



**The National Society for
the Preservation of Tent,
Folk & Repertoire
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

The Winging It

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Winging It

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

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President's Message

I am writing this note on Thanksgiving morning and it occurred to me how thankful I am to work with such a wonderful group of people who are dedicated to our Society.

First, our Board of Directors, All have contributed greatly to the successful reorganization and revitalization of our society this year. Just a few things that these dedicated people have done during the past few months since our annual meeting are:

Claudia, who continues to get our treasury and books in order (not an easy task).

Roberta, who has been invaluable with legal advice and is working hard to keep us right with the state.

Grace, who works tirelessly to preserve our collection and keep the newsletter info flowing.

Brian, has taken on the task (with the help and sage advice of his wife Carla) inventorying and cataloging the collection for better organization and working with our intern Tyler. Carla has been attending board meetings recently and has contributed great ideas and energy.

David, keeps promoting and recruiting members and collections.

"Toby Dick" our statesman who keeps us focused on the mission and also recruits new members.

Kathy, who has been our technical advisor and gotten us up in the new Past Perfect computer program

Mark Tubbs, working on the web-site for better exposure.

Mike Kramme, whose experience also keeps us focused.

Martha Hayes, Sue Mitchell, and Charlene Hintichs who are the primary data entry and do the day to day "grunt work" of cataloging, recruiting and supervising volunteers and interns, giving tours, and answering e-mails.

Karol Schaffer keeps us organized. I am particularly thankful for all of you.

Mark Peper, Mickey Lacey and Brian Iles are members who have also been re-excited about our Society and have contributed quite a bit this year in time, promotion and treasure.

There are too many great volunteers to mention in just this short note and every one of these individuals do much more than what is highlighted above. I am thankful to have the opportunity to work with and get to know each of you better. I look forward to 2014 for more advancement of our mission and Neil and Caroline's dream that this form of entertainment be remembered for its contribution to the arts, society, and America.

Happy Holidays to all

David



AD LIBS

By Grace Swank-Davis

Greetings from beautiful downtown Mount Pleasant, Iowa.

Well, we have snow on the ground and the museum looks beautiful all in white. The Old Threshers organization keeps the road cleaned off so the museum is accessible all winter long. Thank you Larry and crew for keeping us going!

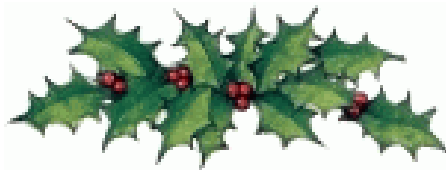
As Roberta Wilkes so movingly wrote about in her article on page five, Society member Mark Tubbs and his community theatre, Rivertime Players presented *Meal Ticket* by the late tent show trouper, Robert La They. Roberta was joined by Society members Mickey Lacey & Mark Peper. I hope to make the trip next year, why don't you join us? Mark Tubbs is a great addition to our museum and comes to every conference in April and fortunately for me he has taken over the management of the museum's web-site: thetheatremuseum.com. I was having trouble getting the newsletter on the site and he graciously took that job over for me. Thanks again, Mark. Check out the web-site Mark built for the community theatre at: rivertimeplayers.org. It's a great web-site and you can see all the research Mark did at the museum's library.

Martha Hayes (who's listed as the museum's Collections Supervisor but does ever so much more) was honored with the Hayes Award this past August. The prize was bestowed by Preservation Iowa at their annual dinner in Burlington, Iowa. The Hayes Award, created this year was named after Martha. According to the organization's web-site: preservationiowa.org, "*Each year Preservation Iowa seeks to honor individuals, organizations, projects, and programs whose work demonstrates a commitment to excellence in historic preservation. In doing so, we hope to inspire others to take action to preserve, protect, and promote Iowa's places that matter.*" Well done, Martha, and well deserved.

I hope you enjoy the back page. It's an ad from Bill Bruno's Bulletin published December 12, 1929. The Bulletin was a weekly magazine for the tent show business. Published in Kansas City, Mo, the headquarters for the Midwest tent show industry. Ted North wished everyone the most prosperous New Year in the history of show business...it was not to be.

But, we at the museum hope YOU and yours have the most prosperous New Year in the history of show business and a healthy and happy one also.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS



YES! I want to be a part of the Theatre Museum.

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Membership

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Please return your payment with this form.

MEMORIES OF A CANVASMAN

This fall we received an email from Mr. Dar Rasmussen who had searched the Web hoping it would “cough up” page after page of names and memories that he would be able to peruse at his leisure and that would further reinforce some of his memories. (That didn’t happen, so he turned to us and included some of his memories. Excerpts of them are given in the following paragraphs.)

Christy Sr. (Obrecht) and his wife interviewed me probably in April of 1945. They were apparently planning with the return of gasoline and tires to put their show back on the road. Returning vets were few at that time—and none wanted to work for \$20 a week and a place to put their sleeping bag. I was over 14 years old and 6 foot tall, but totally without a clue—and excited as I could be about the job.

We went to Bloomington, MN and brought out the tent and laid it out in a large field next to the local movie theatre. The actors and actresses hired for that season spent the week or two (while we patched and repaired the canvas, etc.) practicing the usual three act “Toby/Ole” plays and their individual “vaudeville type skits.” These were presented after the play each night for an additional cost to those who wished to stay.

We started out a bit short of roustabout help that year. Logistically we had four vehicles, all very old. (Two small 1936 Chevy tractors—one hauled the huge stage trailer which, once the tent was in place, folded down to make a stage and also carried all the trunks and paraphernalia necessary to put the show on each night. The other, a small trailer equipped with generators in the event of a power failure with our local city hookup.) Another one carried an endless number of the double sturdy hardwood folding chairs. I drove this truck.

They had a very good—and very old—advance man. When one of their plays called for an “old fogey type,” this guy would show up. Our routine was really excellent in that we had no “down time”; we often played only a one-night stand, many two nighters, and on rare occasions in what was considered a large town—like Rochester, Minnesota, we’d set up and be there three nights.

We roustabouts seemed to earn our money—as mentioned there were no “missed days/nights.” Our drives from town to town were fairly short. We’d arrive and somehow get the tent up and in order for the show that evening. After the last vaudeville type skit, the tent began coming down while the people were leaving and once it was folded and in the International, we could sleep wherever we could find room and some comfort. We woke and got on the road at first light and we’d tool along to the next town and repeat the process.

My memory of the actors and actresses is unfortunately vague. That first season crush was on a young woman with pixie type haircut. I had such a crush on her until I discovered that she was “sharing a motel room” with the actor/tap dancer. There were a couple of middle-aged guys and I can still recite or sing the song-like ditties they did for the vaudeville. A sweet elderly actress whose one song was always the same came out in a dazzling white gown holding her real little puppy and sang the song about “silver and gold.” Christie, Sr., played a violin and his wife the piano. A relative of Christie’s who had to be in her sixties or seventies played the meanest trumpet. *The Flight of the Bumblebee* was one of her nightly acts.

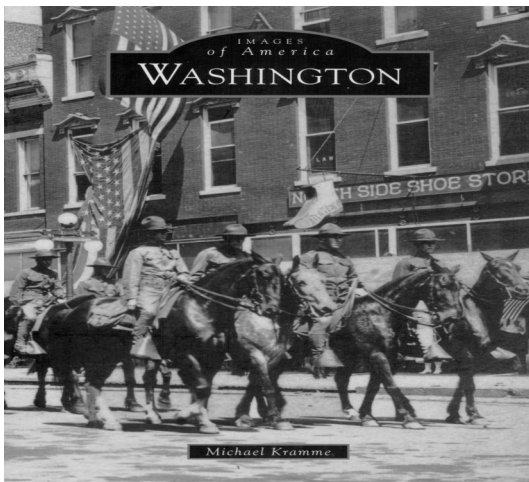
My only possible claim to immortality was that in later years I began to believe that Raymond Burr was the man hired to play the “heavy” that year.

I came back in 1946 and stayed longer. We played all the small and medium towns in southern Minnesota and were playing the fringes of South Dakota when polio reached an epidemic stage. We closed down and took the truck and equipment to their winter parking in Minneapolis.

Dar is wondering if any of the actors or actresses that befriended him would still be above ground. He has started to write a little booklet about his early years for his surviving kids and was looking for some resource he might point them to—to show them what a “hero” he was.

This winter the folks at the Museum will do some research for Dar to see what information can be added to his story. There is quite a file on the Obrechts.

Martha Hayes



Michael Kramme, President Emeritus of the Society, is the author of a new book. It is entitled *Washington*, and is part of Arcadia Publishing’s *Images of America* series. The series has over 8,500 local and regional pictorial history books.

Dr. Kramme’s book has over 200 historic photos from the Washington County (Iowa) Historical Society’s collection. It is available from Amazon.com or at arcadiapublishing.com.

This is the sixteenth book written by Dr. Kramme. He has thirteen titles published by Mark Twain Media/Carson Dellosa, and two titles: *Governors of Iowa* and *The Schaffner Players*, both published by the book division of *The Iowan Magazine*. In addition he is the author of numerous magazine articles.



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"Other People's Business"

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THE 2014 CONFERENCE IS
FRIDAY, SATURDAY & SUNDAY
APRIL 25, 26 & 27

THE DEADLINE FOR PAPERS IS MARCH 15, 2014

Please send proposals to:

Martha Hayes at

theatremuseum@yahoo.com

Or 405 E. Threshers Rd, Mount Pleasant, Ia 52641

Check out our website at: thetheatremuseum.com

A trip back in time

By Roberta L. Wilkes

When the last issue came out I was packing for a trip to Parsons, TN to see the Rivertime Players. In a real tent. I was excited, but hoping I wouldn't be disappointed. After all, none of the troupe was born into the business as I was – so would they be able to pull it off? Would I feel the nostalgia? Would it seem the same?

My friend, Marilyn and I made the journey across part of Oklahoma, all of Arkansas, and on into Tennessee. We got to the lot mid-afternoon. I saw Mickey Lacey's car and just beyond a rolled-up side curtain, Mickey. And then our friend, Mark Tubbs. My heart started to flutter a bit and I jumped out of the car. Well, okay, I don't really jump much anymore. I walked toward the tent.

The tent is vinyl, so it's shiny. That threw me a bit. It doesn't have the canvas smell. But the color is right, the poles are there, the stage looks right and – I can't believe it – I tripped over a stake. The ropes aren't tied; there is some sort of belts with ratchets. And instead of the top being laced together, it's Velcro.

But, believe me, none of that made any difference when the audience got there and the show started. Because as the evening wore on, Marilyn and I laughed and laughed until we thought our sides would burst. And I could smell the popcorn and watch the kids sitting in the front row – yes, behaving themselves. (After all, their parents were sitting somewhere behind them.)

Well, then, it all came back. The reason it was so great trouping under canvas. It was great because everyone was having a good time. And, yes, the audience obviously felt Toby and the rest of the troupe were family. And, in this case maybe they were *really* family, but I remembered how it felt to be treated like family anyway. And, by the way, all of us old-timers who were there were treated not just like family – but like royalty. We were introduced; Mickey and Toby, played by Shane Bridges, did some bits. I did a version of the old "Wages" routine – the one where Toby tries to get paid, but ends up owning the boss money. We put a spin on it by having two come up to ask for money, instead of just one. Mickey and Mark Tubbs stepped in to be the two – without any rehearsal at all.

They didn't need our bits, though. Or us, really. They were obviously comfortable on stage. The characters were good. They had thought up new bits. Bits that were timely. The play was changed a little, too – to accommodate the players they have in their troupe. That's what we would have done, I realized. Sang new songs and made new acts – depending on what we had to work with.

I'm going to go again next year if it's at all possible. I may try to come down from the north, so I won't have to make the pull across Arkansas. But I'm going. Maybe I'll see you there!



Roberta L. Wilkes, Mickey Lacey and Mark Tubbs on stage with the Rivertime Players.

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