1973

A History of Theatre in New Orleans From 1925 to 1935.

Melvin Howard Berry
Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

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A HISTORY OF THEATRE IN NEW ORLEANS
FROM 1925 TO 1935

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

The Department of Speech

by
Melvin Howard Berry
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I  INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II   EDUCATIONAL THEATRE</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School Theatrical Programs</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary School Theatre</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Acting Schools</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College and University Theatre</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III  COMMUNITY THEATRE</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatre Sponsored by Non-Religious Groups</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatre Sponsored by Religious Groups</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV    PROFESSIONAL THEATRE</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaudeville</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimate Theatre</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V     CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

The period 1925 to 1935 was a time of great change in theatre in this country. Dramatics was becoming a legitimate course of study in secondary schools, colleges, and universities. The Little Theatre movement was spreading throughout the country. The "talkies" were threatening the survival of vaudeville and legitimate theatre. The purpose of this study has been to trace in detail the development of these changes in non-professional and professional theatre in New Orleans between 1925 and 1935.

The principal sources of information have been the New Orleans newspapers, secondary school, college and university newspapers, yearbooks, bulletins, and catalogues. Personal interviews, correspondence, and personal scrapbooks also provided detailed information concerning theatre during the period.

This study investigates the theatrical activities in the (1) educational theatre including elementary and secondary schools, colleges and universities, and private acting schools, (2) community theatre sponsored by religious and non-religious groups, and (3) professional theatre including vaudeville, stock companies, and touring shows.

At the beginning of the decade educational institutions at all levels were involved in various forms of theatrical activity. Historical pageants, May Day festivals, and graduation exercises furnished most of the theatrical activity for the elementary school children. Secondary schools presented the annual senior
play throughout the decade, but by 1928 expression courses introduced into the New Orleans high school curriculum caused an increase in the number of theatrical productions. Some of the students active in high school theatre later became leaders in university and community theatre. University groups presented numerous one-act and three-act plays. Near the end of the decade foreign language classes presented plays in Spanish, French, German, and Italian and operettas became a popular form of entertainment. By 1934 most of the universities were incorporating theatre courses in the curriculum or making plans to hire faculty theatre directors. Several expression, elocution, and dramatic art schools provided instruction for persons interested in cultural improvement. One of the schools presented numerous plays and sponsored an annual Play Tournament. This contest encouraged the formation of several theatre groups and brought recognition to local playwrights.

Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré was the only stable community theatre in New Orleans between 1925 and 1935. It was the only theatrical group to perform continuously throughout the decade. Leaders from Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré aided the Jewish little theatre, children's theatre, and other community and educational theatre organizations. Although most of the community theatres in the city did not survive the depression, by 1934 new experimental groups began to emerge.

While theatre was flourishing in the educational institutions and community organizations, professional theatre was dying. Vaudeville, unable to survive the competition of sound films and
the increase in production costs brought about by the stagehands' strike and the economic depression, was no longer part of theatre in New Orleans at the close of the 1933-1934 season. By the end of the 1929-1930 season, the only stock company theatre had closed. In 1935 the only theatre which housed road shows closed permanently forcing only a few large theatre and opera companies to perform in the huge municipal auditorium. By the end of the decade audiences found live theatrical entertainment only in the educational institutions and community theatres.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The ten-year period between 1925 and 1935 marked the beginning and end of a period of change in every facet of theatre in America. Vaudeville was being squeezed out of the theatre by motion pictures. "Talkies" were introduced and seemed to threaten the surviving legitimate theatres. There were few road shows, and many of the stock companies, which were in residence in the large cities, were beginning to fold. "The stock market crash of October, 1929, though its effects on the theatre were not immediately felt, heralded for the theatre not only the end of a period of prosperity but the end of an era during which it had dominated the entertainment field."\(^1\) However, there was an increasing emphasis on and an interest in theatre in the high schools and universities throughout the country. By 1925 dramatics had become an important part of the program in the secondary schools of America.\(^2\) Colleges and universities were beginning to discover that drama must be produced before an audience to be appreciated and that drama and theatre constituted appropriate


subjects for the academic curriculum. Also, the Little Theatre movement was beginning to flourish, for in 1925 the Drama League of America registered 1,900 members, and many cities witnessed the rise of community theatre groups.

New Orleans, a center of theatrical activity in the South, reflected these upheavals in theatre during this period. Yet there has been no study of New Orleans theatre that has traced these changes in non-professional and professional theatre. There have been studies of particular theatres and theatre groups, but these have provided only a limited view of theatre.

The purpose of this study is to trace the development of these changes in theatre in New Orleans from 1925 to 1935, thus producing a comprehensive body of knowledge unfurnished by previous studies. For the first time, both professional and non-professional theatre will be explored in one work, presenting as complete a picture of theatre in New Orleans during this period as possible.

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3Ibid., p. 573.


For this study theatre is divided into: (1) educational, (2) community, and (3) professional theatre. Educational theatre is defined as theatre which has as its primary goal the instruction of students enrolled in an educational institution. Educational theatre in New Orleans will be divided into elementary school programs, secondary school theatre, private acting schools, and college and university theatre. Community theatre is defined as non-professional theatre which is not sponsored by an educational institution but under the auspices of a community organization. Community theatre will embrace theatrical groups sponsored by religious organizations and those operating independently of such organizations. Professional theatre is defined as theatre presented by paid actors for the basic purpose of monetary gain and includes vaudeville performances, touring companies and resident stock companies which have performed during this period in New Orleans.

The data assembled for this study of educational, community, and professional theatre comprises, when possible: (1) the names of the sponsoring organizations, (2) their purposes, directors and leaders, (3) titles and types of plays performed, (4) descriptions of the facilities used for the performances, and (5) critical responses to the productions.

New Orleans newspapers, school newspapers, yearbooks, bulletins, personal interviews, and special library collections furnished the main sources of information for this study. The two major newspaper sources utilized were the New Orleans
Times-Picayune, the oldest present-day newspaper in New Orleans,\(^6\) and the New Orleans Item, the oldest afternoon newspaper in the South.\(^7\) The other afternoon newspaper published during the period was the New Orleans States, owned and published by the Times-Picayune Publishing Company.\(^8\) The contents of this paper were so similar to that of the Times-Picayune that only the Times-Picayune and Item were used. High school newspapers and yearbooks published by Jesuit, Holy Cross, Kohn, Fortier, and Redemptorist, along with newspaper and yearbook publications of Tulane, Loyola, Xavier, and Dillard universities provided much of the information concerning educational theatrical activities. The newspapers furnished the names of the groups, titles of the plays, dates of the performances, locations of the theatres, names of the actors and backstage personnel, and in many instances critical reviews of the plays. Personal interviews with actors, directors, teachers, and founders of various theatrical organizations of the period supplied the much needed point of view toward the material and supplemented the information from the published sources. Those interviewed often gave the researcher access to personal scrapbooks, letters, documents, certificates, and pictures not published in any book or newspaper.


\(^7\)Ibid., p. 92.

\(^8\)Ibid., p. 93.
Special collections found in the archives of the Louisiana State University Library, Baton Rouge; the Howard Tilton Library, Tulane University; the Loyola University Library; the Xavier University Library; the Jesuit High School Library; the Holy Cross High School Library; and the New Orleans Public Library provided access to theatre programs, brochures, commentaries, and letters concerning theatre of this period.

Several isolated studies investigating certain community theatres such as Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré and the New Orleans Group Theatre, professional theatres such as the Tulane and Crescent, and university theatres such as Dillard and Xavier supply some background information for these groups. However, the author has independently researched and reported on each of these theatres and groups in relation to the purpose of this study, resulting in a point of emphasis different from that of the original studies. Elementary and secondary school theatre has not been the subject of past investigations, and for this reason the author has taken time and space to include as much of this new information as possible, particularly in the case of the secondary school theatre.

The three divisions of theatre included in this study are examined in the following order: educational, community, and professional. This organization although chosen, for the most part, based on the potential availability of historical records...
part, arbitrarily, follows what is generally considered an ascending order of competence in theatre. Since many high school, college, and university students upon graduation continued their theatrical activities in community theatre, influencing it to some extent, it is reasonable to report educational theatre before community theatre.

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter I contains an introduction to the study. Chapter II traces theatre on the educational level through an examination of theatrical clubs and activities in the elementary and secondary schools, private acting schools, and colleges and universities. Chapter III examines community theatre sponsored by non-religious and religious groups. Chapter IV traces the demise of professional theatre in New Orleans through an investigation of vaudeville, stock, and touring companies. The final chapter, Chapter V, provides a summary and conclusion to the study of the history of theatre in New Orleans from 1925 to 1935.
CHAPTER II

EDUCATIONAL THEATRE

Educational theatre may be defined as theatre having for its primary goal the instruction of students enrolled in an educational institution. This chapter investigates the theatrical activity in the elementary schools, secondary schools, colleges and universities, and acting schools in New Orleans from 1925 to 1935.

Elementary School Theatrical Programs

Historical pageants, May Day festivals, and graduation exercises furnished most of the theatrical activity for the students enrolled in approximately 100 public, parochial, and private elementary schools in the city during this period.

Historical Pageants

A historical pageant is an elaborate public spectacle depicting the history of a place or event through the actions of costumed characters performing in a procession, masque, or allegorical tableau. Three such pageants involving well over 10,000 elementary and secondary school students were presented during the decade under investigation.

The first historical pageant, "Drama of Independence," was staged at the Loew’s State Theatre on May 28, 1926, as part of the national celebration of the 150th anniversary of the signing
of the Declaration of Independence. This pageant involved forty-five schools and 800 children and included scenes depicting the landing of Columbus, the Pilgrim Fathers, the Spirit of '76, the surrender of Cornwallis, a reception by Martha Washington, and a minuet. Two girls from the Normal School portrayed "Columbia" and "Liberty," while two boys from Easton Boys' High School were soldier and sailor heralds. Thirty other high school boys performed a scene depicting the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Two noted students played an American boy and girl in the final scene showing the coming of the nations of the world to America. The feature of the scene was the ousting of the "Reds." One came in each group and sneaked away as a patriotic poem was recited.\(^1\) The children rehearsed the pageant only once before presenting it at 10:30 in the morning to a crowd of relatives and friends.\(^2\) Tickets were free and obtained from the school board office.\(^3\)

On January 18, 1930, a pageant, involving 2,200 school children and 12,000 spectators, celebrated the opening of the Municipal Auditorium. The Broadcaster, a newspaper published by the Kohn High School students, described this pageant entitled The Glory that is Ours; Our Children, Our State, Our Nation.

\(^1\)Times-Picayune, May 18, 1926. Hereafter referred to as Picayune.

\(^2\)Picayune, May 29, 1926, p. 3.

\(^3\)Picayune, May 18, 1926, p. 5.
A series of eighteen episodes portrayed our glory in our Nation. These episodes took the form of an historical review. Beginning with America as "The Red Man's Continent," the outstanding events of American history were shown, carrying the audience in realistic fashion through the hazardous periods of exploration and colonization, the exciting days of the Revolution, and the years of development that followed to the present day. An inspiring tableau was that of "Flanders Fields." An episode depicting the service of the United States in the World War was presented, with the last tableau representing Liberty being welcomed by the nations and her banishment of the discordant element which seeks to stir up strife and disorder.

An outstanding feature of the pageant was the formation of a great American flag by 800 pupils, dressed to give the effect of a flag and singing "America the Beautiful" and other selections.4

Two years later, 6,000 children saw "An Evening in Mount Vernon" presented at Municipal Auditorium on April 15 and 16, 1932. Proceeds from the pageant went to defray the expenses of sending New Orleans high school bands to Washington where they would take part in the giant bicentennial parade to be reviewed by President Hoover.5

May Day Festivals

May Day festivals also provided a performing outlet for the elementary school children. These festivals were usually outdoor events held on or near the first of May and involving extensive preparation and large numbers of people. The students participated in the crowning of a May king and queen, a May pole dance, a flag presentation, races, games, playlets, folk dances, and

4The Broadcaster, January 20, 1930, p. 1.
5Picayune, April 16, 1932, p. 17.
songs. The parents often helped with money-raising bazaars, and the school board usually provided equipment such as a portable stage, chairs, and outdoor lights.6

The festivals involved many spectators as well as the many active participants. Nine hundred people attended the crowning of the May Day king and queen at McDonogh No. 15 in 1929.7 More than 2,000 people attended "The Robin Hood Pageant" which was part of the May celebration at Jefferson high and grammar schools. The grounds of the school had been completely landscaped to represent Robin Hood's forest.8

The May, 1929, issues of the Picayune list more May Festival activities than those of any of the other years studied during this period. Although elementary schools accounted for most of the festivals, some secondary schools and colleges held similar celebrations. These will be discussed in their respective sections in this study.

Graduation Exercises

New Orleans elementary schools graduated students in January or February and June during this ten-year period. The ceremonies for these graduations usually included songs, recitations, presentations, and sometimes a play or playlet. The

6Personal interview with Blanche Glass, January 6, 1972, New Orleans, Louisiana. Glass taught in the New Orleans elementary schools during this period.

7Picayune, May 6, 1929, p. 3.

8Picayune, May 2, 1928, p. 9.
program presented by the January, 1926, graduation class at W. O. Rogers School was typical of these graduation exercises:

Marching Song
Reading
Class Prophecy
Response
Song "Sunbeams" 8th Grade
Presentation of Class Gift
Acceptance
Presentation of Certificates
Presentation of Class Pins
Essay
Farewell Song - 8th Grade
Play: "The Honor of the Class"
(nine students)9

Lafayette School often made their graduation exercises educational. The June, 1926, graduating class presented a program on the history of New Orleans for their commencement.10

In May, 1929, two schools did an evening of plays in order to raise money. However, there was no indication that these were part of a graduation exercise. On May 18, the St. Vincent de Paul School performed Cinderella's Reception, Spelling Skewl, and Just Plain Dot for the benefit of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception.11 Mount Carmel School at Lakeview presented The Rainbow Smock and The Dream at the Knights of Columbus Hall on May 22 and 23, directed by Olivia H. Lyne who wrote The Dream. It was presented for the benefit of the school building

9Picayune, February 7, 1926, p. 5.
10Picayune, June 5, 1926, p. 20.
11Picayune, May 19, 1929, p. 11.
Secondary School Theatre

In 1900, dramatics was entirely co-curricular in American high schools, although music and art were fully accredited. The plays produced at the time were on the whole lacking in literary merit, and the directors and their coaches were volunteer teachers, enthusiastic but untrained. Amateur theatricals were considered a pleasant and harmless activity with little educational value for either the participants or the audience. By 1925, however, dramatics was an important part of the program in the secondary schools of America.\textsuperscript{13}

The following section of this study will trace the development of the theatrical programs, organizations, and activities in most of the public, Catholic, and private high schools operating in New Orleans from 1925 to 1935.

Secondary School Theatre: Public

By 1925 dramatics had entered the public school curriculum via courses in expression. Expression included two initial courses providing a foundation for advanced courses and training in practical speech for those who would not take the advanced course. Students could elect advanced courses including Public Speaking I and II, debating, and dramatics. The aims of the dramatics course were:

\begin{itemize}
\item Picayune, May 23, 1929, p. 5.
\end{itemize}
to increase the student's ability to analyze, interpret, and assimilate the emotional and intellectual content of drama; to enlarge the capacity for true and vivid emotional reactions which can be expressed through speech and action; to improve the agents of communicating this content in vocal and pantomimic expression; to study representative plays, their theatre and staging theories of dramatic and theatrical art, with practice in stage craft, and incidental presentation of plays.  

These expression courses continued to change and increase, making dramatics a more important part of the program in the secondary schools in New Orleans from 1925 to 1935. In 1928, six white public high schools operating in New Orleans offered a combined total of twenty-six classes in expression. By 1931 the total number of classes had grown to seventy for the nine schools then operating.

These expression classes, some of which had been part of the English course, began to change in content. In 1929, the John McDonogh High School showed the first clear separation of a class as "Speech." The same year Wright High School offered the first clear definition of a course in "Drama," and in 1930 McDonogh offered the first course in the parish public schools

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entitled "Public Speaking." In 1935, Allen, Fortier, and Kohn high schools separated expression from English for the first time. Therefore, expression, public speaking, dramatics, or whatever name it was called, by 1935 had become an important part of the curriculum in the New Orleans white public schools.

New Orleans public high schools between 1925 and 1935 were divided by sex and race. Included in this investigation are white boys' high schools, Easton, Peters, and Fortier; white girls' high schools, Kohn and Allen; and the only black co-educational high school, McDonogh No. 35.

Theatre at Easton

At the beginning of the period, the Easton High Players of Warren Easton Boys' High School were already actively presenting plays under the guidance of two of the most influential figures in New Orleans theatre, Jessie Tharp and Ben Hanley. During the 1926-1927 school year there were thirty-four students active in the organization. That year Tharp directed them in The Whole Town's Talking and later, in Booth Tarkington's Station XYYX, a joint undertaking of the Players and the music department. This program included a quartet, a soloist, dancers, and concert numbers by the band, the orchestra, and the jazz band. The sets for the plays were crude and simple.18

18 Eastonite (yearbook), 1927, p. 131.
The Eagle, the Easton yearbook, gave an account of the entire 1927-1928 season. The Easton High Players opened a "very successful" season in September, 1927, with an "earnest, energetic and willing group of actors and members" with Leon Zainey as president, LeVergne Shaw as vice-president, and Herman S. Cottman as secretary-treasurer. "With its usual ingenuity the Society immediately set to work on workshop plays--one-act dramas of good standing and dramatic offering." The first play of the season was The Sentence of Death, a Spanish tragedy concerning a condemned man and his newly discovered brother. Bernard Abadie, who was "well noted for his constant good work in the theatre line," played the leading role "beautifully" giving "an atmosphere of gruesomeness to the scene that was essential for its quality."

The club remained idle for a few months, until Tharp insisted that something be done.

In due accordance, LeVergne Shaw presented the "Rising of the Moon," an Irish folk play by Lady Gregory. Herman Cottman played the patriot ballad singer at his best but with a failure to achieve the brogue that the part required. The play went well, but Miss Tharp found flaws in the business on stage, which however, cannot be avoided among inexperienced actors and directors.

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19 The Eagle, 1928. This was the new name of the yearbook.

20 Zainey, Shaw, and Cottman all became leaders in the New Orleans Group Theatre, the Stage Arts Guild, and Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré. See appropriate sections.

21 Abadie, too, became a leader in the New Orleans Group Theatre and worked with other community theatres.

22 The Eagle, 1928.
Easton graduated students twice a year, in February and June. According to the yearbook, the February, 1928, graduation play, The Valiant, was "beautifully" and "splendidly" performed by Lesley Staehle, who had also played the lead in Owen Davis' The Haunted House. The yearbook reported that The Haunted House had "all the thrills, chills and spells of a professional production." The cast included Cottman, Abadie, Shaw, Audley Keck,23 and Abe Manheim. Keck's and Manheim's performances in The Haunted House were highly praised. "Audley Keck as the milkman was perfect. He was as dumb as could be and said his lines with a perfect accent and portrayal. Abe Manheim as the brusque, rough and ready police detective seemed to be at his best and his lines were said with a perfect understanding of the part." Most of the all-boy schools used only males in their casts, but Easton had used two "beautiful and proficient actresses" in The Haunted House.

The players won first place in dramatic interpretation at the Baton Rouge Rally that year, performing A Night at an Inn. Abadie, Shaw, and Cottman were in the cast of the winning play.24

When Tharp transferred to Kohn High School in the fall of 1929, Ben Hanley25 became the sponsor of the Easton Players. The

23Keck became founder and first director of the New Orleans Group theatre after working with other theatre groups especially Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré. See appropriate sections.

24The Eagle, 1928.

25Hanley founded and operated the New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art. See New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art section.
school staged four major productions that year. Their first offering was *The Man Without a Country* and the second, *The Nativity*, a medieval miracle play which the yearbook acclaimed one of the most beautiful productions ever given at Easton. Special attention was given to the Old English music and the period lighting, costumes, scenery, and acting. Hanley included some of his female students from his New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art for some of the roles in the productions he directed at Easton.

The Debating Society presented "The Signing of the Declaration of Independence" in tableau form at the opening of the Municipal Auditorium as Easton's third major production. The fourth major theatrical event of the year was a group of one-act plays, which included *The Game of Chess, The Turtle Dove*, and *Allison's Land*. The latter was their winning entry at the 1930 Baton Rouge State Rally.

At various times, the club staged workshop plays for invited audiences. The yearbook stated that year that Zainey directed *The Reckoning*, and Ben Weinstein staged *The Crow's Nest* and *The Grey Overcoat*.

The 1930 *Eagle* explained that the Easton High Players received help for their productions from other related departments in the school. The Art Department's stagecraft class was always

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26 *The Eagle*, 1930.

27 Personal interview with Leon Zainey, January 17, 1972, New Orleans, Louisiana.
ready to help with the stage sets and lighting, and the Music Department provided music for the performances.

Hanley's students repeated two of the previous years' successes during the 1930-1931 school year. They were Allison's Land and The Nativity. The workshop plays continued for invited audiences. Those presented were The Beggar and the King, Good Friday, Fog, and The Glittering Gate. The Art and Music Departments continued to help with the productions. 28

The 1932 Eagle pictured twenty-nine members of the Warren Easton Dramatic Society. This was an increase from the eighteen pictured the year before. Not only did the organization have more members than the year before, but it presented more difficult and challenging productions with larger casts. Hanley used the workshop plays as a testing ground for talent. Among the workshop plays staged were Copy and When the Ship Goes Down.

He also had a procedure for selecting casts to take part in contest plays, and he often had winners. The 1932 Eagle explained his method.

The first major production was "A Night at an Inn" by Lord Dunsany. In order to select a cast to represent Warren Easton in the One Act Play Tournament sponsored by the Alumni Association of the New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art at Dixon Hall on December 5, two casts presented the play. From these two casts a final one was chosen. The play, one of suspense and horror, received first place in the Junior Division of the tournament, defeating the other high schools of the city. As an award, the society received a handsome silver cup.

28 The Eagle, 1931.
The Christmas program that school year included a repeat of the prize-winning performance along with a four-act pantomime *The Doctor of Lonesome Folk*. The same yearbook briefly described the event.

The pantomime was an Old English play and was presented with appropriate music and costumes. Playing to capacity audiences at both day and night performances, the plays were well received and greatly applauded.

Hanley often presented plays of historical value. For the opening of the Washington Bicentennial Celebration, he staged as the third major production an episode from the play *Washington, the Man Who Made Us*, which depicted Washington crossing the Delaware. Among its characters were George Washington, Colonel Alexander Hamilton, Tom Paine, and James Monroe, costumed in the clothes of the period, including knee boots, powdered wigs, and tricorn hats. The sets consisted of three painted drops, those in the foreground representing trees and foliage, while the backdrop showed the Delaware River. Small set pieces used in front of the drops included a small campfire, around which the men stood.

The Debating Society's need for funds gave impetus to the play which was the highlight of the season. Hanley, sponsor of the debate and dramatic clubs, directed the two clubs in a production of the medieval play *Everyman*. The 1932 *Eagle* gave the following account of the production.

Although the society presented three highly successful productions early in the year, it staged one of the most stupendous productions ever attempted at Warren Easton, the old miracle play, "Every Man." [sic] The version used was a special translation from the German of that written by Hugo Von
Hoffmannsthal. The play was presented upon a gigantic scale, with full costume and musical effects. The cast reached about fifty, and the play came up to promises as one of the most beautiful ever presented at the school.

The set for Everyman was modeled on the set used in the annual Salzburg production. A medieval church with two stained glass windows on each side of the entrance dominated the stage. A long table, fashioned after the one used in the Salzburg production, was set upon the church steps for part of the play. Even the costumes, particularly Death's costume, were similar to those used in the European production. Once again, Hanley used students from his dramatic art school for many of the roles.

Students from the expression classes at Easton participated in the plays. In 1928 Easton offered only four classes of expression, but by 1934 the students could choose from fourteen classes in expression, most of them taught by Hanley. Although from 1931 to 1933 he was assisted by E. C. Carver and in 1934 and 1935 by J. D. Bartlow, there is no indication that they helped with the productions.

During this decade, Tharp and particularly Hanley trained students and inspired them to continue their work in theatre. A few years later Easton students of this period not only worked with other community theatre organizations, but Keck, Zainey, McHugh, Manheim, Abadie, Cottman, and Shaw formed the most experimental organization of the decade, the New Orleans Group Theatre.


30 Ibid., pp. 9, 11, and 13. Each page accounted for each of the three seasons.
The challenges of difficult and thought-provoking plays and Hanley, himself might well have been the stimulus of this group.

**Peters' Dramatic Department**

Samuel J. Peters Boys' High School of Commerce trained boys for a career in business by teaching them courses in bookkeeping, stenography, shorthand, typing, advertising, salesmanship, commercial arithmetic, civics, industrial history, and commercial law. Although in 1925 the school did not offer any courses in speech or dramas, there was an active Literary and Debating Society whose debate activities were widely reported in the yearbook. There was no indication of any dramatic activity.\(^{31}\)

However, by September, 1926, Commercial High School, as Peters was sometimes called, added an expression course to the curriculum. This course and English were now considered to be the most important elements of training for any boy entering the business world.\(^{32}\)

In the 1928 volume of *High Ways*, Professor James A. Buisson wrote the objectives and a description of the course in expression.

> The boys realize that, in order to be successful in the business world, they must be able to express themselves easily and forcibly. It is with this fact uppermost in mind that Expression is being taught.

> The objectives of the course, which covers a period of years, may be briefly explained in the following divisions:

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\(^{31}\) *High Ways*, 1926. This was a combination yearbook and catalogue.

\(^{32}\) *High Ways*, 1927.
I. Fundamentals of speech; consisting of tone and word production and the relation of the speaker to the audience.

II. Speech composition; with emphasis on sentence structure and vocabulary building.

III. Platform speaking; the construction of short talks and speeches.

IV. Interpretation; developing observation and imagination in speech making.

V. Group activities; such as informal discussions and business interviews.

VI. Dramatics; drama appreciation.

Professor Buisson further explained the objectives in the following narrative taken from the 1928 volume of *High Ways*:

The sum total of all the Expression work is to develop in the boy the ability and the desire to say what he has to say in such a manner that he will command the attention of his hearers; to overcome that timidity so often found in the young man of school age—which, if allowed to grow, will, in all probability, prove a serious handicap in later life. Stress is laid, throughout the course, on the development of clear articulation; and much effort is given to make the student as natural when addressing a group in the class-room as he is when on the ball field. The student of Expression, or Public Speaking, is constantly reminded that he is the future business man, and that if he can express himself in a clear and concise manner, he has an infinitely greater chance to succeed—other things being equal—than his less fortunate confreere, who is easily overcome by timidity and finds it a difficult task to be his natural self when in the company of strangers.

The attempt to fulfill the sixth objective, dramatics and drama appreciation, possibly resulted in an interest in drama. For the first time the yearbook reported the dramatic activities of two homerooms, a parody on "Mark Antony's Oration over the Body of Caesar" and a skit on "How Not to Get a Job."

By 1930, Professor Edward R. Gschwind had developed a Dramatic Department at Peters. He taught six classes in expression.\(^{33}\)

\(^{33}\)Brooks, p. 8.
and directed his students in plays for various occasions. That year the S. J. Peters High School Dramatic Department entered the one-act play tournament sponsored by the New Orleans College of Oratory and won first place in the Junior Division. In this contest, Peters benefitted from Hanley's work at Easton, for two of his former students, Cottman and Shaw, co-authored the winning play entitled *Submerged*.

Gschwind's students presented one-act plays occasionally for special benefits at social functions, staged plays at graduation, and worked with the band director in presenting dramatic recitations along with the Thanksgiving and Christmas musical programs. Sometimes the students enacted plays written by fellow classmates.

From the simple outline of objectives for an expression course, Gschwind developed a Dramatic Department at Peters capable of presenting contest winning plays, graduation plays, and one-act plays. More important perhaps, his students introduced Cottman and Shaw's play *Submerged*.

**Theatre at Fortier**

Fortier Boys' High School opened in 1930. Its Expression Department was headed by Wilma Lilburn and Joe Abraham. Abraham

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34 *Picayune*, December 5, 1930, p. 5.

35 *Submerged* is still a popular royalty contest play published by Samuel French Incorporated.

36 *High Ways*, 1931.
participated in dramatics at Holy Cross and upon graduating attended Loyola, where he was a leader in dramatic activities. He directed the plays at Fortier, while Lilburn, whose interest was mainly vaudeville shows and minstrels, directed the various variety shows presented at the school during this five-year period.

The annual one-act play tournament sponsored by the New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art gave impetus to the dramatic activities at Fortier. The first play ever produced at the school was *A Game of Checkers*, a three-scene mountaineer play presented at Dixon Hall on the Newcomb campus on December 5, 1931, as Fortier's entry in the annual one-act play tournament.³⁷

In March, 1932, Abraham and Lilburn announced plans for staging plays and a vaudeville show at McMain Auditorium in order to raise money for sending expression department entries to state rally.³⁸ The program was the first Fortier Campus Night in the school's history and the attendance was large.³⁹ Abraham directed the plays, Lilburn attended to the vaudeville acts and musical numbers, and Leonard Denena directed the band. The Fortier school paper reported the following order to the show:

The festivities were opened by the Fortier orchestra which played the selection, "Student Prince". A quartet consisting of H. Janssen, W. Janssen,

³⁷*Silver and Blue*, November 6, 1931, p. 3. This was a newspaper published by the Fortier students.

³⁸*Silver and Blue*, March 18, 1932, p. 2.

³⁹*Silver and Blue*, April 27, 1932, p. 1.
D. Arroya, and F. Rosato, next sang a group of popular songs.

Grant Hastings, a talented Fortier student, then danced what is referred to as the "Novelty Dance".

Then followed the tragedy, "A Game of Checkers." The members of the cast were: Charles Donovan, Ben Welborn, James J. Jaubert . . . "Dance Originality" was next, again featuring Grant Hastings. "A few minutes with Kyle Eddy" was enjoyed immensely.

William O'Regan then sang some of the latest song hits. "Introducing" was next presented with Richard Bond and William Rauch. French Pruitt then delivered "Jonah and the Whale."

"A Man Can Only Do His Best," a comedy was presented by the dramatic society. The members of the cast were: Vernon Payne, William Janssen, Leonard Rosenson, Alden Baker, Robert McGivney, Herman Janssen and James Jaubert.40

That year the play A Man Can Only Do His Best, was Fortier's entry in the State Rally in Baton Rouge.41

In December, 1932, there was much interest in dramatic activities on the part of the students at Fortier. When Wilburn, director of the school's dramatic group, had tryouts for The King's English, a comedy of the South Sea Isles and cannibalism, forty-five boys attended the tryouts.42 It was presented twice during the day for the students and once at night for the parents.43

One year after the vaudeville show, Lilburn and her students presented the "Greater Fortier Minstrel Show" at McMain

40Silver and Blue, April 27, 1932, p. 1.
41Ibid.
42Silver and Blue, December 2, 1932, p. 3.
43Silver and Blue, January 13, 1933.
Auditorium for the benefit of the school library and the school. Miss Lilburn worked out an extensive program of jokes, recitals, song and dance numbers, and other specialty features, such as a xylophone solo, a song, a tap dancing number and a quartet. The show included the traditional interlocutor and four end men. The minstrel show was postponed from March 14 to March 24 because of a lack of finances among the students. This financial plight was possibly an effect of the depression.

The March 24, 1933, edition of the school paper noted that for the first time in a great number of years an extract of the play Circe and Ulysses would be presented in Latin. Dr. Lawrence Zarrilli, the Latin teacher, was directing the Thespians of the Latin Club to present the ancient drama at a future meeting of the members.

Since Fortier opened in 1930 and the first play was in 1931, the school's history in the decade of this study is a short one. Although the school newspaper reported a few plays, the students performed more vaudeville and minstrel shows than the other schools. Contests and rallies helped promote theatrical activity at the school.

Besides the theatrical activities at three of the boys' white high schools, there were dramatic activities at two white girls' high schools, Kohn and Allen.

Silver and Blue, March 24, 1933.
Dramatic Activities at Kohn

Joseph Kohn High School of Commerce for Girls provided commercial training for girls as Samuel J. Peters High School of Commerce did for boys and sometimes held combined graduation exercises. At Kohn senior graduation plays and class one-act plays and playlets provided a modest amount of dramatic activity at the beginning of the decade that led into prolific production of plays by the 1935-1936 school year.

By 1926 Kohn had established the senior class play as a tradition. The bi-annual graduations provided an opportunity for seniors to present two full length plays each year. The plays were performed a week or two before graduation ceremonies, at Wright High School Auditorium, since Kohn was without facilities for such events.

During the 1925-1926 school year, Augusta Conrad directed the January graduating class in The Women's Town and the May seniors in A Corner of the Campus. The only other dramatic activities reported that year were a short comedy, The Weak End, presented for the Parents' Club, and a playlet, Bound or Free, given for the reception of new freshmen.
The following year, Adella Brunet Brown directed the seniors in a three-act comedy called *The Charm School*. The play included several male characters played by girls.\(^{49}\) Throughout this decade, girls played boys roles at Kohn. When there were not enough roles to include the entire senior class, groups of student extras came on as "visitors" or "the chorus" in the spring production, *The Senior*.\(^{50}\) This practice guaranteed all seniors roles in their play.

Sometimes the students had an opportunity to see a professional production. One afternoon, a theatre party of upperclassmen and thirty freshmen saw Robert Mantell in *As You Like It* at the Tulane theatre. One student said, "I enjoyed the performance very much, but the part I particularly like was the ending."\(^{51}\)

Mazie Adkins\(^{52}\) taught expression at Kohn and directed the senior class play. Every student at Kohn was required to schedule at least one year of expression. Classes met twice a week for forty-minute periods, and the students enrolled in the courses were required to participate in "Morning Exercises" or the class play. Adkins chose Expression II students to understudy the roles in the January, 1928, class play, *The Happy Prince* and in the


\(^{50}\) *The Broadcaster*, June 8, 1927, p. 1.

\(^{51}\) *The Broadcaster*, April 4, 1927, p. 5.

\(^{52}\) Adkins later directed the dramatic activities at Allen High School and for the American Association of University Women. See appropriate sections.
June production **Abbu San of Old Japan**.53

The English club at Kohn was active in presenting plays for programs and assemblies. One such program, typical of some of the "educational" playlets at some of the high schools, was described in the March, 1928 issue of *The Broadcaster*.

On Tuesday, March 20, the English Club presented **THE STAMP ACT MEETINGS**, "a dramatic episode," showing the indignation of the colonies over the passage and attempts at enforcement of the Stamp Act, the joint opposition of the colonies and the consequent repeal of the objectionable act by the British Parliament.

The purpose of the presentation was twofold: to have a patriotic review of an important American historical event and to give a demonstration, through the three meetings presented, of important details of parliamentary practice, that is of the way meetings of organizations should be conducted.

The costumes of the girls were of Colonial style, in accordance with the time, 1765-6. The play was exceedingly well acted, and reflected great credit on the English Club and on Miss Adkins, Miss Hinrichs, and Miss Scruggs, who cooperated in coaching the play.

In 1929 Kohn High School combined the graduation exercises and the class play staging both events at the Tulane theatre.

The graduation program was shortened and three one-act plays were performed instead of the usual three-act play. The June, 1929, *Broadcaster* listed the combined programs.

**PROGRAM OF COMBINED GRADUATION EXERCISES AND CLASS PLAY**

**TULANE THEATRE, JUNE 6, 1929**

Entrance March.................Wright High Violin Club
Invocation....................Rev. E. G. Kuenzler
Chorus--"Lift Up Your Heads, O Ye Gates"....Frank Lynes
Award of Diplomas and Certificates....Hon. Edmund J. Garland, Member of Orleans Parish School Board
Award of Alfred Danziger Loving Cup to Annabeth Gulledge
Chorus--"Star Spangled Banner"....Francis Scott Key

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Three One-Act Plays Presented by the Graduates

**Twelve Good Men and True**
Ethel Springer Breene

**The Price of Coal**
Harold Brighouse

**The Devine Lady**
George Ade

Jessie Tharp, former drama director at Easton, transferred to Kohn in 1929 and almost immediately initiated a dramatic club. The club combined with the already existing English Club and in October, 1929, the English-Drama Club rehearsed *Love Is Like That*. This year marked the beginning of a series of class sponsored programs in the school's assembly hall. Some programs included short plays such as *All on a Summer's Day*. However, Misses Hinricks and Morel produced a three-act comedy, *All on Account of Polly*.

