

Curtain Rising

Theater in Falmouth Over the Past Seventy Years

DeWitt C. Jones III

The first theatrical group in Falmouth in the 20th century was probably the Falmouth Dramatic Society founded by Joseph Jefferson Holland who summered at the Quissett Harbor House in 1905 and was the first commodore of the Quissett Yacht Club. After his death in 1926 the Society's name was changed to the Joseph Holland Players. Arnold Dyer was one of the last presidents of the society which disbanded in the early 30s.

More than a dozen different theatrical groups have been active in Falmouth since the 1920s, including the Fireside Comedy Club, the Woods Hole Theater Company, Cross Right Stage, the Falmouth Theater Guild, the Acting Group of Cape Cod, Tanglewood Theater, the Penzance Players, the College Light Opera Company, the University Players, the Trysail Chorus and the Retocom Players.

The Penzance Players

By far the longest playing group was the Penzance Players. In 1928 the Meigs twins in Woods Hole put on a play for their family and friends. The twins, Sarah and Mary, were aided by their governess, Miss Balfour; their brother, Wister, and a friend, Tom Ratcliffe worked behind the scenes.

The next year they again presented a play for their friends and in 1930 they and their friends formed the Penzance Players. The group consisted mostly of college students and children of old Woods Hole summer residents. Over the years the group expanded and

included high school students, "MBLers", summer folk from Quissett and many other young people who lived in Woods Hole during the summer.

Just before World War II the proceeds of one production went to the USO and one performance of the play was given on location at Camp Edwards. For four years during the War, however, the Penzance Players did not perform.

Many local groups, including the MBL Library, the Children's School of Science, the Falmouth Hospital Association, the Woods Hole Child Center, The Woods Hole and Falmouth libraries, the Woods Hole Historical Collection as well as the Red Cross and CARE have benefitted from the proceeds of the players' performances.

At least three Penzance Player alumni turned professional, Peggy Clark became an illustrious lighting designer, Tom Ratcliffe became the producer of the Sea Cliff Summer Theater on Long Island and Pat Butcher can be seen occasionally on local television.

There were no productions from 1942 until 1946 but the group reorganized in 1946 and put on three one act plays from Noel Coward's "Tonight at Eight-Thirty". The casts included Val Worthington, Cecily Cannan, Pat Butcher and Garrett McClung. The following year Bill Crane starred in Thornton Wilder's "Our Town".

About eight or nine years ago the group dissolved largely because its membership had grown younger



Penzance Players, 1946.
 "Hands Across the
 Sea" from Noel
 Coward's "Tonight at
 8:30;" from left to right
 Ned Tebbetts, Edith
 Donelson, Dick Jones,
 Anne Cummings,
 Pamela Wrinch, Hunt
 Mavor, Philip
 Newmark. Courtesy
 Cecily Cannan Selby.

and younger; the group could no longer do it all themselves, but by then the Penzance Players had produced plays for over 55 years making it the longest running drama organization in town.

The University Players

During the mid twenties and also in Woods Hole, Charles Leatherbee started presenting plays, mostly O'Neill one-acters, at his grandfather's house on Juniper Point. Several of his college mates from Harvard came down to act in them. They called themselves the Juniper Point Players.

In 1927 during the Christmas holidays in New York, Charles met Bretaigne Windust from Princeton University. They were both very interested in the theater and began to talk about creating a theater of their own. Neither one felt that he wanted to wait a year and a half before he was out of college to start on this project so they decided to establish a regular theater company. They selected Falmouth as their venue.

They decided to build a company of about thirty and recruited many undergraduates from Harvard, Princeton and Radcliffe. Initial salaries were to be \$5 a week with the understanding that they did not begin until the first play opened. Four members, Windust, Leatherbee, Erik Barnouw and Kingsley Perry, each

agreed to put up one hundred dollars, and thus the University Players Guild was born. \$400 proved not to be enough so, ten days before the opening night, rehearsals were called off for two days and all hands made a house-to-house canvass of Woods Hole and Falmouth. 176 subscribers at \$10 a head were enrolled so the opening was assured.

The Elizabeth Theater on Main Street in Falmouth showed movies six nights a week, but did little business on Monday or Tuesday. Ike Robbins, the owner, agreed to let the University Players present plays there on those two nights if he could receive fifty-five percent of the gross intake.

