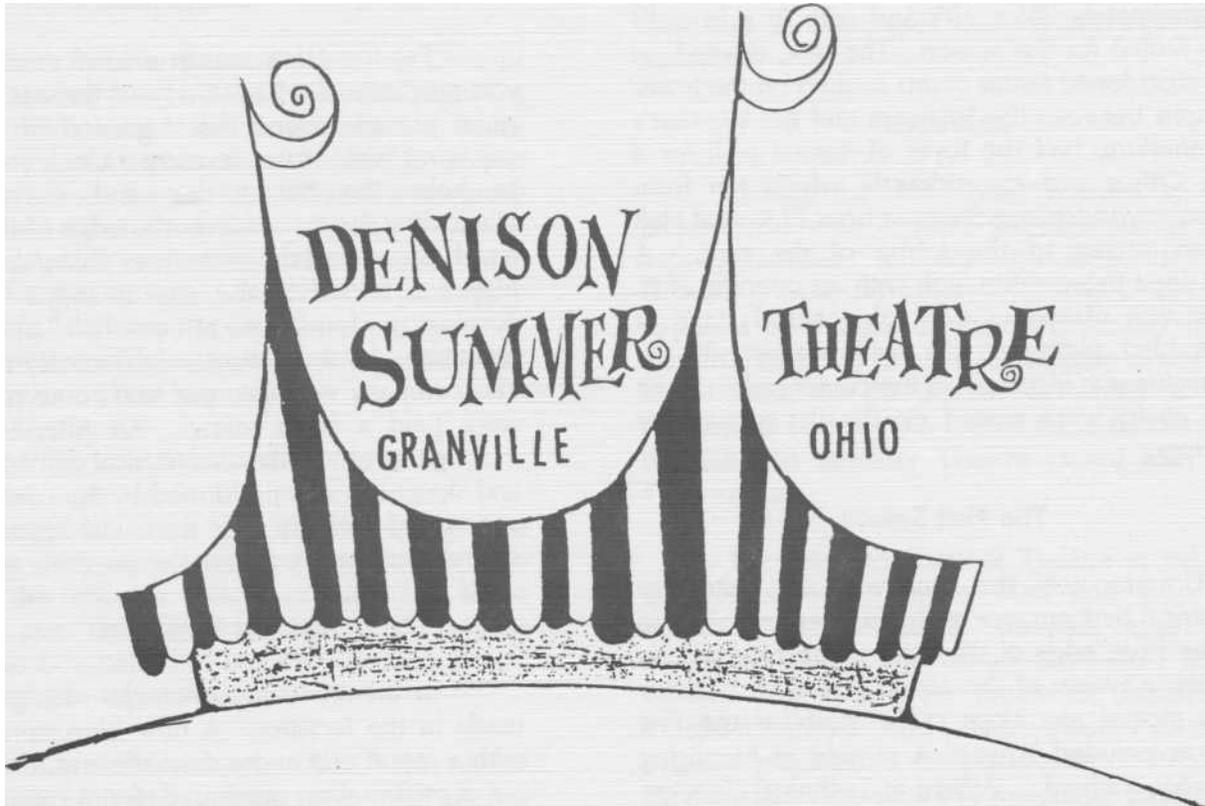


THE HISTORICAL TIMES

NEWSLETTER OF THE GRANVILLE, OHIO, HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Volume IV Number 3

Summer 1990



Until the early nineteen thirties Granville was somnolent in the summer time: entertainment activities were confined to the cool front porch, an ice cream social on a church lawn, or a trip to Newark for a traveling tent show.

The first attempt to offer dramatic entertainment in the summer was made in 1932 by Richard Woellhaf, an instructor in the Department of Speech at Denison, who planned a season of four plays to be presented in the Granville Opera House by the Village Players, a semi-professional stock company under Woellhaf's direction. A special series of courses in "Dramatic Production" was offered by the Department of Speech in June and July of 1932 and Denison students were recruited to receive academic credit through experience in acting, directing, scene construction and theatre management with the Village Players.

In the summer of 1943 Edward A. Wright, then Associate Professor in the Department of Speech, extended the Denison University Theatre into the early summer months with a season of three plays performed by Denison students in the Opera House. For the summer of 1945 the Denison University Theatre was again extended by the presentation of four events, two plays in the Opera House and two Chautauqua-style lectures given in the Baptist Church. A single admission could be purchased for 60 cents or a season ticket for four events at \$1.50.

