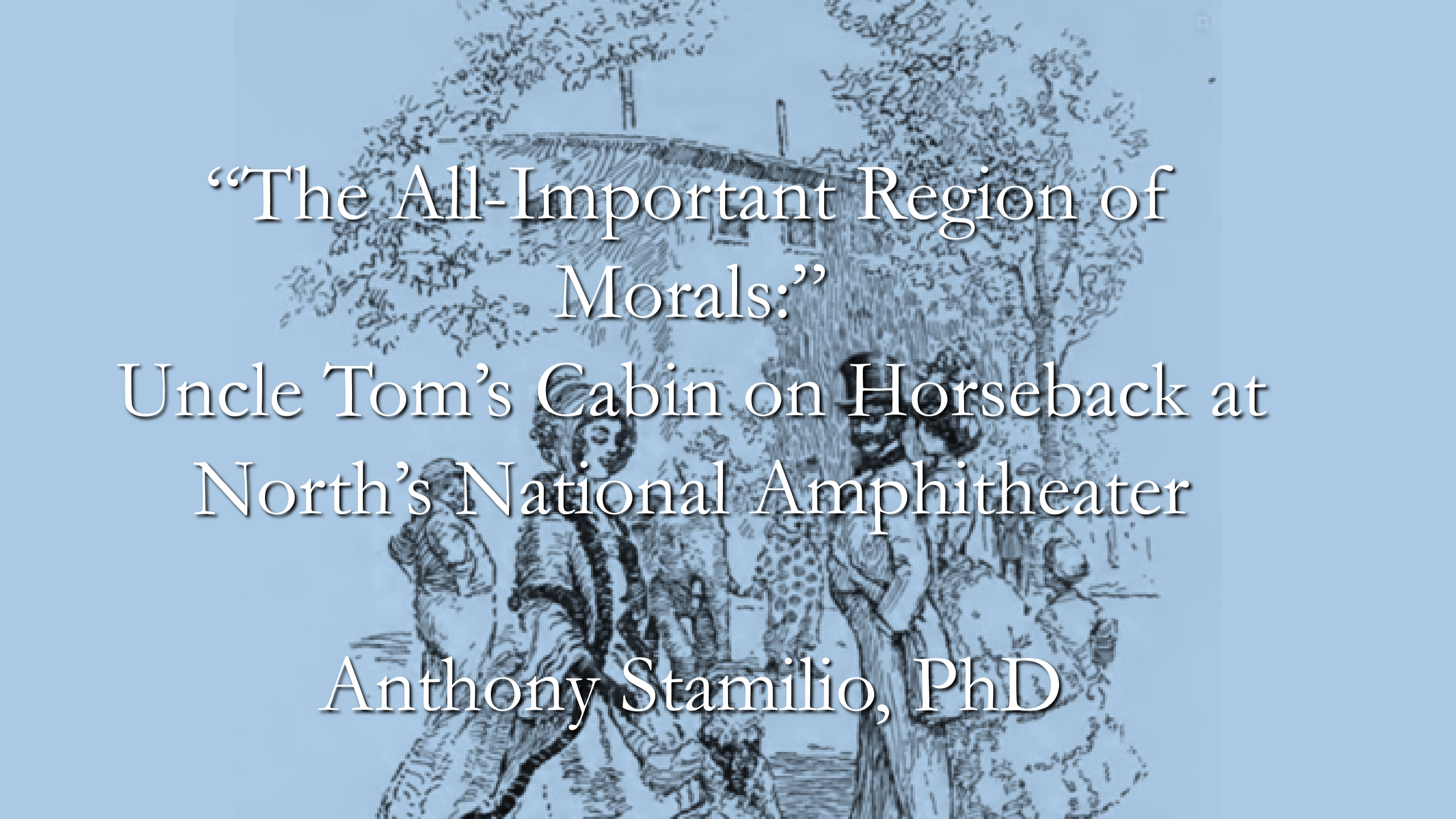


A blue-tinted illustration of a rural scene. In the background, a small cabin with a chimney is nestled among trees. In the foreground, several people are depicted: a woman in a long dress and bonnet stands on the left, a man in a suit stands in the center, and another man in a light-colored shirt and dark trousers stands on the right. The scene is set in a wooded area with a path leading towards the cabin.