The men of the company lived on Leatherbee's grandfather's yacht in Falmouth Harbor or on the Charles Crane estate in Woods Hole or on a boat belonging to John Swope, the brother of Gerard Swope, Jr. John was also a member of the Guild; he later married Dorothy McGuire. The women all lived in a rented house in Quissett chaperoned by Mrs Judith Wells. Rehearsals took place in a camp fifty yards from Charlie's mother's house, "Whitecrest" in Gansett.

Among the players that first summer were Josh Logan, Kent Smith, Myron McCormick, Mildred Natwick,

University Players,
1932. Top figure at left
Bretaigne Windust,
middle figure Elizabeth
Fenner, top figure on
right Kent Smith, others
not identified. Courtesy
Falmouth Enterprise.



Betty Fenner of the Moors, Jay Fassett of West Falmouth and Henry Fonda. Margaret Sullivan (later to marry Hank Fonda) did not join the company until the second year; Jimmy Stewart joined the Players in 1932, their last year of operations.

At the end of the first summer the University Players Guild's 16 performances had grossed \$20,000. As agreed, Mr. Robbins received \$11,000 of this amount. After paying all their bills they found they had a profit of about \$1,200.

The organizers thought that if they had a theater of their own they would not have to pay such a sum to the Elizabeth Theater and could give six performances a week instead of just two. Ike Robbins thought that

he could do better by showing movies throughout the week and did not renew the lease, forcing the boys to find another location for their performances.

Mr. Crane offered them some land he owned in Quissett as a site for a playhouse, but his neighbors in this exclusive residential quarter objected. The boys thought they might be able to use an abandoned plant of the power and light company located on the edge of Falmouth Inner Harbor but this required a change in the zoning which the town turned down at their February 1929 town meeting.

Finally, on Old Silver Beach the boys found some privately owned bathhouses and a dance pavilion under which was a hot-dog stand. The owner of the property,

a Mr. Crowell, agreed to lease the land to them, on which they would build their theater.

Construction, however, never began until June 10, 1929. On the Friday night before the opening on Monday, Windust called off all rehearsals and ordered all hands to turn to and help finish building the theater. On Monday at five o'clock Windy sent the actors, all of whom had been working feverishly on the theater and were exhausted, home to get three hours' rest before the performance. He remained behind to work on the electricity.

The opening curtain finally went up shortly after nine o'clock that evening. The play stretched and stretched until 1 A.M. but the audience stayed and at the final curtain burst into long, sustained, solid applause. The entire show was chaotic and is wonderfully described, as is the whole four years, in a book by Norris Houghton entitled "But Not Forgotten". Houghton was one of the principal members of the guild. He, like everyone else in the group, had played many different roles, including acting, designing, directing, painting and performing any other necessary job.

Henry Fonda says in his autobiography that the first of only two times that he froze on stage was when

Margaret Sullivan appeared in a seaweed brassiere. The second time he "went up in my lines"¹ was in 1953 when he stood frozen, staring at his daughter, Jane, in admiration when they appeared together in "The Male Animal" at the Cape Playhouse in Dennis.

By the third production of that summer things were going much more smoothly, although at one point in "The Last of Ms Cheyney" Windust took hold of both of Edith Dyer's hands as she was playing the piano and the tune continued anyway.

Most of the group had returned in 1929 for a second year and there were a number of new additions. Woods Hole and Quissett were too far away for commuting so homes in West Falmouth were procured to house the company. During that second summer Josh Logan's younger sister Mary Lee showed up and became part of the company, although she seldom appeared on stage. Later she married Charles Leatherbee, and later still became a famous wartime photographer for *Life* magazine.

One staunch supporter of the University Players was Frank Beebe, a wealthy well-known patron of the arts who was in his late seventies and summered in Falmouth. He agreed to take 10 season subscriptions if there were a Wednesday matinee. He didn't want to go out at night. Fortunately, his was not the only car in the parking lot on those Wednesday afternoons.

At the end of the third summer the group, having grown in experience and stature, was persuaded to go to Baltimore for a season of repertory. There it received good notices from the press. Unfortunately the public was not as responsive; the company edged toward bankruptcy. However, to quote Houghton, "they rocked the city with their lusty performance of 'Lysistrata'".

In the late spring of 1932, the directors of the Guild voted to change its name to "The Theater Unit, Inc." partly because they no longer insisted on the members



University Players theater at Old Silver Beach, 1931. From *But Not Forgotten*. Courtesy Boston Herald.

of the company being university graduates. This was the fourth name change of the company in as many years but they were most commonly known as simply the University Players. They also joined forces with Arthur J. Beckhard, the producer of the greatest hit on Broadway of the 1932 spring season, "Another Language" written by Rose Franken.

