



Somewhere between '75 and '80. S. J. Preston built the old Preston opera house, a three story brick with two store rooms on the first floor, one for a grocery and one for a dry goods store, the Opera House on the second floor and lodge rooms on the third floor which were occupied by the Masons for long years and later by the Knights of Pythias and later still was used as an armory by Company K. It was in this old third story room that the Laurel Lodge, Knight's of Pythias, was installed in the early 90's and it was from that room that Company K marched out when the call came for the war of 1898 and they entrained for the camping place on the State Fair Ground at Des Moines.

It seemed to us in those days that the Opera House itself was a thing of beauty. The ceilings were low but it held many people and here were put on some of the better shows of those days. Here political speeches were held and some of the best political orators in the country have graced that stage. We could not name them all. It is hardly worth while to name any of them, but Governor John H. Gear, Samuel J. Kirkwood, Senator Allison, Congressman Henderson, Congressman Lacey, Congressman Roswell C. Horr, and many others graced that old platform.

Here also the Cherry Sisters entertained a small audience with their satire on music and received several fairly good bouquets of turnips, beets, and other garden fruit. At this program Policeman Claude Pigman was present in person with his billy and he wasn't afraid to use it if necessary. Owing to the character of the man and the fact that eggs were forbidden by the management of the theater, none were distributed around where the sisters sang, danced, and played.

Here also appeared several times for a week's engagement Kendall's Comedy Kompany, who were always greeted with good sized houses. Here in the fall of 1878 also was held the Iowa State Inter-Collegiate Contest at which orators from ten or twelve colleges competed and on which occasion first place was given by the judges that night to Fred W. Reed, a Grinnell boy, amidst the violent cheers of the house.