Tent Theatre

With the urging of President K.I. Brown of Denison University, Edward A. Wright set forth to establish a summer theatre in 1947. Mrs. Everett Reese of Newark developed a group of sponsors, many of them Granville residents, who offered a

loan of \$2,000. Denison University provided a subsidy in terms of housing facilities (Monomoy and East Cottage), rehearsal and scene shop facilities (Recital Hall and the Wigwam), a rebate on tuition income from students taking academic course work in the Summer Theatre, and the cost of publicizing the summer season. A stock company of actors and scene technicians of Denison students was recruited. A white pavilion tent with two round ends (measuring approximately 70' x 30') and with 8' side walls was rented for the season. The tent, erected on the abandoned tennis courts located on the lower campus between the Wigwam and the Women's Gymnasium, had the foyer of Recital Hall for a Box Office and the sidewalk which ran from Broadway to College Street in front of Recital Hall as an access to the lobby of the tent. A curtained proscenium arch with an opening of 8' x 18' was placed in front of a raised stage of assembled platforms. A light batten with six spotlights was installed on the center pole. Some 400 chairs were placed on the flat ground for seating.

The First Season

Unfortunately the tent was not suited to theatrical performance as the first center pole rose at the front edge of the stage often blocking an audience's view of the action or felling an actor who moved too close. The staff for the first season included Edward A. Wright as Managing Director, Richard C. Adams as Technical Director, and Mrs. Everett Reese as Business Manager. Among the acting company whom older Granville residents will remember were Hal and Ruby Holbrook, Henry Sutton, Richard Welsbacher, Gordon Condit, and William Utter.

Along with repeat performances of Gordon Condit's original play, Thank You Stranger, five standard Broadway plays were each performed for four evening performances and a Saturday matinee. The first season was a success with a total attendance of 5,598 and a gross income of \$6,970, allowing the sponsors' loans to be refunded and a share of the profits distributed to the actors.



For the 1948 season a used pavilion tent was purchased for \$2,500. From three telephone poles placed around the stage end of the tent guy wires were strung to carry a block and tackle to hoist the baling ring and canvas thus eliminating the tent pole at the edge of the stage which obstructed the audience's view. A seventh play was added to the season and a Tuesday evening performance at one-half price was substituted for the unsuccessful Saturday matinee. The company was enlarged and some members were paid a small salary. An Aftershow - a melange of vaudeville and musical comedy songs and sketches - was performed by the company as an added feature of the final production. Attendance doubled over the previous season.

The Big Blue Tent

In the 1950 season major changes were made in the facilities. A new blue canvas tent with a round end and a dramatic end (measuring 30' x 120') was purchased for \$3,369. The placement of two additional telephone poles with guy wires and block and tackle outside the tent eliminated another center pole. A series of quarter poles was installed, providing added peaks and A-Frames were devised to provide support for additional peaks in the canvas top and to hold light batons, draw curtains, and a cyclorama. A Box Office was constructed and placed outside the tent. Another play was added to the schedule and a musical, Sing Out Sweet Land, and several modern European comedies such as Arms and the Man by Bernard Shaw, The Mask and the Face by Luigi Chiarelli and The Guardsman by Ferenc were introduced into the repertoire, replacing standard Broadway plays.

There was a surge of activity in the 1951, 1952, and 1953 seasons. Four large seating platforms were built and installed in the tent and 600 new chairs were added. A total of 30 plays were produced, including two musicals - Knickerbocker Holiday and Three to One; three 19th century melodramas - Lady Audley's Secret, Billy the Kid, and Uncle Tom's Cabin; and several serious American dramas such as On Borrowed Time and The Country Girl.

William Brasmer became Managing Director of the Denison Summer Theatre at the beginning of the 1953 season and Mrs. Darrell S. Jones became Promotion Manager. In this season Brasmer formed the Denison Players, a company of seven actors from the Summer Theatre company which performed a repertoire of three plays throughout England and Scotland and at the Edinburgh Festival at the end of the 1953 season. Attendance for the three seasons 1951-1953 totaled over 64,000 persons.

Weather!

