



The National Society
for the Preservation of
Tent, Folk and Reper-
toire Theatre

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The museum is open
from Memorial Day to
Labor Day

Tuesday through Sunday

10:00—4:30

During the winter
months the museum is
open by appointment.

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Winging It

National Society for the Preservation of Tent, Folk and
Repertoire Theatre

Volume 18, Issue 3

Summer 2013

President's message

There has been quite a bit of new energy and great new ideas at recent board meetings—a lot of fantastic ideas to further our cause to educate the public about this form and era of entertainment that we hold so dear and raise funds to do so. To that end we need everyone's input on how your museum and library needs to progress.

Your Board of Directors has identified some goals for a museum re-set planned for the winter months. They are:

- A} Re-set and reorganize the collection to better tell visitors about Tent, Folk, and Repertoire Theatre. {a more consistent “flow” if you will}
- B} Increase the security and visibility of the displayed memorabilia
- C} Update displays to incorporate electronic media expected by today's visitor
- D} Create a space for rotating or visiting displays to keep it fresh.
- E} Build a more retail friendly space for gift items.

Some preliminary plans have been discussed, new cabinetry for static displays are also in these plans. We have identified a funding source for this project and the chances are good that we can realize this dream before the next Conference in April! But again this is your museum and the board would like your input!

We want your ideas, thoughts, preferences, and ramblings on this project! A board meeting has been planned for October 19th particularly to discuss your thoughts. So get them in!

Things to think about: colors, displays you would like to see, displays you would not like to see, space allocation, your ideal.

Write a letter, send an e-mail, cast your ballot, or fly a carrier pigeon with a note to the museum with your thoughts on or **BEFORE OCTOBER 15TH**! **EVERYTHING** will be considered, but only if you supply your input!

David

Troupers Volunteer during Old Threshers

Many reunion guests toured the upper level of the museum for the first time during the 2013 Old Threshers Reunion. The museum was a refreshing escape from the over powering heat. Temperatures were in the high 90s.

Numerous former troupers had their own private reunion acting as hosts and tour guides. David Ripper, president of the National Society, and his wife, Michelle were present for the first three days. David trouped with Jimmy Davis in 1978 and again in 1983. Mark Peper traveled with the Schaffner Player in 1981,'82, '83 and he stayed four days. Brian Haymond, a long time supporter of the museum was with the Schaffner Players in 1983 and he and his wife Carla Trees covered Friday, Saturday, Sunday. David Wagaman, secretary of the National Society, former trouper with the Sun Players and the Schaffner Players worked two days. Brian Iles, Toby to all recent fans was on stage for four nights in the Old Threshers' Summer Theatre production of Neil & Caroline Schaffner's *Once in a Blue Moon*. Brian trouped with Jimmy & Grace Davis in 1990,'91,'92,'93. He also played the Toby part during the Theatre's summer dates. Brian's sister Kristy Robison who trouped in 1991,'92, & '93 was in the audience as well as their mother Peggy Iles. This was Brian's 13th season with the Old Thresher's productions.

Grace Davis who spent a lifetime in show business, handled the traditional candy sale every night. She oversaw the construction of the candy boxes, packing the candy and prizes, and the selling of the tasty salt water taffy.

Dick "Toby" Ellis visited one day. Martha Hayes opened the museum and Claudia Streeter locked the front door after selling tickets for *Once in a Blue Moon*. We had full houses on two nights and $\frac{3}{4}$ on the other two..

All of you are invited to be museum hosts. We would be glad to see you and it is cool inside.

Claudia Streeter

Dates were taken from Michael Kramme's book *The Schaffner Players*.

A Chance to Remember

I'm gearing up to make an eight hour trip to visit our friend, Mark Tubbs, and attend a performance by the Rivertime Players, in Parsons, Tennessee. The play will be a play that was used in days gone by in other tent shows. It's called "Meal Ticket." I'm not familiar with the bill. I don't know if my parents ever acted in it. I don't think I ever did, but I know the plot will involve old-fashioned morality along with some belly laughs. I'm sure there will be some singing or dancing – maybe some piano playing.

