

Music at an Exhibition: A Case Study of the Tasmanian International Exhibition, 1894–1895

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On 15 November 1894 a cantata by local composer Frederick Augustus Packer was premiered in Hobart employing organ, an orchestra of around forty, and a chorus of over three hundred. The occasion for this spectacle was the opening of the Tasmanian International Exhibition and excerpts from Packer's commissioned cantata, *The Land of Beauty*, had been heard earlier that same evening, along with Handel's 'Hallelujah Chorus,' as part of the opening ceremony.¹ The Exhibition continued as it had begun, with an extensive musical programme, including an eight-week season of orchestral concerts, large-scale choral works, and chamber music, as well as piano recitals, organ recitals, vocal recitals and military band music.

The monumental success of the Great Exhibition in London in 1851 had inspired a late nineteenth-century fashion for exhibitions, with some notable triumphs (such as the Paris Exhibition in 1878 and the Chicago Exhibition of 1893) and, not surprisingly, some financial liabilities. While the primary impulse behind these exhibitions was trade and the display of industrial innovations, there was generally an associated display of culture, often tinged with nationalistic pride. The perceived high points of achievement in painting, sculpture and architecture of the host nation were commonly presented as part of the promotional activities, resulting in striking architectural monuments to the Exhibition movement such as the Crystal Palace and the Eiffel Tower. Music too played its part in sustaining the festal mood. Patriotic works were commissioned, particularly for Exhibition openings, and musical spectacles became part of the Exhibition landscape.

The first Tasmanian International Exhibition was mounted with high hopes of broadening markets for Tasmanian goods and establishing better trade links with the other colonies of a yet unfederated Australia, as well as with Britain and Europe. Exhibitors were sought widely at home and abroad, primarily to ensure an influx of intercolonial and international visitors to boost the Tasmanian economy. Yet from a purely business point of view, the International

¹ *Official Gazette and Programme Tasmanian International Exhibition Hobart 1894-5* 15 Nov. 1894 (State Library of Tasmania, Tasmaniana Collection). Programme printed in the *Mercury* [Hobart] 14 Nov. 1894. F.A. Packer (1839-1902) was the organist at Hobart's St David's Cathedral and well-known as a performer and composer, particularly of songs and commemorative pieces.

Exhibition failed to be the financial success that had been hoped. The number of exhibitors was below expectations and the number of international and intercolonial visitors was also well down on projections.² In retrospect, the timing of the Exhibition had been far from optimal. An Intercolonial Exhibition had been held in Launceston just a few years previously (1891–92), and it may be surmised that the elapsed time was too short for colonial exhibitors to be keen to return to Tasmania in the severely straitened circumstances of the Depression. Of mainland Australia, only Victoria mounted a major display.³

The Depression no doubt played its part in discouraging or scaling down international exhibits as well, and customs duties were reportedly a disincentive for English exhibitors.⁴ A similar damping effect was seen on public attendances with the total number of visitors to the exhibition over its sixth month duration estimated at 290,000⁵—less than twice the total population of Tasmania at the time.⁶ The content and tone of the regular Exhibition columns in the Hobart *Mercury* suggest a substantial reduction in activity and even interest in the Exhibition in its closing months. Six months was perhaps too long to sustain the excitement, and the Exhibition officially closed on 15 May 1895, more with a whimper than a bang.

Contemporary commentary identified the lasting benefit of the Exhibition as advances in education of the populace in agriculture, technical sciences and the arts, achieved in an atmosphere of entertainment, particularly through the cultural contribution of the art galleries.⁷ In the planning stages of the Exhibition it had been reported to the organizing committee that the chief attractions of the recent Dunedin South Seas Exhibition had been fine arts and music,⁸ and the musical triumph of the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition of 1888 was certainly a model to aspire to.⁹ Subsequent resolutions passed by the committee confirm that the Exhibition was seen as an opportunity to expose the public to high culture, specifically through negotiated exhibitions of art collections from the Royal Academy and European or American galleries, and with programmes of quality musical entertainment.¹⁰

Accordingly a generous budget was allocated for the Exhibition and an imposing building with eleven acres of annexes and gardens was erected in the Domain near the Derwent River. The main hall had a capacity of three thousand and was designed to take a chorus of four

² *Mercury* 16 May 1895.

