BERTHA CLEAR'S MOST-SUCCESSFUL LAST ADVENTURE

The first chapter of Bertha Clear's life came to a conclusion in a court room. I ended the narrative of "The Skeleton's Bride" with Bertha's 1884 court appearance in Philadelphia where she (or more likely her father) expressed second thoughts about her precipitous marriage to Josiah B. Garrison, the Living Skeleton, who had been on exhibition at the Dime Museum in Philadelphia.

The second chapter of Bertha's life, "Further Adventures of Bertha Clear, The Skeleton's Bride" also concluded in a court room. The 12-23-1888 *Herald* of Des Moines, Iowa, proclaimed:

The Jury's True Verdict - Mrs. Bertha Diggle Acquitted of the Charge of Poisoning Her Worthless Husband

Shortly after the Living Skeleton episode, Bertha married George Diggle, moved west, and had two children. Life was difficult and Bertha tried to make ends meet using her acting and singing skills. While she was engaged with the Clint G. Ford Company in Clarion, Iowa, George came to see her and ended up dying from a morphine overdose. After a sensational trial, Bertha, accused of killing her husband, was acquitted.

After the trial, on 1-19-1889, *The New York Clipper* reported the Clint G. Ford Company tendered Bertha a complimentary benefit before her departure for her home in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. After this, Bertha's paper trail apparently came to an abrupt halt.

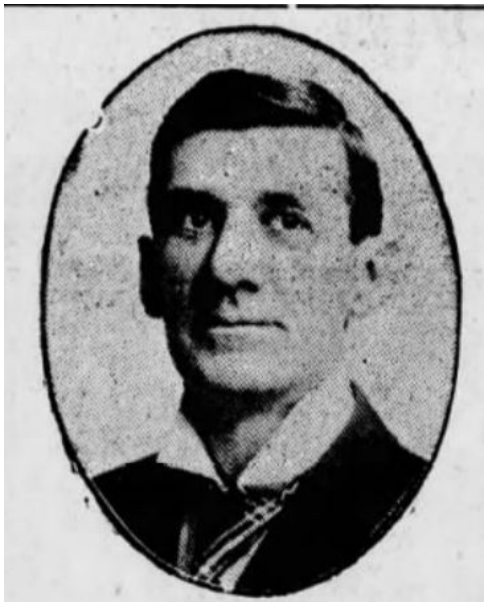
For a few years I searched for Bertha, unsuccessfully, until genealogist Sarah Thorson Little brought to my attention a critical piece of information. Sarah came across a Social Security application for one of Bertha's children which listed her mother as "Bertha StClair." I stared at that for a while, assuming StClair was just a mistake or a poor transcription of Bertha's maiden name Clear. Then one day, I started searching newspapers for Bertha St. Clair. Of course Bertha would change her last name--Clear and Diggle were far too notorious.

After her return to Philadelphia in 1889, Bertha used St. Clair as her last name and found regular work as an actress.

Bertha Clear a/k/a Bertha St. Clair, photo in 12-22-1906 *Sun-Journal* (Lewiston, Maine)

Around 1894, Bertha married Landis Wanbaugh (stage name Lewis McCord) and the couple acted in the legitimate theater, then travelled for years on the vaudeville circuit.

After Landis died in 1911, Bertha adopted his stage name. Now known as Mrs. Lewis McCord, Bertha became a character actress in the first silent films.



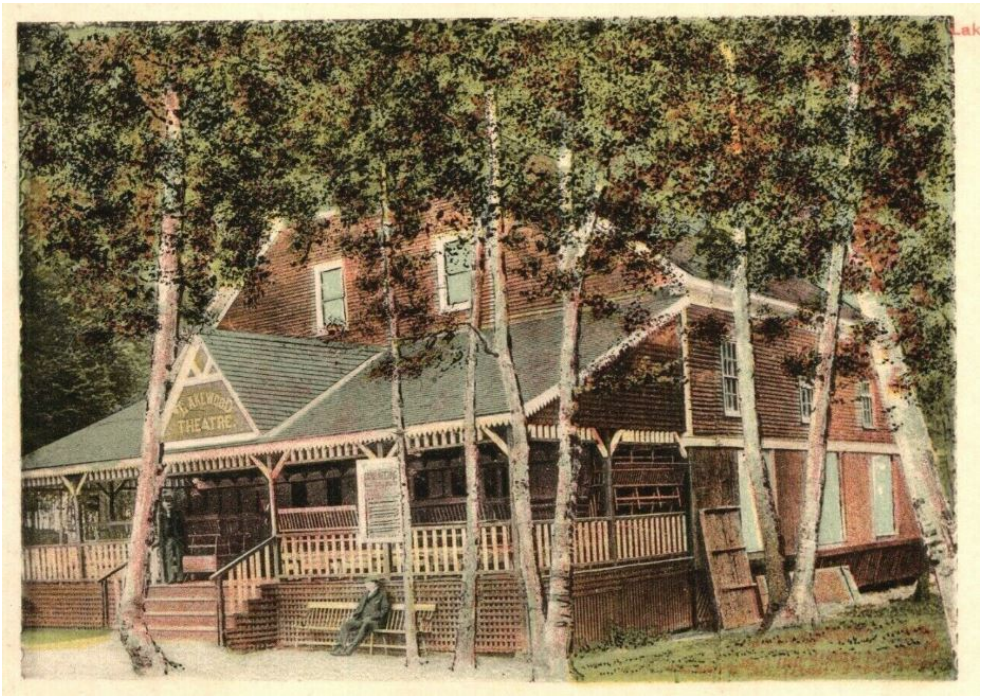
Landis Wanbaugh a/k/a Lewis McCord in 1908

After her return to Philadelphia, Bertha was engaged by Clint G. Ford and other theater companies on the east coast. Bertha's acting career can be followed by searching old newspapers and entertainment publications.

Bertha and Landis Wanbaugh married about 1894. They are often listed appearing in the same entertainments under their stage names, Lewis McCord and Bertha St. Clair.

Home base was either Harrisburg, PA or New York City. In the 1890s, they summered in Columbia, PA, where Landis grew up.

Lakewood Theater, Madison, Maine (postcard circa 1912)



In June of 1901, Bertha and Landis, along with James Durkin and his wife Jeanette Ashbaugh, arrived at the Lakewood Theater, located on the west side of Lake Wesserunsett in Madison, Maine. James Durkin had been asked by Francis W. Briggs 1877-1921, general manager of the company that owned Lakewood Theater, to direct the first legitimate theater season at Lakewood. James and Landis had just completed the winter season in Boston--James at the Bowdoin Square Theater and Landis at the Tremont Theater. These two young men (James 25 and Landis 33) and about 18 other actors named themselves the Lakewood Stock Co. and settled in for an eight-week run of nine plays. At the end of August, everyone dispersed to their next engagements.

Though she wouldn't have known it at the time, it was here Bertha and the history of summer stock theater crossed paths. Bertha had a role in the first play produced at the Lakewood Theater, "The Private Secretary," which opened on June 24, 1901. Lakewood is now considered the oldest, longest-running summer theater in the nation.

