



**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

We just wrapped up our 29th annual Theatre History Conference titled "Other People's Business".

To be frank, I was quite apprehensive in the beginning about how this year's conference would turn out as many of our notable "stalwarts" were not able to attend for various personal reasons and sudden illness. **BOY DID THEY MISS OUT!** (and they were missed).

Wonderful presentations including Christine Hadsel of "Curtains without Boarders", Carla Trees' presentation on getting young people more involved, Doris Montag talking about the history of Minstrel shows, and Grace Davis' talk on Home away from Home gave us some new perspective on the iterate entertainer's life and lifestyle.

Many laughs and tears as Mickey Lacey and "Toby" Dick Ellis added their particular perspective of the entertainer's life. Not to mention the great entertainment provided by the above, Connie Foster, Bob Hollis and Ken Bradbury. If you were not there, **BOY DID YOU MISS OUT!**

During the annual meeting, new alliances were formed for the advance of our mission. We have joined with "Curtains without Boarders" to assist in the restoration and preservation of these historic theatrical art pieces. We began a dialogue with Doris Montag to assist with traveling exhibits, **PLUS** we have formed a committee and have a strong beginning to put together a play writing contest for students! This is in the planning stages at this point, but with a little bit of effort from Donald, Seth, Judith and others we should be able to make this the centerpiece of our 30th annual Theatre History Conference next year. A dream a long time in the making. Plan to attend!

Again, as I drove from Cedar Rapids to Mt Pleasant on Friday I was worried about the health of our Society and our Conference while receiving last minute news about attendees who had fallen ill and could not attend. Many changes are in the air at the Midwest Old Threshers (to whom we owe so much) and our Society is adapting to the changes needed and new structure voted into place last year in order for us to continue our mission.

All of these factors weighed heavy during this drive. I arrived around 1pm, checked the mail, and found a letter from Mr. Hal Holbrook (thank you David Wagaman for this contact information) which lifted my spirit and reaffirmed that what we do IS very important and relevant to today's entertainment industry.

As did Mr. Holbrook, I could pontificate (as can you) about the state of entertainment today for hours. We understand that by preserving the tradition of quality, live theatre and passing this knowledge to the next generation of entertainers, we not only honor our craft, but influence the performing arts as a whole. Your board of directors has been working hard to advance this ideal to today's audience.

Help your board! Get involved! A few hours a year and your knowledge is all that is needed. And bring a friend.

David

P.S. Exciting news is on the horizon. Be ready!



Doris Ditto

National Society Board Member Doris Ditto, 73, passed away March 23, 2014, in Audubon, Iowa. Doris, the youngest daughter of nine children, was born January 20, in Coffeyville, Kansas.



After graduating from High School, Doris and her sister Dola moved to Coon Rapids, Iowa where she was employed in the office of Garst and Thomas Seed Corn Company for many years.

On April 23, 1962, she was joined in marriage to former tent show performer Floyd Ditto in Independence, Kansas. Doris started selling Lyceum Programs for International Lectures in Missouri, Iowa, Illinois and Minnesota. Doris joined Floyd as he traveled throughout the Midwest giving school programs on the *History of Folk Music*. They settled on their farm in Audubon, Iowa in the early 1970s.

From 1979 to 1998, she sold newspaper advertising for the local newspaper. In 1990 Doris started selling specially advertising, developing her own business in 2000, known as Ditto Advertising which she had continued to run up until her death.

Doris was gifted with a lovely singing voice and she and Floyd participated in the trouper entertainment many times at the Theatre Museum's Theatre History Conference.

Among the survivors are her husband Floyd Ditto; her daughters: Dalena Ditto of Branson, Missouri, and her son Landon; Denise and husband Chris Vernon of Des Moines, Iowa and a large extended family.

Ann B. Davis



Two time Emmy Award winning actress, Ann B. Davis passed away June 1, 2014, at the age of 88. Ms Davis sustained a subdural hematoma after a fall in her bathroom in her San Antonio, Texas home.