³ *Tasmanian International Exhibition Souvenir*, 5 (State Library of Tasmania, Tasmaniana Collection).

⁴ *Mercury* 16 May 1895. Customs duties seem to have been operating as a form of protectionism aimed at fostering local industry, and the financial duress of the colony during the Depression made the income from import taxes even more important to the local economy.

⁵ *Mercury* 16 May 1895.

⁶ P.G. Mercer, 'The Tasmanian International Exhibition, 1894-95: An Ephemeral Event or a Lasting Legacy?' *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings* 28/1 (Mar. 1981): 27.

⁷ *Mercury* 16 May 1895.

⁸ *Mercury* 1 Sep. 1894.

⁹ W. Bebbington (ed.), *Oxford Companion to Australian Music* (Melbourne: OUP, 1997) 161. A programme of 244 concerts was mounted under Sir Frederick Cowen, including symphonies, concertos and oratorios standard in the British repertoire of the time.

¹⁰ A selection of cuttings from the *Mercury* reporting on deliberations of Exhibition committee meetings are to be found in a scrapbook of newspaper cuttings and ephemera (Morton Scrapbook 1894-8) compiled by Alexander Morton (1854-1907) and held in the Tasmanian Museum. The cuttings reflect Morton's activities and personal interests as director of the Tasmanian Museum and Botanical Gardens and as a member of the executive management committee of the Tasmanian International Exhibition. Some concert reviews and programmes are included, as well as a good deal about the fine art exhibits.

hundred and an orchestra of sixty, yet no trace of this structure remains. Unlike the vast majority of host cities, Hobart was denied a permanent architectural reminder of its exhibition. An Act of Parliament passed in 1892 enshrined in legislation that no permanent structure could be erected on the working man's recreation area known as the Domain.¹¹ Thus the buildings were dismantled a few months after the end of the Exhibition, despite a vocal lobby in the papers lamenting the loss of a much-needed concert venue with apparently superb acoustics.¹²

The responsibility for the musical programme of the Exhibition was placed initially in the hands of a local musician and composer. Mr Arthur Mills was engaged as musical director on a twelve-month contract from July 1893. Over that time he established both the Exhibition choir of around 300 voices, and an orchestra, and conducted them in concert for the official opening of the main Exhibition Hall on 13 November 1893. This performance included the Tasmanian premiere of Mendelssohn's *Festgesang* and Mills' own composition, *A Song of Welcome*.¹³ Mills conducted the choir and orchestra for a number of other successful concerts given in the Exhibition Hall in the intervening months, but at the conclusion of his contract, the position of musical director was thrown open to tender.¹⁴

The organizing committee had made a large commitment to music in the Exhibition budget and was keen to ensure success. After some 'wrathful' disputes in committee, Mr Otto Linden, recently arrived from Melbourne, was duly appointed to direct the music at the Exhibition.¹⁵ Linden had submitted the lowest tender and substantially undercut the incumbent, Mills, and in spite of Mills' demonstrable success thus far, the committee regarded Linden's reputation in mainland Australia as a guarantee of a quality outcome.¹⁶ Linden agreed to undertake full duties as musical conductor, and supply a military band to play six times a week in the rotunda for the full term of the Exhibition and an orchestra of forty-two of the 'best procurable' players in the colonies for an eight-week season.¹⁷ He also agreed to provide the requisite number of weekly concerts and grand concerts with the choir, engage vocal soloists and procure the music required for these concerts conditional upon his access to the University of Melbourne library.¹⁸

Although the Exhibition was due to open in mid-November, the arrangements with Linden were not finally settled until late September, as he was holding out for a substantial reduction in the number of free concerts as 'the principal part of his remuneration was to come from concert receipts.'¹⁹ Eventually the committee had little choice but to capitulate to his demands.

¹¹ P.G. Mercer, 'The Tasmanian International Exhibition' 24.

¹² P.G. Mercer, 'The Tasmanian International Exhibition' 35.

¹³ *Clipper* 14 Nov. 1893 referred to in P.G. Mercer, 'The Tasmanian International Exhibition' 28.

