

## MT. VERNON'S CHILD PRODIGIES OF THE 1890s

In the 1890s the local newspapers began to mention the wonderful abilities of two children, Wade (b. 1890) and Gertie (b. 1888) Cochran. They were the children of John and Mary E. Cochran, a show business family. (In the 1900 Census of Jefferson County John Cochran listed his profession as "On Stage.") The children's feats of memory were entertaining enough that they were taken on tours of the United States and Europe.



The first notice of the children in the Jefferson County newspapers came January 8, 1896, when they reported that Gertie Cochran, memory expert from Mt. Vernon, was in Erie, Pennsylvania, for an exhibition. Just weeks later on February 2 Wade Cochran and his mother visited the *Mt. Vernon Register's* office to explain that both he and his sister were "memory marvels."

The next report came on October 30, 1898, when the *Register* stated: "Master Wade Cochran of this city, whose marvelous feats of memory have been a source of astonishment in American centers of population, will leave in a few days for London, England, under an engagement with Barnum and Bailey's Show."

In England on December 1, 1898, at the Olympia Theater Wade performed with others who might be described as typical "side show" acts (Jo Jo, the dog-faced boy; Mademoiselle Ivy, the moss-haired girl; and James Morris, the elastic-skin man). One article titled "Freaks at Olympia" noted that, "Master Wade Cochran has a remarkable memory and answers abstruse and hypothetical questions in philosophy, metaphysics, theology, occultism, and physiology." Despite his favorable review Wade joined the other performers on January 14, 1899, in a protest of the use of the term "freaks" being applied to him and his fellow performers.

Back in Mt. Vernon in late 1899 and early 1900 the Cochrans were mentioned twice in the local press and then no more. On November 4, 1899, the *Register* stated: "Miss Gertie and Master Wade Cochran, the mnemonic wonders whose marvelous feats of memory have astonished the habitués of theaters and museums throughout the country and Europe during the past few years, have returned to this city and yesterday matriculated as students at the south side public school."

And on January 21, 1900, the *Register* had this note: "Master Wade Cochran,

accompanied by his father, left today for New York City where he will fill a week's engagement at the Crystal Palace Theater as a mnemonic wonder."



Nothing additional has been found about these two bright children, but Wade's picture can still be found on the internet.

Sources:

1. *Mt. Vernon Register News* (As You Were column) June 13, 1924; March 1, 1927; March 1, 1936
2. *The Era* (London, England) December 17, 1898; January 14, 1899
3. <http://www.showhistory.com/MasterWadeCochran>