When one considers the political, legal, and social status of women in 19th century America, one is surprised to learn, through the mining of contemporary sources, that at least fifty women managed theatres throughout the United States from 1799 to 1902. You can probably name a few. Mrs. John Drew in Philadelphia, certainly. And wasn't there a Laura Keene in New York? And Anne Brunton Merry, and Catherine Sinclair, and Mrs. John Wood? And didn't Charlotte Cushman once try her hand at management. These are the names that float to the top of consciousness. And with good reason: Mrs. Drew for her long occupancy of the Arch Street Theatre, Keene and Wood for their success in New York, Merry because of her acting fame in early Philadelphia and New York, Sinclair because of her notoriety, and Cushman because of her later great fame as an actress.

It is true that most of the other 44 women thus far accounted for managed briefly and often unsuccessfully in minor venues, and not always for impeccable reasons. But that they did it at all - in a society where women had no legal rights and were largely treated as chattel - is worthy of some note.

The two-year managerial career of Anne Brunton Merry at the famous Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia from 1803 to 1805 is included in Gresdna Anne Doty's invaluable study of Merry's whole career, and she enjoys sympathetic notice from Charles Durang in his work on "The Philadelphia Stage." She died in childbirth on June 28, 1808, at the age of 39. Her contract as manager was the result of the death of her second husband, Thomas Wignell, who was joint lessee of the theatre with Alexander Reinagle. Because of her fame as "the first lady of the American theatre" in Philadelphia, then the theatre capital of the United States, her story is well-documented. But what of Mary Sully West, who appears to have managed the theatre in Norfolk, Virginia which had been built by her husband, Thomas Wade West, from his death in 1799 to perhaps 1806? Well, that was Norfolk, not Philadelphia, and the records are scanty.

The assumption of managerial responsibility upon the death of a manager-husband accounted for the managerial careers of a few other women: Frances Anne Denny Drake in Louisville for a whole year in 1838; Mrs. M. A. Garretson at the Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia from August 21, 1859 until she sold the theatre to Edwin Booth and John Sleeper Clarke in 1865; and Anne Sefton at the American Theatre in New Orleans in 1843, whom Joe Cowell nominated as "respectably effective" in his 1844 book, "Thirty Years Passed Among the Players in England and America."

Another kind of "inheritance" is evident in the managerial careers of two other women: that is, father to daughter. Mary Elizabeth Maywood, aged 20, was recommended as manager to the stockholders of the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia by her father, Robert Maywood (a former manager of the house) in the fall of 1842, while he would act as business manager. This "petticoat government" (as Wemyss called it) had a failed play season, a failed concert season, and a failed opera season. Mary Elizabeth resigned on July 31, 1843. One wonders whether her father, anticipating the bad season, had set her up as the "fall guy."

The other "inheritance" was that of Miss A. G. Trimble, at the South Pearl Street Theatre in Albany, New York, whose father had managed the house from 1862 until his death in 1867. Miss Trimble's tenure was short. She opened her season on September 2, 1867, but it ended on January 29, 1868, when fire destroyed the theatre.

At least two lady managers' careers seem to have been motivated by divorce. The earlier one is that of Elizabeth Hamblin, who was divorced from Thomas Hamblin, manager of the Bowery Theatre in New York, in 1834. According to Joseph Ireland's "Records of the New York Stage," Elizabeth used the $2,500 she got as a divorce settlement to lease the little Richmond Hill Theatre at Varick and Charlton Streets in New York City, and opened it on June 13, 1836 as "Mrs. Hamblin's Theatre." She did a summer season there that year, then again the next year. For the months of May and June in 1838 she managed the old Olympic at 444 Broadway, then a summer season at Tivoli Garden in 1840, for a total of about 32
weeks in all.