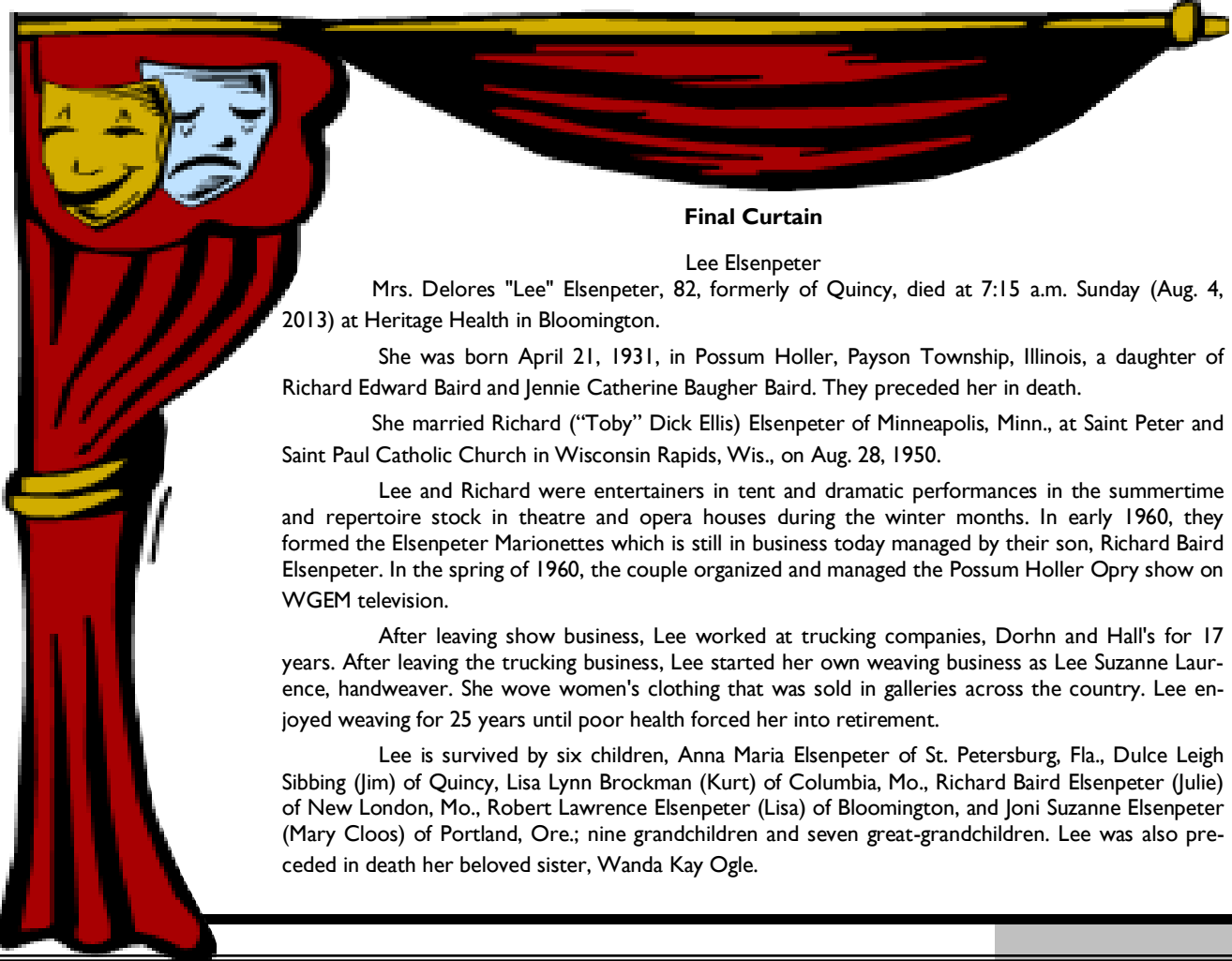
But...get this...it will be performed in a tent. Now I understand it might not be a canvas tent. Those days may be gone. But it will be a tent, and we will sit on chairs that are probably hard, and the chairs will sit on ground that may be hard, too – or, if it rains, wet. But it will be in a tent. If I have to, I will imagine the smell of canvas – wet canvas, if it rains.

