

## ***Vaudeville in Lodi Lodi History Highlights*** **by Artie Maglionico, Lodi Borough Historian**

In the summer of 1923 the booming little town of Lodi entered the zany, smoke filled, world of Vaudeville...or rather it entered Lodi if just for one night. Actually it was a Friday night in late July and it took place at what was then the Mecca of local entertainment...the Lodi Theater later known as the American theater. The show was being sponsored by a group of hardy young men who called themselves the Hamilton Sportsmen. Their ad which ran in the Passaic Daily read: "Vaudeville production of Hamilton Club will have pep and wit galore."

The show, which was run by a minstrel entertainer from Clifton NJ known as William *Billy* Rink, was billed as "Nothing short of a Broadway performance." "The show will be complete with comedy and other entertainment of high class.," Promised Billy. There was no reason not to believe Mr. Rink since his reputation as a minstrel show coach was quite amicable. Still ticket sales were at best sluggish and that reality didn't sit too well with the "Hamilton Boys" who put up the money for this production out of their own pockets. The show was only four days away and the young Sportsmen wanted to see progress...or else.

Frightened over the prospect of having his head mounted over the fireplace at the Hamilton boy's clubhouse, Billy called on his pals the Fonti Boni brothers to get him out of trouble. The two brothers were a popular comedy team who shared the spotlight with Billy on the Minstrel circuit. One of those productions took place in Lodi and was well received by both theater goers and the local media as well. "Get them Billy!" said one of the bigger club members. So he did!

Also on the bill was a performer who was hot off the Keith circuit, by the name of George Warwick. George was known for what was called Cherry Chalk Talks. If any of you Vaudeville historians happen to know what a Cherry Chalk Talk was the please let me know at [artiemags007@yahoo.com](mailto:artiemags007@yahoo.com).

Arriving from the Hippodrome in, along with the Fonti Boni brothers an hour before curtain time, were a group of European Street singers...hey come to think of it they were the opening act! No wonder why Mr. Rink was contemplating an abrupt end to his show biz career by jumping out of the third floor window. Luckily for Billy, he didn't have to make that decision sine the curtained opened right on time. Besides, the only window in the theater was located in the basement which were Billy was hiding.

Other performers included Lawrence Crane the Irish wizard, who had just arrived from the Palace Theater in Newark NJ where his *act of prestidgitation* astonished the audience. A screaming novelty and serenading Ada was presented by Harry Atkinson

who had only the day before closed at the Schubert Theater. Billy had also booked a one man Vaudeville show which was presented by a performer by the name of Al Noda. Then there was the comedian by the name of Al Miller who entertained with songs, dance and stories. Later in the show Miss Mildred Durrie gave her rendition of "The Dances of All Nations "which included Ballet and Acrobatic dances. Of course topping the bill was Billy Rink himself who performed his side splitting monologue "Oh what a Wedding."

According to the reviews that came out in the local newspapers the next morning ,the audience was "convulsed with joy and laughter throughout the evening." Luckily, for our Mr. Rink, the audience included the Hamilton Boys.