NASHVILLE COMMUNITY THEATRE: FROM THE LITTLE THEATRE GUILD
TO THE NASHVILLE COMMUNITY PLAYHOUSE

A THESIS IN
Theatre History

Presented to the Faculty of the University of Missouri – Kansas City in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

by

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B.A., Trevecca Nazarene University, 2003

Kansas City, Missouri
2012
THE LITTLE THEATRE MOVEMENT IN NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE: THE LITTLE
THEATRE GUILD AND THE NASHVILLE COMMUNITY PLAYHOUSE

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University of Missouri - Kansas City, 2012

ABSTRACT

In the early 20th century the Little Theatre Movement swept through the United States. Theatre enthusiasts in cities and towns across the country sought to raise the standards of theatrical productions by creating quality volunteer-driven theatre companies that not only entertained, but also became an integral part of the local community. This paper focuses on two such groups in the city of Nashville, Tennessee: the Little Theatre Guild of Nashville (later the Nashville Little Theatre) and the Nashville Community Playhouse. Both groups shared ties to the national movement and showed a dedication for producing the most current and relevant plays of the day. In this paper the formation, activities, and closure of both groups are discussed as well as their impact on the current generation of theatre artists.
The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, have examined a thesis titled “Nashville Community Theatre: From the Little Theatre Guild to the Nashville Community Playhouse,” presented by Andrea Jane Anderson, candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest thanks to my parents for supporting me throughout my academic endeavors as well as my life. I could not have done this without your love and support.

Heartfelt gratitude goes to my teachers and mentors, Mrs. Sharon Ma, Professor Jeffery D. Frame, and Dr. Felicia Hardison Londré for the instrumental part each of you have played in guiding and shaping me as an actor, director, writer and scholar. To try to explain just how much you all have done for me and other students would fill another chapter, so here let me simply say thank you!

I would also like to thank the gracious and helpful staff members of the Nashville Public Library’s Nashville Room. I am also especially grateful for the generous assistance of the staff at Vanderbilt University’s Special Collections; Teresa Gray, Lauren Sheehan, Kathy Smith, Molly Dohrmann, and Henry Shipman, each went out of his or her way to help me with my most pressing research needs. The kindness and professionalism of both library staffs made my hours at the libraries a pleasant experience.

Finally, I must thank my dear friends Shannon Spencer, Summer Spencer, and David Burger for their hospitality in allowing me to invade their home numerous times over the past year. Without their generosity, this subject would have exponentially more difficult to research.
DEDICATION

For my father, who will always be “Daddy,” who will always be a part of the person I become, and who is still cheering me on.
INTRODUCTION

Throughout my research I have been asked the question “Why Nashville?” I was not born in Nashville and have no blood relations, to my knowledge, in the state of Tennessee. And yet, ever since my family passed through town on the way to Disney World when I was a teenager, something about the city resonated with me. I knew instantly when I heard of Trevecca Nazarene University that I wanted to go there for my undergraduate studies, even before I decided to major in theatre or knew that the school had a drama department. Since then I have referred to Nashville as my second home town and my friends there as my surrogate family. Although I have yet to actually live in Nashville, the city with its artistic climate and southern hospitality has been instrumental in molding me both professionally and personally. To put it simply, I loved the city and wanted to know more about its history.

My journey began with a very open ended search of topics regarding Nashville’s theatre. I began online at home in Kansas City and at the UMKC library to see what had been written. Without a specific topic, I attempted to track all published works regarding various aspects of Nashville theatre. One book in particular gave me a guide to the early history of Nashville’s performing arts. *Apollo’s Struggle* by Martha Ingram gave me valuable clues about where to go and what to look for. I made several trips to Nashville to see first hand what information was available. I looked in the special collections of both the Nashville Public Library and the Vanderbilt University Library and found a wealth of information in manuscript collections and ephemeral files. Based on other theses and dissertations, I began narrowing my focus to the early half of the 20th century. This was still a very broad topic. I soon learned that researching the touring companies that
frequented Nashville was not what interested me, and consequently I narrowed my focus to local groups. After bouncing several ideas off of friends and colleagues, I finally began to narrow my search to focus on the Nashville manifestation of the Little Theatre Movement and subsequent theatres.

For one long weekend each month over the summer break, I traveled to Nashville and spent hours looking over documents in both the Vanderbilt Special Collections and the Nashville Room of the Nashville Public Library. Thanks to the knowledgeable staff members at both locations, I was able to locate several collections that abounded in programs, newspaper clippings, and notes. The value of these collections in my research is inestimable. In fact, it has caused me to reevaluate my own collection of programs and memorabilia and relieved much of my guilt about being a program packrat. It has also given me a great appreciation for the old-fashioned scrapbook. I do not mean the frilly over-marketed crafting phenomenon, but the simple collection of photographs, related newspaper clippings, and other printed material in an accessible book. Of course, with changing technology and the disappearance of many of the country’s printed news media organizations, this method of preservation will most likely become a thing of the past. Yet, I cannot help but think that the preservation and collection of hard copies of materials such as programs and tickets will continue to be a valuable resource for future historians.

Several collections were especially helpful in my research. At Vanderbilt, the Charles S. Mitchell Collection contained the most comprehensive assembly of programs for both the Nashville Little Theatre and the Nashville Community Playhouse. Mitchell owned a candy shop and was prominent figure in Nashville. He was instrumental in the
formation of both theatre groups discussed in this paper. His collection is quite large and contains far more than local theatre programs. However, it is clear that among all his activities, these two theatres were high priorities for him.

Also located in the Vanderbilt Special Collections are the Little Theatre of Nashville Guild Papers. Although the name of the collection is confusing, the materials are valuable original sources for information and include the minute book, by-laws, and financial statements. At the Nashville Public Library, the Madge West Joseph Scrapbooks gave a personal touch to this era of theatre. One scrapbook is a simple black scrapbook; the other is larger with an embossed Viking ship in red leather. Both contain personal memorabilia, programs, photographs and newspaper clippings carefully preserved. Joseph began acting as a child and later led an exciting life on the road in David Belasco’s troupe. She married a handsome soldier from Nashville and “retired” from the stage to settle down in his hometown. Theatre remained a large part of her life, however. In her Nashville life she not only raised a family but stayed busy with the Little Theatre, Nashville Children’s Theatre, and radio dramas at WSM.

After exhausting the information in the Mitchell and Joseph collections, I turned back to my early research to see what I might have missed. My initial rummaging through the special collections began prior to selecting my final topic. Consequently, I nearly missed some key information. One significant source was a thesis written in 1965 by Marjorie Hollister Hargrove titled “A History of the Community Theatre Movement in Nashville, Tennessee, 1926-1951.” When I rediscovered this thesis, I was shocked. Up to that point, I believed that I was writing on an aspect of regional theatre that had not been recorded in one single document. It was somewhat disturbing to think that after all my
work, someone else had already approached this subject. As I looked through Hargrove’s thesis, however, I began to see it as an asset. Since she was writing only 14 years after the end point of her thesis, she had access to interviews and first-hand accounts I could never find. Her list of sources also proved to be a valuable guide as I returned to special collections and found many of the exact documents she mentioned, as well as a surprise find. One source that Hargrove pulled from was a diary written by Little Theatre founder, John Lark Taylor. When I located Taylor’s collection at Vanderbilt University, I selected a few boxes that I thought might contain the information I needed. Just as Hargrove described, I found both his autobiography and his diary. In one box, there was large book that I almost didn’t look at. The book was not listed on the finding aid and nothing else listed appeared to be of any use. On a hunch, I pulled it out. On the front cover was pasted a portion of a program from The Little Theatre Guild! I had located one scrapbook from the Nashville Little Theatre at the Nashville Public Library and knew that several years were unaccounted for. Now here, I had stumbled upon a missing piece to the puzzle in a place it should not have been. The time period for this scrapbook was well after Taylor left the Little Theatre. In all my research, Taylor never had another thing to do with the theatre after he left, even though he stayed in town. Had I conducted a search specifically for this book, I would never have looked for it there. It was an exciting and profitable find; the staff of the Special Collections was very kind to scan the book of newspaper clippings and email it to me within a week.

Although Hargrove’s thesis was highly influential, I have made every effort to ensure that this document is in no way a rewrite of her thesis. After I exhausted my resources and had written what I could, I turned to her work to see if she had any
interviews or other insights into what happened at certain points in the theatres’ histories, and to double check my main events; I didn’t want to miss a major event in the history of either theatre. Most of the time, our information was exactly the same. There are several key differences in our respective approaches to the subject. Hargrove focuses primarily on the life of the Nashville Community Playhouse from 1935 until Raymond Johnson’s departure in 1951. My approach is broader and includes as much information as I could locate about the entire life of both the Nashville Little Theatre and the Nashville Community Playhouse. Hargrove uses her thesis to demonstrate the failings of the first group and the success of the second. In my thesis, I have chosen to illustrate the flow from and influence of one group to the next.

As in most places across the United States, the theatre world of Nashville is a small world. Stories and dreams of the past clash and intertwine to form the current fabric of theatre evident in that city today. Nashville is known primarily for its musical heritage. However, the theatrical history of the city reveals ties to many of the great names in early American theatre. It was not a town isolated from the major theatrical movements and it continues to present quality regional drama that both educates and entertains.
CHAPTER 1
BEGINNINGS

The Little Theatre Movement

The story of Nashville’s community theatre begins with a nationwide theatrical revolution now remembered as the Little Theatre Movement. This renovation of American theatre emerged as a result of continued disillusionment and dissatisfaction with the commercial theatre that permeated the United States. Europe had begun a similar disillusionment in the late 19th century with the Naturalist and Symbolist movements. Theatre practitioners continued their search for true artistic merit into the 20th century during World War I as their societies crumbled around them.

In the United States, the outcry for better theatre began a decade or more later than that of Europe. American audiences were cautious of the European avant-garde; even works that are now considered theatre classics -- such as the plays of Henrik Ibsen -- were met with harsh criticism. Yet it was the innovation of European theatres such as the Théâtre Libre in France and Germany’s Freie Buhne that inspired American theatres to create environments where new plays could be produced in an atmosphere of artistic freedom. By the 1910s, American theatre lovers began to take matters into their own hands on the local level.

Simultaneously, formal studies in theatre, specifically dramatic literature, were taking on a life of their own. George Pierce Baker of Harvard, and later of Yale, pioneered one of the first academic programs of study in theatre. The 47 Workshop, offered in addition to his course on playwriting, became the training ground for many influential theatre artists. As the educated artists left the universities, they began to
assemble small groups of likeminded individuals to produce high quality -- though often low budget -- theatre. The early work was edgy and different. As some groups and/or their members met with success, the plays and artists developed in these little theatres began moving into the mainstream. By the 1920s Little Theatres were popping up in towns across the United States. Some were cutting edge and some were not. Most were operating on shoe-string budgets. Yet they were all in some form driven by the desire to produce good, quality theatre.

The Stagecrafters

Just before the Little Theatre movement swept through America, a small but dedicated group of artists felt the need to enhance the quality of stage productions in Nashville. Thus the Stagecrafters was formed in 1906 and remained a steady presence in Nashville’s theatre life throughout the first half of the 20th century. Little is recorded about the group’s organization. However, the booklet celebrating a second decade of the Nashville Community Playhouse states the Stagecrafters’ goal: “The high ambition of the Stagecrafters was to own their theatre, in which they planned to produce plays written, directed and acted by their own members.” A special note in the Little Theatre Guild’s program for The Butter and Egg Man in 1928 gives a rare recounting of the history of the Stagecrafters calling it “the oldest dramatic club in Nashville…”

The first president was Dr. Thompson Anderson who was succeeded by W. B. Shearon. The program for Sun-Up lists the officers of the Stagecrafters as follows: President – Sam Tarpley; Vice-President – J. B. Hibbetts, Jr.; Secretary – Jennie Mai McQuiddy; Business Manager – R. L. Alexander, Jr.; Historian – Lillian N. Shearon; Director – Dr. H. B. Schermerhorn.
Prior to the formation of The Little Theatre Guild of Nashville in 1926, the Stagecrafters presented a “significant modern play” each year. The Stagecrafters’ first production, *Alabama* by Augustus Thomas, was presented at the old Loew’s Vendome. The Playhouse booklet does not list a year for the production, but it does mention that the production was professionally directed and included several actors whom the original Playhouse audience would have recognized: Mrs. Reau Folk, Matt Pilcher, W. B. Shearon, Harry and Nancy Rice Anderson, Edward Saxon and Jennie Mai McQuiddy. Other early successes of the Stagecrafters were *Kempy, The First Year, You and I, Her Husband’s Wife, and Mrs. Dane’s Defense*. I have found no records of these productions' dates or locations.

The Stagecrafters shared many members with The Little Theatre Guild after the guild’s creation, though the entities remained separate. The two organizations collaborated many times over the years on productions. Even after The Little Theatre Guild closed in 1932, the Stagecrafters continued to hold events as late as 1941. By 1945, the Nashville Community Playhouse booklet refers to the organization’s “active years” in the past tense with no reference to a current body of members.

**The Nashville Center of the Drama League of America**

The Drama League of America began in 1910 as part of the popular movement of ladies’ clubs and soon spread throughout the country. By 1921, every state with the exception of Tennessee had a Drama League somewhere in its borders. On April 14, 1921, Mrs. A. Starr Best, Vice-President of the National Drama League in Chicago,
spoke to the members of the Centennial Club.\textsuperscript{1} Best was an acquaintance of Centennial Club member Jane Douglas Crawford from their time at the Drama Institute of Chicago. The meeting was recalled in an article the following evening in the *Nashville Banner.*\textsuperscript{2} In her presentation, Best expressed the dire need for improvement in the American theatre. According to her, “This country is a generation behind in appreciation and development of dramatic art. The demand for good plays rests with the public.” She went on to state that it was the purpose of the Drama League to “train the public in what is good and how to obtain the best.” Theatre would only become high quality when the educated public demanded high quality. The audience was more than receptive to the call. At the conclusion of Best’s speech, Mrs. Claude Waller proposed to the group that a Drama League be formed in Nashville and the matter was decided. Best assisted in the organization of the group before leaving town. Jane Douglas Crawford was appointed chairman of the League membership and was assisted in this committee by Mrs. Keeble, Mrs. Waller, Mrs. George E. Blake, Miss Mary DeMoville, Miss Ellen Stokes, Mrs. Morton B. Howell, III, and Mrs. B. Kirk Rankin. Membership was open to anyone who was interested in theatre and a campaign for 1500 members began immediately.

Crawford lost no time in submitting the required membership listing to the Drama League headquarters in Chicago. The *Tennessean* reported on April 24, 1921, that delegates from Nashville would be attending the annual convention that week. One

\textsuperscript{1} The Centennial Club began as a women’s fundraising club for the Tennessee Centennial Exposition in 1894. The group officially formed after the festivities as a ladies’ society club with the purpose of civic improvement, specifically in the arts. The group survived well into the 1970s. (Ingram 81-83)

\textsuperscript{2} Articles in this section were found in the Little Theatre Guild Scrapbooks at the Nashville Public Library.
possible motivation for such haste could be the claim of the Nashville Center being the first in the state of Tennessee. It was reported in several articles that Mrs. Best was to go directly to Memphis after her visit to Nashville to assist in organizing a group in that city. The idea of beating Memphis to the title of first in the state was no doubt a factor in the speed of the group’s formation.

Officers were announced September 11, 1921, in *The Nashville Banner* and the first meeting was held on Thursday, September 15, 1921, at the Centennial Club. Jane Douglas Crawford gave the outline of the group structure and announced the officers to the membership. Jack Hayden from the Orpheum theatre addressed the crowd with a talk on “The Relation of The Drama League to the Commercial Theater.” The *Tennessean* reported on the following Sunday morning that officers of the League represented a wide array of the city’s schools, clubs, and organization. Dr. H. B. Schermerhorn was elected president, Miss Theo Scruggs - First Vice-President, Miss Pauline Townsend - Second Vice-President, Charles Mitchell - Third Vice-President, Mrs. B. Kirk Rankin - Secretary, and Morton Howell - Treasurer.

Mrs. John H. Reeves succeeded Dr. Schermerhorn as president of the Drama League in late 1922. The close relationship between the Drama League and the Stagecrafters continued as the Stagecrafters presented another evening of plays for the Drama League, just after Reeves was elected president.³ Other groups also participated in the play presentations. The students of Ward-Belmont presented a one-act play titled *The*...
Call to the Drama League at the group’s meeting on December 8, 1922. Their performance was followed by the Stagecrafters in *In Honor Bound*.

In addition to presenting plays at its meetings, the Drama League also endorsed outside productions. The *Tennessean* reported on December 7, 1922, that the League president, Mrs. J. H. Reeves was encouraging League members to attend *The Circle*, which was playing at the Orpheum that weekend.

Other activities of the Drama League included play readings by members, and instructional lectures, all geared to educate the public and cultivate an appreciation for quality drama. The effort appears to have been quite successful. With that success came an increased appetite not only to read and view good theatre, but to produce it as well. The members of the Drama League were ready to take the next step; the foundation had been laid for a more substantial theatre to rise to prominence.
CHAPTER 2
THE LITTLE THEATRE GUILD

The Little Theatre Guild of Nashville 1926-1932

Dr. H. B. Schermerhorn, a professor at Vanderbilt’s Law School and frequent actor and director for The Little Theatre Guild wrote a history of the Nashville Little Theatre in 1930, as cited in the Nashville Community Playhouse commemorative booklet. Schermerhorn states that the Little Theatre began in the spring of 1926 and was launched by the Nashville branch of the Drama League (est. 1921). Miss Jane Douglas Crawford was the first president and co-founder with director Mr. John Lark Taylor. Taylor was a native of Nashville who performed in Augustin Daly’s New York troupe and later toured with such actors as E. H. Sothern, Julia Marlowe, and John Barrymore. Martha Ingram, in her book *Apollo’s Struggle*, notes that Taylor was a member of Actors Society of America and Actors’ Equity Association. He also joined with managers to form the Actors Fidelity League in 1919, which went on strike that same year.

Through the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many towns relied on the touring companies to supply them with theatrical entertainment. As the world moved into the 20th century, however, things began to change. Ingram continues, “By 1925, troubles compounded for theatrical troupes because of high rail rates and licenses. Taylor could see what was ahead, and he chose to return to Nashville with a grand plan.”¹ That plan was to revive the legitimate theatre through community driven groups that would use local amateurs and bring in “stars” to draw the crowd. Taylor served as director of the Little Theatre Guild of Nashville for two seasons. His manuscripts and papers are held at

¹ Ingram, 134.
the Vanderbilt Library Special Collections and contain many items of personal and professional importance. Taylor’s diary especially gives insight into the formation of the Little Theatre Guild. It should be mentioned, that the diary was not a private day-to-day collection. It is very apparent that Taylor intended the work to be read and published. Consequently, the writings of both the diary and Taylor’s autobiography are from a slightly biased point of view.

According to Taylor, the Little Theatre Guild came into being as a result of his tireless efforts. Taylor met with leaders of dramatic clubs, the Stagecrafters, and the Drama League to drum up support for the Little Theatre Guild. Taylor and crew secured the rental of a small theatre from M. A. Lightman. According to Taylor’s autobiography, Lightman had built the theatre as a neighborhood picture house, but it had been forced to close when a bigger theatre opened up on the next corner. Taylor calls Lightman “A lover of acting, he had planned the building to be used some day, perhaps, as a Little Theatre. He became one of our most dependable actors, and helped in every way he could.”

The group made do with the small stage, large auditorium, and inadequate lighting. With some improvements, the theatre was ready for the opening performance. The modest theatre known as the Hillsboro Theater (now The Belcourt) would remain the home of the Guild and subsequent groups for several decades.

The premiere performance of The Little Theatre Guild of Nashville was Moliere’s *The Imaginary Invalid* on April 15 and 16, 1926. The play was well advertised in the local papers and gained high praise from critics. Among the cast members was Madge

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West Joseph, another actress with noteworthy training; she had learned her craft in the troupe of David Belasco. As a child actor, Joseph had encountered many of America’s theatre legends. One article in her scrapbook, of unknown origin, tells of a gold thimble necklace that Joseph gave to her granddaughter to wear at her 3\textsuperscript{rd} birthday party. The necklace had been given to Joseph when she was a little girl by the great actress Maude Adams. After the death of her husband, Joseph returned to New York where she appeared in a few plays. She found her most memorable role later as the central figure in a series of popular toilet paper commercials in the 1970s.

There is some confusion regarding the next performance. Ingram states that *The Imaginary Invalid* was followed in May by Taylor’s one-act *Long, Long Ago*. Dr. Schermerhorn’s history states that upon leasing the Hillsboro Theater, “two plays, ‘The Imaginary Invalid’ and ‘To the Ladies,’ were produced, followed by a bill of one acts.” It would appear then, that *The Imaginary Invalid* and *To the Ladies* were produced at relatively the same time. Taylor brings some clarity by stating that the one-acts, including *The Stepmother* by A. A. Milne (the first production of that play in the United States), Taylor’s play *Long, Long Ago*, and *Sabotage* were produced in May. *To The Ladies* is listed separately, indicating that it enjoyed its own respective performance run.\textsuperscript{3} Further clarification is given in an article, undated and uncredited, in Taylor’s collection at Vanderbilt. This article titled “Variety Pleasing in Little Theater” states that the bill of four one acts ran for two evenings. The four plays were *Sabotage*, *The Stepmother*, *Poor Columbine* by Jane Douglas Crawford, and Taylor’s *Long, Long Ago*. The writer of the article praises all three but hails *Sabotage* as the very best.

\textsuperscript{3} Ibid. 390.
A small collection of Little Theatre Guild documents is available in Vanderbilt University Special Collections. The collection includes clippings, notes, financial statements and meeting minutes. In this collection are the original by-laws of the Little Theatre Guild. The by-laws state:

The Little Theatre of Nashville is founded with a two fold purpose:
(a) First, to give those throughout the city the opportunity of self expression [sic] in the art of acting and its kindred fields.
(b) Second, to present to the people of Nashville, dramatic productions of pleasurable and literary value.

As with many little theatres, the Little Theatre Guild of Nashville drew much of its support from subscription members. Within this membership, there were four classes. Class A members paid $15 for their memberships and received two seats to each production. Those of Class B paid $7.50 and were given one seat per production. Class C members were given the title of “Patron” for their $25 fee, as well as 4 seats. And Class D members paid $100 and were dubbed “Sustaining Patrons.”

The second season of the Guild began with Captain Applejack by Walter Hackett, October 27-29, 1926. The Tennessean hailed it as a success. Charles Moss, writing in the Nashville Banner on the evening of October 28, 1926 gave his review the title, “Little Theatre Guild’s First Play of the Season is Unqualified Success.” Moss goes on to admit that though there were some flaws, he expected them to be addressed by the second night. He also expresses admiration for the decoration of the theatre with bones and treasure chests. Society girls served as ushers for the evening and were dressed as pirates. Both the Tennessean and the Nashville Banner state that Miss Crawford was met after the performance with a large receiving line of patrons offering their congratulations.
Seven plays and a bill of one-acts were produced in the 1926-1927 season. Each play was given at least three performances. A fourth was arranged if the play were especially successful. Other plays of the 1926-1927 season were as follows:

*The School for Scandal* by Richard Brinsley Sheridan, presented November 22-24, 1926; *The Star Sapphire* by Robert Housum, presented December 27-30, 1926 (with special matinee on December 29th); *Mrs. Bumpstead-Leigh* by Harry James Smith, presented January 19-21, 1927; *The Passing of the Third Floor Back* by Jerome K. Jerome, presented February 21-23; *Enter Madame* by Dolly Byrne and Gilda Varesi, presented March 23-25; *Outward Bound* by Sutton Vane, presented May 18-20, 1927; and “An Evening of One Acts” including *White Elephants* by Kenyon Nicholson, *Butterfly Hearts* by Marion H. Mimms and *The Host* by Ferenc Molnar, presented May 23-25, 1927. *Butterfly Hearts* by Mimms was the winning entry in a playwriting contest that Taylor suggested to the Ladies Press Club.4

The officers of the Theatre Guild were listed in each program. In their second season, the officers were as follows: Mr. Lark Taylor – Director; Miss Jane Douglas Crawford – President; Dr. H.B. Schermerhorn – Vice President; Mrs. B. Kirk Rankin – Secretary; and Mr. R. E. Donnell – Treasurer.

The Little Theatre Guild was an active part of the community from its early days. On January 5, 1927, a benefit was held for flood victims. The Foreword of the program states, “The present performance was the result of a meeting of several members of the Nashville Little Theatre Guild, the Symphony and the Chamber of Commerce.” The Little Theatre Guild presented *The Star Sapphire* by Robert Housum after a musical

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4 Ibid. 392.
performance. Guild member Madge West Joseph served as chairman of the program. An article in the *Nashville Banner* dated January 6, 1927, claims that the program raised $250 for the cause.

The Little Theatre Guild was off to a respectable start. For Taylor, however, the run was not to last. In Taylor’s diary he records, “Our season ended in a blaze of artistic glory - but a sad deficit in its treasury - thru which I was the chief sufferer. I was urged to continue as director the next season but declined to do so - as the directors seemed unable to see things from my angle.”\(^5\) According to the minutes from the Board of Directors meeting on August 23, 1927, the Guild treasurer, Mr. Potter met with Taylor to discuss his salary. Taylor set his terms at $375 for each play with acknowledgement that the Guild owed him a salary of $2000 for the 1926-1927 season. Potter countered with $200 per play with a possible addition of $100 if available. Taylor declined. “In Potter’s opinion no satisfactory arrangement with Taylor can be made.” Taylor did not drop the matter after leaving the Little Theatre Guild. The July 10, 1928 meeting of the Executive committee gives the president permission to write Taylor and decline his suggestion of being paid $600 for the 1926-27 season. The split was permanent. There is no record of Taylor ever being directly involved with another Little Theatre or Community Playhouse production again, although Taylor remained in Nashville for many years after and states in his diary that he attended several productions. Taylor worked at WSM as an actor and even returned to New York where he appeared as Mr. Weatherwright in *The Plutocrat* in

An undated article in the last of the Little Theatre Scrapbooks at Vanderbilt University Special Collections tells of Taylor taking the position of director at the Children’s Theater in New York. Based on other articles in the book, this was probably printed around 1931.

At some point before Taylor’s departure, The Little Theatre Guild did a reading for the local radio station WBAW. An article from an unknown paper in Madge West Joseph’s Scrapbook bears the title “Little Theatre Guild Broadcasts Program.” The program included one act from Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* and Taylor’s one-act play *Long, Long Ago*. The actors involved were Mrs. J. B. Joseph, Mrs. Benton McMillin, John Lark Taylor, Jane Douglas Crawford, and Dr. H.B. Schermerhorn.

Prior to the end of the second season, the board of directors had moved to negotiate a contract with Mr. Lightman to lease the Hillsboro Theatre for another two years, provided they were allowed to sub-rent the theatre and make some changes in the building. Lightman apparently agreed and improvements were made. One article in the Little Theatre Guild Scrapbook describes the recent updates to the theatre. The entrance was moved from Hillsboro Road to Carton Avenue. Rehearsal rooms were also added. Taylor had described the auditorium as large in comparison with the stage. The back wall was then moved to create the foyer and consequently seating was reduced to four hundred. Schermerhorn adds that more lighting equipment was also added at this time.

The Little Theatre Guild Board of Directors had foreseen the departure of Taylor. In the next paragraph of the minutes, after the recounting of the split with Taylor, Guild

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7 The current entrance to the Belcourt Theater is on Belcourt Ave.
president Jane Douglas Crawford reports on the search for a new director. The field had been narrowed to two candidates. President Crawford was given permission to secure either gentleman for a salary of $3000 for a 30 to 35 week season. Later, an article in the *Tennessean* from September 18, 1927, reports that twenty people applied for the position. Out of those who applied, Ramon Savich was chosen to direct the Little Theatre Guild.