I will sit in my chair and wonder if the actors are peeking around from the dressing room to see how many are in the house. I will sit in my chair and pretend I am in an audience from the '40s, '50s, '60s, eagerly waiting for the first sign of the band coming out to play. I will pretend I am one of those farm women who came, dressed up, to sit with their husbands and children, knowing they would smile, laugh, hope, dream, cry. I will pretend I don't have a television back in my motel room.

Maybe I will pretend it is 1950 and I am eight years old. I could pretend I'm watching my own mother and father up there on the stage – or even our friend, Dick Ellis, or maybe Bert Dexter. Or...and this might even be better...I'll pretend it's 1960 and it's me up there on the stage, along with Mickey Lacey, Ralph Blackwell, Trixie Maskew and Dot and Jess Sund.

Well, can you tell? I'm excited. I'm remembering. I can hardly wait.

Roberta Wilkes, September 7



Final Curtain

Lee Elsenpeter

Mrs. Delores "Lee" Elsenpeter, 82, formerly of Quincy, died at 7:15 a.m. Sunday (Aug. 4, 2013) at Heritage Health in Bloomington.

She was born April 21, 1931, in Possum Holler, Payson Township, Illinois, a daughter of Richard Edward Baird and Jennie Catherine Baugher Baird. They preceded her in death.

She married Richard ("Toby" Dick Ellis) Elsenpeter of Minneapolis, Minn., at Saint Peter and Saint Paul Catholic Church in Wisconsin Rapids, Wis., on Aug. 28, 1950.

Lee and Richard were entertainers in tent and dramatic performances in the summertime and repertoire stock in theatre and opera houses during the winter months. In early 1960, they formed the Elsenpeter Marionettes which is still in business today managed by their son, Richard Baird Elsenpeter. In the spring of 1960, the couple organized and managed the Possum Holler Opry show on WGEM television.

After leaving show business, Lee worked at trucking companies, Dorhn and Hall's for 17 years. After leaving the trucking business, Lee started her own weaving business as Lee Suzanne Laurence, handweaver. She wove women's clothing that was sold in galleries across the country. Lee enjoyed weaving for 25 years until poor health forced her into retirement.

Lee is survived by six children, Anna Maria Elsenpeter of St. Petersburg, Fla., Dulce Leigh Sibbing (Jim) of Quincy, Lisa Lynn Brockman (Kurt) of Columbia, Mo., Richard Baird Elsenpeter (Julie) of New London, Mo., Robert Lawrence Elsenpeter (Lisa) of Bloomington, and Joni Suzanne Elsenpeter (Mary Cloos) of Portland, Ore.; nine grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. Lee was also preceded in death her beloved sister, Wanda Kay Ogle.

Don't forget to give us our ideas on how to improve your museum by October 15th. We need ideas on how to best tell our history. E-mail us at: theatremuseum@yahoo.com . Speak now or forever hold your peace.

We would like to welcome these new members.

James Davies
Hampton, IA

Peyton Ellas
Springville, CA

Irina Popov
Utica, NY

Gary & Jane Walton
Overland Park, KS

Lynn Zimmer

Schaffner Player Chairs on sale

Society member Mark Peper donated the chairs he has, that came from the Schaffner Players Tent Show.

The chairs were bought by Mr. Schaffner in 1934 from the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus. The chairs are wooden and painted red and were used both by Mr. Schaffner and Jimmy Davis on the tent show from 1934 until the show closed in 1998.

The price is \$40.00 plus s&h.

This is your chance to own a bit of both circus and tent show history.

Mr. Peper is donating all proceeds to the Theatre Museum for use in updating our displays.

Great Christmas Present!

THE GREAT DR. BALTHAZAR ARCHIMEDES

IOWA'S NEWEST MEDICINE MAN

Richard L. Poole was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan. Since 1978, he has lived in Sioux City, Iowa, where he is Chair and Professor of Theatre and Speech Communication at Briar Cliff University. A Senior Fulbright Scholar, Richard has taught on the college and university level for forty-five years.