¹⁴ Four applications were received. Mr Fred Clutson tendered £1,650, while Mr W.J. Turner submitted two proposals for £1,320 and £2,260 respectively. Mr Otto Linden submitted a proposal with some changes to the specifications but for £1,000 and £100 towards advertising. Mr A.J. Mills estimated £2,800 for the tender specifications. *Mercury* 1 Sep. 1894 (Morton Scrapbook, 19).

¹⁵ *Mercury* 1 Sep. 1894 and 25 Sep. 1894 (Morton Scrapbook, 19).

¹⁶ Little biographical information has been found thus far about Linden, although prior to his time in Melbourne, he was apparently a conductor of the Brisbane Philharmonic Society. See W. Arundel Orchard, *Music in Australia* (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1952) 126.

¹⁷ The original terms of the tender were for a ten-week orchestral season, *Mercury* 1 Sep. 1894 (Morton Scrapbook, 19). Local players appear to have been the major contingent.

¹⁸ *Mercury* 1 Sep. 1894 (Morton Scrapbook, 19). The source(s) of the orchestral music employed by Linden during the Exhibition have not been established at this point.

¹⁹ *Mercury* 1 Sep. 1894 (Morton Scrapbook, 19).

The committee's plans for a free afternoon concert every week and three hundred free tickets for one evening concert each week were watered down by Linden, apparently to his pecuniary advantage. The concessions he won included a limit of three free orchestral concerts for the season, a maximum of two hundred free tickets to be issued for Saturday evening concerts, and an agreement that the free afternoon concert each week could be piano, organ or vocal selections,²⁰ thereby maximizing the profit margin. These arrangements not only divided the committee but also provoked letters of protest from those who discovered that their season ticket for the Exhibition provided access to so few concerts, and that a further subscription of two guineas had to be paid for entry to Linden's advertised eighty concerts.²¹

The range of musical activities on offer was broad, with the eight-week orchestral season providing the greatest concentration of musical activity. Military band music was a prominent feature of the Exhibition experience although programmes do not appear to have survived. Oratorio was a highlight of the concert season, which featured, along with the almost mandatory Handel's *Messiah* and Haydn's *Creation*,²² the Tasmanian premiere of Sullivan's *The Golden Legend* (1886) to a 'depressingly small audience.'²³ A mitigating circumstance, however, may have been that the Town Hall was overflowing that same evening with those who had flocked to hear a popular variety concert by the All Saints' choir from St Kilda.

In addition to the official concerts, recitals were given daily on the grand pianos being exhibited by Brinsmead & Sons. According to reviews these recitals were generally well attended whether given by local or visiting artists,²⁴ and not infrequently vocal items were included on the programmes. Central to the repertoire performed during the eight-week concert season were early nineteenth-century works by high-profile composers such as Mendelssohn, Schubert and Chopin. Virtuoso works of Gottschalk and Liszt transcriptions (particularly those of Schubert lieder) were well favoured. The chamber music concerts relied heavily on Haydn, Mendelssohn, Schubert, and some works of Mozart, but as with the piano recitals, the majority of the repertoire was from lesser-known (even obscure) nineteenth-century composers. Few concertos appear to have been programmed but there was a performance of the Mendelssohn Piano Concerto and Rheinberger's new Organ Concerto.²⁵ The most popular concerts, however, seem to have been the vocal recitals by visiting artists—who included American prima donna Madame Emily Spada, the English tenor Mr Philip Newbury, the boy soprano Cyril Tyler, and Miss Amelia Banks's company—as well as the afternoon Grand Concerts, with their variety programmes relying heavily on oratorio arias and popular drawing-room ballads. Reviews of such concerts stress the appreciative response of the audience, who often stretched programmes to an inordinate length with repeated and noisy calls for encores. The artists seem to have come prepared and been quite willing to oblige on most occasions.

²⁰ *Mercury* 25 Sep. 1894 (Morton Scrapbook, 19).

²¹ Letter to the editor, *Mercury* 14 Nov. 1894.

²² The review in the *Mercury* (2 Jan. 1895) states that the audience was smaller than anticipated. The orchestra was singled out for particular praise.

²³ *Mercury* 18 Jan. 1895.

²⁴ A regular and popular performer at these concerts was the previous musical director of the exhibition, Mr A.J. Mills. Other artists included Mr F.A. Packer, Mrs Turnbull, Mr Tebbitt and Miss Elsie Morrisby. Two concerts were also given by Henri Kowalski and his associate artist, Horace Poussard.