The addition of Savich as director in 1927 brought great excitement. According to an undated article from the *Tennessean*, Savich was a student at the Carnegie Institute of Technology and studied under Professor George Pierce Baker at Yale. Later, Savich traveled to Paris where he was a member of the American Players under Ben Greet and also studied under Neisen and Mme Florence Campbell. It was reported that Savich left the Greenwich Villagers and turned down a part in a Chicago production of *The Devil and the Cheese* to come to Nashville. Savich’s specialties were scenic design, lighting design and other technical stage effects. To add to his praises, an undated article proclaims that Savich was invited to speak at the 12th annual convention of the National Association of Teachers of Speech held that year in Cincinnati from December 28-30.

Savich had a clear vision for what the Little Theatre Guild should be to the Nashville community. In addition to directing the plays planned for the season, Savich was mostly concerned with developing the skills of anyone interested in theatre. Savich

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8 Throughout my research four directors, Savich, Phillips, Rochelle, and Kleibacker, are credited as having attended George Pierce Baker’s 47 Workshop at Yale. I have found no evidence that Harvard’s 47 Workshop continued at Yale under that name. I have chosen to list only George Pierce Baker and the Yale School of Drama as the background for these directors.


10 Now the National Communication Association
expressed a desire to bring experienced professionals to Nashville to lecture and instruct members of the theatre in various aspects of theatre. He also proposed that the theatre begin a workshop where actors and other theatre artists could develop their talents before moving on to the main stage. Several newspaper articles in the first Little Theatre Scrapbook at the Nashville Public Library mention this workshop.

The article titled “Director of Theater Guild Will Seek New Talent Here” from the Nashville Banner, September 18, 1927 states that the Guild planned to present thirteen plays for the 1927-1928 season. This was an ambitious undertaking, to say the least! Unfortunately it was an impossible amount to manage and the season capped at a respectable eight productions.

The Little Theatre Guild began its third season with Elliot Nugent’s The Poor Nut. Several undated articles in The Little Theatre Guild Scrapbook hail the play as “probably America’s best college play” and a “triumph.” An undated article in the Tennessean promotes the opening of the season and boasts a set equal to the one in New York City. Music was provided by a local group, The Commodore Aces. A college night for Vanderbilt and Tulane students was advertised to promote the play. An article dated October 4, 1927, and titled, “Little Theater to Open Season Oct. 19: ‘The Poor Nut’ will be Presented – Declared One of Funniest Comedies,” claims that The Little Theatre Guild is the first theatre outside of New York to stage a production of that play. The article also boasts that Savich, having been in Nashville for only three weeks, received permission for the production directly from the author.

11 Article found in the Little Theatre Guild Scrapbooks. Origin unknown.
Opening night was a gala event. The Little Theatre Guild was eager to show off the new lobby and other improvements to promote subscriptions. It was reported in the *Nashville Banner* that Gov. and Mrs. McMillin would be attending the Friday performance and an invitation had been extended to Gov. and Mrs. Morton. Junior League members were to be there in their tearoom costumes, lovely society girls were to serve as ushers in fashionable gowns, and the “unique feature” of the evening was the serving of coffee in the foyer between acts.¹² As important as the season opening was, the Little Theatre Guild had competition on its opening day. It appears that many in the audience, and possibly many of the cast and crew were also connected with at least one prominent Nashville family that was holding a wedding that same day. As a result, President Crawford announced that the opening performance would not begin until 8:35pm.¹³ Both Donald Davidson, Literary Editor for the *Tennessean*, and Ralph McGill, Dramatic Critic of the *Nashville Banner*, gave positive reviews of the performance. An article in the *Nashville Banner* praised the sense of community as an important success of the production. The play indeed must have been a hit. The theatre’s President, Jane Douglas Crawford confirmed in another article that box office returns were “heavy” and there was a “brisk” demand for seats.

For the 1927-28 season the number of performances per play increased to four nights with a possibility of a fifth if popularity warranted. The plays consisted of *The Poor Nut* by Elliott Nugent, presented in October; *The Servant in the House* by Rann

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Kennedy, presented in November; *The Black Flamingo*, presented December 12-15; *The Butter and Egg Man* by George S. Kaufman and Marc Connelly, presented January 25-28, 1928, in collaboration with the Stagecrafters; *The Last of Mrs. Cheyney* by Frederick Lonsdale, presented February 29-March 3; *Loose Ankles* by Sam Janney, presented March 28-31; *Craig’s Wife* by George Kelly, presented in May 2-5; and *Meet the Wife* by Lynn Starling presented May 23-26, 1928.

The officers listed for this season closely resembled that of the second season, with the changes of the position of Secretary and a new Treasurer. Two secretaries are listed: Corresponding Secretary – Mrs. B. Kirk Rankin and Recording Secretary – Mrs. W. L. Nichol. The Treasurer was Mr. Edward Potter, Jr.

The Little Theatre Scrapbook becomes somewhat out of sequence at this point. As with the first play of the 1927-28 season, there are several articles dealing with the second play, *The Servant in the House*, that are either undated or un-credited. The articles announce that Vanderbilt’s Professor A. M. Harris, head of the department of public speech and debate, will take the lead role. Professor Harris was no stranger to the Nashville Little Theatre; he appeared in *The School for Scandal* and *The Star Sapphire* the previous season. Another article describes the auditions and reading of the play, calling it a challenge for actors. This article also announces a “new idea” that theatre was trying out; that Tuesday there was to be a reading of the first “workshop” play ever to be held by the Nashville Little Theatre. The play was *Prunella*, a fantasy. The theatre called for high school and college students to attend.

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14 The “Report of the President Little Theatre Guild Season 1927 ---’28” lists *Craig’s Wife* as being presented in April. The dates for May 2-5 are listed on the program for that play.
Articles in the Little Theatre Scrapbook regarding the third play of the season, *The Black Flamingo*, are also missing key information. A few facts can be concluded, however. The play was a mystery and ran in December, opening on Monday, the twelfth. Ramon Savich was highly praised for his scenic effects. Mrs. Edward Potter, Jr. was responsible for painting the set, and possibly designing it as well. Two articles call the costumes and sets beautiful. There is no definite record in the scrapbook of the author of the play. One article claims that Guy Bates Post intended to take the play over to London. However, it is unclear whether the article is referring to London, England or London, Tennessee. In either case it does not appear that Post took the play anywhere. The Internet Broadway Database lists Post as producer and director of *The Wrecker*, which opened in February of 1928 at the Cort Theatre in New York, leaving little time for him to develop *The Black Flamingo*.15

While the sets, costumes, and effects garnered praise, the reviews were not without criticism. Ralph McGill felt at least one actor’s diction was poor, the lights were too low, and the action was slow. Donald Davidson of the *Tennessean* thought the play was excellent and was more positive in his review over all. Yet, even he felt that the first act dragged and might be too expository. Davidson also comments on the low lighting, but he does not refer to it as either a positive or a negative.

The Stagecrafters once again collaborated with the Little Theatre Guild in the presentation of Kaufman and Connelly’s *The Butter and Egg Man*. One article titled “Star Cast plays in Guild Show: Leading Amateur Talent to Appear in ‘Butter and Egg Man’” highlights the cooperation of the two groups. The president of the Stagecrafters, W. B.  

15 http://www.ibdb.com/person.php?id=15900
Shearon played the lead in the Guild’s first play, *The Imaginary Invalid*. The Guild president, Jane Douglas Crawford was also a member of the Stagecrafters.

Securing the rights to perform *The Butter and Egg Man* was no simple feat. The story is recounted in an article titled “Nashville Group One of Few Given Right to Play ‘Butter and Egg Man’: Stagecrafters’ President Obtained Permission to Produce play in Personal Interview at New York.”\(^{16}\) Samuel French & Co. was discouraging small companies from performing best-selling plays. The company believed the smaller theatres did not have the following “to warrant the outlay for royalty.” W. B. Shearon made a personal visit to William J. Harris in New York. From there, he was referred directly to Samuel French & Co. where he championed both the Little Theatre Guild and the Stagecrafters. His trip was not in vain; French granted the rights to the Little Theatre Guild.

Securing the rights to perform was not the only hurdle the two groups faced. Apparently, props for the play were rather difficult to come by. An undated article from the *Tennessean* describes the struggle to find the items required. The Little Theatre Guild members persevered, however and *The Butter and Egg Man* set records for sales. Thursday’s sales were better “than ever for a second night performance.”\(^{17}\) A later article recounts that on the final two nights, extra seats were placed in the isles; the audience was left with standing room only.

The reviews were mostly positive. Donald Davidson called the play “Outstanding Entertainment” and gave the performance high praise. Ralph McGill, though positive in

\(^{16}\) Article found in The Little Theatre Guild Scrapbook. Origin unknown.

\(^{17}\) Article found in The Little Theatre Guild Scrapbook. Origin unknown.
his review of the performance, was not lacking in overall opinion. He recalls in his article’s title that the audience was “Vastly Pleased.” His criticism is more of a general critique on the operations of the Little Theatre Guild. McGill felt that the Guild should use its best actors in the leading roles in each production and puzzles over why they do not do so. He speculates that the group wants to experiment and try new people. It is clear that McGill does not agree with this choice.

It is unknown whether the Guild took McGill’s suggestion to heart. However, the following production, *The Last of Mrs. Cheyney*, saw two experienced and locally known actors take the leading roles. Mrs. McMillin, wife of the former governor of Tennessee, played the leading role opposite Griffith Lusky. Lusky’s background reads like a who’s who in American theatre history. He spent two years under Winthrop Ames in the Little Theatre. Lusky spent another two years under David Belasco and appeared in *The Music Master*. And he was even managed for one year by the beloved Charles Frohman. When the United States entered World War I, Lusky left his theatre career and enlisted. After the war, he returned to the South and settled in Nashville.

Both Lusky and McMillin received rave reviews. One reviewer said, “They were easily lost in their parts - theirs was assurance, finesse and perfection of dramatic tempo.” Dr. DeWitt, in the role of Charles connected especially well with the audience. The same review recalls that when the character made his final exit, the audience gave him a long applause, even though the two “stars” were still on stage and had a few more lines to give. The author cites this as a credit to DeWitt’s ability to stand up with two notable
actors. The sets also received high praise. The same reviewer noted that both the acting and the setting were far better than one might expect of an amateur performance.\(^\text{18}\)

In the midst of the run of *The Last of Mrs. Cheyney*, the Little Theatre Guild and Ramon Savich received some national recognition. An article in the Little Theatre Guild Scrapbook titled “Theatre Guild Wins Twin Honor” reports that a telegram had arrived that morning inviting the Little Theatre Guild of Nashville to participate in the Little Theatre Tournament in New York and compete for the silver cup. At the same time, Ramon Savich received an invitation from the Little Theater of Poughkeepsie, New York to direct that theatre’s entry to the same competition. The writer of the article points out that both invitations are high honors for such a young organization. The fact that both the theatre and its director were recognized “is a direct tribute to its fine record achieved in three years.” Sadly the Little Theatre Guild could not gather the funds necessary to transport an entire production to New York. Savich also had to decline his invitation due to his responsibilities at the Little Theatre Guild.

The program for *Craig’s Wife* does not indicate a year, yet both Dr. Schermerhorn’s record and the president’s report place this play in the 1927-28 season. In the program, the Literary Department of The Centennial Club endorses the work of The Little Theatre Guild: “Every intelligent community should have a Little Theatre in order to develop the allied Arts of Drama, Science, Effects and Lighting. If you wish to make your city a more enjoyable place to live in and should you care for better plays next year, subscribe to ‘The Little Theatre Art’ as a civic investment.”

The final production of the season, *Meet the Wife*, gained praise from writer Ralph McGill, who called the play the best of the season. Madge West Joseph starred in the production. In her scrapbook is a letter from A. M. Harris, commending her performance. It must have been the only performance she participated in that season, as it is the only play from that period that she placed in her scrapbook. The *Nashville Banner* published a picture of Joseph and Dr. Schermerhorn on May 20, 1928. No article was attached.

The end of the 1927-1928 season marked another change for the Nashville Little Theatre. Mrs. B. Kirk Rankin took the lead as president after Jane Douglas Crawford. According to an article in the *Tennessean* on June 24, 1928, Miss Crawford voluntarily stepped down from her position as president. The article praises her for her “exceptional histrionic talent, her fine qualities of leadership and her unflagging zeal… She has earned the gratitude of the large number who have profited from the activities of the Little Theater[sic] Guild.” In her final address to the theatre officers, Crawford expresses a continued interest in the theatre. She recommends that a Play Committee be formed in order to relieve the stress of choosing plays from month to month. Suggestions should be given to the president who would then take it to the committee chair. Crawford also urges that the theatre remain “democratic” and obtain closed subscriptions for two productions with set budgets. She further suggests that whatever amount the director saves from that budget be given back to him as a bonus in gold. Crawford also recommends that two performances in the next season be “workshop plays.” Crawford left the Little Theatre Guild with these words:
I believe in the future of the Little Theatre Guild, for I feel that it is filling a long felt need in our civic life; I believe in the talent of our City, and I believe in the public spirited men and women who have supported us in this undertaking. I feel that as time goes on great things will be accomplished, a thoro’ly[sic] successful organization both from the artisric[sic] and community view point will be achieved.,[sic] and the The[sic] Little Theatre Guild of nNashville[sic] will be known through out the country for its personel[sic] its good work[sic] and its high ideals.\footnote{Little Theatre of Nashville Guild Papers, Vanderbilt University Special Collections, Nashville.}

It is unclear what became of Jane Douglas Crawford. Crawford is not mentioned in any productions or articles after her retirement. Her name is mentioned in the Executive Committee meeting minutes. On January 20, 1930, a letter from Crawford was read to the Executive Committee asking to be removed from the Board of Directors. He plea was unanimously rejected and the Executive Committee allowed her to serve out her term. Whether Crawford left Nashville for professional or personal reasons remains a mystery.

Crawford’s suggestions indicate that in spite of the previous reports that announced the creation of a workshop, the classes and performances never came to fruition. After her departure the Executive Committee moved on October 5, 1928 to develop the workshop idea and offer classes as instructors were available. An article appeared in the Tennessean that same month announcing that six courses would be offered. The courses would be taught by a competent professional and would be open to all Little Theatre members. The first meeting for all interested parties took place on October 24, 1928. Ramon Savich was credited as being in charge of the workshop with a host of assisting instructors: H. B. Faulkner, Jack Schwab, Sarah Smith, Louise Jeter, John Tess, Downer Brame, and Everett Crowley. Course work covered the basics of theatre and performance. Classes included acting, dancing, fencing, history of the theater,
theater maintenance, costume, and stage lighting. The *Tennessean* announced that most classes would begin within the week.\(^{20}\) Those who participated in the technical classes of the workshop were given the opportunity to assist with the production of the Guild’s second production of the season, *The Dover Road*.

At the onset of the 1928-1929 season, the Little Theatre began publishing a tabloid titled “The Little Theater News.”\(^{21}\) The publication must have been very short lived as no surviving copies existed in any of the manuscript collections I searched through. Nor were there any preserved in the Little Theatre Scrapbooks.

According to Dr. Schermerhorn’s record, the plays produced in the 1928-1929 season were *The Happy Husband* by Harrison Owen, presented in October; *The Dover Road* by A. A. Milne, presented November 21-24; *Children of the Moon* by Martin Flavin, presented December 12-15; *Erstwhile Susan* by Marian De Forest, presented March 6-9; *The Vortex* by Noel Coward, presented April 3-6; *Sun-Up* by Lula Vollmer, presented April 22-25 in collaboration with the Stagecrafters; *The Torch-Bearers* by George Kelly; and *Charley’s Aunt* by Brandon Thomas, presented May 22-25. None of the programs for this season lists the years.

Coleman Harwell\(^{22}\) reviewed *The Happy Husband* in the October 18, 1928 edition of the *Tennessean*. While other articles speak of large audiences and a sparkling comedy, Harwell’s review is quite different; it lacks enthusiasm and at times borders on apologetic. Harwell writes that the audience was small for a Little Theatre production.

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\(^{21}\) “Little Theater’s Tabloid Popular,” *Nashville Banner*, October 16, 1928.

\(^{22}\) Harwell was a member of the Nashville Little Theatre and appeared in *Loose Ankles* and *The Poor Nut*. 

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Not only was this odd, but there seemed to be a lack of community and teamwork among the cast. “While decidedly strong in their individual characterizations, the cast showed their greatest weakness in working together.” Tempo was an issue and at times the action was “stagey.” Yet, Harwell tries his best to be positive stating his assurance that some of these issues will surely get ironed out in time. One criticism that would not improve with rehearsal was vast difference in ages of the actors, whose characters were supposed to be about the same age. Harwell again tries to remain positive by undermining his own worth as a critic, praises the sets, and lauds the history of the theatre and director Savich of choosing and producing excellent plays. With such effort to find bright spots in the production, one cannot help but wonder what was going on behind the scenes. The low turn out was most likely only a symptom of the greater problem, which ultimately led to the end of the Little Theatre.

Play selection was a challenge for the Little Theatre Guild of Nashville. During the 1929-1930 season, the theatre changed its name. The Tennessean reported on October 18, 1929, that “Due to the fact that he former name, the Nashville Little Theater Guild, Inc. conflicted with the name of the New York Theatre Guild, the local organization found that it could not produce plays whose rights are owned by the Broadway organization.” The Board of Directors voted to change the name to the Nashville Little Theatre, Inc. on October 12, 1928. The new name was to take effect on November 19, 1928. With the name change, the Nashville Little Theatre gained access to even more of America’s most popular plays.

Crawford’s suggestion of a democratic style whereby the audience makes suggestions was taken to heart during the second show of the season. After a performance
of *The Dover Road* on November 22, 1928, Ramon Savich addressed the audience and asked for their participation. In his talk, he also mentioned the challenge of paying royalties for recently successful plays.\(^{23}\) Even after a name change and an increased availability of plays, the theatre was struggling to stay financially solvent.

*Children of the Moon* was reviewed by Coleman Harwell in the *Tennessean* in December 13, 1928. While Harwell enjoyed the acting, the best part of the play was by far the setting by Clara Brown, Raymond Jordan, and Downer Brame, with no small assistance from director Ramon Savich. Harwell describes the set as having a heavy stair railing, a huge stone fireplace, doors of different shapes set in grey walls, and ancient furniture. The harshest criticism that Harwell offers is one that he claims is a problem for many of the Little Theatre productions: enunciation. The Little Theatre loved to choose English plays. In nearly every review of these plays, the author mentions that the accents were not always consistent. Most of the time the reviewer passes this point off and states that the play is still very worth seeing. In this case, Harwell takes the opportunity to point out that if the Little Theatre would focus on improving the vocal quality of performances, “there would be little left to harp on.” Still a concern was the size of the audience. While other articles talk of good crowds, Harwell is concerned. He could not judge who or what was to blame for the low attendance and rather facetiously suggests that the publicity managers arrange some sort of scandal to draw in a crowd. Apparently, the crowd increased with the run of the play and several actors were noted for outstanding performances, particularly Mrs. Lillie’s final ascent up the staircase.

\(^{23}\) “Play Lovers Asked to Assist Little Theater Select Plays,” *Nashville Banner*, November 23, 1928.
The Torch-Bearers opened January 23, 1929. Only two articles are preserved in the Little Theatre Scrapbook regarding this play. The highest praise goes again to the setting. One reviewer in the Tennessean recommends that audience members come early and stay late in order to view something very interesting on the stage. This author calls the setting futuristic. The other article calls the modern drawing room in acts one and three “thoroughly satisfying” although the acting was “undistinguished.”

The setting of Erstwhile Susan was noted for using genuine colonial furniture, on loan from the Old Furniture shop on Capers Avenue, which was owned by Little Theatre member and frequent set designer, Clara Brown. Featured pieces included a walnut Pennsylvania Dutch corner cupboard, a colonial sugar chest or “mealer,” ladder-back chairs, and a massive china press with columns and a heavy cornice. The play was praised in the papers. Although Ralph McGill wrote in the Nashville Banner on March 7, 1929, that at times the play moved far too slowly, he praises the acting and notes that the crowd on opening night was “one of the largest of the season.”

The production of The Vortex saw a departure from the standard routine of the theatre. Ramon Savich took the leading part of Nicky. While he remained deeply invested in all aspects of the production, Savich did not direct alone; Dr. Duncan Heatherington assisted him. The Tennessean reported on March 29, 1929, that Savich had been using a popular technique called a “midnight rehearsal” to help the actors focus on vocal quality and tone. Actors rehearsed their lines in the dark and the best interpretation of each line was chosen. Perhaps Savich chose this method as a response to the light criticism given to previous productions of English plays. Three reviews are preserved in the Little

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24 “‘Torch Bearers’ Well Presented,’” Tennessean, January 24, 1929.
Theatre Scrapbook for *The Vortex*. To the credit of director Savich, none criticizes the diction of the actors. All three praise the acting of the two main characters. The Thursday morning April 4, 1929 article in the *Tennessean* calls the setting the weakest part of the play. Robert Jakes of the *Nashville Banner* blasts the writing, specifically the contrived salvation of the characters at the end. The only criticism of the Thursday April 4, 1929, edition of the *Tennessean* is that the play started off far too slowly. Overall, the efforts of the Little Theatre were applauded, as usual.

The Little Theatre left England behind for its next production. Produced in cooperation with the Stagecrafters,25 *Sun-Up* by Lula Vollmer transported audiences to the mountains of North Carolina. In contrast to the positive reviews that previous productions received, the reviewers of *Sun-Up* seem to be relieving some pent-up frustration over the constant parade of English plays. An unidentified reviewer in the *Tennessean* on April 23, 1929, says that the play “surpasses in excellence any thing[sic] this reporter has attended there before. But that was its distinction. Many Little Theater presentations are sad attempts at sophisticated comedy.” All three reviews that are preserved in the Little Theatre Scrapbook credit Catharine Winnia as the savior of the play. Her polished performance and grasp of the mountain accent made the rest of the cast bearable. This was Winnia’s first lead in a production with the Little Theatre. She would go on to become a Little Theatre and Playhouse favorite for more than twenty years.

25 “Stagecrafters Present ‘Sun-Up’ First of Week at Little Theatre,” *Nashville This Week*, April 22-29, 6.
Programs of this period contained many advertisements for local businesses in addition to the standard cast lists and calls for membership. The programs also frequently promoted theatrical events around Nashville such as touring companies and visiting lecturers. The program for *Sun-Up* notes that the Centennial Club would host Thornton Wilder on April 26 and Robert Frost on April 12.

*Charley’s Aunt* had been considered for an earlier slot in the season. However, the Board of Directors felt that in order for the show to be a success, veteran actor Sam Tarpley must be in the cast. Tarpley was not available at the time and the Board decided to wait. Finally in May 1929, Tarpley was able to take on the role with great success.

While reviews in the *Tennessean* sang the usual upbeat praises of the theatre, Robert Jakes of the *Nashville Banner* had a very different opinion. “It is unfortunate that the Little Theatre season should close with ‘Charley’s Aunt,’ so many really worth while things have been done during the earlier part of the year.” Perhaps it was symptom of English fatigue. For Jakes, the play was far too light, although he was in agreement with others in thinking that Tarpley as Lord Babberly was the best of the show. Audiences seemed to disagree with the critic, as often happens; several reports tell of loud applause and even calls for the director at the curtain call.26

In the program for *Charley’s Aunt*, the Nashville Little Theatre gives its subscribers the chance to voice their opinions about possible plays for the 1929-1930 season. The options reflect a theatre unafraid of taking risks and in touch with the artistic achievements of the day. The options listed were *The Dybbuk, What Every Woman Knows, Justice, The Swan, Expressing Willie, The Idiot, The Wild Duck, Pygmalion, He*

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Who Gets Slapped, R.U.R., Too Many Husbands, Grounds for Divorce, Merry Wives of Windsor, Is Zat So?, Jealousy, The Trial of Mary Dugan, Right You Are, The Skull, Saturday’s Children, Aren’t We All?, Anne Pettersdottor, Paris Bound, Dr. Knock, Prunella (musical version), and Beyond the Horizon. No documentation has been found about the feedback received. Whether the audience was unaware of most of the plays, or unreceptive to some of the more daring choices offered, is open for speculations. Whatever the case, the only play that made the cut for the next season was Ibsen’s The Wild Duck.

After working with the Little Theatre for two years, Ramon Savich resigned as director in June 1929. According to the Tennessean on June 25, 1929, “It is understood that he has accepted a place with either a New York company or with another Little Theater group.” Margery Hollister Hargrove, after a personal interview with Coleman Harwell, June 20, 1965, speculates about the reason for Savich’s departure: “His reasons for leaving have not been recorded. Perhaps the Board was not satisfied with his work or perhaps his intense, highly emotional personality which exploded into outbursts of temper proved too trying.” Based on my research, the parting seems to have been on very good terms. The board moved to send Savich a letter of appreciation for his dedication and excellent work. The Little Theatre looked to the East for a new director and finally signed a man who came with high recommendations.

The Tennessean published an article dated October 13, 1929, boasting that “It was on the recommendation of Professor George Pierce Baker, head of the department of

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drama at Yale University, that Rufus Phillips… was chosen to direct Little Theatre activities here this season.” Phillips was a graduate of Pratt Institute in 1923 and spent the next three years as a freelance designer in New York where he also worked as a drama critic for two seasons. His first directing experience came in Westchester County, New York and also in Connecticut. During these years, Phillips began dabbling in playwriting. While his works were not staged, they did open the door for him to attend the Yale School of Drama where he studied under George Pierce Baker for two years. In that time, Phillips’ play Rackey won a tournament, and his direction of Gorky’s *The Lower Depths* gained praise from George Pierce Baker himself.28

With new leadership and renewed enthusiasm, the 1929-1930 season began with a great deal of publicity. Over a dozen articles of various sizes promoting the first production of the season, *Hay Fever* by Noel Coward, were placed in the second scrapbook of the Little Theatre.29 One article in the *Tennessean*, published Tuesday evening, October 15, 1929, highlights Madge West Joseph’s performance as the leading lady, lauding her as a “Former Broadway Star.” In spite of the pre-show publicity, the performance met with mixed reviews. In the *Tennessean*, Thursday morning, October 17, 1929, the author praises the performance saying, “Hay Fever Well Cast, Staged and Ably Handled.” The article gives praise calling the theatre an “ambitious group of folks… Mr. Phillips should have Nashville’s congratulations from the first and there should be a filled house each night the rest of the week.”

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28 “Theater Director Will Help Select $100 Prize Play,” *Tennessean*, Sunday Morning, August 31, 1930.
29 The Little Theatre Scrapbook, John Lark Taylor Collection, Vanderbilt University Special Collections, Nashville.
Marshall Morgan at the *Nashville Banner* was not quite as enthusiastic in his remarks. His article published October 17, 1929, says that the play was not a smashing success, but deserved more applause than it received. Both articles state that the opening night crowd was small. Morgan’s chief disagreement, however, was not with the acting and directing, but with the writing.

Another mention of the Nashville Little Theatre that was published that same evening of October 17, 1929, in the *Tennessean* was a column titled “The What Not” by Helen Dahnke. She encouraged people to attend the theater saying, “More people ought to patronize it. If they are as weary of the movies and their boresome offspring, the talkies, as we are, they will.” In view of these three accounts, it would appear that attendance was disturbingly low, at least for this first performance. Friday morning’s *Tennessean* published October 18, 1929, called the second night’s crowd “large.” The director was pleased with the audience’s reaction. The Little Theatre Scrapbook has several small articles published in the *Tennessean* reporting the close of *Hay Fever*. Next to the articles are hand written notes stating proudly that these little blurbs appeared on the front page.