Kohn students, along with over 2,000 other New Orleans high school students, participated in the patriotic pageant, "The Glory that is Ours; Our Children, Our State, Our Nation," which celebrated the opening of the Municipal Auditorium on January 18, 1930. Each school was assigned to perform various parts of the pageant.

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54 *The Broadcaster*, November 18, 1929, p. 4.

55 *The Broadcaster*, June 2, 1930, p. 4.
Kohn was assigned participation in "The Living Flag," full charge of a tableau and chanting of "Flanders Fields," and the making of athletic "pyramids."

Miss Tharp's dramatic class was assigned "Flanders Fields" because of its advanced work in expression. To Miss Hall's class were assigned the "pyramids," and from the school at large girls were chosen for "The Living Flag."56

Although the three high schools of commerce, Peters, Allen, and Kohn, combined graduating exercises at Jerusalem Temple on January 27, 1931, the senior play remained a tradition at Kohn. Three days before the ceremony, the graduation class presented His Family at the Easton High School Auditorium, with girls appearing in male roles.57

Again in June the schools consolidated the graduation program, and Kohn staged its senior play, Gypsy Blood, a few days earlier in Warren Easton High School Auditorium.58 The only other play reported that year was the annual play by the English Club entitled At The End of the Rainbow.59

During the 1931-1932 session, Beulah Morel taught three classes of Expression I, two classes of Expression II, and one class of Expression III at Kohn offering for the first time a broad range of theatre and speech in the New Orleans Public School System.60 During the next academic year, the number of

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56 *The Broadcaster*, January 20, 1930, p. 5.
57 *The Broadcaster*, January 27, 1931, p. 5.
58 *The Broadcaster*, June 3, 1931, p. 5.
59 *The Broadcaster*, May 18, 1931, p. 6.
60 *Brooks*, p. 9.
offerings dropped to three.61

The following year Morel taught four classes of expression62 and made plans for her dramatic classes to entertain with three student-directed one-act plays which were to be judged in a contest.63 In April, she directed a group of her students in The King's English.

Although there was no reported senior class play that year, clubs performed various plays. The English Club Players presented three comedies directed by Adella B. Brown to the students at three o'clock in the afternoon.64 The Post Graduate Club presented Barrie's The Twelve Pound Look, directed by Mr. Lawes, faculty advisor to the club. The Glee Club performed on the same program.65

During the 1934-1935 school year Kohn produced more plays than any other school in the city. What had started as a contest in Morel's dramatic classes in 1933 and 1934 became in 1934 and 1935, a school-wide one-act play contest sponsored by the Dramatics Department. Classes presented a play every Tuesday. At the end of the season, the student body voted for the plays and players they liked best. A variety of comedy, mystery, farce,

61Ibid., p. 11.
62Ibid., p. 13.
63The Broadcaster, April 27, 1934, p. 1.
64The Broadcaster, January 12, 1934, p. 1.
and even poetic presentations were in the offering. Some of the plays presented during the contest period included *Pearls; Phoebe Louise; Mr. Thorpe's Conversion; Brothers at Arms; Happy Returns; Play Room; Mrs. Pat and the Law; Miss Burnett Puts One Over; The Last Straw; Gas, Air, and Oil; All Gummied Up; The Eve in Evelyn; Mrs. Sullivan's Seance; Fingerbowls and Araminta; and Wurzel-Flummery.*

This round of plays culminated in a Dramatics Night Program in which the four plays voted best by the students were performed. Morel co-ordinated and directed the composite event.

Still other plays were given during the year at Kohn by the English Club and some of the classes. In December, the English Club presented a three-act play entitled *The Quest.* In May, the school presented two student-directed one-act comedies, *An Uninvited Member and Who's the Lucky Man?* The senior class presented a two-act comedy, *George Sleuthfoot's Career,* written by Sarah Ann Crumhorn, a senior student. Mrs. Brown's Sophomore B's performed *A Deferred Proposal,* and the Freshmen B-3 class staged *Borrowed Babies.* All of these plays were daytime productions at school assemblies.

*Vocational Guidance Through the Ages,* a pageant involving over 2,000 pupils from the New Orleans public schools, was presented in Municipal Auditorium in December, 1934. Its purpose was to acquaint the public with the aims of vocational guidance

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training and to show the progress of this movement through the ages.

Occupations from the time of the caveman to today were depicted. Throughout the program there were dances symbolic of each age represented.

Miss Jeannette David, vocational guidance counselor of Kohn and Allen schools, wrote the pageant, and it was directed by Mr. Ben C. Hanley of Warren Easton.

Eighteen girls from Joseph Kohn, dressed in the costume of 1908, danced the Caprice. This dance was under the direction of Miss Verna C. Allain68

During the decade under the instruction of Adkins, Tharp, and Morel, Kohn broadened its offerings in expression, developed a play contest which stimulated the performance of more one-act plays than had ever been presented in one year at the school. Although the plays were of little literary or historical value, they served to give the students, particularly those in expression classes, an opportunity to perform.

Theatre Programs at Allen High School

Henry W. Allen High School of Commerce for Girls opened in 1929 in order to relieve the overflow of students at Kohn, the sister school. Miss Perry, who had been principal of Kohn, became principal of the new school bringing with her some of the best teachers from Kohn. At the new school, an auditorium, the hand-picked teachers, and better students all contributed to a better and more active theatre program than had existed at

68 The Broadcaster, December 21, 1934, p. 3.
In contrast, Kohn had to rely on the Easton auditorium, and later, on the Allen facilities for their productions. Being forced to use another school's stage and props made it necessary for the students to "trek several blocks for rehearsal. The students were a little harder to train." 70

Allen students raised money for painted drops and curtains to improve the auditorium. The school board carpenters helped to build the sets for the stage, and the students used the proceeds from the plays to buy a circular backdrop and velvet curtains. 71

Mazie Adkins Guidry explained in her October, 1972, letter to the author that since each home room was responsible for one "morning exercise" program a semester, in a sense all of the faculty was involved in the dramatic activities of the school. Even the secretary and the gym teacher helped stage dances and assisted "behind the scenes." Guidry was well qualified for her job as director of the larger productions and graduation plays. She had earned a Bachelor of Oratory from the New Orleans College of Oratory in 1920, a teacher's certificate in

69 Information in a letter to the author from Mazie Adkins Guidry, August 30, 1972. She taught at Kohn from 1923-1928 and then at Allen from 1929, at least to 1935.

70 Information in a letter to the author from Mazie Adkins Guidry, October 3, 1972.

71 Guidry correspondence, August 30, 1972.
1921, a degree from the New Orleans Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Art, a teacher's certificate from the New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art, a Bachelor of Arts in Education, and a Master of Science in Zoology and Biological Chemistry from Tulane University.

She explained the theatrical programs at the school.

I chose to present plays and develop meaningful and interesting graduation and weekly morning exercises as a show place for my pupils to give them confidence in Public Speaking. This was a commercial school and girls who could not afford or were not equipped to go to college were taught shorthand, typing, bookkeeping, business English, office machines, etc. Mine was the only cultural course per se, and the girls and I loved every minute of it. 72

Sometimes Guidry wrote special historical plays for presentation, such as The Life of Henry W. Allen and The Story of John McDonogh. 73

A new "one year program" at Allen brought in better students, some of whom were graduates of academic high schools, some even of colleges, who came for a year's free commercial training, which was eagerly accepted in the depression. This program brought students with more maturity, more educational background, and often better financial advantages. They participated in and greatly enhanced the dramatic program.

In the commercial high schools speech and appearance was as important as speed and accuracy in shorthand, bookkeeping, and typing. Stage appearances gave the Allen girls confidence and a

72 Guidry correspondence, October 3, 1972.

73 Guidry correspondence, August 30, 1972.
great deal of joy. Very few, if any, of the girls became interested in theatre professionally. Guidry said:

They were trained for office work, and when they did not achieve careers there, they married and had families. Dramatics were a pleasant interlude in a very exacting training. Also, since this was the depression period, most of the girls were from families who could not afford a college education, and the abiding purpose of their education was to earn a living.74

McDonogh No. 35 High School Dramatics

During most of the period between 1925 and 1935, McDonogh No. 35 High School for Negro boys and girls regularly presented two plays per year. By 1930 operettas were included as part of the theatrical activities. Ida Maxwell, who taught classes in Oral English, Plays, and Games, directed the school play in January and the senior class play in the spring. The school play was for all interested students from her classes, and the class play was for the graduates. In 1928, she directed Dr. Jim as the school play in January, and for the senior presentation chose a comedy called An Early Bird.75 The following year, the school's name was changed to McDonogh No. 35 and Normal School and, though Ida Maxwell was still there, Oralee M. Barranco now taught Oral English, Plays, and Games. The school play in December was called Sunshine, and Barranco directed the spring play, Cyclone Sally. During this year the drama club formed.76

74Guidry correspondence, October 3, 1972.
75The Roneagle, 1928, p. 75.
76The Roneagle, 1929, p. 95.
In 1930 the school presented *The Ghost Walks* in the Pythian Temple downtown, since there was no auditorium or theatre in the school. The second term school play was *Sonny Jane.* In 1931 Maxwell directed *Daddy Long Legs* as the winter play and for the spring presented *Ducks,* a western folk play.

The 1931-1932 school year contained many theatrical events. In December, Maxwell, who was again teaching Oral English, directed *Pygmalion and Galatea,* and the next month, Cecilia Thomas, who was teaching a new course called Speech Arts, directed *Sunshine Lane.* There were also two plays in the spring. The seniors performed *Merry Madness,* and a group calling themselves the Thirty-five Players performed *His Best Investment,* a three-act comedy, at the Pythian Temple.

Unfortunately, in 1932 the School Board no longer offered Oral English, Plays, Games, or Speech Arts at McDonogh, and plays were performed less regularly. However, interest in the operettas developed. In 1930, the music department presented the first operetta, *Bells of Barcelona.* During the second term the group became even more ambitious and performed the *Mikado* under the direction of Osceola Blanchet, a music and science teacher.

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77 Personal interview with Hilda Armstrong, February 28, 1973, New Orleans, Louisiana. Armstrong is presently librarian at McDonogh 35. Her brother attended the school in the early 1930's.

78 *The Roneagle,* 1930, p. 122-123.


81 *The Roneagle,* 1930, p. 127.
The next year they presented another Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, *Pirates of Penzance*, and the following year another, *H. M. S. Pinafore*. All were successfully directed by Blanchet, who had developed interest in operetta at this Negro high school. Some of the students continued their studies at Xavier University, where their interest helped to develop opera performances and ultimately an opera division in the music department.  

These students were exposed to better quality plays and musicals than most of the other public high school students in the city with the exception of those at Easton.

Secondary School Theatre: Catholic

Between 1925 and 1935, there were two types of Catholic high schools operating in New Orleans, parochial and private. Parochial schools were operated by religious organizations and supported by tuition and the church parish in which the school was located. The enrollment was generally restricted to those Catholic children living within the boundaries of the parish. The private Catholic high schools were operated, supported and owned by religious organizations, and there were no enrollment restrictions. Tuition was much higher than that of the parochial schools, but there were well-qualified teachers, often small enrollments, and some of the schools boarded students.

The following section includes a study of Jesuit, Holy Cross, St. Mary's Dominican, Ursuline, Redemptorist, and Xavier high

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82 Armstrong interview.
schools.

Plays at Jesuit

Jesuit High School was, and still is, a Catholic boys' school operated by the Jesuits, a Roman Catholic order of men called the Society of Jesus. From 1847 to 1925, the school was located on Baronne Street. In the beginning of the 1926 school term, the school moved into its present location at 4533 South Carrollton Avenue. There they continued their tradition of presenting an annual spring play which had begun as early as 1900. The students usually presented a three-act play with the graduation exercises and occasional one-act plays throughout the year.

During the 1927-1928 school year, the students performed two one-act plays, The Hand of Siva and The Three Wishes at the Knights of Columbus Hall,\(^83\) and a play entitled The Other Mr. Smith as part of their graduation exercises at the Tulane theatre.\(^84\)

In 1928, the Philalectic Society, composed of students interested in debate and dramatics, broadened its horizons.

Throughout the year 1928-1929, the Philaleetic Society under the direction of its new Moderator, Mr. J. H. McAtee, S. J., has pursued a policy extending its field of activities and varying its merits. Debating was not neglected, but the Society gave a part of its attention to dramatics, open-house discussions, papers and addresses, and other literary pursuits of a public nature.

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\(^{83}\)The Blue Jay, February 8, 1928, p. 6.

The Annual Commencement play always produced by the Philelectic Society, is now in preparation. From present indications, it is due to equal perhaps excel, the high standards set by previous performances.\textsuperscript{85}

The Philelectic Society's commencement exercise play that year was \textit{The Gay Masquerade}.\textsuperscript{86}

During the next academic year, underclassmen's interest in drama grew. Their Junior Philelectic Society gave them an opportunity to participate in dramatic activities formerly restricted to upperclassmen. Eventually the Junior Philelectic joined the senior group.

Until 1930 the annual play was performed in conjunction with the graduation exercises. However, the excessive length of the program, stricter union regulations for downtown theatres and stricter rent restrictions, especially at the Tulane theatre, led to a discontinuance of the custom. That year the seniors presented \textit{Welcome Stranger} at the St. Charles theatre instead of the Tulane theatre, where they usually held their performances.\textsuperscript{87}

The underclassmen had become part of the Philelectic Society by 1931, for the organization's production of \textit{Cappy Ricks} used two sophomores and seven seniors. The ensuing year, the club performed \textit{The First Night}, a melodrama in three acts with twenty-seven in the cast, along with musical selections played

\textsuperscript{85}\textit{The Blue Jay} (yearbook), 1929, p. 63.

\textsuperscript{86}\textit{The Blue Jay}, May 31, 1929.

\textsuperscript{87}Personal interview with Rev. Michael B. Majoli, May 10, 1972, New Orleans, Louisiana. Majoli graduated from Jesuit high school in 1933.
by the school band. 88

The Philelectic Society performed The Yellow Shadow, as their annual play at the Tulane theatre on May 5, 1933. Graduation was held in Municipal Auditorium. 89 The next year, Reverend Francis A. Fox directed The Jolly Roger with a cast including six juniors and six seniors. 90 For the 1935 spring play the club chose What a Night, a mystery-tragedy in three acts. Included on the program were several musical numbers. 91 The graduation play for 1936 was a farce-comedy entitled Come Seven performed at the Tulane theatre under the direction of Reverend R. A. Fox, S. J., and John A. Zimmerman. The selection of this play was significant in that it was the first to contain female roles, played by the boys. 92

During this decade, the Jesuit newspaper reported an occasional one-act play. Mr. Kearns directed a one-act play called The Crash of Airmail. 93 Jesuit's performance of the one-act play The Other Side won first place at State Rally in Baton Rouge in the spring of 1936. 94

88 Jesuit High School Catalogue, 1931-1932, p. 86.
89 Ibid., p. 85.
94 The Blue Jay, May 15, 1936.
At Jesuit, the effects of the depression on attendance at the plays were evident in 1933. The May issue of the Blue Jay indicated that the club was trying especially hard to make this year's play a financial success. Ticket-selling contests were held for each room, but it was predicted that financial success would be difficult because of the depression. Tickets were thirty-five cents for the orchestra and twenty-five cents for the balcony.95

Each year, Jesuit held the Lily Whitaker Memorial Annual Gold Medal Contest in Elocution, which served to bring together some of the drama teachers from the Catholic high schools in the city. In the 1933 contest, the judges included Brother Leonard, C.S.C., Director of Dramatics, Holy Cross; Brother Finian, S.F.S.C., Professor of Public Speaking, St. Aloysius College; and Mr. J. W. Sewell, A. B., Head of the English Department of Isidore Newman School.96

The dramatic activities at Jesuit High School during this decade seemed to be inspired more by tradition than youthful enthusiasm and interest, with the senior class forming the basic theatrical impetus.

Theatre at Holy Cross College

Holy Cross College is a Catholic boys' preparatory school operated by the Holy Cross Brothers. During the decade under investigation, this school, like Jesuit, was respected as a fine

95Blue Jay, May 4, 1933, p. 1.

institution of learning. Holy Cross was a boarding school which attracted boys from other parts of the United States and from Latin American countries as well as from the New Orleans area. Many of these students participated in the three-act and one-act plays, skits, playlets, minstrel and variety shows performed during this period.97

The 1927 Blue and Gold, the Holy Cross yearbook, contained the earliest information relating to the dramatic activities at the school. This was evidently a year of growth, for the yearbook stated that during 1926 interest in dramatics had become more intense. A greater number of students were given the opportunity to show their talent on the stage. The Dramatic Club listed fifty members, among whom was Leo C. Zinser,98 one of the leaders in the group.

The two principal dramatic activities of the year were productions of Red Jackson's farcical comedy, A Full House, and Owen Davis' mystery-farce, The Haunted House. Unlike the Jesuit High School drama group, this club did not hesitate to choose plays with female roles and use boys to fill them. The 1927 yearbook commented on the female roles in A Full House.

The affair was strictly "high class" and not a few of the friends of the school are still dubious as to the amateur standing of the actors, and especially

97Personal interview with Leo Zinser, March 7, 1973. Zinser was a student at Holy Cross from 1925-1929.

98Zinser later became active in the Loyola Thespians, Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carre, The New Orleans Group Theatre, and in 1950 was the first chairman of the Department of Speech at Loyola. See Loyola section.
of those actors who took female roles. . . . Herman Meyer, as Vera Vernon, the designing chorus girl, proved to be one of the greatest successes of recent years on the local stage. The audience was unmistakable in its appreciation.

It has come to our attention that a bouquet intended for Miss Winnecker (Murray Antoine) was lost in transit. We make note of the fact here in order to show what an appeal this character exercised in the night's entertainment. Antoine's re-creation of the character furnished some excruciating moments.

Lawrence Hamilton, as Susie from Sioux City, and Anthony Mangiaracina, as the English butler, were the favorites of the evening.

Both plays were directed by Brother Pius. Proceeds from The Haunted House helped defray the expenses of publishing the yearbook.

Another highlight of the year was a vaudeville show. Some of the members of the drama club performed a burlesque of Romeo and Juliet. The yearbook said that "the second skit was a negro wedding with Albert Roy Bougere officiating. The rites were preceded by a solemn procession through the auditorium to the strains of the 'Bridal Chorus' from 'Lohengrin'. Directly the company arrived up on the stage things---well---continued."99 The third part included "the revue type," called "The Evolution of the Dance."100 The Glee Club sang and the Knights of Columbus orchestra played during the intermissions.

The following year was not quite as filled with activities by the Dramatic Club. This note appeared in the yearbook under the heading "Dramatics":

99Blue and Gold, 1927, p. 53.

100Ibid.
For many years Holy Cross College has been noted for its dramatic productions. This year we have not had so many plays, but we have given several entertainments with an aim to develop latent talent for the drama which is to be given in May, as well as for the ones of next year. We have concentrated our efforts on younger men with the hope of being able to put on several first class performances next year.

Brother Leonard was given charge of Dramatics this year, and at once turned his attention toward a celebration for St. Joseph's Day. That program was given on Sunday night, March 18. . . .

The program included a one-act comedy, *When Doctors Fail*, followed later by a Minstrel Show, "Hamilton's Dixieland Revue." Junior members of the club presented many specialties in the course of the year. The important play of the year was *The Hottentot* presented Thursday, May 10 with one of the largest crowds that entered Holy Cross Auditorium.102

The *Holy Cross Bulletin* summarized the 1928-1929 season with the following comments:

The Holy Cross stage has been working overtime the last quarter providing an array of entertainments that have been without equal in their number, variety and sources. Movies, vaudevil /sic/ a recital and several three-act plays supplied almost weekly entertainment for a large number of patrons that have found decided pleasure in frequenting the auditorium.103

The two dramatic events of the 1931-1932 school year were the Interscholastic Play Contest held in March and a three-act play. The first Interscholastic Play Contest was held at Jerusalem Temple on March 19. The Holy Cross Players entered a

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101 *Blue and Gold*, 1928, p. 67.
103 *Holy Cross Bulletin*, June, 1929, p. 16.
one-act drama, Out of the River, directed by Brother Leonard. Robert Lacey, president of the dramatic club, played the leading role, and boys took the girls' parts. The Love Theorist, a three-act play, also directed by Brother Leonard, was presented April 13 for the benefit of the Holy Cross Missions. Robert Lacey again played the lead. The students performed The Love Theorist again later at Immaculate Conception School in Marrero, Louisiana, and again on May 20 at Holy Angels Academy.

The 1932-1933 school year brought out a large number of people interested in dramatics. The Holy Cross Players met in order to organize the dramatic club once again. Attendance at the meeting was marked by the presence of a large number of upper-classmen and particularly members of the football squad. The important play of the year was Journey's End, presented at Holy Cross Auditorium on February 12 and 14. The April, 1933 edition of The Bulletin described the audience's reaction.

Educators, business men, army officers, ex-service men, dramatic critics and hundreds of other men, women, and children sat tensely interested through the three hours during which the play ran: a most positive indication of its complete success.

Also in the audience was Professor Edward R. Gschwind, director

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104Lacey graduated from Holy Cross in 1933. He went to Loyola where he was active with the Loyola Thespians. See Loyola section.


106The Bulletin, June, 1932, p. 28.

of dramatics at Samuel J. Peters' High School of Commerce, who later wrote a letter to Brother Gerard, president of Holy Cross College, praising the cast and Brother Leonard, the director, for their fine production. The Holy Cross Orchestra under the direction of Charles Wagner played interpretive war-time numbers during the intermissions, and the uniformed house-staff under the supervision of Brother Florence, who acted as house-manager, all added to the success of the evening.

*Journey's End* was staged at the Holy Cross Auditorium. The proscenium opening of the stage was 30 X 15 feet and the stage proper was 70 X 30 feet. It was equipped with four complete sets of scenery, a cyclorama, several drops and "all the necessary lighting effects."\(^\text{108}\)

The February, 1933 issue of *The Bulletin* contained a picture of the set for *Journey's End* and the principal actors.\(^\text{109}\) The set depicted an English World War I trench of interesting design probably made of wood. Through an opening or door in the rear could be seen the battlefield, which was probably a painted drop. The students were costumed in what appeared to be authentically designed World War I uniforms. The sets and costumes seemed to be carefully executed with special attention to detail. From the pictures it was easy to see why the school was particularly proud of this production and why it was so highly praised.

\(^{108}\text{The Bulletin, July, 1933, p. 27.}\)

\(^{109}\text{The Bulletin, February, 1933, p. 5.}\)
The final play of the season was *Three Live Ghosts*, presented at the auditorium on April 17, 18, and 19. This play, which included some members of the *Journey's End* cast, was a comedy of London city life.110

Holy Cross had an active program in drama and public speaking. "Besides public speaking as part of the regular English courses, intra-class debates, elocution and oratorical contests, and assembly programs provided incentive for the objective expression of thoughts and mental form."111 About the Holy Cross Players' Club the bulletin stated that "each year it presents three or more plays, the cast being varied to provide opportunities for all capable members. The Club's popularity is attested by the frequent invitations it received to present its repertoire in different sections of the city and state."112 The bulletin further stated that "in addition to the expression of mental form, the members of the club design and construct all necessary scenery and properties to create desired effects."113

Over two thousand attended the five performances of the three-act comedy of manners, *Peg O' My Heart*, directed by Brother Xavier in December, 1935. Brother Xavier first produced this play at Holy Cross in 1923, but said that this was the largest crowd

110*The Holy Cross Bulletin*, June, 1933, p. 36.


112Ibid., p. 27.

113Ibid.
ever to attend it. As usual the female leads were performed by boys.114

Also that year, the Mothers' Club of Holy Cross presented "The Merry Mothers' Minstrel Melodies." The February, 1936 bulletin described the opening of the show.

To start off the show, a novelty stunt had been prepared. As the main curtain rose, the eyes of the spectators became fixed on a feature curtain made of blue and gold crepe paper. Through little openings in the paper curtain, four megaphones protruded. The moment the audience hushed, four voices behind the megaphones rang out clearly and distinctly, "This is Station H-O-L-Y C-R-O-S-S broadcasting the Merry Mothers' Minstrel Melodies." Immediately the megaphones disappeared, and the opening feature a... woodland scene revealing a beautiful stage setting with chairs arranged in a semi-circle. In front of each chair stood a member of the group, flag in hand, singing "Your Flag and My Flag" from the Operetta "My Maryland." The novel entrance of the end men elicited applause that was loud and long.

From that moment, the show was a continuous round of laughter, jokes, and songs.

During the decade Holy Cross presented minstrel shows, variety shows, skits, and three-act plays to generally large audiences. They fearlessly presented boys in girls roles winning the audience's praise. Unlike some of the other schools, the Holy Cross players transported their productions to other Catholic schools.

Dramatic Activities at St. Mary's Dominican

St. Mary's Dominican High School was a secondary school for girls administered by the Dominican nuns. Early in the decade the

high school operated departments of music and expression which provided a number of lectures, addresses, literary programs, concerts and dramatic entertainments open to the public. Courses in Expression were an important part of the curriculum.\textsuperscript{115}

The object of dramatic art, as taught at St. Mary's, was "to train pupils to mark the niceties and distinctions of our language, to cultivate an appreciation for the best in literature, and through proper voice culture, to acquire just proportion and grace of expression."\textsuperscript{116} For voice training, the students memorized and delivered classic selections. For interpretation, Shakespeare's plays served as text-books, and the students presented scenes from these plays throughout the year. Story-telling and extemporaneous speech were also part of the oratorical training.\textsuperscript{117}

Sister Mary Angela, in a letter answering an inquiry in 1972,\textsuperscript{118} said that from 1927 to 1931, the high school presented a number of class plays. In 1927, the second-year class presented \textit{Miss Billy Puts One Over}, the third-year class gave \textit{A Southern

\textsuperscript{115}\textit{St. Mary's Dominican High School Catalogue, 1929-1930}, p. 8. Vertical files of Special Collections Division, Howard Tilton Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

\textsuperscript{116}\textit{Tbid.}, p. 18.

\textsuperscript{117}\textit{Tbid.}.

\textsuperscript{118}The information concerning the theatrical activities at St. Mary's Dominican High School, unless otherwise noted, was gathered from yearbooks and issues of the school newspaper, \textit{Regina Rosarii} and sent to the author by Sister Mary Angela, September 20, 1972, New Orleans, Louisiana. Sr. Angela taught at St. Mary's between 1925 and 1935.
Cinderella, and the seniors offered The Chaperon. In 1928, the sophomores presented "a delightful comedy" centering around a resort in northern Maine, and the juniors repeated The Southern Cinderella. For 1929, only one play was recorded as presented and that was Cupid and Calories presented by the second year high class. Several one-act plays were presented the next year. The freshman class produced In A Chinese Garden and The Princess in a Fairy Tale. The sophomores presented three one-act plays, Old Ladies Need a Ride, Varnish, and The Bartonville Women's Club. During the year, this class also presented scenes from Silas Marner and a play called The Sweet Family. The seniors performed three one-act plays The Cameo Pin, The Patchwork Quilt, and Miss Hope Hall's Sale. In 1931, the only theatrical activity was a presentation of scenes from As You Like It by the second-year students.

During the first part of the decade, St. Mary's Dominican College sponsored a literature dramatization program which was promoted in the high school as well as the college. Each class presented a program on the life, works, character, etc. of some literary author. Some of the presentations were dramatizations; some, readings; and others, skits or impersonations. The purpose of the program was to enliven the literary works which the students studied in the classroom.

One fourth-year high school class presented a very interesting program of the life, character and works of Chesterton, and "Short Story Land" was depicted in the playlet "The Story Dream." The third-year class presented a playlet in which many novels were
reviewed and criticized. The sophomore class chose Edgar Guest as the subject of the literary program, which included a reading of his poems and a playlet depicting his life and works. The fourth-year high school class even conducted a spirited debate on the topic, "Modern Magazines Do More Harm Than Good." This was the magazine division of the Literary Society.

At another time, seven poets representing seven different countries were assigned to each of the classes. Each month a class presented a program and an exhibit illustrating the life, works, characteristics, customs, and conditions of the times and places. One class produced a playlet depicting the life, works and character of Sir Walter Scott in *A Dream and Its Consequences*, written by a member of the class.

In 1931 the second-year high school class dramatized scenes from *Thyra*, a play written by one of the Dominican Sisters. But not again until 1933 are there any records of theatrical activities performed at the school. At this time the Dominican College Dramatic Club merged with the high school students to present a three-act play, *A Full House*. In 1935, they joined them once again to present *Joan of Arc*.

During this decade dramatic performances at St. Mary's Dominican High School emanated from the expression and English classes. They centered around literary figures and were presented as dramatizations, readings, skits, and impersonations. No other school studied for this investigation conducted such a unique

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119 See University Theatre section.
Ursuline College was a girls' school combining grammar, high school, and college departments. According to Edna Mae Neyrey Mock, the high school department called Ursuline Academy, presented various class plays and sometimes a senior class play. Usually the plays were inspirational or religious, such as The Making of Miss Graduate, which made the girls aware of their responsibilities as young ladies, and Around the Clock with Claire, which concerned the choosing of a religious vocation. The plays were usually quite simple, because the classes were small; the 1933 class graduated only six students. The English teacher, Mary Belle Welsh, directed the productions, as there were no courses offered in speech or expression during this period.

Occasionally, the Spanish class presented plays in Spanish. They performed Las de Cain by the Quintero Brothers for the student body in the school auditorium. Some classes did children's shows such as Cinderella, a two-act play presented in December, 1933.

Often during this period, the academy and the college joined together for May festival celebrations. The first annual

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121 Item, April 23, 1934, p. 11.

122 Picayune, December 23, 1933, p. 12.
celebration in April, 1932, included a Maypole dance and crowning of the May queen. Approximately 150 pupils of Ursuline Academy and Ursuline College participated in the event. The small children represented flowers, bees, and butterflies, and led a procession, while the upper grade students were the Maypole dancers.123

Performances at Redemptorist Girls' High School

The seniors and juniors were particularly active in dramatics at Redemptorist in 1936. The senior class presented two plays, Jerry Joins In and The Right Answer, and later the junior class presented a skit called "The Washington Ton" and a play entitled My Cousin From Sweden. There was a short rehearsal period for the junior class presentation produced in the school auditorium for the students and faculty.124 The juniors and seniors also acted and sang the part of the chorus in an operetta, Penny Buns and Roses, staged in the Redemptorist Auditorium shortly before Christmas.125

Redemptorist High School, like many of the Catholic schools, expended much time and energy in presenting bazaars and festivals for raising money for the school or church. The Picayune contained many articles concerning such events, and only a few

123Picayune, April 30, 1932, p. 1.


125Hi-Lights, November 6, 1936, p. 4.
indicated any theatrical activities. Minstrel shows, such as the one presented in 1933, were usually an annual event. In May, the La-Ma-So Minstrel Troup presented their annual show for the benefit of the Redemptorist parish churches and schools. Hundreds of people attended this annual minstrel performance presented by the members of the Redemptorist Married Ladies' Archconfraternity.

Plays at Xavier High School

Xavier High School for Negro Boys and Girls was the only Catholic coeducational high school in the city. It prepared the students to enter Xavier University and provided vocational and domestic arts training. Although there were no speech or expression courses offered and no indication of an organized dramatic club, the students usually presented a senior graduation play. In 1929, the twelfth-grade teacher directed the class in their spring production, a comedy about college life, entitled Aaron Boggs, Freshman. In 1931, Misses Jackman and DeWitt prepared the annual senior play and the following year the seniors scored a success in Mother Mine, a three-act comedy which played

126Picayune, May 6, 1933, p. 6.
to a "large and appreciative audience."¹³¹

Secondary School Theatre: Private

There were private schools in New Orleans not affiliated with any religious organization, some of which presented plays and some of which did not. The four schools included in this study are two boys' military academies, New Orleans Academy and Rugby Academy, and two girls' schools, Louise McGehee School and Lottie Miller's School for Girls.

New Orleans Academy and Rugby Academy

New Orleans Academy and Rugby Academy were both private military schools. New Orleans Academy had both a high school and a "lower" school. The purpose of the school was "to prepare boys for entrance into Tulane and other universities of standing."¹³² Dramatics was not an extracurricular activity, nor was it part of the academic program. The extracurricular activity emphasis was placed on sports and military training.

Rugby Academy was a private military school which boarded students and received day students from the New Orleans area. Like New Orleans Academy, there was no drama club or theatrical activity, emphasis being placed on sports and military training as


¹³²New Orleans Academy Bulletin, 1927-1928, Vertical files Special Collections Division, Howard Tilton Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.
extracurricular activities. The small enrollment at Rugby might account, in part, for the absence of dramatic activities. In 1927, Rugby graduated fifteen students, in 1931, twelve, and in 1932, thirteen. Whereas the small, private boys' schools did not have dramatic activities, two girls' private schools, Louise McGehee School and Lottie Miller's School encouraged participation in dramatics.

**Dramatics at McGehee School and Miller's School**

The Louise McGehee School, founded in 1912, was a private school which included a lower and an upper school. The Lower School often presented historical pageants, such as the landing of the pilgrims, for special holiday programs. Simple painted sets and costumes made by the parents formed part of these presentations. The upper school also presented holiday programs such as the senior Christmas play presented December 23, 1932.

In the early 1930's, the Upper School project was to convert the upper part of one of the buildings into a theatre. The result was The Loft, the school theatre in which the Dramatic Club produced its plays.

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133 Rugby Academy: 34th Annual Catalogue and Announcement, 1927-1928. Vertical files, Special Collections Division, Howard Tilton Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.


The Dramatic Club, open to any student in the Upper School, had as its purpose to foster active interest in the study of drama. The several plays given each year were a cooperative effort of the Dramatic Club and the Art Department. Usually two major productions were produced as well as several workshop productions. Although the plays were usually directed by the English teacher, the students managed most of the other phases of production.\textsuperscript{137}

The teachers at the school were generally well educated, and many of them had a master's degree. Janet I. Wallace, for example, was a director of dramatics who was a graduate of Newcomb and Tulane and had a Master of Arts degree.\textsuperscript{138}

This school uniquely afforded students an opportunity to learn scene painting, design, costuming, and fabric design through an elective Arts and Crafts course. \textit{The Wonder Hat} utilized settings and costumes designed and executed by these art students. Pictures of the production indicate that creative, free-standing set pieces were part of the effective setting.\textsuperscript{139}

Lottie Miller's Private School for Girls, a "sister" school to McGehee, also presented plays. On May 25, 1928, the students of French performed four plays in French as an aid to learning the language. These included \textit{Mannekin} and \textit{Minnekin}, \textit{Quinze Minutes de}


Récration, L'Enfant Vole, Le Sarcission, and Pauvre Sylvie.\textsuperscript{140} In November, 1928, the school presented a play, Windmills of Holland and in the spring staged a May Day production. In 1929, the students performed two short plays, Turtle Dove and The Ghost Story for the Parent-Teachers' Association. Zollinger, in an interview, stated that most of the plays presented at Miller's school were class plays. There was no formal drama organization, since the enrollment was very small.\textsuperscript{141}

Private Acting Schools

Between 1925 and 1935, there were several private schools in New Orleans which offered courses exclusively in dramatic art, oratory, and elocution. Among these were the New Orleans Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Art, New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art, Val Winter and Joan Dilworth Drama School, Alice M. Cobb's School, Gross School of Dancing and Elocution, The Olivia H. Lyne College of Oratory, Poche School of Expression and Dramatic Art, and Broadway Studio of Elocution and Dramatic Art.