The arrangement was that the theater would present three or four new plays a summer on which Beckhard would take options. If something really worth while were uncovered it might provide a toehold for getting to Broadway and for getting rid of the stigma of amateurism. The most memorable new member of the company was Jimmy Stewart, who was then a student at Princeton studying architecture. His experience with the University Players in 1932 changed his career path.

On September 10 the curtain fell on the last performance of the fourth and final summer. The show was "Carry Nation"* which the company took to Baltimore where it ran for only four weeks. Then on to Broadway where it closed after a mere 30 performances.

* The name of the play was "Carry Nation" although the suffragette spelled her first name, Carrie.

By then there were no funds left and the company was dissolved. The first and most obvious reason for the failure was "that the time was out of joint"—the Great Depression. Many of the original players had also left by then for Broadway or Hollywood. The departure of the Players and Beckhard left Falmouth with no summer theater for eleven years.

Tanglewood and Highfield

Arthur Beckhard reappeared on the Falmouth scene in 1947. He bought Highfield Hall and the Tanglewood estate along with 200 acres of the Beebe Woods to house a professional summer theater which he named the Tanglewood Theater, a project that lasted only two years. At the end of the 1948 season Noah Gediman, a local attorney, representing a creditors committee, announced that Beckhard's corporation was "hopelessly insolvent."

However Beckhard had an Angel, DeWitt Ter Heun, who bought up the mortgage and allowed Beckhard to direct the policies and theater production. With high hopes Beckhard opened Tanglewood for the summer of 1949.



Cross Right Stage, 1954. "Mr. Roberts": Patrick McGinnis, Gilbert Eliot, Lewis Eldridge, Diana Reynolds, George Rounds, Charles Hewett, Philip Meeder, Ted Weems, Tony Smith, Jay Gates. Photo by Edwin Gray. Courtesy Diana Reynolds Potter.

That same summer Richard Aldrich opened Falmouth Playhouse with Tallulah Bankhead as his first attraction. Her performance put Beckhard out of business almost as soon as he started. Unable to meet the payroll, Beckhard posted closing notices at Tanglewood within two weeks.

As far as the former Beebe property is concerned, DeWitt Ter Heun and others formed a corporation to take a three-year lease on the buildings. Kingsley Perry, one of the founders of the University Players, installed an acting company of collegians using many of the same policies established by the original University Players. He was welcomed by the town, named the theater Highfield, and got off to a good start with "Ladies in Retirement". But Perry left suddenly in early July "due to pressure of other business interests."

Richard Maxson, who had been assistant director, took over for the rest of the season. He continued for several years during which time attendance increased considerably. The theater won a reputation for producing spirited classical works with talented young actors.

Cross Right Stage

In 1954 the Ter Heuns lost interest in the theater and relinquished active administration of the theater to a group drawn principally from Williams College undergraduates and alumni, plus the same from various Eastern girls' colleges. They called their troupe, Cross Right Stage. Diana Reynolds was Treasurer, Ted Weems Production Manager and Jay Gates General Manager. The company opened on June 29, 1954 with "Point of No Return", the first of ten primarily dramatic productions that summer.

Pat ("Packy") McGinnis was one of the actors from Williams. His father, Patrick McGinnis, was president of the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad and his private railway car stood on a siding in Woods Hole every weekend throughout the summer. He promised to bring "2,000 passengers a day into Falmouth's railroad station." He was unable to keep this promise but he was responsible for a number of theater goers who came to see his son.



Cross Right Stage, 1955. "Misalliance": Joan Meek, Ted Weems, Thomas Hammond, Harvey Solin, Patrick McGinnis, Mary Mortimer-Maddox, Diana Reynolds, Stanley Kahn. Photo by Edwin Gray. Courtesy Diana Reynolds Potter.



Oberlin Players, 1968. "Yeoman of the Guard." From *Theater on Cape Cod*. Courtesy Ben Muse.

On the evening of August 31, 1954, just after Hurricane Carol hit Cape Cod, Cross Right Stage had the distinction of being the only theater that had a show. 55 people watched "Mr. Roberts" by candlelight. George Oppenheimer, the playwright, called it "one of the most exciting evenings I have ever spent in a theatre."²

During the summer of 1957, in order to attract patrons who had just arrived on the train from New York to the theater, the opening curtain on Friday nights only was delayed until 9:45 PM. Cross Right Stage was terminated after the 1957 season when the director, David Bryant was called back to Williamstown to direct a local theater group.