MISS ELVIA BATES AT THE FAMILY THEATER THIS WEEK.

Madison, Maine, became Bertha and Landis's destination of choice for the summer months. The Madison Center correspondent for the local newspaper, *Somerset Reporter,* made note of their comings and goings, and the activities at the Lakewood Theater were published from time to time. Bertha and Landis came back for the 1902 season; James Durkin again directed the plays. In 1903 and 1904, Landis took over as director of the Lakewood Stock Co. and Bertha's daughter Elvia Bates (photo left) was hired to fill ingenue roles. In 1904, Bertha's role in the play "Cap't Swift" was noted: *Miss St. Clair has one of those grand dame parts for which she is too well suited and which she interprets so cleverly.*

In 1903, Bertha and Landis purchased a cottage from Mr. Briggs. It was located on Lake Wesserunsett and near the theater. In 1904 Landis constructed a two-story addition to his cottage. Landis's mother visited, as well as his brother George and family. Though they continued to vacation in Maine, 1904 would be the last year Bertha and Landis were members of the Lakewood Stock Co.

During the summer of 1905, Landis played a role of a different sort. He spent weeks in the Somerset Hospital in Skowhegan after an operation. The October 25, 1905 *New York Morning Telegraph* reported:

> *Lewis McCord got back to town a few nights ago. He has been playing a long hospital engagement at Skowhegan, Me. "Appendicitis" was the name of the sketch, he says, in which he played the star part, assisted by a corps of hospital doctors and a trained nurse. McCord missed a month, but is now booked up to next May. His engagements include another trip to the Pacific Coast with "Her Last Rehearsal." Elvira Bates and Bertha St. Claire are to be with him again as Juliet and "the fond mamma." But the other part has not yet been filled. McCord is looking for a good Romeo.*

In January of 1906, Landis, Bertha and Elvia were at the Orpheum Theater in San Francisco. Landis sent a post card to Maine to keep in touch with his friends.

> *A postal received at our office, this morning, advises us that Lewis McCord, the well known actor, has just completed a very successful two weeks' engagement at one of the leading theaters of San Francisco. The card is in souvenir style and bears a picture of a handsome brown stone edifice, the publication and office building of the San Francisco Chronicle. Mr. McCord allows our correspondent to say that he prefers to read the SOMERSET REPORTER rather than the paper published in the building just referred to. The REPORTER can stand this sort of sentiment, either in jest or earnest, and Mr. McCord's Skowhegan friends will be gratified to know he is still interested in them*. (1 -25-1906 *Independent Reporter*)

During the summer of 1906, Bertha, Landis and his Wanbaugh family took a tour of Francis W. Briggs' new venture--the Pittsfield Poultry Farm in Pittsfield, Maine. This was a very large operation, shipping hatching eggs, days old chicks, and breeding cockerels of fancy and utility stock. Mr. Briggs specialized in Barred Plymouth Rocks.

In 1907, local Fred Hayden received a letter from Landis saying he was on tour for the summer and would not make it to Maine.

The years 1908 and 1909 find Landis and Bertha at their cottage for the summers. Landis went on a few fishing trips with Mr. Briggs. Also James Durkin returned to Lakewood to direct the theater during these two years.

The Newly Organized Lakewood Fire Company Shows Great Heroism.

What might otherwise have been a serious conflagration at Lakewood Tuesday afternoon was, through rare presence of mind, and heroic effort, but a harmless blaze.

One of the cottages on "Babbling Brook Boulevard" was still wearing its 4th of July dress of red, white and blue draperies and the youthful occupants were playing with some belated fireworks thereon, when, owing to the proximity of said fireworks and draperies, there suddenly rang out on the still air the dread cry of fire! and a quick blaze ran directly around the veranda. In less time than it takes to write it the Lakewood Fire Company, of which Lewis McCord is Chief and Chas. Willard the company, was upon the scene. With cat-like dexterity, the Company ran up the ladder improvised from the form of the Chief, which Nature seemed to have intended for some such purpose and in the twinkling of an eye, or sooner, the burning draperies were torn from their fastenings hurled upon the ground and the flames furiously stamped out. This was one fire put out without the aid of a drop of water or Joe Murray's Extinguisher, thanks to the Lakewood Fire Co.

We remember Mr. McCord's agility and dexterity on the mimic stage of old, and those who attended the performance of "Faust" at Lakewood Theater last week have not forgotten the nimble dancing step, and fairy-like grace of Mr. Willard, and these accomplishments stand them in good stead on the stage of life, as Tuesday's experience proved. When the Company returned from the scene of disaster leaning heavily on one another, "the long and short of it," as it were, with smiles of victory wreathing their stern countenances, it was a sight never to be forgotten.

An incident involving Landis and Charles Willard was inflated for its comedic value and published in the 7-8-1909 *Somerset Reporter*.

Charles Willard 186?-1911 was a highly regarded character comedian from Boston. He was at the Lakewood Theater in 1908 and 1909.

Joseph H. Murray 1870-1952, Skowhegan oil dealer, was the local agent for liquid and dry fire extinguishers.

Landis belonged to the Pennsylvania National Guard from 1891-1894. His enlistment card tells us he was 6' 2" tall!

You just have to wonder what other hilarious, combustible brews bubbled up when 20 high-energy comedy actors gathered in a small, out-of-the-way village for two summer months!

In 1910, Bertha and Landis were on the road and did not make it to Maine. Madison Center news in the 3-31-1910 *Independent Reporter: The many friends of Mr. and Mrs. Lewis McCord will regret to learn that they are not to be at Lakewood this season. Miss Olive Hayden, who has charge of their cottage, received a letter from their home in Harrisburg, Pa., dated March 24, saying they were to start April 3, for the Pacific coast for a forty-two weeks' trip and should not return to their home until May, 1911.*

Landis died in February 1911. The *Independent Reporter* printed his obituary on the front page. Bertha and Elvia continued vacationing at the cottage through 1913.

The Madison Center correspondent extended a welcome to Bertha in the 7-13-1911 *Independent Reporter*: *The many friends of Mrs. Lewis McCord will be pleased to know that she has arrived at her cottage and intends to spend the summer here.* Likewise, Bertha was welcomed back to the Lakewood Theater for one show: *Mrs. Lewis McCord plays an important part in the play* ("The Truth") *and her return to Lakewood Theatre is received with pleasure by all.*

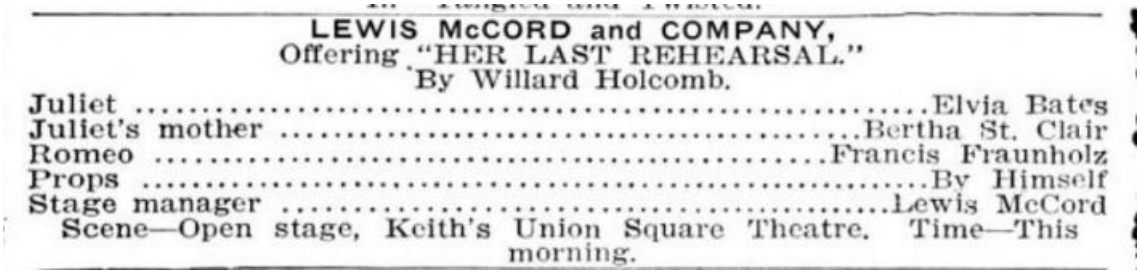
In 1912, Bertha was recruited by the Lakewood Stock Co. to take a role in "Seven Days" and she also presented the vaudeville sketch "Fickle Fortune" on the Lakewood stage. In 1913 she had a part in "Christoper, Jr."