An only marginally longer management career was achieved by the other divorcée, Catherine Sinclair, whose divorce from the famous actor Edwin Forrest in 1852 assumed the dimensions of a national scandal. A month after the divorce was settled in her favor in January of 1852 (there had been acrimonious accusations of infidelity on both sides and Forrest kept the settlement in appeal for sixteen years), Catherine, billing herself as "Mrs. C. N. Sinclair, the late Mrs. Forrest" appeared at Brougham's Lyceum in New York as Lady Teazle in "School for Scandal." She was not a trained actress, although she had some facility in singing, but she had persuaded George Vandenhoff to coach her for her acting debut. As might have been expected, this and subsequent appearances drew curious crowds of spectators and the disdain of the critics. She left New York in the fall of that year to tour the provinces, ending up in San Francisco at Maguire's Opera House and then at the American.

In that gold-inflated boom town in 1853, "culture" was on the rise. There were already five theatres operating: one was primarily a music hall called Meig's; two were minor houses (the Union and the Olympic); but the remaining two were major houses - Maguire's and the American. Nevertheless, Joseph French built the Metropolitan at a cost of $250,000, and opened it under Sinclair's management on December 24, 1853 with (what else?) "School for Scandal," featuring Sinclair as Lady Teazle and James Murdoch as Charles Surface. (Some say Murdoch was responsible for her opportunity to manage.) By April 8, 1854 Sinclair was offering her public the newly arrived Laura Keene, who then, shortly and briefly, became her rival in management.

In an attempt to bolster her repertoire - and enlarge her audiences - Sinclair introduced Madame Anne Thillon "in an operatic season" in the spring of 1854, and announced for the fall season Meyerbeer's "Robert the Devil." For these operas she used visiting artists in the principal roles and augmented the cast with talented local amateurs. Business, however, was not good. She tried operetta, ballet, pantomime, skits - she even tried reduced ticket prices for the third tier. The San Francisco Herald of May 8, 1855 quotes Mrs. Sinclair as saying that her first series of sixteen operas ran at a loss of $3,908 and her second series of sixteen at a loss of $9,977. Mrs. Sinclair took her benefit on Saturday, June 9, 1855 in her signature piece, "School for Scandal," this time with Edwin Booth (who had just returned from Australia) as Charles Surface.

The Metropolitan was thenceforth a vaudeville house, and offered no more plays or operas. Sinclair had been in San Francisco for a little over two years, and had managed the Metropolitan for about eighteen months. She went on to a brief winter season in Sacramento, then to Australia, from which she arrived in London in September, 1857. She played the Haymarket Theatre, then toured the provinces, and made her final appearance on stage at New York's Academy of Music on December 18, 1859. Her total theatrical career had lasted eight years, a year and a half of which had been in management. Born on a wave of notoriety, that brief career ended as the wave receded, and her last 30 years were spent in complete privacy.

Another kind of matrimonial contretemps is illustrated in the careers of Rowena Granice in San Francisco and of Mrs. John Wood. Granice seems to have managed a "bit" theatre called The Gaieties for three years from 1856 on, but was forced out of the business by an estranged husband who claimed all the profits and was, of course, upheld in his claim by 19th century law which said that the wages of wives belonged to husbands, and the wages of daughters belonged to fathers. Granice, however, landed on her feet. She subsequently divorced that husband and then married newspaper owner Robert J. Steele, presumably entering San Francisco society. In any event, her theatre career was over by 1859. With Mrs. John Wood the circumstances were different, and the theatre won out over a failed marriage.

Born Matilda Vining to an English theatrical family, she was a child actress in the English provinces and developed into a comedienne. After marrying John Wood in 1854, she and her husband emigrated to Boston, where they played with the Boston Theatre for three seasons. For the first few months of their last season there they played a "special engagement" at Wallack's Theatre in New York, and Mrs. Wood's reputation began to eclipse that of her husband. After a return appearance at Wallack's in the summer of 1857, they headed for Maguire's Opera House in San Francisco, where they opened on January 18, 1858. That same month, Matilda had one of her great successes in the burlesque, "Hi-a-wa-tha: or, Ardent Spirits and Laughing Waters." She played Minnehaha. Later that year she made a sensation in the breeches role of Amadis in M. M. Noah's "Love's Disguises." She also played Dick in "Whittington and his Cat" during the Christmas season. She is said to have "managed" the Forrest Theatre in Sacramento for a few weeks in 1858, and from March, 1859 to the beginning of that summer, she managed the American Theatre, which a few years earlier had been Laura Keene's domain. Leaving husband, daughter, and mother
in California, she returned to New York in mid-1859, joining Dion Boucicault's company at the Winter Garden Theatre (until that time the Metropolitan and earlier Tripler's Hall). A serious quarrel erupted between Mrs. Wood and the Boucicaults which sent the latter to Laura Keene's theatre and Mrs. Wood to three years of touring. When Keene gave up management of her theatre in 1863, Matilda Vining Wood took it over, changed its name to the Olympic, but retained the majority of Keene's company, including James H. Stoddard, who wrote in his "Reminiscences" that Mrs. Wood's "career at the Olympic was a brilliant one, and many clever people were engaged in her company" - himself, of course, along with E. L. Davenport, Mrs. Gilbert, John Selwyn and others. Mrs. Wood managed the theatre for lessee John Duff (Augustin Daly's father-in-law) until June 30, 1866 - not quite three years - after which she sailed back to England. She never managed again in America, although she returned as an actress in the 1872-73 season.