²⁵ Performed on 19 Jan. 1895.

The orchestral works performed during the eight-week orchestral season (Table 1) provide an interesting picture of what was deemed by Linden to be appropriate fare for the Hobart audience, bearing in mind that this was apparently the first time a full orchestra had been brought to Hobart.²⁶

Table 1. Tasmanian International Exhibition Orchestral season 1894-95 (titles as programmed)²⁷

OVERTURES:	RHAPSODIES:
Auber <i>Fra Diavolo</i>	Liszt Hungarian no. 2
Auber <i>Cheval de Bronze</i>	Mackenzie 'Scotch'
Auber <i>Domine Noir</i>	INCIDENTAL MUSIC:
Auber <i>Masaniello</i>	Mendelssohn <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>
Beethoven <i>Fidelio</i>	Schubert <i>Rosamunde</i>
Beethoven <i>Prometheus</i>	Sullivan <i>Graceful Dance from Henry VIII</i>
Beethoven <i>Egmont</i>	BALLET MUSIC:
Flotow <i>Stradella</i>	Auber <i>Le Dieu et la Bayadère</i>
Gade <i>Im Hochland</i>	Auber <i>Masaniello</i>
Handel <i>Occasional</i>	Meyerbeer <i>L'Africaine</i>
Herold <i>Zampa</i>	Meyerbeer <i>Le prophète</i>
Mendelssohn <i>Ruy Blas</i>	Meyerbeer <i>Robert</i>
Mozart <i>Figaro</i>	Schubert <i>Rosamunde</i>
Nicolai <i>Merry Wives of Windsor</i>	MARCHES:
Reissiger <i>Felsenmühle</i>	Beethoven <i>Ruins of Athens</i>
Rossini <i>William Tell</i>	Gounod <i>Funeral of a Marionette</i>
Rossini <i>Il Barbiere</i>	Gungl <i>Retreat</i>
Rossini <i>Gazza Ladra</i>	Mendelssohn <i>Athalie</i>
Rossini <i>Semiramide</i>	Meyerbeer <i>Coronation</i>
Schubert <i>Rosamunde</i>	Michaelis <i>Turkish</i>
Thomas <i>Mignon</i>	Mozart <i>Turkish</i>
Wagner <i>Flying Dutchman</i>	Södermann <i>Swedish wedding</i>
Wagner <i>Rienzi</i>	Suppé <i>Boccacia</i>
Wagner <i>Tannhäuser</i>	Wagner <i>Tannhäuser</i>
Weber <i>Preciosa</i>	MISCELLANEOUS:
Weber <i>Freischütz</i>	Bach <i>Andante in D (strings only)</i>
Weber <i>Oberon</i>	Boccherini <i>Minuet (strings only)</i>
Weber <i>Jubilee</i>	Brahms <i>Hungarian Dances</i>
SYMPHONIES:	Dunkler <i>Au bord de la mer</i>
Beethoven c minor no. 5	Gungl <i>Dream of Ocean Waltz</i>
Beethoven F major no. 6 (Pastoral)	Handel <i>Largo from Xerxes (org, hp, str)</i>
Haydn D major no. 2	Moskowski <i>In foreign parts</i>
Haydn D Major no. 4	Raff <i>Italian suite (1st movt Tarantelle)</i>
Haydn B-flat Major no. 12	Reinecke <i>King Manfred Entr'acte</i>
Mendelssohn a minor (Scotch)	Taubert <i>Liebeslied for str and oboe</i>
Mozart E-flat major	Weber <i>Invitation a la Valse</i>
Raff <i>Lenore</i>	
Schubert b minor (Unfinished)	

²⁶ *Mercury* 16 May 1895.

²⁷ An incomplete list of works performed in the orchestral season was printed in the *Mercury* 28 Jan. 1895. Additions and corrections have been made from reviews and programmes in the *Mercury* to produce this listing. The numbering of the Haydn symphonies does not correspond to the modern numbering and no further identifying information is provided about the Mozart symphony.

