

Extraordinary actress

■ Ellen Terry made one of few U.S. stops at Winthrop.

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"The incomparable Ellen Terry appeared last night at the Winthrop College auditorium and easily maintained her reputation as the greatest living English actress."

So began a story in *The Record*, a Rock Hill newspaper, Feb. 16, 1911.



Nearby history

LOUISE
PETTUS

Winthrop College was the site of Terry's only appearance south of Washington on her American tour.

She was 63 years old and had been on the stage since she was 8. The stage veteran gained her world fame by acting in Shakespearean roles opposite Sir Henry Irving. At Winthrop, Ellen wore the immense emerald given her by Irving in celebration of his being knighted by King Edward

VII. Terry had not been listed among the performers expected to appear as lecturers or concert artists when the "Star Course" was announced at the beginning of Winthrop's 1910-1911 school year. Less than two weeks before her arrival, the newspaper gave first notice that she would appear.

Within a week, all seats in the auditorium in Main Building (now called Tillman Hall) were sold out. The newspaper reported that a number of the tickets were sold to out-of-towners with large contingents from Charlotte, Chester and Yorkville.

Terry spent the night before her Winthrop performance at the Selwyn Hotel in Charlotte. Dr. David Bancroft, Winthrop's first president, wanted her to have lunch with Winthrop students the day of the performance. Terry told Johnson she had to have her morning nap and refused to come on the morning train. Two automobiles were sent by the college to bring Terry, her companion, a maid and her manager to Rock Hill.

Travel between Rock Hill and Charlotte was not easy in 1911. According to the newspaper, they left Charlotte at 2:30 p.m. and arrived on campus about 5.

Her performance that evening was described by *The Record* as "still alive with the divine histrionic fire. Her every gesture shows the true artiste. . . . She appeared before her audience as daintily and as gracefully as a young girl."

The program's title was "The Heroines of Shakespeare," which combined lecture with illustrative acting. Terry portrayed Portia, Beatrice, Juliet, Desdemona, and her stated favorite, Imogen. The applause was deafening.

After the performance, Terry had something of a problem getting away from the students who clustered around her and the car that took her to the Rock Hill train station, described as a "dreary place." A large group of "enchanted girls" trooped to the station to see her off. She headed for Washington, where she gave her last American performance on the following night.

Terry was a colorful figure on stage and off. From age 8 to 16 she played boys' roles in Shakespearean plays, then eloped with a man 30 years her senior. She married three times and had several alliances, including one with a famous architect who fathered her two children while she was married to another man. Her correspondence with George Bernard Shaw is still read with interest.

Terry attained permanent stardom after her 1875 matchless performance as Portia in "The Merchant of Venice." Three years later she was first cast with Irving. In 1925, after 69 years on the stage, she received the Grand cross of the Order of the British Empire. She died in 1928 at 80.

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