

MINSTREL SHOW

By Kathryn Morano

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As a result of reforms due to the civil rights movement, minstrel shows have become a thing of the past. White people wearing black face and acting as end men are considered an affront to the black race. While I agree with that assessment, I really miss the minstrel shows that used to be held at the Congregational Church, and at the former St. Mary's Hall, both on Maple Street. Although most of the minstrel show was a type of variety show, the shenanigans of the end men made it much more entertaining. Between acts, the group of six to eight men would tell jokes, sing traditional tunes such as "Toot Toot Tootsie, Goodbye," and rattle their tambourines along with a live orchestra. The packed audience would cheer on their family members performing and howl with laughter at the antics of the end men.

When I was old enough, I showed up at an audition for one of the shows, but didn't make the cut. However, my father, Michael Morano, who had a very nice tenor singing voice, got to perform in several of them. I remember sitting in the audience with my mother waiting for my father to come onstage, and having trouble staying awake, since the shows lasted for hours. Lots of talented Danvers amateurs got their spot in the limelight showing off their singing, dancing, instrumentals and comic skits. My classmate, Dolores Tilton, and her sister, Darlene performed their tap number to the delight of everyone.

In a similar fashion, the minstrel show at St. Mary's Hall was staged by the Catholic Daughters. Instead of black-faced end men, women dressed as clowns. I remember one of our neighbors, Dee Dee Lonergan, played the role one year. It was a long time before I was allowed to attend, because the St. Mary's spectacular was an X-rated show for women only. Once I did get to go, I'm sure I failed to get most of the jokes, many of which were double-entendre.

Today, St. Mary's Hall is just a memory, having been torn down many years ago. The Congregational Church still holds concerts and other performances, but nothing like the minstrel shows of yore. I would certainly never wish to turn back time, but, if I could, I would love to see just one more minstrel show.