Born May 5th 1926, in Schenectady, N. Y., and raised in Erie, PA, MS. Davis graduated from the University of Michigan in 1948 with a degree in drama.

She first achieved prominence on television in 1955 on *The Bob Cummings Show*. She was nominated four times for her portrayal of Cummings' assistant, *Schultz*. She won twice for that role and received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 1960.

But, perhaps MS. Davis is best known for her role as *Alice* on *The Brady Bunch*. The show ran for five years from 1969 to 1974. She reprised her role in several *Brady Bunch* reunion shows as well as appearing in a cameo role as a character named *Schultz* in *The Brady Bunch Movie* in 1995. In 2007, *The Brady Bunch* was awarded the TV Land Pop Culture Award on the 5th annual TV Land Awards. Davis and other cast members accepted the award, and she received a standing ovation

As well as her television work and movies, MS. Davis kept busy doing summer stock and regional theatre, appearing in plays across the country, ranging from *Arsenic and Old Lace* to *The Chronicles of Hell*. Davis made her Broadway debut, replacing Carol Burnett as the star of *Once Upon a Mattress* in 1960. She also was a celebrity spokesperson for the Ford Motor Company, Minute Rice, Shake 'n Bake and Swiffer.

In 1958 she was elected to the Screen Actors Guild Board of Governors where she served for five years.

She served on the USO's Council in the late 1960's and spent Christmas 1967 entertaining the troops in Vietnam and in 1968 led a 35-day trip to South Korea.

She started her professional career on the Manhattan Players, a tent show out of Pennsylvania. In a newspaper interview in 1969 she stated that in 1949 she toured one summer in the Midwest with the tent show. Her starting salary was \$20 a week (about \$190 in today's money) and out of that she said she was able to save \$100 and go to California. One of the parts she played on the show was Peg in *Peg O' My Heart*.

In September of 1966 she and her twin sister, Harriett, came to Mount Pleasant at the invitation of the National Society's first president Jimmy Davis (no relation) for a reunion of tent show people.

AD LIBS

By Grace Swank-Davis

Greetings from beautiful downtown Mount Pleasant, Iowa.

Just as we were finishing *Winging It*, we received the sad news that Lennis Moore, CEO of the Midwest Old Threshers organization passed away June 11, 20014. Lennis had run the Old Threshers since 1978 and he was a great supporter of the Theatre Museum. We will have a full obituary in our next issue.

We also lost a lovely lady, Doris Ditto on March 23, 2014. Doris and her husband of 51 years Floyd, were regular attendees at the museum's annual conference where they always took part in the Saturday night trouper entertainment. Floyd an accomplished guitarist and singer, would accompany Doris who was a wonderful singer. Fortunately, we have these performances on DVDs. She will be missed.

In April, the National Society was host to the annual Theatre History Conference at the museum. We had a good turnout and although unfortunately three of our speakers had to cancel we had very interesting papers presented as you can see by checking the program on page 7 of the newsletter. George Glenn could not make it this year for the first time that I can remember. He was going to do a paper entitled *Opera House Art*. Roberta Wilkes was going to speak about *Non-profits, the IRS and the Artistic Community* and Jake Medford was to give an update on the efforts to save the Goldenrod Showboat. All great papers I'm sure and I hope they will present them at the 2015 conference.

Because we had time to fill, Society member Ken Bradbury leaped in and did a whole set on what I guess you could call Honk Tonk music. Boy, can he play the piano and he had the entire museum jumping! Happily, he joined in on the Saturday night entertainment and got us going again! (He is also an author and I'm going to order his book *Around the World with Freida Marie Crump*, on Amazon). Bob Hollis brought his big bass fiddle all the way from Indiana for Saturday night. You don't hear a bass fiddle very often nowadays but it has its own unique sound and Bob knows how to play it. He and Mickey Lacey did a number or two and then they brought up Dick Ellis. They had them in the aisles. Then we had a treat when Connie Foster put on her tap shoes. I say Roberta Wilkes, Connie Foster and my aunt, Billie Schuller should work up a tap routine for next year. Who's with me? If you wish you could have seen the show or any of the papers we have them all on CDs and they are for sale from our gift shop at a reasonable price.

