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Dramatic Publishing

A decorative rectangular border with ornate, symmetrical scrollwork and floral motifs surrounding the text.

A Toby Show

By Aurand Harris

Three-act Version

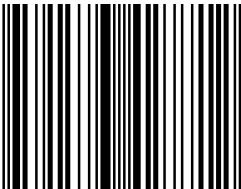
A Toby Show

Written under a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts and premiered at The University of Texas at Austin. Toby is a great role for an energetic actor.

As the early posters advertised: A laugh a minute!
A cyclone of fun! Toby, a stick of dyna-mirth!

Comedy. By Aurand Harris. *Cast: 3m., 4w., plus extras for vaudeville entr'acts.* *A Toby Show* brings back to the stage an American folk character—Toby, the country bumpkin who through naivete, honesty, and homespun humor outwits the city slickers. This farce-melodrama recreates with traditional situations and stock characters—as well as jokes and stage business—a colorful segment of American drama: the traveling tent repertoire shows. Starring in the *Cinderella* story, Toby enacts a comic variation of the fairy godmother. With music and specialty numbers, the production excitingly evokes, for children of all ages, the joy of experiencing an authentic example of American folk theatre. *One interior set. 1915 American upper- to working-class costumes.* Code: TM3

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A Toby Show (3 act)



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(Three-act Version)

by

AURAND HARRIS



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(A TOBY SHOW)

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TOBY, A NATIVE AMERICAN FOLK CHARACTER

BY GEORGE EELLS

Here's Toby treading the boards again, kicking the shins of authority and bringing enjoyment to audiences without preconceived theatrical ideas — just as he did to small-town play-goers sixty years ago.

It is impossible to document Toby's birth anymore than Paul Bunyan's, Uncle Remus', Harlequin's or any other folk hero's. Some authorities try to link him to Greek or Shakespearian comedies; others, to the New England rube or the "silly kid" roles in early commercial plays.

But Toby finally emerged from the mists of mythology and moved into the theatrical spotlight somewhere in Louisiana, sometime in 1911 when Fred Wilson, the red-haired, freckled, leading comic on Murphy's Comedians appeared one night as Toby Haxton in *Clouds and Sunshine* and the next, as Toby Thompkins in *Out of the Fold*. On the third evening, he was called another name, but the audience dubbed him Toby. The name stuck and the Toby show was on its way to being born.

For many years Toby Shows were only an arm of the repertoire theatre. The 400-odd companies that barnstormed the country playing tents, theatres and opera houses also presented other types of plays. Toby, however, penetrated deeply into the unconscious aspirations of small-town audiences at a time when America was changing from a predominately agrarian to an urban society. Eventually, plays starring him filled the production schedule. Toby, the bumbler with his immense goodwill, his naivete, and his shrewdness, managed (depending on the playwright) to stumble onto or contrive a happy ending that reassured small-town patrons. He became the best drawing card these manufacturers of entertainment could offer.

Neil Schaffner, Toby actor-playwright, and his wife Caroline, estimated that in 1916 (the period of Aurand Harris' "*A Toby Show*"), there were 200 comedians calling themselves Toby — each a star in his territory. Currently, only Jimmy Davis carries on the tradition season after season in his own tent theatre.

In "*A Toby Show*", Harris evokes the spirit of this vanishing branch of the entertainment business and in so doing preserves and renews a chunk of Americana. Fittingly, he has chosen to retell the Cinderella story, one of the rep playwright's favorite plots. Skillfully injecting Toby into the familiar story as a variation of the fairy godmother just as the "country playwrights" once did, Harris allows children of all ages to experience the authentic joy of attending a Toby show. Seeing the initial production at the University of Texas at Austin with excellent performances from both the actors and the vaudevillians, it was easy for at least one spectator to understand how for 45 years Jack and Maude Brooks ("*The Show With a Million Friends Presenting Clean Plays For People Who Like That Kind of Entertainment*") could draw a thousand customers a night for three successive nights to a town of 399 people.

With "*A Toby Show*" Toby comes back again to the stage, and reaffirms his right to be thought of as a native American folk character.

So "Hold the horses!" Here comes Toby!

[Mr. Eells is a writer and an authority on popular entertainment.]

