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July, 2012

90th Anniversary Season in Full Swing

by Sally Parry

In addition to the regular season, Community Players has a full slate of activities to celebrate our 90th anniversary of continuous production. The 90th anniversary committee, made up of **John Lieder, Sally Baugh, Aimee Kerber, Wendi Fleming, Cris Embree, and Sally Parry**, has lots of good plans in store. We started with the Community Players picnic on June 2 at Fairview Park where over 50 people came to share in a potluck, watch **Rich Plotkin** grill, and play a variety of games.

On June 30th, Julie Hedgepeth Williams, the author of *A Rare Titanic Family*, spoke to about 50 people, both from Community Players and the community, about her book, based on the life of her great uncle Albert and his family. They were missionaries, returning from Thailand, who booked passage on the *Titanic*, and were one of the few complete families to survive. They moved to Bloomington where they both worked for State Farm. Eventually Albert and Sylvia divorced. She acted in shows at Community Players and married J.G. Meherle, the founder of State Farm. **Bruce Parrish** made a special

trip back from Georgia to introduce Dr. Williams as he worked closely with her on her Community Players related research.

The event was bracketed by two songs from some members of last year's *Titanic* cast and crew, including **Fania Bourn, Sarah Schramm-Bronson, Karen Clark, Cris Embree, Wendi Fleming, Jim Kalmbach, Barb Lemmon, Jean Lieder, John Lieder, Bob McLaughlin, Eli Mundy, Bruce Parrish, Eric Reichelt, Herb Reichelt, and Chrissie Strong.**

Upcoming events include a tailgate at the Cornbelters game on August 13th. This is the second year for the event, which was well attended last year. Game time is 5:00 p.m. We will be tailgating prior to the game, starting at 3:00 p.m. on the grounds outside the stadium. Ticket cost is \$9.00 per person and must be paid in advance. Please RSVP ASAP to Wendi Fleming at cplayersmember@aol.com or (309) 530-7974. You may send a check made payable to Community Players Theater for your tickets to Wendi Fleming, 1504 Belleck Court, Normal, IL 61761. We definitely need a headcount so we know how many mouths we have to feed! Bring your family and come out for an amazing day of friendship and baseball.



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COMMUNITY PLAYERS
Calendar

July - August 2008

Board Meetings

July 10, 6:00 p.m.
Aug. 14, 6:00 p.m.
Community Players Theatre

You Can't Take it With You

Auditions: July 16-17
Preview: August 30
Shows: Aug. 31-Sept. 2, Sept. 6-9.

Leaving Iowa

Auditions: Sept. 4 & 5, 2012
Performances: Oct. 4-7, 2012



Community Players

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www.communityplayers.org

Newsletter Committee

Jim Kalmbach
Wendi Fleming
John Lieder
Bob McLaughlin
Bruce Parrish
Sally Parry

We are always looking for writers, artists, designers and story ideas. Send comments and suggestions to kalmbach@ilstu.edu

Curtain Calls is published six times a year for the voting members of Community Players.

For information about joining us, please contact our membership chair, Wendi Fleming at cplayersmember@aol.com.

Back issues of *Curtain Calls* are available on the Community Players web site. Click on "Newsletter Archive."

You Can't Take it With You Auditions

by Jeremy Stiller

Auditions are coming up for Community Players first show of the 90th season, *You Can't Take It With You*. I am honored and proud to be directing this production and am really looking forward to putting together a great ensemble cast.

This Pulitzer Prize-winning comedy is set in the home of the Sycamore clan, whose patriarch, Grandpa, lives according to the philosophy of doing whatever makes you happy. Over the years, he has collected a number of people who have given up doing what they are supposed to do and have come to live with the Sycamores and pursue happiness. Trouble arises when it comes to the attention of the government that Grandpa has never paid his income tax and when his granddaughter Alice falls in love with the son of a tycoon who believes no one should be happy.



For those of you unfamiliar with the show, think of a mix of *The Addams Family*, *The Munsters*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. Like the Addams family, the Sycamores are quirky individuals who always support and respect each others' distinct lifestyles. Like the Munsters, the Sycamores have no clue that their appearances are anything out of the ordinary. As for *Romeo and Juliet*, who doesn't like a good old love story between children of two opposite families? In this case the quirky Sycamores are visited by the upper crust Kirbys and the fireworks are both figurative and literal!

You Can't Take It With You requires seven women and at least twelve men from mid 20's to 70's and include some of the best character roles you would ever get a chance to play. The show takes place in the mid thirties and in a bit more innocent time. Lots of humor and fun for the actors as well as the audience. So as I have said before, "come out and play with us!" See you at auditions.

Auditions for *You Can't Take It With You* will be held July 16-17, 7 pm at the theatre. The preview is Thursday, August 30 with shows August 20-September 2 and September 6-9. If you have further questions, contact Jeremy Stiller at jrgumbie50@msn.com.



Stan Miller Obituary

One of the Players' friends, Stan Miller, passed away on June 19, 2012. He was 85 and had worked at the *Pantagraph* for over 50 years. He first appeared in the 1980 production of *Inherit the Wind* and continued until the 1997 production of *The Man Who Came to Dinner*. Stan served on the Board of Governors for seven years.

Stan was a kind man and was hailed by many a cast member at parties because he knew exactly what to bring—a bag of McDonalds® hamburgers and a bag of cheeseburgers. To a group of hungry, post-show actors there is no better friend than a man bearing food.

90 Years of Theater

The History of Community Players: Part 1

Dr. Wilson Baltz, Tony Holloway, and Bruce Parrish

As part of the celebration of Community Players' 90th Anniversary Season, Curtains Calls will offer the history of the organization throughout the year. Part 1 covers the founding and the first decade.

