

ELIZABETH KEMBLE WHITLOCK

In the late 1700's one family dominated theatre in England, the children of Roger Kemble 'owned' London. Of Roger's twelve children, John Philip Kemble (1757-1823) and his sisters Sarah (1755-1831) and Elizabeth (1761-1836) were to dominate the stage for nearly fifty years. Sarah, known as Mrs. Siddons', portrayal of Lady MacBeth was the bench mark for years after her death.

On June 21, 1785 Elizabeth Kemble married Charles Edward Whitlock, one of the managers of the Theatre Royal, Chester. The Whitlocks' careers took them to both sides of the Atlantic over the next thirty years and numerous references can be found to both their successes and their failures. In 1803 Mrs. Whitlock was the leading lady at the Charleston Theatre and there is a painting of her by Dunlap in the Harvard theatre collection in her role as Lady Teazle. Charles Whitlock was also shown in the company playing both serious and tragic roles.

A description of Eliza Whitlock by her niece Fanny Kemble (1809-1893) gives us a picture of her in later life. " Aunt Eliza was a coarse edition of her sister Mrs. Siddons, wearing an auburn wig and a monstrous Pamela cap always on one side, Mrs. Whitlock possessed the sonorous Kemble voice but none of the family dignity; as she talked, she would slap her thigh in enforcement of some incredible statement and fling out an 'I declare to God' that would send the children into fits of stifled laughter."

Mrs. Whitlock performed for the major personalities of the day and had met many of them. George Washington's favourite was apparently School for Scandal and the mention of the French statesman, Tallyrand's name was the source of some amusement to the family!!

Elizabeth (Kemble) Whitlock died in England, February 27,1836, Charles Whitlock having died in 1812. She and Charles had one son John Kemble Whitlock, baptized at Newcastle-upon-Tyne April 20,1786 but no further mention of him has been found and it is possible he did not live to maturity.

Sources: "Fanny Kemble" by Margaret Armstrong; X1375; UBC40,57,102