New Orleans Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Art

Dr. Ernest E. Schuyten founded the New Orleans Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Art in 1919. Mary Scott taught

\textsuperscript{140}Production program, for the plays, personal scrapbook of Esther Hall Zollinger, New Orleans, Louisiana. Zollinger, then a student at the school, performed in the plays.

\textsuperscript{141}Personal interview with Zollinger, August 17, 1972, New Orleans, Louisiana.
dramatics, \(^{142}\) and Schuyten taught music and conducted a small symphonic orchestra composed of his students.\(^ {143}\) During the early years, Ben Hanley taught dramatics there and was in charge of the Expression and Dramatic Art Department of the Conservatory. When he left to open his own school, the New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art, Arthur Maitland, the director of Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré, accepted the directorship of the Department of Dramatic Art in order to supplement his income while directing at Le Petit.\(^ {144}\)

With the opening of Hanley's New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art, the Conservatory began to emphasize music rather than dramatic arts. In 1932 Schuyten became head of the Loyola School of Music but continued to operate the New Orleans Conservatory of Music, as it was now called, in the old residence on the corner of St. Charles Avenue and Calhoun Street. As his school became affiliated with Loyola, the purposes changed. The aim of the school now, was to prepare students for both music and dramatic art and also for entrance into Loyola University College of Music. Some graduates of the school were employed in church

\(^{142}\)Sam Sherman's notes in the Hanley Collection, Archives Department, Louisiana State University Library, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Sherman stated that "this information was verified in a telephone conversation with Dr. Schuyten on June 4, 1955."

\(^{143}\)Personal interview with Leon Zainey, January 17, 1972, New Orleans, Louisiana.

choirs, broadcasting studios, as music teachers in schools, and in orchestras. Others became well-known in the music world of New Orleans and other cities. Ultimately the Conservatory was absorbed completely by Loyola University.

New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art

In October, 1923, Ben Hanley, then director of the Department of Speech and Dramatic Art at the New Orleans Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Art and head of the Department of Speech at Warren Easton Boys' High School, founded the New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art. The following section studies the purpose, operation, curriculum, performances, faculty, and graduates of this school in order to discover its contributions to theatre in New Orleans between 1925 and 1935.

The school was designed for those students who were interested in "a special form of speech work as Dramatic Art, Interpretative Speech, Public Speaking, Teaching or for cultural purposes and especially for those students who have not had the opportunity of certain forms of high school and college education." The

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145 Item, September 16, 1934, p. 8.


147 Undated and unaddressed letter from the school, found in the Hanley Collection, Archives Department, Louisiana State University Library, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
1932-1933 brochure for the school148 further clarified the aims of the institution.

The New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art, Inc. is a school of oral expression, open to men, women and children offering through its course of study, cultural, professional and collegiate training. It gives to each individual student the opportunity to develop whatever latent power he may possess; to help him to clear and forceful expression which brings confidence and poise at all times--in private gatherings, in public discussions, in society, in business.

The New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art operated in the following manner. Adult classes of each level of advancement met on separate nights from 7 to 9:30 with certain nights reserved for student rehearsals. Children's classes met Saturday mornings and weekday afternoons. Tuition for adults was $7 per month with a registration fee of $5, and tuition for children was $4 per month with a registration of $2.

The students' training consisted of classroom work and public performances. The 1933-1934 school brochure149 listed over fifty course offerings in the curriculum. Some of the dramatic arts courses taught during the 1930's included make-up, rehearsal methods, play production, Shakespeare, history of the drama, pantomime, and vocal and body training. There were also classes offered in dancing and fencing.

148Hanley Collection, Archives Department, Louisiana State University Library, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

149New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art, Inc., brochure for the 1932-1933 session, Hanley Collection.
Every student participated in three public performances during the year. The seniors produced modern three-act plays with the assistance of some of the beginning classes, the junior classes performed classic plays, and the freshmen performed modern and classic one-act plays. Graduation and Spring furnished an occasion for some of the plays and pageants. Most of the plays were staged in the school's fully equipped Little Theatre. Some, however, were performed at various other theatres, school auditoriums, and open outdoor areas in the city.

Hanley's students performed at Loyola on January 21 and 29, 1926. The first program included The Heritage and sketches from twelve plays. The second program consisted of two plays, Two Slatterns and a King and Aunt Ellen's Hatchet. In March, 1927, they presented an evening of one-act plays in their own theatre. Two Slatterns and a King, a repeat, was the first offering, and Great Queens, which required an all-girl cast, and The Signing of the Declaration of Independence, which required all boys, were the second and third offerings.\(^{150}\)

One of the most memorable productions for Esther Hall, one of the performers, was the June, 1931, graduation performance of Molnar's The Swan. She described it as "simply beautiful."\(^{151}\)

\(^{150}\) Production programs from each of the productions found in the personal scrapbook of Esther Hall Zollinger, New Orleans, Louisiana.

\(^{151}\) Personal interview with Esther Hall Zollinger, August 17, 1972, New Orleans, Louisiana.
In 1932, the school presented Molière's comedy, The Affected Young Ladies and the following year, Royal Family, Cradle Song, and Everyman.\textsuperscript{152}

Sometimes Hanley used girls from his own school to portray female roles in the Christmas productions he directed at Easton. Students from both schools performed in the 1927 Christmas showing of Why the Chimes Rang, and in the 1928 presentation of The Nativity. Both productions were staged at Easton's auditorium. In June, 1928, Hanley produced a fantasy in two acts, Merope, using only students from his own school.\textsuperscript{153}

Traditionally, at the New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art, the juniors performed some dramatic rendering for the seniors. In May, 1929 the juniors performed Peter Pan on an elevated stage on the landscaped lawns behind Soule College. Hanley's students also performed a "cut-down version" of Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Dream there later.\textsuperscript{154}

Hanley presented The Fate of Narcissus, a sketch written by Lily Whitaker, as part of the May day festivities. It was filled with nymphs and Greek gods and goddesses, some of which Hanley possibly added to the script himself. On May 17, 1930, his students performed four pageants entitled Old English Ballads. One

\textsuperscript{152}Production programs from each of these productions found in the Zollinger scrapbook.

\textsuperscript{153}Zollinger interview.

\textsuperscript{154}Personal interview with Leon Zainey, January 17, 1972, New Orleans, Louisiana.
group of students read the ballads while another group simultaneously pantomimed the action. The next year's May Day celebration offered Legend of the Flowers and in 1933, Fact and Fancy. 155

The faculty of the New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art was dominated by Ben Hanley. Leon Zainey, a student of Hanley's at Easton and at the Dramatic Art school, described him as a teacher and as a man.

Hanley was highly respected. He was an excellent teacher constantly in touch with what was going on in New York. He was a great lecturer. He was very, very devoted to his work. He was a very handsome looking man; wore his clothes well. He was a man that you could have some confidence in. I was very fond of him as a teacher. I didn't get on too well with him otherwise. I worked for him on a scholarship for half a year in the technical aspects of backstage work. He snowed me under with work and had a treacherous temper. Hanley was a strict, difficult teacher at times. He could make you feel like two cents, but he did it to bring out the best in you. He didn't do it to be ugly or nasty. You knew this. You knew that he was quite severe in his criticism, and if you could just stand it, then you were just good. 156

Zainey further explained that although Hanley studied elocutionary techniques under Lily Whitaker at the New Orleans College of Oratory, there was nothing in his classes that was "as laughable and ridiculous" as the old elocution techniques. However, there was a good deal of vowel work and syllabification.

Zainey said that Hanley enjoyed reading selections to the class. Sometimes he read from the classics or scripts from current shows on Broadway. If he did not feel like reading, he would

155Zollinger interview.

156Zainey interview, January 17, 1972.
describe the selection and ask several students to read or enact it for him. Sometimes he would give the class problems to illustrate in pantomime. After the performance, "he had a means of tearing everyone down and building them up again."

Ben Hanley received his elementary and high school education from St. Joseph's Christian Brothers and spent two years at St. Mary's in Perryville, Missouri. He received a degree of Bachelor of Oratory and an Artistic Diploma from Lily C. Whitaker's New Orleans College of Oratory. He also studied at the Boston School of Expression (Curry School), the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, Columbia University, University of California, and New York University. His teachers were some of the best in this country and Europe. They included Dr. Silas S. Curry and Anna Baright Curry in Boston, Lemuel B. C. Josephs in New York City, Marjorie Gullan at London University, and Florence Lutz in New York and California.

Hanley taught at Warren Easton Boys' High School from September, 1915, until his death, January 28, 1952. He also taught at Tulane University Summer Teachers' College. He was one of the

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157 Unidentified notes found in the Hanley Collection, Archives Division, Louisiana State University Library, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

158 Statement written by Lily C. Whitaker, President, New Orleans College of Oratory found in Hanley Collection.

159 New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art, 1934-1935 brochure, Hanley Collection.

160 Sherman, p. 240.
organizers and one of the first stage directors of Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré. He was a member of the Board of Directors, organizer, and head of the Dramatic Art and Speech Departments of the New Orleans Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Art until the opening of his school.

Most of the faculty of the New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art received their training in New Orleans, and all were graduates of the school. The faculty included: Peter H. Siren, who had diplomas from New Orleans College of Oratory, New Orleans Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Art, and New Orleans School of Speech; Miriam Poche, who had a diploma, teachers' certificate, and Professional Certificate from the New Orleans School of Speech, a diploma and Normal School Diploma from the New Orleans College of Oratory, a New Orleans Public School Teachers' Certificate from New Orleans Normal School, and had attended the Teachers' Summer College at Tulane University; Mathilda Nungesser, who was a graduate of the New Orleans School of Speech, New Orleans College of Oratory, and the New Orleans Normal School; Dorothy King, who had a diploma and teachers' certificate from the New Orleans School of Speech and the New Orleans College of Oratory respectively, was a graduate of the New Orleans Normal School and held a Bachelor of Arts degree from Tulane University; and Lucille Tapie Burrows, who possessed a diploma and teachers' certificate from the New Orleans School of Speech, was a graduate of the New Orleans

161 New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art, Inc.
Conservatory of Music, and had attended the New Orleans College of Oratory. Esther Hall, the dancing teacher, had a diploma, teachers' certificate, and Children's Class Certificate from the New Orleans School of Speech, and had attended the New Orleans Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Art.162

In the early 1930's, the institution conferred two diplomas and two certificates to its graduates. The 1931-1932 brochure for the school explained the diplomas and certificates.

The regular diploma requires the satisfactory completion of the three-year course, with the required number of hours in each subject.

The normal or teachers' diploma is awarded for the two years' satisfactory completion of the course and hours required in methods, practice teaching, and demonstration.

A certificate is awarded those students who return for additional instruction or who return to learn newer methods which are constantly being added to the course of study.

Certificates are awarded in the children's classes to students that have completed satisfactorily five years' instruction in that department, and are ready for promotion to the adult or diploma course.

The school held its first graduation at Loyola University on June 24, 1926, graduating five students. By the end of the decade, New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art graduates had become leaders in high school dramatics in the city, some had organized their own schools, and still others worked in professional theatre in the city and throughout the country.

The 1933-1934 brochure for the school listed some of the graduates. Among those who were teachers in the New Orleans area

162New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art, Inc. brochure for 1933-1934 session, Hanley Collection.
schools were Mazie Adkins, Head of the Speech Department at Allen High School; Imogene Barrett, Head of the English Department and Speech teacher at Gretna High School; Lucille Tapie Burrows, teacher in New Orleans Convents as well as performer with the St. Charles Stock Company; and Miriam Poche, teacher in the Normal Department of Dominican Convent. Both Gladys Breaux Flowers and Margaret Graham taught in the Dramatic Art Department of the New Orleans Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Art. Flowers headed the department.

Several of the graduates organized their own schools. Aline Vezoux Frank developed the Vezoux School of Expression, Poche founded the Poche School of Speech, Mathilda Pfeffer Nungesser, the Carrolton School of Speech, Amy Oliveira began the Academy of Speech Arts, and Esther Hall opened the Esther Hall Studio of Dancing, Speech, and Dramatic Art after working professionally for Shubert Theatres in New York.

Some of the graduates performed professionally with the New Orleans St. Charles Stock Company. These included Burrows, Laure Cazenave, and Enola Fernandez Tomes. Others worked in other forms of theatre outside of New Orleans. Germaine Cazenave performed in Loew's Vaudeville; Rosa Barcello, with a stock company and pictures in Los Angeles; Warren Reid with the Goodman Theatre, Chicago; Clothilde Tomasovich with Paramount Pictures and Hal Roach Pictures; Ruth Moore with Shubert Theatres and Orpheum

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163 See also Allen and Kohn High School sections.
 Vaudeville, and Helen White in vaudeville.

Dilworth-Winter School of Drama

There were other private drama, elocution, and schools of oratory operating in New Orleans during this period. On October 3, 1927, Eva Joan Dilworth and Val Winter opened the Dilworth-Winter School of Drama in the New Orleans Vieux Carre section. Dilworth taught singing at the school and Winter coached the dramatics.¹⁶⁴

Both Dilworth and Winter had extensive theatre experience and training. Dilworth, before coming South, had her own studio of Vocal Art in New York, had been a pupil of Percy Rector Stephens, an eminent vocal teacher in New York, and had studied under Otto Torrey Simon at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore. She also worked with the Chicago Opera Company and Solo Repertiteur of the Hof Theatre in Munich, Germany.¹⁶⁵ Val Winter, who was one of the founders of Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré, had performed leading roles at that theatre¹⁶⁶ and played at the St. Charles. His background also included work in productions in Chicago, Broadway shows, and East and mid-West stock.¹⁶⁷


¹⁶⁵Brochure for the school from the de Lapouyade Collection, Archives Department, Louisiana State University Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

¹⁶⁶See Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré section.

¹⁶⁷Picayune, September 25, 1927, Section 4, p. 3.
Dilworth taught singing during the day and evening, and Winter coached dramatics in the evening. Adelaide Cohen Ezkovich remembered attending classes at Val Winter's school.

I know that I went to him for a couple of years, but I don't think that there was any specified length of time for the course. My particular class as it progressed did more and more difficult things. I presume that he had beginner classes too.

He taught all the courses. As I remember there were eight or nine in my particular class. He operated the school on the side, because I think that Val was in Neon lighting. It was coming in at that time. I remember the classes were in the evening. We never went in the daytime. I was working at the time. I had finished high school, couldn't go to college, so I had to go to work. So I'd go to Val's after school.168

The school continued to operate throughout the decade; however, Winter began to devote more time to his business, and eventually it became a singing school instead of a singing and drama school.169

Alice M. Cobb's School

Alice M. Cobb's school was typical of the schools attempting to capitalize on the popular cultural demands of the times. From 1925 to 1931, the name of the school and the content of the advertisements continually changed, indicating a new emphasis or scope of the subjects taught at the school. In 1925, the school was called simply, Alice Cobb College of Expression,170 but by

168 Personal interview with Adelaide Cohen Ezkovich, January 10, 1972, New Orleans, Louisiana.
169 Crandall interview.
170 Picayune, September 20, 1925.
1927, the title had expanded to The Alice M. Cobb College of Expression, Dramatic Art, and Dancing, Incorporated. The school was advertised as a "Progressive College for Progressive People." There were ladies' reducing classes along with night classes in expression, dramatic art, "acrobatic musical comedy, buck and wing, and adagio dancing."\(^{171}\)

The 1928 advertisement indicated that this was "a college with a standard."\(^{172}\) Reducing classes were no longer emphasized, and there were classes in all phases of dramatic art and dancing for children and adults. Private instruction was available.\(^{173}\)

By 1930 interest in dancing had grown, and the school announced the opening of the "Dancing Department of the College Studio."\(^{174}\) A separate advertisement in the newspaper a month later indicated that "dancing" had been eliminated from the title of the school, and the word "oratory" was included, so that it was called "Alice M. Cobb College of Speech, Expression, Dramatic Art, Oratory." The advertisement for this division of the school encouraged attendance of "children, high school and college students, teachers, and business men and women."\(^{175}\)

Thus the Cobb school was divided into a dancing school and a school for the study of expression, dramatic art, and oratory.

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\(^{171}\) *Picayune*, September 25, 1927, Section 4, p. 3.

\(^{172}\) *Picayune*, September 23, 1928, Section 4, p. 2.

\(^{173}\) Ibid.

\(^{174}\) *Picayune*, September 14, 1930, Section 2, p. 9.

\(^{175}\) *Picayune*, October 5, 1930, Section 2, p. 11.
Late in the decade interest in dancing increased, and the interest and need to study expression privately decreased. The high schools were beginning to offer more and more classes in expression and dramatic art thus diminishing some of the need to study it privately.

Gross School of Dancing, Singing and Elocution

Before opening the Gross School of Dancing, Singing, and Elocution in 1930, Roberta Gross had attended Lyons School of Oratory studying under Olivia Lyons, a former pupil of Lily Whitaker. Although her school was not primarily an elocution school, but a dancing school, Roberta Gross included elocution, dramatic readings, and recitations as part of the dancing program.

Gross described what and how the students performed in the following manner:

Sometimes I would let them select what they wanted. If they wanted to read a poem, I would allow them to do that, or I would assign, like a reading from "The Lady of the Lake," or from even Shakesperian plays, or a comedy.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
We did musical recitations which was quite nice you know. The pianist would accompany them on the piano, and then they would do the reciting. Some children could not sing, and the ones in the elocution class would do musical recitations. They would also do that in the front right close to the footlights. I would have to run three or four numbers in front to change scenery. I used about six changes of scenery during my show, you know.

Gross described the methods and exercises she used in teaching her classes.

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176 Personal interview with Roberta Gross, January 17, 1972, New Orleans, Louisiana.
I first of all started with breathing exercises. I would give the breathing exercises with the arms too. Then I would do tongue exercises. I can remember having the children with long mirrors and looking at themselves as they would put the tongue up, down, and side and side and round, you know. And then we did pronunciation of words, and we did quite a few tongue twisters, like "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers;" "she sells sea shells on the sea shore." Oh, I can remember we had a variety of them. We had "b's", "c's", "k's", and "d's", and "j's" and quite a variety of them.

Although Gross had only five students who took elocution without dancing during the years she taught it, she continued elocution as part of her school until the early 40's when interest in it faded, and there "was no longer an outlet or use for talent of this kind."177

Other Private Acting Schools

Olivia H. Lyne, who had been a pupil at Lily Whitaker's school, the New Orleans College of Oratory,178 operated The Olivia H. Lyne College of Oratory, Elocution and Dramatic Art, Inc., during the period under investigation. She taught advanced elocution classes and had departments of Oratory and Dramatic Art. Children's classes were taught on Saturday. She advertised an "auditorium" at 4537 Canal Street.179

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177Gross is presently in her 50th year of teaching dancing in her New Orleans school.

178Patricia Roddam James, "Oral Reading in New Orleans from 1890 to 1900" (Master's thesis, Louisiana State University, 1969), p. 74.

179Picayune, September 30, 1928, Section 4, p. 3. Advertisement.
Miriam Poche, like Lyne, received her training at the New Orleans College of Oratory. She supplemented her training there with work as a student under Hanley at his school. She held a bachelor of oratory degree and a teacher's certificate from both of the schools. She opened her School of Expression and Dramatic Art at 4619 Iberville Street and in 1931 the Item stated that "Miss Miriam Poche's school stands out as one of the best in New Orleans."

Finally, Ethelynd M. Bailey operated the Broadway Studio of Elocution and Dramatic Art at 1629 Broadway specializing in children's classes taught on Saturday.

College and University Theatre

There were several private and Catholic colleges and universities operating in New Orleans between 1925 and 1935, all of which presented some form of theatrical activity. The following section examines the theatrical activities at Tulane University, Newcomb College, Loyola University, Dominican College, Ursuline College, and the two Negro universities, Xavier and Dillard.

Tulane University Theatre

Tulane University was established in 1884 through the financial support of Paul Tulane, a wealthy New Orleans business man. Newcomb College for Women was founded two years later as a

180 Item, October 4, 1931, p. 11.

181 Picayune, September 23, 1928, Section 4, p. 2.
coordinate school to Tulane.

Paul Tulane gave all his New Orleans real estate "for the promotion and encouragement of intellectual, moral and industrial education among the white young persons in the City of New Orleans" and "for the advancement of learning and letters, the arts and sciences." Two years later Mrs. Simon Newcomb donated $100,000 to the Tulane Educational Fund to be used in establishing the H. Sophie Newcomb Memorial College for Women as a co-ordinate college of the University. At her death in 1901 the college received an additional bequest of about $2,700,000.\textsuperscript{182}

Although Newcomb College was an integral part of Tulane University and the girls sometimes participated in Tulane's dramatic activities, Tulane's theatre developed independently. The years between 1922 and 1937 at Tulane were the floundering, formative years of what would become one of the outstanding university theatre programs in the country. "Realizing the need of a means of expression to compensate for the lack of a department of dramatics and public speaking in the University, a few ambitious students combined to form a dramatic club on campus. That was 1922."\textsuperscript{183} Between 1922 and 1924 the Dramatic Society produced plays. In 1924, a faction of the Dramatic Society formed a new organization called the Tulane University Players,\textsuperscript{184} which presented plays independently of the first organization. Thus there were three groups operating within the same area and producing independently, the Tulane Dramatic Society, the Tulane


\textsuperscript{183}\textit{Jambalaya} (1936), Volume XLI, p. 120.

\textsuperscript{184}\textit{Tulane Hullabaloo}, October 10, 1924, p. 1. Hereafter referred to as Hullabaloo.
University Players, and the Newcomb Dramatic Club.\textsuperscript{185}

There was hope that having two clubs at Tulane would stimulate interest in dramatics on campus.\textsuperscript{186} Records, however, show that the two clubs merely divided student interest and manpower, and ill feelings and competitiveness developed between the groups.

The Tulane University Players were active for only two years, 1924 and 1925. During that time the Players presented six numbers on the annual Stunt Night program on the Tulane campus. Two of these included one-act plays, \textit{Dregs} and \textit{Surpressed Desires}. In the cast were Mazie Adkins\textsuperscript{187} and Lucille Tapie\textsuperscript{188} who both later became active in community theatre.\textsuperscript{189}

The social and political "wrangling" between the groups did not "improve the achievements of any of the groups."\textsuperscript{190} The squabble lasted through the 1924-1925 school year and into the fall of 1925.\textsuperscript{191} However, they continued to produce plays. Jessie Tharp directed Booth Tarkington's \textit{Intimate Strangers} for the

\textsuperscript{185}See Newcomb Theatre section.

\textsuperscript{186}\textit{Hullabaloo}, October 10, 1924, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{187}Adkins later taught expression and directed productions at Kohn and Allen high schools. She was also active in producing plays for the American Association of University Women.

\textsuperscript{188}Tapie attended Hanley's New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art and worked with the St. Charles Stock Company.

\textsuperscript{189}\textit{Hullabaloo}, October 17, 1924, p. 1.


\textsuperscript{191}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 12.
University Players. The production was termed a "great success" by the school newspaper.\textsuperscript{192} The Dramatic Society produced a French farce, *Modesty*.\textsuperscript{193}

In the fall of the 1925-1926 season Tharp directed an all-male cast in *Charlie's Aunt* for the Dramatic Guild, and Ben Yancey, then a law student at Tulane, directed a one-act play, *Helena's Husband*, for the Alumni Association's program at Jerusalem Temple.\textsuperscript{194} Newcomb students usually took part in Tulane's theatrical activities, and twenty-five of their girls tried out for the part of Helen of Troy in this play.\textsuperscript{195} In December, 1925, Tharp directed a production, *Deceivers*, which the Guild presented at the St. Charles theatre as a one-act afterpiece following the regular St. Charles stock company offering, *Girls*. Leon H. Grandjean, manager of the St. Charles, set aside seats for Tulane and Newcomb students. The members of the Tulane football team attended free and occupied a section of box seats at the theatre.\textsuperscript{196} This gave publicity to the university, motivation to the theatre participants, and brought in Newcomb and Tulane students who might never have come to the theatre. Grandjean possibly saw these students as potential customers.

\textsuperscript{192}Hullabaloo, February 27, 1925.

\textsuperscript{193}Hullabaloo, October 24, 1924.

\textsuperscript{194}Hullabaloo, October 16, 1924, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{195}Hullabaloo, November 6, 1925, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{196}Hullabaloo, December 11, 1925, p. 1.
This production was not enough motivation to keep the playing group together, for at the February meeting of the Tulane Dramatic Guild, the organization almost disbanded. However, the group decided to remain together and tentatively planned a March play.197

In the spring of 1926, Dr. Marten Hoor reorganized the two groups into the Tulane University Dramatic Guild. Immediately the group formulated plans for employing a professional director, presenting more productions, and operating a workshop.198 That spring the Guild presented another one-act play, The Pot Boiler, at the St. Charles theatre after the stock company's performance, and Ben Yancey received excellent reviews as a performer in the production.199

The Guild remained unstable the following year. In the fall of 1926, they planned an evening of three one-act plays, The Glittering Truth, The Mayor and the Manicure, and The Passing of Chow Chow. The group hoped to obtain the services of a professional director for a three-act play later in the year.200 Instead, they sponsored a musical comedy, Miss Cherryblossom, presented by the Senior Young People's Service League of Trinity Church.201

199 Hullabaloo, May 14, 1926, p. 3.
In order to obtain people interested in presenting a play as a group, the Guild presented the first senior class play in the history of Tulane. They included as many graduating seniors as possible in the cast of *A Pair of Sixes* which the club performed at the Tulane theatre in honor of the class of 1927.

In the fall of 1927, the Guild once again performed a one-act play at the St. Charles, this time directed by August Wilson, Jr., a freshman who had been "connected for a time with the St. Charles theatre." The title of the play was *The Girl*, and Yancey was in this one too. In November, he appeared in the three Guild one-act plays, *Bottled in Bond*, Booth Tarkington's *The Trysting Place*, and *The Girl*. He received excellent reviews, but the audience was small and there was not enough interest or organization in the Guild to present another production that year.

However, three hundred undergraduates of Tulane and Newcomb participated in "Frolics of '28" at Jerusalem Temple in June, 1928. The Tulane and Newcomb Glee Club, Newcomb Mandolin and Guitar Club, Tulane Band, and the Tulane Dramatic Club united to produce this variety show under the direction of Albert E. Holleman.

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204 Hullabaloo, November 11, 1927, p. 1.
206 Picayune, May 27, 1928, p. 28.
There was little club activity during the fall of the 1928-1929 season, but by January, Yancey, now a law graduate of the class of 1928, returned to direct one-act plays hoping later to perform a three-act play downtown. The Tulane Dramatic Guild and the Newcomb Dramatic Club joined together to present the one-act plays at the St. Charles Avenue Presbyterian Church and drew what was probably a "record attendance." The reviewer said that the club "certainly broke Tulane records in excellence of production, direction, and acting values." The success of this joint effort brought the Tulane and Newcomb groups together once again for Shaw's Arms and the Man. Indicative of the interest in this project was the fact that fifty students tried out for roles in this production directed by Yancey. The groups acquired most of their sets and costumes from Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carre, since they had no facilities for constructing or storing them. The reviewer found the play not to be the usual "college claptrap." It was under good direction and the audience enjoyed it.

The dramatic guild was virtually disbanded in 1930 because of lack of equipment and a place to stage its plays. However, there was theatrical activity in the form of three Gilbert and

207 Hullabaloo, January 11, 1929, p. 1.
208 Hullabaloo, March 1, 1929, p. 4.
210 Hullabaloo, April 5, 1929, p. 1.
Sullivan musicals which the Newcomb alumnae produced in December, 1930, and two consecutive years after that.

Tulane and Newcomb cooperated to present Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore*, the first major musical to be presented by either college in recent years.\(^\text{212}\) Yancey directed the acting, and Dr. Leon Maxwell conducted the music. The chorus consisted of Tulane and Newcomb students, alumni, and well-known singers from the New Orleans area.\(^\text{213}\) The university reviewer said "the mixture of professionalism and amateurism was delightful, in addition to which the performance was well-staged, and possessed one of those rare things, a good chorus."\(^\text{214}\)

The success of this musical brought the groups together the next two years for two more musicals. In December, 1930, Maxwell directed *The Mikado*, this time without Yancey's assistance. They attempted to produce it authentically as the nineteenth century audiences saw it. Although early press releases described elaborate sets,\(^\text{215}\) the reviewer found the scenery "fairly simple."\(^\text{216}\) The following year they produced *The Pirates of Penzance*.\(^\text{217}\)

In October, 1930, the Guild elected Dan Moore, a Tulane graduate student, as their new director and made plans to produce

\(^{212}\) *Hullabaloo*, December 13, 1929, p. 8.

\(^{213}\) *Hullabaloo*, November 22, 1929, p. 1.

\(^{214}\) *Hullabaloo*, December 20, 1929, p. 2.

\(^{215}\) *Hullabaloo*, December 12, 1930, p. 1.

\(^{216}\) *Hullabaloo*, December 19, 1930, p. 1.

\(^{217}\) *Hullabaloo*, December 18, 1931, p. 1.
a series of one-act plays. However, the Guild was not stable, and the names and dates of the productions were uncertain or changed at the last moment. In January, 1931, the Guild re-organized some of its procedures, making the requirements for entry into the organization more strict, stressing attendance at the meetings.218

Although there was still some disorganization, the group was able to present a three-act play in the spring. In March, 1931, the Picayune announced that Moore would direct John Drinkwater's Bird in Hand and that several members of the Newcomb Dramatic Club would probably be recruited for some of the roles.219 There was a change and three weeks later the president of the Guild announced that the cast had been selected for Robert Sherwood's The Queen's Husband, tentatively scheduled for May 2.220

The following year, Ben Yancey, one of the Guild founders, who was now an alumnus working with Le Petit, returned to direct The Potboilers at the annual campus night.221 The same year, Moore directed R. C. Sherriff's Journey's End, as the major production and the next year, George Kaufman's The Butter and Egg Man. Theta Alpha Phi, the national honorary dramatic fraternity, sponsored this production for the benefit of the Tulane Dramatic Guild.

218 Hullabaloo, January 16, 1931, p. 1.

219 Picayune, March 8, 1931, p. 13.

220 Picayune, March 29, 1931, p. 32.

221 Picayune, January 10, 1932, p. 18.
and the cast included alumni, such as Ben Yancey, as well as undergraduates.222

According to the Tulane yearbook, Jambalaya, the 1934-1935 season was a very ambitious one successfully realized.223 In the fall, Thomas J. Thriffley, Jr., directed three one-act plays: The Rising of the Moon, by Lady Gregory; Poor Old Jim, a comedy by William DeMille; and Copy, a drama by Kendall Banning. In the spring, he directed another one-act play, Moonshine, which the Guild presented on the same program with a three-act comedy thriller, Spooks, directed by Moore. The Guild also sponsored a one-act play contest, and awarded twenty-five dollars to Joseph Starr, a student in the College of Arts and Sciences, for his play An Honorable Rectangle.224

There were two significant events which were to strengthen the Tulane Dramatic Guild during the 1935-1936 season. Walter Richardson came to direct for Tulane, and Newcomb cooperated with Tulane in presenting plays. Richardson was the leading man for the St. Charles Stock Company in New Orleans during the 1924-1925 and 1925-1926 seasons, director of the company during its last two seasons, 1926-1927 and 1927-1928,225 and had played on the legitimate stage in the United States and abroad. When the St. Charles

222Picayune, January 13, 1933, p. 10.
223Jambalaya (1935), Volume XL, p. 28.
224Jambalaya (1935), Volume XL, p. 29.
225See section on St. Charles Theatre.
Stock Company folded in 1928, he remained in New Orleans, directed at Le Petit, and then came to Tulane to continue his work in theatre under this new educational sponsorship. The members of the guild "were able to profit greatly from his instruction." The Newcomb Dramatic Club cooperated with the Tulane Dramatic Guild "so that the best talent from each group can be cast in one production." The fruits of this combination were evident in the January 4 production of George Kelly's satire, The Torch-Bearers, directed by Richardson. Also the Tulane and Newcomb organizations jointly sponsored a lecture by John Mason Brown, a prominent dramatic critic, whose subject was "Broadway in Review." Brown "cleverly and judiciously criticized current plays on the New York stage, to the delight and edification of a responsive audience."

The activity of the group depended on the enthusiasm of the members. Some of the leadership tended to run the group "more as a social fraternity than as a producing body. Membership became a social status, and was closely regulated. At best, the group remained a club, with no faculty leadership. Clearly, there was a need for an official, faculty-directed theatre organization on the campus."

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226 Jambalaya, (1936), Volume XLI, p. 120.
227 Ibid.
228 Ibid.
In December, 1932, A. C. Cloetingh, national secretary of Theta Alpha Phi, honorary Dramatics fraternity, on his visits to college, university, and little theatre organizations throughout the country, spoke at Tulane. He said:

Dramatics at Tulane will never attain their rightful place until the university establishes a department of Dramatics, or at least adds to the faculty a full-time instructor in speech and Dramatics...

It is not fair to expect the Dramatic Guild to bear the expense of a director from its very small and inadequate budget...

The university president and Board of Administration should be petitioned for a faculty member to have charge of speech and Dramatics...

This idea must certainly have won the approval and interest of the floundering theatrical group, for in 1937 Tulane added a speech fundamentals course, an elementary play production course, and a faculty member, Monroe Lippman, who eventually organized the Tulane University Theatre.

Although Tulane's dramatic activities during this period lacked purpose and direction, and Tulane had no theatre facilities, the drama clubs performed one-act and three-act plays continually. They finally gained strength by joining with the Newcomb drama club and, ultimately, their determination to have faculty leadership and become part of the academic curriculum, led to the establishment of a theatre department at Tulane.

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230Hullabaloo, December 9, 1932, p. 8.

231See Warner's study of the Tulane University theatre.
Newcomb College Dramatic Activities

Newcomb College, located on the uptown side of the Tulane University campus, was an institution of higher learning for women and an integral part of Tulane University. This section reports the senior class plays and May Day celebrations which accounted for most of the theatrical activities at Newcomb during the first half of the decade, and the foreign language plays, children's theatre, and other theatre in which the girls participated during the second half of the decade.

The Dramatic Club and the senior class provided most of the one-act and three-act play entertainment during the first five years of the decade. The Newcomb Dramatic Club often performed in December and June. In December, 1925, they presented three one-act plays, Atchi!, The Old Lady Shows Her Medals, and The Shepherd in the Distance. Since there was no theatre building on campus, the club performed in the new gym on a newly constructed stage.232 This facility became known as the "Little Theatre" and eliminated the necessity of renting the Tulane theatre downtown as they had done in the past. The girls performed male roles as well as female roles; however, according to the Hullabaloo reviewer, the girls in men's parts looked "ridiculous," and the plays were "weak."233

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232 Hullabaloo, December 11, 1925, p. 8. Hullabaloo reported activities of Newcomb as well as Tulane.

233 Hullabaloo, December 18, 1925, p. 2.
In April, 1925, the dramatic club performed an evening of three one-act plays, Figureheads, Overtones, and Rosalind. Then, in April, 1926, the upper and lower classes competed in one-act play competition of their own devising and presented On O'Me Thumb, The Shoes That Danced, and The Impertinence of the Creature. The judges were three of the city's most active theatre leaders, Zillah Mendes Meyer, Carolyn Steir, and Jesse Tharp.

There were no one-act plays presented during the 1927 season, but for the 1928 season, the organization returned to the one-act format and presented Tarkington's Trysting Place and Barrie's Twelve Pound Look. However, the attendance was small.

Newcomb's one-act plays were not often well-attended or liked by the student reviewers. About the December, 1929, plays, Dear Departed and The Far-Away Princess, the reviewer said:

"... unfortunately ... in the excitement of the moments, the actors forgot they were supposed to act," and the play, Dear Departed, was "as dead as dear old Father. . . ."

Twice between 1925 and 1930, the Newcomb girls attempted original one-act plays. One of the classes tried out For the

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234Picayune, April 18, 1925, p. 3.
235Hullabaloo, April 16, 1926, p. 5.
237Hullabaloo, January 4, 1929, p. 3.
238Hullabaloo, December 20, 1929, p. 2.
Honor of the Lafittes, by Enid Fisher.239 At another time, on the same bill with Wurzle-Flumery, the club performed The Last Refuge, by Claude Derbes, a local author.240

The senior class as well as the Dramatic Club produced one-act plays between 1925 and 1930. The seniors performed annually during the last weeks of school. In June, 1925, the senior class presented Shaw's Arms and the Man. Traditionally, the class did not reveal the title of the play nor the play's characters until the distribution of the programs on the night of the public performance.

