



Allen's Opera House and "The Death of Juliet"

Paper items often arrive at the museum in wood frames and backed with cardboard or even wood. This is a very acidic environment for paper that we are trying to preserve so most items are removed from the frame. Once the item is removed from the frame, it can be stored in acid-free material and eventually be re-framed, using archival materials, for display in an exhibit.

A number of years ago such an item arrived. The map of Jamestown was very nice but starting to yellow and disintegrate in its acidic environment. It was removed from its frame only to reveal a second paper item behind the map. This item is not in great condition from not only the acidic environment, but it had various tears which at some time had been "fixed" with tape.

This was a large advertising poster entitled *Miss Margaret Mather as "Juliet"*. *A copy of Margaret Mather's great oil painting "The Death of Juliet"*. The Courier Lith. Co., Buffalo, N.Y. was the credit under the picture. Across the top was printed-OPERA HOUSE, JAMESTOWN, ONE NIGHT ONLY, THURSDAY, SEPT. 25. The poster measures 28 by 42 and is in color.

This poster was something that we, as a local historical society and museum, wanted to keep since it was local. But we needed more information to know more of the story that this represented. A perpetual calendar provided the possible years for the poster. A perpetual calendar can tell you the year in which a date occurred on a certain day of the week. The years of 1879, 1884 and 1890 had September 25th on a Thursday and those years were within the range of years that seemed to correspond to the age of the poster. More research would have to be done to learn the rest of the story of the poster.

Recently we took this poster out again and tried to find additional information about Margaret Mather and her role as "Juliet". With the Internet, which we did not have at the time the poster arrived, we were able to find an article at the Wikipedia site about Margaret Mather. According

to that article, Miss Mather was born in Canada, was a leading Shakespearean actress in the 1880's and had toured the United States and Canada in 1883 and 1884. This all fits with the picture-“Juliet” from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* as portrayed by a leading Shakespearean actress and she toured the United States and Canada in 1883-1884. 1884 is one of the years in which September 25th was on a Thursday. The Internet source also had a photo of Margaret Mather and a photo of a poster depicting her as “Juliet” in “*Romeo and Juliet*”. Both of these look like the woman in the poster at the Fenton History Center.

The Jamestown Evening Journal carried ads for her performance in Jamestown along with articles before her appearance here and a review following her performance. In Jamestown, she played “Julia” in *The Hunchback*, a play from the 1820's by James Stanley Knowles. Some in Jamestown were unhappy with Miss Mather’s choice of play to be presented in Jamestown. One of the article explained that this was a good play and “Julia”, “the part to be taken by Miss Mather is always included in the repertoire of all distinguished actresses.” It was her first appearance in Jamestown and the review of the performance was very favorable. Again the Internet provided more information about Miss Mather. Just a year before her performance in Jamestown, she had played the same role in Chicago for an audience that included President Chester A. Arthur.

Margaret Mather collapsed during a play in Charleston, West Virginia on April 7, 1898 and died that night. She was buried in Detroit, Michigan, where 4000 people were in attendance at the cemetery.

In 1884, Jamestown had an Opera House. It was Allen’s Opera House, built in 1881, and located on East Second Street and is the identical building that today houses the Lucille Ball Little Theater of Jamestown.