In 1961 a number of the company returned to Falmouth for a reunion and put on a production of "Bell, Book and Candle" with Diana Reynolds, Francis Schell and Ted Weems from the original company.

Oberlin College Gilbert and Sullivan Players

During the time of Cross Right Stage, a college group from Oberlin in Ohio was doing something quite different under the guidance of Dr. W. Hayden Boyers. In 1953 the Oberlin College Gilbert and Sullivan Players rented the town hall in Mashpee where they presented a series of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas. In

1955 they moved to Memorial Auditorium in what was then Lawrence High School in Falmouth.

The Oberlin Players replaced Cross Right Stage at Highfield in 1958; they remained for the next 11 years. For the first time in the history of the Highfield Theater the season of 1958 was a financial success. In 1962 the Players sold the 75,000th ticket since opening in Mashpee. In 1969 Dr. Boyers retired and Oberlin withdrew its support from the Falmouth operation. The Players remained on their own campus in Ohio.

The College Light Opera Company

Two members of the Oberlin Players decided that it would be worthwhile to continue the efforts. Bob Haslun and Donald Tull formed the College Light Opera Company, or CLOC as it is better known. They asked Terrence Tobias, another member of the Players, to join them. Haslun and Tull were to be co-producers, Tull Artistic Director, Haslun General Manager, and Tobias Associate Music Director.

They were able to continue the lease of the theater under the same arrangement as the Oberlin Players and were able to buy from the Players furniture, cos-



CLOC, 1969. D. Thomas Tull and Robert A. Haslun, founders and co-producers, in front of Highfield Theatre. Courtesy CLOC.



CLOC, 1973. "Oklahoma" with Fred Johnson as Curly (holding hat in hand). Courtesy F. Paul Driscoll.



CLOC, 1977. "H.M.S. Pinafore" with David Cantor as Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B. Photo by Andy Montroll. Courtesy CLOC.

CLOC, 1976. "The Pirates of Penzance" dress rehearsal:
John Butz, David Carl Olson,
and Karen Leigh Campbell.
Photo by Andy Montroll.
Courtesy CLOC.



CLOC, 1985. "Dames at Sea":
Debbie Wheeler and Tucker McCreedy.
Courtesy CLOC.



CLOC, 1991. "Me and My Girl":
Nancy Anderson and Liam Craig.
Courtesy CLOC.

tunes, tools and music. The music was an especially wise investment as some of it is still in use. They recruited many of the members of the Oberlin Players to join them and to this day there are always a number of Oberlin undergraduates in the company.

The transition from Oberlin management was marked by several significant changes. The season was increased from eight to nine weeks, the size of the company was almost cut in half, two pianists took the place of the orchestra, and all members of the vocal company were hired as equal members of the ensemble, meaning that every singer could audition for the principal roles.

CLOC also departed from the Oberlin Players by presenting more than just Gilbert and Sullivan, although in their first year of operation they kept five Gilbert and Sullivan favorites on the program. Not only did widening their repertoire help the box office, it also made CLOC more attractive to applicants hoping for musical careers. Few performers were making a living performing Gilbert and Sullivan in 1969.

Among the innovations that first season of 1969 was a production of "The Mikado", all in black and white and running for two weeks instead of the usual one. It proved to be a mistake because it spread a one-week audience over a two-week period of time. It was also unpopular with the company, surprisingly, because they were bored with the free time they gained by having an additional week to rehearse the next production.

By the end of the season attendance had dropped from Oberlin's high of 82% in 1968 to only 60%. The lack of an orchestra had hurt. The season closed with outstanding debts of \$2000 which were covered by personal loans from Haslun and Tull who hoped to be repaid the following summer.

In 1970 the Company added an orchestra, bringing it up to seventy performers culled from 250 applications from 13 cities. The entire company was housed in

Tanglewood, which also included a rehearsal hall and dining room. It was such a tight squeeze that on pleasant days many of the company ate outdoors. When it rained, the congestion indoors made for very fast meals. The box office receipts had increased ten percent by the end of the season, but expenses were way up. When the bills were finally settled CLOC, was in the black by \$100.

Over the next 25 years many changes were made at CLOC, but fundamentally the program "still remains true to its purpose: to provide young and still-developing artists with an atmosphere where they can learn their craft, challenge their skills and celebrate their talents."³

In 1974 the owners decided to tear down Tanglewood Hall. For a while there was great concern that there would be no place to house the company and that CLOC might not return. Through the generosity of Josephine and Josiah K. Lilly the Inn at West Falmouth was made available to the company and the living quarters and rehearsal stage have remained there ever since.