It was great to see Connie Foster. She started her career on The Schaffner Players and has lived in Chicago for a long time where she is still in the business. In addition, Barry & Lorraine Hawkins came all the way from New York State to attend the conference. Barry, like Roberta, Mickey and myself, was raised on the road and lived in a travel trailer. How lucky were we?!

The dates for the 2015 Theatre History Conference is: April 17, 18 & 19. Made your plans now to attend.

After the conference Mickey Lacey almost ran into the big storm that hit Arkansas. Here is his account:

Well, it took me 14-1/2 hours to drive home after the theatre seminar. Hard rain, sleet, strong winds and dark, dark, dark. As I got closer to home, I didn't realize I was driving right into the path of that EF...high 4. It hit our little town about 30 to 45 minutes before I got there. We live about 3 miles outside of town; but we didn't know until the next a.m. that it took 95% of the business area, 57 homes, 6 deaths. It was 3/4 mile wide. We're all okay though. Just still worn out from that drive. "Oh there's no business like show business"!

Landis K. Magnuson sent word his book *Circle Stock Theater: Touring American Small Towns, 1900-1960* has been reissued in paperback form. It can be ordered on line at Amazon or any booksellers. It is really a well-done book on the subject and I don't say that just because my family is mentioned.

All for now, don't forget you are always welcome on the lot.

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

Membership Levels

Student..... \$15	Business Supporter.....\$100
Individual.....\$20	Director's Circle.....\$150
Family.....\$30	Angel.....\$500
Actor's Circle.....\$50	Gabriel Himself.....\$1,000

Name (s) _____

Address _____

City _____

State/Zip _____

E-mail _____

Phone _____

Membership Level _____

Check Enclose (Payable to National Society)

CURTAINS, BACK DROPS, SCENERY

Do you know what the National Grange Organization and opera houses have in common? If you had attended the 29th Annual Theatre Conference at the Theatre Museum in Mount Pleasant, Iowa in April, you would know the answer. Chris Hadsel of Burlington, Vermont entitled her presentation “Suspended Worlds.” She described the work of Curtains Without Borders, a group that has spent the past fifteen years locating, documenting and conserving historic stage scenery mostly in the New England area. To demonstrate aspects of her talk, photographs of a number of painted backdrops were shown.

As Chris pointed out, a hundred years ago, grand drapes and painted backdrops were the primary artistic feature in the cultural life of almost every village and town in northern New England. The “curtains,” often found in grange halls or town halls, provided color and escapism in these institutions and other places and varied in size and how professionally they were done. They were available as set backdrops for traveling troupes, speakers, town meetings, graduations, and locally-produced variety shows. Some pieces she showed were by local artists and/or local studios, while others were purchased from scenic studios in Boston, New York, Buffalo, Chicago, and Omaha. One of the differences between the curtains Chris had worked with and the ones in the Theatre Museum collection is that the local artists in New England signed their names in many cases.

Chris went on to explain that an important part of Curtains Without Borders was the conservation of the historic painted scenery. She noted that this process includes the stabilization of the fabric, the provisions of minimal in-painting and consolidation of the paint layer, and the improving or recreating the rolling and installation mechanisms on stage. The professional conservation team worked with local volunteers to become “curtain caretakers” through their participation in the treatment of their scenery and through instruction in the care and handling of the historic pieces of theatre mostly painted between 1890 and 1940.

Many of the advertising curtains were found in grange halls, she noted, because that was how the group paid for them. Those in town halls were paid for by donation or public money.

Chris came early to the conference to view the Theatre Museum’s collection and it was discovered that while the curtains looked similar, the terms describing them varied. “Front Room,” “Back Room,” “Timber,” and “Town” appear to be Mid-western terminology. “Grand Drape” is a New England term. She gave some insightful advice on conservation.

Hadsel presented the Museum two publications about the projects the group has worked on: *Scenic Artists in Vermont Theatrical Scenery 1900-1940* and *Historical New Hampshire*. The latter was published in the summer of 2012 and contains an article entitled “New Hampshire Painted Theater Curtains and Scenic Artists, 1890-1940”.



During the National Society’s Theatre History Conference, Karol Shaffer, Sue Mitchell and Charlene Hinrichs were recognized for their volunteer work at the museum. All three have worked hard organizing the research library, working with our new computer system and data entering. We are very grateful for all their work. Pictured are Karol Shaffer and Sue Mitchell.

Let us know if you would prefer to receive your copy of *Winging It* by e-mail. Just drop us a line at theatremuseum@yahoo.com

Please make note of our new e-mail address:

theatremuseum@yahoo.com.

And be sure to like us on Facebook!

Peck's Bad Girl

By Mickey Lacey

Ah.....my sister, Karalee. My pal, Hooper, Acrobat, Vocalist, Pianist and Ingénue.

First born to Maxine and Leo Lacey. Began specialties at four or five years old. Trouped on some of the best shows of the day.

After her birth, I came along about five years later. When I reached four or five, we started doing specialties together. Little song and dance routines that she would lead me through. She was a much more polished dancer even at that time working alone. Better than I could have ever been. We also did a few bits with Mom and/or Dad from time to time. Mostly the corn stuff such as, "Now kids, this spanking is gonna hurt me worse than you" "Yea...but not in the same place"!

What memories I have of the two of us trouping together. Most all were good. Some got us both in trouble.

I don't remember the town we were playing at the time however; we were on Bisbee's Comedians, a well known tent show. It was on a Sunday which was the day we didn't show. We were "day-n-dating" the Clyde Beatty Circus. (For those that don't know; "day-n-dating" means two shows are playing the same town, on the same day, night or week).

Some of the older troupers on our show had met or knew Mr. Beatty in the past. Our whole show was invited to attend the afternoon performance of the circus. Although we knew circus performers through the business, I actually think it was the circus either Karalee or I had ever attended. You have to understand that my sister was an avid animal lover. Any animal, anywhere. She was continually showing up at our trailer with "something", asking to keep it...to no avail.

As I remember it, we were all out front visiting around the marquee I think. For some reason I noticed Karalee heading around the sidewall of the tent. Naturally, I followed. Before long we were out back of the big top where the elephants were kept on the staging line. I was carrying some cotton candy or some treat and Karalee had a sack of peanuts. None of the handlers of the elephants seemed to be around so Karalee quietly started down the feeding one elephant at a time. I was getting a real bad feeling that in no way were we supposed to be where we were.

Karalee must have made three or four trips down that line. Evidently she picked out one elephant that she liked best because she began feeding the peanuts to only him. Evidently he was feeling the same vibes because as other "trunks" began intruding in the space for more peanuts treats, the trunks started flying. All the way down the line!

The slapping of trunks and the shrieking sounds that elephants make got all the show's personnel's attention from the front to the back. The handlers showing up from nowhere hollering "Elephant fight, elephant fight"! Karalee and I both were immediately chased away and back to the front did we go!

No... we didn't get away with the situation. My dad said, "I can't believe you started a damn elephant fight! We'll handle this after we go home." With that on our little haunted minds, we all headed into the big top where everyone was seated on front row box seats. All the way in I kept telling Karalee under my breath, "Wasn't my fault, it wasn't my fault."

As the big musical bally for the parade around the three rings began, there were clowns, acrobats, high wire artists, horses, a few camels, lions and tigers rolled by in cages and elephants intertwined between them all. It was glorious introduction for what was to come.

However, when a certain elephant came by our box seats he definitely remembered Karalee. He made a definite right turn away from the parade in spite of what the handler would do to redirect him. Mr. Friendly Elephant came directly to where Karalee was seated...with trunk fully extended as if to say "More peanuts, please"! There was just no moving Mr. Friendly. We all had to get up, walk out of the top and wait for the parade to end in order for the handlers to move the elephant back to position before we could return.