“The All-Important Region of
Morals:”

Uncle Tom’s Cabin on Horseback at
North’s National Amphitheater

Anthony Stamilio, PhD

Levi J. North





The North Star

North's National Amphitheater



NORTH'S NATIONAL THEATER!

B. HANCHETT, Lessee & Manager.
THOS. K. RADCLIFFE, Asst. Manager. H. WARREN, Treasurer.

MONDAY EVENING, MAY 17th, 1858.

The Entertainment will commence with the Laughable Piece entitled the

STAGE STRUCK BARBER

JEREMIAH CLIP, }
JOHN, } MR. CHANFRAU
MOUSTACHE STRAPADE, }
Podge, Lytton Mrs. Twister, Miss F. Price
Twister, Chaplin Mrs. Radcliffe, Miss F. Rich
Jane Chatterly, Elsie Henderson.

DANCE, - - - - - M'LE HAYDEE

IRISH SONG, - - - - - J. F. LYTTON

To be followed by the Laughable Drama in Two Acts, entitled

THE TOODLES.

TIMOTHY TOODLES, with the great Tipsey Scene, MR. CHANFRAU
Charles Fenton, Chaplin Ed Farmer, Stout
Farmer Acorn, DeGroot Ed Farmer, Wilson
George Acorn, Wallis Landford, Smith
Farmer Fenton, Stewart Mary Acorn, Miss F. Price
1st Farmer, Marble Mrs. Toodies, Mrs. Hanchett

DANCE, - - - - - M'LE HAYDEE

To conclude with the Burlesque of The

LADY OF THE LIONS.

Clod Meddlenot, Lytton Penny Post, Smith
Beau Sauter, Jamison Pelly Ann, O. D. Chaplin
Serg. Dummer, DeGroot Mrs. Dishabilly, Mrs. Hanchett
M. Dishabilly, Stewart Mary Ann, Miss Anne Radcliffe
Gasser, Geo. Radcliffe Widow Meddlenot, Miss Edstrom

INCIDENTAL MUSIC.

SONG, I should like to Marry, POLLY ANN
SONG, As they marched through the Town, POLLY ANN
SONG, Robbing Around, POLLY ANN
DOUBLE POLKA, CLOD AND POLLY ANN
FAREWELL MY OWN POLLY ANN, CLOD
DUET, Be off, be off, POLLY AND CHARACTERS
FINAL, Our Task is Over, CHARACTERS
GALLOP BY ALL THE CHARACTERS.

DAILY PRESS PRINT, 48 CLARK STREET.

North's National Amphitheater

NORTH'S NATIONAL THEATER!

B. HANCHETT, Lessee & Manager. H. WARREN, Treasurer.

MONDAY EVENING, JUNE 14th, 1858.

First appearance of

MARSH TROUPE,

Composed of

FORTY JUVENILE COMEDIANS.

To commence with Jersod's National Drama in Two Acts, of

BLACK-EYED SUSAN, Or, All in the Downs.

William, Miss Louise	Guathrain, Master G. W. Marsh
Black-Eyed Susan, Little Mary Marsh	Admiral, Master Waldo
Sea-weed, Master Marks	Captain Croastres, Miss Carrie
Doogran, Master Waldo	Blue Peter, Amelia Gauden
Baker, Miss Shropshire	Lieutenant Pike, Miss Georgiana
Tom, Miss Maline	Hatchet, Miss Josephine
Jacob Twigg, Miss Sallie	Pow-shore, Miss Harriet
Quid, Master G. W. Marsh	Sailors, Watchmen, Officers, Marines, etc.

To conclude with the never-to-be-forgotten

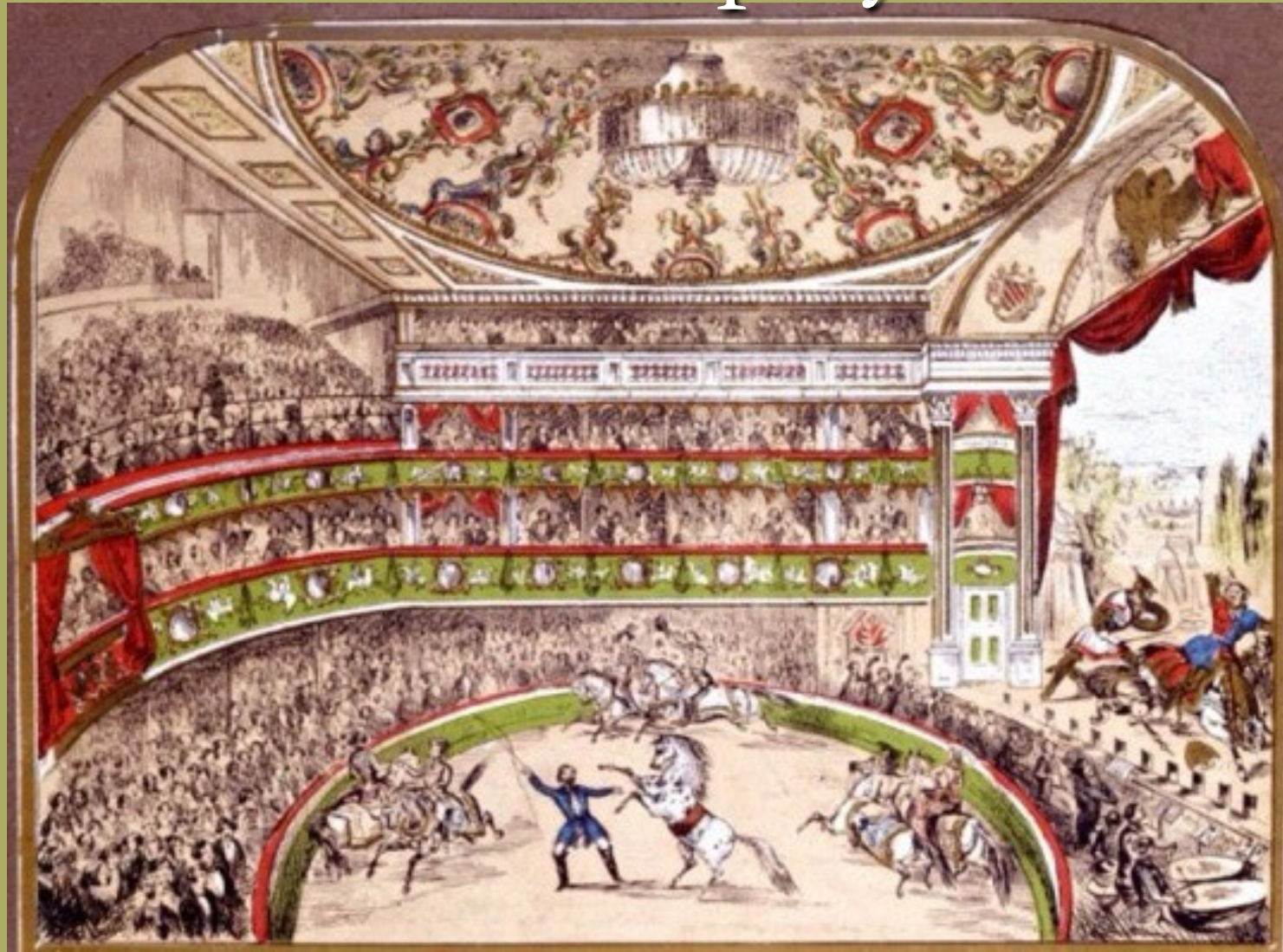
TOODLES.

Toodies, By "That Boy George"
Mrs. Tabitha Toodies, Little Mary Marsh
George Acorn, Miss Louise
Charles Fenton, Miss Carrie Farmer Fenton, Miss Sarah
Farmer Acorn, Master Waldo Farmers, Melynn, Frank, etc.
Lawyer Gills, Miss Amelia Landford, Miss Georgiana
Mary Acorn, Miss Helen

To-Morrow Evening will appear the Juvenile
Comedians in Popular Pieces.

DAILY PRESS PRINT, 48 CLARK STREET.