The premiere production of *A TOBY SHOW* was given by the University of Texas at Austin, Department of Drama, April 3-9, 1978. It was a Master of Fine Arts thesis production under the supervision of Coleman A. Jennings.

A TOBY SHOW

**A New Play by
AURAND HARRIS**

Scene: A rich drawing room, 1915

Cast: TOBY Louis Maloney
CINDY Sara Whitney
MRS. VANUNDERSQUIRE Katherine Griffith
SOPHIA Jillian Graves
MAUDERINA Dianne Arp
PRINCE BURTOCK Jay Vecchio
COLONEL DINWIDDIE Steve Ross

Olio Revue I Melinda Moore Strayhorn,
Anthony Joiner, Leo Lerma,
Lauren Schneider

Olio Revue II Belinda Jefferson, Anthony
Joiner, Laura Lynch

Orchestra Bill Fagan, Doug Rosson

**Directed by Johnny Saldana
Scenery and Properties by Casey Anderson
Costumes by Marie Hilgemann
Lighting by David Nancarrow
Musical Direction by Bill Fagan**

Assistant to the Director Pamela Wolf
Stage Manager Ron Hiatt
Costume Supervisor Gwendolyn Nagle
Costume Design Assistant Sydney Roberts
Technical Director Susan Rugg
Master Carpenter Richard Haws

Toby, with his red wig and freckled face, is a native American folk character. Early in the nineteenth century he made his first entrance on the stage. With his country jokes and lovable personality, Toby became the most popular character in tent repertoire theatres playing in the small towns of the South and Midwest. He is a country boy, funny and helpful, who always outsmarts the city-slickers, and who always brings about a happy ending.

Our Toby Show, using much of the traditional staging — three acts, songs, jokes, the old man with a “G string” sounding voice — is a recreation of this early era in American drama, when Toby was king of the tent shows

— Aurand Harris

• (Vaudeville or musical entertainment presented between the acts of a burlesque or minstrel show.)

The play script of A TOBY SHOW was made possible with a Creative Writing Fellowship awarded to Aurand Harris by The National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D. C. Mr. Harris is the first recipient of a Creative Writing Fellowship for children's theatre. For this premiere production, Mr. Harris served as playwright in residence in the Department of Drama of the University of Texas.

— Editor's note.

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A TOBY SHOW

Cast:

Toby
Cindy
Mrs. Van Undersquire
Sophia
Mauderina
Burtock
Colonel

Time:

A summer day, 1915

Scene:

The parlor of the Van Undersquire mansion.

Act I Toby Comes to Town
Act II Toby Starts Detecting
Act III Toby Makes Right, Right

**There are Specialty Numbers
between the Acts.**

ACT I

[After a short overture by a small orchestra at the right side of the stage — traditionally a march and a popular song of the day, i. e. "O Susannah!" — the house lights dim as the footlights come up, and Toby steps out in front of the curtains lighted with a follow spot. His entrance music is "Turkey in the Straw." Toby is a likeable, fun-loving, country rube comic with red freckles, red wig, and country clothes. He talks, jokes, and laughs freely with the audience.]

TOBY: Howdy, folks. Glad to see you.

[To front row]

TOBY: Glad you got here early and got a front row seat.

[To back row]

TOBY: And howdy do to you, way back there Lady, will you please remove —

[Grins]

TOBY: Will all the ladies, and gentle men, please remove their hats. No hats, no smoking, and if the baby cries, please take it out.

[Lively]

TOBY: Today Toby come so town! If you don' know Toby I' tell you who he is. He' a country fellow. Some folks call him a hayseed, but you can bet your bottom dollar he can outsmart any city slicker. He' got red hair on his head and red freckles on his nose. And he' about as high as a chicken sitting on a roosting-pole.

[Measures his own height with his hand]

TOBY: And he like so crack a joke, like — like tellin' about this Uncle Bub at church, and the deacon said to him, "Nosmoking." "I ain't smoking," said Uncle Bub. "You've got a pipe in your mouth, ain' you?" Uncle Bub said. "So — I' forgot to hush my feet, but I ain' walkin' g'." *[Laughs]* Yup, Toby is a cracker-upper! Now I want to introduce you to him

[At side]

TOBY: Proudly I present America's own favorite, funny fellow — Toby!