Coleman Harwell of the *Tennessean* continued the efforts to generate enthusiasm for the production in the Thursday evening paper that same day with an article titled “Audience Laughs Tribute to Little Theater Play, with Fine Cast, ‘Liliom’ Next.” Harwell proceeds to call *Hay Fever* “one of the best comedies of its history.” While the previous articles tell of a small crowd, Harwell claims the theatre was more than half full. He goes on to comment that the theatre’s choice to do *Liliom* next is either very foolish or very brave.
The production of Ferenc Molnar’s *Liliom* was an ambitious undertaking. Not only was the subject matter of the Hungarian play a challenge, there were six different settings that required extra rehearsals and extra hands to ensure that the changes went as smoothly as possible. The play was well promoted. On November 17, 1929, large photos of the principal cast members appeared, taking up a respectable portion of the page. Reviews were positive; the only slight criticism was of some “rough edges” that would surely be worked off as the run of the show progressed.

The program for *Liliom* announces a December production of Philip Barry’s *Paris Bound* calling it “the most discussed play of the 1927 theatrical season in New York.” The production was probably slated for December but was ultimately abandoned due to the heavy demands of the Christmas season. Another factor that may very well have effected this decision is the onset of the Great Depression. The stock market had crashed on October 29, between the productions of *Hay Fever* and *Liliom*. Surprisingly, very little hint of the economic devastation is mentioned in any of the Little Theatre manuscripts, programs, or scrapbooks. Perhaps it was too early for Nashville to feel the effects. Or it could simply be that economic hardship was something people simply didn’t talk about. The clearest connection between the Little Theatre and the Great Depression, although never directly acknowledged, can be seen in the financial statements of the theatre, and are discussed later in this chapter.

In spite of the difficulties, the Little Theatre members sought to maintain an average of one play a month. To do this, two plays had to be scheduled for January, the

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first of which was to open on January 8, 1930. As early as this was, it was not the first event for the Little Theatre in the New Year. An informal tea, followed by a presentation of Sir James Barrie’s *The New Word*, and the opening act of George Bernard Shaw’s *St. Joan* was given on January 4, 1930 at the Hillsboro Theatre for invited patrons and members. Several articles from both Nashville papers published in late December 1929 announce this gathering. One article in particular in the *Tennessean* on December 29, 1929, calls the gathering an annual New Year’s custom. That may be the case; however, this is the first New Year’s gathering that is documented in either Little Theatre Scrapbook.

Sometime after the close of *Liliom*, the exterior of the Hillsboro Theatre received a facelift. The *Tennessean* reports on January 3, 1930, that the front of the building had been given a fresh coat of white paint, the doors and window frames had been painted dark green, flowerboxes with ivy had been added to the windows, and a wrought iron lamp was hung above the door. It was a great way to spruce up the theatre for its first official show of the year.

*On Approval* by Frederick Lonsdale returned Nashville audiences to the English - or in this case Scottish -- countryside. Most critics gave the typical positive review. In Marshall Morgan’s review the play in the *Nashville Banner* on January 9, 1930, one can’t help but sense a hint of frustration over the choice of -- what he considers -- another mediocre English comedy. The four-person, three-act play involved a large amount of memorization and Morgan gives credit to both the actors and the director for skilled handling of the dialogue. One curious comment that Morgan makes is that there were no sounds heard from backstage during the performance. I have found no mention of such
noise in earlier reviews. However, Morgan’s enthusiastic remark indicates that backstage noise must have been a problem in some production that he attended. Overall, the play appears to have been successful, with capacity crowds on at least two nights.

A great deal of promotion preceded Ibsen’s *The Wild Duck*. The *Nashville Banner* stated on January 28, 1930 that public demand for more information on the play was so great that “all copies of the play contained at local libraries are in excessive demand, and Mrs. McMillin was secured to meet in an adequate way the demand to know more about the play.” Mrs. McMillin was to give an informational talk about the play and the Little Theatre movement over the airwaves of WSM the night before the play’s opening at the Hillsboro Theatre. Interest must have been great indeed. One reviewer noted that the opening night of *The Wild Duck* was far larger than the previous production and takes this as a sign that patrons prefer more serious dramas to the light comedies. The author concludes his remarks by reminding the director that the plays of O’Neill had never yet been staged in Nashville. His plea fell on deaf ears, it seems. It would be nearly ten years before an O’Neill play would take the stage at the Hillsboro Theatre.

After outlining the plays chosen for this season, a note from the director in the program for *The Wild Duck* begs the audience for their input: “We are endeavoring to present as varied and fine a group of plays as can be found. If you have a suggestion or criticism regarding the plays selected, or their presentation, won’t you drop us a little note.[sic] It is your theatre and this is one way you may serve it.”

For the February show, the Little Theatre chose Bartlett Cormack’s gangster drama *The Racket*. Prior to the official opening on Wednesday the 26th, the Little Theatre took the show to the nearby town of Old Hickory for a special trial performance on
Monday the 24\textsuperscript{th}. The performance was given under the auspices of the Poetry Club and took place at the Old Hickory Community Playhouse where the audience numbered 150.\textsuperscript{32} Reviews of the play were uniformly good. Unlike many of the reviews where it seems only the names of the plays have been changed, these reviews have an air of genuine appreciation and criticism is non-existent. One actor that bears noting was Coleman Harwell, frequent critic of Little Theatre plays. For this production, Harwell took the role of the young reporter and was praised for his portrayal in almost all the reviews. Even more than the acting, the directing done by Savich was especially praised. Somehow he managed to take a cast of 19 men and one woman, most of whom were new to the stage, and make an exciting, fast-paced, and engaging evening. The play was not only popular with critics, but with the public as well. The Friday night performance was left with standing room only and plans were made to add 100 seats for the final presentation on Saturday.\textsuperscript{33}

The preview performance of \textit{The Racket} was such a success that the Little Theatre decided to do it again with the next production, George Bernard Shaw’s \textit{Candida}. The players would again perform on Monday night in Old Hickory. Rather than take Tuesday as a dress rehearsal, the play then moved to Murfreesboro, Tennessee for a second preview. Not only was this a wonderful promotional tool for the Little Theatre, it gave the actors a chance to work out the kinks in their performances prior to the official opening on Wednesday, March 26, 1930. Reviews were positive, but with a slight

\textsuperscript{32} “Gang Play Given At Old Hickory,” \textit{Tennessean}, February 25, 1930.
\textsuperscript{33} Three articles in The Little Theatre Scrapbook state this information on March 1, 1930.
change; those reviewing the play seemed to breath a sigh of relief that play selection was finally improving.

In the midst of this success, tragedy struck for Rufus Phillips. At some point during the run of Candida, Phillips received an urgent call that his wife was seriously ill. She had traveled to New York for her sister’s wedding in February. On April 4, 1930, the Tennessean reported that Mrs. Phillips was much improved and that the Little Theatre director would be returning to Nashville very soon. Mrs. Phillips remained in New York and was eventually placed in a sanitarium. She never returned to Nashville.

Rufus Phillips took on a different role for the production of Her Husband’s Wife. Rather than directing, Phillips focused on the set design. At the helm of the production was Dr. H. B. Schermerhorn. As with the previous two productions, the play previewed out of town. This time, residents of Murfreesboro, Tennessee caught the first glimpse of the show on Tuesday, April 22, 1930. The papers report that audiences enjoyed the show. At least one critic, however, blasted it. Robert Jakes of the Nashville Banner on April 24, 1930, called the play “just about the most amateurish thing that the Little Theater has done. First of all the play itself is - I heard someone say - ‘terrible.’ But worse, it is poorly cast.” Only Mrs. Rankin was tolerable in her portrayal of Irene Randolph. Attendance was low that night. Jakes reports that the theatre was only about a third full. Thankfully, the audience grew with each night, and a small article in the Nashville Banner on April 25, 1930, claims that the difficulties of opening night were “ironed out” and the audience gave the cast much applause.

The production of Cradle Song was originally scheduled for April of 1930. Due to causes unknown the production was pushed back until May 7 and ran through May 10.
Whatever the case, it did not stop schools and local literary circles from taking interest in the Spanish play. The production previewed in Old Hickory on Monday, May 5, 1930. With this production, the Little Theatre redeemed itself in the eyes of reviewer Jakes who called the play “a beautiful piece of work.”

With the close of *Cradle Song*, several reports hailed the 1929-1930 season as the best in the theatre’s history. Based on newspaper articles, however, the season of 1929-1930 was a mixture of good and mediocre productions. The quality of productions was most likely a symptom of a greater problem lurking beneath the publicized surface of the theatre. At the conclusion of the season, Little Theatre president Mrs. Rankin gave a report in which she pleaded for more unity in the Theatre’s leadership:

… this brings me to a matter, that bearing as it does upon the future of our little theatre, I wish to stress. no[sic] director, however capable he may be, can carry unaided the burden of an undertaking of this kind. He needs and should have the intelligent and enthusiastic co-operation of others… An organization such as ours has its purely business element as well as its artistis[sic] aspect, and we cannot hope to give our Little Theatre the place that it should have in the community life of Nashville, we cannot assure the support of our subscribers and of the public, unless there is proper co-operation between these two main divisions of our organization.

The Nashville Little Theatre continued the plea for audience input for the upcoming season by listing several options, presumably based on the response to the request in the program for *The Wild Duck* and in the *Tennessean* on May 18, 1930. Some of the options presented were *The Royal Family, The Sea Gull* or *The Cherry Orchard, Man and the Masses,* *He Who Gets Slapped, Red Rust, Aren’t We All, The Skin Game*,

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34 “‘The Cradle Song,’ Finds Little Theater at It’s Own,” *Nashville Banner*, May 8, 1930.
35 Minutes of the Nashville Little Theatre, June 23, 1930, Little Theatre of Nashville Guild Papers, Vanderbilt University Special Collections, Nashville.
36 The program notes that this play would be done “Expressionistically.”
and George Barnwell. The Tennessean was to publish a synopsis of one play each week until the list of eighteen -- minus one original work and one by Eugene O’Neill -- was exhausted. The theatre did not promise that all eight of the top voted plays would be produced. It was good that president Rankin made that clear as only two of the above mentioned plays were produced.

One of the eight slots of the season was to be filled by the Tennessee Prize play. The Tennessean announced on July 27, 1930, that judges for the competition --which was sponsored by that newspaper -- would be announced the following week. In addition to seeing his work staged, the winning playwright was to receive a $100 prize. If other entries were of distinction, those playwrights might also a receive a prize of $10 as well as the possibility of seeing their plays performed by the Nashville Little Theatre. The intent was sincere, yet ultimately impossible. The deadline for submission was eventually announced as February 1, 1931. By the time the winner was announced in early May, the Little Theater had already made plans for the final two plays of the season. Finally, Andrew Nelson Lytle’s The Lost Sheep was announced the winner and was performed in March 1932.

Little Theatre director Rufus Phillips was one of the three judges, in spite of his physical absence that summer. The Tennessean reports that Phillips spent the summer of 1930 in Richfield Springs, New York at camp On-The-Rock.\(^{37}\) I have tried to discover if the town had a theatre or a sanitarium to determine Phillips’s reasons for spending the summer there. It is possible that he had received a position at the local theater. It is also

\(^{37}\)“Theater Director Will Help Select $100 Prize Play,” Tennessean, Sunday Morning, August 31, 1930.
highly likely that his removal from Nashville had as much to do with his wife’s failing health as his employment.

The Nashville Little Theatre kicked off the 1930-1931 season with another open house to welcome new members. The Nashville Banner reported on September 5, 1930, that new members would receive a tour of the facilities, and that director Rufus Phillips would be looking out for new actors who might fit a role in the season’s first play, Kaufman and Ferber’s *The Royal Family*. The open house was to take place on Sunday, September 7, 1930, and would serve as a launch pad for the official membership drive, which was to start on September 10.

At this point in the history of the Nashville Little Theatre, programs become scarce. Apparently, Madge West Joseph, though still active in the Stagecrafters and Centennial club events, no longer appeared in any plays by the Nashville Little Theater. Dr. Schermerhorn’s history also comes to a close, as it was written before the conclusion of this season. At the time of his writing, Schermerhorn states that the plays to be presented that season include *The Skin Game*, *Olympia*, and *Man and the Masses*, although none of these plays was produced.

The practice of previewing shows in nearby towns continued this season and *The Royal Family* by Edna Ferber and George S. Kaufman, played for two nights in Murfreesboro, Tennessee before opening on October 22 at the Hillsboro Theatre. The show ran for four nights and received positive reviews with no criticisms. A record of attendance and box office sales for this season is available at Vanderbilt University Library’s Special Collections in the Little Theatre Guild Nashville Collection. They reveal that *The Royal Family* opened to a crowd of 200 and closed to an audience of 226
with 809 total attending. The box office brought in $250, the second highest box office and second highest attendance of the season.

Almost as soon as the curtain fell on The Royal Family, rehearsals for Chekhov’s The Sea Gull began. The play had been quite successful on Broadway, and the program for The Royal Family notes that this fact was the tipping point in the decision to present The Seagull “the next month” (November). Articles in the Tennessean also state that the play would be performed in late November. However, the time frame must have been too narrow and The Seagull was not performed until December 3-6, 1930. Reviews applauded the Little Theatre’s bravery in tackling such a challenging piece. Wallace Greene of the Nashville Banner qualified his criticisms by saying “that it is better to do difficult things with an incomplete measure of success than to do mediocre things with full success.” That being said, there were few real “actors” in the production and many “elocutionists.” Overall, the efforts of the Little Theatre to produce a quality production of a challenging play were very much appreciated by the critics, if not by the audience. Several articles in the Little Theatre Scrapbook highlight the high interest in the production and “many reservations” being made. However, these claims appear to have been mostly for publicity, as the production saw no dramatic jump in attendance by students or sales at the door. Total attendance was down at 740 total for the four night run and the box office brought in just over $246.

Not long after the close of The Seagull, Phillips was again called away to be with his wife Helen in Ilion, New York. Mrs. Phillips health had been deteriorating since April of 1930, and she was reported to have been confined to a sanitarium for the last few months, though no illness is disclosed in the newspaper articles. Mrs. Phillips passed
away on December 24, 1930, with her husband by her side, according to reports. Phillips was expected to return to Nashville on January 1, 1931, to resume his duties as director.38

Phillips hit the ground running when he returned to Nashville and rehearsals for The Fourth Wall by A. A. Milne began in early January. The play was originally announced to open on January 21, but was pushed back one more week to open on January 28, and close on the 31st. The play previewed in Old Hickory, Tennessee on January 26, 1931, and was heavily promoted in the papers. Only one review from the Tennessean is available in the Little Theatre Scrapbook, calling the play a “triumph.” Even with positive reviews and ample promotion, attendance barely beat that for The Sea Gull with 743 attending. Box office returns were even lower at $213.25

Previous plays had been reported as having strong followings and generating much interest, but with little evidence at the box office. For Dancing Mothers by Edmund Goulding and Edgar Selwyn, these statements were no exaggeration. Based on box office sales and over all attendance, Dancing Mothers, presented March 4-7, 1931, was the hit of the season. The box office reported $387.70 and attendance totaled at a record setting 939 for all four nights.

Director Phillips made an unusual move by appearing onstage in Ferenc Molnar’s The Guardsman as the Critic. It is unclear if this choice was out of necessity or simply a publicity stunt. The news was well publicized in the papers and the familiar claim of “unusual interest” in regard to ticket sales is made in more than one article. No doubt patrons and those familiar with the Little Theatre would have been curious to see the

38 Articles in both the Tennessean and the Nashville Banner on December 26, 1930 are located in the Little Theatre Scrapbook in the John Lark Taylor Collection at Vanderbilt University.
director himself on stage. However, that curiosity and the praise from critics, did not translate to attendance numbers. While the newspapers claim that large audiences attended the production, the records of the Little Theatre tell a different story. A decent amount of subscribers, 472 in all attended. Total attendance, however, was down at 701. The production saw the lowest box office of the season at just over $126. It is interesting that on Friday, March 20, 1931, both the Nashville Banner and the Tennessean report that a larger audience attended the second performance than did the first. Records show this to be incorrect; 144 attended the opening Wednesday night while only 133 were present on Thursday.

For the sixth production of the season, the Nashville Little Theatre announced The Front Page by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur. The Nashville Banner on March 24, 1931, notes an interesting coincidence. On the same morning that the Little Theatre announced its next play, word came from Chicago that the real “Mildy” Johnson, whom the protagonist of the play is largely based on, had died at the age of 42.

Several of the actors cast were current or former newspapermen. The role of Hildy was played by Freddie Russell, sports editor of the Nashville Banner, Walter Paschall, former member of the editorial staff of the Atlanta Journal played Roy Bensinger, and William R. Breyer, reporter for The Evening Tennessean was listed as playing Earl Williams. The newspapers continued to insist that interest in the play was high and that reservations were coming in earlier than ever. This might be entirely true. Members had to make their reservations ahead of time. Their eagerness, however, was not an indication of the final turn out. The Front Page previewed in Murfreesboro,
Tennessee on April 14. The play ran at the Hillsboro Theatre from April 15-18, 1931, with a final attendance total of 723 and box office sales of approximately $217.

_A Doll’s House_ by Henrik Ibsen, was presented May 6-9, 1931, to mild and pleasant reviews. In respect to attendance, the play was the low point of the season with only 618 attending all four nights and the second lowest box office with approximately $170. Even so, the play was by far the most popular of the season with the student crowd; fifty-four students attended over the four-night run.

_The Queen’s Husband_ by Robert Emmet Sherwood ended the season with a run from May 27-30, 1931. The cast included several well-known Little Theatre actors, including Dr. Schermerhorn as Lord Birton, and Sam Tarpley as King Eric VIII. Again it was reported that large audiences attended, while the record shows modest attendance of 706 for the entire run.

On June 2, 1931, the Executive Committee met at Mrs. Rankin’s home. The Business Manager reported on the 1930-31 season. His assessment was that if all subscriptions were paid, the theatre would be $200 in the black. As it stood, “the income and expenses of the season would be about equal.”

The minutes continue by saying that the Board informally agreed that in order for the theatre to survive another season, expenses would have to be reduced. Specifically, “That unless a material reduction in rental of the Hillsboro Theatre could be obtained from Lightman, a smaller theatre would have to be secured.” Lightman eventually agreed to the Little Theatre’s offer of $1200. The Board also reduced the number of plays from eight to six and the number of

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39 Nashville Little Theatre Minute Book, June 2, 1931, Little Theatre of Nashville Guild Papers, Vanderbilt University Special Collections, Nashville.
performances was cut to three. The director’s salary was also to be cut. This combined with the fact that Phillips only received $1250 out of the $3000 promised for his first season, and only $2674.19 for his second must have been too much of a financial strain. Hargrove cites an article in the Tennessean dated June 27, 1955, which recalls that Phillips had married and accepted a position at Grand Rapids Little Theatre. Hargrove’s interviews with Catharine Winnia and John Thompson reveal that Phillips returned to Nashville in 1934 and took a position as drama director at WSM. Although a loss for the Little Theatre at the time, Phillips move would later prove to be auspicious.

On June 15, 1931, president Rankin announced that Hale Shaneberger had accepted the director position for a salary of $2100 for six plays and the possibility of more if the financial situation improved. The agreement was on shaky ground, however. In the next meeting it is noted that Shaneberger accepted, “provided he does not, prior to signing a contract with us, secure a materially better offer elsewhere.” A better offer must have certainly come.

The 1931-1932 season saw the end of the Nashville Little Theatre. To this point, all that is known regarding its closure comes from the programs of that season as preserved in the Charles S. Mitchell Collection at Vanderbilt University and the records located in the Little Theatre Guild Nashville Papers. The final Little Theatre Scrapbook ends after the 1930-31 season with a few miscellaneous articles.

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40 Ibid. June 23, 1930.
41 Ibid. April 23, 1931.
For its final season, the Nashville Little Theatre again had a change in directorship. Julian Rochelle is credited as having staged and directed all productions for the season. Like Savich and Phillips before him, Rochelle is credited as having attended the Yale School of Drama under George Peirce Baker. Rochelle’s tenure in Nashville was so brief, little is recorded about his personality or directing style. By this point in the theatre’s life, it may have been too late for even the most skilled director to salvage it.

The Nashville Little Theatre began the season with *Broadway* by George Abbott and Philip Dunning, presented October 28-30, 1931. The three-night run saw a respectable crowd of 646. According to the records, the door sales were $135.42 and the cost of performance was $299.94. *A Noble Outcast* by John Frazer, is listed in the program as being presented December 2-4, 1931. The records, however, show 199 attended the Wednesday night performance, giving the play a total attendance of 761. Door sales were lower with $126.50 reported. *Ladies of the Jury* by Fred Ballard, presented January 27-29, 1932, had the highest attendance and box office of the season with 920 attending three nights and $182.09 coming in at the door. A bill of one-acts including *The Boor* by Anton Tchekov[sic], *The Valiant* by Holworthy Hall and Robert Middlemass, and *The Lost Sheep* by Andrew Nelson Lytle, was presented March 2-4, 1932, to 707 audience members and brought in $102. Henrik Ibsen’s *Ghosts*, presented March 30-April 1, 1932, held the lowest attendance of the season at 600 over three nights with $91.43 reported as box office sales. *Diplomacy* by Victorien Sardou ended the season.
season with its run from April 27-29, 1932. Although it was not the lowest attendance of the season with 640, it was the smallest box office at a mere $87.58.

The officers listed for the final year of the Nashville Little Theatre are Mrs. B. Kirk Rankin – President; Mrs. John H. Reeves – Vice President; Miss Annie DeMoville – Corresponding Secretary; Dr. H. B. Schermerhorn – Recording Secretary and Mrs. Edward Potter, Jr. – Treasurer.

In the final entries of the Little Theatre Guild minute book, Schermerhorn records that “It was decided that the Little Theatre should be continued for the ensuing season of 1932-33.”

Rental of the Hillsboro Theatre continued to be an issue. The notes state that the group was looking at renting the Belmont Theatre and using that option as leverage for a further reduction in rent of the Hillsboro Theatre. The Executive Committee dismissed the ideas of a closed subscription for the next season, and of enlarging the Advisory Board. The Executive Committee met for the final time on the morning of May 18, 1932. The only business carried out and noted is the appointment of a Nominating Committee for the election of officers. The group clearly intended to keep the theatre going for another season. Whatever discussion took place that led the theatre’s dissolution was not recorded.

Finances seem to be the primary reason for the demise of the Nashville Little Theatre. Based on the financial records available, the revenue and expenditures declined with the onset of the Great Depression. From August 1929 (the earliest record) to

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45 Nashville Little Theatre Minute Book, May 11, 1932, Little Theatre of Nashville Guild Papers, Vanderbilt University Special Collections, Nashville.  
46 Limited financial records are available in the Little Theatre of Nashville Guild Papers at Vanderbilt University.
February 1932 receipts fell 35%. Disbursements fell by 34%. The numbers for 1931 were reported on October 22, a few days before *Broadway* opened the season. Therefore, the amounts do not account for the entire season. They do, however, give an impression of the income the theatre received from subscriptions, as well as the amount of money spent prior to the first performance.

![Receipts and Expenditures](chart)

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Dr. Schermerhorn provides some insight into the financial workings of the theatre in his 1930 history. He estimates that half of a season’s expenses were met by subscriptions. The remaining income came from box office sales. Schermerhorn also states that the theatre’s goal was to be fully funded by subscriptions. A closed subscription would give the theatre more liberty. He concludes, “…for otherwise the choice of plays for production is necessarily somewhat influenced by considerations of

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47 Values might not reflect an entire season’s receipts or disbursements.
box-office appeal. But this is a transition stage through which, doubtless, every Little Theatre enterprise must pass.”

According to the president’s report for the 1929-1930 season, the theatre had to that point presented 35 plays and seen 150 performers cross its stage. Dr. Schermerhorn’s account claims that actors had ranged in ages from ten to 60, some appearing one time, others more than a dozen. Schermerhorn also claims that none of the 120 performances to date had been postponed or required “substitution of players.” By postponement, Schermerhorn must be referring to the delay of a performance after a show’s opening. Several times in the theatre’s history, a production took place several weeks later than originally advertised, as has been noted previously in this chapter.

In all appearances, the financial struggles and slightly lower attendance of the 1929-1930 season does not seem to be enough to close a theatre led by a dedicated group of artists. Perhaps there were internal and interpersonal challenges that never would have been recorded in a newspaper or meeting minutes. Only president Rankin’s address from the 1929-1930 season hints at discord in the group. Her calls for cooperation between the artistic and administrative sides of the theatre, as well as her request that plays for the upcoming season be chosen early will no doubt sound familiar to theatre artists of every generation. But although irksome, these challenges do not necessarily lead to a theatre’s demise. Whatever the case, after seven seasons, the Nashville Little Theatre went dark.

**Nashville Experimental Theatre**

The Nashville Community Playhouse commemorative booklet claims that a three-year hiatus followed the close of the Nashville Little Theatre. During this time the booklet claims that “no non-professional theatre existed in Nashville.” However, this
statement seems to be in error. Two programs survive from a group called Nashville Experimental Theatre which briefly existed within that three-year gap. The first program is for Sir James Barrie’s *Alice-Sit-By-The-Fire*, presented February 7-10, 1934. One familiar name in the program is that of Rufus S. Phillips, former director for Nashville Little Theatre. The names of cast and crew appear to be people unconnected with the Nashville Little Theatre and there is no indication of the location of the performance. The next production is advertised as being Kaufman and Hart’s *Once In a Lifetime* and boasts a cast of over fifty. One paragraph in the program gives notice that subscriptions “will be sold for the four remaining productions of this season on same basis of one dollar down for two tickets and a dollar a production as you attend.” Acknowledgements are also given to several local businesses, though only one store, Sterchi’s was given a slot.

The Nashville Experimental Theatre gave at least one other performance. Just as it advertised in the program for *Alice-Sit-By-The-Fire*, the group presented *Once In a Lifetime* by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart on March 14-17 and 19, 1934. Rufus S. Philips once again staged the play. The location of the play is unknown based on the information in the program. It is unclear whether the cast reached its goal of over fifty members. Thirty-four names are listed as characters with “12 Schlepkin Brothers” and “Hotel Guests” ambiguously placed at the bottom. One familiar name in the cast was Charles Mitchell playing “Weisskopf.” Another cast member of note is Frederick Coe who played “Second Chauffeur,” “Miss Chasen,” and “Tie Salesman.” Coe would later become an influential figure in the Nashville Community Playhouse and eventually leave Nashville for a successful career as a television producer. His work is discussed in the chapter concerning the Nashville Community Playhouse.
As with the previous program, several local businesses are acknowledged for their support. In a section titled “Experimental Theatre Calendar,” two events are listed. The first, to be presented April 6-7, is simply listed as a “classic now in rehearsal. To be presented without charge to the children of Nashville. Two matinee performances.” This would indicate that the short-lived theatre maintained a connection with the group that was to become the Nashville Children’s theatre, just as its predecessor, the Nashville Little Theatre had done.

The second event listed was to take place April 18-21:

An unique event for Nashville play goers. The Experimental Theatre will present an original play, offering for the first time a new means of expression in the theatre. This comedy drama was written by Mr. Phillips. Mr. Brock Pemberton, Dean of the American Theatre, recently said: “It is the most provocative play I’ve read in several years.”

Such praise from a well known Broadway producer and director would have been something to celebrate, indeed. It is curious, however, that such a play, written by a man with close ties to the local theatre, was not named in its advertisement. I do not believe this play was produced since no records or programs have been found. Aside from these programs, I have found no other documentation or mention of this theatre group. With barely enough evidence to prove its existence, the Nashville Experimental Theatre seems to have simply disappeared.

**Loss of a Founder**

During the interim years between the Nashville Experimental Theatre and the more firmly established Nashville Community Playhouse, the theatrical community lost a key member with the sudden death of faithful Stagecrafters member, former president of the Nashville Center of the Drama League of America and founding member of the Little
Theatre Guild of Nashville, Dr. H. B. Schermerhorn. Dr. Schermerhorn was secretary of
the School of Law at Vanderbilt University and died after leaving his classroom in late
January 1935.