Over 25 years CLOC has presented 238 musicals. The company has well over 1500 alumni from all 50 states, including several from Falmouth or Woods Hole such as Debby Wheeler, Dianne Hulburt and Liam Craig. Others have returned to Falmouth to live after having been introduced to the area by CLOC; Fred Johnson, who was in the company from 1971 to 1973, now teaches music at the Falmouth High and Lawrence Schools.

CLOC celebrated its 25th anniversary in 1993 by raising over \$250,000 to further its endowment fund, by printing "25 Years at Highfield, A History of the College Light Opera Company" written by F. Paul Driscoll, and by producing a Gala event at which 25 alumni, representative of the 25 years, put on a wonderful show with musical numbers and dialogue from past performances.

Apart from Haslun, David Bradley and John Lucas are among early members of the company who are still connected with CLOC. David Bradley, remembered for many roles, has performed in more CLOC shows than anyone else. Today he is Assistant General Manager and Director of Plant and Property. John Lucas has directed 26 CLOC productions. Ursula Haslun began at CLOC as an usher in 1966; she became Business Manager in 1974, married Bob Haslun the next year, and, since 1981, has been with her husband, a co-producer of CLOC.

CLOC alumni have appeared on the stages of America's opera houses throughout the country, including the Metropolitan Opera House and the New York City Opera. They have performed on national television, on Broadway and in Hollywood. They are lighting designers, conductors, scenic artists, directors, costumers, playwrights and theater administrators as well as singers, actors and orchestra musicians.

Just a word about a few specific members of the company. Some of the young people who got their start as actors moved on to become directors or conductors. T. K. Thompson, who was in the Vocal Company from 1970 through 1972, became a Principal Conductor of CLOC from 1973 until 1978 and was on the Board of Trustees from 1974 until 1988. He is now the moving force behind the Boch Center for the Performing Arts on Cape Cod.

Sondra Kelly (CLOC '80), James Brewer (CLOC '71) and Martha Thigpen (CLOC '74) have all sung at the Met in New York. Karen Leigh Campbell sang in the Vocal Company from 1975 through 1978, a longer period of consecutive years than any other CLOC alumna. She returned to sing in the 1993 Gala and many were delighted to spot her on television. She is in the military service in Washington and sang with a military chorus at the service for Jackie Onassis and at the D-day service at Omaha Beach.

In 1993 CLOC had total expenses of \$271,000 and a total income of \$226,000; the difference being made up by raising \$72,000. The 1994 season at CLOC was highly successful. However, I believe it is safe to say that no amateur theatrical group operates completely in the black and all depend upon generous donations. I should explain that while the vocal company receive no salaries, members of the orchestra and crews receive very modest amounts. The greatest expense is for salaries of conductors, directors and other staff. The second largest expense is for music and royalties and the third for theater rental.

Over the last seven years there has been an average box office attendance of 90%. "The Music Man", "The Sound of Music", and "The Student Prince" hit 97% or better. No Gilbert and Sullivan did better than 82%.

Trysail Chorus

Another group that produced Gilbert and Sullivan operettas was the Trysail Chorus. Among the original organizers was Willard Dow who had had previous experience with the New England Light Opera company. In 1949 "The Pirates of Penzance" was put on in the Falmouth Recreation Building and a trysail from WHOI's research vessel, *Atlantis*, was used over the stage to improve the acoustics. Thus came about the unusual but appropriate name.

The Trysail Chorus was largely made up of people from the laboratories in Woods Hole including Bostwick (Buck) Ketchum, Brackett Hersey, and Sue and Gordon Volkmann and from Falmouth, Harry Crooks. Sally Hersey was one of the leading directors.

During the late 1940s and early 1950s the Trysail Chorus put on a number of operettas, usually at Highfield Theater, but the Falmouth Playhouse and the Falmouth Recreation Building were also used. Dow and five other members of the company met their spouses through participating in the Chorus. Both



Trysail Chorus, 1953. "The Mikado" rehearsal: Ruth Schleicher, Peggy Scharff Dimmock, Eileen Scharff Bergstrom, Ann Hoadley, Eve Szent-Gyorgi, Shirley Raiche Dunkle, Duncan Blanchard, Harriet Hodgkins, Barbara Atwood Colburn, Stanley Bergstrom, Charles C. Gifford Jr., Carl Ferdensi, Willard Dow, J. Franklin Leach. Photo by Ray Hall. Courtesy WHOI Archives.