Tharp, who was an instructor in dramatics at Warren Easton High School at the time, took time out from her high school theatre activities to direct some of the productions for Newcomb. She directed the senior class play of 1926 and 1928, but the group continued to be plagued with the problem of girls performing boys' parts.241

Annually, the junior class honored the seniors with a May Day festival. The court consisted of chosen members of the junior and senior classes, with the junior class president customarily representing the king. The 1929 festival, entitled "Revels of Arthur, a May Fete from the Class of 1930 to the Class of 1929," took place on a large outdoor set which contained a throne for the

239Hullabaloo, April 29, 1927, p. 1.
crowning of the king. Various dancing groups were included, but the feature of the festival was a joust between the White Knight and the Black Knight performed by girls. Done in "Russian splendor," the 1931 festival marked the seventeenth annual May Day which the school had celebrated.

Dixon Hall, completed in 1929, contained an auditorium with a large stage and seating for over a thousand spectators. Besides housing a major portion of the school of music and the library, it provided a place for both Newcomb's and Tulane's theatrical events. This new facility and a new director probably accounted, in part, for an increase in dramatic activity on campus during the second half of the decade.

Between 1930 and 1935, Newcomb continued to present one-act and three-act plays, but experimented with musicals, puppet theatre, and foreign language productions. In 1931, Elizabeth Boone became new director for the dramatic club. The first productions of the year were an evening of one-act plays, including Overtones, which had been presented before in 1925, The Rehearsal, and Helena's Husband. This was followed in March by a one-act play, The Wonder Hat. The major production of the year was Mr. Pim Passes By, and the graduating class opened the official 1932 commencement calendar with Berkley Square at Dixon Hall. The following year Boone directed Thomas William Robertson's Caste in

242 *Picayune*, May 5, 1929, p. 10.

December, and Zillah Meyer, a founding member of Le Petit and the Menorah Players Guild, assisted by Ethel Crumb Brett, directed G. Martinez's The Cradle Song. In 1935, the dramatic club presented A Murder Has Been Arranged, and the senior class play was If I Were King. The students that year also presented Miss Nellie of New Orleans.

In 1929, the Newcomb Dramatic Club and the Tulane University Dramatic Guild joined in presenting three one-act plays with Ben Yancey directing. In March, as reported earlier, they presented Shaw's Arms and the Man, and by the end of the year they had co-produced their first musical, H. M. S. Pinafore. This was followed the next year by The Mikado, in 1931 by The Pirates of Penzance, and in 1936 by the three-act play, The Torchbearers.

In 1933, Newcomb presented Milton's Comus, a musical work. Comus was probably the Dramatic Club's most ambitious production of the decade combining the talents of the dramatic club and the music department. It was directed by Emogene Stone of the English department, while Virginia Westbrook of the music school staff directed the chorus, and Lillian Lewis choreographed the dancers. Virginia Freret, formerly a member of Ruth Voss' Children's Theatre Guild, played Comus.

Press releases for the production stated that it had one of the most unusual stage settings ever designed for a local production.

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244 Brett was the set designer at Le Petit.

245 Picayune, December 19, 1933, p. 15.
Painted gauze drops produced an illusion of a real forest while pieces of canvas painted and glued to the gauze gave the effect of trees. Philip Rye Adams, instructor in the Newcomb art school, said that the set was lit from the back to suggest the wash drawings of the 17th century landscape painters. He said the set was made entirely by the Newcomb art students and was suggested by an Inigo Jones design.246

According to the 1930 Jambalaya, "the Dramatic Club's aim is to foster interest in the drama and also dramatic technique by monthly programmes and two regular night performances. Every member must participate in these programs."247 There were 125 members in the organization. The large membership is accounted for by the fact that other clubs, French Circle, Latin Club, and Spanish Club, were associate members of the Dramatic Club. All language club plays were presented under the auspices of the Dramatic Club.248

The earliest theatrically active language club was Le Cercle Francais. The members produced and acted in the plays. They endeavored to promote an interest in French by giving representative French plays, under the auspices of the Dramatic Club.249

246Picayune, April 1, 1934, p. B-2.


249Ibid., p. 33.
1927, they presented two playlets, *L'Affaire de la Louricaine* and *Les Coprices de Marianne*, and continued to present such playlets occasionally. In the early 1930's other language clubs became active theatrically. The German department for the first time presented a play in German. Lydia Frotscher, head of the department, directed a German Christmas play, *Weihnachtspiel*, and the cast of thirty also sang German songs.  

In April she directed a production of Emile Rostand's *The Romancers*. The junior and senior Latin students produced Plautus' play, *Rudens*, translated into English. Mary Allen, assistant professor of classical languages, directed this modernized version of the Roman play. The newspaper reported that an "enthusiastic audience" at Dixon Hall saw the characters clad in "flowing robes and sandals of the Roman days," and heard them speak "the slang of today."  

During the second half of this decade, the Newcomb Alumnae Association promoted theatrical programs for children, and especially puppet theatre. Under their auspices, the Sue Hastings Marionette Company presented *Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp* and *Hansel and Gretel* to a matinee audience of 600 school children at Dixon Hall. For the evening performance the four members of the troupe included "The Marionette Follies" along with Aladdin.  

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250 *Picayune*, December 19, 1932, p. 11.
251 *Picayune*, April 4, 1933, p. 20.
252 *Picayune*, April 3, 1933, p. 3.
253 *Picayune*, April 4, 1933, p. 20.
Newcomb alumnae on two separate occasions sponsored Tony Sarg's Marionettes, a professional group consisting of half a dozen men and women who had toured the country for about twenty years. They also promoted two performances by the marionettes at Dixon Hall in January, 1933, and again in February, 1935. In 1935, the group performed *Uncle Remus* at the matinee and in the evening, *Faust, the Wicked Magician*. This production was in "full costume" complete with "sinister stage effects." Tony Sarg's Marionettes also performed again in New Orleans in 1936 at the Holy Name School Auditorium. At this time they performed *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.256

By 1931 Newcomb students performed their own puppet plays for various groups in and out of town. That year they transported their puppet show to Mandeville, Louisiana.257 The following year the Newcomb Puppet Club presented several plays at Kingsley House,258 including *Cinderella, Punch and Judy, Punch Junior's Recitations*, and *The Gingerbread Boy*.259

In 1934 the faculty re-established the tradition of the faculty play. Elizabeth Malone of the physical education department

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256 *Item*, January 26, 1936, p. 7.

257 *Picayune*, November 12, 1931, p. 23.

258 Kingsley House, often called "Hull House of the South," conducted classes for its members for both instructional and recreational purposes. *New Orleans City Guide*, p. 348.

259 *Picayune*, December 23, 1932, p. 20.
directed Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* for the benefit of the Book Loan Fund. There were no try-outs. Faculty members were allowed to select the roles they wished to play, and the cast was not revealed until the night of the performance.260

Members of Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carre, besides helping the students produce some of their plays, frequently came to the campus to talk to the students about theatre. In 1935, Bernard Szold, then director of the little theatre, spoke to students interested in theatre,261 and in 1936, Ethel Brett addressed the students.262

During the decade the tradition of the class play at Newcomb led to the production of foreign language plays, cooperation with Tulane thespians allowed the production of operettas near the end of the decade, and puppeteering provided an outlet for the creative talents of some of the students and entertainment for many youngsters.

**Loyola University**

Loyola University is a Catholic institution operated by the Jesuit order and located on an adjoining tract of land to the Tulane University and Newcomb College campuses. The proximity of Loyola's campus to Tulane's promoted rivalry rather than a

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260 *Picayune*, November 14, 1934, p. 11.


262 *Picayune*, February 19, 1936, p. 18.
closeness between the two institutions. Perhaps inadvertently though, Loyola's theatrical activities resembled, in some respects, those at Newcomb.

Like Newcomb, Loyola presented (attempted to present) one-act plays before Christmas and three-act plays in the spring and presented plays in French, Spanish, Italian, and German. The language club productions and the operettas, vied for popularity with the dramatic club at Loyola.

The Loyola Dramatic Club, formed in December, 1925, was the lineal descendant of the "Thespians," which flourished as an organization at the old Jesuit College in Baronne Street. There were two dramatic societies there, a junior and senior organization. The first was organized under the name of the Philelectic Society63 ... while the latter was transferred here and became the Loyola Dramatic Club. Hence the local society is in reality older than is the university itself.64

In 1926, Andrew Macaluso, Jr. directed A Tailor Made Man, which marked the university's entrance into the dramatic field. Macaluso, a Loyola student, had studied in New York under George Wellington of the Broadway company of The Show-Off. After returning from New York, he directed dramatics for Dominican College and various other groups throughout the city. Since there was no one as well-qualified available to direct, he was persuaded to do

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63See Jesuit high school section.
64The Maroon, January 14, 1927, p. 2.
the job. Howard Bogner,\textsuperscript{265} the president of the Dramatic Club, said that no pains were being spared to make this first production an outstanding one. The all-male cast consisted of thirteen of the university's "most talented dramatists."\textsuperscript{266}

During this time, the university offered three courses in speech, none of them dealing directly with dramatics. Principles of Vocal Expression, a one semester hour course, dealt with methods of breathing, articulation, pronunciation, inflection, qualities of voice, purity and flexibility of tone. Another course dealt with the physical process of speaking. The one semester hour course titled Gesture and Technique of Action, taught poise, posture, movement, gesture, interpretation of emotions, expression, ease, grace, and effectiveness of delivery. The third course, Argumentation and Debate, included techniques and application of skills in presenting debates.\textsuperscript{267}

During the second year the club presented, for the first time, one-act plays, \textit{All Gummed Up} and \textit{Thompson's Luck}. Also for the first time, the men of the club performed feminine roles.\textsuperscript{268} In the spring they performed \textit{Grumpy}.

The third year, Father O'Connor, who had been director the previous year, was assigned other duties, and the club remained

\textsuperscript{265}Bogner was later active in the Menorah Players Guild. See Menorah Players Guild section.

\textsuperscript{266}\textit{The Maroon}, January 20, 1926, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{267}\textit{Loyola University Catalogue}, 1926-1927, p. 34.

\textsuperscript{268}\textit{The Maroon}, January 14, 1927, p. 2.
inactive throughout most of the year.\textsuperscript{269} The only note of theatre in the fall was the report that Eddie Reed, "popular young grid-iron coach . . ." made a "hit in his first starring role at Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré" in \textit{The Face and the Mask}.\textsuperscript{270}

The Thespians, as they were now called, were plagued with financial problems and a lack of student interest and faculty guidance. Besides, they were limited in the plays they could perform with all-male casts. Audiences had not approved of men playing women's roles at Loyola. In the spring, Dr. Alfred J. Bonomo, affectionately called "Doc," became faculty director and imported girls from Ursuline College and the Ladies Auxiliary to the Student Council to perform the female roles in the plays.\textsuperscript{271} \textit{Three Wise Fools} played to a "packed house" at the St. Charles theatre in mid-May,\textsuperscript{272} and the Thespians, with their new Thespian Auxiliary, were active once again.

Beginning in 1927, the Thespian Society and the Literary Society were listed together in the catalogue. The stated purpose of the Thespians was to develop and give an outlet to the dramatic talent of the students. Members were encouraged to write plays of varying length and scope which would be presented by the club if they showed sufficient merit.\textsuperscript{273} In the 1927-1928 season, the

\textsuperscript{269} \textit{The Maroon}, October 21, 1927, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{270} \textit{The Maroon}, November 4, 1927, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{271} \textit{The Maroon}, March 9, 1928, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{272} \textit{The Maroon}, May 18, 1928, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{273} \textit{Loyola University Catalogue}, 1927-1928, p. 34.
club sponsored a playwriting contest. The winning play of this contest served as the first play for the 1928-1929 season.

Joe Abraham directed his contest-winning play, *A Game of Checkers*, the first play written by a member to be produced. *The Man from Borneo* was on the same bill with the original. Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carre' thought enough of Abraham's play to stage it at their workshop in January.

In the spring the club decided to present, for the first time, a complete vaudeville show. It included two one-acts, *The Laziest Man in the World* and *Come Out of It*. The audience "taxed the capacity of Marquette Hall," the campus theatre which seated two hundred. At the St. Charles theatre in May, the Loyola Thespians presented as their annual play *The Witching Hour*.

Although Bonomo often planned one-act plays before Christmas, the performance was seldom before January or February. The plays were often postponed because of examinations or cast illness. Sickness in the cast caused the delay in presenting two one-acts, *Too Much Married* and *Barbara* until January.

274Abraham, later in 1931, headed the Expression Department at Fortier high school.


277The Maroon, April 26, 1929, p. 1.

278Picayune, May 22, 1929, p. 6.

279The Maroon, January 10, 1930, p. 3.
Early in the spring, the Thespians and Thespian Auxiliary presented two one-act plays directed by Bonomo at Marquette Hall, *The Thousand-Dollar Reward* and *Hittin' on all Six*. Alden Echezabal\(^{280}\) was in the cast.\(^{281}\)

In order to lessen expenses, Bonomo decided to present the spring play in Marquette Hall rather than rent a downtown theatre. There were also plans to tour the plays. Although the tour did not materialize, the group produced one of its best productions, *The Enemy*, in the spring. De Lapouyade, a professional scenic designer in the city, constructed and painted special scenery and stage settings for the play. Since only a small percent of the Loyola student body attended the productions, the organization planned a Loyola Night for Loyola students and their dates only. The experiment was successful, and the first full production presented at Marquette Hall drew a full house.\(^{282}\) The reviewer said that it was "the most powerful and colorful production ever presented by the dramatic society."\(^{283}\)

The club was not very active during the 1930-1931 season, but did present some one-act plays. In October they prepared *The

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\(^{280}\)Echezabal later founded the Little Art Theatre. His uncle, Joseph Echezabal, was a member of the St. Charles Stock Company.

\(^{281}\) *The Maroon*, May 2, 1930, p. 2.

\(^{282}\) *The Maroon*, May 2, 1930, p. 2.

Daughters of Men and Aunt Betty of Butte. Leo Zinser performed in the latter one. He had been a member of the Holy Cross theatrical group before coming to Loyola and continued to be an actor and leader at Loyola for the years he was a student. Later in the year, after postponements, they produced two more one-acts, The Bluffers, or Dust in My Eyes and The Importance of Mary. In November, 1931, another winner from the play contest was produced on the stage. To the State, by Loyola student J. A. Charbonnet, shared the bill with Hilliard Booth’s Broadway success His Majesty, the Queen, and The Beloved Chair, written especially for Loyola Thespian presentation by local author, Evelyn Soule Ford.

A course called public speaking and dramatics was added in 1931, along with a course in play production. For this course the students were required to present two one-act or longer plays and special attention was given to stagecraft.

The Loyola club became active once again, presenting Not Herbert. Bonomo directed Behold the Dreamer at Holy Name

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284 Zinser later taught and directed theatre at Loyola for a number of years.


Auditorium in May, 1934, and The Show Off in 1936. However, these plays were eclipsed by the publicity given to and the popularity of the foreign language plays and the operettas.

During this period, Loyola performed plays in Spanish, French, German, and even Italian, as part of the foreign languages studies. The Spanish Club presented a play annually. For the first time, in 1928, the club presented the play in Marquette Auditorium following one of the Thespian presentations. Mrs. R. G. Robinson, a member of the Little Theatre Guild, volunteered to direct the play and procure the costumes. For this event, the group chose Jacinto Benavente’s famous classic The Bonds of Interest. There must have been some concern about boys playing girls' roles, for the press release for this play stated: "Girls will play girls."

Often Thespian members performed and directed the plays. Joseph Abraham, Jr., of the Thespians, played the title role of the following year's three-act comedy by the Quintero Brothers, Fortunato. In 1931, Leo Zinser, a Thespian, performed in El

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290 Item, November 20, 1935, p. 16.


292 Ibid.

293 The Maroon, March 22, 1929, p. 1.
Chico, a Spanish play written by Abraham. Also on the program was La Praviana, a repeat, directed by another Thespian, Howard Bogner. Jesse Montejo, the Spanish teacher, said that the purpose of the productions was to give the students ease of speech in Spanish and to supplement the classwork. Although the acting was not always good, the students did show improvement as a performing group.

The French society at Loyola formed Le Cercle Francais during the 1928-1929 academic year. Although it was basically a social organization promoting interest and study in the French language, like the same organization at Newcomb, the members began to produce plays to achieve their goals. The club's first production was L'Anglais Tel Qu'on Le Parle, by Tristan Bernard, directed by the Reverend Andre J. deMonsabert, Dean of the Romance Language Department and professor of senior French. The success of this play prompted the group to perform Cousin Jeanne, a three-act comedy, the next year, but then the club was inactive for two years.

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294 Personal interview with Leo Zinser, March 7, 1973, New Orleans, Louisiana. Zinser explained that both he and Abraham spoke Spanish fluently. Both were graduates of Holy Cross High School where they had boarded with many Latin American students sent there for an American education. This possibly accounts for some of the interest in Spanish at Loyola, since many of their students came from Holy Cross.


before presenting plays again. In 1932, they performed *La Poudre aux Yeux*, an 18th century satire, in the new Holy Name school auditorium using authentic settings and costumes. Hensley B. Lacy, a Loyola French professor, directed it. Two years later he directed the French Club at the same auditorium in *Un Arriviste*, *La Dame de Bronze*, and *Poil de Carotte*.

During the 1934-1935 school term, a new language club formed. Professor Papale helped organize Circolo Universitario Italiano, and with the help of Bonomo, presented an Italian play for the first time at Loyola. So that they could follow, the audience was furnished with an English synopsis of the play, *Chi sa il gioco non l'insegni*. By 1935 the German class, still not as well organized as the Spanish and French Clubs, began rehearsing *Einer Muss Heiraten*.

At the end of the 1934-1935 school year, the Spanish, French, Italian, and German groups came together to present one of the unique evenings of theatre in the city during this period. On May 28, each of the groups presented a one-act play. The Spanish Club performed *El Chico*; French society, *Les Precieuses Ridicules*; Circolo Universitario Italiano, *Chi sa il gioco non l'insegni*; and the German class, *Einer Muss Heiraten*. This program

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298 Lacy had participated in Holy Cross theatrical activities as a student.


culminated a series of theatrical events which included the Thespians' production of *The Show-Off* and the music group's, *The Bohemian Girl*, an operetta.

*Hulda of Holland* was the first operetta staged at Loyola. It was a group effort of the Loyola Glee Club, the Loyola Auxiliary to the Student Council, the Ursuline Glee Club, and the Loyola Orchestra, which made its initial appearance.  

Clet A. Girard, Jr. directed the operetta in conjunction with Bonomo, director of dramatics.  

*Hulda of Holland* was so popular that there was standing room only, more than a hundred patrons had to be turned away, and the performance had to be repeated. A month later the show toured, playing at the Martin Behrman Memorial Theatre in Algiers under the auspices of the Little Theatre of Algiers, and in April, at the New Iberia High School Auditorium in New Iberia, Louisiana.  

*The Bohemian Girl*, the 1935 Loyola musical offering performed at the Tulane Theatre, was one of the theatrical presentations included in the schedule for May. This opera was as popular as the other had been.  

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Although Loyola's theatrical activities, unlike Tulane's and Newcomb's, received little help from outside groups, members of the Loyola Thespians often acted in Le Petit Théâtre productions. The New Orleans little theatre provided an outlet for those student actors who were interested in performing more challenging roles than the plays at Loyola had to offer.\textsuperscript{307} Wolf, the Loyola annual, listed the students active in the little theatre.

Outside plays in which Thespians and other Loyolans have scored hits include: John Oulliber, ex-Thespian, as Dr. Lewis in the Moss Hart-Kauffmann satire, \textit{Once in a Lifetime}; Felicien Lozes, Thespian, in the title role, in the world premiere of Oliver La Farge's \textit{Laughing Boy}; John Oulliber and Leo C. Zinser, Thespians in Anton Tchekov's \textit{The Cherry Orchard}; Leo Zinser in \textit{Echoes}; Al Leach, Thespian, in \textit{The Bad Man} and Pierre Patelin; and Felicien Lozes in the American premiere of G. B. Stern's \textit{The Man Who Pays the Piper}. All of these productions were those of Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré.\textsuperscript{308}

Other students performed in the Algiers Little Theatre between 1933 and 1936.

The Algiers Little Theatre starred a Thespian, John Brechtel, in \textit{The White Sister} and in the world premiere of \textit{The Southern Buccaneer}, based upon Lyle Saxon's \textit{Lafitte, the Pirate}. This organization also starred Lloyd Salathe in \textit{The Charm School} and Julia Sierra and Lloyd Salathe in \textit{East is West}.\textsuperscript{309}

Many of the thespians at Loyola were law students. Often they had to curtail their theatrical activities during their senior year in order to prepare for the rigid examinations

\textsuperscript{307}Zinser interview.

\textsuperscript{308}Wolf, \textit{1933-1936}, p. 160.

\textsuperscript{309}Ibid.
required by the law curriculum.\textsuperscript{310}

St. Mary's Dominican College Dramatics

St. Mary's Dominican College in 1908 established the first Catholic normal training school in the state. By 1910 it had become the first Catholic women's college in Louisiana. The theatrical activities at the school were often presented in conjunction with St. Mary's Dominican high school.\textsuperscript{311} However, according to Sister Mary Angela,\textsuperscript{312} the Siena Club and the Dramatic Club operated independently of the high school.

In 1926, the Siena Club presented \textit{The Christmas Picture} and \textit{When Shakespeare Struck Town} as their two offerings for the year. The Dramatic Club presented one play, \textit{The Ship}, that year. The next year, 1927, they (the Dramatic Club) again presented only one play, \textit{In-laws} and \textit{Out-laws}.\textsuperscript{313} However, the Dramatic Club was extremely active in 1929 and presented the following productions:

- \textit{Mystery Island}
- \textit{Pollyanna}
- \textit{The Three Pigs}
- \textit{The Romancers} (one-act)

\textsuperscript{310}Zinser interview.

\textsuperscript{311}See section on St. Mary's Dominican high school.

\textsuperscript{312}Information concerning theatrical activities at Dominican College was gathered from school papers \textit{Regina Rosarii} and yearbooks and sent to the author by Sister Mary Angela, September 20, 1972. Sister Mary Angela was a teacher at the high school between 1925 and 1935.

\textsuperscript{313}Sister Angela correspondence.
The Violin Maker of Cremona (one-act)
The Telegram (one-act)
The Sight of the Blind (one-act)

Their presentations in 1930 included Mammy’s Li’l Wild Rose and Peg of My Heart. The Dramatic Club presented three plays during 1931, I Will and I Won’t, The Flour Girl, and a modern comedy entitled Cinderella. Their most ambitious undertaking for the year was Little Women. In 1934, they presented The Upper Room and in 1936, Sylvia.

There was also theatrical activity at Dominican College other than that of the Dramatic Club and the Siena Club. In 1930, a few of the students translated and dramatized Cassilda, or The Moorish Province of Toledo. The same year, three students translated and dramatized The Secret of Fougereuse. The sophomores presented The Spooky House, dramatizations of four scenes from the tragedy Hamlet, and the life and works of Father Tabb. The sophomores later presented Lafayette Rupert Hamberlin. Mr. Hanley, from the New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art, gave four one-act plays for the benefit of the new gym building. They included A Marriage Has Been Arranged, Allison's Lands, Finders-Keepers, and The Flattering Word. On one occasion, the Essay Division of the College Literary Society presented and dramatized "The Trial of the Modern Student."

314 Idem.
Besides the plays mentioned, Dominican College students worked with the Dominican high school students sponsoring playlets and dramatizations based on the life or works of various authors.\textsuperscript{315}

**Ursuline College Theatrical Activities**

Ursuline College was founded in 1927, at which time the school offered only freshmen courses. Since in the beginning the school was not large enough to have its own theatrical program, the girls who were interested in dramatics participated in theatre activities at Loyola and by 1928 formed part of the Loyola Thespian Auxiliary.

Although Ursuline participated in spring activities with Ursuline grammar and high school and the glee club sang operettas, there was no drama club until 1935, when the Thalpomenians formed. Their purpose was to foster and encourage Catholic principles and ideals. Their first production was \textit{Little Women} performed in their new gymnasium-auditorium.\textsuperscript{316}

**Xavier University Theatre**

Xavier University, originated in 1915 by the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament as a preparatory school for Negro youths. In 1925 it became a four-year college. At the end of the decade, it

\textsuperscript{315}See St. Mary's Dominican high school.

\textsuperscript{316}Personal interview with Edna Mae Meyrey Mock, March 8, 1973. Mock was a student at Ursuline College and one of the founders of the Thalpomenians.
was still the only Catholic institution of higher learning in the United States functioning solely for Negroses.\textsuperscript{317} The plays which the drama groups chose during the period of this study reflected their Catholic sponsorship and Negro origins. Students at Xavier often presented religious plays during the Lenten season and black heritage plays during the annual celebration of National Negro History Week. Various classes and theatrical groups presented plays before the organization of a Speech and Drama Department.

Although class plays formed most of the theatrical activity between 1925 and 1928, by 1929, Father Crowe had helped to organize the Xavier Players and with the aid of the Alumni Association staged \textit{Peg O' My Heart}, which drew a large crowd and gained the first real recognition for a theatrical venture. The performance for the benefit of the stadium fund was so popular that it was repeated in order that parochial school children might attend.

The following year, Father Crowe prepared the College Players, another Xavier dramatic club, for a three-act melodrama which he had written. His play, \textit{The Billingtons}, was presented for the Stadium Fund and also for his own church, St. Raymond at Pailet Town. Admission was thirty-five cents, and it too drew a large crowd.\textsuperscript{318} The following year he directed the Xavier Dramatic Association in \textit{Janice Meredith}, a play about the American Revolution usually considered too difficult for amateur

\textsuperscript{317}\textit{New Orleans City Guide}, p. 337.

\textsuperscript{318}\textit{Xavier Herald}, November, 1930, p. 1.
The Dramatic Association, another theatre group, had as its stated intent "to make dramatics an active part of Xavier's curriculum." Its purpose was to select and enact one or two major plays each year, and to foster debates and oratorical contests.

In 1933, Dr. Edward F. Murphy, S. J., organized a Little Theatre Guild whose purpose was to eliminate the superficial staging of plays which left nothing to the imagination of the audience. They wanted to present plays which were psychological in nature and at the same time amusing and entertaining for the audience. They chose Salvation, by the eminent Negro playwright Walton, for their first presentation. Murphy and Father Conahan both supervised this one-act version of a five-act drama. It contained tableaus and special lighting effects which were "very near theatrical perfection." Later in the year Murphy directed two one-act plays, Sham and A Night in the Inn, thus establishing the Theatre Guild firmly at Xavier.

The theatrical groups continued to work during the Lenten seasons by rehearsing religious plays and sometimes presenting them during Holy Week, the week before Easter. Two of the annual

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320 Ibid., p. 2.
322 Ibid.
Lenten plays included Pilate's Daughter, by the Reverend F. L. Kenzel, which had its first performance on Palm Sunday afternoon, 1931, and Monsignor Hugh Benson's three-act play, In the Upper Room, performed during Lent of 1933. This production, directed by Murphy, was presented for children of the public and parochial schools.323

If the Lenten season was a time for religious plays, the celebration of National Negro History Week was an occasion for dramas of Negro life. Inching Along, a colorful Negro drama, culminated the celebration week in April, 1933.324

Robert Wilson, in his study of the theatrical activities at Xavier, states that Xavier did not participate in any other theatrical activities—only plays.325 However, during the 1930's Xavier exhibited a growing interest in operettas which led eventually to the founding of the opera division of the Department of Music. One of the early operettas was Lelawala performed by the Xavier University Glee Club in the college auditorium.326 In 1934 the opera division formed, and in 1935 the university presented a full production of Faust.327

323Ibid.

324Xavier Herald, April, 1934, p. 1.

325Robert Wilson, Jr. "A History of the Theatrical Activities of the Four Negro Colleges in Louisiana from their Beginnings Through the 1966-1967 School Year" (Master's thesis, Louisiana State University, 1969) p. 120.

326Xavier Herald, April, 1933, p. 1.

327Brochure entitled "Xavier 25 Years of Opera" from Archives Collection, Xavier University Library, New Orleans, Louisiana.
From time to time, revues lifted the spirits of the school and gave opportunities for singers, actors, and dancers to release their creative energy. *Rainbow Revue*, "a mirthful melange, guaranteed to make one briefly forget that Mr. Depression still walks in our midst," included not only sketches and dances but opera selections performed by the students.328

The infrequent plays directed by Crowe and Murphy and presented by various organizations included three-act comedies, dramas, and religious and Negro plays, all of which stimulated interest in theatre and helped eventually to form the Speech and Drama Department at Xavier University.

Dillard University Theatre

In 1930 New Orleans University and Straight College merged to form Dillard University. Both Robert Wilson329 and Floyd L. Sandle330 have studied the Dillard University Theatre. In 1935 Dillard began its academic program and theatrical activities at the same time.331 Unlike Xavier, Dillard's church affiliation332

328Production program for *Rainbow Revue*, 1935, Archives Collection, Xavier University Library, New Orleans, Louisiana.


331*Courtbouillon*, November, 1949, p. 3.

332The American Missionary Society of New York maintained Dillard.
had no significant influence on its theatrical activities. 333

During the 1935-1936 season, S. Randolph Edmonds, professor of dramatics and instructor in English, directed the performances of the Dillard Players. Besides holding a B.A. from Oberlin College and an M.A. from Columbia, Edmonds had additional study at Yale University School of Dramatics. There was no theatre for theatrical activities when Edmonds began directing the theatrical activities in 1935; consequently, he had to build a theatre in the basement of Kearney Hall. In the autumn of 1936 the drama program was awarded $25,000 to share with music. 334

Three one-act plays opened the theatrical season for the Dillard Players in 1935. The plays included Let's Move the Furniture, The House of Sham, and The Slave with Two Faces, which were performed in November, 1935. Later in the year Edmonds directed three original one-act plays by James D. Brown entitled Church Wife, The Woman of Grey, and Arctic Glory. 335

The Dillard Players celebrated Negro History Week in February with three one-act plays including Harriet Tubman Attacks, The Martyr, and Nat Turner. The players closed their season in June with the only full length three-act play of the season, Death Takes a Holiday. 336

333 Wilson, p. 106.
334 Wilson, p. 83.
335 The Courtbouillon, Winter, 1936, p. 10.
336 The Courtbouillon, Spring, 1935, p. 15.
Dillard made a significant contribution to furthering Negro colleges and universities' interest in Speech and the Dramatic arts. The university's dramatic director, Edmonds, founded the Southern Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts, and the first annual conference of that association was held at Dillard. This was the first intercollegiate conference on dramatics and speech arts ever held at a Negro college in the South. Under Edmonds' leadership, over fifty delegates representing nineteen leading Negro colleges and universities attended and completed the organization. The Southern Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts developed in order to bring recognition to dramatic work in the curriculum, and raise the standards for dramatics in the schools and colleges.

The speakers at the conference included President James Dogan of Wiley College, C. M. Wise of the Speech Department at Louisiana State University, and the directors of dramatic activities at Tuskegee, Fisk, Spellman, Talladega, Florida A. and M. and Dillard. Dr. Wise, was guest speaker and guest critic at the conference.

... Dr. Wise in giving his general impressions referred to Dillard University itself as being "New and Promising." He felt that many "Outstanding subjects were discussed at this conference." He emphasized the need for the organization to get together; that

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337 The Courtbouillon, Spring, 1936, p. 3.


339 The Courtbouillon, Spring, 1936, p. 15.
at several points "the objectives seemed to lack the drive toward a goal." Dr. Wise warned that he envisioned a possible speech vs. dramatics attitude in the future. He felt that the Southern Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts was essentially a dramatic or theatre organization. It would seem that the critic had laid his hand on the pulse of the organization. There is no account that he was challenged on the character of the organization.340

The Dillard theatre began at the same time that the academic activities began. The Players "... made trips to many high schools and communities, had exchange programs with colleges, hosted festivals, and participated in the Southern Association of Drama and Speech Arts."341

**Play Contests**

Especially in educational theatre in New Orleans during the period, play tournaments were instrumental in stimulating interest in writing and producing plays. High schools, university, and community groups entered an annual contest sponsored by the New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art. This one act play tournament was affiliated with the Belasco Cup Contest.

Considering the one-act play peculiarly the province of the amateur theatrical unit, David Belasco in 1922 decided to give a loving cup annually to the group giving the best all-around play. Little theater and similar organizations have been invited to New York every year since then to compete for four cash prizes of $200 each, after which four winners strive among themselves for the cup. The contest is held in the Waldorf theater, with New York producers and other theatrical experts as judges.

340Sandle, p. 38.

341Wilson, p. 105.
Interest in the cup has been so large and so many groups have been going to New York to contend for it that this year another contest has been added for the best full length play, the prizes being $1,000, a cup, and professional production.

As a result of the Belasco award, one-act play competitions have been multiplying rapidly during the past eight years all over the country. Pennsylvania, Colorado, Massachusetts, Iowa, New Jersey, Missouri, Florida, Utah, Oregon, Arizona, Arkansas, all have statewide contests, Pennsylvania even having two.³⁴²

Although other cities in Louisiana had participated in the contest before, 1930 was the first year that New Orleans entered.

The Picayune stated:

In Louisiana, Shreveport has been having a contest since 1926, and Alexandria is holding one this year. Miss Mason hopes to bring the New Orleans tournament into connection with the other two and produce a real state tournament in the future. Lemist Esler, visiting director of Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré, says that it will be a splendid thing for the encouragement of drama here.³⁴³

The awards to be presented were donated by various theatrical groups in the city. The Picayune explained:

Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré is donating a silver loving cup for first prize in the senior group, the Shakespeare Club one for second prize, and Miss Lily Whitaker, principal and instructor in city schools for many years, another for third. The loving cup for the junior group, composed of younger actors' organizations such as those in high schools, will be donated by the alumni association. Miss Jessie Tharp of the Little Theatre will also give individual prizes for the best performance by a boy and a girl in the junior competition. The judges will be persons prominent in New Orleans for their interest in dramatics.

³⁴² Picayune, November 9, 1930, p. 28.
³⁴³ Ibid.
The judges will make the awards on a basis of choice of play (this is in accordance with the tournament's purpose of encouraging fine drama) of acting (this counting most) and of stagecraft. The same play cannot be given by two groups and none may last more than 45 minutes.

By November 9, ten groups, some of them forming to enter the contest and disbanding after, had listed their names as entries for the December contest. They were:

- Kingsley House Dramatic Club
- Strolling Players
- Menorah Guild
- Martin Behrman Players
- St. Rose de Lima Dramatic Club
- Les Marionnettes
- Public Service Woman's Committee
- S. J. Peters High School Dramatic Department
- Little Art Theatre
- Loyola Thespians

A few of the plays presented included the Cathedral Dramatic Club's production of an original play entitled *Forgotten Escapades*, in which the author played the lead; St. Rose De Lima Dramatic Club's production of *The Social Outcast*, an outmoded drama; and the Dramatic Club of the Women's Committee of the New Orleans Public Service's presentation of a dramatized advertisement. The S. J. Peters High School Dramatic Department won first prize in the tournament.