In early 1918, word made it to Maine about Bertha's death. She was remembered as a member of the Lakewood Stock Co and that she and her husband had made many friends in the area.

* * *

After their second season at Lakewood, Bertha and Landis cut back on legitimate theater stage work and gave vaudeville a try. Landis started working on the play "Her Last Rehearsal," and took it on the road for the winter of 1902.

By the start of the vaudeville season in 1903, Landis has reworked the play to include Bertha and her daughter Elvia. The great success of this play gave Bertha and Landis their bona fides on the vaudeville circuit.

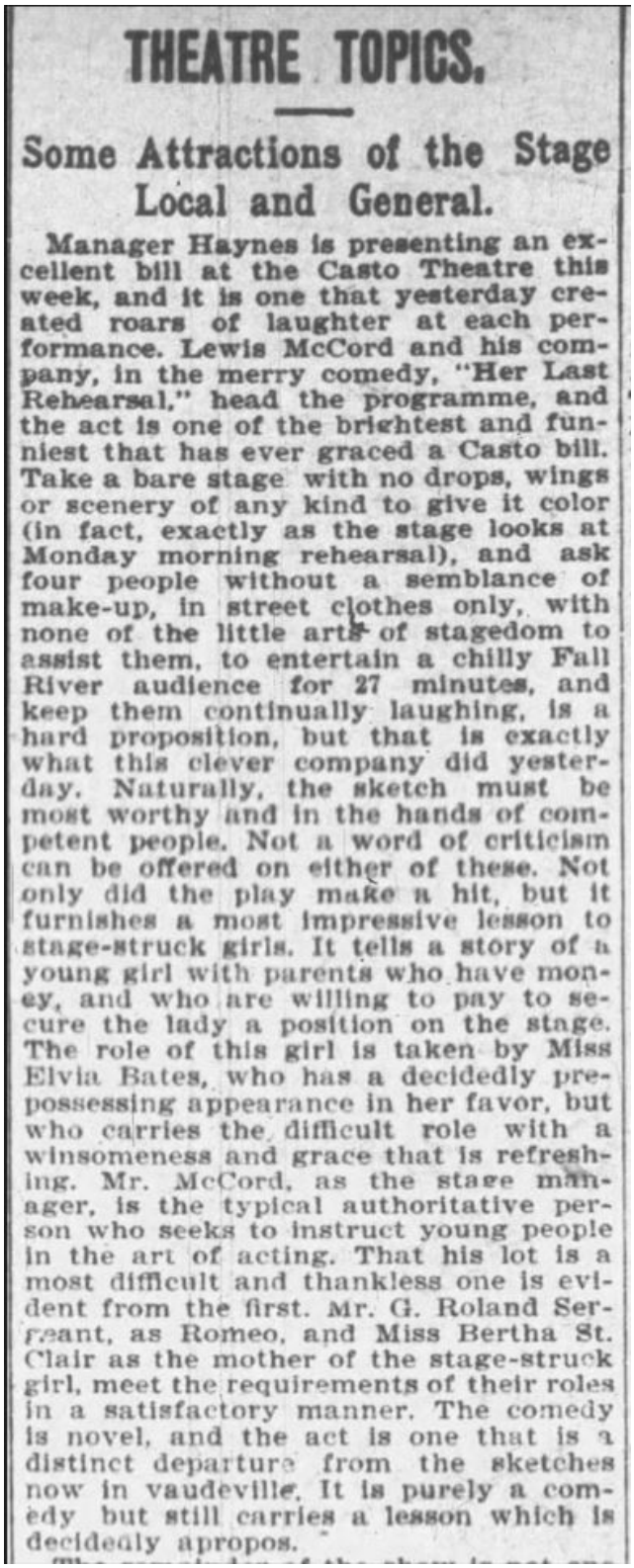


LEWIS McCORD and COMPANY,
Offering "HER LAST REHEARSAL"
By Willard Holcomb.

Juliet .....Elvia Bates
Juliet's mother .....Bertha St. Clair
Romeo .....Francis Fraunholz
Props .....By Himself
Stage manager .....Lewis McCord
Scene—Open stage, Keith's Union Square Theatre. Time—This morning.

Francis Fraunholz was at Lakewood in 1904.

Her Last Rehearsal – presented by Lewis McCord & Company, 1902 through 1908



THEATRE TOPICS.

Some Attractions of the Stage Local and General.

Manager Haynes is presenting an excellent bill at the Casto Theatre this week, and it is one that yesterday created roars of laughter at each performance. Lewis McCord and his company, in the merry comedy, "Her Last Rehearsal," head the programme, and the act is one of the brightest and funniest that has ever graced a Casto bill. Take a bare stage with no drops, wings or scenery of any kind to give it color (in fact, exactly as the stage looks at Monday morning rehearsal), and ask four people without a semblance of make-up, in street clothes only, with none of the little arts of stagedom to assist them, to entertain a chilly Fall River audience for 27 minutes, and keep them continually laughing, is a hard proposition, but that is exactly what this clever company did yesterday. Naturally, the sketch must be most worthy and in the hands of competent people. Not a word of criticism can be offered on either of these. Not only did the play make a hit, but it furnishes a most impressive lesson to stage-struck girls. It tells a story of a young girl with parents who have money, and who are willing to pay to secure the lady a position on the stage. The role of this girl is taken by Miss Elvia Bates, who has a decidedly prepossessing appearance in her favor, but who carries the difficult role with a winsomeness and grace that is refreshing. Mr. McCord, as the stage manager, is the typical authoritative person who seeks to instruct young people in the art of acting. That his lot is a most difficult and thankless one is evident from the first. Mr. G. Roland Sergeant, as Romeo, and Miss Bertha St. Clair as the mother of the stage-struck girl, meet the requirements of their roles in a satisfactory manner. The comedy is novel, and the act is one that is a distinct departure from the sketches now in vaudeville. It is purely a comedy but still carries a lesson which is decidedly apropos.

11-3-1903 *Fall River Globe*

This was Landis's first venture into vaudeville. The play was a great success.

Willard Holcomb, Drama Editor of the Washington Post, wrote this play in 1896. You can read it here https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009573576

In 1902, Landis took this play on the vaudeville circuit with the original cast of three: Romeo, Juliet and the Stage Manager.

The next year, Landis reworked the play and added two characters, Juliet's mother and a stage hand. He also turned the play into a family affair. Bertha took the part of the proud stage mother and Bertha's daughter Elvia appeared as the untalented Juliet.

