After that outburst of silence has subsided...

I have been producing my original Toby play during the summers at Volunteer State Community College in Gallatin, Tennessee since 1994. Every year, the same elderly lady approaches me at intermission of a performance to tell me her story, "You see those children up there on the front row? That was me and my sister seventy years ago. All us kids would try for those front row seats, clutching our bags of taffy. It was the best time! Thank you for bringing this back." Typically every year, I thank her, go backstage and burst into tears. Why does this experience mean so much to her? What made that "the best time?" The summer of 1998 we had to postpone our performances at the college from mid June to mid July because of my preliminary examinations. Virginia Thigpen, department chair of Speech and Theatre at Volunteer State Community College and liaison between the college and me, told me in a 1998 interview that the college had received several phone calls from past audience members in mid June who were wanting to know, "Where is the Toby show? We come every year." What is it that made our show tradition at Volunteer State in just three years? It is extremely important to answer those questions in order to use that knowledge for the future benefit of my company. I yearn to make our show "tradition" in each town that we play. In order to begin to answer the above questions, I will explore audience in this chapter.

I am often asked, as a tent show scholar, what enterprises competed with tent shows. I conjectured that an examination of rivaling entertainment forms could produce information regarding audiences. If I could find descriptions of the same demographic, that might account for information lacking in tent show testimonies. I began the exploration by questioning various tent show troupers about competition. All said that the tent show was really the only event, besides the county fair or a community activity, that occurred in the communities where they played. Through a

1998 e-mail to me, Bill Slout asserted that the only enterprise in competition with a tent show company was another tent show company.

There were tent shows that were competitive and even resentful about a new company....In the 1930s and later there were not enough shows to be a problem. Revivals weren't big in the Michigan territory. Southern shows may have had a problem. Such things as night baseball and other civic activities were more bothersome.

Peggy Henderson MacDonald, former child tent show actress, addressed the notion of competition by maintaining in an interview that, "People went to different things. I don't remember anything competing. You go to a movie on Saturday night and church on Sunday. It was the same." I did find one opposing article dated March 28, 1927, possibly from Bill Bruno's Bulletin, in a scrapbook in the Rosier collection at Michigan State University entitled, "Terrell Tells of Troubles with Carnivals at Fairs," by company manager Billy Terrell. He complained about the 1927 season in Florida, "I have been informed by one of the leading secretaries, who controls four fair dates, that two large carnival companies refused to play fairs if my show is on the grounds....Their cry was that I got too much of the business." In the remainder of the article, Terrell upheld his business practices as fair and could not understand why the carnival companies were so upset. Terrell complained about the behavior of the carnival owners, he called it "squawking," though it did not seem to do his business any harm. Thus, varied and contradictory information produced little results.

Tent shows and tent Chautauqua traveled during approximately the same periods, tent Chautauqua from 1874 to 1927 and tent shows from the 1880s to the 1960s. Similarly, the most profitable period for both was the first two decades of the twentieth century. Surprisingly, though the forms are similar in many ways, I have yet to find evidence throughout my extensive study of tent theatre that tent Chautauqua and tent shows competed. Additionally, both performed under canvas and served rural communities in nearly the same areas. I believe an examination of tent shows and tent

Chautauqua might allow me to ascertain if there is something, demographic or conditional, that caused the two forms to be isolated from each other. Perhaps, that information will help me to more clearly delineate the typical tent show audience.

The first section of this chapter will compare two superficially similar forms, tent shows and tent Chautauqua. This examination will lead to an emphasis of particular elements of structure regarding tent shows, providing a frame of reference that I can apply to the following section. As published analyses of tent show audiences are few, I will structurally analyze the tent show audience by synthesizing the few descriptive accounts available. I will also examine tent Chautauqua audiences structurally in order to discover admiralties between the two. By comparing the two forms, perhaps I can uncover useful information and come to certain conclusions about behavior and ideology concerning tent shows. The second section of this chapter utilizes anthropological theory to find justification for audience behavior and ideology, historically. This information is a critical part of determining how to shape the historic material to accommodate my modern rural audiences. This examination helps me to define the historic audience, explain it with performance and anthropological theory, and compare it to mine so that I can estimate how to alter the material and form to compensate for my modern audiences and their late twentieth century experiences.

Tent Chautauqua developed out of two separate movements, the Lyceum lecture and Chautauqua assemblies. Josiah Holbrook established Lyceum lecture circuits in 1826, which, as Case explained in his book We Called it Culture, "organized his farmer neighbors into an association for intellectual improvement" (23). Reverend John H. Vincent established the first official Chautauqua assembly in Lake Chautauqua, New York in 1874 as a summer camp for Methodist Sunday school teachers. As Case notes, "Lest it be confused with a religious camp meeting–a type of emotional orgy which Vincent detested–they named it the 'Sunday-School Teachers' Assembly'" (13). Popularity greatly increased for both the Lyceum and Chautauqua movement.

Permanent assemblies as well as the number of Lyceum performers traveling multiplied. The increase in platform entertainments enticed business managers to organize the loosely connected platform performers and assemblies. John S. Gentile in his book, Cast of One, concluded, as do most Chautauqua historians, that tent Chautauqua was born in 1842 when James Redpath established the Boston Lyceum Bureau, later known as the Redpath Bureau, by becoming Charles Dickens's performance manager. Though there were other circuits, Redpath's was the most successful Lyceum booking agency in the United States (18-19).

Like tent shows, Chautauqua traveled throughout the Southern and Midwestern United States, but it was in, according to Case, "the lush Middle West that Chautauqua grew greenest" (196). Both tent shows and circuit Chautauqua were described as having appeared in rural towns all over the United States. Orchard in his book, Fifty Years of Chautauqua, notes that Chautauqua appeared in "small villages of only a few hundred population" (16). He goes on to say that competition was fierce in 1920 so much so that "often as many as a dozen chautauquas might be found operating in a single county" (16). From each book concerning Chautauqua that I researched, historians believe over saturation was one of the primary reasons for the form's demise. Why then, are there no tent show writings concerning competition with Chautauquas?

Structurally, through examination of historical summaries, trouper testimony, and personal interviews, I can ascertain that most Toby patrons were similar in certain respects, and formed what anthropologists call specific interest groups: they were isolated, derived their income directly or indirectly from agriculture, usually of a lower-income agricultural class, white, religious, and patriarchal. I will compare Chautauqua audiences to this summation of the attributes of tent show audiences to attempt to discover if the structural elements were similar.