During her tenure at the Olympic, Wood presented a varied bill, with stress on comedies, since that was her acting forte. The 19th century penchant for dramatizing novels was satisfied in such productions as "Monte Cristo," "Martin Chuzzlewit," "Our Mutual Friend," and "The Three Guardsmen." Stoddard summed up her tenure in these words: "While she managed her theatre it was conducted in a thoroughly artistic way; she was a power in herself, liberal in her views, and she spared no expense that she deemed necessary to the proper conduct of her theatre."

After her return to England, as Jane F. Peterson tells us in "Notable Women in the American Theatre," she managed the St. James Theatre in London from 1869 to mid-1872, improving its ambience and its clientele. Until the time of her retirement in 1893 (one year later than Mrs. John Drew's) she acted for and managed several theatres, most notably the Court. She lived until 1915 and was 83 years old when she died.

A few women saw theatre management as the mainstay of support for their families. The earliest of those, with the briefest career, was Elizabeth Jefferson Richardson, daughter of the first Joseph Jefferson. She managed a summer season in Mobile in 1843 because various members of her family were stranded there with her at the close of a season managed by Charles Fisher, who had left Mobile in March of that year. She seems never again to have tried her hand at management, although she lived until 1890.

In Brooklyn, which was then a separate city from New York, Mrs. F. B. (or Sarah) Conway, with her husband, leased the Park Theatre opposite Brooklyn City Hall, and ran it with him from April 2, 1864 to July 23. At the opening of the fall season that year, she took full charge and ran that operation until she moved it all to a new house, the Brooklyn Theatre, which opened on October 2, 1871. A highlight of her career at the old house was the premiere of John McCloskey's "Across the Continent," which opened on November 28, 1870. She continued managing at the new house until her death in 1875. She was the first American-born woman to manage a theatre over several years, strictly maintaining the "lines of business" casting policy, and disapproving of the new "society plays" as evidence of what she saw as "moral decline." She supported her ailing husband and two daughters through her management, and when she died one of her daughters attempted to keep the theatre going, but the attempt lasted for only two months. In all, Sarah Conway was a moderately successful lady-manager, albeit a very conservative one, for something approaching eleven years, and she always called herself Mrs. H. B. Conway.

So, too, the perhaps most famous, and most long-lived of 19th century women managers always called herself Mrs. John Drew. And for two generations she was the mainstay and support of a large family which became a theatrical dynasty, with the latest member of it - Drew Barrymore - active today.

Louisa Lane Drew, who was born in 1820 and lived until 1897, had been on the stage almost continuously from the time she was a babe in arms until a few months before her death. She was born in England to a theatrical family. When her father died, she and her mother emigrated to the United States, Louisa Lane making her first appearance in America at the Walnut Street Theatre as the Duke of York in "Richard III." She was seven. Many of the plays in the then-current repertoire required a child-actor, and Louisa, an accomplished performer, was in demand to fill these roles in many theatres on the eastern seaboard and as far west as St. Louis.