The New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art also sponsored the second annual play tournament which was held in

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344 Ibid.
345 Ibid.
346 *Picayune*, December 5, 1930, p. 5.
November and December, 1931 at Newcomb College. The *Picayune* listed and commented on some of the plays. The *Socereas* by Amy Howard and Wales Bullock was successfully performed by the Bullock Players and directed by Germaine Cazenave. Chi Omega Alumnae staged *Won by a Nose*, written and directed by Marguerite Dow McEnery; and *Grandma and the Grim Reaper*, composed and directed by Claude J. Derbes, was performed by the Masqueraders. Les Marionettes presented Evelyn Soule Ford's *The Path to the Moon* and won second prize.\(^{347}\)

On November 28, three plays were presented by the Memorial Players of Algiers, the Strolling Players, and the Theosophical Society.\(^{348}\) The Strolling Players' production of *Stokers*, written by LeVergne Shaw and Hermann C. Cottman and directed by Miss Jessie Tharp, won first prize in the original plays division. The prize was publication of the play by Longmans, Green and Company of New York and one hundred dollars in advanced royalties to the authors.\(^{349}\)

The senior division entries, performed on December 4, included: (1) Channel Players presenting Eugene O'Neill's *Isle*; (2) the New Orleans Public Service Players presenting *The Last Refuge* by Claude Derbes; (3) the St. Rose de Lima Dramatic Club presenting *Dust of the Road* by Kenneth Goodman Sawyer; and (4) the

\(^{347}\) *Picayune*, November 28, 1931, p. 12.

\(^{348}\) *Ibid*.

\(^{349}\) *Picayune*, November 29, 1931, p. 8.
Tulane Dramatic Guild presenting The Other Side by Allan Davis.\textsuperscript{350}

The junior division entries were presented at Dixon Hall on December 5. Fortier High School entered the contest for the first time, since they had just opened the year before. They presented A Game of Checkers, a three-scene mountaineer play, which was directed by Mr. Abraham.\textsuperscript{351} Other schools entered in the contest were Warren Easton, Commercial High School, and Edward Douglas White.\textsuperscript{352} Warren Easton's production of Lord Dunsany's A Night at an Inn won the first place silver cup.\textsuperscript{353}

The contest grew considerably in popularity the second year, and by the third year The New Orleans One-Act Play Tournament Association formed and presented the contest at McMain High School auditorium. A brochure for the tournament, held December 8, 9, and 16, 1933, listed the entrants and their plays.\textsuperscript{354} Fortier entered with Back Home, Easton with Game of Chess, and the Philalelectic Society of Jesuit High School performed North of 63.

There were numerous entries in the original play division with many groups forming in order to enter the contest. The Strolling Players, a group formed and directed by Jessie Tharp,

\textsuperscript{350}Picayune, December 4, 1931, p. 12.

\textsuperscript{351}Silver and Blue, November 6, 1931, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{352}Silver and Blue, December 4, 1931, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{353}The Eagle, (Warren Easton yearbook), 1932.

\textsuperscript{354}Brochure for The New Orleans One-Act Play Tournament, December 8, 9, and 16, 1933, Zollinger scrapbook.
performed *Bambino* written by H. S. Cottman, a former student of Ben Hanley. The Netoppens Dramatic Guild performed Evelyn Soule Ford's *Number Twenty-four*. Included in this cast were A. P. Schiro, III, Hanley's student, Gladys Reine, Alice Cobb's student, and Lois Winters. The Newcomers presented *Murdered Guest*, directed by the author, Alex Primos, and The Press Club Players performed *Hell and Breakfast* written by Tilden Landry of Easton and Bradley Smith.

The Senior Division entries included a second play by Ford. This one, performed by The Vagabond Players under the direction of Lucille Chamberlain, was entitled, *The Return of Jacques*. 

*The Sponge* by Mrs. A. C. Riley presented by the Padua Players and directed by T. A. Duggan, included Lucille Burrows, another Hanley student, in the cast. William Fulham, whose plays were tried out at Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carre and in New York on Broadway, was represented with his play *Will You Marry Me?* executed by the Marionettes, a group directed by Mildred Masson, who had studied under Hanley. Inez Gonzales, a member of the cast, had also received her training under Hanley. The fact that Ben Hanley's students were well-represented in the contest was a tribute to the man's influence in the theatrical activity in New Orleans during this period.

**Summary**

Between 1925 and 1935 elementary schools, secondary schools, private acting schools, and colleges and universities presented numerous one-act and three-act plays as well as revues, variety
shows, and operettas.

Elementary schools children participated in and viewed several historical pageants, and May festivals. Daily school programs and graduation exercises allowed them to participate in and view one-act plays and playlets.

Most of the public, Catholic, and private high schools participated in some form of theatrical activity. Of the schools investigated, only two private boys' military academies, New Orleans Academy and Rugby Academy, did not present theatricals. Girls' schools, particularly Kohn, presented a greater number of plays than boys' schools, and St. Mary's Dominican reported more dramatizations, some of which were not staged productions, than any of the other schools.

During the period under investigation, the secondary schools of New Orleans presented one-act and three-act plays. When expression became part of the curriculum in 1928, more three-act plays emanated from the expression classes. The teacher used these plays to develop ability in oral expression and to supplement the classroom work. In most of the Catholic high schools where expression was not offered as a separate course, the English teacher instigated the dramatic productions. These productions were usually one-act plays presented for the students during the school hours in classrooms, assembly halls, gymnasiums, or auditoriums.

The major productions, or three-act plays, were either sponsored by a dramatic organization or performed by the senior graduation class. The dramatic organizations operating in the schools
during this period included the Easton High Players, the Philelectic Society at Jesuit, and the Holy Cross Players. Graduation plays were sometimes performed in January and almost always in May or June. These productions were usually staged in a school auditorium. Only Jesuit performed in the Tulane theatre downtown. Although St. Mary's Dominican presented dramatizations of great authors' works, and Easton and McDonogh 35 performed some plays of literary and historical value, usually the educational value of the school productions was in the performance rather than the play itself. Only Fortier and Miller schools reported attempts at foreign language plays, and only Ursuline Academy presented mostly plays with religious content. The public, Catholic, and private schools usually selected mysteries and comedies seldom duplicating each other's choices.

The high schools, during this period, entertained with minstrel shows, variety shows, and May Day pageants. Many of the Catholic high schools occupied themselves with festivals and bazaars rather than plays in order to raise money for their school or church. Only McDonogh 35, the co-ed Negro school, experimented with operettas.

The Easton High School Players under Ben Hanley's direction consistently performed plays of superior quality. The high school graduated such theatre leaders as Audley Keck, Leon Zainey, Abe Manheim, Ben Abadie, Herman Cottman, LeVergne Shaw, and Bill McHugh. Holy Cross graduated Leo Zinser, Robert Lacey, and Joe Abraham, all of whom later became leaders in theatre at Loyola and in community theatre groups.
Between 1929 and 1933, most of the high schools in New Orleans ceased publication of yearbooks, bulletins, and school papers. Therefore there is no indication as to whether or not theatrical performances continued during this period. It is possible that at some schools such activity either lessened or ceased. However, by 1933 most of the schools again reported theatrical activities and continued to do so throughout the remainder of the decade.

Between 1925 and 1935, many of the acting or elocution schools which developed in New Orleans were founded by promising young graduates of Lily Whitaker's New Orleans College of Oratory. These graduates included Ben Hanley, Olivia H. Lyne, Miriam Poche, and Olivia Lyons, each of whom founded a school. Several students from these schools later also began schools of their own, thus perpetuating some of Whitaker's ideas, but changing them to meet the new demands of the public. Near the end of the decade and after 1935, many of them became dancing schools, possibly because the study of dance became socially acceptable and the high schools and particularly universities began to offer courses in speech and dramatics.

Of all the schools, Ben Hanley's New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art distinguished itself through its fine theatrical performances, diverse curriculum, qualified faculty, and devoted graduates as the finest school of drama in New Orleans between 1925 and 1935.

Each of the seven universities in New Orleans sponsored theatrical organizations as part of the extracurricular activities
between 1925 and 1935. Most of the plays chosen were one-act comedies which were more entertaining than educational. Some three-act plays were also presented.

Plays were presented in French, German, Spanish, and Italian at Loyola and in French and German at Newcomb. These plays were an outgrowth of foreign language classes or departments which used the performances to provide students with the opportunity to hear and speak the language they studied in class.

In the early 1930's Tulane, Newcomb, Loyola, and Xavier produced more operettas and fewer straight plays. The operettas had more audience appeal than the straight dramas and provided the music students as well as the drama students with a performing outlet.

In most of the universities, strong faculty leadership kept the student theatrical groups functioning. Where faculty guidance was lacking, organizations often faltered or folded.

Play contests were instrumental in bringing all those interested in theatre together to view one another's work and to be evaluated. The contest was a stimulus for the formation of theatre groups, even if most of them were short-lived. However, more important, it promoted playwriting in the city and furnished the author with an opportunity not only to see his work performed but entered into competition.
CHAPTER III

COMMUNITY THEATRE

Community theatre is non-professional theatre which is not sponsored by an educational institution but under the auspices of a community organization. This chapter examines theatre sponsored by non-religious and religious organizations in New Orleans between 1925 and 1935.

Theatre Sponsored by Non-Religious Groups

Theatre organizations not sponsored by any religious group or church and operating in New Orleans between 1925 and 1935 include Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré, The Group Theatre of New Orleans, the Children's Theatre Guild, Civic Theatre Players, and numerous other short-lived theatre organizations.

Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré

Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré flourished as one of the best known and respected little theatres in the country during the period of 1925 to 1935. Whereas many New Orleans amateur and professional theatre groups folded during the depression, Le Petit Theatre continued uninterrupted, at times providing the only live theatre in the city. The following section traces the development of Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré during these ten years, emphasizing the directors' philosophies, types of plays, quality of the productions, children's productions and the development of local
talent through workshop productions.¹

At its inception in 1917 Le Petit Théâtre presented one-act plays in a drawing room of a Garden District home. By 1925, the group moved to the corner of Chartres and St. Peter Streets where they presented full length plays directed by a professional director, Arthur Maitland. Early in the 1926-1927 season the theatre acquired a technical director, Ethel Crumb, who remained in that capacity at the theatre for forty years.²

Walter Sinclair, a Canadian director originally from England, directed at the theatre for the next three seasons. He explained the role of the little theatre in the country, a role Le Petit Théâtre was to follow for most of the decade: "the Little theatre /sic/ must not be considered a stepping stone to the professional stage but must be of interest for itself and as a hobby, or as a means of self-expression."³ He declared that the New Orleans little theatre was one of the leaders in the little theatre movement in America and promised that he would produce only plays that had not been produced before in America and bring out those that would have no chance on the commercial stage.⁴

¹For more detailed information see Frederick Lamar Chapman, "A History of Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré" (Ph. D. dissertation, Tulane University, 1971).


³Picayune, September 22, 1927, p. 23.

⁴Picayune, September 25, 1927, sec. 4, p. 1.
He chose Edward Ballantine as his assistant to operate the workshop theatre. Born in Edinburgh, Scotland, Ballantine had wide experience with the little theatre movement in the United States as well as Great Britain.

He was a founder and organizer of the old Washington Square Players in New York, and a charter member of the Provincetown Players. He directed the first productions of *Trifles*, by Susan Glaspell, and also *Bound East for Cardiff*, Eugene O'Neill's first play, which was presented on the same bill with *Trifles*. He has also produced several plays of George Bernard Shaw, having brought to the United States under his own directorship *The Philanderer* and *Pygmalion*. He directed Mrs. Patrick Campbell when she starred in *Pygmalion.*

Ballantine's statement to the press agreed with that of Sinclair, but expanded on the relationship of the little theatre movement to theatre in this country.

The competition of tremendous motion picture theatres, offering an elaborate program for about one-third the cost of a seat at a legitimate theatre, has forced the legitimate theatre to compete by producing plays that have a mass appeal, rather than a distinct appeal to one type of highly educated or highly sophisticated audience. . . . The little theatre movement is successful because it gives to the specialized audience the type of play it enjoys. I believe it will prove to be the saving grace of the American theatre. It is more than a fad. It is a workshop where intellectual playwrights can have their works produced and can receive recognition that would be impossible if only those plays that appealed to tremendous audiences could be considered.6

Ballantine and Sinclair planned to make Le Petit Théâtre "a training school for amateur actors who show real dramatic talent,

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5*Picayune*, October 2, 1927, sec. 4, p. 2.

6*Picayune*, October 2, 1927, sec. 4, p. 2.
not only for the sake of developing actors but to give intelligent lovers of drama the sort of plays that today's mass production makes it difficult to see except in the Little Theatres."

During Sinclair's three seasons as Le Petit Theatre's director, the actor-playwright workshop continued, and the group performed untried plays and classics. The workshop produced the plays of William H. Fulham, some of which the principal group presented for all the members during the regular season. During the 1926-1927 season the workshop presented its first comedy, *The Pink Piracy*, a story of Jean Lafitte. The following season some of the active members presented, as an extra play of the season, Fulham's *The Everlasting Apple*.

During the 1926-1927 season, the little theatre had presented a local color play by another New Orleans writer, Flo Fields. *A La Creole* had its debut on the little theatre stage, and during the 1927-1928 season the St. Charles stock company staged it as one of their plays using two local actresses who had performed in the original production, along with the professional actors of the stock company.

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8*Picayune*, May 20, 1928, sec. 4, p. 6.

9*Picayune*, May 14, 1928, p. 17.

10See section on St. Charles theatre.
Virginia Shaw Putnam's Reefs, originally presented as a one-act play to the workshop, became another original offering presented to the entire membership. For this showing the author developed it into a full length play. It was a "difficult and interesting psychological play" about "a boy with two fathers and a mother who erred."\(^{11}\) The press releases predicted that it would shock some with "mid-Victorian attitudes."\(^{12}\) The reviewer said the theme was "compounded of elements not altogether congenial."\(^{13}\)

Besides untried plays, the group performed plays by a group of American playwrights who were commanding serious critical attention. The playwrights and plays included Eugene O'Neill's Anna Christie, Robert Sherwood's The Queen's Husband, Maxwell Anderson's Saturday's Children, and Sidney Howard's The Silver Cord. Under Sinclair's direction the group performed two Shaw plays, St. Joan and The Devil's Disciple, and for the first time attempted a Shakespearian production.

Twelfth Night was probably one of the most ambitious productions attempted by the group during the 1929-1930 season. Sinclair's set designs for the play previously had won a prize and special commendation of the King and Queen of England.\(^{14}\) As was usual, he used a toy stage of half-inch scale to work out the

\(^{11}\)Picayune, April 22, 1930, p. 4.

\(^{12}\)Picayune, April 20, sec. 3, p. 9.

\(^{13}\)Picayune, April 22, 1930, p. 4.

\(^{14}\)Picayune, December 1, 1929, sec. 3, p. 6.
details and even the colors for the set, and a special stage crew spent weeks carrying out his design. Non-members were allowed to attend the play through the addition of four extra performances, and five hundred children packed the theatre for a special performance of the Shakespearian play.

Children also attended other productions directed by Sinclair. They attended Thackery's *The Rose and the Ring*. There were fifty characters in the cast, some of them children, eleven scene changes, and a seven-piece orchestra under the direction of Harold M. Levy. Children also attended three extra matinees added to the regular eight performances of *The Magic Sword*. This production was even larger than *The Rose and the Ring*, for there were seventy-five actors, eight scene changes, and a full orchestra. Knoblock, the reviewer for the *Picayune*, thought the six weeks of rehearsals were worth the bother, for it revealed the musical possibilities of the group. Plans were made for later experimentation with grand opera.

During his three years with the New Orleans little theatre, Sinclair received various comments from the *Picayune* reviewers.

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16 *Picayune*, January 5, 1930, p. 7.
20 *Picayune*, January 1, 1928, p. 25.
concerning his direction. Knoblock said Anna Christie was "splendidly done."\(^1\) For Children of the Moon, "Mr. Sinclair gave the production a splendid setting, rich but dignified, and adequate direction."\(^2\) Knoblock was most displeased with the theatre's production of St. John Ervine's Anthony and Anna. He found it "disappointing." It "seemed silly, inconsequential, ponderous and tedious. It was acted and directed in keeping with its faults, save in a few respects. Ethel Crumb Brett's setting was charming. Walter Sinclair's direction was conventional and uninspired."\(^3\)

His review of George Kelly's Craig's Wife was even more direct in its attack on the direction. He said Sinclair's direction was "stolid and unpaced where it should have been brittle and swift." He felt all the honors must go to the cast.\(^4\)

Knoblock seldom liked Sinclair's direction in reviewing the work of the first two seasons. However, by the 1929-1930 season, J. D. Klorer who was reviewing for the Picayune was much more complimentary. He said that Spread Eagle was "made great by the superb direction of Walter Sinclair and the polished acting of Val Winter which eclipsed anything done so far by either of the artists."\(^5\)

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\(^1\)Picayune, February 7, 1928, p. 16.

\(^2\)Picayune, April 17, 1928, p. 12.

\(^3\)Picayune, October 16, 1928, p. 4.

\(^4\)Picayune, January 29, 1929, sec. 4, p. 1.

\(^5\)Picayune, October 22, 1929, p. 10.
"Ellis and Pritchard star in well-directed satire." And for The Silver Cord by Sidney Howard, he said that Sinclair had again shown "his fine hand in directing."

When it was necessary for Sinclair to return to England to retain his citizenship there, the theatre hired "several of the best known directors in the country" for the 1930-1931 season. The directors this season included Lemist Esler, John R. Froome, Charles Meredith, and Hale Shaneberger.

Although Esler arrived at a time when the effects of the depression were being felt by New Orleanians, Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carre was flourishing with 3,500 members who had paid ten-dollar membership fees to see seven plays giving the organization revenues of about $35,000 for the year. Knoblock, no longer reviewing for the Picayune, but writing a weekly "Theatre" article in The New Orleanian, interviewed Esler. He reported the director's impressive background.

He is a native of New York City, a graduate of the Harvard school of law . . . and a professional playwright and director. Like Eugene O'Neill, and other drama leaders in America, he studied under George Baker, now at Yale. His play on Machiavelli, The Grey Fox, was presented in New York by Brady and Wiman; he has been associated professionally with

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26Picayune, November 26, 1929, p. 21.

27Picayune, March 18, 1930, p. 25.

28Picayune, June 1, 1930, sec. 3, p. 5.

29The New Orleanian, September 6, 1930, p. 29. The New Orleanian was a weekly magazine which reported the happenings in New Orleans and devoted space to activities in the arts.
William A. Brady, Grace George, Jessie Bonstelle and Katherine Cornell.\textsuperscript{30}

Esler's philosophy of the little theatre was similar to his predecessor's.

I want the little theatre to stand on its own feet; it must not be tributary to the professional playhouse. . . . Kenneth Macgowan suggested recently a national organization of little theatres, with a central office through which the thousands of playhouses could be classified, royalties made more just and possibly settings exchanged at a great saving. The operation of some such idea would do much to put the little theatres of America on their feet and to eliminate present failings.\textsuperscript{31}

Knoblock further reported Esler's predictions of the relationship between the legitimate theatre and the little theatre.

Mr. Esler expects to see the legitimate theatre—that is, the theatre of Broadway—turning more and more to the little theatre as a tryout place. The movement already is under way; at Mr. Esler's Parish Playhouse at Stony Creek, Conn., for instance, both \textit{Death Takes a Holiday} and \textit{The Woman in the Clouds} were given their premières. Now comes the Chatfield-Taylor play to Le Petit Théâtre. The practice works to the advantage of both sides, saving the legitimate theatre from twenty to thirty thousand dollars in pre-Broadway costs and broadening the usefulness of the little theatre by giving its people the new experiences that are inherent in first production.\textsuperscript{32}

So the New Orleans little theatre, like others, continued to be a try-out place for new plays, the first one this season being the Chilton-Agar play, \textit{The Painted Ship}. The play premiered

\textsuperscript{30}\textit{The New Orleanian}, September 20, 1930, p. 32.

\textsuperscript{31}\textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Ibid}.
in New Orleans before it was to go to New York.\(^\text{33}\)

With the closing of so many professional theatres, some professional actors found an outlet, but no money, by acting with little theatre groups. Alan MacNeil was one such actor who performed in this season's first production. He had performed with Elsie Ferguson, Margaret Anglin, and De Wolf Hopper, and later had his own acting company.\(^\text{34}\)

Although Knoblock found The Painted Ship somewhat intellectual, he liked Esler's work.\(^\text{35}\) He said later, that Esler's second production, Hotel Universe, was "probably the theatre's most perfect production."\(^\text{36}\) He felt that it was "hardly likely that Le Petit Theatre could do better than engage him for next year, if he can be had."\(^\text{37}\)

After directing the second play, Hotel Universe, by Philip Barry, with sets by Ethel Crumb Brett, Esler left, and the next director arrived to direct two productions, Prunella and Ice Bound.

John R. Froome was from the dramatic department of the Cincinnati College of Music and was supervising director of the little theatre of Maseville, Kentucky.\(^\text{38}\) Prunella, by Lawrence

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\(^{33}\)Picayune, September 14, 1930, sec. 2, p. 8.

\(^{34}\)Picayune, October 12, 1930, sec. 2, p. 9.

\(^{35}\)The New Orleanian, October 18, 1930, p. 28.

\(^{36}\)Orleanian, May, 1931, p. 33.

\(^{37}\)The New Orleanian, October 18, 1930, p. 28.

\(^{38}\)Orleanian, November 15, 1930, p. 40.
Housman and Granville Barker, had an original musical score which was conducted by Levy and was open to the public as was the custom with the Christmas play offering.39

Charles Meredith, the director of the following two productions, *The Apple Cart* by Shaw, and *Poor Nut* by J. C. Nugent and Elliott Nugent, came to the theatre with wide experience largely in metropolitan New York40 and with some definite ideas about the problems of the legitimate theatre and quality of little theatre.

In a newspaper interview he said:

... the complaint made by people living outside of New York that the legitimate stage is sending out inferior plays is just.

But when you take into consideration... that travel for a theater company has almost become prohibitive, this is not surprising. Also it is a tremendous gamble and stars enjoying successes on Broadway and having their homes in New York are reluctant to leave, flatly refusing in most cases to do so.41

About the New Orleans little theatre, he said that it stands at the top among little theatres in the country. To people who object that little theatre casts are made up of only local talent, he said that it is better to have amateur actors than second rate road company stars. He said that few professional "actors and actresses have the intellectual and cultural background found among the talented people of a community who are living on a high

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39 *Picayune*, December 21, 1930.

40 *Orleanean*, January 15, 1931, p. 27.

41 *Picayune*, January 7, 1931, p. 11.
According to Knoblock, who agreed with Meredith's assessment of the New Orleans little theatre, there is no reason why, with the proper direction, the little theatre's productions should not be equal to professional productions. He said that Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carre is amateur in name only because the leading actors appear in several productions during a season and this gives them "an experience greater and more varied than that of the average professional."\textsuperscript{43}

Hale Shaneberger, the final guest director of the season, was a twenty-five year old graduate of Yale who, like Esler, was a former student of George Baker, having attended Baker's famous "47" workshop.\textsuperscript{44} At Le Petit Theatre he directed Ibsen's Hedda Gabler and Fitch's The Truth. Knoblock called the Ibsen play "brilliantly done."\textsuperscript{45} The Truth closed "one of the best little theatre seasons."\textsuperscript{46} Ethel Crumb Brett's settings were there month after month "never obstrusive but always present in the audience's consciousness throughout."\textsuperscript{47}

The 1931 summer workshop sessions continued to encourage and develop new writers. In July, the group presented three one-act
plays, two of which were directed by the authors. Margaret Dow McEnery, a newcomer to the writing group at the theatre, directed her own script, *Won by a Nose*, and Claude J. Derbes, the previous year's winner of the short-play contest, staged his own *Grandma and the Grim Reaper*. The third play on the bill was *The Dear Departed* directed by Margaret Graham.48

Two more plays formed part of the summer offerings and gave opportunities for the local people to try directing as well as acting. Merlin Kennedy produced *Last Mile* for the holders of the 1931-1932 memberships,49 and the full length play, *Places*, directed by Henry Goric with scenic effects by Gus Jaquet, was the last production of the summer workshop session.50

The leaders at Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré must have shared Knoblock's opinion that Esler was an excellent director and would be a valuable asset to the group, for they hired him to direct the 1931-1932 season of plays. Knoblock felt that Esler was "professional in his attack" and "had the absolute understanding of tempo and pace."51

He directed a full season of seven plays including *Death Takes A Holiday, They Knew What They Wanted*, and Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*. The latter was probably the most challenging of them all. Esler worked with a cast of eighty-five and overcame the

49*Picayune*, July 26, 1931, p. 6.
51*Orleanean*, May, 1931, p. 33.
difficulties of the numerous set changes required by the play to present, as Charles P. Jones reviewer for the Picayune said, a "spectacle lavishly staged."52

At the beginning of the 1931-1932 season the theatre inaugurated a series of thirty-minute broadcasts of edited full length plays presented over New Orleans' radio station WSMB. The plays included in this project were Shaw's How He Lied to Her Husband, with the little theatre's original cast performing; Spread Eagle, which had been staged originally in 1929;53 and The Vinegar Tree, which was presented on radio before it opened the 1931-1932 season.54

The workshop session began at the end of May with the understudies performing their version of Michael and Mary.55 The members of the workshop performed The Bad Man, directed by Milo B. Williams, and two plays by local writers, The Honor of the Figuiers, by Laura Castellanos May, and The Last Hope, by Evelyn Soule Ford.56 The principal summer play was "Scoop" Kennedy's production of Lawrence Stallings and Maxwell Anderson's What Price Glory?57

52Picayune, April 19, 1931, p. 19.
54Item, October 4, 1931, p. 10.
57Picayune, July 3, 1932, sec. 2, p. 6. The St. Charles stock company had performed this play in March, 1926. See St. Charles theatre.
The mood of the 1932-1933 season was comedy. The effects of the depression caused audiences to want lighter escape entertainment. The theatre furnished them with the remedy: Kaufman and Hart's *Once in a Lifetime*; two Noel Coward plays, *Hay Fever* and *The Marquis*; and some others.

Thayer Roberts, the new little theatre director, had experience in Broadway productions and Hollywood films. Among the season's plays which he directed was Chekov's *Cherry Orchard*. Merlin Kennedy, who had directed productions for the summer workshops, was the director's assistant. Charles P. Jones, a second-rate theatre critic for the *Picayune*, dismissed the entire production as "a worthy effort from the viewpoint of artistry." He later called it a "dismal cultural failure."

At the beginning of the summer, Brett, as was often the case, left for New York and Philadelphia to obtain special costumes and get production rights for several plays included on the following season's bill. Dramatic activity abounded at the workshop this summer. Besides Gilbert and Sullivan's *H. M. S. Pinafore* and Bouccicault's *The Streets of New York*, the workshop premiered Fulham's *To My Husband*, and Audley Keck directed *Art and Mrs. Bottle*. Playwrights, actors, and directors continued to develop.

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58 *Picayune*, January 29, 1933, p. 12.
59 *Picayune*, November 29, 1932, p. 17.
60 *Picayune*, January 8, 1932, sec. 2, p. 6.
61 *Picayune*, June 29, 1933, p. 15.
Once again, Le Petit Théâtre employed a director from the professional theatre. Walter Richardson, who had been leading man and director for the St. Charles stock company before it closed, directed some of the productions this 1933-1934 season. He directed *Let Us Be Gay*, *What Every Woman Knows*, *Dangerous Corner*, and *A Lady With Five Husbands*, another play by Fulham. Frank Lovejoy directed two plays, *Both Your Houses* and *Biography*. The success of the summer musical directed by Levy prompted the theatre to present a second Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, this time during the regular season. Early in December, 1933, Levy directed *The Mikado*.

For the 1934 summer workshop, Keck directed Robert Sherwood's *Road to Rome*, and Dan Moore directed *Whistling in the Dark*. The workshop attempted opera for the first time this summer when Levy directed *Le Portrait de Manon*, by Jules Massenet.

At the end of the summer, Ethel Crumb Brett returned from New York, where she had studied architecture, and reported that she had seen William Fullham's new play, *Stevedore*, which was playing in New York. She said "... it was funny to hear the

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62 See St. Charles theatre.

63 He directed at Tulane University during the 1935-1936 season. See Tulane University theatre.

64 *Item*, June 24, 1934, p. 3.

65 Moore directed at Tulane during the 1930-1931 season. See Tulane University theatre.

66 *Item*, July 8, 1934, p. 6.

characters talking about Rampart Street, and me in a New York theatre."

For the next season, 1934-1935, Walter Richardson was again director of Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré with Brett as technical director and Levy as musical director. The reviews of Richardson's plays were not much better this season than they had been when he was at the St. Charles. The reviewer for The New Orleanian said Three Cornered Moon was "paced slowly" and "lacking spontaneity," and Night Over Taos had "... too little dispatch about it." Richardson not only directed this one, but returned to the boards for the first time since his retirement from acting to play the lead. Dorothy Dabney assisted him in directing Divine Drudge and received from the reviewer more credit for her assistance than Richardson did for his work.

Near the end of the season, Richardson had some difficulty casting some of the plays. The illness of Ben Yancey caused a delay in Yellow Jack, and Divine Drudge had to be delayed, because of casting difficulties.

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68 Item, September 23, 1934, p. 8.
69 The initials on the review were A.C.S.
70 The New Orleanian, November, 1934, p. 19.
72 Item, December 9, 1934, p. 11.
74 Item, March 17, 1935, p. 10.
75 Item, April 7, 1935, p. 10.
The summer workshop attracted teachers from the city high schools and gave them a theatrical outlet during their summer vacation. During the summer of 1935 three members who were associated with educational theatre in the city directed. Jesse Tharp, who in the 1926-1927 school year taught at Easton and worked with Herman S. Cottman and LeVergne Shaw in the theatre program there, directed an original play The Cuckoo's Nest by these two former students for Le Petit Théâtre. Zillah Meyer, who had been active in various community theatres in the city and had taught expression and public speaking at John McDonogh's Girls' High School in the 1931-1932 school year, directed The Late Christopher Bean, which the theatre offered only to those with new memberships. The popularity of the play caused a significant increase in memberships. Dan Moore, who had worked with the Tulane groups, directed Elmer Rice's Judgment Day, which included five lawyers in the cast.

During that summer, the most significant happening was the establishment of the School of Arts of Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré. The purpose of the school was to give those who were interested in perfecting themselves in any of the arts of the theatre an opportunity to do so either for careers in the theatre

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76 See Warren Easton high school.

77 Item, June 9, 1935, p. 6.


or to satisfy their own needs. Incidentally the little theatre would benefit from the trained help. They offered courses in interpretation taught by Meyer, diction taught by Eva Joan Winter, make-up by Norris Brett, scenery and costumes by Ethel Brett and Mrs. Louis Andrew Fischer, lighting by Wallace Paletou, and dancing by Olga Peters. The classes were open to the members and met once a week.\(^8\)

During the 1935-1936 season, Bernard Szold directed, Ethel Brett executed the technical aspects of the productions, and Harold Levy directed the music. The season opened with Oscar Strauss' *The Chocolate Soldier*. For this production, the Louisiana State University school of opera assigned Rocco A. Conti, one of their students, to the little theatre. The *Item* described the arrangement in the following manner.

The method the school uses is this: that if in any nearby city, an opera or operetta is to be given, and a leading man or woman is needed, and the university can supply one, it does so. The school paid Rocco's expenses here during rehearsals.\(^8\)

Tryouts this season attracted various talented men and women in the community whom "Director Bernard Szold is developing into splendid material for the Little Theatre."\(^8\) This was particularly true for the first non-musical production of the season, *Elizabeth, the Queen*. Even retired vaudeville performers attended.

\(^8\) *Item*, June 23, 1935, p. 6.

\(^8\) *Item*, October 13, 1935, p. 20.

\(^8\) *Item*, November 10, 1935, p. 5.
Herman the Great—for thirty years a topliner magician, who played on the Orpheum and Keith circuits, and was seen many times in New Orleans, has been given a part in Elizabeth the Queen. . . . His real name is Felix Hermann, and he is now a resident of New Orleans. He is the nephew of the first Hermann the Great, and took his name and reproduced his illusions after his death. Once he toured the country with Mabel Normand, Charlie Chaplin, and Fatty Arbuckle.83

Kind Lady, the March production, produced a new leading lady, Bessie Shields Fourton, who was from a theatrical family. Her father was one of the founders of the Drawing Room Players, forerunner of Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carre, and her mother, Bessie Smallwood, worked in stock and performed in the legitimate theatre.84

The newly formed drama school of Le Petit Théâtre began to supply the theatre with new talent. Adele Longmire, a product of the school, played Julie in the theatre's April, 1936, production of Ferenc Molnar's Liliom.85 Szold announced that with few exceptions the cast of this production was composed of newcomers, "indicative of the results achieved by our new plan for open trials for parts."86

The theatre developed in other ways also. Brett continued to grow and develop as a scene designer and experience gained in her years of study, travel, and contact with various directors was evident in her work. For the set of Liliom, like Sinclair her first

83Ibid.
84Ibid., March 1, 1935, p. 5.
85Ibid., April 26, 1936, p. 7.
86Ibid.
director and designer at Le Petit Théâtre, she built a model stage in order to work out the mechanical and lighting effects. Brett "used the Jessner school of the German theatre and contrived a series of unit settings. Combining imagination with efficiency she evolved a swift-moving background for the drama." 87

An earlier Item article described the set and lighting.

Fast changes of the play's seven scenes will be made possible by the use of wagon stages, supplemented by small set places and draperies. One scene will be on a guaze drop with projected background. The lighting effects, which are most unusual and interesting include the use of moving leaf shadow. 88

The settings for the June production of O'Neill's The Hairy Ape, designed by Mrs. Louis Fischer and carried out under the supervision of Brett, utilized two playing levels. The play was done in the "constructivist manner with actors wearing masks." 89

Theatrical design at the end of the decade at this theatre was moving toward the "new stagecraft."

Numerous members of the active group in the little theatre, used the theatre as their home base and yet worked in other community groups and in educational theatre. Among these were Jesse Tharp, Zillah Mendes Meyer, Ben Yancey, Walter Richardson, Audley Keck, Dan Moore, Herman Cottman, LeVergne Shaw, Val Winter, Bernard Szold, and of course, Ethel Brett.

87 Item, April 26, 1936, p. 7.
88 Item, April 19, 1936, p. 8.
89 Item, May 31, 1936, p. 8.
During this decade, 1925-1935, Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré had not only survived but upheld its reputation as one of the finest community theatres in the country. Through the fine leadership of such professional people as Walter Sinclair, Lemist Esler, Edward Ballantine, Ethel Brett, and others, the theatre afforded an opportunity for writers, actors, and directors to develop, and it became the leading amateur force in the community in the period.

New playwrights had an opportunity to present their works. They included William Fullham, Flo Field, Herman Cottman, LeVergne Shaw, Virginia Shaw Putnam, Margaret Dow McEnery, Claude J. Derbes, and others. Directors such as Walter Richardson, Audley Keck, Dan Moore, Jesse Tharp, and Zillah Meyer, were able to develop their skills. Numerous new actors treaded the boards and some of the old ones performed at the little theatre as well as with other groups. Besides working at the little theatre, Ben Yancey performed at the Menorah Guild, Val Winter opened his own school, and others worked with various groups.

At a time when there was little and, at times, no other live theatre in New Orleans, Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré provided it for men, women, and even children in the community.

Group Theatre of New Orleans

In 1935, a group of young people who had been apprentices and active members of Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré, dissatisfied with what they considered mediocre Broadway plays and the continual change of directors at the little theatre, left to form
a theatre of their own. They wanted to present low cost, meaningful, experimental theatre which made a social comment. Modeling themselves on the New York Group Theatre, founded by Strasberg, Clurman, and Crawford in the early 1930's, the young thespians even used the name of the original company and called themselves the Group Theatre of New Orleans.90 This new theatre was a refreshing addition to the theatrical scene in New Orleans from its inception in 1935 to its demise in 1939.

Since the Group Theatre was initiated at the end of the period of this study, and another study91 provides a detailed history of the organization, this study will concern itself only with the Group's formation, initial season, goals, and contribution to theatre in New Orleans during this decade.

Marc Antony, one of the founders of the Group Theatre and their scene designer during the first years, explained the formation of the Group in an interview with the author.92 According to Antony, several young theatre apprentices from Le Petit Théâtre revolted against the mediocrity of the little theatre plays and formed their own theatre. Although they were approached by Lionel

90Marc Antony stated that the Group Theatre in New York did not approve of them using their name, but the new group retained the name arguing that they were the Group Theatre of New Orleans. Personal interview with Marc Antony, designer for the Group Theatre, January 6, 1972, New Orleans, Louisiana.


