth’s experience encapsulates the essential character of the culture of a regimental dramatic corps.

Scene VI

1860 was the beginning of what has become known as the mid-Victorian era. Changes were taking place in England and in North America. Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* was published in 1859, putting doubt in the divine authenticity of the Bible; and Christianity was subordinated to scientific rational thought. Prince Albert died of typhoid in 1861, and Queen Victoria went into seclusion for more than 25 years. The Victorian world seemed to be turning upside down. And on April 12th, 1861, the American Civil War began. There is no impenetrable armour to withstand

the arrows of fortune; even the fortifications on Citadel Hill by this time were “Largely obsolete” because of “improvements in military technology” (Fingard 46). And like the Citadel, comedy of manners was becoming outmoded and obsolete, failing to excite audiences anymore. The high water mark for garrison theatre was when Vieth and the amateurs bailed out Sothern.

Fingard writes that commercial activities created a mid-century boom, and that “Halifax enjoyed a number of economic opportunities in the 1850’s and 1860’s which related to its relationship with the United States. A reciprocity treaty which lasted from 1854 until 1866 increased trade” (Halifax 72). So there was a favorable tide of prosperity; and social change, promoted by pressure groups from churches, physicians, teachers, and the new middle class was taking place in the form of new institutions such as schools, a visiting dispensary, and Mount Hope Asylum. Welfare remained a private sector activity led by the churches; “Poverty, though widespread was not something that attracted much government attention” (Fingard, Halifax 79, 80). In fact the provincial government seems to have been in the hands of men who held views directly opposite to its end and design. This became obvious when “In 1859 a hospital was finally built on the Common but remained empty amidst wrangling over money and control”. It finally opened in 1867 after an agreement between the doctors and the government. (Fingard, Halifax 80).

Theatre Royal (“Lyceum” was dropped after Sothern left Halifax in August, 1859) was now in a dilapidated condition, but a new theatre was nowhere in sight of the government’s myopic vision. With all the changes taking place at the time the idea of a new theatre existed only in the imaginations of dreamers and the theatrically inclined. It was not until 1865 that that unconscious thought manifested itself when the editor of the

Acadian Recorder suggested that “Men of wealth and enterprise should see to it that we have a large and substantial edifice for theatrical purposes in a respectable part of the City” (August 11th). But this plea came to nought. Apparently the garrison amateurs were not interested in making improvements or renovations to Theatre Royal as nothing was done; perhaps their spirits were disenchanted because they knew British imperialism in Canada was coming to an end.

However, Theatre Royal continued to be used by amateur and professional troupes until 1867, after which it sat there languishing in a dilapidated condition, and rarely used until it “was torn down, probably sometime in the fall of 1885 . . .” (Best 528). Because of the American Civil War all of the productions at Theatre Royal in the early 1860’s were presented by different theatrical groups who were in Canada at the time, such as Lanergans Company who performed there from July 30th to October 9th, 1860 (*British Colonial Advertisements*); and various newspaper announcements show that a Mrs. Barrow’s Company used it from July 30th to October 22nd, 1861. After that it was used by military amateurs including the Dramatics Corps of the Irish Volunteers, the amateurs of the 2nd Battalion 17th Regiment, the amateurs of the Royal Engineers, and of course the garrison amateurs, right up until the end of 1864. Dramatic Corps of the Royal Navy ships performed at Theatre Royal more and more infrequently until they stopped altogether at the end of the decade. The *British Colonist* of August 31st, 1861, advertised three plays at Theatre Royal on September 2nd, by the “officers of H.M.S. Nile.” In 1860 plays were staged there by the amateurs of H.M.S. Hero (*Acadian Recorder* 14 June), by the amateurs of H.M.S. Nile on July 4th (*Sun* 4 July), and by the amateurs of H.M.S. Cadmus on July 7th (*Sun* 7 July). In 1863 the amateurs of H.M.S. Rinaldo performed

there “For the benefit of widows and orphans of H.M.S. Orpheus” (*British Colonist* 10 Sept.). On December 12th and 13th, 1865, the amateurs of H.M.S. Pylades put on benefit performances at Theatre Royal for the National Lifeboat Institution (*British Colonist* 9 Dec.). The *Citizen* of January 16th, 1866, advertised that the amateurs of H.M.S. Pylades would perform at Theatre Royal on the 23rd. The last record of a performance on board a British naval ship in Halifax harbour is in a review done by the *Acadian Recorder* of June 26, 1869, which states that two performances were acted by the amateurs of H.M.S. Royal Alfred on the quarterdeck of their ship on the 25th. And the last performance by a ship’s company at Theatre Royal was when the amateurs of H.M.S. Raccoon, under the patronage of Sir Hastings Doyle, performed there on January 12th, 1870 (Review, *Evening Express* 14 Jan. 1870).