Before she settled in Philadelphia in the fall of 1852, Louisa Lane had been constantly on the road, had married the much older actor Henry Blaine Hunt in New Orleans (where for one year she and her mother were in the same company with Charlotte Cushman), divorced him in 1847, married George Mossop in Albany in 1848 (he died the next year), and, on July 27, 1850, also in Albany, married her third and last husband, John Drew. He, at twenty-two, had expressed to Louisa Lane Mossop his interest in her half-sister, Georgiana Kinlock, age eighteen. The thirty-year old Louisa decided to have him for herself, and from that point to the end of her life she was determinedly Mrs. John Drew. An offer from the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia brought the acting couple to that city which Mrs. Drew would thereafter call
home, where she would raise, in a series of houses, two generations of Drew/Barrymores and become a pillar of the community as well as a theatrical legend.

The next year - 1853 - William Wheatley of the Arch Street Theatre asked the popular John Drew to join him as co-manager. With one child already born in Philadelphia, and another on the way, Mrs. Drew urged her husband to accept the offer and moved with him to the Arch as a member of the company. After two successful years with Wheatley, John Drew left for a tour of Europe and Ireland, leaving behind his pregnant wife and two children, but taking along his mother-in-law. When he returned in 1857, he took over the lease of the National for an unsuccessful three months of management, after which both Drews joined the Walnut Street Theatre. In the winter of 1858, John Drew set off for an extended tour to San Francisco, Australia, England and Ireland. Mrs. Drew rejoined Wheatley's Arch Street company, notably playing Queen Katherine to Charlotte Cushman's Wolsey in "Henry VII." When Wheatley, early in 1861, told Arch Street's Board of Agents that he would leave at the end of the season to manage Niblo's Garden in New York, leaving behind a debt of some $20,000, the Board offered the position to Mrs. John Drew. Before she accepted, she wrote to her husband in Ireland, seeking his permission. That granted, she became "manager and sole lessee" of the Arch, opening on August 21, 1861. For three decades to come, she was the linchpin not only of that establishment, but also of a widespread, expanding and peripatetic family, balancing the professional and personal demands; but everyone understood that the theatre came first.

During her first season at the Arch - a difficult one in which she had to borrow money to pay the company's salaries - she astutely added to her seasoned players amateurs from some of the dramatic societies of the city - a move which endeared her to a wide audience. Sinclair had done the same thing earlier in San Francisco. Meanwhile, John Drew had returned, covered with foreign laurels, to begin a starring engagement early in 1862, at his wife's theatre. The engagement was eminently successful, ending on May 27, 1862. Two weeks later he died as a result of head injuries received in a fall down the staircase in their home. Although Mrs. Drew wore black "widow's weeds" for the requisite period, she did not waver in her management of the Arch, even moving her family to a house nearer the theatre. How could she waver? She was now the sole support of her mother and her children. The whole family faithfully attended St. Stephen's Episcopal Church each Sunday morning, and the children were afforded all the advantages of an upper-middle class upbringing - a pattern she continued with her grandchildren, the Barrymores.

By the end of her third year at the Arch, she had completely renovated the theatre, had successfully raised the price of orchestra seats to one dollar (from seventy-five cents), and had probably paid off the indebtedness which she had inherited. An often quoted figure is the rise of the value of the Arch Street Theatre's stock from $500 a share to $750 during those three years. Whatever the exact financial records, it is obvious that over a long period of time Drew saw to it that the stockholders were pleased with their investment and her handling of it, for there is never a suggestion of displeasure on their part. It became legend that she never missed a payroll, distributing salaries personally every Saturday morning. She was able to maximize the income from her 1,400-seat house, and at the end of each season generally showed an entry on the plus side of the ledger. She was astute in balancing expensive star appearances with her regular stock company, so that public interest was maintained while the books still balanced. She generally had a business manager and a complement of what today we would call technicians. And, in addition to supervising the work of all these, she decided on the repertoire, did the casting, and conducted the rehearsals. Every day (except Sunday) was full from morning until almost midnight.