Stanley Bergstrom and his wife Eileen had many of the leads in these shows. Among the Trysail Chorus productions were "Princess Ida," "The Pirates of Penzance," "H.M.S. Pinafore," "Yeomen of the Guard," and "Trial by Jury."



Falmouth Playhouse, 1950. Gertrude Lawrence in front of Falmouth Playhouse. Photo by Edwin Gray. From *Gertrude Lawrence as Mrs A.*

The Falmouth Playhouse

To go back to 1949, Richard Aldrich, who had had a great success with the Cape Playhouse in Dennis, decided to open the Falmouth Playhouse in Coonamessett-on-Cape Cod. The facility was built in 1941 as part of the Coonamessett Ranch by Bob and Frances Crane, uncle and mother of Charles Leatherbee of the University Players. For a while during the war it was used as an entertainment center for convalescing soldiers. Later it was briefly used as a nightclub by Vaughn Monroe.

Aldrich turned the enormous ballroom into an auditorium seating 600 people. He was convinced that he could bring star material and name shows to Falmouth and appeal to large audiences. He proved to be correct. This was professional theater as contrasted with the other more amateur ventures in Falmouth.

For each show Aldrich would bring in one or more stars and perhaps a few supporting actors. All the smaller parts would be performed by a resident company of apprentices but those who appeared on the

stage of the Falmouth Playhouse were then, and continued to be, professional in every sense of the word. Occasionally he would need an extra large group and he found local people willing to be walk-ons.

In 1950 Bill Litzkow and I were lucky enough to be included in this group and were in shows with Paulette Goddard and Maurice Evans. The professionals were very good but some of the apprentices were extremely amateur. Patrons of the Playhouse tried to avoid front-row seats when Evans was playing as his careful enunciation and projection often resulted in a sprinkling in the audience. In one performance of "Caesar and Cleopatra" the zipper on the back of Paulette Goddard's dress slipped partly open. It was not a bit disastrous but "some columnists had the zipper transferred to the front of the gown and had it going to all lengths, including off the dress."⁴

Among those stars who appeared on the stage were Helen Hayes, Kent Smith, Sir Cedric Hardwicke, Joan Blondell, Lillian Gish, Eve Arden, Zasu Pitts, John Garfield, Veronica Lake and Bea Lillie to mention only a few. Aldrich's wife, Gertrude Lawrence, was one of the theater's most popular actresses.

After four years Aldrich's interests became so widespread that he could no longer give the time necessary

to the management of the Playhouse. The fifth season was opened by Mrs. Sidney Gordon of Boston and in 1953 she became the owner-producer of the Playhouse. She introduced many changes in her daring new productions and gradually, during her 25 years as producer, audiences began to accept plays which had once been considered offensive.

The theater changed hands a number of times largely because of financial difficulties. The most recent owner was Ralph Miller and 1993 was the last season for the building. It burned to the ground on February 28, 1994.

Falmouth Theater Guild

In 1957 the Falmouth Theater Guild, a community theater group, was founded by, among others, Kitty Baker and Frances Malone. Their first show was "Good-Bye My Fancy" which opened on February 28, 1958 and the cast included Mary Bray, wife of Captain Scott Bray of WHOI's *Atlantis*. For three years they put on their plays in the Lawrence School Memorial auditorium. In the early 60s Kitty went to DeWitt Ter Heun and arranged to lease Highfield during the winter months for 10 years. For several years the cost to the Guild was winterizing the building, which has been successfully completed. The Guild and CLOC now both rent the theater from the Cape Cod Conservatory, the present owner of the building and grounds.

Over the years the Guild has presented many wonderful plays and musicals including "The King and I", "My Fair Lady", "South Pacific" each of which they did twice, and an excellent production of "The Music Man", in which Professor Harold Hill was played by Michael Palmer, the well-known author and physician, and the barbershop quartet included Tom Sweeney, Maury Appel, Walter Swain and Billie Joe Mackey. Frank Duffy, our town attorney, remembers wearing a jacket from the Princeton University band. Kitty Baker starred as Eulalie MacKecknie Shinn.



Falmouth Theater Guild, 1969. "Separate Tables": Floyd Pratt, Marie Baxter. From *Theater on Cape Cod*. Courtesy Ben Muse.



Falmouth Theater Guild, 1981. "Cabaret": Susan Ketchen, Eugenia O'Connor, Dick Babineau, Barbara Johnson. Courtesy Falmouth Theater Guild.