The date was March 6, 1923. The place was Turner Hall on South Main Street near the Big 4 railroad tracks. The event was the playlet *Overtures*. The producer was the Women's Club. The plan was to sponsor a Little Theater movement. Those were the days of the silent movie, when the spoken word and the real presence of the actor had all but vanished in small cities like Bloomington and Normal. There was a need to keep legitimate theater alive. March 6 was an auspicious evening. The

responsive audience was dressed to the teeth. The four attractive actresses were elegantly costumed. Does anyone alive remember their names? Winifred Kate James, Grace Kessler

Green, Edith Elliot Kuhn, and Lucy Park Williams took the stage to begin a tradition that would have a very long run.

So great was the enthusiasm of the audience and the production crew that before the theater was darkened that night, Community Players was organized. The first membership was 150. Carl Vrooman was elected president. A Bloomingtonian, he had served as assistant secretary of agriculture in the Woodrow Wilson administration. (Vrooman attended the formal dedication of our new theater in May 1923. Talk about a Players booster!) Rachel Crothers, a Bloomington native and a leading Broadway playwright and director, was named honorary president. She sent a telegram reading, "I accept with pride and great pleasure. All Success to you."

At the beginning, the programs consisted of readings, playlets, and musical numbers. In 1924 Lewis Greene Stevenson was elected president for two terms. A member of the cast of *Captain Applejack*, also 1924, went on to bigger triumphs, but not as an actor: Adlai Stevenson would serve as Illinois governor and two-time Democratic nominee for the presidency. His sister, Elizabeth (Buffy) Stevenson Ives was also on stage a few times.



The Butter and Egg Man, Community Players, June 1928

Early on, the 800-seat Illini Theater on East Market was the venue for the shows. (It later housed the Biddle Advertising Agency.) *The Whole Town's Talking* was billed as the funniest show ever given in Bloomington. The gross income from *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* was donated to the Red Cross fund

for the victims of the Mississippi Valley flood of May 1927. Eula O'Neill, one of the most ardent and talented Players, made her debut as Nora in Ibsen's *The Doll's House* in 1928. She went on to direct some 30 shows for Players. Ruth Bower and Joseph Hannie scored stage triumphs as the leads in *The Patsy*. *The Haunted House* in 1929 had nature on its side when one performance was accompanied by thunder and heavy rain. That play carried an unusual list of props, including a pool of blood, a plaster cast of a footprint, and clanking chains. After the opening night performance of *The Youngest* in 1929, one of the leads, Dorothy Garrett, was struck by a car and couldn't continue the run. A young woman (later Mrs. Freida Frey) was given the script at 7:00 A.M. the next morning and went on that night.

Continued on page 4 . . .

... Community Players' 90th Season events continued from page 1.

In the spring, April 4-7, there will be a musical revue, celebrating the musicals that we've done over the years with a wide variety of performers. There will also be a performance on March 6 of *Overtures*, the first show that Community Players ever produced. On dates to be determined, we will have two movie sing-alongs, probably including *The Sound of Music*.

To cap off our celebration we will be having a gala at the Illinois State Alumni Center on June 1. It will be in the style of the 1920s and will feature entertainment, a DJ, and a silent auction. Sally Baugh is heading up the event with assistance from Aimee Kerber. More details on tickets are to follow.

And be sure to renew your membership. This year, everyone who becomes a member or renews membership gets a 90th anniversary mug as a keepsake. We also have for sale 90th anniversary T-shirts. Contact Wendi Fleming to put in your order.



... 90 Years of Theatre Part 1 continued from page 3.

In 1931 the average cost of each play was between \$600 and \$800. Those were the days!

Famed Illinois poet Vachel Lindsay was in the audience for *The Royal Family* in 1931. He was delighted by the show and spoke particularly of the tempo, professional verve, and careful direction. E. Melba Johnson Kirkpatrick, a familiar name in Bloomington-Normal theater, appeared in *The Trial of Mary Dugan* in 1932. In 1933 Players returned to old Turner Hall to celebrate their 10th anniversary with *If. Grumpy* was staged at the Majestic Theater at East Washington and North East Streets. Community Players was honored when Rachel Crothers made them the first non-professional theater to be granted rights to her latest hit, *When Ladies Meet*.



John Lieder, Julie Hedgepeth Williams, Sally Parry and Bruce Parrish after Dr. Williams' lecture, "A Rare Titanic Family."

Historian's Corner

At the start of the 75th season at Players, there were 65 layers of paint over a message on the stage floor from the cast of *Cabaret* which read "XOXOXO the cast of 'Cabaret' dated 8/26/88."

After a dancer fell and was slightly injured, the cast voted to cancel rehearsal and replace the old floor. There were eventually 104 shows on that floor before it was replaced after the 2002 show *Singing in the Rain*. The floor had become damaged by the rain and had to be replaced that summer. The old top layer decking of stage floor masonite was torn up and replaced with new 3/4 plywood. There have since been 70 more shows on this floor as of this writing.

History Mystery Contest!

We had no winners for last month's History Mystery Contest. The show was *A Thousand Clowns*, from 1988, and the actors, from left to right, were: **Scott Myers** (*Hairspray*'s Edna) and **Angie Davis**.

To encourage submissions, this month we have a prize: the first person to e-mail the name of the show and the year will receive a Community Players 90th Anniversary Season Mug! Extra credit for identifying the performers. Send answers to rmclaugh@ilstu.edu. The winner and runners up will be announced in the next issue!