He is the author of numerous essays on theatre in Midwest small towns and rural areas. He co-authored with Dr. George Glen *The Opera Houses of Iowa* (Iowa State University Press, 1993). His most recent essay is *History, Archive, Memory and Performance: The Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Play as Cultural Commemoration in Enacting History* (University of Alabama Press, 2011). Humanities Iowa (HI): How does someone from Detroit, Michigan, a big city kid with a father who was a symphony conductor, become a medicine man in Sioux City, Iowa?

Richard Poole (RP): Seems like a long journey, doesn't it? My mother was an actress in the 20s in Detroit and I always wanted to be on stage. My family thought I had talent. I did school plays and when it came time for college, I picked theatre as my major.

Before I became a teacher, I did a lot of acting. In 1966, I was a member of the California Shakespeare Festival where I acted with David Ogden Stiers and Kurtwood Smith. I made commercials, did dinner theatre and took just about any gig I could get. When reality struck, I got into teaching.

Of course, teaching is a type of acting, so there was a natural progression from acting to *teaching* acting, directing, and playwriting. Then came the medicine show, an extremely theatre form in the Midwest in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

HI: When did you begin to learn about medicine shows?

RP: About thirty-five years ago, I was in Georgetown in the District of Columbia visiting my brother. I walked into a used-book store and came across *Step Right Up: An Illustrated History of the American Show* by Brooks McNamara. I couldn't put it down. I was fascinated.

I taught American Theatre History so I knew something about medicine shows, but I had no idea how popular and prolific they were. General histories of American Theatre devote a paragraph, if that much, to this performance type. Yet it affected Americans for almost one hundred years. So I learned as much as I could about it.

HI: So you had all this fascinating information. What did you do with it?

RP: I wanted to put together a show. I had McNamara's book and other sources, but I wanted to create a character that was my very own. A few years after I had read McNamara's book, I joined an organization in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa: The National Association of Tent, Folk, and Repertoire Theatre. This wonderful organization has all types of information about small town opera houses, traveling tent shows, and medicine shows. I felt sure that I could find someone who had been a medicine show man or who had traveled with a medicine show. I was right.

I met this old guy—his name escapes me now. He had been a medicine man and I told him of my aspirations. He asked what I called myself and I said, "Dr. Balthazar T. Archimedes." I thought it was a classy name, kind of foreign, Greek and exotic. But as soon as I got the words out of my mouth, he stopped me.

"Son," he said, "You can't just be plain Dr. Balthazar T. Archimedes. You have to be THE GREAT DR. BALTHAZAR T. ARCHIMEDES." His gravelly voice boomed over the second floor of the organization's museum and THE GREAT DOCTOR was born. The name appealed to my ego and my sense of the theatrical!

HI: What kind of show did you develop?

RP: American Medicine shows varied from one-person outfits to entire production companies with many performers and even animal acts. Medicine men were actually theatrical entrepreneurs. At some point during the entertainment, they pitched their medicines, soaps or salves. Since initially I was by myself I created a show that I could perform and control: the Great Doctor sold hope, cures, and a special kind of medicine. Eventually, I needed to include other performers..

HI: Where did you first perform your medicine show and who were the other people in your show?

RP: Well, I did a one-man show as Dr. Balthazar for an arts organization outside of Sioux City. Someone heard about it and I was asked to perform for Sioux City's annual River-Cade festival. So I got together a group of people, students mostly, and pitched an elixir "guaranteed" to cure whatever ailed you. It was called *Collegium Rupis Spinozac*. It was pretty successful.

We performed in a tent on the River-Cade grounds and afterwards a woman came up and asked if I thought my potion would help her brother, who was very sick with a variety of diseases. I didn't have the heart to tell her I was merely an actor and this was just a show for entertainment purposes only. I said, "All we can do is pray, sister." And we did.

Continued on page 5

Continued from page 4.

HI: How else have you used your creation?