Madge West Joseph, a frequent actor for the Nashville Little Theatre, preserved in
her scrapbooks several articles regarding Dr. Schermerhorn’s death and the Stagecrafters'
plans to remember him. The Nashville Banner reported on January 27, 1935, that Dr. W.
F. Tillett would officiate the funeral and that the burial would take place in Philadelphia.
The Nashville Banner also reported on February 11, 1935, that the Stagecrafters had held
a memorial meeting for their friend and colleague on the previous day at the School of
Arts and Applied Design. During the meeting, the members paid tribute to Dr.
Schermerhorn and ended by calling roll. It was the first time since joining the
Stagecrafters that Dr. Schermerhorn had not been present to answer.

While I have found no records or personal correspondences to prove any
connection between Dr. Schermerhorn’s death and the formation of a new theatre, one
can safely assume that the passing of someone so tied to the circle of local theatre artists
would have been keenly felt.
CHAPTER 3

THE NASHVILLE COMMUNITY PLAYHOUSE

The Playhouse Opens


The activities of these organizations reveal that other clubs and drama groups had continued to spring up after the demise of the Nashville Little Theatre. And yet, something was still lacking. Charles S. Mitchell, Chairman of the Executive Committee, hints at the inciting conversations that led to the development of the Nashville Community Playhouse:

It happened at the Coco-Cola [sic] hour when someone asked the embarrassing question, “Why hasn’t Nashville, the acknowledged educational center of the South, a little theater?” It was shortly after that some half dozen crusaders comprising the lawyer, the journalist, the architect, the advertising man and the merchant, (in order of importance), began lunching together to see if something
could not be done to retrieve the fair name of our city by bringing into being a theater in which local amateur talent, under proper direction, would once again bring the spoken drama to a stricken public.¹

This polished account of the theatre’s creation leaves many details to the imagination. No doubt those present at the luncheons understood the reasons for the death of the Nashville Little Theatre. Whatever those reasons were, the group appears to have learned from them and a new, stronger, and more organized theatre emerged.

One innovation for the group, already mentioned, was the publication of The Offstage Noise. The staff included Lilian Armstrong – Editor, Wendell Phillips – Associate Editor, John Boxley, Jr. – Art Editor, and George Doyne – Correspondent. This was to be far more than a program for performances. The policy outlined in the first publication dated November 1935, states:

> It is the principal purpose of this publication, aside from setting forth the program of each performance, to publish the news about activities of amateur theater in Nashville and environs; to report on what everybody is doing, who is acting in what, et cetera; and in our small way, to do what we can to coalesce all the unrelated units into the active and related whole which is the Nashville Community Playhouse.²

The editor goes on to express the desire for contributions from all readers, as well as the vision to expand with a department of news in other community and little theatres. The newsletter includes articles highlighting theatre groups in the Davidson County area in addition to news about the Playhouse’s season and workshops.

The “Spotlights” article gives a brief synopsis of most of the groups’ activities, several of which have familiar names including the Stagecrafters and the Hillsboro Players. The Stagecrafters were continuing activities with staged readings and reviews.

¹ *The Offstage Noise*, November 1935.
² Ibid.
There were plans at the time of the article’s publication for a full-length play in the spring, as well as a special lecture at the December meeting from Charles B. Parmer on David Belasco.

The article calls the Drama Caravan the youngest dramatic group in affiliation. This title does not appear to be indicative of the age of the members, but the age of the theatre. As of November 1935, the group had performed one full-length production, *Code of Honor* written by founder Charles B. Parmer -- the same Parmer who was scheduled to lecture at the Stagecrafters’ meeting. The Drama Caravan’s second production was slated to be another local creation titled *Duels* and written by Mrs. Lillian N. Shearon, formerly of the Nashville Little Theatre. The Hillsboro Players had already given ten performances of *The Unknown Soldier Speaks*. Two other productions were scheduled for later in the year with the young Fred Coe and W. F. Christopher -- head of the Hillsboro Players -- directing.

At the same time that *The Offstage Noise* burst onto the scene, another publication was making plans to further improve communication between theatre people. The November 1935 issue of *The Offstage Noise* announces the coming pamphlet *Stage Whispers*. George Doyne of the Vendome Theater intended to publish the document once a month, approximately ten days before the first the date of each of the Playhouse’s productions, and distribute it to the heads of all dramatic groups. Doyne was also the correspondent for *The Offstage Noise* and much of the information from the pamphlets would be included in the “Spotlight” section of the newsletter. While the “Spotlight” segment became a regular feature, it is unclear whether *Stage Whispers* ever got off the ground. My research has turned up no surviving issue.
The Nashville Community Playhouse secured for its director former Little Theatre
director, Rufus S. Phillips. After a few years away from Nashville, Phillips had returned
and taken a position at WSM. If there had been any ill feelings over his departure in
1931, they were forgotten by the new organization. With Phillips at the helm, the
Nashville Community Playhouse opened its doors in November 1935 with *Three
Cornered Moon* by Gertrude Tonkonogy. The corresponding issue of *The Offstage Noise*
lists *Double Door* by Elizabeth McFadden as the next production running December 18-
20, 1935. No other play selections had been finalized and the editor solicits suggestions.
Ideas were to be submitted to Mr. Drury, Mr. Parmer, or the editor. Possible plays listed
for consideration included *Yellow Jack* by Sidney Howard, *Goodbye Again* by George
Haight and Allan Scott, *The Left Bank* by Elmer Rice, *The House of Connelly* by Paul
Green, *Close Harmony* by Dorothy Parker and Elmer Rice, and *Berkeley Square* by John
L. Balderston to name a few.

In addition to plans for a six-show season, the Nashville Community Playhouse
also announced the presentation of three one-act plays in early December. However, the
December 1935 issue of *The Offstage Noise* gives further clarification and announces the
finalized date of January 10, 1936. This presentation was intended to be the early form of
the Playhouse’s workshop. The three directors hailed from different affiliates: W. F.
Christopher of the Hillsboro Players was to direct *The Peace I Give Unto You*, Miss
Susan Vaughn of the Peabody Demonstration School Dramatic Club was to direct *The
Man From Brandon*, and Mrs. Inez Bassett Alder of the Hume-Fogg Dramatic Club was
to direct *The Trysting Place* by Booth Tarkington. Performances were limited to
Playhouse members with season tickets. Excitement was high for this facet of the
Playhouse. Director Rufus Phillips, as quoted in the November issue of *The Offstage Noise*, said:

> The result of the whole thing… should be that it will provide for the young people of Nashville an outlet for creative expression, -- and there isn’t anything else, so far as I know, that offers such grand possibilities for bringing the young people out of the mental inertia that the cinema and the radio are fostering – however fine in other ways these things may be.

Phillip’s statement might appear to be somewhat disingenuous in light of the fact that he served on the radio committee for the Playhouse and worked at WSM as the Dramatic Director. Perhaps he used his position as an opportunity to purify the medium. The radio committee of the Playhouse was dedicated to transmitting theatrical pieces over the airways. Chaired by Gertrude McCall, the first audition for a radio performance was held December 10, 1935, at the WSM studios. A second audition was to take place in January. Committee members also included Casper Cuhn, Catharine Winnia, Julia Gibson, Orville Miller, Russell Wiley, Jennie Mai McQuiddy, and Lillian Armstrong.

Like the Playhouse, affiliate organizations shared in a broader vision for Community and Little Theatres. The Drama Caravan announced in the December 1935 issue of *The Offstage Noise* that it intended to conduct two dramatic tournaments the following year. One would award a plaque to the secondary or intermediate school that produced “the most ably staged play.” The second contest was open to any Community or Little Theater in the South and was to offer “a really substantial prize.” Both contests were created with the intention of “fostering dramatic talent in and concerning the South and Southern people.” It was a noble ambition. Sadly, by May of 1936, the Drama Caravan was no longer listed among the Playhouse’s affiliates. It is unclear if the group
simply underwent a name change or if its members disbursed throughout the other area theatre groups.

The booklet celebrating the “2nd Decade of the Playhouse” includes a section titled “The Playhouse Government” which gives a very brief history of the inner workings of the early playhouse. The booklet notes that during its first year of existence, the Nashville Community Playhouse was “originally organized and incorporated, with appropriate officers and a Board of Directors of twenty.” Later program histories quote the charter for stating that the Playhouse was incorporated “for the purpose of establishing and maintaining a theatre for the promotion of painting, music, drama, and the fine arts, and for general theatre purposes.” Signing members were Mrs. Inez B. Alder, Maxwell E. Benson, Reber Boult, William R. Breyer, Charles S. Mitchell, Mrs. B. Kirk Rankin, E. B. Stahlman, Jr., and Catharine Winnia. Officers of the Playhouse are listed in the initial publication of *The Offstage Noise*: E. B. Stahlman, Jr. – President; Mrs. B. Kirk Rankin – Vice-President; Miss Catharine Winnia – Secretary; and Reber Boult – Treasurer.4

Fewer than 100 subscribers funded the theatre, according the tenth anniversary booklet. In the first years, all subscribers were involved in questions of government and in the productions themselves. The first article in the bylaws states: “Any person who has purchased a ticket of admission to the performances to be given by the Corporation during the season 1936-37 shall be entitled to the membership in this Corporation for

4 See Appendix B.
such period…” Hargrove claims this structure is a departure from that of the previous Little Theatre. While the Little Theatre relied on several classes of Patrons, the Nashville Community Playhouse relied on corporate sponsors and seasonal membership; any person who purchased a season ticket -- $4 for adults, $3 for students -- was considered a member and could serve on any committee or board. The Playhouse also supplemented its income by sub-renting the theatre to WSM’s Grand Ole Opry.

Evidence of heavy volunteer involvement in the infancy of the Playhouse can be seen in the second publication of *The Offstage Noise* in December 1935. The editor’s opening article “The Mouse Labors And Brings Forth a Mountain” praises the hard work of committee members and makes witty jabs at readers who have not contributed with time as well as money. The men and women behind the theatre magazine had set a high bar for their publication and were in need of further resources in order to continue. As with many Community Theatres of the day and present time, this was to be an issue throughout the Nashville Community Playhouse’s existence.

Corporate sponsors not only paid for advertising in *The Offstage Noise*, but also provided services and free advertising for the theatre. Prior to the opening of the first show, three companies were involved in providing new draperies for the theatre. Werthan Bag Company donated the materials, McEwan’s Laundry was responsible for dyeing the fabric, and Watkins Institute and domestic science classes custom-tailored the finished product. Several former Little Theatre actors and current Playhouse participants were

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5 *The Offstage Noise*, March 1937.
active employees and actors at WSM, so it is no surprise that the radio station gave the Playhouse free advertising. WLAC also provided free advertising, though I found no personal connections between the theatre and the station. Corporate sponsorship and the new system of membership provided a more stable financial base for the Playhouse, allowing them to plan on a fairly dependable budget.

Ann Mann – wife of Delbert Mann and active member of the theatre – recalls the early days of the Nashville Community Playhouse in an article titled “A Remembrance of ‘Pappy’” which appeared in a memorial booklet for Fred Coe. Fred and Del began their theatre careers in the first years of the playhouse when they were teenagers and college students. Both men went on to have highly respected careers in television.

According to Ann Mann, Double Door - the Playhouse’s second production – was Fred Coe’s premier performance with the group. Coe had shown an early leaning toward theatre as a child. His teachers knew that the best way to interest him was to have him write a script and act it out for the class. As a teenager, Coe became heavily involved in the youth group at Hillsboro Presbyterian Church and the Hillsboro Players under student pastor W. F. Christopher. Coe recalled in an article for The Nashville Tennessean Magazine, published September 4, 1955: “Chris had us putting on a new show about every six weeks…We were always busy building scenery, rehearsing, making costumes.” The training Coe received at his church made the move to the Playhouse a natural transition. Both he and Christopher participated heavily in the first two years of

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7 Ibid. 49.
the Playhouse’s existence. Christopher eventually left in the summer of 1937 to “make a survey of student work in educational institutions throughout the United States…” It is unclear exactly what this job entailed or who was Christopher’s employer. But, by this time, Coe was deeply invested in the Playhouse and under the mentorship of its new director, as will be addressed later.

For the production of Yellow Jack by Sidney Howard -- presented February 5-7, 1936 -- The Offstage Noise published its most dramaturgical issue to date. Due to the historic nature of the play and the fact that many of the characters were still living at the time of production, a great deal of space was dedicated to the education of the audience about the development of the Yellow Fever vaccine. The Playhouse even partnered with Carnegie Library to make materials regarding Major Walter Reed and his associates available to patrons. The play was a great success and set an attendance record for the new theatre. It was noted in the June 1936 issue of The Offstage Noise that at one sold-out performance, extra chairs were added to the 400-seat auditorium and the theatre was still left with standing room only.

The Nashville Community Playhouse’s workshop had met with great success in its initial production of three one-acts, despite its brief postponement. Demand was such that another presentation was scheduled for February 21, 1936. This time the Temple Youth under the direction of Miss Helen Roth would present The Twelve-Pound Look by Sir James M. Barrie, the Isaac Litton Dramatic Club under the direction of Miss Virginia King would present Who Gets the Car Tonight by Chris Sergel, and the Central High

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10 The Offstage Noise, October 1937.
11 Ibid. February 1936.
School Dramatic Club under the direction of Helen O’Callaghan would perform *White Phantom* by Wilbur Braun. John Boxley constructed a basic set for use by all three plays.

A few weeks later, the Workshop held its first business meeting. Among the presenters were Rufus Phillips and Charles S. Mitchell. Mitchell reinforced the importance of the Workshop and announced an upcoming tournament of one-acts. The tournament was scheduled for May 18-21, 1936. The winner would receive the H. B. Schermerhorn Memorial Cup, presented by the Stagecrafters. At the next tournament, the trophy was to be returned and passed on to the next winner. If a group won three successive tournaments, the cup would be theirs permanently. Individual actors also had a chance at making the All Star Cast, regardless of their group’s rating. Those groups entering had to do so on the proper form and with a registration fee of one dollar. A qualified entry could be a one-act or a scene from a longer play, so long as it did not exceed 35 minutes in length. Participants were judged on interpretation of the play, individual acting, ingenuity in staging, unity of production and general effectiveness. Only eight plays total were to be accepted and would be chosen based on their postage-stamped date and time. A maximum of four registered crewmembers was allowed.

Groups were given one hour of stage rehearsal May 11 and 12. Each group had fifteen minutes to set the stage and ten minutes to strike. The Playhouse provided some sets and properties, but ultimately each group was responsible for its own expenses.

In the February 1936 issue of *The Offstage Noise*, *Goodbye Again* by George Haight and Alan Scott is announced as the fourth performance of the season. Something changed, however, and *Her Master’s Voice* by Clare Kummer -- listed as being presented April 2, 3 and 6, 1936 -- went up instead. But it was not an easy road. The story was told
in very witty and entertaining style in the May edition of *The Offstage Noise* in an article titled “Now It Can Be Told.” The play’s seven characters had been a challenge to cast due to their specific types. The female lead was particularly daunting. The role was cast, however, and rehearsals began. Ten days into rehearsal “Aunt Min” caught the flu. The role was recast, only to have “Aunt Min II” leave for Florida. Finally, “Aunt Min III” was found. The Stage Manager was the next victim of the flu, leaving the crew without its leader to finish the sets. Production was postponed one week. Three days before performance, “Aunt Min III” was struck with the dreaded influenza virus. The play was postponed one more evening and the actress took the stage, still weak and gaunt, but convincing, nonetheless.

Other minor issues were a factor, as is the case with nearly any production. However, this production came very close to being canceled altogether. In the April 1936 issue of *The Offstage Noise*, the front page article mentions the effort put forth to produce the show: “Last Sunday, for the first time in Playhouse history, the theater looked like it housed a community enterprise… a lot of unsung heroes fell to and became paper hangers, painters, carpenters, drapers, interior decorators, et cetera, and completed the sets for ‘Her Master’s Voice’ in fine fashion.” It was a path no one would have chosen; yet, it resulted in a truly communal effort.

The workshop concluded its season with three more presentations by local Playhouse affiliates. The Stagecrafters presented *Fleurette Returns* written by their own Lillian Shearon. Madge West Joseph had appeared in a production of this play on February 28, 1933, at the Centennial Club Auditorium. The Altrusa Club presented that early production. A short write-up appeared in the *Banner* on February 26, 1933, listing
the other actors involved. Joseph was included in The Offstage Noise’s announcement of one-acts, but Isobel Goodloe was credited with that same role in the subsequent issue. Donelson High School, under the direction of Ellen Rion Caldwell, presented Gas, Air and Earl by Bertram Bloch. East Nashville High School, under the direction of Miss Julia Gibson, presented Thanks Awfully by Jean Lee Latham. It was the only play of the three to meet with some criticism from local reviewers. The editor of one paper felt the production would have been better if it had been half as long.

Two more productions remained in the first season of the Nashville Community Playhouse: Hotel Universe by Philip Barry, presented May 6-8, 1936; and Clear All Wires by Bella and Sam Spewack, presented June 3-5, 1936. Christine Sadler of the Nashville Banner admitted that although Clear All Wires was “not the best of the six plays given during the year…” it was “a tasty dessert for a ta[sty] dramatic season.”

William Rich Breyer, a playhouse member who had refrained from officially reviewing any of the Playhouse’s productions that season, gave an overview of the season calling Hotel Universe the best over-all production, Catharine Winnia as Victoria Van Bret in Double Door the outstanding female performance, Israel Kaufman as Private Busch in Yellow Jack and John Thompson as Tom Ames in Hotel Universe the outstanding male performances, and Hotel Universe the best set design.

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12 Sadler, Christine. “‘Clear All Wires’ Ends Successful Playhouse Season,” Nashville Banner, June 4, 1936.
13 Hargrove, on page 52 of her thesis credits this article as appearing in the June 7, 1937, issue of the Tennessean. Only the morning edition for this date was available and it did not contain the referenced article. A loose clipping of the article was found, by chance, in the bound collection of The Offstage Noise in the Special Collections of The Nashville Public Library. No date or source was indicated, though one accompanying article had a handwritten note indicating that it had been clipped from the Nashville Banner.
The *Offstage Noise* declared the first season a success. Financially, it was no triumph. With $2,200 in subscriptions and only $500 at the box office, the Playhouse turned a small profit of $6.95.\(^\text{14}\) But, the basic necessities were covered. The theatre had paid its bills, made modest improvements to the playhouse building and had reason to hope for increased subscriptions in the following season. In view of other theatre groups who had not been able to survive due to lack of funds and the state of the US economy in the late 1930s, the fact that the Playhouse was financially solvent at the close of its first season was a major accomplishment.

There was little time to celebrate, however. Lillian Armstrong records that after one season with the Nashville Community Playhouse, Phillips again left Nashville, this time to pursue the bright lights of Broadway. Indeed, he did find his way into at least two shows: *The Lady Has a Heart* in 1937 and *Ringside Seat* in 1938.\(^\text{15}\) With Phillips’ departure, the fledgling theatre was in desperate need of a talented and competent director who could help establish the theatre as a significant presence in the Nashville community.

**Director Fritz Kleibacker**

Phillips’s transfer to New York brought about an important transition in leadership for the Playhouse’s second season. Fritz (Fred) R. Kleibacker, Jr. took the helm as director in 1936. Kleibacker, like Phillips and Savich before him, was a graduate of the Yale School of Drama. After graduating from Bowdoin College in Maine, Kleibacker spent two years at Yale studying playwriting and directing “under Alec Dean, Oenslager, Bevan and McCandless… and dramatic criticism under John Mason Brown.

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\(^\text{14}\)McCleary and Glick. *Curtains Going Up*. 148-150.

He worked, of course, directly under Professor Baker, and wrote the last play that Baker produced before his retirement.\textsuperscript{16} That play, titled \textit{The King’s Coat}, was one of five to receive honorable mention from the Bureau of New Plays the following year.\textsuperscript{17}

Armstrong records Kleibacker as the “former director of Little Theatre productions at Pittsburgh, and at the Cedar Rapids (Iowa) Community Theatre, where he was working on a Rockefeller Fellowship in directing and playwriting.”\textsuperscript{18} Kleibacker came to the Playhouse with a clear vision of what community theatre should be:

Only by constant injection of new talent, he feels, can any theatrical organization live and grow, for it is from such organizations that the great names of the theatre of tomorrow will spring. He feels too, that an experimental workshop is an indispensable adjunct to maintaining the life of any community theatre organization, as it will serve as a training school in acting, playwriting, directing, and designing, and will serve as a source of supply for talent for the major productions of the season. And because a community theatre should be just what its name implies, it cannot maintain a high level of excellence in its productions, or even its very existence, unless it is actively supported by the community it represents. It should “belong” to no one group of people, and no group or individual should be entirely responsible for its courses of action; but every member who is interested in the work of the organization of the theatre should have a voice in its policies and a hand in its work.\textsuperscript{19}

Those members who survived the Nashville Little Theatre, no doubt, welcomed this viewpoint.

With the changing of directors came a change in the organizational structure of the Nashville Community Playhouse. In November, it was announced that the Board of Directors was to be replaced with a staff organization composed of various committee chairs. This change was made in an effort to streamline operations: “It was felt that the

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{The Offstage Noise}, November 1936.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. February 1937

\textsuperscript{18} Armstrong, Lillian. “The First Decade.” \textit{Nashville Community Playhouse 10\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary}, 2.

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{The Offstage Noise}, November 1936.
staff… could work more efficiently, [sic] with the director acting as co-ordinator [sic] of the various committees.”

The Playhouse committees included: House Committee, Design Committee, Lighting Committee, Costume Committee, Make-up Committee, Play Reading Committee, Publicity Committee, Program Committee, Workshop Committee, and Music Committee. All members were encouraged to serve on any committee whose work interested them.

This new structure must not have worked quite as well as they had hoped. In December, it was announced that a Board of Directors had been elected at the annual membership meeting. In the leadership listing for 1937-38 both the Board of Directors and Staff are listed.

The Annual elections were held at the membership meeting on November 24th, 1936. The results were printed in the December issue of The Offstage Noise with the note that “In the absence of a president, the meeting was conducted by the business manager, Reber Boult.” No record has been found regarding the fate of President E. B. Stahlman, Jr., though one can rule out death and promotion as either would have garnered some mention in the theater’s newsletter -- as with subsequent presidents. It is assumed that the lack of a president was not due to the natural termination of Stahlman’s one year term in office. If that were the case, his name would have most likely stayed in circulation on a committee or cast list.

Fifteen members were elected to the Board of Directors. After the general business meeting these fifteen board members elected the following officers: John Thompson – President; Mrs. B. Kirk Rankin – First Vice-President; Mrs. Louis Hibbetts

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20 Ibid.
– Second Vice-President; Reber Boul – Business Manager; Miss Catharine Winnia – Secretary; Miss Lillian Armstrong – Assistant Secretary; Wirt Armistead – Treasurer.

Thompson was a Nashville native who graduated from both Vanderbilt and Harvard. At the time of his election, he was on staff at the Tennessean where he penned the “Random Reader” literary column. Hargrove interviewed Thompson for her 1965 thesis and states that the election was a surprise to everyone, especially Thompson himself; he had not served on the Board previously.21 Sadly for the Playhouse, Thompson received a job offer from the Knoxville Journal and moved to that town after only two months in office. The Board of Directors elected Charles S. Mitchell as President in mid February 1937. Wirt Armistead also resigned as treasurer after a few months and was replaced by James Barbour.

The Workshop also saw a change in leadership for the 1936-37 season. Mrs. J. Frank Burns came to Nashville in 1936 from Columbus, Ohio, where she was active in the Players Club and the Columbus Opera Company. Along with a change in personnel came a change in organizational structure and location. For its second season, the Workshop obtained its own performance space in the balcony of the Playhouse. The group also received a more defined identity. “Our Workshop group will work together as a theatrical company,” states Burns in November 1936 issue of The Offstage Noise. Members -- which could include any Playhouse member, or could be secured by paying $1 for Workshop only membership -- would be cast based on their suitability to a role and would rotate as set crew. Burns sought to instill in each member a focus on the

21 Hargrove, 56.
dramatist’s text and cooperation in achieving -- as close as possible -- the author’s intention.\textsuperscript{22}

Two original one-act plays were scheduled to kick off the season for The Workshop Company: \textit{A Toast We Can Drink} by Stokes McCune of the Players Club of Columbus, Ohio, and \textit{Country Sunday} by Walter Spearman, professor of journalism at North Carolina. Spearman’s play had recently won a $100 prize from the Anti-Lynching Society.\textsuperscript{23} Renovations were taking place during this time for the Workshop rehearsal area. As a result, it appears that \textit{A Toast We Can Drink} was bumped back to the spring.

\textit{Country Sunday} was produced and received a special invitation from Jessie Daniel Ames, director of the Atlanta Association to bring the production to that group’s council meeting on January 11, 1937, all expenses paid. Elizabeth S. Topping penned an article in the February 1937 edition of \textit{The Offstage Noise}, which describes the adventure. The cast was delighted by the invitation and made the trip to Atlanta. A Negro group followed the performance of \textit{Country Sunday} with \textit{Lawd, Does Yo’ Undahstan?} written by Ann Seymour. Both plays were well received by all but one audience member:

\begin{quote}
...the audience was just rising to congratulate the players when the general harmonious effect was assaulted by an enemy of the association, a prominent Atlanta woman, who rose in her seat at the conclusion of the second performance and made an excited verbal attack against Mrs. Ames, the Anti-Lynching Association, and everyone connected with it...her challenge was ignored...and the audience silently stole away, leaving her to continue her harangue to empty seats and a deserted hall.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

The Nashville cast members reported that this was the woman’s first open attack on the Atlanta group, though the Association was well aware of her opposition. She was

\begin{footnotes}
\item[22] \textit{The Offstage Noise}, November 1936.
\item[23] Ibid.
\item[24] Ibid. February 1937.
\end{footnotes}
involved in a small racist group called the Southern Association for the Preservation of the White Race. Topping cites one plausible source for her hatred was the fact that her expensive property was slowly being surrounded by homes purchased by African-Americans. Although this incident did not result in any physical violence or further threats to the Nashville group, the decision of the Workshop Committee to produce the play and boldly align itself with an anti-lynching group in the Deep South in the 1930s, should nonetheless be seen as an act of courage.

A major contribution of the Nashville Community Playhouse and its leadership was that of developing new talent. Under Kleibacker’s directorship, several young artists cut their teeth and ultimately impacted the nation. Fred Coe spent two seasons with the Playhouse under Kleibacker’s direction before following in his footsteps and attending the Yale School of Drama. While Kleibacker was away for the summers of 1939 and 1940, he gave Fred Coe the opportunity to experiment with directing. In both productions, Coe cast a young and lanky Delbert Mann. Mann was only a few years younger than Coe. At the time, he was a political science major at Vanderbilt, but still dreamed of a career in theatre. Two of his major roles at the playhouse were in What Price Glory (’37) and Our Town (’40). Mann graduated from Vanderbilt in 1941. His plans for a career in theatre were put on hold as he served his country in World War II as an air corps pilot of a B-24. After the war, Mann would also go on to the Yale School of Drama.

In the meantime, Fred Coe became director of the Town Theater in Columbia, South Carolina, in 1940. In 1945, Coe left South Carolina to try his luck in New York. The Town Theatre was left in trusted hands. Del Mann had just completed his time at
Yale and was ready to take over after his friend. Coe did not meet with success right away in New York. He worked on two plays both of which failed. To make ends meet, he worked in a hat factory. His patience paid off, however. In 1946, Coe was in the right place at the right time and with the right training to get in on the newborn television industry. *The Nashville Tennessean Magazine* states that Coe “…was the sixth man that NBC hired to produce its first television shows.”

Coe worked his way up and became a respected television producer by the 1950s. He had never forgotten his Nashville connections. Dick Dudley played opposite Coe in the Playhouse production of *Boy Meets Girl* (’37). Later, Dudley did warm-up commercials on Coe’s award-winning *Mr. Peepers* program. Other Playhouse actors who went on to national careers included Hank Fort, Frank Sutton, Ruben Morse, and Dinah (Francis Rose) Shore.