This was a fairly ambitious programme for Linden's orchestra and was, by all accounts, performed well. The capabilities of the orchestra, the availability of the music and the perceived taste of the audience would have all exerted influence on Linden's choice of music. This choice is remarkable for the predominance of opera overtures, marches and dance movements by early to mid nineteenth-century European composers. There are very few works dating from the eighteenth century. Those symphonies that were programmed were infrequently performed and even then performance of selected movements was the general rule. Raff's *Lenore* symphony stands out as the only symphony composed within twenty-five years of the Exhibition, but its introduction in programmes at the Melbourne Exhibition in 1888 was no doubt a factor in its inclusion.²⁸ Most of the works were probably not known to the Hobart audiences, yet according to the reviews, the concerts of the orchestral series were well-attended and the audiences appreciative. Presumably the works found favour through their comfortable mid-nineteenth-century idiom, and an abundance of good tunes and well-defined rhythms. Linden seems to have chosen repertoire designed to woo an audience largely unaccustomed to classical music, with the small representation of absolute music symptomatic of this aim.

The best revelation of public taste, however, comes from the programme of the final concert of the orchestral season, which was selected by a plebiscite conducted at the orchestral concert held the previous evening, with an audience of around a thousand. Ballots of this type were not a new phenomenon.²⁹ The two works receiving the highest number of votes (by a considerable margin) were Mendelssohn's Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Gounod's *Funeral March of a Marionette* (see Table 2).

Table 2. Results of the Plebiscite conducted 25 January 1895 ³⁰

Composer	Work	Votes
Mendelssohn	Overture to <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	97
Gounod	<i>Funeral March of a Marionette</i>	92
Wagner	March from <i>Tannhäuser</i>	78
Wagner	Overture to <i>Tannhäuser</i>	78
Schubert	Ballet from <i>Rosamunde</i>	78
Liszt	<i>Hungarian Rhapsody</i>	71
Raff	<i>Lenore</i> Symphony	68
Rossini	Overture to <i>William Tell</i>	47
Boccherini	Minuet	46

These works were performed at the final orchestral concert of the Exhibition season, at 3.30pm on Saturday 26 January 1895, along with the first movement of Schubert's *Unfinished* symphony. The catchy melodies and infectious rhythms of the 'people's choice,' characteristics that are epitomized by Gounod's crowd-pleasing *Funeral March of a Marionette*, might be seen to account in large part for the popularity of these selections.

²⁸ Orchard, *Music in Australia* 118.

²⁹ A plebiscite of the audience was held at the 1880 Crystal Palace Saturday Concerts and this practice appears to have been employed in Australia prior to the Hobart Exhibition.

³⁰ *Mercury* 26 Jan. 1895.

The number of votes received for the overture to *Tannhäuser* is particularly noteworthy, as this work apparently received its first performance in Hobart only a week before, on 19 January. A quite lengthy synopsis of the opera was printed in the *Mercury* on the day of the concert. Whether the work had instant appeal to the general audience cannot be deduced from the plebiscite, but there was certainly a cohort that wanted to hear it again.

The orchestral season was a high point in the musical life of the Exhibition, and by the time the Exhibition closed about four months later, it seems that a degree of musical fatigue had set in. The only appearance of the Exhibition chorus in the closing ceremony was in the singing of the National Anthem. By May 1895, reviews of musical entertainment at the Exhibition became cursory or non-existent, a noticeable contrast to the enthusiasm of the columns in the early months.

The effect of the Exhibition on the musical taste of the colonial audience is difficult to discern. There was clearly an audience for classical music before the advent of the Exhibition, as reports of a performance of Beethoven's Mass in C given in the Hobart Town Hall attest.³¹ Every seat was occupied, the alcoves and ante-rooms were overflowing and the work was greeted by 'long and excited' applause. There is also evidence that a strong participatory musical culture was already established in Hobart,³² for Mills apparently experienced little difficulty in raising a choir of three hundred for the Exhibition, nor did Linden when he re-auditioned the choir and sought another sixty voices.³³ Furthermore, reviews of the choral performances suggest that the singers were generally well-equipped to tackle the music.

A rise in the level of musical confidence of the community would have been an inevitable outcome of the Exhibition's musical programme, which had demonstrated clearly—relying for the most part on local performers—that large-scale musical events were achievable and desirable in Hobart. The orchestral season spurred on those inspired by the prospect of a permanent orchestra for Hobart, and from the size of the audiences attending the orchestral concerts it may be surmised that new members were won to the cause.