Deciding on the plays to be given each season was, of course, the most important thing she did, for on those choices hung financial solvency. She knew her audience, for she had become one of the "first citizens" of her adopted city. And she had to get the most value out of her resident stock company and keep them happy and productive, while at the same time planning ahead for a judicious number of guest stars. Her seasonal offerings over the years show what one might expect: a preponderance of melodramas, a sprinkling of classics and Shakespeare, a healthy dose of comedies, usually one or two "spectaculars," and none of what Olive Logan called "the leg business." It was refined, it was elegant, it was fun. But then, she had been all her life in the resident stock company business; it was as familiar to her as morning coffee. When stars began bringing with them a group of supporting players for their visiting engagements (a system called the "combination"), she held out against it as long as she could - and longer than most. But by 1876 she had sent off her son, Jack, and her daughter, Georgiana, to New York, answering the invitation of Augustin Daly, and there was no longer a resident company at the Arch. She was still the manager of record, but the Arch became a booking house for touring companies from that time on, and left her to tour in her own starring vehicles. When she finally retired from the Arch in 1892, she went to live out her days
in the household of her son, who had become one of Daly's major stars in New York.

Mrs. John Drew has been described in the autobiographies, memoirs and reminiscences of many actors and actresses. Besides the books written by her children and grandchildren, she appears in the writings of Clara Morris, Joseph Jefferson, Rose Eytinge, Frank Stull, Otis Skinner, Mrs. Gilbert, J. H. Stoddard and Lester Wallack. Some of these extol her keen eye for young talent (cheap and effective - she needed them), her ability to bring out the best in each member of her company, her strict eye for detail and for good housekeeping at the Arch, her kindness, her objectivity, her rehearsal discipline, etc. - all the details adding confirmation to what one suspects from the beginning - a very special aptitude for theatre management as it was known at the time. The appellation of "the Duchess" was given her as a sign of respect, awe, and recognition of a kind of imperiousness and supreme self-confidence. She had no doubt in her abilities and she proved that she was right. She not only managed a successful theatre, but a successful family, unto the third and fourth generations. And that family - the Drews and the Barrymores - are probably the most written about in the history of the American theatre. They form, in many ways, the paradigm of the theatrical family in America.

By far the most prevalent reason for women to attempt management in 19th century America was to showcase their individual talents as performers. Joseph Ireland, in his "Records of the New York Stage" tells us of Charlotte Baldwin (character actress at the Park Theatre in New York) who, miffed at the Park's denial of a benefit to her, leased space on the second floor of 15 Warren Street, and opened on July 2, 1822 with two benefits for herself. That first season lasted until August 31. She ran a second season in the same space from November 29 to January 31, 1823, and a third from February 16 to April 29, thus allowing herself additional benefit opportunities.

Baldwin was followed by a host of other women whose chief motivation for management seems to have been a desire to highlight their own acting skills. Short term leases in minor venues are typical of these ventures. There were the Webb sisters (Ada and Emma), who played under their own management for a month in February 1860 at the Broadway Boudoir, which was a new name for the old Olympic Theatre at 444 Broadway. They lasted for only a month. Mrs. Charles Howard took the same house for the month of March, and Mrs. John Brougham (sometime since divorced from her famous playwright husband) followed for the month of April. There was Mary Provost, who gave her name to the old Wallack's Theatre at Broadway and Broome streets for six weeks in March and April of 1862; Lucy Rushton, who found an angel to showcase her for four months of 1866 in New York; Minnie Cummings, who, like Rushton, seems to have had more ambition than talent, and who did one production at the end of 1878; and Helen Douvray, known as "Little Nell, the California Diamond", who leased the old Lyceum in November 1885 to star herself for 200 nights.

A mode so frequently employed as to almost merit the term "widespread" was that of a woman mounting summer seasons in various venues. The usual practice in 19th century theatre was to contract players for seasons lasting from September or early October to May or early June, that time usually being divided into two seasons, allowing the cluster of benefit performances to occur twice each year. Theatres were often leased to other managements for the summer months of June, July and August. In this slot a number of women had their first taste of management. We have seen that Elizabeth Jefferson Richardson was an early one of these (though her try was chiefly a means of supporting a stranded family). The actress Bella Carr ran a season during July and August of 1859 at the National Theatre in New York. Sophie, Irene and Jennie Worrell ran a season at the tiny New York Theatre in May, June and July of 1867. Linda Edwin headed Hooley's Opera House in New York for a summer season in 1870. Jane English, mother of Lucille and Helen Western, and originally from Boston, managed a summer season in New York in 1863. And Rosina Yokes, during the year a member of a travelling theatre company, took Daly's theatre every summer from 1886 to 1893 for resident summer seasons. It was a kind of reverse summer stock, one supposes.

None of these short term tenures, of course, threatened the established male managers, and even those of longer term which could be explained by the inheritance principle or the family support necessity seemed to arouse little opposition. But what of women who frankly and openly aspired to a theatre management position for its own sake? What about Matilda Clarendon, whose two-month tenure at the Pittsburgh Theatre ended in a violent altercation with the theatre's male owner in 1844? Or the similar situation of Julia Grenville (who called herself Madame de Marguerittes) at the Green Street Theatre in Albany - also a two months' stint? Or Marie Duret who lasted for four and a half months at the Museum in Utica in 1854 before the male owner replaced her? How then did Laura Keene (notice that none of these women is a "Mrs." anything) survive for ten years as a woman manager, eight of those in a major theatre in New York, which by that time was the theatre capital of the country? Not only did she survive, but she
earned the enthusiastic approval of both press and public, and, of course, the ire of most of her male colleagues. She is unique, and her story is an interesting one.

Like Mrs. John Drew, Keene (who was six years younger than Drew), spent her entire working life in the theatre, and was a successful manager in Baltimore, San Francisco and New York before Drew took over the Arch. In fact, it seems that Drew would not have been invited to manage the Arch in Philadelphia if it had not been for Keene's success in New York. It was Keene's example, brought to the attention of the Arch's Board of Agents by Adam Everly, son of the Board's president, and deliberated over at some length, that finally persuaded the Board to commit to Drew. There had, understandably by 19th century standards, been some reluctance to turning over their investment to a woman.

Keene's first recorded stage appearance was as Juliet in Surrey, England, on August 26, 1851, when she was 25 years old. Two months later she was playing in London at Henry Farren's Olympic Theatre, and by May 12, 1852, she was a member of the company at the Lyceum, then under the management of Madame Vestris and her husband, Charles Mathews. Keene had been married to one Henry Taylor, tavern-keeper, some years before, and by the time of her first recorded performance had given birth to two daughters and had seen her husband transported to Australia as a felon. Her beginnings in the theatre are obscure, although she was related to the famous Yates family. In any event, the influence of Madame Vestris was definitive. Her early biographer, John Creahan, deplored Keene's association with Vestris as "not perhaps the best mentor for a young and very pretty debutante." But Keene herself obviously thought otherwise, for one of her cherished possessions was an ivory miniature of Vestris which she gave to Joseph Jefferson shortly before her death on November 11, 1873. Jefferson records the gift in his autobiography.

Recruited by James W. Wallack as leading lady for his company when he took over Brougham's Lyceum in 1852, renaming it Wallack's Theatre, Keene sailed for America (along with her two daughters - thenceforth to be known as "nieces" - and her mother) in the summer of 1852. She never returned to England. The season opened on September 2. She played a variety of roles as well as leads in Shakespearean, classic, and contemporary plays. She was widely heralded as "a leading woman of personality and distinction." Critics credited her with contributing significantly to the success of Wallack's venture, the Alhambra, declaring, "She will spoil the critics' trade if she continues adding laurels upon laurels to her brow."

In his "Memories of Fifty Years" Lester Wallack tells the harrowing story of Keene's failure to appear for a scheduled performance of Lydia Languish in Sheridan's "The Rivals" on November 25, 1853, well into Wallack's second season. Creahan remarks in his biography that "under the persuasion of well-meaning but injudicious friends, she quitted Mr. Wallack's friendly patronage and went to Baltimore and opened a theatre," an action which later "she always deprecated as a foolish act of youthful independence." Odell caps the episode by saying that although "she was ill advised ... after all, she had the delight of opening her own playhouse." Her two daughters were in a convent school in Washington, DC, and she had met John Lutz, son of a well-to-do mercantile family in the nation's capitol. He seems to have committed himself to Keene, was her business manager in later ventures and her husband from 1860 until his death in 1869. It is likely that Lutz was involved in the Baltimore scheme.