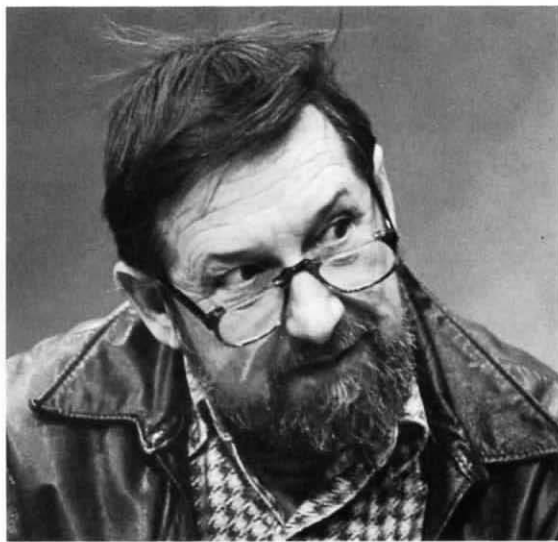


Falmouth Theater Guild, 1985. Ray Vick as Captain Andy in "Showboat." Courtesy Falmouth Theater Guild.

The Theater Guild has a membership of about 200 drawn from all over the lower Cape. They put on three shows a year including two musicals. Beginning in 1976 they managed to produce "Scrooge" on six different occasions, each one being somewhat different from each of the others. Ray Vick, from Marstons Mills, is their permanent historian and archivist. He has enough material on hand to write several books. He has the distinction of being involved in more productions than any other individual as a director, an actor, a stagehand or almost any other stage related job one can imagine.

The Woods Hole Theater Company

In 1973 an attempt was made by Grant Bishop to establish a professional contemporary theater in Woods Hole. It was entitled the Woods Hole Theater Festival and was housed in the renovated Old Mess Hall of the MBL. The season opened with "Old Times" by Harold Pinter and it was met with encouraging community response. However the rest of the season consisted of heavy and humorless drama and



Woods Hole Theater Company. Director Karl Schleicher. Courtesy Woods Hole Theater Company.

according to the *Falmouth Enterprise* "people stayed away in considerable numbers." At the end of the season Bishop left for England leaving debts of more than \$2500.

In October of 1974 three women from the company, Karen Cutler, Shaine Marinson and Janet Spring Toner enlisted the help of John Keosian, Sylvia Crane and other Woods Hole residents in establishing the Woods Hole Theater Company. In order to secure the goodwill of the electric company and the lumber company they assumed the debt incurred by the bankrupt Theater Festival and it was finally paid off in 1976. The Theater Company moved from the MBL Mess Hall to the more spacious and heated Woods Hole Community Hall which allowed them to have productions all year long.

The Woods Hole Theater Company is a well organized group which produces original works, family shows, workshops, and low-budget plays. In addition

to producing full length stage plays it participates in village celebrations and sponsors outside artistic groups. Karl Schleicher, Catherine Smith, Bob Bock, Eric Edwards, Genie Stevens, Joan Howard, Katharine Woodwell and Bill and Jean Adelman are people who should be included in the long list of members of the company.

The aims of the company are regularly being revised, partly because of frequent turnover in membership. Current plans call for a wide variety of plays, perhaps as many as four a year.

Other Organizations

In the late 70's and early 80's there were a number of other theater groups, each lasting for a year or two and each performing at various locations in Falmouth. These included The Acting Group of Cape Cod, the Fireside Comedy Club, and the Retocom Players. Among those connected with these companies are Joni Stevens, Frank Murray, Davian Gould, and Al Moniz.

Theater-on-the-Bay, although strictly speaking not in Falmouth, has many Falmouth residents involved in their exciting productions. This organization is located in Bourne and has been in existence for ten years largely under the guidance of Laura Garner of Falmouth. "Salome," one of their recent productions included Eric Edwards, Maura Powers Tietje, Joe Richards and Vincent Myette.

School Theatricals

No discussion of theatrical productions in Falmouth would be complete without mentioning the plays and musicals put on by the Falmouth High School. Both senior class and school wide productions have been very favorably received. Over the years many dramatic plays have been notable, especially "Our Town" in which young Paul Olenick gave such a fine performance as the Stage Manager. The first musical was "Bye, Bye Birdie" in 1970 directed by Bill Fraher. One of the most memorable was the first musical to



Woods Hole Theater Company. Bob Bock in "The Imaginary Invalid". Courtesy Woods Hole Theater Company.

be produced in the new high school, "Fiddler on the Roof," directed by Mike Helfen.