“Hippo-drama” Horse-play



Uncle Tom's Cabin American "Repertoire"



Uncle Tom and the “all-important region of morals”



Hippodrama's Highwaymen

Hippodrama's Highwaymen

North and Wentworth



North's National Amphitheater



“The All Important Region of Morals:”
Uncle Tom’s Cabin on Horseback at Levi J. North’s National Amphitheater

Outline and script:

- Introduction:
 - January 1858, Levi J. North’s National Amphitheater staged a production of the most popular piece of narrative art in the nation, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* on horseback.
 - This strange piece of art and entertainment demonstrates the bizarre ambiguity of the politics of a city poised to become the progenitor of the anti-slavery Republican Party.
 - The story of the hippodramatic version of Uncle Tom’s Cabin comes from my dissertation and book project: *Factories of Fame: Production of Culture in Chicago’s Nineteenth-Century Theaters*.
 - The manuscript tracks the first commercial theaters in Chicago from the 1830s to the 1890s, outlining the growth the monopolized theater business alongside other forms of industrialization such as agriculture. I argue that the expansion of the American star system led to the emergence of celebrity culture as actor-celebrities started to commercialize their fame in the middle of the nineteenth century.
- Levi J. North: One of the mid-nineteenth-century theaters that served as a node in the American star system was Levi J. North’s National Amphitheater.
 - Levi J. North was one of the most famous circus performers in America during the nineteenth century. At the turn of the century, nostalgic memoirists who mourned the end of the one-ring circus named North alongside other scions, Dan Rice and Adah Isaacs Menken.
 - Likely born in Newtown Township, Long Island, on June 14, 1814. His equestrian journey began when he fell in love with a small circus at the Military Garden, a in Brooklyn, NY.
 - As early as 1823, at nine years old, North joined a Quick and Meads Circus at Military Gardens and went with them on tour. North apprenticed to one of the owners, Isaac Quick. Apprentices worked in the stables and trained as equestrians. Adolescents made good riders because of their height. North apprenticed on the road in his early adolescence and was made a full “public rider” as early as thirteen years old with Welch & Handy’s Circus.
 - In winter 1829, North travelled to Cuba, the Caribbean, and South America with the Welch and Handy circus and then continued on with J. Purdy Brown’s Circus where he became a star for the first time. At “Mr. Brown’s Circus,” North became a star for the first time. He was taking benefits as the featured performer just after his eighteenth birthday as “Mr. North,” the “first rider in America.”
- The “North Star”
 - North and a clown, Joe Blackburn decided to travel to London for the first time in 1838 and gained passage aboard the *Hibernia* sailing for twenty-four days. One of the popular feats of the period was repeated somersaults on a small springboard, and Astley’s Royal Amphitheater agreed to build one in order for North to compete with their own star, Thomas Price. North bested him night after night, and spent the next couple of years at Astley’s, Paris’s Cirque Olympique, and

provincial amphitheaters entering athletic competitions and winning “awards” from European nobles, Louis Phillipe, and Queen Victoria.

- In the dozen years before Levi North built his amphitheater in Chicago, he toured the country cashing in on his international acclaim. He was the “North Star” with golden trinkets gifted to him by European royalty. He mostly travelled with the Welch and Delavan’s Circus Company, and the woodcut advertisements burned descriptions of his European exploits into the public imagination. North became the “First Horseman in the World,” “Apollo on horseback,” and “the Great Equestrian Hero” who had “born away the palm of all superiority” of English horsemen.
- North’s National Amphitheater
 - In 1855, taking what they had learned from the travelling circus and long-term stays at the New York Amphitheater, Levi North and manager Harry Turner converted a warehouse on Monroe Street between Wells and Clark. The structure was ninety feet of frontage and two hundred and six feet deep, the peak at least four stories high and entirely open from floor to rafters in the center of the ring.
 - The interior of the Amphitheater looked like Astley’s, with a ring surrounded by multi-tiered seating except for the large stage in the back of the building. Walking in the front door, the audience would walk in through an eighteen-foot-wide entrance. After passing their tickets to the doorkeeper, they would see the ring in front of them with stairways on either side leading to the “boxes,” which was the entirety of the gallery in the three-thousand-seat amphitheater. The building’s capacity doubled that of the only other commercial theater in the city, Rice’s Chicago Theater. In front of them, the audience would see the forty-two-foot sawdust-filled ring backed by a large proscenium stage.
- Chicago Theater
 - The theater produced Tony Pastor, one of the most widely acclaimed Vaudeville MCs, Tony Pastor, and perhaps the first commercial theater production Abraham Lincoln ever saw, comedian William E. Burton’s *Toodles*—a show he returned to three times from July 10th through 16th, 1857.
- “Hippo-drama” Horse-play
 - The main project of Levi North was to create a venue for the nineteenth century’s most significant form of theater, Hippodrama, which merged staged melodrama—including Shakespeare—and equestrian performance. Starting in London at Astley’s Royal Amphitheater at the end of the 18th century, there had been hippodromes in the Eastern US for more than thirty years, and with only one other commercial theater in Chicago, Rice’s Chicago Theater, North’s was capable of far greater spectacle, especially during the winter months when the circuses did not tour, than anywhere in the region. North himself was capable of stepping into any of the leading roles popular in hippodrama, especially the orientalist melodramas *Mazeppa* and *Timour of Tartar*.
- Uncle Tom’s Cabin
 - More bizarre than the proprietor on horseback was the theater’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in 1858. Theatrical versions of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1852 novel proliferated over the course of the decade. In fact, because of the novel’s serialization, some versions preceded the written work. These productions became