Scene VII

Although the garrison amateurs did not wish to sink any more money in the declining Theatre Royal, it is obvious they wanted to preserve the tradition of staging plays. An announcement in the *British Colonial* on November 25th, 1862 states that the garrison officers would put on two plays at Theatre Royal on the 26th, “Proceeds to establish a soldiers institute”. From newspaper advertisements it becomes evident that this institute, or club, consisted of recreation rooms probably located in the Glacis Barracks where the library was, and where soldiers and officers of the British military held “smokers” and otherwise entertained themselves, and that it was established sometime prior to December, 1864. The *Citizen* of December 15th, 1864, advertised three plays to be performed that night at the “Garrison recreation rooms”, as “a benefit for Sapper Surrey’s widow”, by the amateurs of the Royal Engineers. This is the first time

the general public were invited to attend a performance there, and what the advertisement suggests is that the rooms were fairly large. The club was private, but reviews of performances by the amateurs of different regiments at the garrison recreation rooms from February 15th to 20th, 1866, were reported in the *Sun* on February 23rd. All that is known about the interior of this theatre was published in the *Acadian Recorder* on November 16th, 1872, when a reviewer wrote that “the auditorium is roomy, light, and pleasant. In short the Soldier’s [sic] Theatre is better adapted for the purpose than any other in this city”. It is likely that the officers and men stationed at the Citadel put on plays in the club rooms for their own entertainment until they left Halifax in 1906.

At the end of the American Civil War a professional company from Boston owned by M.W. Fiske arrived in Halifax and leased Theatre Royal. His company put on plays there from August 3rd to 18th, 1865, and again in the summers of 1866 and 1867. “Although Fiske complained of the lack of a proper theatre in the city, he seems to have made no alterations in the Theatre Royal” (Best 527), but this was probably due to a lack of box office receipts caused by a declining audience. The end of the reciprocity treaty with the United States saw a huge slump in the economy of Nova Scotia, and theatre always suffers during hard times. Fiske’s was the last professional company to lease Theatre Royal, but it was used sporadically by amateur companies during the early 1870’s. When T. Charles Howard arrived in Halifax in May, 1868, he “took his company to Temperance Hall and renovated that building to make its stage suitable for dramatic performances, the result was that other touring companies followed his example and chose [this] ... well equipped theatre” (Best 527). Apparently the Sons of Temperance’s carnival of shortsightedness had ended. Theatre was not sinful any more.

Whether theatre was sinful or moral it made no difference, money was not plentiful in Halifax during the years immediately following Confederation, and Haligonians were turning to cheaper forms of entertainment. Newspapers of the time posted announcements of picnics, bazaars, concerts, teas, socials, and outdoor band performances, and other complimentary or otherwise inexpensive entertainments, all much more affordable than the theatre. Circuses began to arrive in Halifax as early as 1869, catering to Halifax's love of the spectacle: that illusion which captivates the imagination of young and old alike. Colin Howell writes that although baseball was popular in Halifax in the 1860s, the first attempts at placing it on an organized footing did not begin until May, 1868 (13). Baseball would eventually emerge as a huge spectator sport in Nova Scotia in the latter part of the century. All these amusements drew away the theatre audience which had been fickle in the best of times. Transient professional companies usually ran into financial difficulties in Halifax because of sparse audience attendance, whereas the dramatic corps of H.M. ships and the garrison amateurs could depend on the military to pack the house. But these amateur troupes of the military were not performing on a regular basis any more. Rewa states that "The tradition of garrison theatricals died after confederation ..." (224). However, the tradition faded out slowly in Halifax. Politics has always had some influence on theatre, and when Nova Scotia joined Confederation with Canada in 1867 the British military probably thought they would be recalled to England in the near future, and providing public theatre was not a priority any more.

However, the years passed, and the recall was not forthcoming, the garrison amateurs put on a few more plays at different venues for various reasons. On February

2nd, 1872, they put on *To Oblige Benson* and *Post of Honor* at Government House for Lieutenant Governor Sir Hastings Doyle (Review, *Citizen* 6 Feb.). In July 1872, the garrison amateurs, along with guest opera singer Rosina D’Erina, presented three nights of musical comedy at Hesselins Hall, and another at Temperance Hall as a “Benefit for the poor of Halifax” (Reviews, *British Colonist* 23 July). The amateurs of the 60th Rifles put on the last performances ever to be held at Theatre Royal, in February, 1874. They performed *Black-Eyed Susan* and *Self Accusation* on February 12th, and *Black-Eyed Susan* and *Charles XII* on February 14th. (Reviews, *Acadian Recorder*, February 16th).

After that the doors of Theatre Royal were shut for good. The very last record of a garrison amateur performance is in a review in the *British Colonist* dated December 31st, 1874. It states that the amateurs of the 60th Rifles performed *Turkish Bath* and *A Fish Out of Water* at Temperance Hall on December 30th. On that night the garrison theatrical tradition in Halifax ended, and as Hamlet said, “the rest is silence” (Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 5, 2, 340).

Afterpiece

With the passing of the British North America Act in 1867 Nova Scotia reluctantly joined a federation with Upper Canada; and Canada became a Dominion in the British Commonwealth. This did not mean it was a fully independent country; it remained a colony of Britain for many more years. Until the end of the nineteenth century there would be a delicate balance between the old-world order and the new, and the legalistic and economic details would be long ironing out. Governors-General, for example, were appointed by the British Parliament until 1946. Sometimes the swearing-in ceremony took place when they disembarked in Halifax, as was the case with the Marquess of Lorne when he and his wife Princess Louise arrived in November, 1878. However, in 1871 Britain recalled all her troops from Canada with the exception of a small naval force at Esquimaux, British Columbia, and of course the garrison at Halifax was maintained for the protection of its naval base. Because of tensions in Europe and elsewhere, and the reality of war, the prevailing anglo-imperialist logic was that the naval base at Halifax should be kept in operation as a tactical redoubt. This rationale guaranteed a continuing British presence in Halifax until the early 1900's. As well, once the change from sail to steam was perfected in the late 1800's Halifax became strategically important as a coaling station. Ties to empire were always strong in Nova Scotia, and they remained so long after Confederation.

These ties were strengthened almost immediately after Confederation when Prince Arthur arrived in Halifax in 1869. The public turned out in droves to see this royal visitor, as he "proceeded to Government house through streets lined with redcoats of the

garrison, Royal marines, local militia, volunteer companies ... and all the various societies”, and keeping with tradition, “In the evening the public buildings were illuminated ... every loyal citizen kept his house lights burning to a late hour” (Raddall 209). But this cheerful picture of the colonial military in times past did not alter the reality that there was a bleak future looming on the Canadian political horizon which would change the social and economic conditions under which maritimers lived. “The economic depression of the 1870’s ... created economic hardship throughout the region” (Buckner 59). Support for theatre had always waxed and waned in relation to economic circumstances in Halifax, and in the early 1870’s it was on the wane, and garrison theatre faded out completely at the end of 1874. Fingard notes that by 1871 the regiments posted in Halifax, along with the customary units of Royal Artillery and Royal Engineers, accounted for a military population of between 2000 and 4000 year round (Halifax 98). This is a far cry from the 20,000 troops stationed in Halifax during and after the American Civil war right up until Confederation. When Britain withdrew her troops from the garrisons across Canada the regimental dramatic corps were removed with them as well. So one can draw the conclusion that the small contingent left in Halifax had but a few acting enthusiasts: These few, it seems, were the amateurs of the 60th Rifles. This consequence, along with the fact that Theatre Royal was beyond repair, marked the end of the garrison theatrical tradition in Halifax. In the aftermath the officers and men may have put on skits or other short pieces of satire in the military club rooms for their own amusement, but there is no record of such activities.

Soon after, the amateurs of the 60th Rifles performed at Theatre Royal for the last time, in February, 1874, their dramatic talents turned to the game of cricket with its

simple plots, over-acting, and stylized posing and posturing. “The game was played as early as 1786 in Nova Scotia ... in Halifax the popularity of the game waxed and waned with the relative strength of teams fielded by the British garrison ...” (Moss, 58).

Apparently the 60th Rifles felt they had the strength to compete against all-star teams, and in a burst of nostalgia, and with time on their hands, they decided to revive the game. In an interesting anecdote Howell describes what took place: “In the spring of 1874, Captain N. W. Wallace ... wrote many prominent cricketers in the United States, inviting them to an international cricket tournament in Halifax.” The response was disappointing, and the plan fell through, but one team of “well-to-do Philadelphians” did show up in August, and “they were hosted and toasted by the officers of the fort in a manner befitting gentlemen” (31). However, what is interesting about this two-team tournament is the audience and the hosts. As Howell notes, “Cricket matches provided the urban bourgeoisie with an opportunity to display their fashionability, and in so doing to lay claim to an ascendancy over the social order” (31). Like comedy of manners, cricket was class-conscious, and the higher rank of the military was reflected in the social hierarchy of the audience. Howell concludes his short narrative by commenting on the high fashion of the ladies in fine carriages, and the swell-looking Englishmen, who attended the nine day event; and in regard to the hosts he writes, “Among the entertainments were yachting parties; balls at Government House and at private mansions; dinners by the Mayor, the officers of the garrison, and citizens of Halifax; and lunches at private clubs and in regimental messes” (32). The visiting team won, but the 60th Rifles and the Halifax elite had their day.

In any event a new era was arriving. The intercolonial railway was completed in 1876 and was opened for two-way traffic from central Canada to Halifax in July of that year. But apparently the traffic was only one-way. Instead of propping up the economy and creating markets for Halifax and outport merchants, the province was inundated with fast talking commercial travelers representing manufacturing companies in Toronto and Montreal who used every disguise in their sales manuals to snatch away provincial customers and steal accounts from the Halifax entrepreneurs and importers. The theatrical touch belongs here. Judge Haliburton's Sam Slick, the clock peddler from Connecticut who bamboozled bluenosers, was a man of integrity compared to these Upper Canadian predators. At the same time the new rail line provided easy access to Halifax, and small town Nova Scotia, for travelling troupes and big shows like circuses and other spectacles which became common in the latter part of the century.

But Halifax still did not have a legitimate theatre in 1876. The *Acadian Recorder* as far back as August 11th, 1865, had complained about this problem, and during the following years many opinionated letters, pro and con, were published in newspapers, and a host of adverse sermons were delivered in some churches. Eventually the dissonance was adjusted, and sometime in the spring of 1873 schemes for a new theatre were being proposed. But these proposals led to more controversy. There were endless absurd arguments between investors, property owners, and even the Nova Scotia Legislature, concerning the new theatre's interior and exterior design, location, and cost: whether to use wood, which was cheaper than granite or brick. Every scheme, proposal, location, and design was aborted until finally in December of 1875 the new *Halifax*

Academy of Music was incorporated with John Doull as Chairman (Statutes of Nova Scotia, 1876).

In July, 1876, construction of the edifice began on the corner of Barrington and Salter Streets, and, amazingly, the elaborate Academy of Music opened on Tuesday, January 9th, 1877 “with a Grand Opening Concert by one hundred and fifty singing members of the Halifax Philharmonic Union under the direction of C.H. Porter, assisted by the Rudolfson Quartette of Boston, and the Boston Philharmonic Club of Instrumentalists”. The new theatre was immensely popular, and “In the closing decades of the nineteenth century many kinds of entertainment were offered at the Academy, ranging from grand opera to vaudeville” (Blakeley 12-13). But puritan voices of dissonance sometimes interrupted the harmony: when Oscar Wilde lectured there in 1882 the *Presbyterian Witness* objected to “the conceited idiot” being allowed to speak in Halifax.

The *Morning Chronicle* of January 10th, 1877, gives a long and precise description of the Academy of Music, reporting on its interior which was “entered by three double doors fronting on the street”, then commenting on the orchestra stalls and parquette, the floor slope, the portrait of Shakespeare, the neat carpets, the frescoed ceiling, the gassaliers glittering with crystals, the pillars, bases, capitals, statues, urns, scroll work, and many minute details too numerous to mention here. The report is very critical throughout, and the editor concludes by calling the interior design regrettably ugly, shapeless, and tawdry. Perhaps he thought the interior too exotic for Halifax. Such extravagance was more frowned upon in the past than now. However, the Academy of Music was Halifax’s first arts and culture centre, and it ensured the end of garrison

theatres in the city. When it was torn down in 1929 the Academy had served Halifax for over fifty years.

In the meantime, while carnival barkers from Upper Canada were confounding the commons beneath Citadel Hill, and opera singers from the United States were stimulating the sophisticates at the Academy of Music, large numbers of the general populace were enjoying Sunday picnics on McNabs Island. “On July 8th, 1873, Charles Woolnough, a former military officer, officially opened his pleasure grounds on McNabs Island. The “grounds were complete with two large pavilions for dancing and dining, grounds for quoits and football”, and nature trails (Kinsman 3). Since 1856, when Vieth and his comrades first enjoyed the festivities offered there, Woolnough had only catered to private parties. But now that he opened it to the public it became a favorite spot for humble family expeditions, outings of all sorts, and picnickers. And during the last three decades of the century three fortifications were constructed on McNabs: Ives Point Battery was completed in 1870, Fort McNab in 1892, and Fort Hugonin in 1899. These forts were all manned by the British military and were certainly a boon to the success of Woolnough’s. Sometimes whole regiments, along with hundreds of friends, held picnics there, which included “games, dancing in the pavilion, and sports”. Woolnough’s began to decline in the mid 1890’s because of competition from one James Findlay who acquired part of the Hugonin Estate there, and offered the same facilities but added carnival games and rides. Woolnough sold his business to Findlay and returned to England in 1906. Findlay managed to survive after the garrison and fortifications were abandoned until the beginning of World War I when he, too, ceased operation (Kinsman 3, 4, 5).

The 1870's were years of economic hardship in Halifax, but even though garrison theatre had ended, the shows went on with the opening of Woolnough's Pleasure Grounds in 1873, cricket on the commons in 1874, the New Academy of Music in 1877, and the influx of carnivals and circuses from parts unknown. Howell states that baseball emerged as a spectator as well as a recreational sport during the 1870's and 1880's (45). It should also be mentioned that "The Halifax Public Gardens was established in 1874 by the amalgamation of the Nova Scotia Horticultural Society Garden (circa 1837) and an adjacent public park (opened 1866)" (Historic Places 2). The gardens gave the public a place to stroll and relax. Haligonians, no matter where on the social ladder, would not be denied their entertainments and diversions under any circumstances. Beginning in 1880 the depression was finally coming to an end. Established firms such as Oland's Brewery, Morris' Flour mill and bakery, and others that made pianos and furniture, and processed tobacco, were prospering or starting to prosper. In 1883 the Nova Scotia Cotton Manufacturing Company opened, the Starr Manufacturing Company was turning out ice skates and iron goods, and "[l]arger-scale mechanized establishments made everything from candy and boots to rope and steam engines". The intercolonial deepwater terminus was completed in 1880, and eventually this complex could handle twelve ocean steamers simultaneously. By the end of the decade there was shipbuilding and repairs of Royal Navy and merchant ships at Brookfield's drydock (Fingard, Halifax 92-8).

With all this commercial enterprise there was a gradual increase of standards of living, and "Although there began another rebuilding of the fortress which went on quietly for twenty years" (Raddall 219) the economy no longer depended on the military. As a matter of fact the untaxed garrison was now considered a liability (Fingard, Halifax

99). The economy had shifted, and politics were shifting as well. With the coming of the intercolonial railway Nova Scotians soon saw how the cold hard politics of Ottawa functioned. The institution of religion was shifting too: the Catholics had always kept their flock culturally insulated, but over the years many non-conformist houses of worship were ensconced in Halifax, thus ensuring that the pulpit of the Church of England would no longer dominate. In the wake of all this shifting Citadel Hill was no longer the stage around which British institutions revolved. The gilded age was flowing into the age of awareness.

During the 1880's, although Nova Scotia was becoming economically and politically independent, cultural cleaving to Britain was still prevalent, especially in Halifax. In 1887, for instance, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of Queen Victoria's reign, the Victoria School of Art and Design opened. (Fingard, Halifax 101). That same year "the city built an ornate bandstand in the Public Gardens and arranged weekly concerts by the excellent bands of garrison regiments and visiting warships, as well a civic orchestral groups" (Raddall 225). Blakeley writes that "In the nineteenth century stirring band music could be heard nearly everyday in Halifax from bands of the British regiments" (15). Down through the years the British army had always made its presence known with fife and drums at every changing of the guard; and parades led by military bands were consistently held to celebrate Royal birthdays and special occasions such as Natal Day. In the late 1700's spectators observing the marchers in these military parades were watching history being made — in the late 1800's they were looking at characters from a historical pageant.

Nevertheless, besides the nostalgia of history, it was still culture plus loyalty that drew the spectators to these parades and concerts. Things did not change much in Halifax in the 1890's. Music and harmony was everywhere. The military bands played, and the British "army and navy played interminable games of cricket on the wanderer's grounds, or the garrison grounds ..." (Raddall 229), and the Academy of Music brought in star attractions. Blakely notes that "in 1891 Haligonians crowded the Academy to hear the Grau Opera Company in *The Gondoliers* and *The Chimes of Normandy*", and, "In April 1897, the Carleton opera Company appeared at the academy for two weeks with a cast of forty from the Metropolitan to present the *Queen's Lace Handkerchief*, *Nanon*, and *Dorothy*" (15). Halifax was hesitantly weaning herself from cultural colonialism; some say it never did. But history knows no hesitation: in 1899 the Anglo-Boer war started and the British regiments were sent to South Africa. They returned in 1902, but that conflict brought retrenchment of Britain's sea power. Needs and interests shifted from North America to Europe. The renovation of the Citadel and the forts, begun in 1885, was complete in 1905, and after they were turned over to the Canadian Department of Militia and Defence the British army left for England on November 15th, and the Royal Navy sailed out of Halifax harbour in 1906. Britannia left Citadel Hill as a cultural monument along with its legacy — the gift of theatre. The garrison theatrical tradition, with its comedy and farce, was of its time; it encompassed a culture, and it has survived the weight of time, through its gift.

Epilogue

In conclusion, the purpose of this thesis was to cover the 300 year history, from 1606 to 1906, of theatre and entertainments provided first by French explorers, and then by the British military in Nova Scotia; and to show how religion, politics, and economics were involved in the social and cultural aspects of theatre and spectacle during that time. From the very beginning, politics, religion, and French culture were written into the script of the play *Neptune* produced by Marc LesCarbot at Port Royal in 1606. Prior to the founding of Halifax plays were performed at the British garrison of Fort Anne to celebrate royal birthdays. After the founding of Halifax, the British military stationed at Citadel Hill participated in political ceremonies, shows of strength and spectacles in the form of mock battles, and parades complete with marching bands. They also provided social activities such as band concerts, song and dance routines, and live theatre. These activities were elements of their culture. As for live theatre, although it was condoned by the Church of England, it was condemned by some other denominations. Politics were very much involved in what became known as garrison theatre (p.37 above); as well, a valid analogy is often made between political systems and the flourishing of theatre. And through the years theatrical productions waxed and waned along with the Halifax economy. So British military culture, politics, and economics brought about the rise of garrison theatre, and these same factors ended it. The long tradition of military theatrical productions in Halifax was officially over when the British Army and Navy left in 1906, and their connection with Nova Scotia ceased.

Besides the intention of showing that garrison theatre, along with politics and religion, was part of the basic cultural package of British colonialism, the central idea of this thesis was to focus on the rise, and on the decline, of the garrison theatrical tradition in Halifax from 1773 to 1874, and to search for answers to the questions set forth in the first paragraph of the prelude. Bearing in mind that history is always open to interpretation, what follows, then, is a restatement of each of those questions, countered with or responded to by arguments drawn from the premises and data outlined in the study. Using this method I try to arrive at some reasonable explanations in the epilogue, so that the curtain may fall.

The first question asks why the officers and men of the British Military produced and acted in stage plays. There is no one clear-cut answer to this question. Rewa makes the assumption that “British colonial officials apparently encouraged public theatricals as a means of asserting ... British cultural and political supremacy” (223). This may have been apparent at other garrisons across the country. However, I tend to agree with O’Neill, who states, “Halifax in matters cultural was a British town, and there was no need to employ theatricals to promote British culture ...” (Halifax 159). As stated on page 35 of this thesis Halifax was founded and laid out on a system which followed the English principles necessary for a “genteel” town, with public spaces for churches, a parade square, and Government House (notes taken from Dr. R. Field, ACS 301). And Harvey alleges that the latest fashions, pictures, expensive furniture, and all the materials of good living were imported from England. Furthermore, Buckingham wrote (c.1841) “The general society of Halifax, of which we saw a great deal during our stay here — having been invited out to parties almost every day — appeared to be more like that of an

English seaport town, than any we had met since leaving home”(341). So it seems that all the institutions of British culture were established and maintained from the founding of Halifax in 1749. Live theatre was also part of Halifax’s cultural heritage; and instead of “asserting” (Rewa 223), the garrison repertoire “emulated” British culture, and flattered the colonials.

In Halifax, at least, there were five venues of garrison theatre: subscription theatre; public theatre; private performances at Government House and in homes of the well-to-do; private performances in the barracks and club rooms; and public performances on board Royal navy ships in the harbour. The first venue, subscription theatre, funded and organized by the military, was staged in a theatre and aimed to raise money for charity, as well as to promote good relations and repay the entertainments, such as rides and dinners and dances, freely given to the officers by the well-to-do. Public performances, also staged in a theatre, were put on to raise money for charitable purposes, and sometimes for the benefit of professional troupes who were in financial difficulties. The plays performed at Government House and in private homes had underlying political purposes (p37 above) and were put on at the request of the patron: the Governor, his wife, a local dignitary, or a rich merchant. These plays provided entertainment for the patron’s guests, and the officers would have been honoured to perform. The officers and men also put on plays in their barracks to amuse themselves — perhaps to increase morale, or to cure homesickness, or to simply relieve the monotony of winter in an age when there was no radio, television, or cinema. The fifth venue was the theatre performed on board Royal navy ships as benefits for the families of

fallen comrades. The dramatic corps of these ships also put on benefit performances at Theatre Royal at different times.

Many of the prominent patrons, such as the Lieutenant-Governor and high-ranking officers, who subscribed to and organized the theatricals, were either sons of nobility or connected to upper class British families, and this raises the question of *noblesse oblige*. That it was an ulterior motive for subscribing to live theatre cannot be denied. As well, part of the culture of the British military officers was that they were *in honour bound*, under moral obligations to help the poor and distressed, and charity made theatre eligible for patronage. This patronage would bring honour to their regiment. As for the actors themselves there certainly were dilettantes among them, taking part in theatre merely as a pastime. Lieutenant Vieth, who said, “I seldom tired of seeing acting, [and] never of taking part in it ... I fell in love with things theatrical” (131), definitely had the mark of a dilettante. For these amateurs, acting was purely art for art’s sake; monetary rewards were never a consideration. Originally, as stated on page 22, the primary object of the Garrison Theatrical Society was the relief of the poor. The occasional plays performed at Government House, homes of the wealthy, or in the barracks, were put on for political and private reasons. However, concerning the subscription, shipboard, and public performances, whether the patrons felt they had a moral obligation, or whether the actors were dilettantes who loved things theatrical, does not alter the fact that the main rationale was charity.

The next question is in two parts. The first part inquires why the men found it necessary or even pragmatic, to act in the women’s roles. Perhaps rehearsals were done in the men’s garrison, which would have been off-limits to women. Nevertheless it was

traditional: there were no women on board British naval vessels in those days, so the men naturally acted the women's roles. And since traditionalists always look backwards the practice continued with plays put on in the garrisons. Moreover, the garrison era was an age dominated by a British patriarchal society; it was a men-only culture. Military training at that time was designed to inculcate the notion that women were by no means equal to men. This convention of exclusion was accepted by all of male society: perhaps they were afraid of the liberal views of some far-sighted women of the time. As explained earlier (p. 47 above), women were governed by social conventions, and "amateur-actress" was an euphemism for "loose-woman"; she would bring dishonour. Yet the accepted rationale was that for a garrison amateur, acting alongside a professional actress was an honour; and, as stated, most of the professionals were either married, or they used the honorific title of Mrs. because the title carried respectability. However, the practice of male domination of theatre was dying out, and amateur actresses began appearing on stage by the decline of the garrison theatrical tradition.