Two years after succeeding Fred Coe, Delbert Mann left the Town Theatre. By 1949, Coe was a full-fledged producer at NBC and invited Mann up to New York to become an assistant director. The two formed one of the most prominent teams in the industry. Mann became the first to direct legendary film stars -- Grace Kelly, Lauren Bacall and Humphrey Bogart to name a few -- in their first television appearances. Mann’s film debut *Marty* was the first film made from a television script and won first place at the International Film Festival in Cannes, France in May 1955. Not surprisingly, Mann directed the film with two Playhouse alumni -- Frank Sutton and Ruben Morse -- in the cast.

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Delbert Mann remembered this period in Nashville as an exciting time. In his interview with Louise Davis of *The Nashville Tennessean Magazine* he recalls, “The whole atmosphere in Nashville was stimulating… It’s not surprising that many people have gone into the theatre from Nashville.”

In its second season, the Nashville Community Playhouse produced six plays starting with *Biography* by S. N. Behrman, presented November 18-20, 1936. The production set attendance records for the Playhouse, narrowly beating out the numbers for *Yellow Jack* the previous season. *The Offstage Noise* reported in its December 1936 edition that an estimated 1100 people attended *Biography* with a sold-out opening night and an extra 100 audience members on closing night.²⁶ Cast members of the Playhouse were no strangers to sacrifice and perseverance. One cast member in particular, Martha Brush, showed a tremendous amount of fortitude -- perhaps bordering on foolish -- by postponing her surgery for appendicitis until after the final show.

A few production photos taken by Dillard Jacobs were reprinted in the June 1937 edition of *The Offstage Noise*. The photographs show a painted set with a prominent staircase leading to a landing up-center stage. The furnishings and paintings on the walls suggest a stiff and upper-class setting, but cannot disguise a certain lack of quality in materials; there is no hiding that it is a painted set and not part of a real house.

The musical theme of the show was titled “The Charming Lady Waltz.” The piece was originally a lyric written by Joseph Elson as a portion of a symphonic drama titled *Let There Be John Michaeljohn* written by none other than Fritz Kleibacker. The original

²⁶ The Hillsboro Playhouse had a seating capacity of around 400, as has been noted previously.
drama was set to Berlioz’s *Symphonie Fantastique*. To the best of my knowledge, this piece was not recorded separately. It appears, however, that enough audience members inquired about the song that the December publication of *The Offstage Noise* made a point of researching its origins.

There was some confusion surrounding the performance dates of *Whistling in the Dark* -- written by Laurence Gross and Edward Childs Carpenter. The November issue of *The Offstage Noise* listed the play as being scheduled for December 9-11 in one article and December 11-13 in another. In actuality, neither was correct and the play was presented December 16-18, 1936. The play was another success with standing room only at the final performance. Each night the Workshop Committee hosted a reception. Members could come after the show, enjoy a cup of coffee, and see the improvements to the balcony and green room of the Playhouse. Laura Mai Burns was credited as heading up the effort to freshen the space, which was noted for its blue and white décor “with touches of red.”

The February edition of *The Offstage Noise* gives special praise to another brave cast member. Marjorie Kirby suffered a sprained wrist during the dress rehearsal and was ordered to wear a sling. The cast adapted and played off the sling as part of the character. They even kept the “rough stuff” that initially caused the sprain.

*Winterset*, by Maxwell Anderson, was the overwhelmingly popular audience choice for the third production of the season. Actors who were considering auditioning were cautioned not to approach the play lightly: “Director Kleibacker warns and gives

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27 *The Offstage Noise*, December 1936.
28 Ibid.
due notice to anybody interested in acting in Winterset [sic] that no lukewarm or light-minded would-be actors need attempt a role.” Kleibacker made it clear that the show was to be done “as nearly perfectly as possible” and allowed more than six weeks to prepare. Auditions were scheduled for December 20, 1936; performances were finally held on February 10-13, 1937. The performance was originally planned for the preceding week; however, a flood in Nashville forced the Playhouse to postpone the production. The scheduling of the performances ultimately proved very timely; the Alfred Santell film version of Winterset -- which starred Burgess Meredith and Margo -- was still playing in movie theaters. The Offstage Noise encouraged Playhouse audiences to view both versions and compare the “rose-tinted” film adaptation to the Playhouse’s faithful presentation. The production was a source of pride to the Playhouse; Winterset was a recently produced award-winning play, chosen by a theatre savvy audience. The Offstage Noise of February 1937 claims that this production of Winterset was only the second non-professional staging in the United States. The play proved extremely popular and prompted the Playhouse to extend the run from three nights to four.

Acting and staging were praised in the March issue of The Offstage Noise. Production photos show a glum exterior set with the edges of two imposing buildings of large squares of stone or cinderblock on either side of the stage. The building stage left angled in, contained an arched doorway, and had a small angled shed attached to its

29 Ibid.
31 Hargrove sites an article in the Tennessean as stating that the movie opened the same week as the Playhouse production. According to IMDB.com, the film opened in the USA on December 3, 1936.
32 The Offstage Noise, December 1937.
center stage wall, while the stage right building stood straight, contained a standard door and balcony, and appeared to disintegrate into the background. Between the two buildings a horizon was visible. It is unclear from the photograph whether the view is of trees, buildings or both. A tilting streetlamp and a low stone stairway leading off stage left completed the foreground.\textsuperscript{33}

Music was a major component of the atmosphere of Winterset. Betsy Lusk Dudley provided the offstage music that was supposedly being played by Garth during the scenes. The program was careful not to credit Dudley until the following production in order to maintain “a dramatic illusion.” A string ensemble provided music before and between acts on the first two nights of performance. For the final two performances, the group left after act one. A witty jab is made in The Offstage Noise that the group couldn’t stand the sight of Shadow, and takes their departure as a “backhanded compliment.”\textsuperscript{34}

Goodbye Again by Allan Scott and George Haight -- presented March 17-19, 1937 -- was originally considered for the premier season of the Playhouse in 1935. Its run was completed with little to no fanfare in The Offstage Noise; most of the newsletter’s space was dedicated to promoting the following production, The Pizen Song. Production photos were present in the end of the season collage by Dillard Jacobs. The photos reveal a large interior setting with prominent arch upstage left and bedroom furniture that appears miniscule on the wide stage.

The Pizen Song by Adelaide C. Rowell -- presented April 22-24, 1937 -- fulfilled the ambition of the Playhouse to produce more plays by and about Southerners. Rowell

\textsuperscript{33} Dillard Jacobs, “Scene But Not Heard,” The Offstage Noise, June 1937.
\textsuperscript{34} The Offstage Noise, March 1937.
was a native of Chattanooga, Tennessee, where the Chattanooga Little Theatre, among other amateur groups, had produced her play. The title itself harkens back to an English ballad still sung by mountaineers at the time of the Playhouse’s production. The play centers on the mysterious disappearance of a hypocritical evangelist and the young man accused of his murder. The painted setting represented a rustic cabin interior with a large stone fireplace stage right and sparse kitchen stage left.\(^{35}\) A special reception took place after the Saturday night performance in honor of Miss Rowell and other visitors from Chattanooga, including John C. Gilbreath, president of the Chattanooga Little Theatre.

The Nashville Community Playhouse continued to gain recognition in the surrounding area and was offered two opportunities to tour productions. The Players’ Guild of Bowling Green, Kentucky, invited the cast of *The Pizen Song* -- all expenses paid -- to perform there on May 3, 1937. The second invitation was from nearby Dickson, Tennessee. Two one-act plays, *Death of the Swan* by Walter Spearman -- author of *Country Sunday* -- and *Inca of Perusalem* by George Bernard Shaw, were scheduled to be presented May 9\(^{th}\) at 3 o’clock at the Playhouse for 25 cents admission.\(^{36}\)

It was around this time that the Nashville Community Playhouse caught the attention of *Stage* magazine. *The Offstage Noise* states that the April 1937 edition of the magazine contains an article written by Albert McCleery -- head of the “West of Broadway” department -- who outlines the life of community theatres throughout the depression and the government efforts to subsidize theatre. In the article, McCleery

\(^{35}\) Dillard Jacobs, “Scene But Not Heard,” *The Offstage Noise*, June 1937

\(^{36}\) *The Offstage Noise*, April 1937. The article does not specify if this is the Hillsboro Playhouse or a Playhouse in Dickson, Tennessee.
highlights the Nashville Community Playhouse as an example of the theatres that do not receive government funds. The Offstage Noise quotes McCleery:

Here is the center, the fountainhead, for all the dramatic and cultural activity in this Southern city. In the Community Playhouse Workshop is developed the new talent which is discovered in its public tryouts, and art and music and the ambition of local designers are furthered, the latter by holding competitions for scenic designers.37

McCleery continues by praising the Playhouse -- and subsequently its audiences -- for the method of play selection and the resulting season.

The Nashville Community Playhouse closed its second season with the rollicking Hollywood farce, Boy Meets Girl by Bella and Sam Spewak -- presented June 2-5, 1937. It was an exceptionally popular production that set box office records and prompted the Playhouse to extend the run from three nights to four.38 The play also set a record for the youngest member ever to be cast in a role; Lilian Lawson Taylor made her stage debut at the age of two months and three weeks in the role of “Happy.”39 After the final performance, the members of the Playhouse celebrated with a party that was recalled in the gossip column of The Offstage Noise the following autumn. Many of the references would only make sense to the original audience, however, one can discern that everyone was in high spirits and the season ended on a very high note. Even Kleibacker’s visiting mother and father seem to have enjoyed themselves.40

The season’s final issue of The Offstage Noise declared the 1936-37 season a success, citing five performances with standing room only, an increase in attendance of

37 The Offstage Noise, April 1937.
38 Ibid. December 1937.
40 Ibid. October 1937.
20-25%, and “a budget for next year already more than half balanced.” Subscriptions for this season increased to $2,600 and the box office brought in $927.

As the membership increased, it became clear that two types of members unofficially existed: members who worked on or acted in productions and those who attended productions. Prior to the close of the season, a campaign was initiated to re-subscribe current members and solicit new ones. In the March 1937 edition of *The Offstage Noise* the budget for the 1937-1938 season was announced as being fixed at $5000.00. The budget depended on subscriptions; without a certain amount they could not guarantee use of the Playhouse building, or the director’s and other staff members’ salaries. More than a few people had expressed their plans to forego full membership by assisting with one show so they could in turn attend it for free. *The Offstage Noise* emphasized that while the labor was greatly appreciated, without funding the Playhouse would cease to exist. The season ended optimistically with subscriptions up, Kleibacker secured as director, and an exciting line-up of plays slated for the fall.

The return of Kleibacker was a great relief to the members of the young theatre. By more than one account in *The Offstage Noise*, Kleibacker was noted for his brilliance and patience; qualities that seem to be in stark contrast to previous directors. This evenness of temper did not indicate that Kleibacker was lax in his leadership. An amusing and playful gossip column in the June 1937 issue of *The Offstage Noise* recalls an incident during the rehearsals for *Boy Meets Girl*. Apparently Kleibacker was a stickler for punctuality; cast members were to be on time for rehearsals! One day, however, the tables turned. “Herr Director himself was late and when he arrived about forty-five minutes after his own scheduled time [sic] he found his cast sitting in a circle
on a stage completely dark except for one lighted candle, holding a seance [sic] before a large placard reading ‘Kleibacker is unfair to undisreunorganized [sic] actors!’”

One exciting development announced for the final production of *Boy Meets Girl* and the following season was the opportunity to broadcast dress rehearsals and performances on the new radio station WSIX. The station director, S. A. (Steve) Cisler, was an ardent supporter of the Playhouse and shared its vision to be an integral part of the community. 41

New members were elected to the Board of Directors on May 10, 1937. With the growth in membership came a growth in board members; twenty were elected at this time. The new board elected the following officers on May 25, 1937: John Thompson - President; Miss Catharine Winnia - First Vice-President; Mrs. Louis Hibbits - Second Vice-President; Lilian Armstrong - Secretary; Noncie Reed - Assistant Secretary; and James Barbour - Treasurer. Reber Boult remained the business manager. At this time, the Board of Directors decided to create an Honorary Council “to be composed of several members of the Playhouse who are unable to take an active part in the work of organization and production, but whose advice and counsel is of help and value.” 42 Members of this council were to be announced later, however, I was unable to find any record of this council’s existence.

Over the summer, improvements were made to the Playhouse. Hargrove records that Thompson was instrumental in the extensive changes that involved moving the entrance from Hillsboro Road to Belcourt Avenue and moving the back wall in order to

41 Ibid. June 1937.
42 Ibid.
create the new lobby.\textsuperscript{43} The new layout was designed by member Ed Keeble to be a warmer, more welcoming place to gather before performances and between acts. Members of the Children’s Theatre made improvements backstage, and a permanent collection of properties and costumes was begun.\textsuperscript{44}

The Playhouse had presented a tentative schedule of recognizable plays for the 1937-38 season. However, many of the choices did not come to pass. Originally, \textit{Idiot’s Delight} was scheduled to open the season. The New York Theatre Guild had released the play for community groups that summer, but withdrew the rights in order to present the play themselves in the fall.

The Nashville Community Playhouse was more than ever determined to choose a work just as timely and meaningful. For that reason, \textit{What Price Glory} by Maxwell Anderson and Laurence Stallings was selected to open the Playhouse’s third season on October 27-30, 1937.\textsuperscript{45} It was a gutsy move in the conservative atmosphere of Nashville to present a play known for pushing the boundaries of acceptable language. The Playhouse members, however, felt it was a risk worth taking. The premiere issue of \textit{The Offstage Noise} justifies the choice by saying: “But ‘What Price Glory?’ was chosen not only for its intrinsic value as a play but also for its subject matter. The most casual glance at the headlines is warning enough that the war rumbles of the Far East and Europe are spreading ominously closer by the day. In such a situation it behooves us to pause and take a good long look.” The piece was to bring to civilians a taste of life in the trenches,

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{43} Hargrove, 58.
\textsuperscript{44} \textit{The Offstage Noise}, December 1937.
\textsuperscript{45} An increase in membership necessitated that the normal run for each show be extended to four nights -- Wednesday through Saturday -- per production beginning with the 1937-38 season.
\end{footnotes}
unpolished and without agenda. The editor’s final commentary is chilling in retrospect:

“And for the youth of today, those who are growing towards maturity in the post-war age, we offer a vision of what approaches – as a reminder that they are the cannon-fodder for the next conflict.”

An author’s note was reprinted in the program to caution the audience about the type of language they were to encounter. From its premiere in 1924, What Price Glory had faced mountains of criticism and censorship, though its language seems tame by today’s standards. The December 1937 issue of The Offstage Noise happily reported that almost no criticism or censure was given. In fact, What Price Glory set another new record in attendance; two of the four nights were left with standing room only. However, the production did not set a new box office record. Therein may lie the reason that the play was lacking in criticism. High attendance and low box-office receipts indicate that most of the audience was comprised of Playhouse members -- season ticket holders -- rather than the general public. Members of the Playhouse were much more likely to be familiar with the play and to have been personally invested in the production resulting in a much more sympathetic audience.

An additional note also explains the choice of costuming Marines in Army uniforms. The note states that at the time, Marines stationed in France were issued Army equipment when they were moved to the front. The Playhouse was acting on good authority. Mr. David Roskind, who had served with author Laurence Stallings in the Great War, assisted the Playhouse as military advisor. The Offstage Noise included a

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46 Ibid. October 1937.
47 Ibid.
brief history of the play’s origins and personal recollections from Roskind’s time in the Marines.\textsuperscript{48}

The Workshop continued its work with a production of \textit{Cavalcade} written by Noel Coward and directed by Fred Coe, on November 14, 1937.\textsuperscript{49} The setting was described in the December issue of \textit{The Offstage Noise} as being “semi-impressionistic.” The play was so well attended that it moved to the main auditorium where it played to a full house. Afterward, the Stagecrafters treated the cast and crew to tea. Plans were announced in December for the Workshop to present a program of three original one-acts, submitted by Playhouse members, in the coming year.

High priority was still given to this branch of the Playhouse. Head of the Workshop, Laura Mai Burns spent the summer of 1937 at the School of the Theatre of the Pasadena Community Playhouse where she took courses in “make-up, stage technique and directing, eurhythmics [sic] and laboratory theatre.”\textsuperscript{50} Burns would only have a few months to impart her knowledge before returning to Columbus, Ohio with her husband Frank.\textsuperscript{51} Upon Burns’s return to Nashville from California, Morrell Fisher -- who had played “Shadow” in \textit{Winterset} -- left for the winter term at Pasadena.\textsuperscript{52}

To close out 1937, the Playhouse presented \textit{There’s Always Juliet} by John Van Druten, from December 1-4, 1937. Nothing of significance was recorded for this

\textsuperscript{48} Roskind recalls a time, similar to an incident in the play, when the Germans dropped propaganda notes on US soldiers, urging them to plead with their superiors to stop fighting. Another incident of German note-dropping occurred as Roskind was escorting a Major. The note bid farewell to the second division and welcome to the incoming 26\textsuperscript{th}.

\textsuperscript{49} The performance of \textit{Cavalcade} was originally slated for November 7\textsuperscript{th}.

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{The Offstage Noise}, June 1937.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid. January 1938.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid. October 1937.
production, except for the mention of set decorations. The leading lady and her husband, Puryear and Marion Mims, provided paintings and sculptures for use on the set.

As Playhouse membership grew, a clearer divide began to grow between the few members who worked and acted in productions and the majority who participated on a more passive level. The time for clearer organization had come. On December 19, 1937, a committee met to draw up plans for a new branch of Playhouse government. On December 22, charter members and by-laws were approved for the Backstage Club: “The purpose of the Backstage Club is to further cultural interests, physical equipment and social activities of the membership of the Community Playhouse.” In order to qualify for membership in the club, a Playhouse member had to have been involved in either four backstage activities or five acting roles in major productions. Two Workshop productions could count as one major production. Once a member, each person was required to participate in a minimum of one show per season. The Club membership was capped at fifty. In addition to charter members, the group honored former director Rufus Phillips with honorary club membership and little Lillian (Happy) Taylor as club mascot. As its first activity, the Club held a dinner in the Greenroom on December 28th and made a rather spontaneous ad-libbed presentation of the spoof “What Price Juliet.” No doubt, it was an evening to remember.

The Nashville Community Playhouse continued its practice of allowing the audience to choose a portion of its season. High Tor by Maxwell Anderson was the audience’s number one choice and was presented January 26-29, 1938. The Offstage
Noise hailed it as “the crowning event in the history of the Playhouse to date.”\textsuperscript{53} The performance of January 28\textsuperscript{th} saw a standing room only crowd. The audience was so large, some people were turned away at the door and the curtain had to be held for thirty minutes to allow time for the extra people to settle in. After the final performance, the Backstage Club continued its merry-making by entertaining the cast and crew.

The Playhouse took a different approach in casting Juno and the Paycock by Sean O’Casey -- presented March 2-5, 1938. Traditionally, “try-outs” for the next performance had always taken place the week after the current show closed. By the time High Tor was staged, Juno and the Paycock had already been cast.\textsuperscript{54}

The production of When Ladies Meet by Rachel Crothers --- presented April 20-23, 1938 -- saw a return to the usual practice of auditioning after the close of the current show, though Spring Time for Henry by Benn W. Levy was originally advertised as the Playhouse’s fifth production.

Stage Door by Edna Ferber and George S. Kaufman -- presented May 25-28, 1938 -- was an answer to many a lady’s request for a play with more female roles. Local station WSIX was broadcasting live from the lobby on opening night in a Hollywood-style event. It does not appear that the play itself was broadcast as the program states that there would be a ten minute broadcast between scenes one and two of the third act and a second fifteen minute broadcast of interviews after the performance. Additional broadcasts took place on Friday night prior to the beginning of the play and on Saturday after closing when the entire cast was interviewed.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid. May 1938.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid. January 1938.
The Backstage Club announced the first annual award dinner for the Playhouse to be held the evening of May 24, 1938, in the main dining room of the Hermitage Hotel. As with many Playhouse events and productions, the award dinner had to be postponed until May 31\textsuperscript{st}. The event was open to all members as well as the general public for $1.25 a ticket. Based on the original advertisement, this price might have originally included dinner. However, the final announcement states that the dinner will be “Dutch treat.”\textsuperscript{55} Trophies were designed by the Playhouse’s own Thomas Puryear Mims and awarded to various categories of achievement. The entertainment included skits, spoofs of current plays, and dancing.

The season ended with a seventh production: \textit{Night of January 16\textsuperscript{th}} by Ayn Rand - presented in June 1938.\textsuperscript{56} Twelve audience members were chosen prior to the performance to serve as the jury. Each received complimentary tickets for the rest of the show’s run or the refund of their admission price as compensation for their “service.” The event was a cash play to raise money to improve the theatre’s lighting equipment. This upgrade was especially needed in light of the coming season; the Playhouse planned to produce the Orson Welles version of \textit{Julius Caesar}. This modernized rendition of Shakespeare’s classic required no scenery, but extensive lighting.\textsuperscript{57}

Financially, the Playhouse had a very successful third season. Subscriptions nearly doubled the first year’s number with $4,200. The box office also saw an increase over the previous year with an income of $1102.\textsuperscript{58} The Playhouse took an unusual step by

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid. May 1938.
\textsuperscript{56} Exact dates of performances are not listed on the play’s program.
\textsuperscript{57} \textit{The Offstage Noise}, May 1938.
\textsuperscript{58} McCleary and Glick, 150.
releasing its annual budget to the public. McCleary and Glick reproduced the budget as well as expenses for *High Tor* in their book *Curtains Going Up*. It reveals that the Playhouse budgeted for $531.16 for general overhead and $307.73 for production expenses bringing the estimated cost per production to $838.89.\(^\text{59}\)

The fourth season saw further expansion with the addition of a summer production. *Idiot’s Delight* by Robert E. Sherwood was presented October 26-29, 1938. The song titled “World of Tomorrow,” which was used in act II, was written by the Playhouse’s own Eleanor “Hank” Fort. Fort also choreographed the little number performed by the six chorus girls. *Room Service* by John Murray and Allen Boretz was presented December 7-10, 1938, followed by *Men in White* by Sidney Kingsley, presented February 8-11, 1939.

*Pride and Prejudice* by Helen Jerome -- presented March 20-25, 1939 -- saw the return of Nashville Little Theatre star Madge West Joseph in her Playhouse debut. Prior to that time she had occupied herself as head of the Nashville Children’s Theatre and Drama Director at WSM. Joseph would appear in several more productions in the coming years between her trips to New York and preserved quite a few newspaper clippings and programs in her scrapbooks. The reviews that Joseph kept for *Pride and Prejudice* were very positive. The one criticism of opening night, which echoes earlier performances of the Little Theatre, was that the curtain should rise promptly at the advertised time of 8:30pm. By all accounts, the performance ran smoothly. According to the “Here and Hear About” column by Belle Meade, however, the week leading up to performance was quite frantic. Beautiful costumes had arrived on Thursday for all but two of the principal

\(^\text{59}\) Ibid, 386.
characters: Mrs. Bennett, played by Madge West Joseph and Lady Catherine De Bourgh played by Catharine Winnia. Lady Catherine only required two costumes and was easily rectified. Madge Joseph, however, was sent scrambling to find five complete costume changes after the costumer sent several costumes ranging in sizes from “sixteen to fifty-two.” By Friday Joseph had been to every friend and neighbor trying to find something appropriate. Finally, she was referred the costumer of dance instructors and Playhouse members Sarah Jeter and Louise Smith. The seamstress worked tirelessly over the weekend in order to have the costumes finished in time.

*Night Must Fall* by Emlyn Williams followed *Pride and Prejudice* and was presented April 19-22, 1939. *By Request – 1939* by Jeter and Smith -- presented April 25-28, 1939 -- was a musical revue with original songs and skits written by Playhouse members and featured Horace Holley and his Orchestra. Many of the numbers appear to have been spoofs of the season’s productions. One such example is the musical number “Pride and Prejudice” with words by Sarah Jeter and “With apologies to Jane Austen and Gilbert and Sullivan.” The performance must have been a success as it spawned subsequent spoofing revue productions in the following years. *You Can’t Take It With You* by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart concluded the regular season of the Playhouse in June 1939. *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare, was presented as a summer workshop August 15 and 16, 1939. Fred Coe directed and Delbert Mann assisted.

The Backstage Club remained active that season and wrapped up the year with its second annual Awards Banquet held at the Hermitage Hotel on June 13, 1939. *Men in

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60 *By Request.* Program, April 1939.
*White* and *Pride and Prejudice* were voted the two best productions of the season. *Men in White* also won for best stage setting along with *You Can’t Take It With You*.

Unfortunately, the publication of *The Offstage Noise* did not reflect the artistic growth of the Playhouse. The publication was greatly reduced during this season. The first issue of the season states that costs were underwritten by advertising and only two pages could be afforded. Nevertheless, the editor was optimistic that the publication would return and even be expanded to sixteen pages. Such enthusiasm did not yield the desired results; not only did the publication see few pages, but by March of 1940, the size of the page had been reduced by half. The reason for such a reduction in the publication was a sharp drop in subscriptions. The December publication of *The Offstage Noise* contains a plea from Playhouse president Edwin A. Keeble for audience members to enroll and members who had not yet picked up their tickets to consider doing so for an adjusted rate. The February 1939 issue of *The Offstage Noise* continued this theme stating: “The failure of 150 persons to recognize season ticket orders as obligations to the extent of about $1,000 makes our very existence a play-to-play proposition.” The old mentality of volunteering in order to attend for free or paying per show was threatening the livelihood of the Playhouse. The Playhouse was forced to reconsider its season ticket policy and announced that the next season’s membership ticket would allow for a specific number of admissions to be used throughout the season, rather than once per production. During two productions, drawings for a free season ticket were also held in an effort to generate interest.

In March 1939, the Playhouse began to evaluate its financial situation for the next season. Membership for the 1939-1940 season was announced at $7.50 for two
admissions to all 7 plays and $4.00 for one admission to all plays and $2.50 for students. Box office tickets were to be .75 per ticket. An estimated 1600 members or approximately $6,000 was necessary for the Playhouse to meet its financial obligations for the 1939-1940 season. As of April 1939, only 771 had subscribed, yielding a projected income of $2,795. The budget for operating expenses was set at $2,510 and production expenses at $2,260, not including the director’s salary or money to repair the building. At the conclusion of the regular season subscription numbers were still described as “disappointing” with only 1,100 members. Potential assets were a mere $4,125, an improvement since April, but still far short of the $6,000 goal.

It appears that the Playhouse’s Workshop was also reduced during this season. Throughout the programs, no indication is given that performances were held on the balcony. In fact, in the following season, it is mentioned that a possible area of improvement would be to convert the Green Room on the Balcony -- previously the Workshop’s performance space -- as a lounge for patrons between acts. Of course, it is possible that this may have been only a temporary change and performances could still be held there. However, there is no mention of the Workshop until the production of Julius Caesar in August 1939 where it is called “The Summer Workshop.”

The limiting of the Workshop might not have been due entirely to finances, however. Fred Coe, who had been an integral part of the Workshop, had begun his studies at the Yale School of Drama and was consequently away for much of the regular season. With his return to his hometown of Nashville in the summer, and Kleibacker’s

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61 *The Offstage Noise.* March 1939.
62 Ibid. April 1939.
annual departure for New York, the summer months provided an excellent time to allow
the budding director to spread his wings. The program for Julius Caesar gives a slightly
different explanation for the Workshop’s existence than had been given previously.
While the Workshop remained a place for experimentation in technique, it also became a
place of audience experimentation; specifically to see how Nashville audiences would
react to things that had been tried elsewhere in the country. With Julius Caesar, the
Workshop members wanted to see how the Nashville audience would respond to
Shakespeare performed in modern dress and the new techniques in stage lighting. No
doubt the experience was valuable to those involved. Sadly, no record of the audience’s
response has been found.