Further research needs to be undertaken to establish whether there was, in the longer term, a noticeable change in programming and continued commitment to mounting large-scale musical events in Hobart in the wake of the Exhibition. One might expect that the most popular of the orchestral works from the season would reappear on concert programmes following the Exhibition, with a similar effect on local choral and piano repertoire.

Immediately following the close of the Exhibition there was a lapse into the familiar variety concert paradigm for relatively major musical events such as the Grand Farewell Concert given for Otto Linden in the Exhibition Hall on 30 May 1895. Linden himself performed in a number of items including Liszt's transcription of the Romance from Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. The Exhibition Choir regrouped for the occasion yet their contribution was but a few madrigals.³⁴ A Grand Musical Evening billed 'to equal if not surpass' the music of the

³¹ *Mercury* 7 Aug. 1894 (Morton Scrapbook, 15). This performance was conducted by Otto Linden.

³² The Hobart Musical Union had been formed in 1867 and ran for almost thirty years. The Orpheus Club, founded in 1877, is still in operation today and the Hobart Operatic Society was founded in 1894. See Bebbington (ed.), *Oxford Companion to Australian Music* 277.

³³ 'The Choir and Music,' *Mercury* 16 May 1895 (Morton Scrapbook, 44).

³⁴ *Mercury* 29 May 1895.

Exhibition³⁵ was given on 10 December 1895, but the promised chorus of 250 voices apparently failed to materialize. As it transpired, the event was effectively an array of vocal solos—mostly drawing room ballads with some instrumental solos, chamber music (a Haydn Trio) and a musical sketch. This type of programming was aesthetically and financially 'safe.' The variety paradigm ensured there would be something to everyone's taste, and consequently receipts could be maximized.

In that sense, the Exhibition's musical programming was often at odds with received wisdom. Linden had used the variety format for some of the Grand Afternoon Concerts, but, as a general rule, presented the public with more homogenous programmes. The commentary published in the *Mercury* at the close of the Exhibition contains some revealing observations:

[T]he best was done according to the lights of the committee, which tried to provide first class entertainment for the people, which [*sic*] was not appreciated as it should have been. Had another course been taken, it is certain that the pecuniary results may have been better, but, then, the committee might have felt that it had hardly done its duty in the matter of endeavouring to raise the public taste and supply a classical musical entertainment.³⁶

Claiming moral profit in the face of unsatisfactory financial return seems a quintessentially Victorian response, but it is a common refrain, even today, among those frustrated with the public's failure to embrace the new. Financial records of the Exhibition located so far are somewhat opaque, but appear to show that in the final analysis the Exhibition broke even, which was certainly not the outcome anticipated when the project was first undertaken. Records have not been found that would make it possible to discern the specific effect of Linden's reduction of the proposed number of free concerts and his two-guinea concert subscriptions on the financial outcomes for either the music budget or Linden personally. It is clear though that what appeared initially as almost cynical manipulation of the organizing committee, was in retrospect necessary and fiscally-responsible change, enabling Linden greater freedom in programming than might otherwise have been the case, given his low tender. Without such changes the pecuniary results may well have been much worse, or the aims of the programming compromised by concerts designed to match rather than elevate taste.

There is no doubt that the Exhibition offered a new experience of music for the Hobart public, particularly in regard to orchestral music, but its real value lay in the proportion of the population exposed as audience members, performers or both. Exhibitions were a cult of the new; their primary attraction was in the display of the latest technology, scientific advances and novelty, which was extended into artistic and cultural practices. Given this prevailing mode, the Tasmanian Exhibition audience was more likely to be receptive to new musical experiences than would normally be the case. Even so, a sudden cultural shift in a community, provoked by experiences in the somewhat rarefied atmosphere of an exhibition would be an untenable scenario. Rather, it would be more realistic to view the musical programme of the Tasmanian International Exhibition as a catalyst or facilitator for more gradual cultural development and the broadening of musical taste.

³⁵ *Mercury* 4 Dec. 1895 (Morton Scrapbook, 78). A printed programme of the actual concert is to be found in the Morton Scrapbook, 82.

³⁶ *Mercury* 16 May 1895 (Morton Scrapbook, 37).