Mike Helfen also introduced the state drama festival to Falmouth High School. This is a state-wide contest for 40-minute plays or excerpts with very strict rules about the staging, timing etc. Since 1972 Falmouth has competed regularly and several times Falmouth has reached the finals, placing third in the entire state in 1976 with "The Importance of Being Earnest." Bob Bock, a teacher at the high school and an avid member of the Woods Hole Theater Company, has continued to involve the students in this festival. Many students have gone on to perform professionally, the most notable being Brian McCue who appeared with a national company in "The Mad Woman of Chaillot." Falmouth Academy has also produced several fine plays including "Antigone" and "The Rivals" under the direction of Liz Monroe.

In 1975 a group of teachers and other would-be-actors from Falmouth, Bourne, Sandwich, and Wareham

put on "1776", a musical based on the signing the Declaration of Independence. Among the outstanding performances were those of Peter Clark, who played John Adams, Jim Murphy, Mike Helfen, Brian McCue and Bob Bock. The show played in a number of local communities where it was so well received that the company was invited to Washington, DC to put on some of the musical numbers at the Kennedy Center and in a local school.

Mine was the one non-singing part, so I was left out. However, when the group arrived in Washington, they discovered that their wigs had been left behind in a locked car in the Buzzards Bay bus station. I got a hurried call asking me to break into the car with the help of the local police, pick up the wigs and take them to Washington by plane for the performance in the school.

Although some of the companies have had only a short life it should be obvious that during these past 70 years there has been a lot of theater in Falmouth;



Woods Hole Theater Company, 1982. "Buried Child": Paul Ryan, Karl Schleicher, JoAnn Allard, Eric Edwards, Ashley Edwards. Photo by Thomas N. Kleindinst. Courtesy Thomas N. Kleindinst.

in fact so much that I could not begin to mention all the wonderful productions and actors.

It has been encouraging to note the tremendous amount of cooperation between many of these groups. New companies may form and some may fold but surely interest in the drama will continue here. The plays, the musicals, the actors, the directors, the stages, the scenery, the costumes are all important to good theater, but they would not survive without an audience. Supporters can help the theater, especially the student productions, by buying tickets for themselves and their friends, and by getting more intimately involved in the adult companies which welcome new actors, directors and managers.

I should like to close by recounting a fine example of theatrical dedication. In 1970 in CLOC's production of "Ruddigore", Diann Thomas was playing Mad Margaret when she fell off a prop barrel while singing the opening recitative and broke her arm. She finished the aria and all of the following dialogue scene before leaving the stage. The soprano finished the performance and then went to the Falmouth Hospital to have her arm set. "The show must go on."

DeWitt (Dick) C. Jones III came to Falmouth first as a child and in 1956 moved here to work in the Falmouth Schools as a teacher and an administrator until he retired in 1988. During WW II he served with the Eighth Air Force in England. His Executive officer was Jimmy Stewart and they would discuss the University Players and their stay at Old Silver Beach during breaks in their joint briefings of air crews. After the war he returned to complete his studies at Princeton, where he became the President of the Theater Intime, Princeton's dramatic organization. Over the years Dick had many small parts in some of our local theatricals, including a bit part with the Penzance Players in Noel Coward's "Tonight at Eight-Thirty." At the Falmouth Playhouse he was able to make use of his military experience in roles as a spear-carrying soldier in "Caesar and Cleopatra" with Paulette Goddard and as a rifle-carrying soldier in "The Devil's Disciple" with Maurice Evans. He had bit parts or walk-ons in Falmouth High School musicals including Mr. Lundy, the domineer, in "Brigadoon" and three different waiters in "Guys and Dolls" and Caesar Rodney in the town's bicentennial production of "1776." In addition to

his roles on the stage, since 1973 he has been a member of the Board of Directors of the College Light Opera Company (CLOC) and since 1980 he has been the President of CLOC's Board of Directors.

Notes:

- 1 Fonda, Henry, *Fonda, My Life, As Told to Howard Teichman*, New American Library, New York, NY, 1981, p. 252.
- 2 *Variety*, Sept. 22, 1954, p. 64.
- 3 Driscoll, F. Paul, *25 Years at Highfield, A History of the College Light Opera Company*, The College Light Opera Company, Falmouth, MA, 1993, p. 65.
- 4 Falmouth Playhouse Playbill, Week of July 20, 1950, p. 7.

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