In spite of the financial challenges of the fourth season, the Nashville Community
Playhouse landed on its feet and started strong for its fifth season. Kleibacker returned for
his fourth year, regardless of the uncertainty about the Playhouse’s ability to pay and
offers from several other theatres. According to the inaugural issue of the freshly restored
-- though still truncated -- Offstage Noise, October 1939, Kleibacker returned to a theatre
in improved condition: “Marvelous new entrance doors that actually opened and shut
without the aid of a brawny shoulder or impatient boot, that actually locked-in our rapidly
growing collections of properties and costumes.” Other improvements that were made to
the theatre included new paint on the front wall of the building, fresh paint in the interior,
new lighting as well as “a new stoker, a new floor cloth for the stage, new beam spots, a
completely re-planned basement that includes property and costume rooms and a drafting
room for design and publicity…” Most renovations were attributed to new staff member
Arnold Bentein.
Such improvements were made possible by an increased membership of 1,667 at the time of *The Offstage Noise*’s publication in October 1939. This allowed the budget to be set for $7,500. *The Offstage Noise* states that “More than half the subscriptions were practically without solicitation. Almost all were without persuasion.” It is an interesting claim considering the constant pleas printed in the previous season, as well as the allusions to pre-curtain calls for membership. One can’t help but wonder what more “persuasion” and “solicitation” would have entailed. Nevertheless, the Playhouse survived to perform another year. In January 1940, the Playhouse announced a new plan for memberships to be continuous; memberships would renew automatically every year. This plan, if put into action would save the Playhouse about $400 in mailings and telephone calls to re-subscribe current members.

The governing bodies also saw an adjustment in structure. The trained staff was now included in the Board of Directors which in turn was “in charge of all productions, instead of a few haphazard devotees who were too, too thrilled to be doing anything in the Theatre.”

*The Offstage Noise* attempted to fill a void with its next publication in December 1939. *Stage* magazine had ended its run leaving much of the region with little access to Broadway news. In truth, *The Offstage Noise* author admitted that he or she could not attend every performance on Broadway, but the staff was dedicated to perusing the New York Times for reviews and keeping the Nashville crowd abreast of any developments. It was a good idea, but ultimately was not realized in every issue.

The Workshop also saw revitalization in the fifth season. Under the direction of Margaret Hall, the Workshop organized classes in “speech and diction, eurhythmics [sic],
make-up and costuming…“ Unfortunately, director Hall – who also directed the Children’s Theatre during her time in Nashville -- and her husband moved to Milwaukee in early January 1940. Hall had left the workshop well organized and staffed, however, and plans remained in full swing for regular classes. Albertine presented her dancers in “Ballet Intime” on May 11 as a Workshop presentation. Later that month, Sarah Jeter and Louise Smith -- directors of By Request and heads of the Dance Center -- presented a dance recital at the Grand Lodge Auditorium. In the summer, the Workshop production of Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night again saw Fred Coe at the helm. This year, the play was treated as “the broadest kind of farce” according to the program. The program also states that the Workshop keeps records of all its productions for future research and pages of the production book and art layouts would be on display in the lobby. It is unfortunate that these renderings and records seem to have been lost with the passing of years; I found no record of them in my research.

The 1939-1940 season included the following productions: Ah, Wilderness! by Eugene O’Neill, presented October 24-29, 1939; The Petrified Forest by Robert E. Sherwood, presented December 5-9, 1939; What a Life by Clifford Goldsmith, presented January 23-27, 1940; Our Town by Thornton Wilder, presented March 4-9, 1940; Berkeley Square by John L. Balderston, presented April 3-9, 1940; By Request – 1940 by Jeter and Smith, presented in April 24-27, 1940; First Lady by George S. Kaufman and Katharine Dayton, presented May 28-June 1, 1940; and Twelfth Night by William Shakespeare as a summer workshop August 14 and 15, 1940. Seven productions for the

63 Ibid. March 1940.
64 Hargrove cites the Playhouse ledger in claiming Our Town to be the “outstanding success” of the season with 2,963 attending.
1939-1940 season was an ambitious undertaking. The result was a lack of rehearsal time, particularly for Berkeley Square. Hargrove records this as Kleibacker’s biggest mistake in his time at the Playhouse and quotes an article from the Tennessean on April 4, 1940, which states that the “opening performance gave a hint that no play should go on with only two and one-half weeks of rehearsing even with Director Kleibacker in charge.”65

Throughout its history, the Playhouse had hosted events and exhibits featuring local artists. For the final party of the 1939-1940 season, a “Beaux Arts Ball” was held on June 1st from 10pm to 2am. Attendees were to wear costumes inspired by modern art. The winning man would receive a sculpture of himself by Puryear Mims and the winning woman would receive a portrait of herself in oils by Frank Ryan.66

At the close of the regular season, the Playhouse was again faced with a shortage of membership. With 2,000 members needed to balance the budget for the coming season, only 800 had signed. However, enough funding was assured for the Playhouse to secure Fritz Kleibacker as director for another season.

A few programs and reviews have been recovered for the sixth season. According to later Playhouse publications, this season began with Margin for Error by Clare Boothe, presented in October 1940, followed by Morning’s at Seven by Paul Osborne, presented in November 1940. Outward Bound by Sutton Vane, was presented in January 1941 in celebration of the Stagecrafters’ thirty-fifth anniversary. The cover was drawn by the late Dr. H. B. Schermerhorn and members of the original Little Theatre production

65 Hargrove, 70.
66 The Offstage Noise, May-June 1940.
were invited to participate, though only Sam Tarpley accepted. This play as well as *Pursuit of Happiness* by Lawrence and Armina Langner, presented February 11-14, 1941, included Madge West Joseph as a cast member and are subsequently noted in her scrapbook with newspaper articles. John Tower of the *Banner* gave a glowing review of the performance of this play on February 12, 1941, praising Kleibacker’s direction and the actors’ performances.

Next in the season came *Sailors of Toulon* an adaptation of Friedrich Wolf’s *The Sailors of Cattaro* by the Playhouse’s own Fritz Kleibacker. Wolf’s original drama takes place in Austria after the first World War. Kleibacker reset the story in “present day” France to give the story an updated and possibly prophetic feel. The thirty-member, all male play was presented in April 1941.

*H.M.S. Pinafore* by Gilbert and Sullivan also showed in April with *The Male Animal* by James Thurber and Elliott Nugent, concluding the season in June. No mention of Workshop performances or summer production for 1941 has been located. Fred Coe by this time was working in South Carolina where he would remain until his move to New York in 1945. In his absence it seems no other Playhouse or Workshop member was either willing or able to take over the summer workshop for several years.

In 1941 the Nashville Community Playhouse continued with another season of seven plays: *Twentieth Century* by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, presented in October 1941; *Ladies in Retirement* by Edward Percy and Reginald Denham, presented

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67 Hargrove, 64.
68 Hargrove states that Thompson assisted in this adaptation.
69 *Offstage Noise*, February 1941. (Beginning with the 1940-1941 season, “The” was dropped from the publication’s name.)
in November 1941; *The Women* by Clare Boothe, presented in January 1942; *The Gondoliers* by Gilbert and Sullivan, presented March 2-7, 1942; *Mr. and Mrs. North* by Owen Davis, presented in April 1942; *Petticoat Fever* by Mark Reed, presented May 19-23, 1942; and *The Man Who Came to Dinner* by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, presented in June 1942.

With the beginning of American involvement in World War II, the Playhouse members faced a decision. Within the program for *Petticoat Fever*, a plea is issued under the title, “‘Blackout or Bright Lights’ or: The Playhouse Faces a Crisis.” The nation was at war and all were called upon to do their part. For theatre artists, this posed a serious question. Was it more helpful to suspend the theatre and focus on more practical contributions? Or did theatre -- and the arts in general -- aid in the war effort by rallying the people and raising morale? Letters were sent to several prominent citizens asking their input about whether the Playhouse should continue during the War. After much consultation, it was decided that the Playhouse should “carry on” if the theatre received the needed funding from membership. The program note makes the claim that the director cannot be engaged without sufficient funds. This plea, though no doubt a relevant point, became mute in the following months. Rehearsals had begun for the first production of the eighth season, *The Eve of St. Mark*, when Kleibacker left to serve in the Army. Jonathan Curvin took over the production. For the following two seasons, no permanent director was hired by the Playhouse, and a host of guest directors filled the gap. Most were local instructors and Playhouse members such as Curvin, who headed the Speech and Drama Department at Vanderbilt University; Charles McGlon of Peabody

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*The Women* set the attendance record for the next several years with 3032 attending.
College; Inez Bassett Alder, director of dramatics at West End High School and East High School; Catharine Winnia, charter member of the Stagecrafters, director of the Speech Department at Ward-Belmont School, and a speech instructor at Watkins Institute; and former director of the Louisville Little Theatre and then current Playhouse President W. G. McComas.\textsuperscript{71} Hargrove reveals in a footnote that she had heard from one source that honorariums were taken up for some of the guest directors. From her records and interviews, it seems that each director volunteered his or her services in order to keep the Playhouse going and usually refused any honorarium that was offered.\textsuperscript{72} During this season it was announced that the Playhouse would show its support for the war effort by offering one performance night free to service men and special prices for military personnel for all other performances.\textsuperscript{73}

For the 1942-1943 season, six plays were produced: \textit{The Eve of St. Mark} by Maxwell Anderson, presented in November 1942; \textit{George and Margaret} by Gerald Savory, presented in December 1942; \textit{Tweedles} by Booth Tarkington, presented in February 1943; \textit{Papa Is All} by Patterson Greene, presented in March 1943; \textit{Suspect} by Edward Percy and Reginald Denham, presented in April 1943; and \textit{Forward March} by personnel from the Nashville Army Air Center, presented in May 1943. In spite of the incentives to servicemen and the appeal to national moral, attendance dropped. As a

\textsuperscript{71} Armstrong, Lilian. “The First Decade.” \textit{Nashville Community Playhouse 10th Anniversary}, 1945. (Armstrong includes Fred Coe in the list of guest directors who filled in Kleibacker’s absence. However, the two Shakespeare productions that he directed took place in the two summers prior to Kleibacker’s departure: 1940 and 1941.)
\textsuperscript{72} Hargrove, 73.
result, most productions were reduced to four night runs. However, *Forward March* was the one exception and ran for six nights with 2125 attending.\(^74\)

The season of 1943-1944 began with *Claudia* by Rose Franken, presented October 26-30, 1943. By this time, *The Offstage Noise* had ceased its run as the Nashville Community Playhouse’s newsletter and the Playhouse began using a more traditional program. In the program for *Claudia* is a complete listing of committees and sustaining members. Although the smaller programs contain less information about the inner workings of the Playhouse, there are still some important facts that can be gleaned. During the 1943-1944 season, all productions were to have a one-night performance at the Nashville Army Air Center. The Playhouse continued to show its support of the war effort by offering special memberships to servicemen. These memberships were purchased by firms or individuals and distributed at “various lounges.”

As the season continued, attendance picked up enough to warrant five showings per production.\(^75\) The following productions for the ninth season were led by a variety of guest directors: *The Little Foxes* by Lillian Hellman, presented in December 1943; *Spring Again* by Isabel Leighton and Bertram Bloch, directed by Catharine Winnia, presented February 8-12, 1944; *Letters to Lucerne* by Fritz Rotter and Allen Vincent, directed by Jonathan Curvin, presented March 7-11, 1944; and *The Philadelphia Story* by Philip Barry, directed by W. G. McComas, presented April 11-15, 1944. The final production of the season was *Buddies* by George V. Hobart, presented May 16-20, 1944. The play was

\(^74\) Hargrove, 72.
\(^75\) Ibid. Cites the Playhouse ledger as stating average attendance at 1500 per play.
produced by Smyrna Army Air Field Dramatic Club and directed by Major Walter C. Stroud.

**Director Raymond Johnson**

The tenth season of the Nashville Community Playhouse saw the end of reliance on guest directors and the establishment of Raymond Johnson as Playhouse director. It was the perfect time to celebrate an entire decade of the theatre. The War years had been difficult for the Playhouse, just as they had been for the entire country. Casting was at times an issue because of the lack of manpower. Rationing and gasoline shortages made it challenging to collect the necessary props and supplies. Yet the Playhouse persevered and survived. With the tenth season new leadership brought renewed vision for the Playhouse.

Raymond Johnson was a native of Nashville. His father, Raymond Johnson, Sr. had performed under the direction of Playhouse and Little Theatre veterans before moving to Georgia. His son, hereafter referred to as Johnson, first learned theatre from Mrs. Inez Bassett Adler at Hume-Fogg before continuing his training in London at the Old Vic. Afterward he spent over a decade in New York and with touring companies before the War deposited him back in Nashville. The addition of Johnson to the Playhouse seemed to be a match made in heaven. Those who admired Johnson were enthusiastic in their praise. Hargrove herself describes him as having a “genius for theatre that is only found in a very few people. When he assumed the directorship of the Playhouse, he brought with him that certain magic that should, ideally, be theatre.”

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76 Ibid. 74.
The governance of the Playhouse saw several changes at this time. In 1944 it became increasingly clear that the simplified membership where all season ticket holders are considered members, was no longer viable. Some “members” were heavily involved in the work of productions while other “members” attended the shows. The new structure did little to change the nature of the Playhouse. Instead, it clarified the already existing community by dividing the membership into three parts. The Sustaining Membership had no limit to the number of members and provided the financial backbone of the Playhouse. These memberships were considered continuous until the individual requested cancellation. A double membership -- two tickets per performance -- cost $9.00, a single membership -- one ticket per performance -- cost $4.80. The Artist Membership was made up of 100 select members who took greater responsibility in the functions of the Playhouse. From this body nine people were chosen to serve on the Board of Directors and other leadership positions. Cost was per individual at $4.80. Student Memberships were annual memberships and open to any registered student of Nashville area high schools and universities for $3.00.77

The Playhouse continued its policy of relying on memberships, rather than box office sales for its primary financial support. An explanation of the financial structure was given in the Playhouse’s commemorative booklet. In planning for the coming season, it was estimated that the Playhouse would sell 175 single memberships, 275 double memberships, 75 Artist Memberships and 375 Student Memberships for a total

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77 All prices include tax.
membership of 1000. These numbers were largely based upon the preceding year. Totaled, the Playhouse expected at least $4,000 in ensured income with supplemental income from the box office and leasing of the theatre to The Nashville Children’s Theatre allowing a total projected income of $6,600. On average, each play cost $358 to produce. Salaries for the director and janitor were set at $2,212 combined. Building operations cost around $2,000, which included the mortgage on the building, revealing that the Playhouse had succeeded in purchasing the Hillsboro Playhouse. In 1945 there were still sixteen years to go before the theatre was theirs, free and clear. As always, the goal was for continued growth and the Playhouse expressed the desire for 1,200 sustaining members in the following season. The Playhouse did better than expected and grossed $8,402 for the season.

For its tenth season, the Nashville Community Playhouse presented *Gold in the Hills* by J. Frank Davis in September for an open house. The official season began with *Arsenic and Old Lace* by Joseph Kesselring, presented in October 1944. *50 Wimpole Street* by Marjorie Carleton, presented in November 1944, again showed the Playhouse’s support for the war effort. Opening night was “admittance by war bond only” and was described by the *Tennessean* as being “packed-to-the-last-seat” with the audience paying an astounding $21,750 in war bonds to see the play. The New Year began with *My Sister Eileen* by Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov, presented January 16-20, 1945, followed by *The Old Ladies* by Rodney Ackland, presented February 20-24, 1945; *The

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78 The Playhouse booklet records that 444 Student Memberships were sold in the 1943-1944 season.
79 *Victoria Regina.* Program, May 1951.
80 Hargrove, 74.
Skin of Our Teeth by Thornton Wilder, presented April 17-21, 1945; and Private Lives by Noel Coward, presented May 22-26, 1945.

No comprehensive listing of plays has been located after 1945. A few programs exist in the special collections at the Nashville Public Library and Vanderbilt University Library. Since The Offstage Noise ceased publication in 1942, the programs fluctuated between a bare-bones approach and a more artistic playbill style with articles about the latest books and music. Occasionally, a little tidbit of historical information about the Playhouse is found in the surviving programs.

To begin its second decade, the Playhouse presented Dinner at Eight by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber, October 8-13, 1945. The close relationship with The Nashville Children’s Theatre continued and the Playhouse thanks the theatre for supplying decorations and furnishings for the production. December 10-15, the Playhouse’s sixty-seventh production, Uncle Harry by Thomas Job, took the stage. In this program it is noted that Sustaining Membership now exceeded 1200, which made many improvements possible, such as the purchase of a marquee for the front entrance. Four more productions were scheduled. William Saroyan’s The Time of Your Life was presented in early February 1946. The program for this play announced that Kiss and Tell by F. Hugh Herbert would follow in March.

The Playhouse’s production of Shakespeare’s Hamlet in April 1946 was a landmark event for two reasons. First it reunited Johnson with Wyman Kane, an acquaintance from his days at the Old Vic in London. Kane found himself stationed near Nashville after the War. He received his discharge just in time to join the production and
receive rave reviews as the Danish prince.\textsuperscript{81} Kane would later be hired as the Playhouse’s Technical Director.

The second important event connected with \textit{Hamlet} involved a very special guest. Raymond Johnson’s biography boasts that he had spent 64 weeks in the same company with Helen Hayes in \textit{Victoria Regina}.\textsuperscript{82} The two maintained their acquaintance. In fact, a note in the program for the previous season’s production of \textit{The Skin of Our Teeth} states that the hat worn by Mrs. Antrobus in the second act was worn by Helen Hayes in the Theatre Guild’s production of \textit{Twelfth Night}. When it became apparent that the Playhouse could not afford a new curtain for \textit{Hamlet}, Johnson wrote to Hayes and asked her to attend a performance. Hayes accepted, the curtain was ordered, and a gala event opened the production with tickets selling for $3.60. The opening night crowd of 475 paid the cost of the new curtain. The show proved to be so popular that the run was extended to twelve performances with 4543 attending and receipts of $3,888.38.\textsuperscript{83} Hargrove recounts Helen Hayes’ reaction to the production in a quote from the \textit{Tennessean} on April 25, 1946: “Tonight’s performance has been one of the most memorable of my experience and I want to congratulate Nashville on having such brilliant theater.”\textsuperscript{84} The cast autographed a program and dedicated the show to Hayes’s honor.\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{81} Hargrove, 76-77.
\textsuperscript{82} Johnson states in the Director’s Note for \textit{Victoria Regina} that he performed with Miss Hayes for 76 weeks.
\textsuperscript{83} Playhouse Ledger as cited by Hargrove, on page 76.
\textsuperscript{84} Hargrove, 77-78.
\textsuperscript{85} Charles S. Mitchell Collection, Vanderbilt University Special Collections, Nashville.
The season concluded with Noel Coward’s *Blithe Spirit*, which ran from May 27 to June 1, 1946. Financially the season ended very well with an income of $14,503. As attendance continued to rise, runs were extended and seats were added to the auditorium for the next season. Other additions included a new proscenium curtain, a new false proscenium, rearranged dressing rooms, and a “vastly improved lighting system.”

The 1946-1947 began with an open house held on Sunday, September 22, 1946. According to the brochure for the event, the first performance of the season was to be *Angel Street* by Patrick Hamilton and was set to run October 2-9. Hargrove cites the program in her statement that the Bowling Green Players Guild had invited the Playhouse to bring the production to Kentucky in an effort to restart that theatre. She also states that at this time that Wyman Kane was hired as technical director of the Playhouse.

The November production was “an evening of drama and music by Noel Coward” titled *Tonight at 8:30*. This collection of one-act plays provided theatres the opportunity to pick and choose what segments they wanted to perform. The Playhouse production presented two evenings of different material, giving the audience a chance to see two different shows on successive night. *Rain* by John Colton and Clemence Randolph filled the January 15-22, 1947, slot and garnered a crowd of 4505 in spite of the torrential rain. *Junior Miss* by Jerome Chodorov and Joseph Fields followed in February, with Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* from April 16-23. Hargrove makes an interesting observation and states that in Johnson’s director’s note, he reveals that he shared his

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86 *Victoria Regina*. Program, May 1951.
87 Hargrove, 78.
88 *Angel Street*. Program, October 1946.
89 Hargrove, 78-79.
90 Ibid. 80.
concept of setting the play in Restoration England with Laurence Olivier -- another old friend from his days at the Old Vic. John Thompson told Hargrove in his interview with her that the next year, the Old Vic presented a production of Taming of the Shrew with the same concept. Carmen Matthews was invited by Johnson to take the lead in the Playhouse production. Apparently she won over the cast and crew by helping backstage and with costumes, all without pay.  

Reunion in Vienna by Robert E. Sherwood was originally slated to close the season in June 1947. However, a program for Maxwell Anderson’s Joan of Lorraine reveals that this play, not Sherwood’s, was given and closed the season with its run from May 28-June 4, 1947.  

Attendance had steadily climbed in the last two years. The season ticket policy was again revisited. In the Program for Joan of Lorraine, it was announced that Sustaining Members could obtain their tickets one week before the general public. Hargrove cites the program for Junior Miss and President Witworth Stokes’ note explaining the new seating policy. The Playhouse had added seating and extended runs, but still found it necessary to change its rules on reserved seating: “He pointed out that the seats were to be reserved on an equal basis, that is, it was to be a first-come-first-served matter.”  

Finances for this season were reprinted in the program for The Tempest in the next season. Here it is explained in detail the expenses and salaries paid out for the 1946-1947 season.

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91 Ibid. 82.
92 It is very possible that Reunion in Vienna played earlier in the season. Most listings were from the Open House brochure, which was printed in September 1946.
93 Hargrove, 80.
season. The six plays presented cost the playhouse $5,521 combined. The Playhouse was also able to make improvements to the theatre, including a new front curtain, new seating, redecoration of the lobby, new stage equipment, new dressing rooms in the basement, a new stoker, and a new roof over the loft for $6,193. Total expenses for the year were $19,197, which exactly matched receipts plus the balance from the previous season.

During the summer months, the Playhouse revived the practice of presenting theatre “classics.” From July 9-16, 1947, Nashville audiences were treated to Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*. A second summer production was planned and announced as most likely Maxwell Anderson’s *Elizabeth the Queen*. Unfortunately, no other programs from the summer of 1947 have been located. These productions do not appear to have been in the same vein as previous “Summer Workshop” productions. The early Workshop plays had been for the purpose of training new artists and were often headed by a local director while the Playhouse director left town. In this new incarnation, Raymond Johnson directed these plays in addition to the regular season.

The Playhouse presented *Swan Song* by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur from October 29 through November 5, 1947. *The Tempest* was presented in cooperation with The Nashville Children’s Theatre December 10-20, 1947. The cover of the program is a whimsical photograph of two young “Nymphs” tormenting a small ship that appears to be tossing in a sea of flowing fabric. A few hints are given about Johnson’s interpretation of the play. Ariel was to be played in a fashion similar to Puck of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, rather than the popular interpretation of Ariel as a ballerina. A Narrator was used, played by Madge West Joseph. According to a newspaper article preserved in her
scrapbook, she was to deliver the prologue only. Johnson also made the decision to cut the first scene of the play and cites in his Production Note that this scene may not have been included in the original production since the shipwreck is described in detail elsewhere. Aside from this, there seems to have been few changes and adaptations to the script. No surviving photographs have been located.

The New Year began with Tennessee Williams’s *The Glass Menagerie*, presented January 28-February 4, 1948. Following that was *Cradle Snatchers* by Russell G. Medcraft and Norma Mitchell, presented March 10-17. With ten performances, Hargrove counts the production as one of the top two of the season. The top production honors went to the fifth production of the season: Sophocles’ *King Oedipus*, translated by W. B. Yeats, with *The Warrior’s Husband* by Julian Thompson. The choice and concept of the production were highly influenced by the successful version of *Medea* on Broadway starring Judith Anderson. Johnson praises this production in his Director’s Note and while he insists that the Playhouse version of *Oedipus* is not trying to copy, it certainly inspired their approach. One such influence was to personalize the chorus and make it part of the action rather than simply a mass commentator, a feature hinted at in the original text, according to Johnson. In the Playhouse production, the chorus was to be represented as “the plague-stricken children of Thebes.” Johnson chose not to set the play in its original time period, but in “that terrible and romantic past from which the fifth century poets usually drew their material.” His desire was to capture the barbarism and cruelty of the age. The only instruments used were the harp and drums. To dispel the

94 Ibid. 87.
95 No production dates are listed in the program.
“gloom” of *Oedipus*, and to keep in the spirit of classical drama, the Playhouse presented the lighter comedic *The Warrior’s Husband* as an afterpiece.

The Playhouse closed its season with the musical *Of Thee I Sing* with music by George Gershwin, lyrics by Ira Gershwin and book by George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind, presented June 3-12, 1948. That play held the attendance record for the Playhouse with 5419 attending. The Playhouse again saw a new high in total income with $23,330. The sum was enough to prompt the theatre to expand its facilities; a contract was taken out for $6,100.97

Elections had been held for the two summer productions. The program for *Of Thee I Sing* announced the winners as *Charley’s Aunt* and *Camille*. *Charley’s Aunt* by Brandon Thomas was presented July 19-24, 1948, with direction from Raymond Johnson and special summer guest Cherry Hardy. Perhaps it was the presence of Hardy that caused *Camille* to be bumped from the summer line up. The second production of the summer season was *The Shanghai Gesture* by John Colton, presented August 23-28 and featured Cherry Hardy.

Few programs were found for the 1948-1949 season. We know that *Voice of the Turtle* by John Van Druten began the season with a run from October 14-23. *Camille* was announced as the Playhouse’s second production of the season to run in December. The program for *Victoria Regina* recalls that Carmen Mathews returned to the Playhouse as the leading lady. Based on biographies and news articles regarding cast members in later

plays, two other possible plays of this season might have been *Time and the Tide* and *Macbeth*.

In contrast, there are several surviving programs for the 1949-1950 season. The season began with *The Spider* by Fulton Oursler and Lowell Brentano, followed by *Happy Birthday* by Anita Loos, presented November 16-26, 1949. In December 1949, the Playhouse partnered with The Nashville Children’s Theatre to produce Sir James Barrie’s *Peter Pan*, although this play was not included in the Playhouse’s official count of productions. The 1950s began with George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, presented January 25-February 4. The *Tennessean* praised the production for its acting and authenticity. Only one cast member received a negative review: the reviewer felt Fred Rains lacked the dignity necessary to play Colonel Pickering to full potential.  

For its ninety-third production, the Playhouse presented *The Royal Family* by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber from March 15-25, 1950. Almost a full page was dedicated to the production in the *Tennessean* on Friday Morning, March 17, 1950. Four photographs show moments in the play, but without revealing the full setting. Mortimer Trull of the *Nashville Banner* described the set as “elegant” and praised the acting. Other reviews were also positive and it appears that the audience enjoyed the performances.

In April, Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* opened with a gala even on April 23rd to celebrate Shakespeare’s birthday. The production also received a nearly full page of

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The Nashville Banner on April 27, 1950. According to the article, this was the first production in Playhouse history to utilize a revolving stage. Albertine Maxwell designed costumes in the style of the 15th century. Based on the photographs in the paper, the costumes were elaborate, and the setting was all of one color -- probably white -- with numerous archways, cutouts and levels, all with a definite 1950s interpretation. This was founding Playhouse member Catharine Winnia’s final production. In her interview with Hargrove, she recalled that it was the best production of Romeo and Juliet she had ever seen. The season ended with the musical Roberta with music by Jerome Kern, and book and lyrics by Otto Harbach, presented with extended performances from May 31-June 10.

Four programs have been located for the 1950-1951 season. Only two have dates to determine the order of performance. In the autumn of 1950, the Playhouse presented Born Yesterday by Garson Kanin. Jean Giraudoux’s Madwoman of Chaillot was presented January 31-February 10, 1951. The adaptation by Maurice Valency was the Playhouse’s ninety-eighth production. Sometime following this production came the musical Finian’s Rainbow with book by E. Y. Harburg and Fred Saidy, lyrics by Harburg and music by Burton Lane. Some possible plays, based on later programs, for this season might have been Sweethearts, Man and Superman, and Personal Appearance.