The 1954 season was hampered by bad weather. A severe rainstorm destroyed the stage end of the tent and a large tarpaulin had to be erected over the stage in order that the season could be finished. For the 1955 season a new stage end canvas section was added.

From the 1956 season to the 1961 season the Denison Summer Theatre performed a series of musicals - Where's Charley, Oklahoma, Brigadoon, South Pacific - which broke all previous attendance records. During this time new Denison actors were introduced and developed, including Thomas Hawley, Gayle Yantsen, Pamela Maull, John Schuck, Ellen Ebert, and John Fields.

In 1960 a completely new tent was installed which had a hip and gable dramatic end. All the ropes were banded in red canvas and the sidewalls were made of contrasting sections of red and blue canvas. This new tent was utilized in the concluding three Denison Summer Theatre seasons in which John Davidson, Mary Kay

Williams, Jonathan Reynolds, and Robert Armstrong, and actors from the graduate departments of Yale, Carnegie Mellon, and Ohio State were featured in a series of intimate musicals.

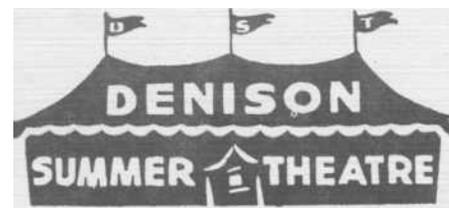
A concert series of musical artists was added in the last three seasons and such attractions as the Fine Arts Quartet, the Claremont Quartet, the Lee-Makanowitsky piano-duo, and an evening of Rodgers and Hart were featured.

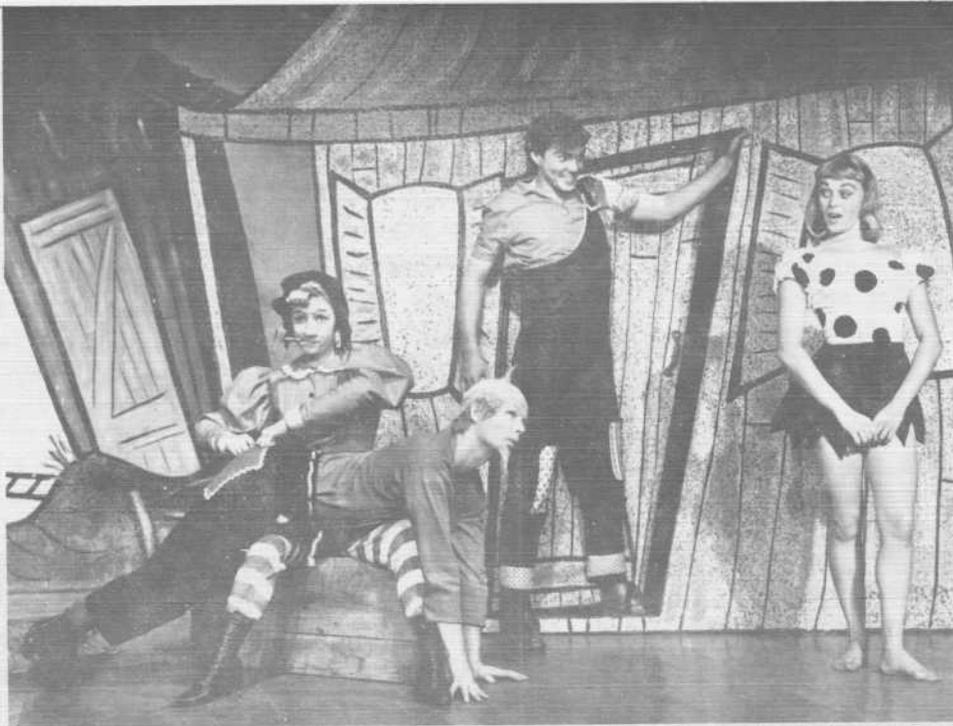
The Finale

During the last three seasons of the Denison Summer Theatre the dormitories and eating facilities formerly provided by the University were no longer available. It became apparent by the end of the 1963 season that it was not financially feasible to continue to operate the Theatre in the format in which it was established without the use of these facilities, so the Denison Summer Theatre closed after the 1963 season.

