

Ellen "Eli" (Bolen) Schoonover
April 25, 1859 – November 7, 1941

Residents of Calloway County have always sought a variety of entertainment venues and performances. A local professor at the Murray Institute, Joe Streeper, organized an orchestra and a dramatic company to put on Shakespearean and other types of plays and performances. The troupe performed in Murray as well as all around the region in several towns and cities.

Ellen Bolen, the leading lady of the company, shocked local sensibilities when she showed her shapely physique wearing skin-toned silk tights. The 1931 *History of Calloway County* reported, "...it was the first time "the female form in all its enticement was ever revealed to a Murray audience." Up to this memorable performance in the 1870s, no one in the community had ever seen a girl's legs above her shoes in public.

Ellen's part in this particular show was promoted as an eye-opener of the first magnitude as the role necessitated "that she wear flesh-colored skin tights such as a circus rider." Both men and women clamored for the 25-cent reserved seats. Consequently, the show enjoyed sell-out performances before it took to the road for encores in Mayfield, Fulton, Paris, Paducah and Union City.

The play created quite a sensation, and there was considerable talk about Ellen and her costume. As she was the daughter of Captain James N. Bolen, the well-known editor of the *Murray Gazette* (see Bolen), it surely caused familial consternation. It wasn't long after her Murray performance that the Bolen family moved to Pocahontas, Arkansas, taking Ellen and her tights with them.

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Ledger and Times, History of Calloway County – 1931, “The Dramatic Company.”

Jennings, Dorothy and Kirby *The Story of Calloway County 1822-1976*.

Murray: Murray Democrat Publishing Co., 1980, page 82.

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/69933471/ellen-a-schoonover>