The 100th production of the Nashville Community Playhouse came May 7-16, 1951, with Laurence Housman’s Victoria Regina. In the Director’s Note, Johnson defends the choice of the play to those who would consider it a sacrilege for any actress

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100 Hargrove, 89.
101 No date of performance is listed in the program. However, based on biographies in the program for The Mad Woman of Chaillot, the play came earlier in the season.
other than Helen Hayes to portray the Queen. Hayes had toured with the play to Nashville in 1938 and the memory was still vivid for many of the city’s theatergoers. As noted previously, Johnson had performed with Hayes in *Victoria Regina* for seventy-six weeks and maintained an acquaintance with the actress. Johnson recalls: “It was Miss Hayes herself who suggested ‘Victoria Regina’ as a possible Playhouse production to me last summer. She also consented to attend the opening of our 100th production, a visit which has since had to be postponed because of her current commitment with the motion-picture world until July 1st.” No evidence has been found that Miss Hayes was able to attend a performance. Hargrove personally attended a performance of this production and recalls that “a full house gave the cast a standing ovation of several minutes duration -- a reception such as she [Hargrove] has not observed for several hundred plays she has seen since that time.”

Hargrove reveals in her thesis that it was after this season that Raymond Johnson was dismissed by the Playhouse, in spite of a gross income of approximately $50,000 and an estimated attendance of 30,000. In a footnote, Hargrove hints that the reasons for his dismissal were not unknown. However, “The reason for the dismissal of Mr. Johnson is not, this writer feels, pertinent to the subject of this paper. Also, since the persons involved are still living and the reason is of such a nature that inclusion here might arouse some ill-feeling, the writer declines to go into the matter.” Whatever the reason, it is believed by Hargrove that Johnson’s dismissal led to the decline of the Playhouse, citing

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102 Hargrove, 90.
103 Ibid.
falling attendance and income. Hargrove gives no indication of how long the Playhouse continued after Johnson’s dismissal.

It is unclear exactly where Johnson went after leaving the Playhouse. A search on the Internet Broadway Database reveals that Johnson was a replacement dancer in *As the Girls Go* sometime between November 13, 1948, and January 14, 1950. Of course, this was prior to his dismissal and most likely he participated only during the summer months. After his dismissal, Johnson is credited as appearing as Jensen in Ibsen’s *The Wild Duck* at the City Center, which ran for 15 performances between December 26, 1951 and January 6, 1952. His next and final Broadway credited play came more than a year later when he appeared as a Court Clerk and The German Baron in *The Merchant of Venice* at the City Center, March 4-14, 1953.104

**A Slow Fade**

No programs for the 1951-1952 season are preserved in either the Charles S. Mitchell Collection at Vanderbilt University or in Madge West Joseph’s Scrapbooks at the Nashville Public Library. The last program I was able to locate for the Nashville Community Playhouse is for *The Red Mill* with music by Victor Herbert and original book and lyrics by Henry Blossom, presented October 15-25, 1952, and directed by Howard R. Orms. An article appeared in the *Tennessean* on September 17, 1951, noting the first membership meeting of the year. In this short acknowledgment, the paper states that the October production was to be *Three Blind Mice*. For whatever reason, this play did not make it to production and *The Red Mill* played instead. The operetta was the Playhouse’s 108th production.

104 http://www.ibdb.com/person.php?id=47084
In the program is a memorial to Playhouse founding member Charles S. Mitchell, or “Mister Charlie” as he was known, written by former Playhouse president Whitworth Stokes. Mitchell is remembered for his support of various artistic organizations in Nashville, but it seems that the Playhouse was particularly special to him. His collection at Vanderbilt Library contains the most comprehensive collection of Nashville Playhouse and Nashville Little Theatre programs that I have found. According to his memorial essay, Mitchell rarely missed an opening night. There is no doubt that for this production in particular, the Playhouse members were remembering a dear friend who had contributed much to the arts and their lives.

Sadly, Charles S. Mitchell was not the only death suffered by the Playhouse this season. Across the page from Mitchell’s essay is a note from then current president Henry F. McElroy. Apparently, the walls of the Playhouse had been in desperate need of repair and painting. There was no money in the budget to pay for them to be painted, so members rallied and in the summer of 1952 set to painting the Playhouse before the season began. The joy and pride of the community effort was dealt a blow, however. McElroy recalls: “On the night that the painting project started [sic] Jean Wallace, one of the finest actresses and one of the nicest people ever connected with the Playhouse, died… The morning after the painting crew was underway I received an anonymous contribution to that cause with a note that read, ‘From Jean Wallace.’ She was with us.”

Other plays listed for the eighteenth season in the program for The Red Mill are The Happy Time by S. A. Taylor, scheduled for November 26-December 6; Skylark by Samson Raphaelson, scheduled for January 21-31, 1953; Ten Little Indians by Agatha Christie, scheduled for March 4-14; Life With Father by Harold Lindsay and Russel
Crouse, scheduled for April 8-18; and a musical comedy to be determined, scheduled for May 20-30. The program also lists the membership prices for the season as $7.00 for a single, and $12.00 for a double with single tickets at $1.50. By this time, student memberships were only available through the schools and artist memberships were by invitation only.

It is unclear what befell the Playhouse after this season. There is one prominent photograph in *The Nashville Banner* on September 15, 1952, of board members who met at Joseph’s house to plan the upcoming season. According to the title, the “Playhouse Board Meets To Make Plans for Elaborate Season,” a 1952-1953 season was planned. However, it is highly doubtful that the season came into being. For one thing, the board meeting was held at Madge West Joseph’s house, indicating that she was a member of the Board of Directors. Up to this point, Joseph had been very careful to collect any programs or articles that mentioned her. There are no articles, programs, or any type of souvenir for the 1952-1953 season in her scrapbook.

*The Nashville Banner*, on April 24, 1952, shows Madge West Joseph as one of the “first nighters” for The Circle Players’ final production of the season, *The Fatal Weakness*. The Circle Players began in 1949 and has become one of the longest running community theatres in the United States. The fact that the Nashville Community Playhouse and The Circle Players co-existed for several seasons shows that the transition from the Playhouse to the Circle Players was very different from that of the Little Theatre to the Nashville Community Playhouse. The end of one theatre did not lead directly to the creation of the other. In fact, Martha Ingram states that in 1958 the Playhouse and the Circle Players merged to form Theatre Nashville. A small card announcing the first
season is preserved in the Special Collections at Vanderbilt. The card states that “Theatre Nashville will operate both the Circle Theatre and the Community Playhouse, presenting a unified season of eight plays, four at each theatre.” Gene Feist is listed as the director for the season. Shows for the Playhouse include *The Matchmaker* by Thornton Wilder, *Separate Tables* by Terrence Rattigan, *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller, *The Boyfriend* by Sandy Wilson. Circle productions included *Cat On a Hot Tin Roof* by Tennessee Williams, *Children of Darkness* by Edwin Justus Mayer, *A Clearing in the Woods* by Arthur Laurents, and *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Luigi Pirandello. Based on this information, it would appear that the Nashville Community Playhouse continued to exist in some form up to 1959.

It is regrettable that Hargrove could not elaborate more on the dismissal of Johnson. While understandable that she desired to respect her acquaintances who were still living, it makes it very difficult to discern the historical events of the Playhouse, now fifty years later. Her silence on the matter indicates it was a tender subject for those involved. Indeed it must have been shocking to members for one of the most successful directors in the Playhouse’s history to be dismissed after a successful season. I tried to locate Margery Hargrove to see if she might be willing to elaborate. Sadly, she was killed in a house fire in the summer of 2010 at her home in Cookeville, Tennessee. The real reason may never be known. Whether it was politics or scandal, the dismissal of Johnson permanently damaged the Playhouse and it never fully recovered its prestige of previous years. With the removal of Nashville’s “theatrical genius,” the Playhouse faded into the background while other groups led the charge for quality theatre in Nashville.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

As the sun set on the Nashville Community Playhouse, other theatrical groups emerged, many of which did not last past their first season. One group, however, found a way not only to survive but also to thrive through the remainder of the twentieth century and into the new millennium. The Circle Players, formed in 1949, is still very active in Nashville and is currently in its 62\textsuperscript{nd} season. Like the Nashville Community Playhouse and the Little Theatre Guild, the group was formed by passionate local volunteers who saw a need in the community and endeavored to fill it. After a nomadic start in which the group performed in locations all over town, the group eventually settled in as the only resident group at the Tennessee Performing Arts Center from 1980 to 2004. The Circle Players continue to perform around the city in various locations and show no signs of slowing down.\textsuperscript{1}

Nashville has grown significantly as a city since the Stagecrafters first met in 1906. Along with the growth in population has come a growth in the arts community as well. Gone are the days in which one community theatre is sufficient for an entire city. While the Circle Players are by far the longest running volunteer arts group, not only in the city, but also in the state of Tennessee, they by no means hold a corner on the theatrical market. Numerous semi-professional and volunteer based theatres exist throughout the city and its surrounding towns, most with the same ambition that formed the first theatrical groups nearly a century ago: to raise the quality of theatre in the community through education and the presentation of good plays.

\textsuperscript{1} http://www.circleplayers.net/about.html
# APPENDIX A

## PLAYS BY SEASON

**The Little Theatre Guild of Nashville**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1926</th>
<th>Molière</th>
<th>April 15-16, 1926</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>The Imaginary Invalid</em></td>
<td>George S. Kaufman and Marc Connelly</td>
<td>unknown</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>To the Ladies</em></td>
<td>John Lark Taylor</td>
<td>May 1926</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1926-1927</th>
<th>Walter Hackett</th>
<th>October 27-29, 1926</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Captain Applejack</em></td>
<td>Richard Brindsley Sheridan</td>
<td>November 22-24, 1926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The School for Scandal</em></td>
<td>Robert Housum</td>
<td>December 27-30, 1926</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>The Star Sapphire</em></td>
<td>Harry James Smith</td>
<td>January 19-21, 1927</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1926-1927</th>
<th>Dolly Byrne and Gilda Varesi</th>
<th>March 23-25, 1927</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Enter Madame</em></td>
<td>Sutton Vane</td>
<td>May 18-20, 1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Outward Bound</em></td>
<td>Kenyon Nicholson</td>
<td>May 23-25, 1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>An Evening of One Acts</em></td>
<td>Marion H. Mimms</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>White Elephants</em></td>
<td>Ferenc Molnar</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Butterfly Hearts</em></td>
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<td><em>The Host</em></td>
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<tr>
<th>1927-1928</th>
<th>Elliott Nugent</th>
<th>October 1927</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>The Poor Nut</em></td>
<td>Charles Rann Kennedy</td>
<td>November 1927</td>
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<td><em>The Servant in the House</em></td>
<td>George S. Kaufman and Marc Connelly</td>
<td>December 12-15, 1927</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>The Black Flamingo</em></td>
<td>Frederick Lonsdale</td>
<td>January 25-28, 1928</td>
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<tr>
<th>1927-1928</th>
<th>Sam Janney</th>
<th>Feb 29-March 3, 1928</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>Loose Ankles</em></td>
<td>George Kelly</td>
<td>March 28-31, 1928</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Craig’s Wife</em></td>
<td>Lynn Starling</td>
<td>May 2-5, 1928</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Meet the Wife</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>May 23-26, 1928</td>
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1 The “Report of the President Little Theatre Guild Season 1927 ---’28” lists *Craig’s Wife* as being presented in April. The dates for May 2-5 are listed on the program for that play.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play</th>
<th>Author</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Happy Husband</td>
<td>Harrison Owen</td>
<td>October 1928</td>
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<td>The Dover Road</td>
<td>A. A. Milne</td>
<td>November 21-24, 1928</td>
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<td>Children of the Moon</td>
<td>Martin Flavin</td>
<td>December 12-15, 1928</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Torch-Bearers</td>
<td>George Kelly</td>
<td>January</td>
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<tr>
<td>Erstwhile Susan</td>
<td>Marian De Forest</td>
<td>March 6-9, 1929</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Vortex</td>
<td>Noel Coward</td>
<td>April 3-6, 1929</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sun-Up</td>
<td>Lula Vollmer</td>
<td>April 22-25, 1929</td>
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<td>Charley’s Aunt</td>
<td>Brandon Thomas</td>
<td>May 22-25, 1929</td>
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<td>Hay Fever</td>
<td>Noel Coward</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liliom</td>
<td>Ferenc Molnar</td>
<td>November 20-23, 1929</td>
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<td>On Approval</td>
<td>Frederick Lonsdale</td>
<td>January 8-11, 1930</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Wild Duck</td>
<td>Henrik Ibsen</td>
<td>Jan 29-Feb 1, 1930</td>
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<td>The Racket</td>
<td>Bartlett Cormack</td>
<td>Feb 26-March 1, 1930</td>
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<td>Candida</td>
<td>George Bernard Shaw</td>
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<td>Her Husband’s Wife</td>
<td>A. E. Thomas</td>
<td>April 22, 1930</td>
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<td>Cradle Song</td>
<td>G. Martinez Sierra</td>
<td>May 7-10, 1930</td>
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<td>The Royal Family</td>
<td>Edna Ferber</td>
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<td>and George S. Kaufman</td>
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<td>The Seagull</td>
<td>Anton Chekhov</td>
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<td>The Fourth Wall</td>
<td>A A. Milne</td>
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<td>Dancing Mothers</td>
<td>Edmund Goulding</td>
<td>March 4-7, 1931</td>
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<tr>
<td>and Edgar Selwyn</td>
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<td>The Guardsman</td>
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<td>Charles MacArthur</td>
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<td>A Doll’s House</td>
<td>Henrik Ibsen</td>
<td>May 6-9, 1931</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Queen’s Husband</td>
<td>Robert Emmet Sherwood</td>
<td>May 27-30, 1931</td>
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2 Performed in Murfreesboro, TN.
1931-1932

Broadway

George Abbott and Philip Dunning
October 28-30, 1931

A Noble Outcast
John Frazer
December 2-4, 1931

Ladies of the Jury
Fred Ballard
January 27-29, 1932

One Acts

The Boor
Anton Chekhov
March 2-4, 1932

The Valiant
Holworthy Hall

The Lost Sheep
Andrew Nelson Lytle

Ghosts
Henrik Ibsen
March 30-April 1, 1932

Diplomacy
Victorien Sardou
April 27-29, 1932

Nashville Experimental Theatre

1934

Alice-Sit-By-The-Fire
Sir James Barrie
February 7-10, 1934

Once In A Lifetime
George S. Kaufman
March 14-17, 1934

Nashville Community Playhouse

1935-1936

Three Cornered Moon
Gertrude Tonkonogy
November 1935

Double Door
Elizabeth McFadden
December 18-20, 1935

Yellow Jack
Sidney Howard
February 5-7, 1936

Her Master’s Voice
Clare Kummer
April 2-3 and 6, 1936

Hotel Universe
Philip Barry
May 6-8, 1936

Clear All Wires
Bella and Sam Spewack
June 3-5, 1936

1936-1937

Biography
S. N. Behrman
November 18-20, 1936

Whistling in the Dark
Laurence Gross
December 16-18, 1936

and Edward Childs Carpenter

Winterset
Maxwell Anderson
February 10-13, 1937

Goodbye Again
Allan Scott
March 17-19, 1937

and George Height

The Pizen Song
Adelaide C. Rowell
April 22-24, 1937

Boy Meets Girl
Bella and Sam Spewack
June 2-5, 1937

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1937-1938

*What Price Glory*  
Maxwell Anderson and Laurence Stallings  
October 27-30, 1937

*There’s Always Juliet*  
John Van Druten  
December 1-4, 1937

*High Tor*  
Maxwell Anderson  
January 26-29, 1938

*Juno and the Paycock*  
Sean O’Casey  
March 2-5, 1938

*Stage Door*  
Edna Ferber and George S. Kaufman  
May 25-28, 1938

*Night of January 16th*  
Ayn Rand  
June 1938

*Idiot’s Delight*  
Robert E. Sherwood  
October 26-29, 1938

*Room Service*  
John Murray and Allen Boretz  
December 7-10, 1938

*Men in White*  
Sidney Kingsley  
February 8-11, 1939

*Pride and Prejudice*  
Helen Jerome  
March 20-25, 1939

*Night Must Fall*  
Emlyn Williams  
April 19-22, 1939

*By Request - 1939*  
Jeter and Smith  
April 25-28, 1939

*You Can’t Take It With You*  
George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart  
June 1939

*Julius Caesar*  
Shakespeare  
Summer Workshop  
August 15-16, 1939

1939-1940

*Ah, Wilderness!*  
Eugene O’Neill  
October 24-29, 1939

*The Petrified Forest*  
Robert E. Sherwood  
December 5-9, 1939

*What a Life*  
Clifford Goldsmith  
January 23-27, 1940

*Our Town*  
Thornton Wilder  
March 4-9, 1940

*Berkeley Square*  
John L. Balderston  
April 3-9, 1940

*By Request - 1940*  
Jeter and Smith  
April 24-27, 1940

*First Lady*  
George S. Kaufman and Katharine Dayton  
May 28-June 1, 1940

*Twelfth Night*  
Shakespeare  
Summer Workshop  
August 14-15, 1940

1940-1941

*Margin for Error*  
Clare Boothe  
October 1940

*Morning’s at Seven*  
Paul Osborne  
November 1940

*Outward Bound*  
Sutton Vane  
January 1941

*Pursuit of Happiness*  
Lawrence and Armina Lagner  
February 11-14, 1941

*Sailors of Toulon*  
Fritz Kleibacker  
April 1941

*H.M.S. Pinafore*  
Gilbert and Sullivan  
April 1941

*The Male Animal*  
James Thurber and Elliott Nugent  
June 1941
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Play</th>
<th>Authors/Adapters</th>
<th>Dates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Twentieth Century</em></td>
<td>Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur</td>
<td>October 1941</td>
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<td><em>Ladies in Retirement</em></td>
<td>Edward Percy and Reginald Denham</td>
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<td><em>The Women</em></td>
<td>Clare Boothe</td>
<td>January 1942</td>
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<td><em>The Gondoliers</em></td>
<td>Gilbert and Sullivan</td>
<td>March 2-7, 1942</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Mr. and Mrs. North</em></td>
<td>Owen Davis</td>
<td>April 1942</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Petticoat Fever</em></td>
<td>Mark Reed</td>
<td>May 19-23, 1942</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>The Man Who Came to Dinner</em></td>
<td>George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart</td>
<td>June 1942</td>
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<td><em>The Eve of St. Mark</em></td>
<td>Maxwell Anderson</td>
<td>November 1942</td>
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<td><em>George and Margaret</em></td>
<td>Gerald Savoy</td>
<td>December 1942</td>
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<td><em>Tweedles</em></td>
<td>Booth Tarkington</td>
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<td><em>Papa Is All</em></td>
<td>Patterson Green</td>
<td>March 1943</td>
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<td><em>Suspect</em></td>
<td>Edward Percy and Reginald Denham</td>
<td>April 1943</td>
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<td><em>Forward March</em></td>
<td>Nashville Army Air Center</td>
<td>May 1943</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Claudia</em></td>
<td>Rose Franken</td>
<td>October 26-30, 1943</td>
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<td><em>The Little Foxes</em></td>
<td>Lillian Hellman</td>
<td>December 1943</td>
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<td><em>Spring Again</em></td>
<td>Isabel Leighton and Bertram Bloch</td>
<td>February 8-12, 1944</td>
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<td><em>Letters to Lucerne</em></td>
<td>Fritz Rotter and Allen Vincent</td>
<td>March 7-11, 1944</td>
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<td><em>The Philadelphia Story</em></td>
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<td><em>Buddies</em></td>
<td>George V. Hobart</td>
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<td><em>Gold in the Hills</em></td>
<td>J. Frank Davis</td>
<td>Open House</td>
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<td><em>Arsenic and Old Lace</em></td>
<td>Joseph Kesselring</td>
<td>September 1944</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>50 Wimpole Street</em></td>
<td>Marjorie Carleton</td>
<td>October 1944</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>My Sister Eileen</em></td>
<td>Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov</td>
<td>November 1944</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>The Old Ladies</em></td>
<td>Rodney Ackland</td>
<td>January 16-20, 1945</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>The Skin of Our Teeth</em></td>
<td>Thornton Wilder</td>
<td>April 17-21, 1945</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Private Lives</em></td>
<td>Noel Coward</td>
<td>May 22-26, 1945</td>
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<th>1945-1946</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dinner at Eight</td>
<td>George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uncle Harry</td>
<td>Thomas Job</td>
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<td><strong>December 10-15, 1945</strong></td>
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<td>The Time of Your Life</td>
<td>William Saroyan</td>
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<td><strong>February 1946</strong></td>
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<td>Kiss and Tell</td>
<td>F. Hugh Herbert</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>March 1946</strong></td>
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<td>Hamlet</td>
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<td><strong>April 1946</strong></td>
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<td>Blithe Spirit</td>
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<td>Angel Street</td>
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<td>Tonight at 8:30</td>
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<td><strong>November 1946</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rain</td>
<td>John Colton and Clemence Randolph</td>
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<td><strong>January 15-22, 1947</strong></td>
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<td>Junior Miss</td>
<td>Jerome Chodorov and Joseph Fields</td>
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<td>Joan of Lorraine</td>
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<td><strong>May 28-June 4, 1947</strong></td>
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<td>The Importance of Being Earnest</td>
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<td><strong>Summer Workshop</strong></td>
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<td><strong>July 9-16, 1947</strong></td>
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<td>Swan Song</td>
<td>Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur</td>
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<td><strong>December 10-20, 1947</strong></td>
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<td>The Glass Menagerie</td>
<td>Tennessee Williams</td>
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<td><strong>Jan 28-Feb 4, 1948</strong></td>
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<td>Cradle Snatchers</td>
<td>Russell G. Medcraft and Norma Mitchell</td>
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<td><strong>March 10-17, 1948</strong></td>
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<td>King Oedipus</td>
<td>Sophocles</td>
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<td>The Warrior’s Husband</td>
<td>Julian Thompson</td>
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<td><strong>June 3-12, 1948</strong></td>
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<td>Of Thee I Sing</td>
<td>George Gershwin, Ira Gershwin, George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>July 19-24, 1948</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charley’s Aunt</td>
<td>Brandon Thomas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>August 23-28, 1948</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Shanghai Gesture</td>
<td>John Colton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>December 10-20, 1947</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 1948-1949

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play title</th>
<th>Author/Adaptation</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voice of the Turtle</td>
<td>John Van Druten</td>
<td>October 14-23, 1948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camille</td>
<td>Alexander Dumas, fils</td>
<td>December 1948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time and the Tide</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macbeth</td>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1949-1950

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play title</th>
<th>Author/Adaptation</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Spider</td>
<td>Fulton Oursler and Lowell Brentano</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy Birthday</td>
<td>Anita Loos</td>
<td>November 16-26, 1949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Pan&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Sir James Barrie</td>
<td>December 1949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pygmalion</td>
<td>George Bernard Shaw</td>
<td>Jan 25-Feb 4, 1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Royal Family</td>
<td>George S. Kaufman</td>
<td>March 15-25, 1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Edna Ferber</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romeo and Juliet</td>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
<td>April 1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberta</td>
<td>Jerome Kern and Otto Harbach</td>
<td>May 31-June 10, 1950</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1950-1951

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play title</th>
<th>Author/Adaptation</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Born Yesterday</td>
<td>Garson Kanin</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madwoman of Chaillot</td>
<td>Jean Giraudoux adapt. Maurice Valency</td>
<td>Jan 31-Feb 10, 1951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finian’s Rainbow</td>
<td>E. Y. Harburg, Fred Said and Burton Lane</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria Regina</td>
<td>Laurence Housman</td>
<td>May 7-16, 1951</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possible Plays for 1950-1951<sup>5</sup>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play title</th>
<th>Author/Adaptation</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sweethearts</td>
<td>Fred De Gresac, Harry B. Smith, Robert B. Smith, and Victor Herbert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man and Superman</td>
<td>George Bernard Shaw</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Appearance</td>
<td>Lawrence Riley</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1952-1953

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play title</th>
<th>Author/Adaptation</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Red Mill</td>
<td>Victor Herbert and Henry Blossom</td>
<td>October 15-25, 1952</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

<sup>3</sup> Based on program bios and other information, *Time and the Tide* and *Macbeth* most likely occurred in the 1948-1949 season.

<sup>4</sup> Produced in cooperation with the Nashville Children’s Theatre and is not included in the official count of Playhouse productions.

<sup>5</sup> Based on information in later programs.
### Possible Plays for 1952-1953

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play Name</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>The Happy Time</em></td>
<td>S. A. Taylor</td>
<td>Nov 26-Dec 6, 1952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Skylark</em></td>
<td>Samson Raphaelson</td>
<td>January 21-31, 1953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ten Little Indians</em></td>
<td>Agatha Christie</td>
<td>March 4-14, 1953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Life with Father</em></td>
<td>Harold Lindsay and Russel Crouse</td>
<td>April 8-18, 1953</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

*Play names and dates listed in the program for *The Red Mill*. No confirmation of these dates has been located.*
APPENDIX B

BOARDS AND COMMITTEES BY SEASON

Little Theatre Guild of Nashville

1926
President
Jane Douglas Crawford

1926-1927
President
Jane Douglas Crawford
Vice-President
Dr. H. B. Schermerhorn
Secretary
Mrs. B. Kirk Rankin
Treasurer
Mr. R. E. Donnell

1927-1928
President
Jane Douglas Crawford
Vice-President
Dr. H. B. Schermerhorn
Corresponding
Mrs. B. Kirk Rankin
Secretary
Recording Secretary
W. L. Nichol
Treasurer
Mr. Edward Potter, Jr.

Committee Chairs
Art
Mrs. Edward Potter
Advertising
Rumsey Lewis
Casting
Mrs. J. B. Joseph
Editorial
Mrs. Byd Douglas, Jr.
Educational
Mrs. E. B. Stahlman
Finance
Mrs. Edward Potter, Jr.
High and
Mrs. Inez Alder
Public Schools
Music
Charles Mitchell
Peabody College
Miss Lucy Gage
Radio Features
Mrs. Benton McMillin
Vanderbilt Univ.
Dean Ada Bell Stapleton
Ward-Belmont
Miss Pauline Townsend
Ushers
Mrs. Morton B. Howell III

1928-1929
President
Mrs. B. Kirk Rankin
1929-1930
President Mrs. B. Kirk Rankin
Vice-President Mrs. John H. Reeves
Corresponding Secretary Mrs. Edward Potter, Jr.
Recording Secretary Dr. H. B. Schermerhorn
Treasurer Mr. Edward Potter, Jr.

1931-1932
President Mrs. B. Kirk Rankin
Vice-President Mrs. John H. Reeves
Corresponding Secretary Miss Annie DeMoville
Recording Secretary Dr. H. B. Schermerhorn
Treasurer Mrs. Edward Potter, Jr.

Nashville Community Playhouse
1935-1936
Officers
President E. B. Stahlman, Jr.
Vice-President Mrs. B. Kirk Rankin
Secretary Miss Catharine Winnia
Treasurer Reber Boult

Executive Committee
Chairman Charles S. Mitchell
Members Mrs. Inez Bassett Alder, Maxwell Benson, Reber Boult,
William R. Breyer, Mrs. B. Kirk Rankin, E. B. Stahlman,
Jr., and Miss Catharine Winnia.