Tent show audiences were rural and derived their income from agriculture. Surely town businessmen and their wives as well as those of an upper, probably

merchant, class attended, but it is important to remember that these upper classes were also dependent, though indirectly, upon farming. Though a somewhat melodramatic example, Larry Clark, in the first dissertation concerning Toby shows, provides an illustration:

Although no description of a very early audience is available, this one of a typical audience in 1929-30 shows many elements which must have been equally present earlier. The company plays to lean farmers, unshaven, often unwashed, who come clad in working overalls, collarless, who slump in their seats, worn out by all day's haying in the hot sun, who are childishly eager to be amused, to plump farmers' wives in housedresses and aprons, to young couples who have come twenty miles in the Ford over rough dirt roads, carrying the baby in their arms, bringing the two and four-year-olds to sit sleepily alongside until nearly midnight, to the garage mechanic and his daughter. Their audience is talkative, lively, and it has the wistfulness of people who work hard and have little recreation. (66)

Tent show scholar, Jere Mickel relates a similar story in Footlights on the Prairie in that these people worked for a meager living and saved enough of their income to attend the show each year. The story goes that one night Bess Robbins, co-owner of the Robbins Show, which toured the Midwest, had spoken to a newspaperman about her annoyance with crying babies during the show. The man severely, and with good reason, reprimanded her:

Bess Robbins, the mothers of those babies have saved egg money for months, to get to see you tonight. Some of them came forty miles by horse and buggy, because you are the brightest spot in a very dreary existence. Any time your audience boasts a baby, it means the mother is a devoted fan--and you be grateful. (110)

These stories illustrate not only the shows' appeal to rural people who lack entertainment alternatives, but the economic essence of their rural American audiences.

There is more extant material concerning Chautauqua's history, program content, and performers than tent show accounts, but little scholarship regarding Chautauqua audiences. Surprisingly, material seems to describe Chautauqua audiences as possessing many of the same attributes as Toby's audiences, though the Chautauqua descriptions seem to point to more professional, up-scale patrons. Regarding Chautauqua's patrons, Case asserts that, "the circuits and bureaus might be independent of each other, but the audiences were similar" (204). He described the audience in a somewhat dramatic way, as well:

There were weathered farmers, still-faced women, shopkeepers, bespectacled professional men and their wives and children, young girls and young men. All were hungry for music, for drama, for the glimpse of wider interest offered ever so sketchily by the scientist and his test tubes. All were tied to the mental poverty of Main Street, yearning for something outside themselves, grateful for what they got, patiently sinnowing through chaff and bombast and triteness to garner the few grains of inspiration. (142)

The Culture Under Canvas description, by Redpath Chautauqua superintendent, Harry P. Harrison, characterizes Harrison's Chautauqua audiences:

Thus our initial Redpath-Chicago circuit covered every type of town. Proud, respectable communities and new booming cities, north, south, rich, poor, industrial and farming, with audiences of strictly middle-class citizens with personalities and tastes of their own, but all with common desires.... (91)

The differences in tent Chautauqua audiences and those of a Toby show begin to surface in those few melodramatic descriptions. Though, certainly the authors' passions for each genre of tent entertainment color their descriptions, clues to demographic or structural information can be uncovered.

Through audience description, it seems that there is a difference in income between tent and Chautauqua audiences. I argue that tent show audiences seem to be

predominantly of a lower economic class, while Chautauqua audiences seem to be middle class. Further, I can support my assumption by looking at the ticket prices for both genres.

I found a collection of handbills from the former owners of my equipment, the Henderson Stock Company, at the Theatre Museum in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa. In the early years, prices ranged from ten, twenty, to thirty cents per night and rose to twenty-five, thirty-five and fifty cents by the mid 1920s. These prices are comparable to tent theatre as most opera house rep companies toured opera houses in the winter and did tent theatre in the summer. Additionally, tent companies usually performed a maximum of five days at each location.

At the height of the Chautauqua era, prices were similar to tent shows, Case maintains, "at an average price of twelve to sixteen and a half cents" per day (210). However, often families bought two week season tickets and many camped on the Chautauqua grounds by renting tents and bedding so as not to miss any of the day's or evening's entertainments. Magnuson in his article, "Clarinda Seeks 'the Thrills of Human Imitation: The Development of Theater in an Iowa's Chautauqua," includes an advertisement for rental equipment. "Tents may be rented on the Assembly grounds as follows: 10x12 wall tent, by the day, 75 cents; by the week, $2.50; by the season, $3.50; with floor, by the season, $4.50..." (168). The Clarinda season lasted for two weeks. The advertisements and photos of numerous rented tents pitched on the Clarinda grounds suggests Chautauqua audiences had more than just egg money to spend on their entertainments. Additionally, evidence suggests that prices rose to accommodate the expense of presenting top-notch performers. Harry Harrison notes that he attended a program in 1917 in Michigan that charged $2.50 for a season ticket or seventy-five cents per daily program (8).

The organizations of the companies certainly demanded differences in revenue. Tent companies were self-supporting and self-managed organizations. The owner was

often the manager as well as the lead character. Wives and children performed, as well. Tent show companies usually supported an average of twenty-five to thirty people who entertained from five to seven nights per location. Tent rep revenue had to cover salaries, all traveling expenses, and publicity. Conversely, tent Chautauqua was a larger event, which had to support many more entertainers in its two week season. Chautauqua entertainers might perform on Wednesday night, then hop on a train late that night to travel to the next venue for a performance the following day. The Verne Slout Players were not only an opera house repertoire company and a tent show company, but also appeared on the tent Chautauqua stage. That meant that the theatre company of twenty-five, which had to be paid, was merely one evening's entertainment at Chautauqua. Often each day's bill would consist of approximately, according to programs in Magnuson's article, sixteen events (164-65). Certainly, some of these entertainers appeared in more than one event, but the cast numbers were still much larger than those of the tent show. Someone had to support these programs, and that was through audience ticket and rental prices. Local merchants usually fronted the circuit Chautauqua performances by purchasing all the tickets up front then reselling to local patrons. This was known as the guarantee. Theodore Morrison's book, Chautauqua, clarifys the role of the community regarding tent Chautauqua guarantees:

The notable characteristic of the contract was the guarantee. In each community that accepted a circuit Chautauqua, a committee was formed which undertook to raise an agreed fund by the sale of season tickets. Each member of the committee was personally and legally liable for the amount of the guarantee. This provision, which later became a bone of contention, at first induced a high degree of community cooperation. (178)

Even though the circuit was not responsible for the debt, Chautauqua season ticket prices were much higher than tent show per performance prices. Therefore, Chautauqua patrons must have had more expendable income to support those big

productions than the poorer tent show patrons, and therefore were of a higher economic class.

I would maintain from sketchy evidence that audiences for both genres were generally white. In e-mail to me concerning tent shows, Slout remembers,

No Blacks during the early Michigan years. There weren't many Blacks in Michigan before World War II and defense work. Later, when the [Slout] show went farther south into Illinois and Missouri, I guess there must have been. I wasn't really conscious about it.