Bertha's eldest daughter Elvia Bates 1885-1953 had an acting career of her own, but often joined Bertha and Landis, particularly in this vaudeville play.

In 1914, Willard Holcomb wrote about his play: *Countless "Juliets" have wrestled with Shakespeare's lines for the first time in this sketch, and some of them have become "leading ladies." One of the cleverest was Elvie Bates.*

Welly Jones' Scoop – presented by Lewis McCord & Company, 1907 to 1909

Bertha and Landis took this short play on the road from 1907 to 1909. They followed two vaudeville circuits--the first year through the northern states and down into California. The next year through the south to Texas.

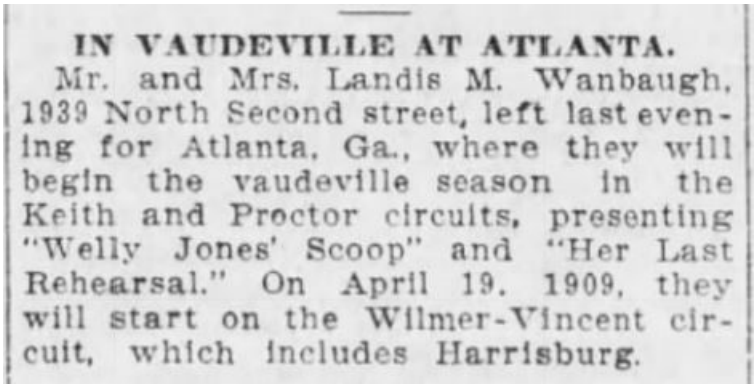
LEWIS M'CORD & CO.,
in "WELLY JONES'
SCOOP," a newspaper
story.

The play was described as *a furiously funny farce…deliciously enacted by Lewis McCord & Company.*

Synopsis: Wellington Jones, a newspaper reporter, played by Lewis McCord, and his wife Bertha Jones, played by Bertha St. Clair, are at home in their one-room New York City garret, longing for riches, when a $10,000 package of money drops down the chimney. For a quarter of an hour there is great fun over the arrangements for a luxurious $57 dinner to celebrate their good fortune. Then there is the almost apoplectic consternation of the reveling Jones and his wife when they are rudely interrupted by the arrival of the reporter's managing editor, who assigns him to look up a $10,000 bank robbery the night before. The thieves have been caught, but the money is missing. Then Welly wakes up to the fact that the $10,000 is not his, but, in newspaper parlance, the scoop is!

Harrisburg theater-goers particularly liked this skit. Not only were Landis and Bertha Harrisburg residents, but the sketch, written by Fred J. Beaman, was adapted from a newspaper story written by Wellington G. Jones 1867-1944, long-time drama critic and sporting editor of *The Harrisburg Telegraph.*

Reviews for this play hailed Bertha as *a comedienne of the front rank.* And, *Miss Bertha St. Clair, as Welly Jones' wife, sustains the comedy with a vim*.

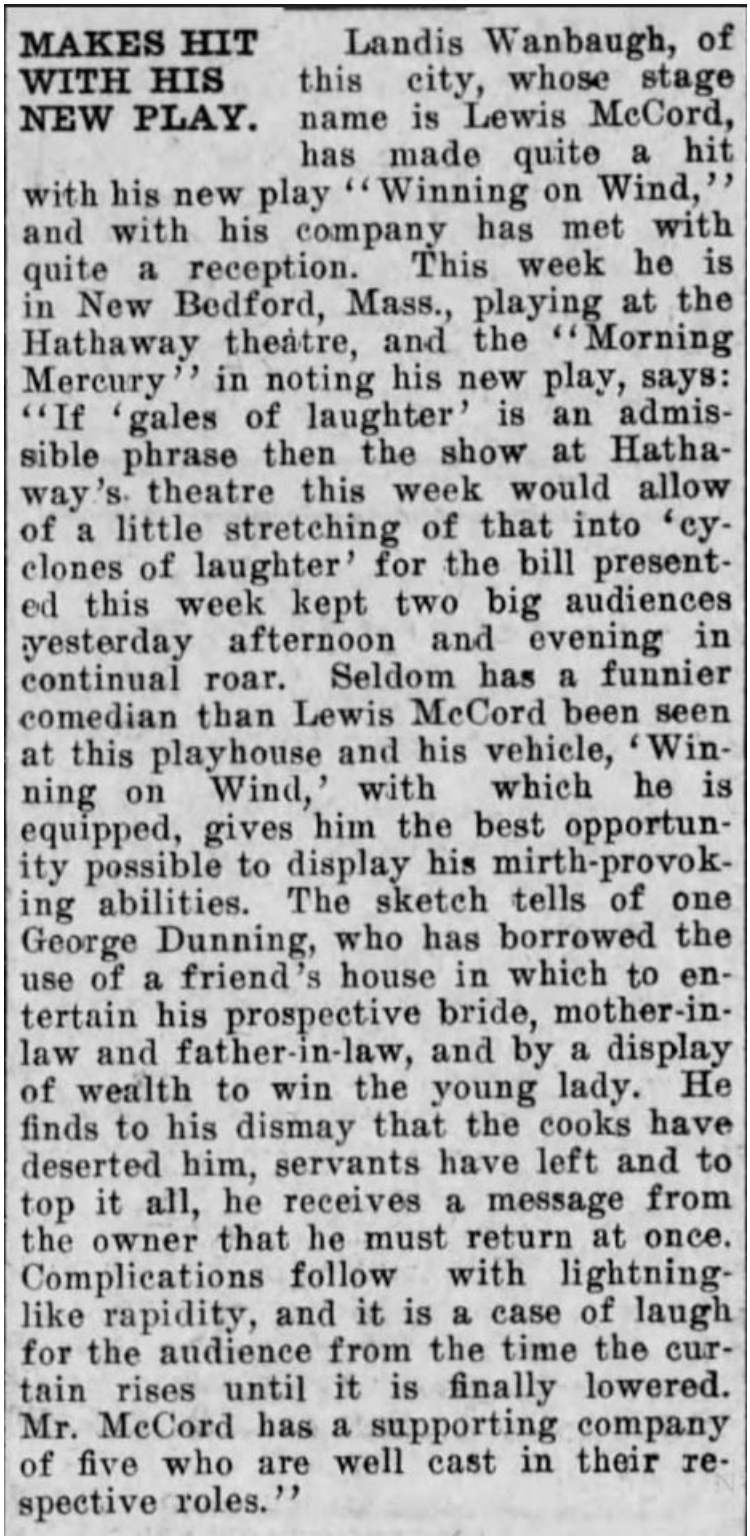

IN VAUDEVILLE AT ATLANTA.

Mr. and Mrs. Landis M. Wanbaugh, 1939 North Second street, left last evening for Atlanta, Ga., where they will begin the vaudeville season in the Keith and Proctor circuits, presenting "Welly Jones' Scoop" and "Her Last Rehearsal." On April 19, 1909, they will start on the Wilmer-Vincent circuit, which includes Harrisburg.