[Spotlight moves to side of proscenium arch. No one enters. Spotlight moves back to Toby, who grins and waves.]

TOBY: He's standing right in front of you. Yup, I'm Toby! You're dang tootin' I'm Toby. And we're going to give you a humdinger of a rip-snorting Toby Show!

[Closer]

TOBY: In this play, you're going to see, there is a girl who has a step-mother — Oh, hoity-toity!

[Poses comically and wiggles hips]

TOBY: And she makes the girl do all the work while her own two daughters primp and get ready for a party. And at the ball that night there's a Prince who — I ain't going to tell no more. You just hold on to your seats and see what happens. I have to lickity-split now, because I'm on my way to this swell-elegant house. I've come to the big city — all dressed up in my best bib and tucker — to get me a job. And here it is.

[Takes newspaper clipping from pocket]

TOBY: "Rich lady wants handyman for light work." I'm handy and a man and the lighter the work the better! *[Laughs]* So I'm heading that away. I ain't going to gallop, but I'll do some fancy trotting.

[Enjoys whooping, and trot-running across stage to other side]

TOBY: Whoa! Hold the horses. Here we are.

[Reads imaginary address on curtain.]

TOBY: Number One—0—0 Grand Avenue. This is the place where it's all going to happen. Pull the curtains and let the show begin!

[Music for the opening of the curtain. SCENE: elegant drawing room, 1915. Ornate double doorway, D.R. Smaller doorway D.L. Three open French doors, or open archways, at back, elevated on a one-step platform. Terrace exterior backing. Ornate fireplace with large portrait above it on left wall.]

Ornate mirror with console table beneath on the right wall. Sofa with table behind it at R. Chair by fireplace at L. Toby is awed by the grandness.

TOBY : T & ca loo kat t h Swell-elegant! I'll bet she's so rich she has four cars, one t odr ivain c achdirection. *[Laughs]*

[Telephone rings]

TOBY: Something is ringing. Cowbell! Church bell? Fire bell! Oh, it's one of t hem new t el -E - phones.

[Rings]

TOBY No one is around.

[Rings. Toby starts to phone, stops, excited]

TOBY: If I was in there . . . He l l B&t I ain' t Wh oa, h ol d h horses! Someone a nsw ct h t el-E-phone!

CINDY *[Off]* I ' m coming. I'm coming. Just a minu te. I ' m coming

TOBY *[By proscenium arch]*: Somebody's c oming

[Rings]

[CINDY enters L, running and carrying a dress. She is young, pretty, and is dressed plainly. Although she is treated like a servant, she is always vital, cheerful, and sometimes spunky. She speaks into telephone]

CINDY: Hello. The VanUndersquire residence. Who is calling, please? The Society editor of the News! She'll be here. She's coming. She's here. Mrs. VanUndersquire.

[Mrs. VanUndersquire enters L. She is elegantly dressed, haughty, commanding, and comically affected in her speech and manner]

TOBY: Hoity-TOITY! I'll bet she's so rich she has a different dentist for every tooth! *[Laughs]*

MRS. V. *[Stands, holding the telephone]*: Mrs. VanUndersquire? Yes, Mrs. VanUndersquire is speaking?

TOBY: It's Mrs. VanUnderSKIRT.

MRS. V: Oh, the society editor! Yes, I am giving a dance tonight — a masquerade ball — in honor of his Royal Highness Prince Burtock.

[Laughs affectedly]

MRS. V: He's a real live prince.

[To Cindy]

MRS. V: Hurry and finish my dress.

[Into telephone]

MRS. V: His mother was a friend of my late second husband. She married a Balkan prince, and now her son — no throne of course — is honoring us with a visit.

[To Cindy]

MRS. V: Hang the lanterns in the garden, get the chairs for the orchestra, and -

[Cindy starts to R, then L, drops dress]

MRS. V: My dress! Oh, you nitwit!

[Into telephone]

MRS. V: No, no, not you — not you!

[Glares at Cindy]

MRS. V: My step-daughter.

CINDY: I can't do everything at once.

MRS. V: Well, someone do something!

TOBY: Hold the horses! I'm a-coming!