so numerous by the Civil War, historian Robin Bernstein says, they must be conceived of as part of a “repertoire.” The *Uncle Tom* repertoire included not just a novel and plays but images, toys, and other souvenirs that were ubiquitous in American society.

- The most successful version of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* on stage came from upstate New York, where George Aiken wrote the version for his sister’s family, the Howards. Aiken only ever received a small initial sum for his *Tom* script. Conversely, Cordelia Howard’s four-year-old face would go on to represent the childish innocence of “little Eva” for a generation. Cordelia and her mother, Caroline, starred in the Aiken/Howard *Uncle Tom* first in Troy, New York, in 1852, moving the play to New York’s National Theater for a then-record 325-show run. Cordelia played Eva until she aged out of the role at thirteen and retired from the stage. Her mother Charlotte continued playing her Black counterpart, the enslaved Topsy character, for decades, including two runs at John Blake Rice’s Chicago Theater in 1855.
- Caroline Howard’s Topsy was especially unique because white women almost never performed in blackface. Minstrelsy was reserved exclusively for men, and white men always played black women. Stylistically, *Uncle Tom* plays descended directly from blackface minstrelsy, and the moral message never sat affirmably in abolition discourse as it did with the novel.
- The singular thesis in minstrel theater, beginning with T.D. Rice stated that black people were incapable of fitting into Western society. Stowe’s novel intervened slightly in that framework with a kind of redemption, a pathway to full humanity for Black people. Still based in racial hierarchies, Stowe’s Christian message presented slavery as morally deleterious in opposition to the cynicism of the minstrel show. On stage, the aesthetics of minstrelsy and the morality of Stowe collide.
- Uncle Tom’s Cabin on Horseback
 - Levi J. North’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was as morally incongruent as the Howards’. Starring North’s daughter, Victoria North, as Eva, this production maximized the facilities of the hippodrome: ring, stage, and stable. *Uncle Tom* received a twelve-hundred-word write-up in the Democratic newspaper, *The Chicago Times*. The article barely discusses the plot or staging at all. Rather, the author devotes around a thousand words to the morality of the theatre; this makes the piece a rare insight into the value of the stage in nineteenth-century culture.
 - The piece places antebellum Chicagoans in a sort of neo-Enlightenment of “intelligent progress” represented by colonization and technological revolution. Along with these advancements, the author believes America needed the same progress in the “all-important region of morals.” However, while they saw “this spirit illustrated in literature,” the stage “ha[d] become the haunt of the vicious and depraved.” To save America from the degrading entertainment of the theater, they saw North’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as a new “moral drama of which our country ought to feel proud.” Citing productions of the play in all of the English-speaking cities in the world, the author celebrated *Uncle Tom* as a “discourse” in moral enlightenment comparable to the passion plays of the Middle Ages. He invokes Thomas Becket, Presbyterian ministers, and David Hume. In many ways,

the article feels like a direct retort to Lyman Beecher and the anti-theater preachers of the period, especially when the author compares *Uncle Tom* to a “lecture hall,” which P.T. Barnum cleverly named his American Museum Theater to attract Beecher.