Statistics found on the "Historical United States Census Data Browser," support Slout's contention. In 1910, less than 1% of the population in Michigan was African-American. In 1920, the numbers had risen to only 2%, and remained until 1940 when the count rose to 4% of the total population. In an interview, Billy Henderson Schuller, former tent show child actress and sister to Peggy, recalled, "No. There were no blacks in our territory [Michigan and upper to middle Midwest] prior to World War II. After the war, there were some, but I don't remember them attending the show." It is unclear whether this was due to a low minority population in those areas or if minorities did not choose to attend tent shows. Tent show material was often very racist, though in the early nineteen hundreds, that was standard throughout many popular entertainment forms. Though we know that minstrel shows were popular with black audiences, they were declining by the 1920s According to Brockett in his History of the Theatre, "By 1919 there were only three, and soon the Minstrel Show was a mere curiosity" (481). Moreover, they were situated mostly in urban areas, according to a summary in the 1995 World Book Encyclopedia, "Minstrel companies performed in permanent minstrel theatres in almost every major city in the United States, especially in the Northeast" (612). Since tent shows were flourishing in the twenties, and most were situated in the Midwest, I conclude that minstrel shows were not a competitive element.

Though I could not find any evidence concerning the racial mix of Chautauqua audiences, through surveying pictures found in books and articles, most especially the large picture included in Magnuson's article of Clarinda, Iowa's Chautauqua assembly, not a black face can be seen.

Tent shows were known as "mother, home and heaven" shows reflective of the Christian belief systems sustained by their audiences. Slout's Theatre in a Tent, describes the shows, "'rube dramas' tailored to rural tastes, portraying Victorian ideals of virtue, reverence for mother, home and heaven..." (71). Mickel describes the rural audience and the idea of virtue and sin, "Rep show audiences were rural....The city was not only more sophisticated but it was a place of sin" (7). Mickel believes rep audiences were reflective of the rural population in general. In his book, he agrees with Clarence Darrow's description of rural folk, "Among the things they knew, was that Protestantism was divinely inspired... .the cities were evil, and the country was good" (7). The comedy in the early Toby shows was never "blue" (sexual or vulgar in nature) because the predominately Christian audiences would not tolerate it. Mickel stated that the general rule concerning comedy was, "'If you can't tell the story Sunday morning in church, you can't tell it Monday night on the stage,' except maybe in the Saturday night concert," because the concert was after the regular show and an optional performance for which additional charges were levied (68). Moreover, the satisfaction of attending ministers was an important marketing strategy because they, in turn, would persuade their congregations to attend a clean family show. Trouping Through Texas: Harley and His Tent Show by Clifford Ashby, illustrates:

Preachers who regularly inveighed against 'the sinful delights of that gorgeous playing place, the theatre,' were regular patrons at Harley's show, and would frequently move Wednesday night services to an earlier hour so that both religion and entertainment could be accommodated in the same evening. (2)

Additionally, they required their employees to uphold a virtuous image. For example, managers forbade actresses to fraternize with "towner" males and often actresses boarded in a separate building from men in the company.

As mentioned earlier, Chautauqua began as a school for Sunday school teachers. It was founded upon religion. Chautauqua was a "respectable" form of entertainment, which allegedly fostered intellectual stimulation and development. Theatre in the nineteenth century, according to platform scholar, Gentile, "was believed to be corrupt for its origins, for the character of those attracted to its employ, for the people who regularly attended it as audience members, and for its very nature" (4). It was this "pervasive prejudice against the theatre inherited by Victorian Americans from their Puritan ancestors" that gave rise to popularity of Lyceum and Chautauqua platform performers (4). Unlike theatre, it did not utilize, as Gentile notes, "illusionistic devices...which aimed at seducing the unwary away from reality into a false world of fantasy" (5). The platform was a way to entertain audiences under the guise of respectability and intellectual advancement. Gentile further asserts that this guise was due to the eventual "breakdown of the Victorian intolerance for the theatre and the theatrical" (5). Ironically, descriptions of tent Chautauqua and tent shows tended to reflect consistent ideologies, including predominantly Christian religious devotion.

To combat the tawdry reputation carried by the theatrical profession, tent show owner/managers presented moral plays that reflected rural attitudes. Because testimony is scant and often dubious, I additionally rely on the following supposition when conducting research of early performances. If, according to Barbara Herrnstein Smith in her book, Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory, what a society values is contingent upon its social, economic, philosophical, and political atmospheres, what she calls "economies," then I can assume that what an audience responds to positively is generally what they deem appropriate, based on those economies (30). Evidence supporting tent rep patrons' religious devotion is best

upheld by an examination of material. Tent show authors wrote their plays to reflect rural ideologies. Moreover, by considering the statistics concerning attendance, the plays were highly approved of by their audiences, and therefore reflected the values of their patrons. In his book, Born in a Trunk, Billy Choate, popular Toby comedian, summarizes the subject matter found in the tent rep plays :

The most important feature of the tent show was the play. The plots, predictable enough, reflect small town values and tastes in every detail. The farmer, for example, is an important fixture in many shows. He is portrayed as the ideal man--simple, honest, independent, industrious, healthy and happy....The country life always represents the ideal....plainness seems to represent an innocence and a simplicity that is to be admired. (7-8)

Moreover, tent show people held their art in high esteem. An article from an unidentified newspaper in the Michigan State University collection dated August 13, 1937 highlighting Hila Morgan entitled, "Hila Morgan Tent Rep Revives Old Memories Reporter Says," reflects the degree to which tent show manager Hila Morgan believed in what she was doing,

She believes the tent show attracts more people and does the most good. She regards her profession as an opportunity to do great good in the world, and her aim in life is to provide clean, wholesome entertainment for the public, she says....The legitimate theatre hastened its death by dishing up "dirty" plays, she declares.

It seems, however, that tent show audiences were righteous, yet not immune to minor off-color humor. A Toby one-liner in my collection of bits from the Theatre Museum in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa is a good example, "I like the girls here in (Local town). They're not like the girls in (Local Town). The girls here in (Local Town) never whistle at the boys...they stand in doorways and DRAG 'EM IN!"

The ideologies seem similar in Chautauqua, however, the difference seems to lie in the intellectualism of Chautauqua versus the simplicity of the Toby plays.