[Exits at side]

MRS. V: Yes, the Prince is young, handsome, and very rich. I haven't seen him, but he is arriving today. We are expecting him at any minute, expecting the bell to ring at any moment.

[Doorbell rings]

MRS. V: Oh, the bell! He's here. The Prince is here!

[To Cindy]

MRS. V: Put on the apron and cap.

[Points to them on table]

CINDY: Apron and cap?

MRS. V: The maid's apron and cap.

CINDY: But I'm not the maid.

MRS. V: You will be the maid while the Prince is here. The cap — the apron — ON!

[Doorbell rings. Cindy gets apron and cap]

MRS. V: He's waiting. You half wit!

[Into telephone]

MRS. V: No, no, no, not you!

TOBY *[Enters R, and shouts happily]:* Howdy, folks. The door was open and here I am!

MRS. V *[Freezes, her back to Toby]:* He's here.

[Puts telephone down. Cindy freezes, cap over eyes. Mrs. V regains her composure, turns slowly and speaks with great affectation, and curtsies]

MRS. V: How do you do. I am Lizzenna — *[Swallows]* — Lizzenna Smythers VanUndersquire.

TOBY [*Shakes her hand vigorously*]

TOBY Howdy do. Glad to meet you, Lizzie.

[*Mrs. V is shocked*]

TOBY: I'm harnessed, hitched and ready to give you a hand.

[*Turns and sees Cindy*]

TOBY: And look who else is here. Howdy do to you.

[*Shakes hands vigorously*]

MRS. V [*Gasps in astonishment*]: We have been waiting — to see your countenance.

TOBY: See my what? [*Alarmed*] Is it showing?

MRS. V: We are honored that you will inhabit our unostentatious domicile.

TOBY: You want to trade that big word for two little ones?

MRS. V [*Surprised, then laughs with forced affectation*]: What? Oh-oh-oh, how clever. What an original — royal — sense of humor. You do understand English?

TOBY: Sure. I *you* can speak it.

MRS. V: I shall call my daughters. They are so anxious to meet you.

TOBY: They are?

MRS. V [*To Cindy*]: Tell Sophia and Mauderina to come at once. Hurry.

[*Cindy exits R*]

MRS. V: I *if my* take the liberty, have something which *speci* in your ear.

TOBY [*Quickly cleans out ear with finger and tilts head*]: Let her whisper.

MRS. V: My daughters in YOUR presence may be a bit shy — overcome with modesty.

TOBY: Aw, shucks, fetch 'em in. My sister, she's modest, too. Yessirree. My sister is so modest that she blindfolds herself when she takes a bath.

[Laughs. Mrs. V is startled, then affectedly joins the laughing]

TOBY: Poor Sis. Poor Sis, she is sick now.

MRS. V: She is ill?

TOBY: Yup. She thinks she is a chicken.

MRS. V: A chicken? You've put her in a hospital?

TOBY: Nope, can't afford to. We need the eggs.

[He laughs. Again Mrs. V joins him, laughing affectedly. They build the laughing, each topping the other]

[Cindy enters R]

CINDY: The girls are ready.

[Cindy exits R]

TOBY: Girls? Girls!

[Fixes himself up for the fair sex]

TOBY: My ears are up and I'm biting at the bit. Herd 'em in.

MRS. V: Entre vous.

[Sophia enters R and stands. She is comically overdressed, imitates her mother's affectation]

MRS. V: May I present my older daughter, Sophia.

TOBY: Howdy do. Glad to meet you, Soffce.

[Shakes hands vigorously]

SOPHIA [*She ALWAYS speaks musically, up and down the scales, holding certain notes with melodic tremors*]: How do you do. How do you do.

TOBY: Listen at her talk. She sounds prettier than the church organ.

MRS. V: Sophia is precociously musical.

SOPHIA [*Speaking very very musically*]: Be at home here — now, please do-oo-oo-oo. How do you do. How do you do.

TOBY [*Imitates her comically, with the same musical rhythm and notes*] I'm at home when I hear a cow — moo-oo-oo-oo. [*Laughs*]

MRS. V: And now may I present my second daughter. [*Waves*] Entrez vous-hoo.

[Mauderina enters R, and stands. She is also comically overdressed, but the two daughters look nothing alike. She is also comically affected]

MRS. V: My younger daughter, Mauderina.