92Personal interview with Marc Antony, January 6, 1972, New Orleans, Louisiana.
Adams, president of Le Petit Théâtre, asked to return and guaranteed that they could do experimental theatre, they were determined to operate independently of any other stage group in the city, provide their own wardrobe, scenery, other stage trappings, and present plays of their own choice.

Several members were involved in the break. Among them were Audley Keck, Marc Antony, and Bill McHugh. Keck began his theatrical training at Easton High School under Tharp and Hanley before graduating to Le Petit Théâtre and directing several of their summer workshop productions. He became one of the first directors of the Group. Marc Antony had attended the Chicago Art Institute where he apprenticed as a scene painter for the Chicago Opera Company. He had traveled through Europe observing theatre, particularly German theatre, returned very excited about new experimental lighting techniques, and developed the use of black curtains as a cyclorama for the first time in New Orleans at Le Petit Théâtre. He constructed the sets for Le Petit Théâtre in the early 1920's, but was dissatisfied with lack of experimentation, and after he married he found that he could not live on the $150 per month the theatre provided. He resigned in 1925 to enter business for himself. Bill McHugh, the third member of the group, had been a member of the Easton Dramatic Club. He was a business man and managed the new group's finances. Others from Easton who were to contribute to the Group's efforts were Ben Abadie, Ethel Crumb took over his duties at Le Petite Théâtre in 1926.
Albert Hoover, and C. LaVergne Shaw.

The Item explained the plans and purposes of the new theatrical group.

Their purpose is not to compete with other local theatre groups, but to form an organization which will be able to give to the theatre-going public a chance to view what is new and experimental to the theatre. The new group is modeled after the numerous experimental theatres now flourishing in the North and East.

Mr. Keck, founder of the group, stated that there were more than two hundred such theatres prospering in the North and East at the present time. Some of the outstanding Broadway players spend their summers at these theatres where they gain knowledge and inspiration. An increasing number of Broadway successes are first seen in these summer playhouses. They are the testing ground for the American stage.\(^9^4\)

The Group announced Elmer Rice's Adding Machine and Luigi Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author as the opening plays to be presented in the Knights of Columbus Auditorium\(^9^5\) on Corondolet Street. However, Antony explained that these were try-out plays used to build interest and test audience reaction. They were finally presented at McMain High School Auditorium. At the time of the announcement of the plays, there were already "fifty enthusiastic members."\(^9^6\) The Group Theatre completed its try-out season with Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio, at the Tulane theatre in May. By the opening of the 1935-1936 season, the organization had moved into their new studio-theatre at 2211

\(^{94}\text{Item, December 9, 1934, p. 12.}\)

\(^{95}\text{The Knights of Columbus is an organization for Catholic men.}\)

\(^{96}\text{Ibid.}\)
Magazine Street. They renovated an old building to suit their needs and staged a pre-season performance of *Maria Marten, or Murder in the Red Barn*. In order to educate audiences to this new kind of play, Keck explained the background of the plays at length in interviews for the newspaper. The September 22, 1935, edition of the *Item* published his explanation of this pre-season production.

*Maria Marten* is one of the best examples of the "curse the girl" school of English melodrama and was first presented by portable theatres and provincial stock companies over a hundred years ago.

These theatres were known as "Theatres of the People" for at the end of the 18th century there began a demand for popular playhouses for the first time since the Elizabethans. As there were only four licensed theatres in England at that time, these tiny temples of art were actually illegitimate as distinguished from the "legitimate." Of all the illiterate literature written for these illegitimate theatres which sprang up in great numbers all over England, the most famous was *Maria Marten*. The first known production of the play was 1840.

*Squaring the Circle* marked the formal opening of the Group Theatre's season. The November 10 issue of the *Item* explained the play, setting, and the purpose of the selection of dramas.

Presented by the group as an example of advanced Soviet playwriting, the drama gives full scope of their experimental aims. Scenic designer Marc Antony will indulge in a semiconstructivist setting which will permit Director Audley Keck to show the audience, simultaneously, acting within and without the crowded apartment.

As the first of the year's series of Group productions, *Squaring the Circle* initiates a program which will cover a general history of the theatre, both from a chronological and from an artistic point of view.

Included also in this opening season were two plays by Clifford Odets, *Waiting for Lefty* and *Till the Day I Die*. The *Item* described them as "two of the foremost dramas of the 'new'
theatre, the theatre of social problems and frank propaganda. . . ."97 Keck was careful, once again, to inform the audience about the plays.

Waiting for Lefty, using a strikers' meeting as its background, and shifting its action from the stage to the audience and back again to the stage, has been described as "the most exciting entertainment in the past ten years." With an amazing grasp of theatrical technique, Odets builds his action to a smashing climax which has not yet failed to leave the audience limp from excitement.

Using Nazi Germany as the scene, Odets tells in Till the Day I Die, a harrowing tale of persecution under the new regime. Here again are found the brilliant climaxes and the sharp portraits which distinguish Lefty. Both plays will be given on the same night. They are under the direction of Audley J. Keck with Marc Antony doing the sets.98

In April, they performed Maxwell Anderson's poetic tragedy, Sea Wife, which had only one previous try-out presentation at the department of speech at the University of Minnesota. Antony had to rebuild the stage to accommodate the unusual impressionistic sets designed to enhance the fantastic tone of the play.99 The final offering of the 1935-1936 season was Richard Brinsley Sheridan's The Duenna. Again the organization explained the play and its purposes in presenting it.

The Duenna is not as well known as Sheridan's other plays because it has fewer revivals, probably due to the fact that it was originally written as a comic opera and thought more difficult to present. The Group Theatre feels that in reviving this romantic

97 Item, January 26, 1936, p. 6.

98 Item, February 2, 1936, p. 5.

99 Item, April 26, 1936, p. 8.
comedy, which is filled with lively situations, good spirits, and much jesting—reviving it in a style which will make it more understandable and enjoyable to modern audiences—it is again fulfilling one of its aims as an experimental theatre.100

This play officially closed their first season, but at the end of June, almost as an after-thought, Edward J. Levy101 directed his original manuscript, Toby Or Not Toby, at the Group Theatre. Many thought that the script was "a brilliantly sophisticated comedy full of amusing situations and witty dialogue."102

In the middle of their first season, the Group Theatre brought the Hedgerow Players to New Orleans in order to fulfill their aim to bring the best professional companies for the city's audiences to view. The Hedgerow theatre was recognized as one of the outstanding repertory theatres in America.

Now in its thirteenth season, the Hedgerow Theatre is the most important American actor's theatre, built and run by actors. In 1933 Jasper Deeter, director of the Hedgerow, gathered together a group of players who had become dissatisfied with the commercial Broadway theatre. Deeter felt that the theatre in its New York "set-up" was run chiefly to enhance real estate men and that it was not conducive to sincere artistry in drama. The result of that revolt is the present Hedgerow, with its remarkable 113 play list, offering a different show each night ranging from the classics to the most modern experiments. Last season the Hedgerow presented thirty-four plays and operated fifty-one weeks out of the year. Over three hundred thirty performances were presented and eight more plays were added to its repertory to make one of the most successful seasons in theatrical annals.

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100 Item, May 24, 1936, p. 8.
101 Edward J. Levy changed his name to Lee Edwards and later became director of the Baton Rouge Little Theatre.
102 Item, June 21, 1936, p. 8.
The first national tour was essayed by the Hedge-rovians last year with four plays. This year the company is closing its Pennsylvania theatre and touring nine of the most popular plays across America. Since early October they have played to audiences totaling 41,000 persons and traveled 5,000 miles through eight Midwestern states. This is the largest road repertory toured by a native company in recent years, and is truly representative of the high standards of this famous group.103

The Hedgerow Players were welcome in New Orleans during a season in which the audiences witnessed the last of the road companies to come to the Tulane and no prospect for more professional theatre. Their productions varied in style and period to include O'Neill's Emperor Jones, Moliere's The Physician in Spite of Himself, Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, and Chiarelli's The Masque and the Face. Charles L. Dufour, reviewing for the Item, praised Twelfth Night and the other productions.

Shakespeare, himself, would probably have enjoyed the Hedgerow Players' version of Twelfth Night presented at Dixon Hall, under the auspices of the Group Theatre.

The bard would have relished the Elizabethan gusto of the players. He would have recognized the boisterous humor of his comedies, which, unfortunately, are often hidden from public gaze by scholarship's invasion of the theatre.

He would have liked, too, the swift moving action of the drama, unhampered by scene shifting and tinkering with the text.

In a word, Saturday's Twelfth Night was a most Shakespearian presentation such as the Virgin Queen might have witnessed of a winter's night.

As on Friday night, when they presented O'Neill's The Emperor Jones and Moliere's Physician in Spite of Himself, the Hedgerow troupe was uniformly good.104

103 Item, December 1, 1935, p. 6.
104 Item, January 12, 1936, p. 2.
Luigi Chiarelli's *The Masque and the Face* thoroughly excited the audience. Another reviewer for the *Item* reported the audiences reaction.

You see, part of the audience went expecting to see performed a highly sophisticated piece. A few of those who make a business of reading everything insisted vigorously that Signor Chiarelli had written with that intention. Another part of the audience went expecting it didn't know what and therefore, was not surprised to meet such slapstick mixed up with sophistication. It seemed that about half the audience could take either kind of drama with equal pleasure, but a third, unfortunate part, thought such diverse fare should not be mixed. But they had a good time, too, for there were such splendid things to see on their side. And all could agree that either the acoustics or the enunciation were pretty terrible.

Mr. Jasper Deeter was the principal actor and the greater, indeed, of the stimulating effect must be laid to him. We argued about it so much already that we just won't argue any more here.105

This was certainly the most exciting, thought-provoking theatre viewed in New Orleans during this period. If this was a taste of what the Group Theatre would sponsor and present, then it appeared that the city's theatre audiences did not mind going to the theatre to think as well as be entertained and would certainly support such a group. The audience did support the group from 1935 to 1939, and when revenue from the box office could not pay the bills, generous patrons, such as Dorothy Feeblemen and others, furnished the necessary finances to insure their survival.

If, as Mays' study reports and as this writer's research supports, the purpose of the Group Theatre of New Orleans was to

bring to its audiences serious, meaningful drama, the first season--1935-1936--was convincing evidence that the group was firmly on its way.

The Children's Theatre Guild

Ruth Voss, the founder of the Children's Theatre Guild, received the "Artistic Diploma" from Lily Whitaker's College of Oratory. While at the school, she worked closely with Ida Whitaker, Lily Whitaker's sister, who taught her "a kind of declamation. You struck an attitude, and you made certain gestures. You spoke out with melodious tones." Although Whitaker asked her to remain as her assistant, Voss could not, because she would have had to continue this approach and felt "the time had passed for that."

Voss, in an October 7, 1972, personal interview explained the events which led to the founding of the Children's Theatre Guild. After graduating from the College of Oratory she went to New York where she studied at the Alviene School of United Stage Training. The course required her to work in all phases of theatre: directing, acting, and make-up. She attended classes during the day and put on plays for audiences in the school's small theatre in the evening. She worked with children while in New York by teaching

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106 Personal interview with Ruth Voss, October 7, 1972, New Orleans, Louisiana.


108 Idem.
at two of the Buckley elementary schools. While in New York, Voss had an opportunity to visit and talk with Clair Tree Major, who had a traveling children's theatre company there. It was then that she decided that she might return to New Orleans and start a children's theatre of her own. The difference in her theatre and that of Major's was that whereas Major trained and used professional adult actors to present plays for children, Voss used children to present plays for children. After a six-month stint as a director for the Sewell Chataqua Circuit, Voss returned to New Orleans where she founded the Children's Theatre Guild.

During this period, the parents were concerned about the influence of motion pictures on children. Voss founded the Guild as an escape from the possible unwholesomeness of films. She said,

It is easy to forbid your children the movies, but difficult to find a substitute for them, if all the other little people are going too. The Guild offers children an absorbing substitute—one in which they have an actual part, so it cannot fail to be of the greatest interest to them.109

Since there was no entertainment outlet for children in New Orleans, one of the primary goals of the Children's Theatre Guild was "to provide children with the proper kind of entertainment."110

The New Orleans Life magazine expanded on this goal by stating:

The Children's Theatre Guild was an organized movement to wean Little Folks away from "grown up" entertainment, that may at times be sensational or suggestive,


and substitute instead, plays that can command the confidence of parents and educational leaders because they are clean and wholesome, at the same time delighting the youngsters because of their fascinating adventure and merry make-believe.\textsuperscript{111}

Besides providing children with good entertainment, Voss stated that she wanted "to teach great classics by having child actors present children's classics to a child's audience."\textsuperscript{112} This was the "only organization of its kind in the South, and one of the five in the United States making a concerted effort to meet the growing demand for better plays for children."\textsuperscript{113}

She further stated the purpose of the guild in the magazine interview.

In our plays we aim to supplement educational work in the schools and to subtly influence the imaginative life of the child so that a fine ideal of life and love and drama will remain with him through life. All children live in a dream world--it is for the parent to see that the dreams are the right kind and not distorted by the false standards of the movies.\textsuperscript{114}

The motto of the Children's Theatre Guild was: "Children's Plays with Child Actors for Child Audiences."\textsuperscript{115} The list of plays presented over the seven years of the guild's performances indicates that these, indeed, were the "classic" plays for

\textsuperscript{111}New Orleans Life, December, 1925, p. 20.

\textsuperscript{112}Voss interview, January 4, 1972.


\textsuperscript{114}Beatrice Washburn, "The Children's Guild," Holland's, The Magazine of the South, April, 1928.

\textsuperscript{115}Children's Theatre Guild brochure from Voss' scrapbook, New Orleans, Louisiana.
children. Some of the plays presented through the years included *Pollyanna*, *Robin Hood*, *Little Orphan Annie*, *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*, *Penrod and Sam*, and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Voss further clarified the types of plays presented in an interview for *Holland’s, The Magazine of the South*.

... we don't confine ourselves exclusively to children's plays.

Such plays as "The Dragon" by Lady Gregory and "Siegfried" have an appeal for adult audiences. But we absolutely bar all melodrama and musical comedy. There are plenty of charming and artistic plays that give children a wholesome point of view of life and a sense of charm and romance that is within their grasp. One thing a play for children must have, and that is suspense—something to keep them interested every minute—an element of adventure that keeps them breathless, and then a slight element of romance. No passion and no slap-stick comedy—both of these are beyond their understanding—but convention demands that the prince marry the princess in order that everybody may live happily ever after.116

The Children’s Theatre Guild "made its first bow to the public in November, 1924, with the presentation of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, in the Little Theatre of the Hotel Roosevelt."117 In December, *The Bird’s Christmas Carol* opened the Guild Playhouse at the little theatre of the Woman’s Club, and this "stage and cozy auditorium"118 became the permanent meeting place for the group. The first season’s program included:

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117*Holland’s, The Magazine of the South*, December, 1925, p. 20.

118Ibid.
Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves
The Little Princess
The Princess and the Goblins
The Goose Girl
The Boston Tea Party
The Queen and the Toymaster

For the first season, Voss was aided by her co-director, Jessie Tharp. Under Tharp's guidance, "the boys from Warren Easton High School created the attractive sets used in the plays," and the music was furnished "by the Easton High Orchestra under the direction of Professor Paoletti until his death, and then by a group of younger children under Ione Duncan."120

The Guild closed its "first season in the Woman's Club Little Theatre with nearly two hundred members."121 These included the sustaining members, children and adults, who attended the plays but did not act in them; and "active" members, the children who actually performed the plays.122 The membership fee was four dollars for six plays, and the child had to be a member and under fifteen years of age in order to try out for the plays. There was no other charge to the players except that they had to furnish their own costumes and play-books.123

119Ibid.
120Ibid.
121Holland's, Magazine of the South, September, 1926, p. 8.
122Voss interview, October 7, 1972.
123Holland's, Magazine of the South, December, 1925, p. 20.
The children who participated in the plays usually came from fine families who had the money to allow their children to be presented on the stage. Children from all parts of the city ranging in age from three to fifteen, participated in guild productions. Voss felt that children from "the upper middle classes have more ability--those who are not too poor to have been deadened by the sordidness of their surroundings, and not too rich to have been surfeited with luxury."124

Tryouts for the first season were held in the lecture hall of the New Orleans Public Library before each play. The contestants read scenes from the play, using scripts which had been furnished to them a week ahead of time in order to allow them ample time for preparation.125

Holland's magazine described the tryouts for the 1928 season in the following manner.

First there is a "tryout" before five judges to see if the child has talent enough, and then if it is decided that he has, he is given a copy of the play, assigned a part, and told to report at rehearsals three times a week. Since each act has twelve rehearsals, and the average play three acts, one can see that it is a serious business, and any child who enters the Guild has his work cut out for him.126

In order to promote membership, Voss formed The Boosters' Club.

124Holland's, "The Magazine of the South," April, 1928, no page number.

125Ibid.

126Ibid.
The aim of the Club is to make the New Orleans CHILDREN'S THEATRE GUILD the largest in America—and the club is working "specially" to have 1,000 Members.127

The object of the Club was to have each one of the members become a booster and have each of the new boosters bring in one new member.128 The boy and girl who brought in the most new members were made king and queen and rode at the head of the annual motor parade. The 1930 parade was described in the following manner.

The presentation ceremonies followed the annual parade of the guild. The costumed casts of the guild plays of last year and of the first play of this year, "Robin Hood" that is to be presented on November 22—as well as the actors of the guild workshop and the members of the Guild Mothers' club rode in the twelve decorated automobiles from the guild studio at 4133 St. Charles avenue to the City Hall and around the city.129

After the first season, Tharp withdrew from the organization, and Voss continued as the Executive Director130 and guiding spirit of the organization throughout its existence. The membership had grown, so the group decided to present the season's plays in the 1800-seat Jerusalem Temple. For the remaining years, the guild presented major productions in the Jerusalem Temple. Workshop plays were held in various facilities. One major production,

127 Production program for Cinderella, February 15, 1930, Voss scrapbook.

128 Ibid.

129 Item, October 26, 1930.

130 Voss interview, October 7, 1972.
Tom Sawyer, was presented in the St. Charles theatre in April, 1928, and again in June.

It was during this production at the St. Charles that Voss, for the first time, had problems with the union. She explained it in this manner.

Spangenberg, his son, and a helper did the scenery for us at the St. Charles, and we used some of the backdrops which the theatre already had there. Spangenberg was not union. At Jerusalem Temple we did not have to have union workers, but at the St. Charles, they told us that we would have to have six union men. I said that the most I would take would be three, because we didn't need prop men since we did all that ourselves. At curtain time the union manager came to me and insisted on six men. I told him I'd take three or I would go out there and tell those people what he had done. Well he finally settled for three. We had to pay for the use of the St. Charles, for the union men, Spangenberg and his helpers. We just got through without bankruptcy. Everyone was happy that we got the bills paid. That was the only encounter that I had with the union trying to do a thing like that to people at a helpless moment. 131

As theatre membership continued to grow, leaders in the community began to take an interest in the project.

An ever increasing membership testified that New Orleans needed and wanted a children's theatre with the high educational and cultural standards that the Guild had set for itself. Educational leaders began to take vital interest in this new and important development. In the beginning of the current season Miss Voss was permitted to present the Guild plans at a meeting of principals of the public schools, and their cooperation was recommended by the superintendent. Private and parochial schools are also lending their enthusiastic support to this delightful enterprise. 132


132 Hollanda's, Magazine of the South, December, 1925, p. 20.
The Children's Theatre Guild was the first organization in the city to broadcast radio plays in New Orleans and the first children's organization to do so in the United States. These plays were "arranged" by Alma Luck, assisted by Clyde Randall, program director and announcer for WSMR radio in New Orleans; Voss directed the shows. School groups and private radio parties listened to the broadcast in both Louisiana and Mississippi.

The Harcol Film Company made a news reel of the closing production which was shown at the Orpheum and played in the neighborhood houses of the Saenger circuit. This gave excellent publicity to WSMR through their own Saenger circuit and to the Children's Theatre Guild. One of the principal purposes of the Radio series, besides benefiting the performers and the listeners, was to publicize the Guild.

For at least two years, 1926-1928, Voss presented over twenty fifteen-minute one-act plays for children on the radio. Some of the plays included were:

- Siegfried
- Pandora
- Jack and the Beanstalk
- Evangeline

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133 Letter. Randall to Voss, dated March 27, 1928. Sent to researcher by Voss.


135 Saenger Theatres, Inc. owned WSMR according to the letter head of the Randall letter.
Why the Chimes Rang
Legend of the Moor's Legacy
William Tell
Persephone
Hansel and Gretel
Columbus
Bernard Pelissy
The Golden Touch
Baucis and Philemon
Boston Tea Party
The Toy Shop
Dickens's A Christmas Carol
The Sandalwood Box

In a letter to Voss, Randall estimated not only the success of the radio show, but the Guild in general.

I am sending this note as a material evidence of my appreciation of your efforts in promoting a better literature education for the children throughout the United States. I doubt if any single influence in New Orleans, aside from your own, has ever done as much for the little folks as your untiring efforts in producing plays that are interesting, educational, beautifully staged and presented with a finesse that compares favorably /sic/ with the large professional productions that have come before.137

He also commented on the radio plays.

I know that these Radiocasts have been appreciated for I have had hundreds of letters commenting on it,

136 Personal correspondence from Voss, October 10, 1972.

137 Randall letter.
and have seen frequent stories in national magazines concerning the New Orleans Children's Theatre Guild.\textsuperscript{138}

With the assistance of Bower Spangenberg, the artistic designer, the children under Voss' direction presented one of "the most beautiful out-of-door productions ever staged" in the city.\textsuperscript{139} Together they presented this production in Audubon Park for the "natatorium fund"\textsuperscript{140} and to gain publicity for the Guild by showing that they were doing the classics.\textsuperscript{141} "One hundred children were cast and the water carnival included twelve beautifully decorated and electrically illuminated boats from the 'Land of the Rainbow.'"\textsuperscript{142} Spangenberg decorated the boats and placed lights all around the Audubon Park lagoon.

The decorated boats came out of the dark, up and around in front of the bandstand. Lohengrin, of course, rode in the leading boat. The children were in elegant costumes. Homer Duprey, who was Lohengrin, wore the page costume that he wore when his father was king of carnival in New Orleans. It was perfectly beautiful, studded with pearls and rhinestones. They didn't make special costumes for the pageant. The children used the costumes which they had used in the plays.\textsuperscript{143}

The event was basically a pageant, and when the boats arrived there was a little pantomime and two children sang arias from Lohengrin.\textsuperscript{144}

\textsuperscript{138}Idem.

\textsuperscript{139}\textit{New Orleans Life}, September, 1926, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{140}\textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{141}Voss interview, January 4, 1972.

\textsuperscript{142}\textit{New Orleans Life}, September, 1926, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{143}Voss interview, January 4, 1972.

\textsuperscript{144}Idem.
Spangenberg designed and executed most of the sets for the Guild productions at the Temple. He and Voss were the only paid members of the Guild's staff. After all bills were paid, including Spangenberg's fee, the remaining money went to Voss. She was able to earn a living from the Guild during the years of its existence.

The Guild had the support of schools and civic leaders in the community. The private schools sent their children to see the plays. Sometimes the Guild traveled to elementary schools performing during the recess period, using few props and no set. Florence Wilson, principal at Lafayette Elementary School, supported the group by encouraging her students to attend the performances. The largest attendance at Jerusalem Temple was 800.

In 1930 the Commissioner of Public Safety, representing the Mayor, presented the members of the New Orleans Children's Theatre Guild with a plaster plaque "in recognition of cultural and artistic service to the children of New Orleans." Rabbi Brinstock, who was present, said that the Guild contributed to "the mental, cultural and physical development of the community as well as of its members." He also commended Voss for her work.

145 Spangenberg's sons later developed their father's business into one of the largest scenic studios in the city, specializing in Mardi Gras decorations.


147 Idem.

148 Item, October 26, 1930.
Although Voss received recognition from the Superintendent of the Schools in the Archdiocese of New Orleans and Bauer, Superintendent of Public Schools, she was not able to gain financial support to sustain the group through the depression years.

The depression affected us very much. Here we were in the middle of the nine years; 1929, 30, 31, and 32. It was hard to get anything floating. It was difficult to get people to buy tickets; they didn't have the money. But we struggled along as best we could. 149

By the early 1930's the motion pictures, utilizing professional actors and large budgets, began to film those plays which the children were presenting on the stage. The film industry released such films as "Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm," and "Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch." 150 It was in the early 1930's that the Disney characters, Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, made their appearance, and the movie industry began to make some films and shorts for the child audience. 151 The depression and these films made it difficult for the Guild to survive. By the end of the 1930-1931 season, Voss' dream of a children's theatre for children performed by children throughout the state and ultimately the nation had come to an end.

The following year Voss returned to New York to present her idea for children's theatre on radio to NBC and CBS network.


150 Voss interview, October 7, 1972.

executives. After auditioning some children she had trained in New York for NBC executives, she was told that the network did not have a budget for educational children's theatre on radio.152

Jesse Tharp, imported Clair Tree Major from New York in an attempt to re-establish children's theatre in New Orleans. However, children's theatre of the type and caliber of the Children's Theatre Guild was not formed again during this period.

During the seven years of its existence, the Children's Theatre Guild presented over sixty children's classics to hundreds of children and adults on the stage and on the radio in the New Orleans area. Children active in the productions developed an understanding of theatre and an appreciation for good children's literature. Patsy Maloney, who appeared in several of the Guild productions including Little Lord Fauntleroy, said in a recent interview153 that her work with Voss gave her an ability to face the public, to deliver and modulate her voice well, and exposed her to live theatre and to good children's literature. As Supervisor of Reading in the New Orleans Public Schools, she enjoys reading stories to children and hopes that the teachers under her will read well to their students. She is presently concerned that children today are not exposed to the children's classics in the way she was.

Joseph M. Seiferth, Jr., was one of Voss' most talented child actors. In 1927 at the age of ten, he considered several offers

152Voss interview, October 7, 1972.

153Personal interview with Patsy Maloney, January 6, 1972.
which would determine a stage or screen career for him.\textsuperscript{154} In later years he became active in theatre in New Orleans by developing his own small theatre in the French Quarter\textsuperscript{155} and is presently teaching high school speech and English in the New Orleans area.

In 1934 Ruth Voss opened the Ruth Voss Speech Arts Studio at 4133 St. Charles Avenue to develop self-expression in both children and adults.\textsuperscript{156} Voss found that parents were willing to pay for instruction which would increase the child's self-confidence. She cast against type to aid the child in developing traits which he did not already have. She admitted that she presented plays which "only the parents could tolerate."\textsuperscript{157} These were produced in her studio which had "its own stage with simple though effective scenery, lighting equipment, and a cozy auditorium."\textsuperscript{158} The school was advertised as an "artists' bureau for talented adults and children who study privately to perfect themselves."\textsuperscript{159}

By 1936 Voss had shifted the emphasis in her school from theatre to personality, poise, and public speaking.

\textsuperscript{154}\textit{Picayune}, December 4, 1927, Section 4, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{155}Voss interview, January 4, 1972.
\textsuperscript{156}\textit{Item}, September 16, 1934, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{157}Voss interview, January 4, 1972.
\textsuperscript{158}\textit{Item}, September 16, 1934, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{159}\textit{Ibid.}
Distinct and perfect speech is stressed in all classes, as well as the correction of common errors in English and the enrichment of the vocabulary. Technical training further includes exercises for breath control, voice culture, posture and rhythmic pantomime.160

The major courses in the curriculum included reading, phrasing, public speaking, and dramatic art, and the theatre had become less a place to present plays and more a place to train the speaking voice. An article in the Item explained the school's shift of emphasis.

Every twelve weeks students are required to appear on the stage before studio audiences, giving short talks or participating in plays. No costumes are permitted in these test recitals as all emphasis is placed on voice, speech, and manner. It is through this means that students develop personality and acquire poise and self confidence essential to leadership in school and in social and business contacts.161

By the end of the '30's, the Speech Arts school had become a school for training adults in public speaking and Voss had left the Children's Theatre Guild and the training of children behind.

Civic Theatre Players

Warren Lyle, a native of New Orleans, returned after twenty-five years as leading man of Broadway successes, to become director for a new group operating through the Jewish Menorah Institute, calling themselves the Civic Theatre Players. They made their debut in November, 1934, with A Window in Green, by Lea Freeman, a New Orleans playwright. Achille V. Gallo arranged the musical

160 Item, August 30, 1936, p. 6.

161 Ibid.
score performed by his string ensemble. The reviewer for the November, 1934, Orleanean said that the play was "good but could be better."

Lyle staged James P. Judge's three-act comedy, Square Crooks, for the active membership's second play for the season. The reviewer said that the cast enjoyed themselves. Lyle followed this production with Mary's Other Husband. Juan Villasana, who had worked with Le Petit Théâtre, directed the fourth production of the season, Attorney for the Defense, a four-act drama by Eugene Hafer featuring Howard Fabacher and Sydney Maurice, Jr., in the leading roles. The fifth production of the season was a three-act farce, Pulling the Curtain. Villasana directed this show with some "unusual theatrical effects." Villasano concluded the six-play season with Boyce Loving's three-act comedy, Gay. This was the first American production of the play, and press releases stated that the author would visit New Orleans on his way to California to give an explanation of the European production. Irving Young, Civic Theatre Players' scenic artist, consulted with various New Orleans scenic artists in order to produce a fine set.

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162 Item, October 28, 1934, p. 8.
165 Item, April 7, 1935, p. 12.
Orville Childress, managing director and chairman of the board of the Civic Theatre Players, announced performance dates for the 1935-1936 season, but no play titles. He also announced the opening of a school of dramatic art and speech for anyone from ages sixteen to sixty. "Students entering this school will be given tuition free and will be taught facial expression, make-up, diction, elocution, and general technique of the stage."167

For the 1935-1936 season the group leased the Jerusalem Temple for their productions. Dan Moore, who had worked with the little theatre and at Tulane, directed the first play of the new season, The Circle. The organization was unable to announce the remaining plays of the season, but the public was assured that Mrs. Henry Levy, the president, had completed arrangements for the other plays while in New York.168 There was a rush on memberships this season, and Richard A. Dowling, membership chairman, said that there would be no tickets sold at the door.169 Although the plays were not reviewed in the newspapers, there were numerous notices of forthcoming attractions. The audience requested a mystery play, so the organization produced The Phantom of Gage Manor, a mystery-comedy by Jay Tobias as their second production. Howard Fabacher, former actor with the St. Charles Players and Edward Ewals and Company, directed the show. He also directed the remaining plays of the season. These included Not So Wise


168 Item, October 6, 1935, p. 6.


Through extensive press releases the Civic Theatre Players made more promises than they could fulfill. Zainey recalled that Orville Childress had a rather poor reputation as managing director of the group. In an interview with the author, Ethel Crumb Brett said the plays were "dreadful." She said Childress was a "con man." He publicized the Civic Theatre Players and enticed wealthy middle-aged ladies to support the theatre through donation and subscription. He would "flatter and cajole people like Juan Villasano, who was a sweet man, into thinking he could do something. He would get him and people like him to direct." Sometimes he would collect the money and not even present the promised plays. He never really did anything illegal so he was safe from the police. Lee Edwards said in an interview that the Civic Theatre Players, through their inferior productions and amateurishness, damaged the reputation of community theatre in New Orleans at this time.

Other Theatre Sponsored by Non-Religious Groups

There were numerous other small, short-lived theatre groups which operated in the community between 1925 and 1935. Among

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170 Personal interview with Leon Zainey, January 10, 1972.


those which will be discussed in the following section are Uptown Little Theatre, Little Art Theatre, Stage Arts Guild, Dramatic Club of the New Orleans Public School Teachers' Association, Dante Alighieri Dramatic Club, and performances sponsored by the American Association of University Women and the Junior League.

Between 1925 and 1930, the Uptown Little Theatre group performed for a small, select audience composed mostly of Tulane and Newcomb students. William A. Bell, Jr., wrote an account of the Uptown Little Theatre's history in the April 26, 1929, issue of The Tulane Hullabaloo.

Bell said that in 1925, John McCloskey, then a Jesuit High School student, and his friend Victor Wogan, often burlesqued Shakespearian plays which they were studying in their senior English classes. The boys were encouraged by the reception their performances received from Wogan's sister and her Newcomb friends. So McCloskey's basement on Peters Avenue became the production area which was dubbed McCloskey Arena. If visitors demonstrated acting ability, they were admitted to the select circle of neophytes. After running the gamut of Shakespeare, making every situation laughably ridiculous, they ventured to other authors. Three years later they presented O'Neill's The Hairy Ape with a great deal of success.

A chimney draft cavity fitted with red lights gave the proper touch to the stoke hole scenes. A bed spring was the ape's cage. Circles painted on beaver board were life savers strung to a rail in the deck scenes. Costumes came from everywhere: old carnival dresses, relics from mothers' wardrobes, hats from fancy dress
Soon they changed their name to the Uptown Little Theatre, and in 1929 graduated to a stage twenty feet by ten feet with a canvas roll curtain, footlights, two sidestage floodlights, and all the other accessories. They equipped the auditorium with graded benches for easy viewing by a capacity house of sixty-five. Printed programs were handed out to the members who were served refreshments at intermission along with pleasant music. The theatre attracted sorority and fraternity students from Newcomb and Tulane.

The group began to penetrate the more serious field of drama when they performed a gangster play, The Third Degree. Of course, they included on the same program the burlesque for which they had become famous. This time Taming of the Shrew was the target.

... John McCloskey, cast in a part homologous to Katherine, made things smoke when he appeared in a pink ensemble: pink shoes, pink dress and pink stockings, and a flaming red, long-curled wig.174

The group even presented a play written by Aline Mitchener, a Newcomb senior, entitled Sally. According to the school newspaper reporter, this was no burlesque, but a well-plotted bit of light comedy. McCloskey and Wogan performed the leads, as usual, with McCloskey playing the hero and taking the acting honors.

The young students found release for their creative energies and a source of satisfaction in this little theatre. It was an

173 William A. Bell, Jr., Hullabaloo, April 26, 1929, p. 6.
174 Ibid.
example of the many small theatres which formed during this period, simply out of the desire of a group of people to perform.

Leon Zainey was instrumental in founding two theatres, the Little Art Theatre and the Stage Arts Guild, during this period. According to Zainey, after graduating from Easton High School, he was inspired by Tharp and Hanley and wanted to continue working in the theatre. He founded the Little Art Theatre as a means to release his creative urge. He and a group of other young students, about twenty years old, were able to secure a small, ninety-seat, private theatre located in the Pontalba building in the Vieux Carré district.

The young group began their first season in January, 1928, with a production of Sheridan's The Rivals, using local settings such as Jackson Square and City Park. They modernized this period piece by costuming the characters in the latest styles of the day. This was a conscious attempt to imitate the modernized version of Taming of the Shrew, which had recently been popular on the New York stage.

The theatre group remained together for three seasons, 1927-1929, performing such plays as Kismet, Rain, Candida, Road to Rome, and Mrs. Dane's Defense. Although their operating funds

175Personal interview with Leon Zainey, January 17, 1972, New Orleans, Louisiana.

176Among the group were other Easton graduates, Cottman, Shaw, and Keck.

177Zainey explained that Alfred Danziger had built this private theatre there to entertain his friends among whom was Huey P. Long.
were meager, their interest and enthusiasm kept them producing. When they did not have scenery for the plays, they borrowed, made, or were given set pieces. They persuaded the manager of the Orpheum motion picture theatre to give them an old vaudeville drop with an outdoor setting about ninety feet in length. They cut out parts of the drop for the eleven set changes needed in Kismet. The actors themselves worked on the settings. During the second of their seasons, the Little Art Theatre moved to a new St. Ann Street location. While there they brought in a Louisiana State University production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The group had some costumes, but performed mostly on a bare stage with some drapes. Zillah Meyer brought some of her high school students to see the production.

