

How Burger

Minstrels.

We sometimes think of minstrels and minstrel shows as being a comparatively modern form of entertainment, when, as a matter of fact minstrels flourished in the middle ages. They were a class of men who amused their audience with song, poetry, and mimicry usually accompanied by a small ^{lute} harp or mandolin. They depended on the peoples generosity for their living. Minstrelsy of the 16th and 17th centuries reached its golden age during the reign of Richard (le coeur de lion) and it was during Elizabeth's reign that the art declined to its lowest ebb. A law was enacted placing minstrels in the same class with rogues, tinkers, vagabonds and beggars. There in brief, is the history of the original minstrels. Minstrel shows in the United States became very popular within the last century. It was, and still is popular entertainment because all forms of talent can be used in making up a minstrel show. A second part or olio is often used introducing comedy sketches and specialized acts. At one time, the population of Maynard did not exceed 4000 people, yet it became a Mecca for some of the biggest minstrel show companies in the business. Some of the names included such nationally known minstrels as Hi-Wenty's, The San Francisco's, The Dark Town Minstrels and the DeRue Bros, (Bobby & Billy). I nearly joined this group and was to be booked as the boy soprano. I was only 13 years old at the time and parental objections put a squelch to any ambitions I had entertained to be a ^{pro} minstrel. Sometimes, what appears to be a keen disappointment, is all for the best, because I learned several months later that the ^{Variety} show disbanded in Evansville, Ind. Now to get back to the other out of town minstrel shows. I shall never forget Hi. Henry parading down Summer St, heading his band, resplendent in a gold braided gray uniform and proudly playing his solid gold plated cornet. Nor can I forget The Dark Town minstrels and an end-man by the name of Turner singing "It must have been the ghost of a coon." Turner was the champion roller skater in the country and Bat Coughlin challenged him to a skating contest. They met twice, each having a victory to his credit. Imagine what a great show ^{Maynard} town must have been when the itinerary of these big shows usually included big

cities like Worcester, Springfield, Fitchburg etc.-----

Of course Maynard itself, was daffy over minstrel shows. I can recall in being in over sixty shows with most every society and club being a sponsor. I also participated in minstrel shows held in Concord, Hudson, Stow, Groton, Framingham, ^{Acton,} Charlestown and many others. The only reason I am mentioning these ~~several~~ towns is that several humorous incidents took place which I think you will enjoy listening to. In summing up, at least in my opinion, ^{the best} were minstrel shows sponsored by the Eks's, Knights of Columbus, and the Grange. On each occasion the hall would be filled to capacity both nights. Some who remember might disagree with my selections and would at least want to include a juvenile minstrel show sponsored by St Bridget's parish and coached by Miss Mullin and I. Of course with the kids participating the show was bound to be a hit. "I fa down and go boomb" was the big hit that night.-----While television has more or less put the skids to minstrel shows people still ask me " why can't we have another minstrel show? and now as I am about to conclude my monograph more humorous incidents connected with minstrelsy keep coming back to me. So as they say on television " don't go way" AND I will be back to tell you some true stories connected with my many years of minstrelsy.

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