TOBY: Howdy do. Glad to meet you, Maud.

[Shakes hands vigorously]

MAUDERINA [*She ALWAYS speaks in verse, stressing clearly and loudly each rhyming word*]: A welcome **BOUQUET** of words we **SAY**, and wish you **MAY** enjoy your **STAY**.

TOBY: Listen at her talk! Fancy words that rhyme like a book.

MRS. V: Mauderina is lyrical, versical and poetical. Recite a poem, my dear.

MAUDERINA [*Takes poetic stance and recites*]: "A mouse! A mouse!" cried Miss **DOWD**. She shook with fright and screamed **ALLOUD**. Then she thought of a **WAY** To scare it **AWAY**; She opened her mouth and — **MEOVED**.

TOBY [*Laughs*]: That's pretty good. Now I'll prime my pump and see what words come out — the spout.

[Takes comic stance and recites]

TOBY: There was a girl named Nellie, who fell in the bath and wet her — knees.

MRS. V: That doesn't rhyme.

TOBY: The water wasn't deep enough. *[Laughs]*

MRS. V: Come, girls. Show him to the garden and do take a peep at my gazebo.

TOBY: Peep? *[Aside]* I'll take a goldarn good look.

SOPHIA: A summer house is a place for a rendezvous.

[Sophia exits L]

TOBY: For who?

MAUDERINA: Turtle doves FLY — BY — and bill and COO.

[Mauderina exits L]

TOBY: They do?

[Looks after girls and shouts]

TOBY: Hot diggitty-dog! Hold the horses! I am a-coming!

[Makes a fast funny exit, stops, waves]

TOBY: Tootle-doo.

[Exits]

[Cindy enters R. There is a loud sound offstage of a flying machine]

CINDY: What is that? It sounds like a machine in the air.

[Runs to French doors at back. Points in air, excitedly]

CINDY: It is. It's a flying machine.

MR S V: What is all the noise?

CI NDYAn aeroplane. He's circling around.

MR S V: Tell him to fly away.

CI NDY[Motions]: Go away. He's waving back. [*Waves*] Hello.

MR S V: Tell him to GO AWAY.

CI NDYGo away. Away.

MR S V: Flying in the air! What will they think next?

CINDY: He's coming back

MR S V: I will tell him to leave.

[Mrs. V goes to French doors]

MRS .V: Go away! Away! and stay away!

[Sounds dim out quickly]

MR S V: There. [*Romantically*] Tonight — in the moonlight, the Prince will dance with Sophia and Mauderina.

CINDY: I hope he will ask me to dance.

MR S V: You ~~uto~~ dance? You ~~u~~

CI NDY: I like to dance.

MR S V: You are plain with no beauty or proper clothes.

CINDY: Bu d —

MR S V: You will stay i n t heit erth

[Points. Cindy starts]

MR S V: You and the Prince. [*Laughs*] For you it is pot and pans.

[Mrs. V exits R]

CINDY: Pots and pans . . . apron and cap . . . press her dress . . .

[Angrily throws dress on chair, then with spunk puts her chin up]

CINDY: If my real mother were here . . .

[Looks at portrait over mantel]

CINDY: If my father . . . if you were still alive . . . I'd go to the ball. I would wear . . .

[Grabs the dress]

CINDY: . . . a beautiful dress,

[Holds dress up in front of her]

CINDY: and the Prince would look right at ME. I'd be — a razzle-dazzle.

[Sings and dances a fast fox-trot. Stops and then pantomimes talking to Prince]

CINDY: Oh, I would be charmed to dance, your highness — if you can tango.

[She sings and does a funny tango. Burtock enters at back at French doors. He is young, handsome, and a Prince. He wears coveralls, helmet with goggles which are pushed up. His face is smeared with dirt and there is a small cut on his forehead. Cindy ends her dance, curtsies and smiles at imaginary partner]

CINDY: Thank you, your highness. You dance very well.

BURTOCK: So do you.

CINDY *[Does a double take]*: What? Who? *[Sees Burtock]* Where did you come from?

BURTOCK: I — I fell out of the sky.

[Takes off helmet and comes into room]

CINDY: It's you! In the aeroplane!