Chautauqua was founded to intellectually stimulate its patrons with lectures, music and appropriate readings. Magnuson's article advertises lectures entitled, "Canadian Women in Parliament, Hawthorne, and Emerson a Personal Study" (164-5, 178). The Clarinda "Bible Hour" covered topics such as, "Barabbas, The Reed in His Hand, and Joseph of Arimathaea" (178). Theatrical endeavors soon found their place on the Chautauqua stage.   According to Gentile, "when the nontheatregoing Chautauqua audiences...saw platform performance that approached the theatrical, their general reaction was one of fascination and delight" (82). From reprints of programs for the Clarinda Chautauqua in Magnuson's article, out of the eight days represented, seven included a "Bible Hour" (164-5). Thus, early tent Chautauqua theatrical endeavors maintained an essence of piety out of necessity. In the same article, "The Hiawatha Indian Passion Play was billed as 'especially suited for churches and Chautauquas for it describes reverently this beautiful Messiah legend...No one can hear it without receiving an impulse for a better life'" (167).   The L. Verne Slout Players performed at Clarinda in 1923. "There publicity materials promised versatility: 'Classic Dramas, Biblical Plays, Modern Comedies" (174). The lure of the theatre was disguised by the godly subject matter. However, it was not long before managers found that variety entertainment served to spice up the program. Before long, Chautauqua programs, such as the example in Magnuson's article, boasted moving pictures and plays, though framed as educational (164-65). Harrison's examples from 1904 are further removed from the original intent by advertising "Musical Novelties and Juggling" (59). Gould, in The Chautauqua Movement agrees, "Entertainment values rather than educational values became paramount in Lyceums following Redpath's lead" (75). Harrison sums up the irony or, in my prejudiced eyes, hypocrisy:

So although Chautauqua, played in a tent, set up a stage, sold tickets from an improvised box office.... It employed actors and actresses by the hundreds; it identified

them as “entertainers,” “readers,” “elocutionists,” impersonators ,” “lightning change artists.” Acting was iniquitous, “elocution” was not. (190)

Rural tent show patrons lived in a patriarchal culture. Men ran farms and businesses; women worked those farms and business. Tent show plays and organizational structures reflected this culture. Toby was the main character, around whom the action revolved. Susie, though a female personification of Toby, was a subordinate character in the plays. Moreover, the companies cast women in a subservient capacity. Early tent show scholars and biographers, categorized women in the business as either manager’s wives or actresses, the former being the most esteemed position. Females not categorized as wives were hired actresses contracted by tent show managers to uphold the flawless image of the company; an image certainly constructed by those male managers and the patriarchal culture. Though many women worked on the tent show circuit, they seemed to continually defend, and thus maintain, a spotless reputation.

Chautauqua differed in its ideas about women greatly from those of the tent show. Women were encouraged to perform in what some deemed the only respectable genre of performance. Platform performer, Anna Cora Mowatt held a grim view of theatre, though she eventually became a playwright and an actress. Finding herself in need of income, she began a career on the lecture circuit in 1841. According to Gentile, “Mowatt’s work began a tradition in the United States of women on the platform as solo performers” (28). Chautauqua’s female performers were encouraged to speak and were often the most popular performers. Women were also encouraged to engage in Chautauqua as audience/participants. The invitation to women came early as it was for some the only outlet for further education. Case notes,

Since colleges and universities of that day held fast to the classical education, mostly [sic] closed their doors to women or at least discouraged female students, and

certainly had no place for businessmen and married women with families, Vincent's correspondence study was a gift from heaven. (15)

After an examination of audience, clearly the two forms are not as similar as they seemed on the surface. In fact, the similarity ends with territory and morals. I believe what kept the shows from competing is most probably that audiences dedicated to the same set of ideals perceived similar values differently. Additionally, each was looking in a different direction. Chautauqua wanted to advance American culture through knowledge, while tent shows were successful through presenting plays that preserved and perpetuated past rural American ideologies and behaviors.

Chautauqua audiences were attempting to be progressive to better themselves through education and intellectual stimulation. Gould asserts that Americans attempted to solve their domestic national problems by bettering themselves through Chautauqua (98-99). Gentile agrees that betterment included the eradication of the vulgarities of society, which included vernacular speech. "Elocution was becoming a part of the American mass culture. The reaction against the epidemic of American vernacular speech catapulted elocution, perceived as a corrective to a cultural force" (70-1). The Toby show celebrated rural vernacular by assigning rustic speech to its heroes, thus a return to an idyllic better life could be achieved by perpetuating past ideological practices.

Further, Orchard asserts that, "progressive men and women from all parts of the country were drawn to Chautauqua Lake" (38). I believe the term, progressive is essential in understanding the difference between the two forms, which represented their audiences' ideologies. The Progressive era, from 1893 to 1917, was one of reform in this country. I would maintain that a major part of this influence was reflected in the messages and practices of Chautauqua, most especially through William Jennings Bryan. Hofstadter in his book, The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR, maintains that the general theme of Progressivism was,

the effort to restore a type of economic individualism and political democracy that was widely believed to have existed earlier in America and to have been destroyed by the great corporation and the corrupt political machine; and with that restoration to bring back a kind of morality and civic purity that was also believed to have been lost. (5)

Bryan's campaign of 1896 fell at the height of the movement. Bryan's appearances in the tent Chautauqua during the nineteen teens and twenties were an opportunity for him to continue to preach his messages of Progressive ideals, most especially those of morality and civic pride.

Though Bryan's message with its particular ideological base was similar to that of tent show plays, by participating in a performance genre dedicated to intellectualism, betterment and growth, he differed in his direction from tent show drama. For Toby audiences, Progressivism called them away from the cities and intellectualism. Toby shows seem to reflect Progressivism as an outcry to return to a previous way of life that was more moral, pure and physically versus intellectually centered. Tent show material favored hard work and honesty over education.

An examination of tent and Chautauqua audiences provides interesting conclusions regarding tent Chautauqua and tent rep shows. Both forms traveled the same territory. Both demanded change from political and corporate corruption. Both turned to moral teachings, specifically through Protestant religions, to provide a framework for their messages. Finally, both looked to Progressivism as embodying standards to which society should aspire. However, each turned in a different direction; Chautauqua toward the future through betterment and growth, tent shows toward the past through a return to rural ways of life.

After a structural analysis of audience, and then a comparison with a similar popular form, I can continue to assert that Toby and tent shows celebrated the past and its ideologies. I can now examine the reasons behind the ideologies reflected and

represented by tent show audiences and material through an anthropologist's lens to critically view these shows from a different perspective. This may lead to a determination of motivation behind behavior that I might use to compare with motivation for the positive behavior exhibited at my shows by my modern rural audiences. First, by examining the material and testimony concerning tent shows, I have argued that the plays reflected certain attitudes and beliefs. Slout in Theatre in a Tent further describes the typical tent show plot:

Tent show dramas supported [an] idealistic image of the farmer. The gossips, the hypocrites, and the dishonest deacons were small town upper-class, not tillers of the soil. The yeoman was their prey, vulnerable through innocence. For him, righteousness was his defense and his strength. The simple way was the honest way. Education connoted insincerity and even dishonesty... (80-81)

I believe because Toby personified these ideologies, he became the rural people's prophet/trickster. Toby shows were a theatrical representation of a nativistic movement. Ralph Linton, in his article, "Nativistic Movements," defines nativistic movements as, "Any conscious, organized attempt on the part of a society's members to revive or perpetuate selected aspects of its culture" (230). A brief examination of the historical atmosphere in the United States focusing upon the rise of the agrarian myth will help to illustrate this concept.