The little group furnished an outlet not only for actors, but gave an opportunity for Cottman to present some of his one-act plays from time to time. They produced one of his plays on Christmas Eve at eleven o'clock. Admission was free and people stopped in to see the play before going to midnight mass at St. Louis Cathedral across the street from the theatre.

Finally, at the end of the 1929-1930 season, the group no longer had the necessary finances to continue to produce and was forced to close. However, the Little Art Theatre served as a training ground in theatre and theatre management for those of the organization who were later to found the Group Theatre of New Orleans. 178

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178 Among them were Keck, Shaw, Cottman, and Zainey.
Almost immediately after the Little Art Theatre folded, Zainey made plans for another theatre. Zainey stated\textsuperscript{179} that he and his business partner Alden Echezebal\textsuperscript{180} started the Stage Arts Guild because there were few road companies coming into New Orleans and no stock shows available to fill the need for professional theatre in the city in 1931. Their plans were to start a permanent professional acting company in the city. Echezebal, a lawyer enamoured with theatre, invested the money necessary to rent a rehearsal hall on the fifth floor of the Godchaux building on Canal and Chartres Streets. Their plan was to hold auditions, select a cast with a professional quality, rehearse the plays, take them out of town in repertory, and when they were good enough return to New Orleans to perform. Although Zainey and Echezebal had brochures printed and sought out talented people by attending various shows in the area, they could not find a cast with sufficient ability. The rehearsal hall remained open for four or five months, but Zainey and Echezebal's plans did not evolve in the way they had envisioned.

By February, 1931, Zainey was able to gather together a cast to embark on a non-commercial venture with the Aristophanes comedy *Lysistrata* and announced an ambitious list of plays comprising Gorky's *Lower Depths* and Andreyev's *He Who Gets Slapped*.

\textsuperscript{179}Personal interview with Leon Zainey, January 17, 1972, New Orleans, Louisiana.

\textsuperscript{180}Echezebal was nephew to Joseph Echezebal of the St. Charles Stock Company.
The *Lysistrata* script was pruned of its vulgarity and performed at Dixon Hall in February and again in June at the Martin Behrman Memorial Auditorium in Algiers. A reviewer commented on the amateurishness of the production.

There was, by the way, a production of Aristophanes *Lysistrata* . . . directed by Leon K. Zainey, equipped with ineptly topical illusions and funny in the extreme because of the fact that hardly anybody knew his lines, the stage, consequently, being something like a Bedlan dressed in Greek togas and cheesecloth.

There were more than enough laughs produced by rank amateurishness at its rankest.181

When it looked as though the Stage Arts Guild would not succeed in the way that the two men had hoped, Echezebal went to New York to pursue a career in theatre,182 and Zainey sought other theatrical outlets. The Stage Arts Guild was an example of the dream of a professional theatre which remained amateur and failed before it began.

A group of teachers interested in dramatics came together in 1927 under the leadership of Amy Henricks to form the Dramatic Club of the New Orleans Public School Teachers' Association. During that year the club performed various entertainments and skits for the general meetings of the association. The following year the Dramatic Club decided to present a three-act play at the St. Charles theatre to raise money to fight legislation which would prevent teachers from receiving a desired salary increase. Maude

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181 *Orleanean*, June, 1931, p. 38.

182 According to Zainey, Echezebal performed in a Broadway production of a play about Oscar Wilde.
Parsons directed the group in Rachael Crothers' play, *He and She*, with Mazie Adkins and Edward Gschwind in the leads. The production was staged at the St. Charles and attracted numerous school teachers and members of the school board. The event also included several numbers performed by the Teachers' Choral Club directed by Mary M. Conway.

The success of this production prompted the group to perform plays annually to raise money to further the purposes of the organization. In May, 1929, the Dramatic Club of the association performed *A Prince There Was* at the Tulane theatre, the boys from Easton High School furnishing music during the intermissions.

Gschwind directed the 1930 production of the Dramatic Club at the Peters High School auditorium. They chose a play in which the story was woven around modern youth, *Wild Wescotts*. The organization announced that in 1931 they would extend their season to six plays per year. However, the club disbanded after the 1929-1930 season, because the new president of the Public School

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183 Adkins was teaching and directing plays at Kohn high school at the time, and Gschwind was head of the Dramatics Department at Peters high school.

184 Personal interview with Mazie Adkins Guidry, April 15, 1973, New Orleans, Louisiana.

185 *Picaso*, May 13, 1928, sec. 4, p. 9.

186 *The Broadcaster*, May 27, 1929, p. 5.

Teachers' Association was not interested in promoting dramatics, there was no longer a need to raise money, and the leaders of the Dramatic Club had become involved in other activities. The Dramatic Club of the New Orleans Public School Teachers' Association had served its purpose by giving an outlet to those teachers who wished to perform and providing a source of revenue for the club's needs.

The 1930 census estimated that there were more foreign-born Italians in New Orleans than any other nationality. In January and March of 1930, some of the Italians in New Orleans came together to present two separate series of plays at the Italian Union Hall on Esplanade Street. Calling themselves the Dante Alighieri Dramatic Club, they presented *Cornelia*, a drama, and *Norfrio's Duel*, a comedy. Cioacchino Schilleci, one of the founders of the group and formerly one of the leading actors, directed the plays. Music was furnished by the Dante Alighieri orchestra conducted by Castrenze Cuccia.


There is no evidence that the group was active during the intervening years, but in 1936 the Dante Alighieri group presented

188Adkins interview.


190Picayune, March 28, 1930, p. 25.
a four-act play entitled *La Giaconda* entirely in Italian at the Italian hall. Andrea Schiro directed the show and Salvatore D'Angelo worked as stage manager. The proceeds from the drama were used to assist in maintaining Italian instructors in the public high schools and grammar schools of the city. It is quite possible that this group provided other entertainments and theatricals for which there is no record.

The New Orleans Branch of the American Association of University Women sometimes presented money-raising theatricals in New Orleans during the period covered in this study. On the evening of March 30, 1932, they presented a unique theatrical event at Jerusalem Temple for the Million Dollar Fellowship Fund. The play, or pageant, was *Living Chess Game* by Dr. Ernest Riedel, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Tulane University. The pageant was a re-enactment of a well known chess game between Morphy and Paulsen in the New York Tournament of 1857 using human figures to represent each of the chess pieces.

Mazie Adkins, teacher of Expression and Dramatics at Allen High School, was in charge of the dramatic arrangements, designing the costumes, and laying out the pattern of the chess board on the ballroom floor. The chess board was sixty feet by sixty feet.

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191 Item, January 12, 1936, p. 1.

192 Production program for *Living Chess Game* and typed notes, Vertical files, Special Collections Division, Howard Tilton Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.
containing four foot squares.\footnote{193}

The procedure for the game was described in the following manner.

The players should be two well known chess players.\footnote{194} They should provide themselves with small cards, on which the individual moves are written. They pretend to study the game and then write their moves on the cards which they hand to the heralds. They sit on raised platforms, back of their respective sides.\footnote{195}

A master of ceremonies, who knew the game, commented on the game even in an impromptu manner. Piano and organ music was used throughout the game and each chess piece was accompanied by his own music.\footnote{196} The writer designated music cues for the entrance and exit of the chess pieces. The "Funeral March of the Marionettes" denoted the exit of the defeated white pieces, while the winning red pieces marched out to the triumphant march for the opera \textit{Aida}.

The players included Adkins as the white queen and Mrs. Riedel as the red queen. All of the chess pieces were AAUW members' children.\footnote{197}

\footnote{193}{Personal correspondence from Mazie Adkins Guidry, October 3, 1972, New Orleans, Louisiana.}

\footnote{194}{Dr. Ernest Riedel and Didgely Moise, two well known New Orleans chess enthusiasts, were the players.}

\footnote{195}{Typed notes, Vertical files, Special Collections Division, Howard Tilton Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.}

\footnote{196}{The program indicated that the musical arrangements were by Henri Wehrmann.}

\footnote{197}{Adkins correspondence.}
"It was a great success financially and otherwise. The popularity of chess in New Orleans, the famous game being played, the well known skill of the players, the large cast with all the relatives interested, a good publicity program, and the zeal of the Branch members to raise Fellowship Funds" all contributed to the success of this theatrical evening.198

A few years later the New Orleans AAUW raised money for the same benefit by staging three original one-act plays written by one of its members and directed by Adkins. The production was staged in Dixon Hall and included AAUW members and their children. The only other dramatic activity of the club during this period included "several 'Literary Teas' where some dramatic selections were presented, most of which were directed by Francois Genre, a Branch member who was also active in the Little Theatre."199

The Junior League consisted of a group of young women socialites of New Orleans who annually presented a benefit show called the "Junior League Revue" and occasionally performed children's theatre. Once they presented How Boots Befooled the King, for children residing in the Vieux Carré.200 However, one of their largest undertakings for children was a presentation of Materlinck's Blue Bird at the Municipal Auditorium in March, 1931. This program marked a departure from the usual League offerings. The Junior League, in effect, became a national producer, the

198Adkins correspondence.

199Adkins correspondence.

200Picayune, December 15, 1932, p. 11.
national organization having selected The Blue Bird for production by its chapters. The national organization used its resources in the creation of "lavishly elaborate costumes and settings"\textsuperscript{201} sending the entire material end of the production "on tour" to the chapters. The local group had only to supply the talent. Zillah Meyer directed the play for the benefit of the Junior League Nutrition Center, one of the organization's philanthropies.\textsuperscript{202}

Theatre Sponsored by Religious Groups

Many churches and religious organizations in New Orleans sponsored theatre during the period 1925 to 1935. The Menorah Players Guild sponsored by the Beth Israel Synagogue was the most significant and will be reported here in detail. The less significant church theatre groups will be reported briefly to give a general view of theatre sponsored by religious groups.

The Menorah Players Guild

According to Adelaide Cohen Ezkovich,\textsuperscript{203} three events led to the founding of one of the "most unique and successful" community theatres in New Orleans during the period of this study. The Beth Israel Synagogue located on Corondolet and

\textsuperscript{201}Orleanean, March, 1931, p. 26.
\textsuperscript{202}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{203}Personal interview with Adelaide Cohen Ezkovich, January 10, 1972, New Orleans, Louisiana. Ezkovich was one of the founders of the Menorah Players Guild and an actress in most of their productions.
Euterpe built a social center which contained offices and classrooms downstairs and a "tremendous" social hall with a stage at one end upstairs. The synagogue hired a director named Israel Chodos who got "the bright idea of starting a Jewish Little Theatre; not in Jewish, but a Jewish Little Theatre." During the summer of 1926, the Philo Society, a Jewish organization at Tulane which was "interesting itself in the drama," produced a translated version of Dr. Max Nordau's A Question of Honor. "The play dealt with what was and what is a highly controversial theme--anti-Semitism." This play was so successful that Chodos decided to form a Jewish theatre group at the synagogue with the help of Tulane's Philo Society, and perform Jewish plays in the large social hall on Euterpe Street. The group called themselves The Menorah Players Guild taking the word, "Menorah" from the candlelabra used in Jewish services.

This section examines the Guild's purposes, plays, directors, members and reviews of their productions to determine their role in the history of theatre in New Orleans between 1925 and 1935.

Ezkovich explained that the Menorah Players Guild performed as their first play in October, 1926, the same play which the Philo Society had presented, A Question of Honor. Zillah Mendes Meyer, one of the founders of Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré, directed this first Guild production with even greater success than the previous production of the play by the Philo Society.

204 Item, undated clipping from Ezkovich scrapbook.
The organization, which was under the spiritual guidance of Rabbi M. Raphael Gold of Beth Israel synagogue, and Israel Chodos, superintendent of the Menorah Institute and chairman of the productions, had one guiding purpose, "to promote the highest type of dramatic art, particularly along Jewish lines." The Menorah Players Guild proposed to present "those plays which echo the Jewish voice of yore—those works which bring back, even if but for a moment, that golden era of Jewish life—those masterpieces which—who knows why?—strike a responsive chord in our Jewish hearts demanding sympathy and understanding."

Throughout the five years of the existence of the Menorah Players Guild, the group presented many plays dealing with Jewish life, ideas, or beliefs. A Question of Honor dealt with anti-Semitism. The Phonograph and Forgotten Souls were both one-act plays of Jewish settings. The former was set "in a remote Russo-Yiddish town, where the Jews lived upon wind and miracles."

The Dybbuk by S. Ansky was Jewish in setting and theme. The story of "The Dybbuk" is more than 2,000 years old. Deep in Southeastern Europe, the Jews developed the mystical Chassidic cult, harking back to Mosaic days. Rabbis became miracle workers, and the black art of the Kabbala often superseded the Bible and the Talmud. Out of this atmosphere developed a rich, profound, poetic but frequently cruel and tragic life,

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205November 28, 1926, newspaper clipping.

206Item, November 28, 1926, p. 6.

207Production program for The Phonograph and Forgotten Souls, December 5, 1926, Ezkovich scrapbook.

208Ibid.
which is transmuted into world drama in "The Dybbuk."
The play turns on the exorcism from the body of
a beautiful girl of a disembodied spirit—the Dybbuk,
by the power of a miracle-working rabbi.209

This play was so successful that the Menorah Guild presented
it first in February, 1927 and then brought it back by popular
demand in November, 1929.210

Samson in Chains was another script typical of the play fare
chosen by the Menorah Guild. It was written by the modern Russian
playwright, Leonid Andreyev.

... Samson in Chains has been called by some
critics, a poem in prose. The author himself refers
to it in his writings as probably his best tragedy.
It is an unusually harmonious blending of the poise
and dignity of the Biblical narrative with the
appurtenances of later-day dramatic developments.211

One newspaper reporter considered this production to be "the
most ambitious undertaking of any amateur dramatic organization
in the city of New Orleans."212

The Guild sought the recognition of various civic leaders
by inviting some of them to the 1928 production of Samson in
Chains. Mrs. J. Oscar Nixon, founder and president of the board
of Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré, and Henry M. Gill, librarian
of the New Orleans Public Library, were among those who saw the

209 The Item-Tribune, November 10, 1929.

210 Unidentified and undated newspaper clipping from
Ezkovich scrapbook.

211 Unidentified and undated newspaper clipping from
Ezkovich scrapbook.

212 Ibid.
production. Gill, in a letter to the Guild, made the following comments about the organization and their production.

The work of your institution in making known to the general public the spirit of Jewish intellect and culture, as shown especially in the drama, is an exceedingly commendable one. I congratulate you upon the courage and intelligence with which you have labored to present to the community the great work "Samson in Chains," the equal in value of anything that the great representative writer Andreyev has done.213

Ethel Brett, the designer for the New Orleans little theatre, designed elaborate sets for this play. The temple pillars were built in sections so that when Samson pushed them, they broke and smoke and fire arose. Although the critics praised the scenery and Israel Chodos' acting, Knoblock, the Picayune reviewer, found the play "faulty," but "powerful," and some of the grouping "stiff."214

Other plays about Russian and Jewish life included The Dawn of Things, a one-act play depicting an episode of the Russian revolution after the death of the Czar. The Constant Path was a one-act drama of Jewish life in Russia depicting the poverty and misery of a factory worker whose life is brightened only when love re-enters his home through his children. Israel in the Kitchen and Mollentrave on Women were also about Jewish life.

213 Unidentified and undated newspaper clipping from the Ezkovich scrapbook.

214 Undated Picayune clipping from the Ezkovich scrapbook.
When the Guild was unable find plays Jewish in content, they chose challenging plays of well-known authors. In 1927 they presented John Galsworthy's *Loyalties* and in 1930 his play, *The Skin Game*. In 1928 they produced *Outward Bound* by Sutton Vane, and in the 1928-1929 season *Liliom* by Ferenc Molnár and Eugene O'Neill's *Beyond the Horizon*. Also that season, the group presented an evening of three one-act plays which included George Bernard Shaw's *Man of Destiny*, Essex Dane's *The Whirlwind Blows*, and Florence Reyerson's *The Third Angle*. The second to last play of the 1929-1930 season was *The Sacred Flame* by Somerset Maugham. They also produced *The Magistrate* by Arthur Wing Pinero. Until this time, no local amateur theatre group had chosen such intellectually challenging plays for presentation.

In January, 1929, the Menorah Players Guild began a Guild workshop in order to attract new young people and develop talent. No previous effort had been made to train Guild actors. One member, however, Adelaide Cohen, received training as a student at Lily Whitaker's New Orleans College of Oratory and at Val Winter's Dramatic School in the early 1930's.

Older members and veteran actors directed the workshop productions. Carolina Stier, who taught English, speech, and expression classes at John McDonogh High School at the time, directed the first evening of workshop productions January 20, 1929. She chose *The Constant Path* and *The Welcome Intruder*, because she had never seen or directed these plays, and she wanted the workshop to remain truly experimental. Although these plays were Jewish in content, most of the subsequent workshop plays were not.
An evening of two plays marked the beginning of a second series of workshop productions on May 5, 1929. The first play, directed by Adelaide Cohen and Dr. Morris Laufer, depicted an episode of the Russian revolution after the death of the Czar. The second play *The Smiths*, directed by Helene Levy and Dr. Harry Laufer, was a modern flirtation comedy with the usual entanglements of confused identities. These same directors, veteran Guild actors, presented two one-act plays, *Payment* and *In Love With Love*, in August, 1929, as part of the summer workshop.

The directors for the Menorah Players Guild received payment for their services. Most of them including Zillah Mendes Meyer, Andrew Rogers, Mrs. Alexander Mathis, Howard Bogner, and Ben Yancey, had extensive theatrical experience.

Meyer, one of the founders of Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré, taught Expression at John McDonogh High School in 1932 and guided many of the theatrical activities of the New Orleans public schools during this period. For the Guild she directed *Forgotten Souls*, *The Phonograph*, *The Dybbuk*, *The Magistrate*, *Mollentrave on Women*, and *Loyalties*.

Rogers had an impressive theatrical background, as evidenced in an unidentified and undated newspaper article from Ezkovitch's scrapbook.

Mr. Rogers enjoys a reputation for thoroughness and accuracy in direction, for deep penetration into the subtleties of light and shade, and for his discriminative taste in the selection of types. He has played, "Marc Antony" to Frederick Ward's "Brutus"—in "Julius Caesar;" the lead in "Old Kentucky," two seasons: "Istvánus" in Thomas Dicon's "Sins of the Father," played "Major Andre" to Walter Hampden's "Arnold," directed and played leads in Phil Marr stock company. In pictures he was a
member of Solax Stock Co., Fort Lee, N. J. He was featured in several pictures with Leatrice Joy. He directed and played in sketches sent over the air by National Broadcasting Co., WEAF, New York.

After gaining prominence in the theatrical world, Rogers returned to New Orleans in 1928 to write a three-act play for Riskin Brothers, New York producers. The Menorah furnished a theatrical outlet for his creative energies. He directed *Samson in Chains*, and *Beyond the Horizon*.

Although Mathis' ability as a director was not generally known to the people of New Orleans, she received her training at the Emerson College of Oratory at Boston where she was also a faculty member. "As Mrs. Violet Brothers, Mrs. Mathis made a sensational tour of the country as reader and impersonator before the Little theatre movement swept the country."215 She made her debut at the Menorah Players Guild as a director with their production of *Minick*.

Bogner and Yancey, both graduates of Tulane, had been active in theatre while at the university. Yancey directed *Love in a Mist*, and *The Silver Fox*, while Bogner directed *Skin Game* and *The Square Peg* for Menorah.

Membership to the Menorah Guild was $5, entitling members to see a full season of plays and the summer workshop productions. Although membership was open to everyone the Jewish community predominately supported the Guild. Ezkovich said that the acting

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215 Unidentified and undated newspaper clipping in the Ezkovich scrapbook.
group of the Menorah Players Guild consisted mostly of young Jewish boys and girls.

These young people did not have the need to go down to the little theatre to try out for parts, because they had their own theatre. They were perfectly happy and satisfied. There was not anything clanish about their group, it was just that it belonged to them, and they had a feeling of pride and ownership. It was a wonderful fresh outlet for everyone's energies.

Although the reviewers found the Guild's early plays faulty in some respects, they minimized their comments on the production's weaknesses, concentrating on the strengths. During this time the Guild had set standards for themselves which the reviewers expected them to uphold. By the 1930-1931 season, the quality of their productions had lessened. More frequently the reviewers made comments such as, "what it lacked in technical aspects, it made up for in characterization," which was said of Howard Bogner's production of Galsworthy's Skin Game.

The next production, The Silver Fox, directed by Ben Yancy, was reviewed as "another production below the standard set in years past by the Menorah Players Guild." The third production, The Square Peg directed by Bogner, however, gained the critic's approval. K. T. Knoblock, writing for the Orleanean magazine, said that The Square Peg "marked the peak of the Guild's accomplishment for the season, previous endeavors having been far from satisfactory." He said the Guild was able to do only certain

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216Ezkovich interview.

217Picayune, October 27, 1930, p. 8.
types of drama well. The "outmoded dramas of the English countryside" got their season off to a bad start. What they could do well, he said, was "something like The Square Peg--a story of small town life, bitter, and dramatic."\(^{218}\)

By 1931, the depression caused the memberships to decrease. Many people could no longer afford the luxury of a theatre membership. This, coupled with the poorer quality of productions, led to the demise of the group at the end of the 1930-1931 season.\(^{219}\)

The Menorah Players Guild had contributed significantly to the theatrical interests of the Jewish community. Herman B. Deutsch said in his theatre column that

> there is something distinctly refreshing about such groups as the Menorah Guild; something that the more pretentious organizations which rely upon the lavishness of their stage settings and the professional finish of direction and effects, cannot hope to satisfy. The remarkable success which the Menorah Guild has achieved lies in the spontaneous enthusiasm of its members and active heads. It is, of course, a small body, which considerably simplifies the task of ascertaining the wishes of the component units.\(^{220}\)

It was not until the Group Theatre developed that another organization was to fill the gap by giving thoughtful and challenging plays.\(^{221}\)

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\(^{218}\)Orleanean, February 15, 1931, p. 28. The magazine eliminated "New" from its title.

\(^{219}\)Ezkovich interview.

\(^{220}\)Untitled newspaper clipping, July, 1927, from Ezkovich scrapbook.

\(^{221}\)See New Orleans Group Theatre section.
Theatre Sponsored by Other Religious Groups

Some of the other theatre groups sponsored by churches or religious organizations during the period were the First English Evangelical Lutheran Church, Napoleon Avenue Methodist Church, Christ Church Cathedral, Jackson Avenue Episcopal Church, First African Baptist Church, St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Young Women's Christian Association, Young Men's Christian Association, Knights of Columbus and Catholic Daughters of America.

The First English Evangelical Lutheran Church presented various theatrical programs during the period of this study. In June, 1926, the adults presented scenes from School for Scandal. Later in the week there was a variety program of songs, dances, piano solos and other acts. In July, three one-act plays were presented to mark the forty-fifth anniversary of the Evangelical Lutheran Bethlehem Orphan Asylum. Theatrical events at the church became so popular that they were continued in the fall. In November, 1926, the adults performed the three-act play The Dutch Detective, and later in the week the children presented a variety show. The following year the forty-sixth anniversary celebration of the founding of the orphanage included another evening of one-acts. On October 27, 28, and 29, 1927, the church staged Clarence Decides. The church also gave a "Dance

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222 Production program for Schools for Scandal from Esther Hall Zollinger's scrapbook. Zollinger performed in these plays.

223 Production programs from the Zollinger scrapbook.
and Expression Revue" entitled "Oh! Doctor" and playlets on a
later variety program.

By 1929 the Senior Young People's Dramatic Club had formed
and was presenting one-act plays such as The Telegram and Not
Quite Such a Goose along with various sketches. The plays were
directed by interested church members, rehearsed for two or three
weeks, and staged in the church auditorium. "It was a get-
together for the young people."224

Roberta Gross described the plays performed at the First
English Evangelical Lutheran Church in the following manner:

We'd have three nights of entertainment, and we'd put
on a three-act play for the first night and the third
night. The second night we'd use vaudeville. The children
from the Sunday School who could do anything, or if some-
body was willing to train them, they would do dances or
songs or tricks, or what have you, or what they could do.
It was like a vaudeville night, and we did that for many,
many years. Just for the fun of it you know. They liked
it. It was part of the church's recreation, you know.
The plays themselves were not used to make money, but
they would sell things during the intermission, and they
would realize money on it.225

The Napoleon Avenue Methodist Church also produced plays in
order to fulfill some of the theatrical needs of various members
of the congregation. Gustave Rasch, who had been a student at the
New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art, was a member of the
congregation and brought his theatrical interests to the church

224 Personal interview with Esther Hall Zollinger, August 17,
1972, New Orleans, Louisiana. Zollinger, a member of the church,
performed in some of the plays.

225 Personal interview with Roberta Gross, January 17, 1972,
New Orleans, Louisiana.
group. He directed a variety program including a playlet, *Daisies Never Tell*, which he had written and in which he and his sister had acted.226

The Cathedral Guild Players of the Parish Guild of Christ Church Cathedral presented two plays in the Wall Center on Napoleon Avenue Friday, May 4, 1934. Albert Lovejoy, who had directed at Le Petit Théâtre, directed *The Long Christmas Dinner*, by Thornton Wilder. Lucille Hitchcock Chamberlin, who had "achieved distinction as a local dramatist," directed her own play, *The Power Deal*.227

The Young People's League and Men's Bible Class staged Lillian Mortimer's *Path Across the Hill* in the assembly hall of the Jackson Avenue Episcopal Church in order to raise money for church improvements. The congregation sold tickets for this comedy-drama presented February 4 and 5, 1926.228

The First African Baptist Church depicted the entry of Christ into Jerusalem, climaxed by his death upon the Cross of Calvary in *The Awakening Passion Play*. The performance included more than forty characters, members of the choir, and members of the congregation. Olivia Ford directed this series of tableaus which lasted more than three hours and drew praise from a large audience.229

226 Production programs for the plays and Zollinger interview.
227 *Item*, April 23, 1934, p. 11.
228 *Picayune*, January 9, 1926, p. 10.
229 *Picayune*, June 10, 1931, p. 3.
Ezkovich remembered that in the early 1930's a young Syrian girl and her family were very interested in presenting plays at their church, St. Mark's. They contacted her to direct a series of three plays for a church benefit. The one that she remembers most fondly was *The Bells of St. Mary's*. The group called themselves the St. Mark's Players.

The YWCA, Young Women's Christian Association, staged various theatrical performances at irregular intervals. They often staged variety shows, musical revues, and playlets. "Flashes," a revue which included more than 160 participants, was presented by the Business Club and the Girl Reserves of the YWCA, and performed at Dixon Hall in the spring of 1930.\(^\text{230}\)

The following year, the same two groups in the organization presented an original play by Florence K. Wurkee entitled *Blue Waters*, directed by Gustave G. Jaquet in the Easton High School auditorium. The proceeds from the play were used to send delegates to the national summer conference.\(^\text{231}\)

Although there is no indication that the YMCA itself presented theatrical programs, there was at least one program presented in the Y building by another group. During the depression the New Orleans Transient Bureau housed many men who were out of work and waiting to be rehabilitated in some way. Among the jobless were stage, radio, and movie performers who could not sit idle. In 1935, they organized and presented a vaudeville

\(^{230}\) *Picayune*, May 4, 1930, p. 35.

\(^{231}\) *Picayune*, April 26, 1931, p. 10.
show in the old YMCA building on St. Charles Avenue. Jerry Arnold, who had performed with Myrt and Marge on the radio for a long time, directed the show assisted by J. F. Smith. They discovered former vaudeville and stock performers among the group and hoped to include more ambitious programs of stock and revues at a later date.232

The Knights of Columbus, a Catholic fraternal order with many chapters throughout the city, frequently sponsored or performed plays to raise money for various benefits. The New Orleans Council No. 714 sponsored a three-act comedy, Her Gloves, in their auditorium on May 2, 1928. Wilfred J. Drez, chairman of the dramatic committee, directed veterans of the amateur stage in New Orleans in this production.233 William Whitmore, a native of Algiers234 and graduate of Jefferson College in Convent, Louisiana, wrote a play based on Lyle Saxon's Lafitte the Pirate entitled The Southern Buccaneer. The Behrman Memorial Players of the Algiers Little Theatre presented their production of this native drama at the request of the Knights of Columbus Council headed by Charles A. Ahern, a grand knight. Ahern appointed a committee of three hundred members of the club to promote this activity for the benefit of the Knights of Columbus relief program. This was probably the largest backing of any play ever presented

233Picayune, May 2, 1928, p. 16.
234Algiers is located on the west bank of the Mississippi River.
at the Knights of Columbus hall.

The Catholic Daughters of America utilized the Knights of Columbus Auditorium for various revues and minstrel shows. In May, 1926, the New Orleans Minstrel Maids, under the auspices of Court Mater Dei No. 368, Catholic Daughters of America, presented "Big Fun Revue" under the direction of Hazel Theisen Godolfo.235

Summary

The community theatres operating in New Orleans between 1925 and 1935 were supported by both non-religious and religious groups. Of the groups not affiliated with a religious organization, Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carre, the New Orleans Groups Theatre, and the Children's Theatre Guild were the most successful. Each offered challenging plays to large subscription audiences. Of the groups sponsored by religious organizations the Menorah Players Guild was probably the most successful and stable, regularly offering challenging plays to their Jewish community. Many other groups formed and presented plays irregularly for brief periods of time. Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carre was the only community theatre groups which performed throughout the decade.

Many of the community theatre leaders were also active in educational theatre as well. Among them were Tharp, Hanley, Meyer, 

Keck, Zaine, Zinser, Moore, Hendricks, Adkins, Cottman, and Shaw.

The community theatres of New Orleans provided a creative outlet for numerous men, women, and children as well as providing audiences with inexpensive live theatrical entertainment during a period when there was little or no professional theatre in the city.
CHAPTER IV

PROFESSIONAL THEATRE

There were two types of professional theatrical activity in New Orleans from 1925 to 1935, vaudeville and legitimate theatre. Vaudeville was a form of theatrical entertainment consisting of several individual performances, acts, or mixed numbers. During this decade a number of theatres housed both vaudeville and motion pictures. Among these were the Orpheum, Palace, Lyric, Dauphine, Famous, Loew's State, Strand, Liberty, Saenger, and Crescent theatres. The legitimate theatre, consisting of professionally produced stage plays, was present in the form of stock company productions and road touring attractions. The St. Charles theatre housed the stock company, and the Tulane theatre received the road shows.

Although New Orleans supported vaudeville and legitimate theatre at the beginning of the decade, by 1936, all professional live entertainment had disappeared from the city's stages. In this chapter the discussion of vaudeville describes its state at the beginning of the period in New Orleans, traces its decline, and reports the activities of the principal vaudeville theatres. The discussion of legitimate theatre also examines its state at the beginning of the ten years, traces its decline and reports the performances at legitimate theatre houses in New Orleans.
Vaudeville

At the opening of the 1925-1926 season in New Orleans, the Picayune stated that the prospects for vaudeville and motion pictures looked good. For the first time since it succeeded the St. Charles as the local home of the circuit, the Orpheum house was crowded at all shows. The management presented six acts of vaudeville along with a feature motion picture. Loew's Crescent and the Palace, equally popular, offered only five acts with their film. Saenger's Strand and Liberty theatres also followed the vaudeville-motion picture policy. Only these five of the twenty-eight film theatres in the city offered vaudeville. It was becoming evident in New Orleans, as elsewhere, that audiences were often more interested in the film attraction than the vaudeville acts.

By 1925, straight vaudeville was tottering, shoved on one side by the great new show houses, on the other by the popular-priced movie theatres, many of which were now being swamped by acts deserting the sinking ship of the Orpheum Circuit. As more and more vaudeville houses went pix, vaudevillians were reduced to bookings in only about 100 independent theatres. These theatres booked acts through agents for so little money that they were known as C. & C.—the Coffee and Cake circuit. The curtain was falling fast on vaudeville.

However, in New Orleans in 1926 the vaudeville-movie houses continued to advertise vaudeville headliners, giving more advertising space to them than the motion pictures, thus indicating the

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1Picayune, September 20, 1925, sec. 4, p. 1.

hope at least that vaudeville was still the main attraction. However, by the summer of 1927 the reverse was true. Film advertisements were larger, usually including pictures of the film stars, while vaudeville received a simple printed listing at the bottom of the advertisement. The Orpheum continued to feature six vaudeville acts and the Loew's State and Palace five.

Over the next few years, a number of events took place which led to the demise of vaudeville in New Orleans. Sound was introduced into a number of the theatres, numerous movie houses not designed for vaudeville began to develop in the suburban areas, and the already existing ones added sound. A musician's strike caused a walkout at the theatres with orchestras, and although vaudeville attempted a come-back, the depression and a stage-hand strike hastened its death. This section examines each of these factors as they pertain to vaudeville in New Orleans during this period of decline.

In the spring of 1928, Saenger Theatres, Incorporated bought the Tudor theatre,3 installed Vitaphone sound reproducing equipment, and exhibited the first sound picture in the city. The sound equipment was a Warner Brothers and Western Electric device which synchronized sound and motion picture. The film, Glorious Betsy, contained several speech and song sequences which inspired rounds of applause, although encores were not possible.4

3Picayune, June 24, 1928, sec. 4, p. 10.
4Picayune, June 30, 1928, p. 18.
Included on the same program were four acts of Vitaphone Vaudeville with George Jessel and Fred Waring's Pennsylvanians. The film did "sensational" business the first day and was so popular in New Orleans that it remained at the theatre for six weeks. It was followed by another talking film, The Jazz Singer, starring Al Jolson. During this time the Orpheum and Loew's State continued running vaudeville with silent films.

The Saenger was the next theatre to install sound, and by October, 1928, the Loew's State and seven New Orleans suburban theatres were ready with sound. Nevertheless, many of the theatres were still showing silent films, while waiting for more sound films to be made and released.

Strikes and threat of strikes, particularly by the musicians, hastened the installation of sound equipment that would eliminate all need for any orchestra except for the vaudeville act. In August, 1928, the musicians at the Saenger and the Loew's State went on strike and the audience walked out. New Orleans theatres were also faced with the possibility of a walkout of almost the entire staff of theatre employees.

The 1928-1929 season found only five of the big houses ready for business and seven closed. John D. Klorer of the Picayune

5Ibid.
6Picayune, July 22, 1928, sec. 4, p. 7.
7Picayune, October 28, 1928.
8Picayune, August 28, 1928, p. 2.
9Picayune, September 1, 1928, p. 1.
stated that the Tulane, Saenger, Loew's State, Orpheum, and Tudor would carry the brunt of appeasing the appetites of 425,000 show-hungry people.\textsuperscript{10}

This season, in an attempt to gain customers for vaudeville and perhaps capitalize on the popularity of the little theatre movement at the time, a spokesman for vaudeville indicated that the circuit would incorporate plays produced by the little theatre into the vaudeville bill. He said:

The little theatre movement has spread throughout the nation faster and with greater success than any non-professional attempt ever made in America.

We have decided to co-operate with the little theatre movement by putting on our circuit the best of the one-act playlets produced by various little theatres and, so far as possible, using the same casts.\textsuperscript{11}

Although there is no indication that the little theatre in New Orleans participated in vaudeville, this was an attempt to encourage the writing of plays, enlarge the scope of the little theatre movement and secure on their circuit new attractions of high merit.

Since vaudeville teams were already having difficulty surviving, they were not strong enough to survive the economic blow of the depression. The Orpheum and other show houses in the city reduced their bills. However, despite the economic pressures of the depression, vaudeville attempted a come-back in the early thirties in New Orleans. Charles P. Jones in his \textit{Picayune} column

\textsuperscript{10}\textit{Picayune}, September 23, 1928, sec. 4, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{11}\textit{Picayune}, August 26, 1928, sec. 4, p. 11.
"Post-View," commented on the possible return of vaudeville.

You will be glad to know, if you have read as far as this, that vaudeville is staging a noble comeback. The pictures almost killed it for a while, but it has a great old tradition to live up to. There has been scarcely a great personality of the stage, from Sarah Bernhardt to Anna Held, who has not appeared at one time in vaudeville.