When we got back to our lot and in our trailer, I distinctly remember my dad forgetting his cue lines to us...being "Now this is going to hurt me more than it hurts you." Yes, you're right. Karalee and I didn't even bother returning our line..."Yea, but not in the same place". And boy did it!!!

Karalee eventually married out of the business when she was eighteen. I really missed her.

She passed away in 2011. I miss her even more now. I keep thinking back to the first song we sang as a duet. She had beautiful harmony too...

*Now is the hour...when we must say goodbye
Soon I'll be sailing, far across the sea
While I'm away, oh then remember me
So when I return, I'll find you waiting there.*

Martha Hayes' Corner

TWO BOXES TELL A STORY

The week before the 29th Annual Theatre History Conference took place two boxes arrived at the Theatre Museum but weren't opened. The name on the boxes, however, rang a bell and sent the staff to the shelf with the books that describe tent repertoire theatre and what it was like. The name was Jerry L. Martin and in 1984 his book *Henry L. Brunk and Brunk's Comedians* was published by the Bowling Green State University Popular Press, Bowling Green, Ohio. Dr. Martin, who is now the retired Chair, Speech Communication and Theatre Department, Muskingum University, New Concord, Ohio had spent years researching this facet of American Popular Entertainment. The boxes, which have not been inventoried yet, contain the background material that the author used in developing his book. What fun the Museum will have this summer when there is time to discover all the treasures that have found their way to Mount Pleasant. Thank you, Dr. Martin.

A little peeking has already taken place in the boxes and in the back of the book. There are nine pages of bibliography in the text that list the books, periodicals, theses and documents, correspondence, manuscripts, and interviews that Dr. Martin used to describe "Tent Repertoire Empire of the Southwest." Some of the latter had been taped and are included in the boxes. Time will tell what else is there. More news will be included in the next *Winging It*.

Martin states that "Brunk's Comedians, the focus of this work, constituted the most successful tent theatre organization operating in the Southwestern United States. Through the first half of the twentieth century, the seven Brunk brothers and one uncle built an organization that spanned all important eras of tent show existence." This collection will add much to the Research Library at the Theatre Museum. Come visit and help delve into the boxes.

NEW MINSTREL SHOW KNOWLEDGE

Doris Montag, who is broker of small museum exhibits, recently mounted an exhibit about Minstrel Shows at the University of Iowa Hospital in Iowa City, her hometown. Much of the material came from the private collection of James Hicks also of Iowa City who is a collector of African-American Art and History memorabilia. She had also used a tambourine and a poster from the Theatre Museum's collection in that exhibit since Hicks did not have those items. (Doris had visited the Theatre Museum earlier and knew what our facility had.) She brought a tableful of memorabilia from the exhibit which she referred to as she gave a broad outline of the minstrel show era and listed some of the many show companies that played all over the United States.

NEW FRIENDS, NEW TROUPERS, NEW TOBY

In 2013, Barry Hawkins and his wife Lorraine joined the National Society, having discovered us via the Internet. They reside in New York State, and made the long trip to Iowa in 2014 to attend the 29th annual Theatre History Conference. Much to the delight of the group it was learned that Barry had been a trouper primarily playing child parts as well as doing other jobs like selling candy. Later he had a career as a professional ventriloquist with his character Toby Tyler and performed in many clubs and did regional television on the west coast.

Barry was the son of Stuart Maxwell and Patsy Hawkins. When Barry said that Stuart or "Skip" Hawkins was well known as "Toby" on the Hugo Players, there was a mad dash to view the list of known Tobies and he was not on it. (It had been quoted somewhere that two hundred men and one woman had played the Toby character and the Museum's list contained the names of one hundred eighty six. Now a new one has been added and Barry gave the Museum a photo of Skip as Toby.)