The golden age of tent shows grew out of the profitable first two decades of the twentieth century. World War I caused the agricultural market to flourish. Further, according to Slout, "the war years brought prosperity to tent show managers the like of which they had never experienced" (63). The most influential phenomenon supporting the success of the tent play was what Hofstadter called the agrarian myth, which "[represents] the kind of homage that Americans have paid to the fancied innocence of their origins" (24). This myth, incidentally, originated long before the turn of the century, apparent in the writings of Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. Early

writers, especially Thomas Jefferson, idealized the role of the citizen-farmer. Browne, Skees, Swanson and Thompson in their book, Sacred Cows and Hot Potatoes: Agrarian Myths in Agricultural Policy, assert that a romantic notion of agrarian values has two basic themes: "First is the notion that nature is a formative element in the American national character. Second is the related idea that hard physical labor is a prerequisite to achieving the virtues necessary for self-realization" (9). Toby, a hard working farm boy, embodied both of these ideals. The authors continue by noting that "Jefferson and Emerson elected farmers as embodying moral and political ideals that should be applied to all citizens" (11). Therefore, our founding fathers believed that not only should the American public believe that hard work and honesty were the American way, but that they should hold the farmer as a consummate standard. Toby provided them an archetype through all his regional incarnations, cowboy, hillbilly or farmer. He represented agriculture as he survived by utilizing natural resources from each of the circuit's representative regions.

Heightened demand for agricultural products due to the war caused the farmer to move from an agrarian society to a commercial society. Hofstadter asserted that "the more farming as a self-sufficient way of life was abandoned for farming as a business, the more merit men found in what was being left behind" (24). The myth grew; and farmers fears were magnified as 1920 brought the end of the social, political, and economic power that they had previously enjoyed. Necessity mandated that young sons and daughters leave the farm in search of better income in urban areas.

Rural Americans believed that cities were stealing their children. Farmers' sons and daughters were disappearing into corrupt territory. Ostrander, in his book, American Civilization in the First Machine Age: 1890-1940, charged the city with being a center of wickedness long before the war commenced:

The American city was just as shockingly sinful in reality as it was in the lurid imaginings of the farm woman whose son or daughter had left home for the bright

lights of the metropolis. All cities supported their raging red-light districts, and until the nineties little thought was given to eradicating these...They were taken for granted as manifestations of the dark side of man's nature; and many pious people took some satisfaction in viewing them as the continual working out of God's law that the wages of sin are death. (65)

In self-defense, the rural population perpetuated the agrarian myth and its premises, such as the belief that the city was a wicked place that could corrupt the best of men, that the country was the home of all virtue and honor, and that the poor and meek, even the stupid, would eventually triumph over the rich and clever. According to Mickel, "The myth was already in the minds of the folk when Toby appeared to personify it" (151).

Additionally, as mentioned in the first section of this chapter, the nation as a whole was immersed in the progressive era. Pease, in his book, The Progressive Years, described the Progressive activists:

The reformers of that generation did not comprise more than a small segment of the young and middle-aged urban citizens, but they were educated far above the average, their professions placed them in a strategic position in society, and in consequence their influence grew all out of proportion to their numbers. (7)

Though the actual representation of the agrarian myth was personified by the opposing Populist party, the progressive movement also fueled the belief in the agrarian myth. According to Terry Wunder, is his dissertation, Living in a Progressive Age: Tent Repertoire Shows, Melodrama, and the Agrarian Myth, "many of the reforms suggested by the Progressives were based on an economic individualism and political democracy that rural Americans believed was escaping them" (36). Progressives espoused the same beliefs and ideals concerning big business as the tent shows did, however, tent shows saw the cities as evil and the country as the ideal environment.

The above examination of political and social environments preceding and during the heyday of Toby shows foregrounds a look at Toby shows as a representation of a nativistic movement. Ralph Linton believes that nativistic movements take distinctive elements and assign them symbolic value. He argues, "The more distinctive such elements are with respect to other cultures with which the society is in contact, the greater their potential value as symbols of the society's unique character" (231). The rural characters in Toby plays came to represent each man or woman in the audience and personify distinctive elements such as morality, integrity, honesty, and righteousness in contrast to the city's perceived antithetical customs. In all Toby plays, the silly hillbilly outwits the evil city slicker through righteousness and integrity. Further, Linton asserts that "the practicability of reviving or perpetuating the element[s] under current conditions is a main consideration" (232). The plays were not about another time and place, but about problems close at hand. For Toby, integrity was his defense and his strength and the optimal way was the honest way, the backbone of rural tradition and the agrarian myth. Supporting the tent show companies by attending the plays was indeed a conscious, organized attempt to perpetuate aspects of the culture that rural Americans felt were being taken away by the wicked dominant urban culture.

The above assertion seems self-evident to me. However, Linton further classifies the movements into typologies dependent upon dominance and perpetuation/revival elements of culture. In the remaining portion of this chapter, I will examine the shows as social events that reflect a perpetuative-rational nativistic movement. The movement was certainly perpetuative because the ideals mentioned above were a continuing part of the agrarian society when tent shows appeared on the scene. Additionally, the movement was rational. Linton asserts that rational movements, "find their main function in the maintenance of social solidarity" (233). With commercialism fragmenting the rural way of life, rural community solidarity was something that was

continually challenged by urban influences. Farmers felt threatened by urban ideologies and used the shows to remind the audiences of their ideological roots. Further, Linton states,

The elements selected for perpetuation become symbols of the society's existence as a unique entity....The culture elements selected for symbolic use are chosen realistically and with regard to the possibility of perpetuating them under current conditions (233).

The cities were wicked and Toby's audiences were not, because of their unique way of living life via their beliefs in mother, home and heaven. They believed that they could fight the encroaching urbanization by remaining Christian, honest, and moral.

Linton further divides his categories based on the assumption that the, "inception of such movements can be traced almost without exception to conditions of extreme hardship or at least extreme dissatisfaction with the status quo" (234). He continues to detail that this is due to a perceived inequality between two cultures and that the inequality is based "on attitudes of superiority and inferiority" (234). Certainly, the feelings of Toby audiences toward the encroaching urban ideologies were congruous.