The season opened on Christmas Eve (the same day that Catherine Sinclair opened as manager in San Francisco) and ended on March 2, 1854. An excellent company of actors had been assembled, and more than fifteen plays were presented, starring Keene in light comedy, farce, melodrama and Shakespeare. It was a successful season both artistically and financially. But by April, 1854 Keene was in San Francisco. After appearing for Sinclair briefly at the Metropolitan, she spent the months of June and July as "sole manager and lessee" of the Union Theatre, having a brilliant success with the elaborate "A Sea of Ice; or the Orphan of the Frozen Sea" before setting off for Australia in early August, taking as a member of her company the young but talented Edwin Booth. Had Lutz proposed marriage? Was Keene on her way to find or verify the death of her legal husband? There is no answer to these questions, but in any event, she did not marry Lutz until 1860, when Taylor could be presumed dead.

By April 1855 she was back in San Francisco, taking over the management of the American Theatre, reorganizing the company, and presenting a season through July of melodramas, comedy, tragedy - and Shakespeare. The American had opened on October 20, 1851 with Anna Cora Mowatt's "Armand; or, The Peer and the Peasant" and was a gilt and plush house highly admired as a major theatre. It had a generous supply of stock sets. Keene's company was largely composed of San Franciscans, like Mrs. Judah, Caroline Chapman (of the previously famous showboat family), and "Doc" Robinson. In addition to some memorable productions of Shakespeare ("Much Ado," "Twelfth Night," "Romeo and Juliet," "The
Tempest," "Midsummer Night's Dream"), she presented some interesting burlesques. For many of these productions, the stock sets were used, but at least for "Midsummer Night's Dream," in which Keene played Oberon, a spectacular setting was concocted. The San Francisco Pioneer describes it: "The rising moon, the flowing water, which seemed to flow far back and under the trees, the flowers opening up on stage to let Puck out and to display the fairies, the green banks and woodland glade, sprites - all were admirable." This production would become a staple of future seasons. Keene's season lasted through July, then she was on her way back to New York - headed for the big time. No other woman manager had thus far challenged the major New York theatrical scene; she was ready, but it was not easy.

She secured a lease on the Metropolitan Theatre (formerly Tripler's Hall) on Broadway near Bond Street. She refurbished the house, calling it Laura Keene's Varieties, announced an opening for December 24, 1855 (the anniversary of the Baltimore opening) and hired her company. (Three of her new company had defected from William Burton's Chambers Street Theatre.) Her opening bill was to be "Prince Charming" and "Two Can Play at That Game." Marshall's Broadway Theatre was then offering a piece called "King Charming." The day before her announced opening, Keene arrived at her theatre to find her scenery irreparably slashed. Was it Burton? Was it Marshall? Or someone else giving New York's new "lady-manager" her comeuppance? The opening was delayed to December 27, when "Old Heads and Young Hearts" and a fantasy ballet were presented. The season continued until June 21, 1856, and included four premieres of new works and at least eighteen other productions, including Shakespeare, Sheridan, and an expressly designed series of ten tableaux in honor of George Washington on February 22. Laura Keene's Varieties was a success, both artistically and financially.

But her old enemy, Burton, snatched the Metropolitan from her before the next season began. Crehan attributes this to "some flaws in the lease." Actually, Keene was a little behind in her rent on May 1, the contract date for payment, and, although she was fully paid up by May 15, Burton persuaded the owner to cancel her lease and give that property to him. Undaunted, Keene made a public appeal for a theatre, acquired the property at 622-624 Broadway, engaged John Trimble to build her a new theatre, and opened the Laura Keene Theatre on November 18, 1856, assuming a debt of $74,000 plus interest, to be paid off at the rate of $12,000 annually for seven years. She had completely discharged this debt by May 1863, when she gave up management of the house for reasons that seemed to include failing health. But she had given a run for their money to the established New York producers: Wallack, Burton, Marshall. She survived the panic of 1857, to which Burton succumbed, and initiated a number of new managerial practices. Although she was as fiercely competitive as any of her male rivals, she adopted an acceptably lady-like public persona as a strategy for deflecting criticism, over the years inserting notices in the press about "gratuitous and unmanly attacks" and "ungenerous and unjust allusions."