RP: I wanted to include my students. Briar Cliff University, where I teach, has a small theatre department—two full-time faculty plus adjuncts. Depending on the year, we have from five to fifteen majors, so in order to mount a full season we depend on students from other majors. Besides, as a liberal arts university, we provide every student, regardless of his or her major, opportunities to become involved in what I consider the perfect and all-inclusive art.

So I created a show—a variety show. We used original medicine show scripts and bits and pieces from vaudeville and burlesque—popular entertainments. The frame of the show is the 19th century, but it can be moved forward or backward in time to accommodate whatever entertainments we collectively create.

HI: One last question. What can *Collegium Rupis Spinozac* do for me?

RP: Ha! I'm glad you asked. If you remember your Latin, it roughly translates as Briar Cliff College. Now that we are a university, my elixir is called *Universitatis Rupis Spinozae*. If you ingest my elixir, the spirit and power of Briar Cliff University infuses your body and you will be cured of all pains.

You know, toward the end of the pitch, I offer one drop “free of charge to anyone in the audience who is sore afflicted. And I can see, ladies and gentlemen, that many are sore afflicted. Who will be the first? Who will step up and ingest the miracle, magic elixir, *Universitatis Rupis Spinozae*? Step up, Step up, do not be shy!”

At that moment, when I look into their eyes and see the expressions on their faces, I know I've got them! I could sell them anything!

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Of Humanities Iowa from *Voices from the Prairie*, Winter 2013

Ad Libs

By Grace Swank-Davis

Greetings from beautiful downtown Mount Pleasant, Iowa

The annual Midwest Old Threshers Reunion has come and gone. The attendance was down slightly due in no small part to the very high temperatures...101 on Friday. Needless to say, the air conditioned museum saw a good turnout.

We had good crowds for the Old Threshers' Summer Theatre's production of Neil & Caroline Schaffner's *Once in a Blue Moon*. Brian Iles was back by popular demand as Toby. Because of the lower attendance our candy sales were down compared to last year. The profits from the candy sale go directly to the museum, so we try to make it as profitable as possible by keeping the cost down. I want to thank the Mount Pleasant volunteer group, RSPV and their new director, Carol Dustman for constructing 800 candy boxes for us. I also want to thank Michelle Ripper for filling about 400 of those boxes.

During the Reunion the museum is opened from 9:00am until 5:45pm Wednesday through Monday and we couldn't do that without our wonderful volunteers. A full list can be found elsewhere in *Winging It*, but I want to give a big thank you to all for supporting the museum.

The museum has received an amazing donation from member, John Igo. The collection consists of the scrap books, posters and photos of Al Warda, a female impersonator. The material dates from 1904 to about the mid 1930s. To the left is a small sample of one of Mr. Warda's flyers from about 1907.

The dates for the 2014 Annual Theatre Museum's Theatre's History Conference is April 25, 26 & 27. Mark your calendar. We already have several presenters signed, So plan to come and join the discussion and have some fun too!

That's all for now, remember you are always welcome on the lot,
Grace

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DATES ARE:
APRIL 25, 26 & 27
2014

We're on the Web
thetheatremuseum.com

Reprinted from the back page of Bill Bruno's Bulletin 1929.

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BILL BRUNO'S BULLETIN

September 19, 1929

Prisoners Were Grateful

While our folks occasionally visit institutions of all kinds to give the inmates entertainment, Hila Morgan broke all records while playing at Vinton, Iowa, this summer, when she brought her tent show to the inmates of the county jail in that town. The lot used adjoined the jail and Miss Morgan on one night of the engagement caused the sidewalk to be raised so that the prisoners could see the performance. That they were grateful is proven by the following letter written by one of them:

To Hila Morgan:

I thought that I would drop a few lines to thank you very much for the favor you done for all of us Sunday night by having your men prepare the tent so that we could enjoy the show. Wishing you and your players good luck, I am,

An Inmate of the Benton
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E. L. Gamble, Playwright, East Liverpool, O.

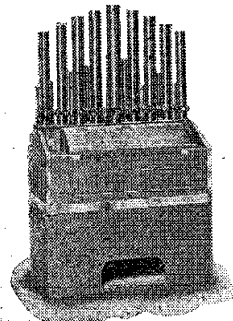
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