Stuart Maxwell "Skip" Hawkins (1913-1988) traveled with various tent and circle stock companies from 1931 through 1949 including the Bob and Peggy Show, Rosalie Nash Players, Doug Morgan Show, and the Hugo Players. With his brothers Robert and Theodore, he also formed the Hawkins Brothers Dramatic Stock Company. They played opera houses, granges, community halls and other venues during the thirties. The family performed and often doubled in music: Robert was a tuba player, Theodore played the trumpet and tap danced, and sisters Catherine and Helen performed. At one time ten different Hawkins family members were in one show or another. Later the company became the Skip Hawkins Company, Skip played dramatic leads in all the groups and was well known as a Toby in the Hugo Players, He also originated a radio personality called "Checkers" on KDEC in Decorah, IA. Skip doubled in brass, playing trombone, piano, and xylophone.

Barry's mother Pat or Patsy Hawkins (1916-1994) played ingénue and other dramatic and comedic parts. She also danced, sang, and played clarinet.

Brother George Wallace Hawkins, born in 1940, traveled with the Hugo Players doing children's parts. Later on he had a career playing percussion and doubling on other instruments with various groups including the Grand Old Opry and Buck Owens.

The Society is glad to welcome Barry and Lorraine to our group and know we will learn more about troupers and trouping from them.

2014 Theatre Conference Program

Friday, April 25, 2014

- 1:30 Informal Activities and Registration at Theatre Museum
- 4:30 Registration and Social Hour—Mi Pueblo Real | 106 Baker St
- 6:00 Supper—Mi Pueblo Real
- 7:15 Welcome and Introductions
- 7:30 Social Hour (Pick Up Where We Left Off)

Saturday, April 26, 2014

The James V. Davis Performance Center of the Theatre Museum

- 8:15 Registration, coffee, juice, rolls
Gift Shop open:: Books, T-Shirts, etc.
- 9:15 Welcome and Program Notes
- 9:30 **Session I: David Ripper Presiding**
Christine Hadsel
Suspended Worlds
- 10:30 Coffee Break
- 10:45 **Session II: Judith Zivanovic Presiding**
- 11:15 Mickey Lacey
School Days On Rep, And I Don't Mean Repetition
- 11:30 Carla Trees
Troupers—the Next Generation
- 11:45 George Glenn
Opera House Art
- 12:00 George Glenn and Brian Haymond
Theatre Museum Curtain Collection
- 1:30 **Session III: David Wagaman Presiding**
Doris Montag
History of Minstrel Shows
- 2:00 Toby Dick Ellis
What Ever Happened to Rep??
- 2:30 Jake Medford
Showboat News
- 3:00 Grace Swank-Davis
Home Away From Home
- 3:30 Roberta Wilkes
Non-profits, the IRS, and the Artistic Community
- 4:00 Break and Business Meeting, Election of Officers
- 6:00 Happy Hour and Catered dinner at the museum
- 8:00 Troupers Entertainment

Sunday, April 27, 2014

The James V. Davis Performance Center of the Theatre Museum

- 9:30 Coffee, juice, rolls
- 10:00 Time for More Research
- 12:00 No Host Luncheon at Jerry's Restaurant, Hwy 34E.
- 1:30-4 Museum and Library open

Note: Any troupers in attendance who have not already told their stories on videotape, please let us know and we will arrange to have you taped sometime during the seminar.

**2015 Conference Tentatively Scheduled for
April 17, 18, & 19, 2015**



**Pictured above are the attendees of the
Theatre Museum's 2014 Annual Theatre History Conference**



**TROUPERS ATTENDING
the CONFERENCE**

Left to right, Bob Hollis, Dick Ellis, Connie Foster, Barry Hawkins,
Mickey Lacey, Grace Davis, David Wagaman, David Ripper & Brian
Haymond

PRESENTERS

Carla Trees, Doris Montag, Dick Ellis, Judith Zivanovic, Grace Davis,
Mickey Lacey, Christine Hadsel, Ken Bradbury

**PLAN ON COMING TO THE
2015 NATIONAL SOCIETY'S THEATRE HISTORY CONFERENCE
AT THE THEATRE MUSEUM
THE DATES ARE
FRIDAY, SATURDAY & SUNDAY, APRIL 18TH, 19TH AND 20TH**