Board of Directors
Mrs. Nancy Rice Anderson B. V. Acree
Maxwell Benson W. F. Christopher
Miss Annie Demoville F. K. W. Drury
George Doyne Mrs. Bernard Fensterwald
Miss Jane Carey Folk Miss Julia Gibson
Edwin Rumsey Lewis* Mrs. John T. McCall
Charles Moss Miss Helen O’Callaghan
Charles B. Parmer Rufus Phillips
Francis Robinson Robert Rowlett
F. C. Sowell Leslie Sterne
Miss Pauline S. Townsend Miss Susan Vaughn
Mrs. William Waller Edwin A. Keeble**

* Appears in first listing, but not in subsequent listings of the same season.
Edward M. Kirby**

Mrs. Rumsey Lewis**

Committees Chairs
Publicity               Maxwell Benson
House                  Mrs. Rumsey Lewis
Properties             Mrs. William Waller
Costumes               Mrs. Harry Hedrick
Contact                George Doyne
Music                  Charles S. Mitchell
Play Selection         F. K. W. Drury and Charles B. Parmer
Casting                W. F. Christopher and Miss Susan Vaughn
Lighting               Henry Badoux
Program                Lilian Armstrong
Radio                  Mrs. John T. McCall
Workshop               Miss Inez Bassett Alder

1936-1937

Officers
President               John Thompson (replaced by Charles S. Mitchell)
First Vice-President    Mrs. B. Kirk Rankin
Second Vice-Pres.       Mrs. Louis Hibbetts
Secretary               Miss Catharine Winnia
Assistant Secretary     Miss Lilian Armstrong

Executive Committee
Chairman                Charles S. Mitchell (replaced by Edwin Keeble)
Members                Mrs. Inez Bassett Alder, Reber Boult, William R. Breyer,
                       Mrs. B. Kirk Rankin,* Robert Harwell,** John
                       Thompson,** and Miss Catharine Winnia

Staff Organization
Business Manager        Reber Boult
Treasurer               Wirt Armistead (replaced by James Barbour)
House Manager           W. F. Christopher

Board of Directors
Mrs. Inez Bassett Alder Miss Lilian Armstrong
Reber Boult             William R. Breyer
W. F. Christopher       F. K. W. Drury
Mrs. Robert Harwell     Mrs. Louis Hibbitts
Edwin Keeble           Mrs. Rumsey Lewis
Mrs. John T. McCall     Charles S. Mitchell
Mrs. B. Kirk Rankin     Miss Noncie Reed

** Does not appear in first listing, but in subsequent listings of the same season.
Miss Catharine Winnia

Committees

House Committee

Chairman  W. F. Christopher
Members  Bill Breyer, Mrs. Henry Badoux, Mary Parks, Alice Marie Griggs, Mrs. Elizabeth Biggs, Virginia Jones, Alice Overton, Mary Overton, Mary Morel, Betsy Proctor, Mildred Mason, Mary Heron, Eunice Hammond, Mrs. Samuel Rothstein, Mrs. Rumsey Lewis and Noncie Reed

Design Committee

Chairman  John Richardson
Members  Gert Uthman, Bennett Marshall

Lighting Committee

Chairman  Henry Badoux
Members  Ray Edenfield, H. H. Clarkson, W. B. Shearon, Murril Tew, Dillard Jacobs, A. M. Souby, and Thomas H. Evans

Costume Committee

Chairman  Mrs. Robert Harwell
Members  Mrs. Harry Hedrick, Jr., Mrs. Maybelle Davis, Mrs. Calvin Winford, Alice Overton, Peggy Turner, Betsy Proctor, Mary Morel, Francois Cordier, Finis Marshall, and Mrs. McCune

Make-up Committee

Chairman  Sam Tarpley
Members  Samuel Rothstein, John Wands, Mrs. Eleanore Brush, Louise Combel, Francois Cordier, Rush Hammond, W. B. Shearon, and R. R. Hutcheson

Play Reading Committee

Chairman  John Thompson
Members  William R. Breyer, Mrs. Rumsey Lewis, Mrs. Henry Badoux, Florence Long, and Mary Taloe Gwathmey

Publicity Committee

Chairman  Mrs. Elizabeth Topping
Members  Mrs. Henry Winford, Henry Badoux, Mary Brown, Peggy Turner, Martha Goodlett, William R. Breyer, Lilian Armstrong, and Mrs. Maybelle Davis
Program Committee
Chairman Lilian Armstrong
Members Betty Anderson, Mrs. Henry Badoux, William R. Breyer, Nola Byrne, Katherine Eckford, Margaret Felts, Martha Goodlett, Virginia Jones, Helen Pitt, Noncie Reed, Alice Overton, and Mrs. Henry Winford

Workshop Committee
Chairman Mrs. Burns
Members Mrs. Elizabeth Parrish, Katherine Eckford, Florence Long, Mary Taloe Gwathmey, William R. Breyer, Charles S. Mitchell, and Mrs. Inez Bassett Alder

Music Committee
Chairman Harold Kapp
Members Charles Rutherford, Jr., and John Richardson

Staff Photographer Dillard Jacobs

1937-1938

 Officers
President John Thompson
First Vice-President Miss Catharaine Winnia
Second Vice-Pres. Miss Louis Hibbitts
Secretary Lilian Armstrong
Assistant Secretary Noncie Reed
Treasurer James Barbour+
Business Manager Reber Boul

Executive Committee
Chairman John Thompson
Members James Barbour,** Catharine Winnia,** Reber Boul, Charles S. Mitchell, Robert Harwell, and William R. Breyer

Board of Directors
Mrs. Inez Bassett Alder Lilian Armstrong
Mrs. Henry Badoux Maxwell E. Benson*
Sam Berger Reber Boul
William R. Breyer Mrs. J. Frank Burns*
DeWitt Carter Mary Tayloe Gwathmey
Mrs. Weaver Harris Mrs. Tinsley Harrison

+ By May 1938, James Barbour is listed as being both Treasurer and Business Manager
Mrs. Robert Harwell                     Mrs. Louis Hibbitts
Edwin Keeble                           Mrs. John T. McCall
Charles S. Mitchell                    Noncie Reed
Eugene Strayhorn                       Catharine Winnia
Mrs. Harry Hedrick, Jr.**              Mrs. Elizabeth Coyle Parrish**

Staff:

- House: Catharine Winnia
- Scene Technician: Verne Phillips
- Lighting: Tom Evans, Martin Roberts
- Sound Technician: Casper B. Kuhn, Jr.
- Costume Design: Mrs. Harry Hedrick
- Make-up: Mrs. J. Frank Burns
- Properties: Mrs. Louis Hibbitts
- Program: Lilian Armstrong
- Scene Design: Gert Uthman
- Play Reading: William R. Breyer
- Workshop: Mrs. J. Frank Burns
- Music: Mrs. Weaver Harris
- Publicity: Harry Armstrong
- Staff Photographers: Dillard Jacobs, Dr. Beverly Douglas

1938-1939

President: Edwin A. Keeble

1939-1940

Board of Directors:

- President: Edwin A. Keeble
- Vice-President: Catharine Winnia
- Secretary: Mrs. John T. McCall
- Treasurer & Business Manager: James Barbour


Committee Heads:

- Program: Lilian Armstrong
- Lighting: William Breazeale
- Production: C. E. Brush, III
- Make-Up: Martha Geistman
House Martha Gillespie  
Workshop Mrs. Emile S. Hall  
Costumes Mrs. Harry Hedrick Jr.  
Membership Mrs. Elizabeth Coyle Parrish  
Scenery Mrs. Cobb Pilcher  
Properties Elizabeth Ziegler

1940-1941  
President Reber Boult

1941-1942  
Officers  
President James Barbour  
Vice-Presidents Charles E. Johnstone and Sara Catherine Hibbitts  
Secretary Sue McDaniel  
Treasurer F. K. W. Drury

1942-1943  
President James E. Barbour

1943-1944  
Officers  
President W. G. McComas  
First Vice-President F. K. W. Drury  
Second Vice-President Martha Gillespie  
Secretary Mrs. Delbert Mann, Jr.  
Treasurer F. K. W. Drury

Board of Directors  
Executive Committee  
W. G. McComas Mrs. Delbert Mann, Jr.  
F. K. W. Drury James C. Barbour  
Reber Boult Charles S. Mitchell  
Charles E. Johnstone

Members  
Mrs. Sara C. Hibbitts Edwin A. Keeble  
Catharine Winnia Lilian Armstrong  
Mrs. Carter Bennett Mrs. Thomas W. Steele  
Martha Gillespie Mrs. Edwin Keeble  
Mrs. Boyd Maxwell Jonathan Curvin  
Mrs. James Mercer Mrs. W. R. McDaniel  
Mrs. Inez B. Alder

Standing Committees  
Art Christine Slayden  

130
Building and Equipment
House
Membership
Photography
Production
Costumes
Lighting
Make-Up
Properties
Set Decoration
Stage Manager
Program
Publicity

Charles Johnstone
Martha Gillespie
Emmie Keeble
Sgt. Harold Twitty, USMC
Mrs. Inez B. Adler
Lilian Armstrong
Mike Wiley
Margie Knight
Mrs. Carter Bennett
Mrs. Ila Stromquist
James Bailey
Frances Scruggs Mercer
Lucia Donnelly and Margaret Sanders

1944-1945

Executive Committee
Officers
President
First Vice-President
Second Vice-President
Secretary
Treasurer
Business Director
Members
Lilian Armstrong
E. T. Proctor

W. G. McComas
Charles S. Mitchell
Morton B. Howell
Mrs. Delbert Mann, Jr.
F. K. W. Drury
Mrs. W. T. Bradley
Catharine Winnia

1945-1946

Officers and Directors
President
First Vice-President
Second Vice-President
Secretary
Treasurer
Members
Lilian Armstrong, Charles S. Mitchell, Martha Gillespie,
Samuel A. Bingham, Jr., Hayden B. Johnson, Mrs.
Whitworth Stokes

W. G. McComas
Catharine Winnia
James Reppert
Mrs. Delbert Mann, Jr.
F. K. W. Drury

1947-1948

Board of Directors
President
First Vice-President
Whitworth Stokes
Charles S. Mitchell
Second Vice-President: Jim Reppert  
Secretary: Catherine Winnia  
Treasurer: F. K. W. Drury  

Members: Mrs. Walter Fort, Martha Gillespie, Hayden B. Johnson, Sam Tarpley, John Thompson, Terry Tomlin, Mrs. William B. Tyne  

1949-1950

Board of Directors  
President: Robert L. Gwinn  
First Vice-President: Walden S. Fabry  
Second Vice-President: Vince Harding  
Secretary: Sam Tarpley  
Treasurer: F. K. W. Drury  

Members: Mrs. Inez B. Alder, Billy Houston, John Thompson, Carolyn Binkley, Whitworth Stokes, Mrs. Courtney Marshall, Terry Tomlin, James Bailey  

1950-1951

Staff  
Executive Director: Raymond Johnson  
Technical Director: Wyman Kane  
Business Director: Susan Brandau  

Board of Directors  
President: Samuel H. Tarpley  
First Vice-President: Walden S. Fabry  
Second Vice-President: Henry F. McElroy  
Secretary: Carolyn Binkley  
Treasurer: Frank Drury  


Program Staff  
Editor: Jane Dabney  
Advertising Editor: Floy Beatty  
Art Editor: Bob Johnstone  
Editorial Committee: Lilian Armstrong, Herschel Gower  
Business Manager: Myrtle Jones
Cover

Advertising Committee
Floy Beatty, Mrs. Amos Christie, Walden Fabry Myrtle
Jones, Wyman Kane, Mrs. John McCall, Mrs. Henry
McElroy, Sam Tarpley, Joe Thompson, Jr.

1952-1953

Staff
Director
Howard R. Orms
Technical Director
John W. Caldwell
Business Manager
Mary Bloker

Board of Directors
President
Henry F. McElroy
First Vice-President
Raymond Kennedy
Second Vice-President
Eldis Rice
Secretary
Mrs. John McCall
Treasurer
F. K. W. Drury

Members
Mrs. Courtney Marshall, Mrs. Christine S. Tibbott, Mrs.
Mary Bloker, Robert Booth, Mrs. Madge Joseph, James
Denham, Cinton E. Brush, III, Bill Alder

1 Listing appeared in the program for Mad Woman of Chaillot.
APPENDIX C

BY-LAWS OF THE LITTLE THEATRE GUILD, INC. NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

I Purpose: The Little Theatre of Nashville is founded with a two fold purpose:
(a) First, to give those throughout the city the opportunity of self expression [sic] in the art of acting and its kindred fields.
(b) Second, to present to the people of Nashville, dramatic productions of pleasurable and literary value.

II Membership:
(a) There shall be a patron membership, consisting of a limited number of patron and patronesses, the number and price of such membership to be determined by the Board of Directors.
(b) There shall be a season membership which entitles the holder thereof to the privilege of 2 or 4 seats to each production, to all special performances and the privilege, when possible, of securing choice seats, the price of such season membership, and the number to be sold, to be left to the descretion [sic] of the Executive Committee.

III Officers:
(a) The officers of the organization shall be as follows: President, Fice [sic] President, Recording Secretary, Cor. Secretary, and Treasurer.

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1 Little Theatre of Nashville Guild Papers, Vanderbilt University Special Collections, Nashville.
(b) The officers shall be elected from and by the Board of Directors and shall receive compensation neither for their services as such officers, nor for any other service which they may render the organization.

IV Duties [sic] of Officers

(a) The officers shall perform such duties as are usual to their respective offices.

(b) In case of resignation or failure to act, the Board of Directors, by majority election, at the instance of the chairman, or chairman pro tem, shall act to fill any vacancies which may occur.

V Board of Directors

(a) There shall be a Board of Directors of 24 members, 8 of whom shall be elected for 1 year, 8 for 2 hears [sic], 8 for 3 years.

(b) The Board of Directors shall elect officers and the Executive Com. It shall meet regularly 4 times during the year, receiving the report of the Executive Com. and transact such business as may come before it.

(c) Nine members shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business in the meeting of the Board of Directors.

(d) The majority vote of the Directors present shall be sufficient for a decision.

(e) Any member absent without excuse from 3 consecutive meetings shall be automatically dropped from the Board of Directors, and the Board of Directors shall proceed to fill the vacancy so created.
VI Executive Committee:

(a) The Executive Committee of which the President is Chairman, shall be composed of the Officers of the Little Theatre and 4 additional members to be elected by the Board of Directors.

(b) The Executive Committee shall engage a STAGE DIRECTOR, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, and appoint a business manager[sic] and shall have the sole and exclusive power and management and control of the affairs and policies of the Little Theatre of Nashville, and in all matters not herein or otherwise provided for.

(c) The Executive Com. shall meet regularly the first Tuesday in each month or upon call by the President or upon the written request of 4 members of the Committee.

(d) Any 5 members of the Executive Com. shall constitute a quorum and a majority of members present shall be sufficient for a decision.

(e) Any member absent without excuse from 3 consecutive meetings shall automatically be dropped from the Executive Com. and the Board of Directors shall proceed to fill the vacancy so created.

VII Elections:

(a) The Executive Com. shall appoint a nom. com. consisting of 3 members of the Board of Directors

(b) This Nom. Com. shall elect nominate and present by letter at least one week in advance of the annual meeting, which will be held the first week in June, the names of 8 persons to succeed the 8 retiring members of the Board of Directors.
(C)[sic] The Board of Directors at this annual meeting, shall proceed to elect the 8 persons so nominated or any other persons or person it may desire.

(d) The officers hereinbefore provided for shall be nominated and elected at this time and in the manor above provided for in the election of the members of the Board, [sic]

VIII Producing Director:

(a) There may be appointed by the Executive Com. a Producing Director, on a salary to be determined.

(b) Such Producing Directors shall be selected for his or her expert knowlege [sic] of D. Art.

IX Committees:

(a) The President shall appoint such additional Com. as may be advisable by and with the consent of the Executive Com.

X Amendments:

(a) These by-laws may be amended by submission of proposed amendments in writing signed by at least 3 Directors at a regular meeting of the Board of Directors and shall be passed and made a part here of by a two-thirds majority of the Directors present at the following regular meeting of the Board of Directors.
APPENDIX D

NASHVILLE LITTLE THEATRE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

As of August 13, 1929

Receipts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subscriptions</td>
<td>$7422.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>$537.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Door Sales</td>
<td>$2799.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>$48.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$11,798.40</strong></td>
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Disbursements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>$2600.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvements &amp; repairs</td>
<td>$238.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director, R. Savich</td>
<td>$3020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misses Douglas &amp; Keeble</td>
<td>$900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>$375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janitor</td>
<td>$330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Hands</td>
<td>$156</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extra Help</td>
<td>$65</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Salaries Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$4846.00</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Supplies</td>
<td>$919.70</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>$151.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rights</td>
<td>$375.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postage, Telephone,</td>
<td>$235.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telegraph &amp; Traveling</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water, Lights &amp; Fuel</td>
<td>$938.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing Programs</td>
<td>$260.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>$63.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$10,628.21</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Balance on hand last report June 18, 1928: $1191.01

Receipts: $11,798.40

Interest on Savings Acct. to July 1st 1929: $101.95

**Total:** $13,091.36

Disbursements: ($10,628.21)

**Balance on hand Aug. 13, 1929:** $2463.15
Balance checking account $1672.37
Balance savings account $790.78
Total $2463.15

$900 royalties to be paid for the past season

As of June 17, 1930

Receipts

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
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<td>Door Sales</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subscriptions</td>
<td>$690.25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>$117.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>$90.00</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$2096.10</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Disbursements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>$1250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douglas &amp; Keeble</td>
<td>$400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara Carter</td>
<td>$175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Hands</td>
<td>$72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janitor</td>
<td>$166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Salaries Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$2063.00</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplies</td>
<td>$148.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights and Manuscripts</td>
<td>$691.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone and Telegraph</td>
<td>$49.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lights and Fuel</td>
<td>$256.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>$800.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>$103.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing</td>
<td>$173.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>$18.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>$116.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$4420.28</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Balance on hand Feb. 15, 1930 $4025.00
Receipts $2096.10
Total $6121.10

Disbursements ($4420.28)
Balance on hand June 17, 1930 1700.82

---

1 This note appears on the financial statement, most likely as a reminder that the royalties were an outstanding bill.
2 Approx $10,787 was expended during season of 1929-30.
Balance Checking $894.24
Balance Savings $806.58
Total $1700.82

As of October 22, 1931

Receipts

Subscriptions $807.50
Advertising $15.00
Total $822.50

Disbursements

Salaries
Director $100
Ewing and Douglas $100
Janitor $48
Salaries Total $248.00

Supplies $1.75
Automobile $100.00
Rent $150.00
Manuscripts $6.50
Lights $9.09
Telephone and Telegraph $13.95
Total $529.29

Balance on Hand September 14, 1931 $777.74
Receipts $822.50
Total $1600.24

Disbursements ($529.29)
Total $1070.95

As of February 10, 1932

Receipts

Subscriptions $3186.00
Door Sales $421.93
Rent $110.00
Advertising $315.00
Miscellaneous $56.69
Total $4089.62
Disbursements

Salaries
  Director $850.00
  Ewing & Douglas $400.00
  Secretary $175.00
  Janitor $188.00
  Stage Hand $68.00
  Total $1681.00

Supplies $535.59
Postage $9.00
Rent $650.00
Printing $126.80
Manuscripts $30.31
Fuel $40.80
Rights $240.00
Lights $123.72
Telephone & Telegraph $40.39
Insurance $87.50
Advertising $49.73
Total $3614.84

Balance on Hand October 22, 1931 $1070.95
Receipts $4080.62
Total $5160.57

Disbursement ($3614.84)
Balance on Hand February 10, 1932 $1545.73

Interest on Savings Account $3.45
Total $1549.18
APPENDIX E

ITEMIZED COST OF PLAYS\textsuperscript{1}

**Plays Last Year**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Royal Family</td>
<td>$177.00 (Money for Sat. night-not included)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sea Gull</td>
<td>246.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fourth Wall</td>
<td>213.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancing Mothers</td>
<td>387.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Guardsman</td>
<td>126.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Front Page</td>
<td>217.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Doll’s House</td>
<td>170.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Queen’s Husband</td>
<td>186.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Plays This Year**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broadway</td>
<td>135.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Noble Outcast</td>
<td>126.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladies of the Jury</td>
<td>182.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Itemized Cost of Each Play**

**ROYAL FAMILY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bill Board Advertisement</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banner Advertisement</td>
<td>11.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nashville Tennessean Advertisement</td>
<td>11.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs</td>
<td>37.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royalty</td>
<td>150.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrician – Mr. Holt</td>
<td>26.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>17.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. C. Tiller (Piano)</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electric Equipment</td>
<td>7.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neely-Harwell</td>
<td>9.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldberg</td>
<td>16.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebeck</td>
<td>2.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburg Paint &amp; Glass</td>
<td>7.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miller Mfg. Company</td>
<td>15.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>14.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grimes</td>
<td>16.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{1} As copied from the Little Theatre of Nashville Guild Papers, Vanderbilt Special Collections, Nashville.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Money on Nashville Door Sales</td>
<td>270.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cost of Producing “Royal Family” [sic] in Murfreesboro:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gasoline</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent of High School</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royalty</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hauling Furniture</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posters</td>
<td>7.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murfreesboro</td>
<td>52.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receipts</td>
<td>20.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE SEA GULL</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Board Advertisement</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banner</td>
<td>11.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessean</td>
<td>11.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>37.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royalty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrician [sic]</td>
<td>26.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldberg</td>
<td>14.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburg Paint &amp; Glass</td>
<td>3.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbrick &amp; Lawrence</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harris-Davis</td>
<td>25.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elec. Equipent</td>
<td>6.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. C. Tiller</td>
<td>7.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs</td>
<td>37.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costumes</td>
<td>6.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grimes</td>
<td>16.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Door Sales for Play</td>
<td>245.26</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>THE FOURTH WALL</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Board Advertisement</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banner</td>
<td>10.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessean</td>
<td>11.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs</td>
<td>37.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royalty</td>
<td>165.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Holt</td>
<td>21.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>8.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electric Equipment</td>
<td>6.70</td>
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</table>

Total: 357.53
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Castner Knott</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grimes</td>
<td>16.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peabody Pharmacy</td>
<td>4.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam Bitner</td>
<td>12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>298.57</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Door Sales for Fourth Wall | 207.37

**DANCING MOTHERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bill Board Advertisement</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banner</td>
<td>11.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessean</td>
<td>11.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs</td>
<td>34.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royalty</td>
<td>200.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burk &amp; Co.</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Holt</td>
<td>26.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. C. Tiller (piano)</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>301.95</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Door Receipts | 387.15

**THE GUARDSMAN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bill Board Advertisement</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banner</td>
<td>11.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessean</td>
<td>11.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs</td>
<td>34.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royalty</td>
<td>150.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Holt</td>
<td>26.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>22.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McEwen’s Laundry</td>
<td>12.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam Bittner</td>
<td>29.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldberg Lumber Co.</td>
<td>19.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery Ward</td>
<td>12.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>334.46</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Door Sales | 123.45

**THE FRONT PAGE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bill Board Adv.</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banner</td>
<td>11.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessean</td>
<td>11.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs</td>
<td>34.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Royalty 150.00
Mr. Holt 21.00
Typing Manuscript 2.00
Sam Bittner 12.50
    Total 246.95

Door Sales 218.02

THE DOLL’S HOUSE

Bill Board Adv.  5.00
Nashville Banner 11.10
Nashville Tennessean 11.10
Programs 34.25
Mr. Holt 26.00
Claude Street (piano) 10.00
Pittsburg Paint & Glass 18.00
Neely – Harwell 7.69
Herbrick & Lawrence 3.00
Sherwin, Williams 4.50
Grimes 4.30
    Total 134.94

Total Receipts from Door Sales 279.00

THE QUEEN’S HUSBAND

Bill Board Advertisement 5.00
Banner 11.10
Tennessean 11.10
Programs 34.25
Royalty 100.00
Mr. Holt 22.00
Draperies from Sears-Roebuck 26.44
Sam Bittner 16.00
Pittsburg Paint & Glass 18.68
Electric Equipment 2.55
Dury 1.15
Weise 1.18
Loveman 1.34
Keith-Simmons .95
J. S. Reeves 6.45
Keith-Simmons 8.35
Miscellaneous 15.52
    Total 282.06
Door Sale Receipts 186.08

HAY FEVER

Royalty 150.00
Manuscripts 6.75
Advertising – Street Car 8.00
Outdoor Advertising 8.00
Tennessean 8.58
Banner 8.58
Holt, Electrician 24.00
Herbrick & Lawrence 4.50
Norvell & Wallace 8.40
Sherwin – Williams 1.50
Keith-Simmons 3.80
Neely Harwell Co. 12.92
Southern [sic] Door & Glass Co. 2.50
Bitner 2.50

LILLIOM

Royalty 200.00
Manuscripts 11.13
Advertising[sic], Street Car 8.00
Tennessean 8.58
Banner 8.58
Holt 24.00
Incidentals 10.00
Southern Door & Glass Co. 2.50
Bittner 2.50
Records .75
Incidentals 2.96
Neely – Harwell Co. 12.81

ON APPROVAL

Royalty 150.00
Manuscripts 3.75
Advertising- Street Car 8.00
Outdoor Advertising 8.00
Tennessean 5.46
Banner 7.02
Holt – Electrician 21.00
Sherwin-Williams 2.20
Incidentals 9.05
Curtains 9.36

WILD DUCK
Royalty  None
Manuscripts  None
Advertising – Street Car  8.00
Advertising – Outdoor  8.00
Tennessean  5.46
Banner  7.02
Holt  25.00
Incidentals  11.85
Miss Lewis  3.35
Cups – for Beer  1.00
Wall Paper  10.00
Beer  1.60

THE RACKET
Royalty[sic]  150.00
Manuscripts  8.77
Manuscripts  3.75
Advertising – Street Car  ----
Advertising – Outdoor  8.00
Tennessean  9.90
Banner  10.52
Holt – Electrician  18.00
Sam Bitner – Policemen Costumes  29.95
Royalty for Murfreesboro  Performance  30.00

CANDIDA
Royalty  200.00
Manuscripts  4.41
Advertising – Outdoor  8.00
Tennessean  9.90
Banner  10.52
Holt – Electrician  15.00
Curtains – Neely-Harwell  21.76

HER HUSBAND’S WIFE
Royalty  75.00
$110.56 was spent on lumber, other stage supplies, etc., and reused in the production of the season’s plays.


Charles S. Mitchell Collection. Vanderbilt University, Nashville.


Delbert Mann Papers. Vanderbilt University, Nashville.


Hindsell, Oliver. *Making the Little Theater Pay*. New York: Samuel French, 1925


John Lark Taylor, “With Hey Ho,” Box 1, John Lark Taylor Papers. Vanderbilt University Special Collections, Nashville.

Joseph E. Wright Papers. Vanderbilt University, Nashville.


Katherine Barnes Collection. Vanderbilt University, Nashville.


Little Theatre of Nashville Guild Papers. Vanderbilt University, Nashville.


Louis Thurston Nicholas Paper. Vanderbilt University, Nashville.


Nashville Little Theatre Minute Book, 1926-1932, Little Theatre of Nashville Guild Papers, Vanderbilt University Special Collections, Nashville.

*The Offstage Noise Nashville Community Playhouse 1935-1940*. Nashville Public Library Special Collections.


VITA

Andrea Jane Anderson was born in North Kansas City, Missouri. She received her education from several private schools and graduated from Kansas City Christian School in Prairie Village, Kansas with honors in 1999. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Dramatic Arts with a double major in Mass Communication and minor in Music in December 2003 from Trevecca Nazarene University, Nashville, Tennessee, where she graduated summa cum laude.

After completing her degree, Ms. Anderson returned to Kansas City and took a position at Pleasant Valley Baptist Church as Administrative Assistant to the Technical Director. For five years, she served as the volunteer drama director for the church’s Acts of Faith Drama Ministry where she wrote, performed, and directed numerous sketches and plays, in addition to planning and teaching training courses for volunteers.

Ms. Anderson began pursuing her Master of Arts in Theatre History at the University of Missouri - Kansas City in the spring of 2010. Upon completion of her degree, she plans to pursue a Ph.D. in either Theatre or Fine Arts and begin a career as an educator in higher education.

Ms. Anderson is a member of the UMKC chapter of the Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi.