



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

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Collections Supervisor  
Martha Hayes

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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[thetheatremuseum.com](http://thetheatremuseum.com)

405 E. Threshers Road  
Mount Pleasant, IA  
52641

# Winging It

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

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Spring 2014

## President's Message

It has been a long and cold winter for all of us this year. How I long for spring and the smell of canvas.

That scent which opens up my soul for the new season, new possibilities, new friends and the hope of long days and entertaining nights.

The board and committees have been busy planning for this year's Conference scheduled for April 25, 26, and 27th. We already have some exciting presenters and they are putting together some great entertainment.

If you have not already made plans to attend, Get into that spring spirit! Make your reservations, plan that presentation, reserve early, bring a friend, and tell a student that you believe can benefit from the hundreds of years of knowledge about entertainment! The more young people, the better!

We have found some new artifacts this year to add to the collection and are moving forward to ensure a spring-like blossoming of new interest in our museum and library.

I look forward to seeing familiar faces and some new ones to add to our knowledge and enjoyment.

I was always taught in this business to always leave them wanting more. So I will close with this:

We hope to have exciting news for our annual meeting scheduled for Sunday morning! So plan on attending this exciting weekend!

David



## AD LIBS

By Grace Swank-Davis

Greetings from beautiful downtown Mount Pleasant, Iowa.

The countdown to the Theatre Museum's 2014 Theatre History Conference is on! The dates for this year's gathering are Friday, Saturday & Sunday, April 25, 26 & 27.

Amongst our speakers this year will be Chris Hadsel of Burlington, VT. MS Hadsel is the Director of *Curtains Without Borders* an organization that restores historic theatre scenery. Up to this time they have stabilized over 200 curtains in Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine and New York.

Doris Montag has developed a display of minstrel show artifacts for an exhibit in Iowa City, Iowa and will bring various pieces of the show to our conference.

Also speaking will be veteran trouper, Toby Dick Ellis. I don't have the title of his presentation but with his vast show business experience anything he does will be fascinating. I will be presenting a paper titled *Home Sweet Home*, a PowerPoint presentation on the way of life of a trouper.

Now's the time to make your plans to join us here in sunny Mount Pleasant, Iowa for a great weekend of new and interesting information, fun, food and cutting up jackpots. Use the handy registration form found on page three or just e-mail us at: [theatremuseum@yahoo.com](mailto:theatremuseum@yahoo.com).

At the last meeting it was decided Old Threshers' Summer Theatre to present Neil & Caroline Schaffner's play, *Chain Stores*. It will be presented the last two weekends of July and during Old Threshers.

We hope to see you at our conference

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

I'd like to:

Become a Member

Renew my Membership

Give a gift of  
Membership

### Membership Levels

Student.....\$15  
Individual.....\$20  
Family.....\$30  
Actor's Circle.....\$50

Business Supporter.....\$100  
Director's Circle.....\$150  
Angel.....\$500  
Gabriel Himself.....\$1,000

Name (s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Membership Level \_\_\_\_\_

Check Enclose (Payable to National Society)

Please return your payment with this form.

408 E. Threshers Road  
Mt. Pleasant, IA 52641



**Registration For**  
**The Annual Theatre History Conference**  
**MUSEUM OF REPERTOIRE AMERICANA**  
 Museum (319)385-9432 · Main Office (319)385-8937 ·  
 405 East Threshers Road, Mt. Pleasant, Iowa 52641  
 theatremuseum@yahoo.com  
[www.thetheatremuseum.com](http://www.thetheatremuseum.com)  
 Fax (319)385-0563

**April 25, 26 and 27, 2014**

\_\_\_\_\_ I plan to attend the annual Theatre History Conference. Fee: Members, \$75.00  
 Non-members, \$95.00. Troupers, \$25.00  
 \_\_\_\_\_ I/we will attend the casual supper on Friday, April 25. (Circle I or We)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ I/we will attend evening banquet on Saturday, April 26. (Circle I or We)  
 Price included in conference.

**PRE-ACTIVITIES:** Friday, April 25, 12:30-4:00pm Theatre Museum Library  
 4:30: Happy Hour & Supper TBA

**CONFERENCE FEE INCLUDES:**

Conference program, continental breakfast, Saturday lunch and dinner, and entertainment.  
 Members, \$75.00 - Non-members, \$95.00 - Students & Troupers, \$25.00

**National Theatre Society dues:**

Student	Individual	Family	Actor's Circle	Business Supporter	Director's Circle
\$15	\$20	\$30	\$50	\$100	\$150

*Reservations for Conference/Dinners are needed by Tuesday, April 1, 2014*

**MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO: National Theatre Society**

Seminar \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 Dues \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 TOTAL \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Mt. Pleasant Hotels:**  
 (Grand Avenue - Frontage Road)

Comfort Inn & Suites 319-385-0571  
 FAX 319-385-3464

Rodeway Inn 319-385-2004  
 FAX 319-385-8324

Mt. Pleasant Inn 319-385-2102  
 FAX 319-385-3223

Super 8 Motel 319-385-8888  
 FAX 319-385-8888

**OTHER INFORMATION DESIRED**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_



**THE THEATRE MUSEUM  
MOUNT PLEASANT, IOWA**

# **CALL FOR PAPERS**

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

## **Annual Theatre History Conference "Other People's Business"**

The conference will focus on the variety of entertainments  
that toured the heartland of America. Papers may include, but are not

limited to:

**TENT REP**

**CIRCLE STOCK**

**TAB SHOWS**

**OPERA HOUSES**

**SHOW BOATS**

**CIRCUSES**

**VAUDEVILLE**

**MINSTREL SHOWS**

**BURLESQUE**

**"UNCLE TOM'S CABIN" SHOWS**

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](mailto:theatremuseum@yahoo.com)**

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

**Check out our website at: [thetheatremuseum.com](http://thetheatremuseum.com)**

## Another Opera House Being Renovated

By Martha Hayes

Mount Pleasant, Iowa is joining the group of towns that is restoring one of its early performance venues. This opera house is not like the ones in Greenfield or Hampton because it is not a separate structure but is on the third floor of an Italianate building known as the Union Block—a building that is essentially four stories wide and takes up almost half of a half block.

Henry Ambler and E. L. Penn, in 1861, had William McCandless and a group of mostly Irish workers construct a three story building on the north side of the Mount Pleasant square. The first floor at that time consisted of several different stores, the next floor contained several offices and the top floor was known as the Union Hall or the Union Opera House. (It also served as part of the County court system for about ten years.) Each man owned half of the building and up until 2011, there have been two owners. Nothing had been done to restore, update, and make the entire building usable until 2011 when one owner purchased both halves of the building.

The cost estimate for the restoration is three million dollars and the project is expected to be completed in the summer of 2014. Funds are being raised locally and with state and federal grants and tax credit financing. An elevator is being added so that the third story can become again “the center of the town’s social activity.” *Cornerstones*, a book about the history of downtown Mount Pleasant published in 1991 on page 15 states “It was the site of many theatrical productions, concerts, and community events.”

Harry Miner’s American Dramatic Directory for the Season of 1884-1885 described the Union Hall as the following: seating capacity 1,000, size of stage 23’ x 40’, number of sets scenery 7, rental one night \$10, three nights \$25, license \$5 share. Willis Bass was the manager of it along with being the manager of the Saunders Opera House (it was in the next block west but has since been demolished). There are two rooms on the third floor; one being described as “fifty by fifty with nineteen foot ceilings” Now there is no indication of where the stage might have been or what happened to the scenery.

Local historians have been trying to document what theatrical productions did take place between 1861 and 1885 by scouring local newspapers. A sampling of what has been located is given follows:

Report on Iowa’s Rendezvous Camp, prepared for the Iowa National Guard in 2011 that appeared in the Mt. Pleasant Home Journal, February 15, 1862: Grand Concert by the Regimental Band, Professor Gougler. About the same time, Searl, magician and prestidigitator performed at Union Hall.

April 18, 1863, at Union Hall, according to the Mt. Pleasant Home Journal, Frankenstein’s splendid panorama of Niagara Falls on canvas was presented there.

The Henry County Press on Wednesday, January 5, 1870 noted the following: “The concert delivered at Union Hall, on Friday last by the Mendelssohn Quintette Club was one of the grandest and finest productions of music ever delivered in this city. Miss Jennie Busk, as a singer, she is excellent, she captivated the audience by her clear and sweet voice, the echo, which was produced by Mr. Heindel, on the flute, in an adjoining room, was perfect.”

Sometime in 1872, date not clear, the Tennesseans from Fisk College sang and the notice in the paper was enough to pack Union Hall—ten colored persons singing in aid of a college for colored people located in Nashville, Tennessee.

The Free Press noted in two places on October 29, 1874 the coming of Happy Cal Wagner and His Minstrel Troupe to Union Hall. It was the return of the favorites and they had a brass band. In May of 1883, Haverly’s Minstrels performed there. General admission was 50 cents, reserved seats were 75 cents.

That same paper on February 18, 1875 noted this about Mrs. Scott Siddons. “She Came and Saw and Conquered.” Her recitations consisted of selections from Shakespeare, a couple of extracts from Mark Twain, and a scene from Sheridan’s “School for Scandal.”

In 1879, the Free Press noted that Professor T. F. Price, at present teaching elocution in this city, is the author of the play “Joshua Whitcomb,” which had such a successful run all over the country, It will be played this Thursday evening by the Kendall Company at Union Hall.

On September 20, 1883, according to the Free Press advertisement “The celebrated Forham Dramatic Company at Union Hall next Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evenings.” The following week the paper stated “Don’t fail to see Forhan as “Banta Bob” tonight. The Forham Comedy Company, supporting Miss Adelaide Elliott, every night this week at Union Hall. They also performed “Black Diamonds” and the sterling play about Rip Van Winkle.

Then on November 8, 1883 in the Free Press the following appeared “The Double Uncle Tom’s Cabin Company at Union Hall last Thursday night had a full house. The old yet ever new drama was presented in a very creditable manner, the jubilee singing by the colored people being one of the best features of the entertainment.” This will be remembered for many years as the last performance given in Union Hall, the carpenters beginning to tear out the old partitions on Monday, preparatory to fitting it up for the use of the Masonic fraternity.” (The history behind this change came about because the building where the Masons had formerly met had been destroyed by fire and they leased the entire third floor for a period of twenty years) When they left, the International Order of Old Fellows leased the third floor and continued to meet there until the 1950s. From that time on, that story has remained unused until now.

Bookings for the use of the top floor beginning in the fall of this year are already being taken. It will be interesting to see what types of events will take place there.

The National Society would like to welcome this new member:  
Dar L. Rasmussen, Brookings, OR

## A Valentine to the Theatre Museum

By Cara Trees

The air smelled fragrant with freshly cut grass when I opened my car door. As I looked across the rolling hills of the fairgrounds, I could see the bountiful rows of cornstalks in the distance amongst the lush green landscape. Where I stood, the air was sticky hot but a gentle breeze cascaded over the crest of the hill as we took our seats. It was a perfect summer day in Iowa between the edge of a small town and the enveloping countryside.

I was twenty-something with many places I would rather be but had told Kathy Jennings Buxton that I would be there. Of course, I convinced my usual cohort in unusual jaunts to tag along with only a promise of buying her ticket. Sue (Miller) had never seen one before. I hadn't gone since I was ten but didn't remember much being stuffed in the back between my taller cousins. Little did I know that when the sun set and the stage lights flickered on that I would fall in love. Yes, the seed of my romance for the tent theatre genre began there as well as for a young boy on stage. It was an enchanted evening, one that has remained etched forever in my memory. As a young spectator, I was inspired. And now as a mature audience member, I still cherish these productions. My only wish is for continued generations to experience the "magic".

It is both my pleasure and my passion to be back working at the Theatre Museum once again alongside my husband, Brian Haymond (that young boy on stage). As teachers, we know the necessity of educating our youth but probably the more difficult task is that of inspiring them. We have such a rich heritage here at Midwest Old Threshers in making history come to life for our children and want to include the Theatre Museum in this endeavor as well. This vision we share with Martha Hayes and our first quest will begin during Old Threshers Reunion 2014.

What better way to intrigue children than through our *Toby*? This summer, we will build a working display with a makeup booth and a trunk full of costumes. During the reunion, volunteers dressed as Toby and Susie will assist participants in painting freckles, selecting their costume, and possibly rehearsing a small skit for their stage debut. All will be done outside under canvas. Commemorative hats with red wigs, one designed for Toby and one for Susie, are possible souvenirs to sell. I plan to have a prototype on display during the Theatre Seminar. Hope to see you there and welcome advice on how to make this thespian experience historically authentic and amusing as possible.

When Martha Hayes contacted me last spring to help during the summer at the Theatre Museum, I couldn't refuse and am glad I didn't. Every day I entered the doors, I was amazed at the wonderful stories uncovered whether it be in reading old letters and scripts, talking to visiting guests, or just the impromptu conversations Martha and troupers shared about the artifacts that I was recording. As my husband Brian and Martha were my entry enthusiasts into the world of Repertoire Americana, I propose that *Toby* be our gateway into capturing the hearts of a new audience. Once crossing the threshold, they, too, will fall in love like I did that magical summer evening under the tent of the Schaffner Players in Washington, Iowa.



**JOS. T. WEISMAN**  
PROPRIETOR  
*Member of the*  
**N. V. A.**  
**BURLESQUE CLUB**  
AND  
**THE SHOWMEN'S**  
**LEAGUE**



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**AND THEATRICAL**  
**MAKE-UPS**