9-21-1908 *Harrisburg Telegraph*

A newspaper article in the 4-19-1908 *The Courier* (Harrisburg, PA) titled "The True Story of Welly Jones' Scoop" tells just that.

Winning on Wind – presented by Lewis McCord & Company, 1909-1910



MAKES HIT WITH HIS NEW PLAY.

Landis Wanbaugh, of this city, whose stage name is Lewis McCord, has made quite a hit with his new play "Winning on Wind," and with his company has met with quite a reception. This week he is in New Bedford, Mass., playing at the Hathaway theatre, and the "Morning Mercury" in noting his new play, says: "If 'gales of laughter' is an admissible phrase then the show at Hathaway's theatre this week would allow of a little stretching of that into 'cyclones of laughter' for the bill presented this week kept two big audiences yesterday afternoon and evening in continual roar. Seldom has a funnier comedian than Lewis McCord been seen at this playhouse and his vehicle, 'Winning on Wind,' with which he is equipped, gives him the best opportunity possible to display his mirth-provoking abilities. The sketch tells of one George Dunning, who has borrowed the use of a friend's house in which to entertain his prospective bride, mother-in-law and father-in-law, and by a display of wealth to win the young lady. He finds to his dismay that the cooks have deserted him, servants have left and to top it all, he receives a message from the owner that he must return at once. Complications follow with lightning-like rapidity, and it is a case of laugh for the audience from the time the curtain rises until it is finally lowered. Mr. McCord has a supporting company of five who are well cast in their respective roles."

Fred J. Beaman wrote this play in 1908 and the next year Landis and Bertha gathered a cast and played it on the vaudeville circuit.

Winning on Wind opened in Trenton, New Jersey, on September 6, 1909.

The opening cast:

Lewis McCord
Margaret Armstrong
Bertha St. Clair
Joseph W. Fox
Edward LeDuc
Richard Hall

I couldn't determine which part Bertha played--maybe the mother-in-law.

The sketch appeared on the east cost during the fall/ winter 1909-1910. In the spring and summer of 1910, the group traveled across the northern states and down into California.

9-18-1909 *Harrisburg Daily Independent*

After Landis Wanbaugh's death in 1911, Bertha honored her husband by adopting his stage name. Now known as Mrs. Lewis McCord, Bertha acted in a few plays and, for a short time, joined her daughter Elvia on the vaudeville circuit. Then, moving along with the times, Bertha found a niche as a character actress in the new silent films.

Bertha's first movie was *The Caricature of a Face*, a comedy produced in 1912 by Mark M. Dintenfass of the Champion Film Company. The Champion studio was located in Ft. Lee, New Jersey.

Synopsis: Mr. George Fattie married his secretary with the proviso there will be no mother-in-law in the house. After the honeymoon, mother and daughter devise a plot. A dozen ridiculous caricatures of the mother are secured and one is hung in the Fattie house. Mr. Fattie is beside himself at the awful visage.

One day Mr. Fattie meets the mother in another context (who of course looks nothing like the portrait) and flirted with her. Later, the mother insists on coming into his house, so he introduces her to his wife as his sister to hid the fact of his flirtation. Then the wife announces "This is my mother," and Mr. Fattie collapses.

A CARICATURE OF A FACE: (Champion), April 8. A Mother-in-law picture, but one that Miss St. Clair, as the mother-in-law who plots to make her daughter's husband receive her, adds grace and charm to, with the good help of Miss Evelyn Francis, as her daughter. The same story was pictured by a Licensed company some weeks ago; but this, except for its too conventional and crowded office scenes, is much more pleasing. The story isn't very vital, nor deeply absorbing, but it is amusing. We enjoyed seeing it again done by these players, and feel safe in calling it a good filler. (Review in *Moving Picture World*, April-June 1912)

Left: a photo of 19-year old Evelyn Francis who played Mrs. Fattie in this movie. The rest of the cast is lost to history. Evelyn was put under contract by Champion Films.

Bertha's second film, *Trapped in the Great Metropolis*, was produced by George K. Rolands. A girl reporter and her detective boyfriend infiltrate a white slave operation in order to bring its leader to justice.

Bertha's character is "Theresa, Confederate of the Social Bureau." Shot in 1914, it was Rolands' first film. His company was located at 145 West 45th Street in New York City.

3-28-1914 *The Billboard*

In 1913, Cecil B. DeMille 1881-1959 and Jesse L. Lasky 1880-1958 met for lunch at the Claridge Grill in New York City. Looking for a way to prosper in the entertainment field, they came up with the idea of forming a company to make motion pictures, and the rest is history.

Their first film was to be a western. DeMille and his production crew traveled west by train, scouting out locations. A few miles west of Los Angeles, California, at a place called Hollywood, DeMille rented a barn and set to work on *The Squaw Man*.

Looking for a female character actress for his second film, *The Virginian*, DeMille wired Bertha and asked her to come to California. (DeMille knew Bertha. In early 1913, DeMille had cast Bertha and her daughter Elvia in *The Reckless Age*, the last stage play produced by DeMille before his transition to silent films.) So, in 1914, Bertha joined the Lasky Players and never looked back. Over a span of four years, until the day of her death, Bertha played character roles in 25 Lasky/DeMille silent movies.

The July 25, 1914 *Motion Picture News* reported:

Leaves Brady for Lasky

Mrs. Lewis McCord, who played on Orpheum time for a number of years, together with her husband, has been contracted for pictures with the Jesse Lasky company, and is delighted with her new work. To accept the offer of Director Cecil de Mille, of the Lasky company, Mrs. McCord gave up an excellent engagement with W. H. Brady.

Three of Bertha's silent films can be viewed on the internet. I've rounded up whatever still photos I could find of Bertha playing her roles in other movies.

See End Notes regarding W.H. Brady.

The Virginian (1914)

Above: Bertha reunites with her own child.

Right: Bertha gives the Virginian what-for.

Bertha's first Lasky/DeMille movie, *The Virginian*, can be viewed on line.
https://archive.org/details/TheVirginian.

Starting at about 14 minutes, the plot takes an amusing aside with the townsfolk throwing a barbeque in honor of the new school teacher. The Virginian and his sidekick play a practical joke by moving around the babies sleeping in a bedroom while their parents party. At the end of the barbeque, the parents, of course, gather up the wrong children.

You can recognize Bertha by her black skirt, white shirt with black tie, and black hat with a white feather.

Young Romance (1915)

Young Romance, Bertha's third Lasky/DeMille film is available on DVD or https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXhAzN90zsk

In this romantic comedy, Bertha plays a no-nonsense landlady.

Bertha with Tom Forman.

This PR release reminds Harrisburgers of Mrs. Lewis McCord's association to their city.

5-12-1915 *Harrisburg Daily Independent*

Edith Taliaferro at the Regent

In the Paramount production of "Young Romance," presented by Jesse L. Lasky at the Regent theatre to-day and to-morrow, there is a dual interest. Edith Taliaferro, whose wonderfful work in "Polly of the Circus" made her an international star, plays the principal role in the successful play by William C. DeMille. Her ability is well known to Harrisburgers, and supported as she is by an able company of stars, nothing but success has ever come of "Young Romance." But Edith Taliaferro is not the only person in the play who interests Harrisburgers. The other star is Mrs. Lewis McCord, widow of the late vaudeville actor, whose home was in this city, and brother-in-law of the late George Wanbaugh, who was one of the best-known newspapermen in this city. Mr. McCord's real name was Landis Wanbaugh, but when he went on the stage he assumed the name under which his widow now travels. When Mr. and Mrs. McCord appeared here in a vaudeville house they presented a sketch, "Welly Jones' Scoop," adapted from a newspaper story written by Wellington G. Jones, a local newspaperman, and printed in the Harrisburg papers as a news item, telling of the recovery of a sum of money lost by an express company. Adv.*

Rose of the Rancho (1914)

Outlaws and love in the wild west.

When Cecil B. DeMille's brother, William, joined him in Hollywood, he was immediately pressed into service as an extra in this film. William took this candid photo on the set and included it in his memoir, *Hollywood Saga.*

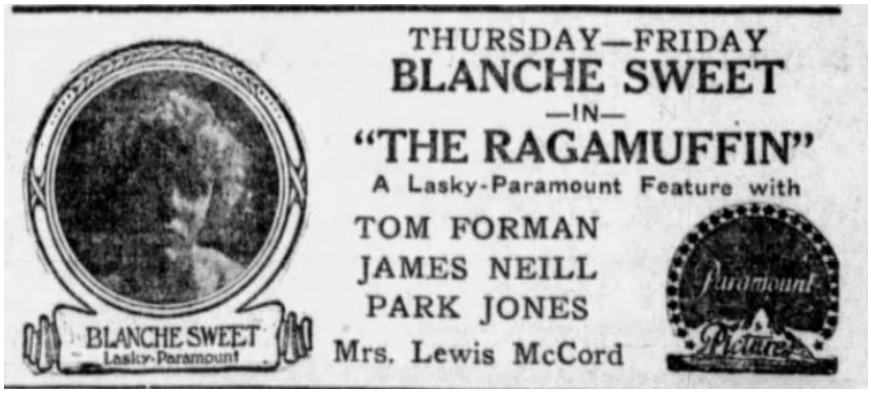
Bertha is third from left with the coif/scarf head covering. I don't know what role she played. C.B. is Cecil B. DeMille.

A "Rose of the Rancho" group. Left to right: Horwitz, (asst. director), Garcia, Mrs. McCord, C. B., Horace Carpenter, Bessie Barriscale, "Charlie," Miss Darwell, and Mr. and Mrs. Hopkins.
Photographed by the author, 1914.

Bertha in the background.

This film is at the George Eastman Museum.

The Ragamuffin (1916)



2-6-1916 *Springfield News-Sun* (Springfield, Ohio)

The plot: when given a chance, a poor young girl from the slums comes up in the world. Bertha plays "Mary, the housekeeper," and was said to "offer an unusually clever character portrayal."

An archive in the Netherlands has a 16-minute segment of this 50-minute film. The intertitles are in Dutch.

Link to the segment: youtube.com/watch?v=c5olyTVTc_A

Left - Screen shot from *The Ragamuffin*

Right - Photo sold at ebay.

The Wild Goose Chase (1915)

This film was a humorous look at an arranged marriage. Two American grandfathers in France try to arrange marriages for their grandson and granddaughter by promising them money. The young people refuse and run off to join a theatrical group where they meet and fall in love. Bertha had such a minor role, her character name is not listed.

Above: Bertha at the right.

Below: Bertha fourth from right

The Marriage of Kitty (1915)

ROMAN THEATRE

PROGRAMME WEEK OF OCTOBER 18th

Monday, September 18th—Paramount Picture

JESSE L. LASKY Presents

MISS FANNIE WARD in

"The Marriage of Kitty"

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

Fannie Ward. Richard Morris, Jack Dean, Cleo Ridgley, Tom Forman, Mrs. Lewis McCord.

"The Marriage of Kitty" is a comedy of modern continental and American life and manners, which, on the legitimate stage, has been presented in all the European countries, in England and throughout the United States and Canada.

MATINEE, 5 Cents. EVENING, 10 Cents.

10-16-1915 *Pittston Gazette* (PA)

Bertha played the part of "Annie," an old housekeeper and friend of the heroine "Kitty." The film is a romantic comedy with a convoluted plot.

Chimmie Fadden (1915)
Chimmie Fadden Out West (1915)

Bertha played the mother of the Fadden brothers, Chimmie and Larry. *Chimmie Fadden Out West* is archived in the George Eastman Museum.

Bertha and the crew spent a week in Death Valley shooting outdoor scenes for *Chimmie Fadden Out West.*

One critic: *Mrs. Lewis McCord scores an individual hit as a realistic looking Irish woman. Her work is of a high standard.* And, *This artist is absolutely unsurpassed in such parts as that of an old Irish woman.*

10-16-1915 *The Daily Notes* (Canonsburg, PA)

MONDAY, OCTOBER 18

Jesse L. Lasky presents the inimitable comedian

VICTOR MOORE

a picturization of the World-Famous Irish-American Comedy

"CHIMMIE FADDEN"

A Picturization of the Famous Comedy by E. W. Townsend

Produced under the Personal Direction of Cecil B. De Mille

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Chimmie Fadden....Victor Moore
Larry Fadden..Raymond Hatton
Mrs. Fadden (their mother)....
.....Mrs. Lewis McCord
Mr. Van Cortlandt.....Ernest Joy
Fanny (his daughter).....
..... Anita King
Hortense (her maid).....
..... Camille Astor
Antoine (French valet-crook)
..... Tom Forman
Perkins (butler)....Harry De Roy

Bertha as Mrs. Fadden, far right. So proud of her son Chimmie.

Bertha in the *Chimmie Fadden* movies

12-18-1915 *Lancaster New Era* (Lancaster, PA)

LANCASTER PEOPLE FIGURE IN "MOVIES."

There are at least two Lancaster county people who are seen constantly in the moving picture theatres throughout the United States—"Billy" Bletcher, of Lancaster city, and Mrs. Lewis McCord, widow of the late Landis M. Wambaugh, of Columbia.

"Billy" Bletcher made his first screen appearance of consequence with Mr. and Mrs. Sydney Drew in the "Jarr" series. Lately he has married, and with his bride, is now playing for the Vim Company at Jacksonville, Fla.

Mrs. McCord (or Wambaugh) became widely known first in vaudeville. Landis Wambaugh, a brother of the dead journalist, George M. Wambaugh, of Harrisburg, had made "Her First Rehearsal" and "Willy Jones' Scoop" nationally famous and both acts were seen at the Woolworth Roof Garden. A better fellow than Landis Wambaugh never lived and he was an ornament to his profession. Mrs. Wambaugh is with the Famous Players and was last seen as "Chimmie Fadden's" mother in support of Victor Moore at the Hippodrome this week.