Evidenced by the messages and ideologies present in popular tent show plays, Toby audiences agreed that they were the superior culture, though they increasingly feared that they were becoming subordinate to urban influences. Therefore, according to Linton's typologies, Toby audiences were considered Dominated-Superior (236). He describes this type as developing "patterns of rational nativism from the moment it is brought under domination" (238). I must point out, however, that Linton's research typically involved cultures which came into direct contact with other cultures attempting colonization. Toby audiences were never confronted directly, but always felt the invading urban presence. For my purposes, the most important conclusion that Linton asserts is:

One of the commonest rationalizations for a loss of a dominant position is that it is due to a society's failure to adhere closely enough to its distinctive culture patterns. Very often such nativism will acquire a semi-magical quality founded on the belief that if the group will only stand firm and maintain its individuality it will once again become dominant. (238)

A magical nativistic movement "usually originates with some individual who assumes the role of prophet" (232). Further, cultural elements' "revival [or in this case, perpetuation] is part of a magical formula designed to modify the society's environment in ways which will be favorable to it" (232). Toby became their prophet/trickster. Prophetic in that Toby brought the message to audiences that they must uphold and practice their rural ideologies in order to perpetuate their culture and resume their dominant status. Examples, though often subtle, of ideological reminders for rural patrons abound throughout tent show material. A comic sketch found in the Theatre Museum at Mt. Pleasant bearing a "Pitcauthley" tent company stamp provides such a warning. M and C denote man and comic respectively. Most probably, due to the tone of the entire sketch, the man was the heavy from the city and the comic was Toby:

M. You don't know much bible history either. Don't you go to church?

C. Of course, I go to church every Sun. I remember the bible verse from last Sun.

M. Good, what was it?

C. Don't worry, you'll get your blanket.

M. No, no, it must have been....Fear not, thy Comforter cometh.

C. I knew it had to do with bed clothin....

M. Let me see your profile.

C. I should say not. If it ain't a showin, you ain't a goin to see it.

Subtle, yet the Toby speech represents certain rural ideals. He goes to church every Sunday and, though he mistakes the heavy's words, he would not consider showing anything that is not proper within the rural social context.

Though the mythic trickster figure can also be prophetic, Toby most resembles the trickster in that he turns the normative world upside down. Through theatrically radical improvisational antics, he deviates from the written script, the normative, though the created, theatrical world of the play. Moreover, Toby prevails. Rural audiences perceived Toby's triumph over the city and its evil ways as a departure from their normative world. Toby additionally acted, as trickster figures often do, as a transforming archetype. Lundquist, in her book, The Trickster, explains Jung's definition through Joseph F. Rychlak, "Transforming archetypes...emerge when the personality is moving for change and particularly that balancing change which will result in a total personality" (25-6). Further, "The movement involved in such...change is towards wholeness" (26). Indeed, Toby's message is one of unification of an increasingly fragmented rural society. Rural Americans feared fragmentation through the loss of their children and neighbors to the lure of the cities. Additionally, another more blatant comparison emerges with Radin's assertion that, "Many of the Trickster's traits were perpetuated...and have survived right up to the present day... in the clown" (ix). Toby was the clown of the play. Toby comedians such as Neil Shaffner and Billy Choate furthered the clown relationship with their gaudy, clown-like make-up. Toby personified their values and instructed, through the plays' moral messages, his audiences to perpetuate the ideologies that they held dear in order to rise above threatened (or in some cases, actual) metropolitan ideological dominance.

By looking at tent show audiences in this way, I can reconfirm the desperation they felt because their lives were affected by a political and societal power beyond their control. This, in turn, helps me to speculate about modern audiences and try to find

similar elements of past culture that they are holding on to, as well as the societal reasons for their clinging to those cultural elements.

James C. Scott's arguments in his book, Domination and the Arts of Resistance, seem to support my nativistic assertion. He uses theatrical metaphor to explain behavioral phenomenon concerning dominated cultures. He terms "hidden transcript [as] discourse that takes place 'offstage,' beyond direct observation by powerholders" (4). Additionally, he believes that dominated cultures often take on certain characteristics before their dominators that they would not normally embody. He calls these interactions, "public transcripts" (2). I think that the Toby character embodies the public transcript of the rural dominated culture, as ignorant, simple, slow, and unrefined. Moreover, Toby plays represent the culture's hidden transcript as the plays were written to resist urban ideologies and to be presented only within the rural cultural context.

At first glance, Toby's slow, rube, low comedy characterization, or public transcript, may seem to be a negative personification of the rural stereotype as one that is ignorant, slow, and old-fashioned. Scott argues that "the greater the disparity in power between dominant and subordinate and the more arbitrarily it is exercised, the more the public transcript of subordinates will take on a stereotyped, ritualistic cast (3). Toby shows' stock characters reflect distinct virtues or evils. The positive elements stand as the cultural elements that are perpetuated. Moreover, dominant groups often perceive inferiors as "deceitful, shamming, lying by nature" (3). The villains in Toby plays are suspicious of the rural characters. In one example from my Toby play, Which I obtained from my collection of historic bits, Darkheart, the villain, accuses Toby of deceit:

TOBY: How much money [do you have to wager]?

DARKHEART: All that I have left after you swindled me on that bet you made. This much money! (shows Toby the wad of money that he has left)

TOBY: Now Mr. Darkheart, that was an honest wager and that's a lot of money! (150)

Scott notes that often "subordinates offer a performance of deference and consent while attempting to discern, to read, the real intentions and mood of the potentially threatening powerholder" (3). However, Scott further explains that public transcript is "an indifferent guide to the opinion of subordinates" (3). Simply, subordinates often take on characteristics expected of them by those that dominate them. In an early interchange between Toby and the villain in my Toby play, the villain has asked Toby whether he knows anything about show business. Toby replies, scratching his head, that he does not. The villain then asserts himself as an expert and asks Toby, "Do you even know what an expert is?" Toby innocently replies, "Well, let's see. X always stands for the unknown and a spert is a drip under pressure. So I guess that makes you an unknown drip under pressure!" (97). Thus Toby's public transcript indicates that he agrees that he is not as smart as the villain, yet proves he is, through an honest reply, superior.

The plays were hidden transcripts in that they were presented only within the dominated community that they were representing. Scott defines hidden transcripts as "derivative in the sense that it consists of those offstage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript [and by] assessing the discrepancy between the hidden transcript and the public transcript we may begin to judge the impact of domination on public discourse" (5). The tent show plays reflect a great discrepancy between public and hidden transcripts. Often in the tent show plays, though rural characters would appear subordinate to the city villains in their presence, they would figure out what the villains were up to when alone on-stage. Further, the Toby usually led the scene of inquiry into the rural characters' quandary and then would solicit ideas and solutions from the audience. Those scenes were hidden transcripts within the hidden transcripts of the play.