- Bizarrely, all the proverbial spilled ink about morality, the *Times* author fails to mention much about which moral *Uncle Tom* purported to promote. The word “slavery” is never employed. The closest the article comes to an anti-slavery argument is in the single full sentence about the plot where the writer describes the reason so many audiences flocked to the theater to see the play. There they could “witness the thrilling scenes which ensue on the escape of Eliza with her child from degradation and bondage, illustrating in the most eloquent manner, the deep affection of a mother’s heart and the perils and dangers which a mother’s love will overcome.” While this section references “bondage,” it feels ancillary to the overall moral thesis. The author cites motherly affection as more central. Perhaps they were avoiding the use of slavery in a Democratic paper, hoping that the message of the play would speak for itself; maybe they believed in the power of the theater to transform the audience. But the indirect writing is logically cumbersome even by nineteenth-century standards.
- While the morality of North’s hippodramatic *Uncle Tom* was ambiguous, the *Times* author illustrates enough of the theatrical elements to demonstrate the scope of the spectacle. Though this was not likely to be the only hippodramatic version of the play, the author believed it to be, claiming “this drama [was] in a style altogether unknown in any other theater in the United States.” The scenery was an important part of the epic display. For this production at North’s, that included a 20,000-square-foot canvas panorama exhibiting the frozen Ohio River over which Eliza escaped with “raging elements of ice and flood.” All of these technical aspects of the theater served to enhance the horsemanship of North and his riders. This likely included men pretending to chase Eliza. There is little description of the actual production, and no script of North’s version survives, but the review from the *Times* resembles the chases in one of the sub-groups of hippodrama, Highwaymen plays.
- Circus and Hippodrama
 - Highwaymen horse plays began at Astley’s in 1819 with *Richard Turpin, the Highwayman* based on the novel *Rookwood: A Romance* by William Harrison Ainsworth. *Richard Turpin* included the adventures of the protagonist Dick Turpin, as a sort of Robin Hood character who runs heroically from the law.
 - These plays were popular in the United States. Highwayman plays also provided more potent acting moments for the horses themselves. In H. M. Milner’s *Turpin’s Ride to York; Or, Bonny Black Bess* (1836), the equestrian’s horse co-star is given equal billing in the title and for good reason. The horse playing Black Bess is called to dramatically die on stage after saving Turpin, who stands over the mare.
 - Adding horses to *Uncle Tom* was only a matter of time. North built his sawdust ring for horses to run around. The precarity of a large animal chasing another around a ring creates real drama on stage. The athleticism that equestrians like North brought to the theater added the element of live risk to the stage, and

whether in *Turpin* or the most important story of the age, North could provide what the proscenium stage could not, physical stakes.

- North's Politics:
 - In 1857, North joined the Democratic Party municipal ticket, running for alderman of Chicago's Third Ward, which included the area just south of the Chicago River (in today's "Loop"). He jumped into the shifting sands of partisan Antebellum politics.
 - Chicago's Republican *Tribune* newspaper was poised to disseminate negative stories about North to its national network, and they would continue to do so over the course of the next two years. Like with other national political figures in the Civil War era, North's troubles started with attacks on his character, but that quickly escalated to political violence.
 - When Chicago elected the owner of the Republican newspaper, the *Chicago Democrat*, Mayor "Long John" Wentworth, he targeted alcohol and entertainment. Wentworth attacked gambling houses in the "Sands" district, raiding this area and tearing down buildings with horse-drawn hooks and chains.
 - On December 7, 1847, North held a benefit for "the poor" as he had in the past, promising to give the proceeds to the mayor's office. The *Tribune* then published his letter to Wentworth in its entirety after North refused to pay the mayor the more than five hundred dollars he had raised. The paper then accused North of giving the money to his own Democratic campaign.
 - Days later, Mayor Wentworth took aim directly at Levi North in the Republican paper, the *Chicago Democrat*, by threatening the theater with fire. In a series of articles, the *Democrat* advised its readers how "easily an incendiary may fire it" inviting someone to burn the theater and its adjoining buildings. The theater was never burned or attacked, yet the Republican papers continued to attempt to connect it with danger. North was elected as Third Ward Alderman in March despite a Republican John C. Haines winning the mayoral race. According to the *Tribune*, North's had become the "Democratic Head Quarters," an Aldermanic office in the heart of the city.
- North's National Amphitheater
 - As with the politics of North's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the actual issues at play were never explicitly stated in the battle of Chicago's partisan newspapers. Thus, when examining the downfall of North's National Amphitheater, I can no sooner point to North's political party as the cause than I can point to the function of slavery in his production of Stowe's novel.
 - Regardless, in winter 1859, he decided to leave North's National Amphitheater behind. North took his circus on the road for the entirety of 1860, ending in New York at his old stomping grounds, the Bowery Theater, by December.
 - By 1861, North's National Amphitheater sat empty, abandoned, and decaying throughout the Civil War. North never stopped touring during the war, entirely in the North.