The Denison Summer Theatre in the Big Blue Tent and Concert Hall and the 250 members of the acting company played a significant part in the life of Granville. In 17 seasons 156 plays were produced (Edward A. Wright directed 24 and William Brasmer directed 56) and played to a total audience of 291,768. In 1990 many persons still remember fondly the Big Blue Tent and the experience of lively summer entertainment provided there.

William Brasmer





Top to Bottom:

Li'l Abner, 1962
Playboy of the
Western World, 1957
South Pacific, 1960

DENISON SUMMER THEATRE



Top to Bottom:

Teahouse of the
August Moon, 1957
Twelfth Night, 1956
The Lady's Not
for Burning, 1952



CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

In June, the Civil War Roundtable sponsored by the Society completed one year of discussions. Meeting monthly on the third Tuesday, members of the roundtable discussed items ranging from the book, *THE KILLER ANGELS*, to the only Ohio Battle--Buffington's Island--to General Morgan's capture to an analysis of General McClellan as a military leader. The roundtable also met in Lancaster in February for a dinner celebrating Sherman's 170th birthday and sponsored a civil war "show and tell" session with documents, letters, arms and so forth in January. Several members journeyed to Gettysburg in April with the Columbus roundtable.

MEMBERSHIP

In order to increase the visibility of the Society and to attract new members, the Membership Committee under the leadership of Dan Freytag has sent letters and complimentary copies of *THE HISTORICAL TIMES* to persons on the Granville Foundation mailing list. In addition, persons who have not renewed memberships have been contacted.

PROPERTIES

Two new items will grace the front of the Museum later this summer. The Society has arranged for an Ohio Historical Society marker describing the historical significance of the museum building to be cast and placed in the lawn in front of the museum. David Neel has worked with the Ohio Historical Society arranging the casting of our new marker.

Buck Sargent has worked long and hard to acquire an iron fence to be placed in the front of the museum. Over the past few years, it has been increasingly difficult to keep the lawn neat and growing, especially during the summer months. Not only will the iron fence protect the front lawn, but it will add an aesthetic dimension to the museum.

The Board of Management is excited about both the new marker and the iron fence. Both items will enhance the historical setting of the museum building.

HISTORIAN OF THE YEAR

At the annual meeting, Professor Horace King received the Society's "Historian of the Year" award. Professor King was acknowledged for his long service to the Society and for the publication of his book, *GRANVILLE: FROM MASSACHUSETTS TO OHIO*.



Horace King receiving the Howe Family Award from President Eric Jones. (f. Lisska photo)

R.I.P.

Anyone driving or walking on Main Street in Granville has noticed the **Restoration in Progress** sign in the Old Colony Burying Ground. The Society's committee to restore the cemetery has made significant progress in this effort. As a project toward his Eagle Scout requirement, Clay Caroon is setting low - stakes which mark the intersections of a grid map of the grounds, so that the position of each gravestone can be precisely mapped. Scoutmaster Fred Nickerson is assisting Clay and also helped to survey the boundaries of the property to establish a baseline.

The Village has appropriated \$1,000 for plantings in the Old Colony, which will be in memory of Bill Chambers. The Granville Garden Club has ordered bulbs for fall planting for the cemetery. The brush and weeds which nearly obscured the lower gate on Main Street have been cleared away.

Records of burials in the Old Colony are being entered into a computer database. This will provide easy access to this information in many useful ways. In early July the entry of about 15% of the Old Colony records had been completed. A small computer program written by Charles Reitsma, which calculates the birth date from the date of death and age at death, has been very helpful. Through the cooperation and assistance of Township Clerk Norman Kennedy, we are using the same database and format in which the records of Maple Grove Cemetery are kept. When the entry of the Old Colony records is complete, it will also be possible to produce a master list of all burials in both of these cemeteries.

As this newsletter was being prepared, the Society received the gratifying news that the committee appointed by the Township Trustees to recommend uses for the Opera House Settlement Funds has recommended full funding of the request submitted by the Old Colony Committee. The Township Trustees have reserved the right of final decision and will

announce their decision later this year. The money would enable us to right and restore stones in the cemetery.

Note: The Society would be grateful for help with the expense of an /BM compatible computer. It is needed for museum records and the records of Old Colony.