Since her new theatre was not ready for occupancy in September 1856 when the company assembled, they played in Philadelphia and Baltimore through October. One of her early offerings in the new house in New York was a play written by Edward G. P. Wilkins, drama critic for the Herald, and called "Young New York." She interspersed literary drama with lighter fare and an occasional burlesque.

So she proceeded, season after season, usually beginning about mid-September and continuing until early June, running alternating repertory with an occasional long run. "Our American Cousin," in its first presentation, ran consecutively from October 19, 1858 to the third week of March, 1859 and made Jefferson and E. A. Davenport famous.

In January, 1860, after their quarrel with Mrs. John Wood at the Winter Garden, Dion Boucicault and Agnes Robertson joined Keene's company, thus beginning a very fruitful and profitable association. Boucicault's "Colleen Bawn" ran from March 29 to May 18 that year. The latter half of the next season was marked by the 177-night run of "The Seven Sisters." Keeping her eye on both audience and box office, Keene seems to have ended every season in the black, and still to have managed any number of splendid presentations of the classics and of new plays. Quinn credits her with "making New York theatre more hospitable to native plays that had merit as literature as well as possibilities of stage success." Her eight-year record of success would seem to refute Jefferson's gibe that "Laura Keene's judgment in selecting plays was singularly bad." But even Jefferson had to admit that "nothing but the best ever entered her theatre." And Crehan quotes the New York Times in saying in 1862 that her work had "a wealth of fancy and artistic finish that has never been equaled or even approached by any other New York theatre." She was evidently a demon for details, and a strict disciplinarian. She drew up and posted a set of Rules and Regulations for behavior in the green room and during rehearsals and performances. Her company called her "The Duchess."

She had one more try at managing a theatre. In mid-1869, after the trauma of Lincoln's
assassination during her engagement at Ford's Theatre, which was part of a widespread tour, and after the
death of her husband, she took the lease of the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia for a season from
September 20, 1869 to March 25, 1870. It was an indifferent season, surprisingly marked by another
innovation - a series of children's matinees in November and the December production of Dickens' "A
Christmas Carol." The Philadelphia Press had greeted her enthusiastically in October: "Refinement and
genius, discipline and completeness in detail are conspicuous in all she does." In other words, she was "the
compleat lady-manager." There ought to be an interesting Philadelphia story in that season with Keene at
the Chestnut and Mrs. John Drew at the Arch.

All of the women I have mentioned, with one exception, were actresses, just as male managers,
with few exceptions, were actors. It was a long-standing tradition in the theatre, just as lines of business and
possession of parts had been in place for generations. The 19th century actor-manager hired all the theatre
personnel, from leading man to call boy, chose the repertoire, cast the plays, conducted rehearsals, chose
scenery and costumes, supervised box-office and publicity, and played the parts of her/his line. In the case
of lady-managers, all this meant that a woman would be telling men what to do, would be handling money
(sometimes in large sums), would be hiring and firing employees, and making business deals. All these
activities were clearly (to the predominant 19th century mind) male activities - not feminine, not proper for
women to engage in. Charles Durang, writing about Anne Brunton Merry's resignation from management,
said that "she had been a good deal annoyed in the business of theatre; some of the actors pressed their
affairs with ungentleness." Charlotte Cushman, in her one-year management stint had been the recipient of
resentment and the butt of jokes from the men in the company.

The woman-manager's position was never an easy one on either side of the footlights. That so
many women tried it is remarkable; that so few lasted beyond a brief time is entirely unremarkable, for they
lived in a patriarchal society where civil law and social custom made women second-class citizens. Mrs.
Drew asked her husband's permission to sign a contract because she was legally bound to do so. Women
could not hold title to property; they could not vote or hold public office, or serve as jurors. With all the
cards that were stacked against them, it is a wonder that any of them won the game. By dint of
persistence, hard work, and talent, at least two of these - Laura Keene and Mrs. John Drew - won a place
beside (and maybe above) Burton, Mitchell, Wheatley, Wallack and - yes - Daly and Belasco. But then,
they were not just talented - each of them was a genius.