In order to provide a more personal representation for the rural audience member, the Toby character was purposefully shaped by the actor to reflect the geographical area in which the company toured. Ranny in his article, "Forever Toby," illustrates:

Verne Slout of the Slout Players [played] Toby as a Midwest farm yokel, for he tours Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Missouri and Arkansas. On the other hand, the Bisbee comedians [traveled] in the mountains of Tennessee and Kentucky, so their Toby, played by Boob Brasfield, is more of a hillbilly. Out in the West and Southwest you're apt to find Toby in chaps and carrying side arms. (95)

Similarly, each Toby would use the area's particular accent and find a delivery style to suit that accent. Mickel cites that, "[Toby's] witticisms in the West were the dry, cow-country type which would send the audiences rolling in the aisles with laughter, but would fall flat in another part of the country" (155). These regional differences in character provided an intimate connection with the audience in order to further entrench the company via the hidden transcript into the exclusive rural community.

Another important element of the show was its title, and often these were changed to parallel what the manager thought his audience would respond to, embedding Toby in the rural culture where the company toured. Schaffner points out that:

Titles are important. When we did Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm, nobody came. But we changed the title to The Unwelcome Relative and they loved it. The best title I ever wrote was Right Bed, Wrong Husband, which was a farce, but a clean one. (55)

Though this technique was most certainly used within other performance contexts, it was applied to further empower Toby within the rural community.

The Toby character also personified radicalism, which reified for his audiences that radical behavior was appropriate in certain situations. It is at this point where the trickster figure emerges. The theatrical world had always frowned upon ad-libbing.

Currently, the unauthorized use of ad-libbing in scripted plays is grounds for legal suit. Ad-libbing, physically and verbally, was a consistent element of Toby's character. As Downing points out, Toby did not always reserve the physical action just for the stage, "Toby may [have climbed] the proscenium or [ridden] into the flies clutching at drop curtains" (652). Ad-libbing was a liberty that the Toby comedian took for granted. It was an integral part of the Toby character. With these ad-libs and asides, Toby maintained the rhythm of the comedy. To illustrate the term, Mickel, describes Boob Brasfield, a master of ad-libbing:

He was a natural comedian....He stayed in the general vicinity of the script though he would toss in a new line whenever he saw fit. If on account of this an actor happened to miss a cue, Brasfield would be ready to cover with more ad libbing, and help the actor back to his place. (155)

I believe that these shows also acted as a cathartic device for the rural dominated audience. After public declaration of the hidden transcript, though only to their own kind, through the presentation of the Toby play, those involved would release pent up frustration and hostility. Scott asserts that such insubordination was the first breach into the wall of domination, a "safety-valve theory" (185). At that point, the dominant group lost some element of social control over the subordinate group. However, Scott does not fully agree with these theories and admits that safety-valve theories differ "in supposing that this desire can be substantially satisfied, whether in backstage talk, in supervised rituals of reversal, or in festivities that occasionally cool the fires of resentment" (186). Though this display did not accomplish re-domination entirely for the rural culture, it surely did remind and reestablish the need for rural ideologies within the community.

Scott uses the term, infrapolitics, to denote "forms of disguised, low profile, undisclosed resistance" (198). He maintains that attempted ideological domination of infrapolitical structures creates the "development of dissident subcultures e.g.,

millennial religions, slave 'hush-arbors,' folk religions, myths of social banditry and class heroes, [and] myths of the 'good' king" (198). The ideological domination of the rural culture forced a certain kind of folk religion and crowned Toby as their "good" king. Certainly, I can see a parallel in the tent show audience's behavior. The play disguised the hidden transcript so that even if a member of the dominant culture were to view it, they would think it merely rural entertainment. It is this disguise that Scott asserts the dominated culture can use to voice aspects of the hidden transcript "in muted or veiled form into the public transcript" (138). Scott further argues that popular culture is in itself an "elaborate form of disguise" (156). It allows a way out for the dominated culture in the case of retaliation by the dominant culture. He argues that popular or folk culture is "capable of two readings, one of which is innocuous" (157). The innocuous reading "provides an avenue of retreat when challenged" (157). Toby plays were considered safe because they were merely theatre, not reality, and moral theatre at that. Scott further asserts that "infrapolitics is, by contrast, the realm of informal leadership and non-elites, of conversation and oral discourse, and of surreptitious resistance" (200). This corresponds with Jeffery Paige's assertion in his book, "Agrarian Revolution, that small farming communities, like Toby audiences, lack political solidarity. "Cultivating classes dependent on land are politically conservative and unable to form strong political organizations based on class solidarity" (45). That is why the only outcome of resistance in their case is reform of the commodity market instead of revolt. Though Toby shows may have had a cathartic effect on audiences, any kind of reform was minimal or nonexistent. Understanding the psychological atmosphere of Toby audiences, through Scott's theory, allows me to attempt to discover what did and did not mobilize resources within this nativistic movement.

Resources supporting the rural culture included first, the agrarian myth, which directly represented the community, as well as the social bond between the Toby company and the community. Published sources repeatedly cited this bond to be a

unique and powerful force. The bond was strengthened each season by the arrival of the manager who often played the role of Toby. Ashby, in his biography of Harley Sadler, illustrates that these individuals were highly visible in each small town and well acquainted with the community,

Harley Sadler was more than an entertainer. To call him a genuine folk hero would be to risk understatement....He was almost universally adored, a best friend to senators, movie stars, mayors, grocery clerks, and the poorest, raggediest cotton chopper on the Texas High Plains. (2)

Not only did the companies use this technique for advertising, but it was also a method by which to obtain local material to use in the show. Toby shows utilized this local humor to make the material applicable to the area and to strengthen the bond between the audience and the players. Therefore, the local people felt that the players were family. This familiarity fostered intense loyalty on the part of the local townspeople towards the company. Many times, showmen and women were given special dinners, awards, and keys to the city. One such example of loyalty by the fans of the Schaffner troupe appears in Russel Dale Kittle's dissertation, Toby and Susie: The Show-Business Success Story of Neil and Caroline Schaffner, 1925-1962:

Before the tent season of 1955 opened, the town of Wapello held a two-day festival in honor of the Schaffners and their company. The program began on May 17 at eight o'clock in the morning with "Toby and Susie" specials being offered in bargain sales by all the merchants. Just before noon a parade was held in the business district. Businesses closed, as did the schools, for the parade and the rest of the day. The evening program began with a concert by the Wapello High School band... (354-355)

The bond was further strengthened by the first moment of the show, the curtain speech, often delivered by Toby. The company used this speech to establish a rapport with the audience and to prepare them for the play. Clark quotes Clyde Robinson from the Iberson Show in Tennessee:

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a real pleasure for me to stand here before you again this year. We have been looking forward to our stand here in your good town of Bolivar all the year. There is just something good about being in Bolivar. We went away with some pleasant memories of a fine week here last year. And at this time we are going to show our appreciation by opening up tonight with Big Money, written by Mr. Iberson himself. Mr. Iberson writes nearly all our plays, thus assuring you of the very choicest bits of drama in the whole country. He writes especially to fit the individual charms of each and every member of our talented cast. Tomorrow night we will give you Bucking Horse also written from the able pen of Mr. Iberson. We will announce the later plays along each night. Every member of our talented company asked me to tell you how pleased they are to be back in your good town and acting before you. And they asked me to thank you for your splendid crowd on this rainy looking night. Good crowds make good actors act, so you are assured of our best acting. We are going to do our best to give you the best acting you have ever seen in the best play you have ever seen right here tonight. This is a splendid play, and I am sure you are going to enjoy Big Money. I thank you. (9)

The bond was a strong factor contributing to the success and continuation of the Toby company within a specific community.

I have inherited a large responsibility; to revive, in some areas to perpetuate, a nearly lost art. By examining this obligation through an anthropologist's lens, I have come to conclusions that help me to predict audience behavior and change the art form to suit it.

Structural analysis helped me to understand and delineate the historical interest group involved in these tent shows. Audiences were isolated, derived their income directly or indirectly from agriculture, usually of a lower-income agricultural class, white, religious, patriarchal, conservative. Similarly, my contemporary community

audiences compose the same general interest group. A 1998 letter from an audience member reflects her modern, yet historic concerns,

I just wanted to write and let you know how much we enjoyed your recent show at Vol. State. My kids really liked the performance and for me it was such a relief to be somewhere I could actually relax and not have to worry....So many places that claim to be family oriented really aren't. The prices...were really great too....Thanks again and we look forward to the next performance.

We produce at a community college and the greatest percentage of our audiences represent the rural community surrounding the college. Most students and community members attend the show with their family. This knowledge helps me to select and write material as well as prepare publicity materials.

The comparison to tent Chautauqua more firmly rooted my argument that tent shows and Toby shows looked to the idyllic past to form or perpetuate their moral and practical ideologies. The comparison illustrated more strongly to me that agrarian values were present specifically in the tent genre of theatre.

The look at nativism illustrated that rural society may still be attempting to perpetuate, in some cases revive, lost ideologies. Cultural elements are the same; honesty, integrity, family and conservatism. I believe modern rural society is in search of a prophet/trickster and that is one reason why these old, goofy, Toby shows are so popular with my rural audiences.

Scott further supported my assertion that Toby shows and modern versions of them, like the once popular television program, Hee Haw are hidden transcripts that urban people view as merely rural, crude entertainment. A performance of my Toby play in 1992 at a coffeehouse in Nashville, Tennessee was attended by Nashville Banner and Nashville Tennessean theatre critics. The Tennessean critic was an older woman, born and raised in Nashville. The other was younger, quite sophisticated, hip. Both laughed at the material. When the younger woman interviewed me after the show, I

began to explain to her why I thought the comedy was timeless due to the agrarian values represented by the play. She looked at me quizzically and replied, "Isn't this just a no-brainer?!" The local critic said, "Where are you from?" The Banner critic replied, "I'm originally from New York city." The local critic laughed, "humpfed" and walked away. The message was there, but the dominant urbanite could not see past the public transcript of the characters and the rural nature of the material.

An examination of the resources that were responsible for perpetuating these ideologies allow me to conjecture about my modern audiences. I believe the historic resources, the agrarian myth and community bond, still apply to them.

I can compare the history of tent shows with the current rural social, political, and economic situation. We are in a similar predicament as the shows and audiences of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Both societies are feeling invading mechanization in our rural communities. The agricultural recession of the 1980s caused a rural outcry against corporate commercial farms. Though not as severe, nearly fifteen years later, there is still discourse against corporate commercial farms whose offices are found in metropolitan areas. The early recession, in turn, led to social events such as Farm Aid, Willie Nelson's benefit concert to raise money for farm relief. This particular event certainly emphasized elements associated with the agrarian myth; family, history, honesty, and ethics. It even used a popular culture genre, country music, to disseminate its message. Farm Aid is successfully continuing to raise millions of dollars for farm relief. I can assume that rural audiences, which are largely comprised of agricultural workers or those middle-class Americans tied to agriculture or sentimentally to rurality, must need to resist the urban commercial ideology of factory farms. Moreover, I can also see a connection to Farm Aid as a nativistic movement. I think these country singers are acting as Tobys, prophet/tricksters representing rural people and spreading the agrarian myth's message. This further suggests why Toby

shows are still popular. The ideologies are basically the same and the agrarian myth is alive and well, at least in rural Tennessee, Missouri, and Southern Illinois.

The examination of audience in this chapter shows me what elements of the old shows are necessary to retain. The rural comedy and the philosophies that the shows represent still apply. The mythic element seems to be an important aspect of the shows that I should not change. Like early companies, I merely need to incorporate local patrons and customs to create and maintain a strong social bond. Moreover, this social bond can help to restore a sense of community to those rural areas that are increasingly fragmented by providing a performative experience where audience can take part in creating the show through audience participation, as well as taking part in the construction of the performance space through volunteering with tent set-up. According to Overton in Re-Building the Front Porch of America,

The challenge facing all of us who work in rural and small communities is to help people find a way to address and overcome their fear and nurture rural genius....The community arts experience provides an opportunity to overcome the sense of isolation and separation that is one of the causes of people's fear. (26)

This fear seems to very closely resemble the historic fear of isolation, fragmentation, and loss of culture that tent show patrons alleviated with Toby shows over one hundred years ago.

The first summer I did my show in a tent, a boy of about 10 or 11, dressed like a "surfer dude" with jam shorts and big untied tennis shoes, strutted up to the sponsor and asked, "So these Toby shows are kinda historical, huh?" She told him that this was what people did before there were movies and television. He exclaimed, "Wow, this is way cooler than movies or TV!" And he came back with his brothers and sisters each subsequent night of the run. Though I was thrilled with his response, I always wondered why such a rural, low comedy would appeal to him. Besides the fact that live theatre is so much more corporeal and sensual than movies or television, this child

was raised in a small farming community. Toby spoke to him literally and figuratively. That is why I plan to continue to bring the canvas cathedral to small towns in rural Tennessee and Kentucky because I am a rural daughter and I believe with all of my heart that a person should be honest, ethical, hardworking, and most of all, I believe good wins. Therefore, armed with information and assumptions about historic and new audiences, the next chapter examines new conclusions about my role in all of this and how I alter the form to make it more applicable to modern patrons.