AUTUMN MEETING

The next quarterly program of the Society will be held September 24. It will include a tour of the meticulously restored George T. Jones House hosted by Constance Barsky and Steve Katz. Watch for the announcement with further details.



Photographs of the Denison Summer Theatre used in this issue were taken by the late Rolan Thompson.



The Historical Times is included with membership and is sent to all members of the Society. Questions or comments may be sent to:

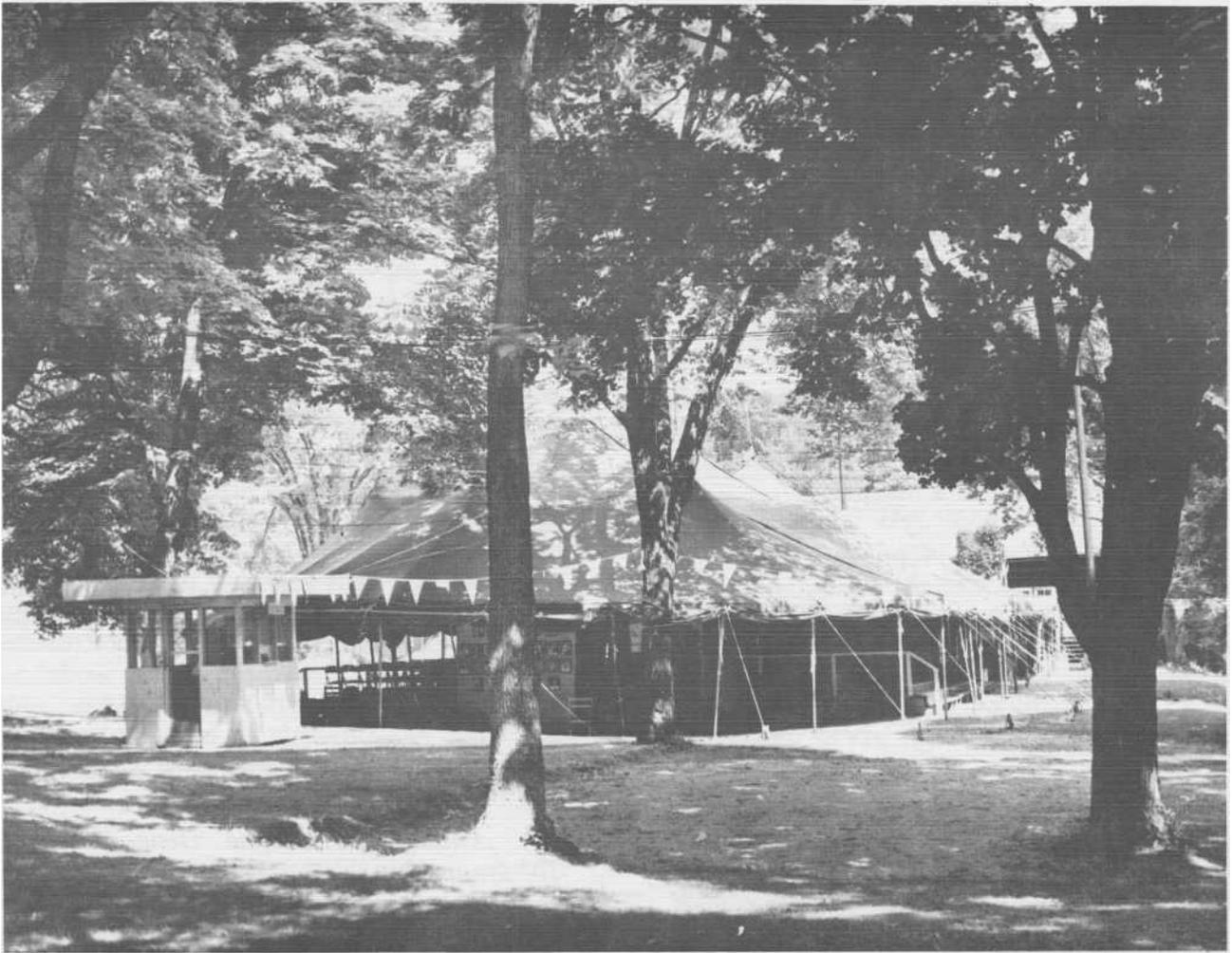
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From the Denison University Archives:
The Summer Theatre Tent - a pleasant memory.



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