When the *Chimmie Fadden* movie showed at the Hippodrome in Lancaster, PA, Lancaster County people were reminded of Bertha's ties to the area.

Bertha in the *Chimmie Fadden* movies

Kindling (1915)

12-15-1916 *The Neodesha Daily Sun* (Neodesha, Kansas)

A young tenement wife unwittingly gets caught up in a burglary scheme.

Bertha plays “Mrs. Bates,” who was kind to the heroine.

A copy of the film is at the George Eastman Museum.

The Dream Girl (1916)

Article in *Moving Picture World*, July 1916. Here is Bertha, looking determined. I don't know what part she played in this movie.

"THE DREAM GIRL" (Famous Players-Lasky).

Mae Murray will appear in her third photoplay production for the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company on July 17, when there will be shown publicly for the first time in Paramount theaters Cecil B. De Mille's production "The Dream Girl." This is an original story by Jeanie MacPherson and marks Miss Murray's first appearance under the direction of Mr. De Mille and under the most favorable combination of circumstances as the star in a photoplay which is the joint work of

"Scene from "The Dream Girl" (Famous Players-Lasky).

Miss MacPherson and the Lasky studio's director general, who are responsible jointly for the film drama "The Golden Chance."

As Lady Jocelyn Leigh in "To Have and to Hold," Miss Murray made her screen debut and scored a pronounced success. Again as the mischievous widow in "Sweet Kitty Bellairs" she increased her popularity and established herself as a photodramatic artist of distinction. But as the little child of the slums in "The Dream Girl" she is said to have surpassed any of her previous triumphs.

Theodore Roberts, as the father, is said to have done the best character work of his remarkable career either on the stage or on the screen. The brilliant young English actor Earle Foxe, is seen as the young college student who appears to "The Dream Girl" as the magic knight.

Other members of the cast are James Neill, Mary Mersch, Mrs. Lewis McCord and Charles E. West.

The August 1917 issue of *Picture Play Magazine* printed a heart-felt and humorous tribute to Bertha. This article was published four months before her death.

Relations Picked and Thrust

They are usually thrust upon screen folk, but, those who can, pick Mother McCord.

By Roger Packard

THE old woman who lived in the shoe led a life of sinful idleness compared with the existence of Mrs. Lewis McCord, character actress. Mrs. McCord is the mother of the entire organization at the Lasky studio. She pets, scolds, sympathizes with, chides, and helps all troubled souls from extras to stars. Every one goes to her with their troubles, and their sorrows are her sorrows, their joys her joys.

Let some ambitious ingénue feel that she is not given the proper opportunity to make a name for herself, and Mother McCord listens to the tale of woe, and then advises the latent genius to wait, and make good when the opportunity does come. Let some leading man get into a little matrimonial difficulty, and Mother McCord tells him the proper way out. All the younger people at the studio are under her protection—she keeps them away from temptation and bad habits.

Among theatrical people, Mrs. Lewis McCord is considered one of the leading character people of the country—in fact, she is continually referred to as the Annie Yeamans of the screen.

As young Bertha St. Clair, Mrs. McCord sang in a church choir in Philadelphia. An opera company playing the "Mikado" lost its prima donna. The city was then searched, and finally Miss St. Clair stepped in and filled the vacancy, and shortly made a name for herself. Eventually she married the famous actor, Lewis McCord, and,

Mrs. McCord playing the mother of Victor Moore in "Chimmie Fadden."

after a number of theatrical engagements, they went into vaudeville in a vaudeville sketch, entitled "Her Last Rehearsal." For years this amusing skit was the joy of vaudeville patrons, but Mr. McCord was taken ill and died —then Bertha St. Clair did a thing that endeared her to the whole theatrical world. She had established her own name, Bertha St. Clair, as an actress of repute, and it was under that name she had appeared with her husband, but when he passed away, she immediately sank her own identity, and took the name of Mrs. Lewis McCord, so that his name might still live during her lifetime in the minds of the theatergoing public. All that Bertha St. Clair had gained and achieved was lost that the name of Lewis McCord might live, and she was forced to commence again and gain a new reputation. And this she did.

When Cecil B. De Mille started to organize his all-star organization for the first picture the Lasky Company produced, he promptly thought of Mrs. McCord for the character part. She had been with him in some of his theatrical productions, and, although she was in New York and he was in California, he telegraphed her to come on. No mention was made of salary, or of contract, for Mrs. McCord knew that both would be adjusted to her satisfaction.

Mrs. McCord scored a substantial hit in the first picture she appeared in, and has been repeating that success ever since. Any time a motherly old lady—an Irish washerwoman, or a negro mammy, or a slum virago is needed, Mrs. McCord always fills the bill.

As *Mother Fadden*, with Victor Moore in the "Chimmie Fadden" series, her success was overwhelming. She made the Irish washerwoman in the New York slums a most lovable and sympathetic character. With the instinct of a masterly artist she could move the audience from laughter to tears and back again.

Mrs. McCord is large—and she need be, because no slight body could hold her great, big heart, or bear the burdens of the many tribulations that are placed upon her shoulders by her adopted children.

No matter who is ill at the studio, Mrs. McCord is at the bedside. No matter who is hungry or homeless, there is always a bountiful meal, or a roof, waiting in her little home. She is the godmother to every studio baby.

And, beside her human traits, Mother McCord is primarily an actress, and one of the best in the screen character parts. Since her engagement with the Lasky Company she has been cast in countless plays, and her portrayal of characters, plus personality, have gained her the title of "Mother" McCord.

Landis Wanbaugh Dies in New York

Was Known on State as Lew McCord; Pneumonia Victim; Will Be Buried Here

Landis Wanbaugh, a well-known actor, whose home was at 1939 North Second street, this city, and who in stage life was Lew McCord, died in New York City this morning at 11 o'clock after a two weeks' illness of pneumonia and Bright's disease. McCord had gone to New York for treatment prior to taking up a new sketch. His wife and mother were with him at the time of his death.

Landis Wanbaugh was a brother of the late George N. Wanbaugh, former well-known newspaperman. Landis Wanbaugh was 42 years of age. He had been an actor for fifteen years. His career before the footlights began in Harrisburg at the old Eden Musee, which stood on the site now occupied by the Telegraph building, and was better known as Shakespeare Hall. The Musee was controlled by Harry Davis, of Pittsburg, and managed by John G. Foley, and Newton Beers, who was playing "Lights o' London," gave Wanbaugh his first trial. Comedy parts fitted him well and he became quite proficient, going on the road with the Newton Beers company, and later becoming a member of a New York stock company. Subsequently he joined the Belasco forces, playing in the dramatic production, "Madame Butterfly," and in "Naughty Anthony." The latter was a part of the repertoire of Blanche Bates, who was presenting "The Darling of the Gods," and Mr. McCord became a member of the Blanche Bates company, remaining with it for several years.

A member of this company was Bertha Bates, of Philadelphia, a relative of Blanche Bates, and during an engagement in Philadelphia Mr. McCord and Miss Bates were married. The following season the McCord Company entered vaudeville, presenting "Her Last Rehearsal." This sketch was produced for a number of years, until "Welly Jones' Scoop," a dramatization of a story written by a local newspaperman, was taken up and was played by the McCord Company for two years.

The last sketch in which McCord appeared was "Winning on Wind."

Landis Wanbaugh was the son of the late William A. Wanbaugh and was born in Bainbridge, Lancaster county. His mother, Annie Wanbaugh, who has been making her home with her son for several years, was called to New York city yesterday. The Wanbaugh family came here from Columbia about three years ago and purchased a home at 1939 North Second street. The body will be shipped to Harrisburg for burial, and arrangements for the funeral will be announced later.

Mr. Wanbaugh was a member of the Elks, White Rats' Association, Actors' Club of New York city and of several insurance orders.

The *Harrisburg Telegraph* (Harrisburg, PA) published obituaries for Landis and Bertha Wanbaugh.

Landis died February 16, 1911 and Bertha December 24, 1917.

Funeral Services Held For Mrs. Bertha Wanbaugh

Funeral services for Mrs. Bertha Wanbaugh, wife of the late Landis Wanbaugh, were held from Hoffman's undertaikng parlors, at 2 o'clock this afternoon. Mrs. Wanbaugh was known on the professional stage as Mrs. Lewis McCord, and before the death of her husband, played with him on the vaudeville stage. One of their feature acts was "Welly Jones' Scoop," which was played from coast to coast. Mrs. Wanbaugh, under her professional name, was identified with the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Films until a short time before her death. She died at her home, 151 West Forty-sixth street, New York City, Monday afternoon, of a complication of diseases. Her body was brought to Harrisburg for burial in the Harrisburg Cemetery.

Mrs. Wanbaugh's daughter, Miss Elvia Bates, and her sister, Mrs. Mary L. Bates, are the only survivors.

Mrs. Wanbaugh played in the cast with Blanche Bates and other famous stars. Her first appearance was in the old Shakespeare Theater in this city. She was well-known here and had many friends.

There is no indication Bertha was related to the actress Blanche Bates 1873-1941.

Bertha and her daughter Elvia used the last name Bates; likely it derived from Bertha's sister Mary Clear 1858-1939 who married James M. Bates 1853-1944. The Bates lived in Philadelphia, cared for Bertha's daughter Elvia when she was child, and probably provided a home base for Bertha until her marriage to Landis.

Harrisburg Cemetery, Harrisburg, Dauphin County, Pennsylvania

Findagrave has memorials for Landis, Bertha and Elvia in the Wanbaugh Plot in Section U-2.

Only Landis has a stone to mark his burial spot. It reads: Landis M., 1868 – 1911, He Was Just.

Cemetery Cards provide burial information for Bertha and Elvia.

Bertha C. Wanbaugh (Mrs.)
Age 57, died 12-24-1917, New York, cause Pneumonia
Section U2, Lot 7, Space 3
Widow of Landis M. Wanbaugh

Evelyn Elvia Bates (Mrs.)
Age 55, died 6-20-1953, New York, New York
Section U2, Lot 7 West, Space 1
Wife of John B. Bates

6/15/2018 email from Rich Dennis who researched all Bates in the Harrisburg Cemetery

The information on Evelyn came from the Interment Card of the Harrisburg Cemetery. Here is information on the card that I did not post. Her residence was New York, NY. She was the wife of John B. Bates. On the back of the card there is this handwritten note: "Given name: Elvira Evelyn Bates, daughter of Mrs. Bertha C. Wanbaugh." Cause of death is not listed.

Bertha Clear was born June 30, 1862 in Philadelphia (birth certificate).

Bertha's first child Evelyn/Elvia Diggle was born November 1885.

Bertha's second child Irene Dlggle was born November 1887 and died August 11, 1949 in Seattle, Washington. Irene married Durwood Harvey and had children.

END NOTES

Bertha's first two adventures are found here http://ancestorsandothers.net/index.htm
"The Skeleton's Bride"
"Further Adventures of Bertha Clear, The Skeleton's Bride"

History of Lakewood Theater
Jenny Oby, *Lakewood Theatre*, 2017

Lakewood Theater today
https://www.lakewoodtheater.org/

Maine historic newspapers at Chronicling America
https://www.mainegenealogy.net/newspaper_search.asp
Search the Skowhegan newspapers for news of Lakewood Theater and Landis and Bertha:
The Somerset Reporter (1885-1909)
The Independent Reporter (1909-1924)

Deed citation for the cottage on Lake Wesserunsett in Madison, Maine
Somerset Co. Deeds, Francis W. Briggs to Lewis McCord, 6-16-1903, 264/35

Internet Movie Database – Mrs. Lewis McCord - https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0566387/

1917 Sunshine Nan (Bertha died after filming started)
1917 Ghost House
1917 Those Without Sin
1917 On Record
1917 The Golden Fetter
1916 Unprotected
1916 Common Ground
1916 The Dream Girl
1916 The Heart Nora Flynn
1916 The Race
1916 The Ragamuffin
1915 The Immigrant
1915 Chimmie Fadden Out West
1915 Armstrong's Wife
1915 The Chorus Lady
1915 The Marriage of Kitty
1915 Kindling
1915 Chimmie Fadden
1915 The Wild Goose Chase
1915 Stolen Goods
1915 The Country Boy
1915 The Warrens of Virginia
1915 Young Romance
1914 Rose of the Rancho
1914 The Virginian
1914 Trapped in the Great Metropolis
1912 The Caricature of a Face

The H in W. H. Brady is probably a typo. William A. Brady 1863-1950, actor, manager, stage and motion picture producer and sports promoter. In 1914, Mr. Brady set up a motion picture studio in Fort Lee, N.J.

The Champion: A Story of America's First Film Town, documentary, view at https://vimeo.com/120117737

Robert S. Birchard, *Cecil B. DeMille's Hollywood*, 2004

Gene Ringgold, *The Films of Cecil B. DeMille*, 1962
https://archive.org/details/filmsofcecilbdem0000ring/mode/2up

William C. DeMille, *Hollywood Saga*, 1939
https://archive.org/details/hollywoodsaga00unse/mode/2up

Historic newspapers and publications for tracking down Bertha, Landis and Elvia
FultonHistory.org
Newspapers.com ($)
Media History Digital Library, Eric Hoyt and the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research - https://lantern.mediahist.org/

Tribute to Bertha
Picture Play Magazine, August 1917 - https://archive.org/details/pictureplaymagaz06unse

George Eastman Museum
https://www.eastman.org/collections-online

A SATURDAY POST FAKE IS EXPOSED

All Stagefolk Do Not Dwell in Bohemian Atmosphere

SOME LOVE THEIR OWN HOMES

Proved By Visit to Residence of Mr. and Mrs. Lewis McCord, of This Week's Orpheum Bill—Domesticity Instead of Bohemianism.

12-23-1909 *Harrisburg Daily Independent*

A newspaper reporter visits Bertha at her home in Harrisburg. View at Newspapers.com