The second part of the question has to do with the selection of male actors for women's roles. My research shows that invariably the women's roles were played by young subalterns. "Subaltern", a British military term for a junior officer, literally meaning subordinate, is used to describe commissioned officers below the rank of captain, and generally comprises the various grades of lieutenant, as well as cornet and ensign. Apparently these young officers were necessary for the female roles in all dramatic and comic representations. Malone notes that at the New York garrison between 1777 and 1783 the female roles were often played by young subalterns (p. 16 above). Lieutenant Vieth explains what happened when none were available for the Crimean

productions: “There was no lack of actors to choose from for male parts; but for the other sex on the stage it was a more difficult matter, and as young subalterns with smooth faces had to be utilized for the ladies in the pieces, farces were alone attempted” (79). Even in India subalterns were cast in the same way. Kipling, in his short story, “His Wedded Wife”, describes a young subaltern by the name of Henry Augustus Ramsay Faizanne as being “An exceedingly pretty boy, without hair on his face, and with a waist like a girl’s”, and that he had a “quiet, lady-like voice” (155-6). So it is reasonable to assume that the subalterns selected to impersonate women on stage would have had characteristics regarded as feminine.

The question of comedy and farce must now be addressed. Unlike the professionals, acting was not a career for the garrison officers. They did not have the time to rehearse, and set the stage, for elaborate productions. Comedy and farce usually make fewer technical demands than other theatrical genres such as epic, melodrama, or tragedy, and can be played anywhere: for the most part all that is required is a painted canvas backdrop. In comedy of manners, even though men played women’s parts, the military could maintain its dignity because there were no passionate embraces as in other forms of drama. The farces were intended only to excite laughter, and if the actor forgot his lines he could easily improvise on the spur of the moment, which would probably bring more hysterics from the audience. The function of the garrison actors was not to deepen understanding of human nature, but to provide entertainment and escape. All the scripts were imported from England, and they were popular because the actors and the audience could participate in their own cultural repertoire.

As with the other questions there are several possible answers concerning the query into the decline of garrison theatre in Halifax. It seems to have begun in 1856 when Sothern leased and refurbished the garrison's Theatre Royal, and brought in his professional company from the United States. After his departure in 1859, and during the American Civil War, there was a lull in theatre. Through the 1860's, with no maintenance or upkeep, Theatre Royal was slowly deteriorating. After Confederation in 1867, there was a huge reduction in troops: British imperialism was also deteriorating. A consequence of the small contingent left to maintain Citadel Hill, combined with its uncertain future, was that the garrison amateurs would have been reluctant to solicit subscriptions to either renovate Theatre Royal or to construct a new theatre. At the same time more amateur troupes were appearing on the Halifax scene, along with amateur actresses, and they were putting on different genres of drama such as social theatre and melodrama. Comedy and farce were becoming outmoded and obsolete. The last official patron of garrison theatre was Lieutenant-Governor Sir Charles Hastings Doyle, whose tenure ended in May of 1873. After that garrison theatre suffered and died.

There is no one factor why the officers of the garrison did not put on plays at some venue between 1875 and 1905. But, for the most part, in the 1870's, with a slump in the economy Haligonians were turning to either complimentary or inexpensive entertainments. Circuses, vaudeville, and spectator sports such as baseball were capturing the interest of the public in general. The sociodynamics of Halifax were changing, and with it the theatrical choices made by audiences: when the Academy of Music opened in 1877 the public's attention turned to opera, and big companies were brought in from the United States. The taste of the audience had moved on to newer and

more elaborate delights. However, there is no doubt that up until Confederation dramatic art was kept alive through the patronage of the army and navy officers stationed in Halifax, and even the love of music was fostered by the military. Through the ironic humour of comedy of manners, and the ludicrous situations portrayed in farce, as well as lavish spending, the British military officers were unconsciously showing Haligonians how to laugh at their own foibles. That type of common sense and fortitude survives today in Halifax.

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