The Loew circuit and RKO announce that they want more talent, that they are prepared to pay well for what they have and that they are utilizing their best for a high standard of performance.12

RKO, in order to help assure the success of vaudeville's return, took an audience poll to determine the changing tastes of its "new" audience. Audiences said that they wanted personalities. There were more requests for motion picture celebrities than there were for radio or musical comedy stars, who were the attraction formerly. Opera and straight singing were not as popular as they once were. Some speculated that perhaps singing presented at its best on the radio had taken some of the interest of the audience away from the vaudeville singer.13 Reports from New York promised bigger, better, and more varied vaudeville in the coming season.

But the vaudeville come-back was not successful. Although by June, 1933, the Orpheum was offering five acts of vaudeville, some of the theatres in the city had discontinued it completely, and by the fall of the year, the stage-hand strike proved to be the final blow which ended vaudeville in New Orleans.


In the fall of 1933, 250 stage-hands were in Washington to sign the National Recovery Act code, which provided for a minimum union scale salary for all hands, including musicians, stage-hands and operators in movie and vaudeville houses. Many believed the non-union motion picture and vaudeville houses would be forced to close, since they probably could not pay the increase demanded. Mel Washburn, writing for the Item, speculated that vaudeville would return.

There is no reason why vaudeville should remain the stepchild of show business any longer, and even the managers will have to admit that if the public wants vaudeville they have to provide it or else. This is the first time New Orleans has been entirely without vaudeville and there hasn't been a lot of difference at the box offices, but the same conditions won't go on forever. New Orleans is too metropolitan a city for that. There will have to be vaudeville and I rather suspect all the theatre managers will be happier when they get it again.14

After the National Recovery Act code was handed down, vaudeville in New Orleans died. During the strike, the managers discovered that the patrons still came to the theatres to see the films even without the vaudeville. This discovery led to the elimination of the vaudeville acts and their expense without loss of box-office receipts.

Washburn felt the death of vaudeville somewhat influenced the death of the legitimate theatre. He said that because New Orleans did not support the remaining vaudeville tour, it lost its reputation as a good show town and many of the legitimate stage bookings did not include New Orleans for this reason.15

14Item, October 29, 1933, p. 6.
15Item, April 22, 1934, p. 10.
Because vaudeville was almost extinct by the end of 1933, the entertainers and the entertainment had to be absorbed elsewhere. Dance halls and cafes began to employ entertainers, and with the repeal of prohibition in February, 1933, numerous beer halls opened which also used entertainers. Washburn, writing for the Item, described this change in his column.

Has vaudeville gone back to another infancy? The vaudeville that we enjoyed (sometimes) before Depression sent the dancers and singers, skipping and yodeling into the bread lines, or into night clubs and midway shows, had its inception about 30 years ago in the beer halls and cafes of that day. It started with singing waiters, novelty artists and such and advanced until its variety was an established institution of the American stage. From that it grew into miniature productions for movie theatre presentations, spectacular prologues and such until three or four years ago when the skids, greased by financial collapse of the country, hit the toboggan.

Then beer became legal in the United States again. With it came the modern beer gardens, the dim and colorful beer halls, and they increased in number so that owners needed something more than beer and colored lights to attract crowds. Just as the proprietors and such places back in the 90's needed colorful features and novel entertainment, the beer garden owner today needed them and back came the singing waiters, the dancers and the singers. The shows have become more elaborate as competition became keener until it looks now as if vaudeville was in its second childhood. How long, I wonder, will it be until the 'baby' grows up?16

Although the end of this decade saw the death of vaudeville, it began as a period alive with vaudeville activity at many vaudeville houses in New Orleans. The following section examines vaudeville programs at the Orpheum, Palace, Lyric, Dauphine, Famous, Loew's State, Strand, Liberty, Saenger, and Crescent theatres.

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16 Item, December 17, 1933, sec. 4, p. 6.
Orpheum Theatre

The Keith-Orpheum Circuit and the Loew Circuit were two national circuits that supplied vaudeville acts to their theatres throughout the country. The Keith-Orpheum Circuit supplied vaudeville acts to the Orpheum theatre in New Orleans. Compared to the Loew Circuit, Keith-Orpheum was "big time," and aimed at a "class" audience--the kind that went to Broadway plays. They operated with five million dollars capital and the Palace in New York was their star showcase.17

In the summer of 1925, the Orpheum began its vaudeville and picture policy, which attracted many to the theatre.18 By the summer of the following year, cooling systems installed in most of the theatres attracted "throngs" to the theatre.19

In January, 1926, Orpheum's prices, including six top vaudeville acts and a "photoplay," were 50¢ for adults, and 15¢ for children under 10 and gallery seats. However, by March, 1928, the theatres announced reduced prices, the inclusion of a matinee, and the following price list.

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Saturday Matinee up to 5 p.m.

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<td>15¢ (children under 12)</td>
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17 Abel Green and Joe Laurie, p. 268.
18 Picayune, July 19, 1926, p. 4.
19 Picayune, July 25, 1926, sec. 4, p. 12.
Although the legitimate theatre was having its troubles at the opening of the 1927-1928 season, vaudeville continued "to do more than pay its way."21

The experience of the New Orleans Orpheum theatre is beautifully illustrative of the point. For years the house had a struggle making both ends meet, while offering seven acts of the best variety entertainment. Today, with five acts of perceptibly lower grade—and old-time vaudeville just doesn't exist today—the house is prosperous and usually packed.22

The Orpheum billings were attractive and offered appealing variety. Typical of the type of bookings at the Orpheum was the program for the second week in January, 1926. There was a Charleston contest to determine the New Orleans champions plus a regular vaudeville bill. It included Mildred Livingston, headliner, in "a spectacular" musical comedy by Wilson K. Wells called "Cinderbella."23 She was assisted by Billy Hutchinson and a feminine quartette. The second headliners were Chain and Bronson, a team of singing comedians. Also on the bill were Ralph Pollock and his orchestra; and Mac Follis and Mat LeRoy, a team of terpsichorean artists known for their "Bowery Dance" and offering

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21 Picayune, October 23, 1927, p. 12.
22 Ibid.
a routine called "Eccentricities," which consisted of songs and comedy dances. Another act included Paul Johnson, "the wizard golf player" who demonstrated tricks in golf and an "interesting conversation routine." Finally there was a group of fox terriers on the bill. 24

The management often included regional talent in the billing. During the week of January 10, the Orpheum billed Florence Brady, "the Southern Singer," assisted by the "Gentlemen of Mississippi" along with Charles Withers, a character comedian, as the two headliners. The manager of the Orpheum, Si Spivens, also included four other teams and talents under the top billings. They included Earl Mossman, "a dancing juvenile," and Alice Turner, a "pretty song and dance girl;" Jo Lane and Pearl Harper in a singing and talking skit; Mary Reilly, "the Girl from Kentucky," a singer; and LaFleur and Portia, "Incomparable Equilibrists," whose feature was "the human top." 25

The Orpheum often billed big name talent also. On one such occasion they presented Ole Olsen and Chic Johnson in "Surprise Party," along with five other acts. 26 On another occasion, they billed George Burns and Gracie Allen whom the reviewer found a relief from the usual vaudeville fare. 27

24 Ibid.


26 Picayune, January 1, 1926, p. 30.

27 Picayune, January 6, 1927, p. 9.
During the period from 1925 to 1928, the Orpheum as well as other theatres, gave more space in their newspaper advertisements to the vaudeville acts than they did to the films. The motion pictures seemed to be something extra for the price. But by the spring of 1928 sound pictures had been introduced into the city, the advertisements reversed the emphasis, and the Orpheum was advertising the 50¢ ticket and attracting capacity houses. Knoblock of the Picayune said that everyone had "gone 50¢ crazy" and that it certainly was "hard to get more than that sum for motion picture entertainment."\(^{28}\)

But the prosperity was short-lived. In order to survive the depression, the Keith-Orpheum Circuit merged with radio interests to form RKO, which supplied films to the theatres that the group owned.\(^{29}\) The Orpheum in New Orleans became the recipient of the films, and by 1931 they were the most important attraction at the theatre. Vaudeville was reduced to four acts and an organist.

By the end of the decade the Orpheum had resorted to showing full length feature films with no stage show. The New Orleans Orpheum became the home of RKO pictures.

**Palace**

The Greenwald Theatre opened at 201 Dauphine Street as a legitimate house in 1904. In 1905, it began housing burlesque shows and did so for some years. When it was used by the Emma

\(^{28}\) *Picayune*, March 18, 1928, sec. 4, p. 1.

\(^{29}\) *Green and Laurie*, p. 372.
Bunting Players, a stock company, its name was changed to the Emma Bunting Theatre. From 1915 to 1930, the building was operated—when it was operated at all—as a motion-picture and vaudeville house, under the name of the Palace.30

The Palace, in 1926, received its bookings, like the Orpheum, from the B. F. Keith vaudeville circuit, which operated the Palace in New York, the nation's leading vaudeville money-maker.31 Typical of some of the Keith circuit shows here was the January, 1926, booking of Don Finch in a two-act "real minstrel revival with ultra modern jazz motifs."32 Other bookings included Jack Henry in "The Little Cottage," as top billing, with Marjorie Burton, DeAlma-Hashl and Osal, and Ray and Adele as added attractions. The photoplay was Glenn Hunter in "The Little Giant," with admission prices of 15, 25, and 50 cents.33

K. T. Knoblock, the Picayune reviewer, was often displeased with Palace vaudeville, finding that the management often substituted quantity for quality. One such booking included two billings and eight acts. Among those in the first billing were Margit Hegedus, violinist; Valdo, Meers, and Valdo in "an eccentric acrobatic act"; and Pat Barrett and Nora Cunnsen in a skit entitled "Looking for You".34 The second bill of the week included

31 Green and Laurie, p. 268.
32 Picayune, January 3, 1926.
33 Picayune, January 2, 1926, p. 25.
34 Picayune, January 10, 1926, sec. 4, p. 1.
"Singing" Eddie Nelson, a minstrel and character comedian; Fred Walton and Mary Brant with "bright dialogue and clever situations"; Dorothy D'Orsay, Tom Sedman and Company in "Cycle of Dance Melody and Song"; the Gaudsmith twins with their clown dog; and the Dallas Walker Trio in a sketch.35

In the fall of 1927, the Palace began a new policy of presenting a series of musical entertainments of the type that the Crescent had inaugurated. These tabloids, or tab shows as they were called, originated in 1912 and were abbreviated musical comedies consisting of four or five principals, seven or eight chorus girls and one set of scenery. "Although tab performers preferred to think of themselves as a musical comedy lineage, a healthy percentage of tabs were really junior burlesque shows."36

By the end of the 1927-1928 season the newspaper reported that "the Palace, once a secondary vaudeville house, seems committed indefinitely to the tabloid musical comedy policy, with Danny Duncan as its very efficient high priest."37 One such musical was the Harry Rogers Musical Company presentation of "Old Sweethearts," reviewed as a "weak vehicle" for a group of "high grade stage people."38

The 1928-29 season found the Harry Rogers musical company once again at the Palace. They performed Little Jesse James, the

35Ibid.
36Green and Laurie, p. 72.
37Picayune, April 8, 1928, sec. 4, p. 1.
38Picayune, December 19, 1927, p. 29.
Gerschwin-Whitman piece that had played the Tulane three seasons before. This time Knoblock's review was favorable. He said it was "well worth a look" at this "far and away above the average 'tab' company" that "comes off, really, in good style."39 The next week, October 28, Ken Christy and the Palace Players presented *Dolly of the Follies.*40

By January 13, 1929, the Palace Players had closed their season with H. R. Seeman directing the Harry Rogers Musical Comedy Company in *Happy Days,* a musical revue. The newspaper said that "the company has scored a big hit here and its members will be missed by the patrons of the theatre."41 Ken Christy, the comedian, and Dorothy Sevier, leading lady, were "entertaining and popular," and the twelve pretty girls known as "The Freshie Beauties" also "won the theatre patrons' hearts."42

Although many citizen groups protested the leasing of the Palace theatre as a Negro theatre, the mayor said that the city was powerless,43 and the theatre opened as a Negro theatre in October, 1935, offering motion pictures and vaudeville.44 As a Negro house, it offered "all-colored revues,"45 vaudeville, and

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39 *Picayune,* October 22, 1928, p. 10.

40 *Picayune,* October 29, 1928, p. 6.

41 *Picayune,* January 13, 1929, sec. 4, p. 1.


43 *Picayune,* October 26, 1935, p. 7.

44 *Picayune,* October 20, 1935, sec. 5, p. 8.

45 *Item,* January 5, 1936, p. 7.
minstrel shows. Richard and Pringle's Georgia Minstrels was one of the outstanding minstrel groups to play the Palace. The troupe of fifty was the largest Negro group to play leading vaudeville circuits. They had played the East, North, and West and toured the South to play a few of the "choice colored theatres" in Jackson, Montgomery, Atlanta, Birmingham, Nashville, Memphis, and New Orleans. Although the other houses had ended their vaudeville shows, the Palace continued intermittently to offer a stage show with its film until the late 1930's.

Loew's State Theatre

The New Orleans Loew's State, one of the 400 theatres in the United States owned by Marcus Loew, opened on Saturday, April 3, 1926, with a street parade and twenty-five motion picture stars on stage at the newly built theatre. From its inception, this theatre was a success in New Orleans. Loew, even when he controlled the Crescent theatre interests in New Orleans, had a five-act vaudeville-motion picture policy. His theory was that "if they don't like the stage show, they'll like the picture, and vice-versa, while, if they like both, you coin money."

The vaudeville at Loew's State was obtained from the Loew Vaudeville Circuit. "Loew vaudeville was machine built for a

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46 Item, February 6, 1936, p. 10.
48 Loew operated the Crescent theatre from 1915 to 1925.
49 Picayune, October 23, 1927.
mass audience—the kind that wanted their money's worth with a movie and some acts. "Marcus Loew's credo was a low price so the entire family could go."\(^{50}\)

In May, 1926, the management presented Mabel Walzer and her boy friends in a "Miniature Musical Comedy" plus a vaudeville act and show.\(^{51}\) By 1928, the vaudeville programs were sometimes one-person acts such as the Ruth Elder appearance. Elder was the first woman to fly the Atlantic. She received a $100,000 contract for a one-hundred-day tour of vaudeville theatres to tell her story and charm the audience.\(^{52}\)

Often the theatre facilities were used to present local talent.\(^{53}\) One such event was the 1928 Loew's State Frolics, featuring sixty New Orleans boys and girls in costumes and elaborate sets brought from New York. This was part of the Loew's Circuit's attempt to find new talent to fill the frequently occurring vacancies in vaudeville and musical comedy.\(^{54}\)

In September, 1929, manager Rodney Toups of the Loew's State announced that there would be no vaudeville program during the week's engagement of the film *The Hollywood Revue*. This was a departure from the usual format and would test audience interest in programs without vaudeville. *The Hollywood Revue* was itself a

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\(^{50}\)Green and Laurie, p. 268.


\(^{52}\)Picayune, May 9, 1928, p. 19.

\(^{53}\)See Elementary schools.

\(^{54}\)Picayune, March 11, 1928, sec. 4, p. 1.
filmed revue and vaudeville spectacular with "songs, new dances by stars of the screen and stage, lots of 'gags' and abundant laughs."  

It is a radical departure from the motion pictures to which theatre goers have become accustomed, even in the talkie epoch. It is a revue, a huge vaudeville show for young and old alike, staged with gorgeous settings, twenty musical numbers, a huge dancing chorus and a galaxy of stars in the greatest cast ever assembled for one motion picture.  

This was the type of picture that eventually proved films could do what vaudeville and the revue could do but on a grander scale.

Two weeks later the management once again announced that there would be no vaudeville program with the film The Cock-Eyed World. They simply stated that "owing to the importance and magnitude of this picture, vaudeville will be eliminated this week only!"  

If there were any doubts whether or not vaudeville would be missed, Knoblock dispelled them by saying that "vaudeville has been eliminated at the Loew's this week, but it is not missed. You'll enjoy The Cock-Eyed World without it."  

However, the following week five acts of vaudeville returned with the screen film.

One of the top attractions in December, 1929, was Milton Berle in a "sizzling revue" called Get Hot with a cast of

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56 Ibid.
57 Picayune, October 14, 1929, p. 18.
58 Ibid.
However, in 1931 economic pressures caused the Loew's Circuit to drop vaudeville. Independent circuits practically disappeared, and circuit houses like New Orleans' Loew's State became picture houses without vaudeville by 1934.

Crescent Theatre

With the opening of the Loew's State theatre in April, 1926, Marcus Loew terminated his association with the Crescent theatre after nine years of vaudeville and motion pictures, and the theatre closed as a movie-vaudville house. The Saenger interests took over the theatre as a showcase for the Saenger stock of "miniature musical comedy revues." The shows were advertised as "the first continuous musical comedy with a plot at the Crescent." They were produced by A. B. Marcus, performed by the Marcus Players, sometimes called the Marcus Merrymakers, and directed by Virgil E. Singer. Some of the shows were Oh! Oh! Nurse, billed as an unusual comedy farce; Midnight in Chinatown, one of the "most elaborate" Marcus Shows of 1926; and Linger Longer Letty, with the Marcus Show of 1927 directed by Lionel Stillwell.

59 Picayune, December 1, 1929, sec. 3, p. 6.
60 Green and Laurie, p. 372.
62 Picayune, June 6, 1926, sec. 4, p. 11.
63 Picayune, May 9, 1926, sec. 4, p. 10.
64 Picayune, July 11, 1926, sec. 4, p. 12.
65 Picayune, May 9, 1926, sec. 4, p. 10.
66 Picayune, September 26, 1926, sec. 4, p. 2.
After several weeks of this type of show, the newspaper stated that the Marcus Show of 1927 would depart from the revue form and move into the musical comedy field with *Sweet Dreams*, "an underworld story with touches of the dramatic and melodramatic." However, this departure did not result in a musical. Instead, as Knoblock noted in his review, it could "hardly be distinguished from the revue type of entertainment which has been a more frequent rite at the theater." Successive musical shows still remained more the revue type, for the reviewer said that *Picking the Winner* had the "barest outline of a plot," and in *Who's Your Husband*, the Marcus Peaches, the girls' dancing chorus, sang and danced between the dramatic numbers. The reviewers were continually surprised that the audiences liked the shows "whatever the opinions of the more austere critics of the arts."

The Crescent tried various methods of gaining the interest of the audience. One method was attempted early in 1927. Burlesque returned to the city at the Crescent theatre in the form of *Burlesque a La Carte*, executed by the New Marcus Unit of fifty-five people. Knoblock wrote of his feelings of burlesque in his newspaper column.

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67 *Picayune*, October 10, 1926, sec. 4, p. 1.

68 *Picayune*, October 11, 1926, p. 17.

69 *Picayune*, October 17, 1926, sec. 4, p. 1.

70 *Picayune*, October 24, 1926, sec. 4, p. 1.
Burlesque was restored to New Orleans a week ago and great has been the rejoicing. There is something primitive about the form that gets you, be your brow low or be it high. It is, for one thing, utterly naive, utterly unassuming. It calculates on no kartharsis in its estimate to the effect of thwackings administered by comedians. It is a form meek and lowly and it inherits the admiration of a good bit of the earth.71

Another method of gaining audience interest was by allowing them to give a title to the show currently running. The person submitting the best title received a cash prize.72 The contest not only added audience interest but perhaps indicated how shallow or illusive the shows really were.

The Crescent attempted to attract audiences of all ages. In January, 1927, the management presented a show called Minstrels of 1937. The advertisements predicted that this show would set a trend in minstrels for the next ten years. The management promised a "leg show with a dash of burnt cork thrown in to please the grandpas who remember. . . ."73 Thus there was something for the young and old alike.

In the week of August 29, 1927, the company performed Oh! Mary, Behave as their last production, clearing the stage for "a new troupe headed by the indelibly subtle Eddie Chittenden."

Chittenden headed the All-Star Edition of the Marcus show entitled

71Picayune, October 30, 1927, sec. 4, p. 1.
72Picayune, November 7, 1926, sec. 4, p. 1.
73Picayune, January 3, 1927, p. 17.
74Picayune, August 29, 1927, p. 17.
Lemons and Peaches, directed by Limie Stilwell. Knoblock termed the production "normal" and summed up his thoughts on the feelings about Chittenden while expressing the reviewer's sentiments. He said, "New Orleans' favorite comedian, the mysterious Eddie Chittenden, is on tap in his usual characterizations. How the boy has managed to sell himself as a comedian to so many people--and they do laugh at his stuff--is the funniest thing about him." This edition of the Marcus show continued until October, 1927, when the Crescent became a burlesque theatre. Although the reviewers were pleased with the change, the Marcus groups had more audience appeal and drew a larger crowd. Burlesque remained two weeks before the Crescent players moved in to present vaudeville playlets in conjunction with moving pictures.

At the opening of the 1928-1929 season, E. V. Richards, manager of the Saenger interests, indicated that the Crescent would be closed because the leg shows, tab shows, burlesque, and other types of shows had not been profitable. He attributed the cause to bad business, generally poor financial conditions, and the mounting cost of stage labor.

On February 4, 1928, the Crescent theatre presented an unusual theatre offering. For the first time in the history of New Orleans, a group of Italians sponsored an Italian comedy featuring "the most distinguished comic artist in all Italy."

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75 Picayune, September 11, 1927, sec. 4, p. 1.
76 Picayune, September 12, 1927, p. 18.
77 Picayune, September 23, 1928, sec. 4, p. 1.
Although the troupe of thirty and the star, Musco, were easy to understand because of their facial expressions and gestures, the Italian actors failed "to stir New Orleans interest." Musco was "a world figure in theatre ranking with Duse and the divine Sarah," and Knoblock scolded his audience for neglecting to view such great acting. The players presented a different play each night from February 4 to February 10.

The new company of Crescent players opened at the Crescent on February 11, 1928, with a tabloid musical entitled *Four Jolly Bachelors*. This musical was flexible enough to allow room for drunk scenes, comedy situations, specialty numbers, and chorus drills. Knoblock complimented the group on being loud enough to be heard, for he often complained that he could not hear the Marcus group, and said that the show was "up to snuff, a good, standard tabloid musical comedy."

However, the patronage continued to lessen, and it was necessary to discontinue the shows at the Crescent in May, 1928. It did not open as a regular theatre again until 1930, and then there was much dispute involved. In the March 30, 1930, issue of the *Picayune* there appeared an advertisement which declared the

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78 *Picayune*, February 8, 1928, p. 20.
80 *Ibid*.
81 *Picayune*, February 5, 1928, sec. 4, p. 2.
82 *Picayune*, February 13, 1928, p. 23.
"Formal Opening of the Crescent Theatre Exclusively for Colored." 83 It was to open "... completely reconditioned and equipped with the latest in sound equipment" with *Hearts in Dixie* with an all-colored cast. 84 However, there was much opposition to such an opening. The Lions Club, an organization of business and professional men, and the Young Men's Business Club, protested the opening. However, it was not until Governor Long vetoed the move to have the Crescent open to Negroes that the opening was cancelled. 85 The permit for the operation of the Crescent theatre for Negroes, was revoked by Commissioner Habans who blocked the move to operate a Negro playhouse in the heart of the city. 86

October 5, 1930, marked the opening of the Crescent once again with the return of the Marcus show. For the first time in many months, New Orleans was permitted to see a girl show devoid of anything risque. The show performed three times daily and was reviewed as "an elaborate and gorgeously dressed musical revue that is favorably comparable with the large traveling aggregation seldom seen outside of principal Northern and Eastern cities." 87 Although the review was favorable, the audience did

83 *Picayune*, March 30, 1930, sec. 3, p. 11.
84 *Ibid*.
87 *Picayune*, October 13, 1930, p. 22.
not support it, the engagement ended on November 9, 1930, and the theatre closed for several months. 88

In September, 1934, Eddie Chittenden and a company of twenty-five returned to the Crescent and remained for an undetermined period of time. In 1935, under Chittenden's management the theatre opened as a motion picture house which specialized in "nudie" films and later that same year closed its doors.

Strand, Liberty, and Saenger Theatres

Not all vaudeville circuits were as successful as the Orpheum and Loew circuits. The New Saenger and Publix chain, which supplied vaudeville to the Strand, Liberty, and Saenger theatres in New Orleans, had a difficult time. The Picayune states that this circuit was having difficulty "breaking into the closed corporation of vaudeville chains. There has been a gradual increase in the entertainment quality of Publix bills and, as the chain is extended, there will be new gains." 89

However, these three theatres never offered the quality and variety of entertainment that either the Orpheum, Loew's State or Palace did. In January, 1926, the Strand offered famous radio personalities on stage performing before microphones. The "National Aces of Radio", Macy and Scott, broadcast "mirth and harmony at


89Picayune, October 23, 1927, p. 6.
all deluxe performances." The following week the management advertised the same duo, this time performing in "The Bundle Boys." The Strand Concert Orchestra played at all performances.

While the Strand played the radio act, the Liberty promoted a "comedy special," "Off His Beat," with Walter Hiers and "New Orleans' favorite ballad-soloist, Guy McCormick in songs you love to hear." Two weeks later McCormick was still featured on the same program.

The reviewer for the Picayune, dissatisfied with the bookings at these theatres, expressed his feelings and a possible solution to the problem.

But there will always be many to wish that the Publix houses, devoted as they are to superior pictures, could see their way clear to avoiding vaudeville entirely and building up the picture end. An ideal bill under such a plan would consist of the picture, scored throughout for the orchestra, even if that meant eliminating the overture; of a news reel, certainly edited to the limit; perhaps another short subject, possibly a comedy and, for the stage, a vocal or instrumental soloist or a single act of superior quality. The experiment would be interesting.

The Saenger theatre, the most lavish and beautiful new theatre in the city, opened on February 5, 1927. Like the other Saenger-operated theatres, it did not have the quality of vaudeville found

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90 Picayune, January 1, 1926, p. 30.
91 Picayune, January 12, 1926, p. 16.
92 Picayune, January 1, 1926, p. 30.
93 Picayune, January 12, 1926, p. 16.
94 Picayune, October 23, 1927, p. 12.
at such theatres as the Orpheum and the Loew's State. While these two theatres were each billing five and six acts of high quality vaudeville, the Saenger had only Lou Breese and his banjo with Wesley Lord at the organ and the Saenger Grand Orchestra playing "Orpheus in the Underworld."  

The Saenger management was aware of their inferior vaudeville and hastened to install sound in order to capitalize on the motion picture business. They were the first of the city's large theatres to offer sound films. By July, 1928, the Saenger advertised all-talk films with "sound acts." By June, 1933, although the Orpheum offered five vaudeville acts and the Loew's State advertised a vaudeville extravaganza, the Saenger had discontinued vaudeville and only offered first rate sound films distributed by Paramount Pictures.

Dauphine, Lyric, and Famous Theatres

The Dauphine, Lyric, and Famous theatres were used as Negro vaudeville and burlesque houses from time to time. The Dauphine, the most infamous of the three, was closed almost as much as it was open. Clarence Bennett, one-time mayor of Abita Springs, opened the Dauphine as part of the Majestic Theatre Theatrical Circuit Incorporated, a new vaudeville chain for Negro artists. The first midnight show at the new theatre was Steamboat Days with

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95Picayune, March 30, 1930, sec. 3, p. 10.
96Picayune, September 2, 1928, sec. 4, p. 4.
97Picayune, June 8, 1933, p. 16.
some of the finest Negro circuit performers: Bessie Smith, Sam Davis, and Bootsy Swan. Knoblock said that "Swan was consistently amusing, occasionally vulgar, and sometimes hot." 98

In the fall of 1929, while it was still a burlesque house, Pat Brenan, the manager, was charged with housing an "indecent show." 99 The following September, he was found guilty of staging a show of "questionable nature" and running a "disorderly" house. 100 Later burlesque was discontinued there.

In September, 1933, the Item announced the opening of burlesque once again at the Dauphine. In fact, at this time there was no indication that there would be any live theatre in New Orleans that season other than the Dauphine's offering. Burlesque at the Dauphine was always considered a venture, and Billy Vale, who introduced modern burlesque to New Orleans the previous year, was the man who promoted it. Washburn promised that if the shows were anything like those of the past years at the Dauphine, then it would certainly be "flesh entertainment." 101 In 1935, The Drunkard was presented at the Dauphine. The house name had been changed to Kagle Music Hall. 102

The Lyric theatre was billed as the home of Negro vaudeville and revue. It opened occasionally to white audiences for midnight

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98 Picayune, November 25, 1928, sec. 4, p. 1.
100 Picayune, September 23, 1930, p. 7.
101 Item, September 10, 1933, p. 6.
shows. As the ten-year period progressed, the shows varied and it opened infrequently.

In 1928, the Famous theatre, another Negro theatre, also operated as a vaudeville and burlesque house. It too had midnight shows. One such show was a woman impersonator billed as "Miss Inez." "She" had with her a chorus of "red hot chorus girls."103

The beginning of the decade of this study witnessed the decline of vaudeville in New Orleans. Two new theatres, the Loew's State and the Saenger, offering some vaudeville, but emphasizing motion picture, gave stiff competition to the older vaudeville-motion picture theatres. This unaccustomed competition, the rising popularity of sound pictures, the economic depression, strikes, and the interest in radio contributed to vaudeville's demise in the city by 1933. The principal theatres finally eliminated vaudeville and became motion picture theatres. The Negro show houses continued intermittently to sponsor vaudeville and burlesque after the decade. Only the Crescent, which had depended heavily on live entertainment to attract patrons, was not able to adjust to the changing times and closed its doors in 1935.

Legitimate Theatre

By 1925, a forecast of the decline of legitimate theatre in New Orleans was evidenced by the existence of only one legitimate

103 Picayune, January 25, 1928, p. 22.
stock company and only sporadic road company productions providing legitimate theatre for the city. This section describes legitimate theatre at the beginning of the ten-year span studied and traces its state throughout the period in the two legitimate theatre houses, the St. Charles and the Tulane theatres. Throughout the discussion the critics' comments are used frequently, as the critic was an integral part of the legitimate theatre world and at the same time the voice of the community.

**St. Charles Theatre**

By 1925 Saenger Theatres, Incorporated, had operated a stock company at the St. Charles theatre for three years. Although the previous seasons had not been financially successful, stock continued there with anticipation that the succeeding season would prove profitable. This section traces the last four seasons of legitimate theatre at the St. Charles and the end of professional resident companies in the city.

The St. Charles opened its 1925-1926 season in the newly decorated and freshly painted theatre. Leon H. Grandjean, the manager, announced the company. Walter Richardson, previous year's leading man and Laneta Lane, former leading lady of the National theatre in Washington, D. C., would head the cast. Frank McNellis, also from the National theatre, would be second man; Amelia Fowler, second woman; Neil Buckley, the juvenile; Marton L. White, the ingenue; Gus Forbes, the character man; Betty Ross, character woman; and Vincent Dennis, comedian. Lee Sterret remained as director with Joseph Pech as stage manager and Joseph Echezabal as
assistant stage manager.104

The season opened with Andre Picard's *Kiki*, billed as "the appealing story . . . of the little Parisian waif who won the man she loved in spite of every obstacle."105 This was following by *In the Next Room, The Bride, The Love Child, Nervous Wreck*, and *Lightin'*.106

In the first months of 1926, the theatre changed managers and leading ladies and announced a bill of eight hits of the Broadway season. Grandjean, manager of the St. Charles for nearly two years, transferred to the general offices of Saenger Theatres, Incorporated, and was replaced by Earl Steward, former manager of the Orpheum theatre.


Knoblock, the reviewer for the *Picayune*, was very pleased with the casts and the plays chosen for the beginning of the

104*Picayune*, September 6, 1925, sec. 4, p. 1.
105Ibid.
106Ibid.
season. He particularly liked *Mud Turtle* and made the following comments about its production in his column the day after the opening:

...The St. Charles players played it yesterday with vibrant power, giving it characterization and sub-surface tension considerably above its intrinsic merits. They made it a melodrama as powerful, as raw, as anything they have done. They seemed to give it approximate truth, a theatrical ideal seldom attained.\(^\text{107}\)

According to Knoblock, Kay Hammond, the new leading lady, gave everything she had to her role in *Mud Turtle*, and Walter Richardson was splendid.\(^\text{108}\)

*The Goose Hangs High* marked the return of Orris Holland, who had spent a year with Northern stock groups. Knoblock stated that his welcome would surely "go down in the annals of the company as probably the loudest in its history."\(^\text{109}\) Although the company's leading lady, Kay Hammond, was absent from this production, Knoblock felt that the play and the company were so good that she was hardly missed.\(^\text{110}\)

In the following production, *Oh Mama*, Holland "stopped the show." Knoblock praised his acting ability highly but had less favorable comment to make about the play. He said that although it was "delicately nasty," it grew rather "tiresome" and was "dull

\(^{107}\text{Picayune, January 25, 1926, p. 6.}\)

\(^{108}\text{Ibid.}\)

\(^{109}\text{Picayune, February 8, 1926, p. 6.}\)

\(^{110}\text{Ibid.}\)
quite frequently." It was Lawrence Stallings and Maxwell Anderson's *What Price Glory?* that really proved popular with the critics and the audience alike. Knoblock called it "a hell of a play." He said that the play is so great it could not have been given a "shoddy" performance even by a weak company. In fact "it is so great that it crushes the actors, in a way, with the result there isn't an outstanding performance." Knoblock judged that Stallings and Anderson produced probably the greatest play ever written by an American. *What Price Glory?* was brought back by popular request on April 16 of the same year.

As the season continued, Knoblock seemed less satisfied with the plays than he had been earlier. About James Holbeck Reid's *Confession* he said that it was "absolutely trite melodrama," "pre-historic American dramaturgy," and that "it is at least fifteen years old and compared to new American drama it looks forty." Although he generally liked *Flaming Youth*, he found it

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112 Ibid.
113 *Picayune*, March 14, 1926, sec. 4, p. 1.
115 Ibid.
to be "almost a fashion parade." 118

In April, 1926, Adelyn Bushnell replaced Kay Hammond as leading lady. In her first performance with the company in Forbidden Fruit she was found to be "the most completely satisfying leading lady in the history of the St. Charles theatre." 119 Knoblock said that her "soul came across the footlights" and "every player seemed to feel that here was an actress suited to the job of being an important integral part of the great machine." 120

The audiences were usually enthusiastic about the stars of the St. Charles sometimes to the point of hampering their work in the play. Knoblock commented on one such matinee audience that attended The Family Upstairs.

The players were handicapped by a well-intentioned bunch of matinee fans who greeted the initial appearance of each member of the cast with applause which destroyed the illusion and required considerable "stage business" to pass before the thread of the play could be picked up again. 121

Although most of the actors in the stock company were professionals from various parts of the country, often local actors performed with the stock group on the St. Charles stage. Henry Dupre and Val Winter performed as extras in What Price Glory?. During the 1925-1926 season, two local young ladies, Laura Cazenavette and

118 Picayune, April 5, 1926.
119 Picayune, April 25, 1926, sec. 4, p. 6.
120 Picayune, April 26, 1926.
121 Picayune, February 21, 1926, sec. 1, p. 1.
Esther Hall, made their debut on the St. Charles stage. Cazenavette, a student of dramatic art, made her first appearance with the stock group playing a juvenile role in Mud Turtle with "feeling as well as cleverness."\(^{122}\) She next appeared as a young woman in Dancing Daughters, and later in The Auctioneer.

Esther Hall played a juvenile role with the professional stock company at the St. Charles in the early 1920's. She was probably recommended for this role by Maurice Barr, head of Saenger Enterprises. Hall, a well-known dancer and actress in New Orleans during this period, began her studies at the age of three when she entered Lily Whitaker's school of oratory and also began dancing lessons.\(^{123}\)

She first appeared at the St. Charles at the age of nine in Why Men Leave Home. She later performed in Eyes of Youth at the St. Charles on January 25, 1925, and performed a role there in Mismates on January 10, 1926.\(^{124}\) Hall explained her involvement with theatre in a recent interview with the author.\(^{125}\) She said that since her father was Commissioner of Public Utilities she was called upon as a child to meet and entertain numerous dignitaries who visited New Orleans. This experience, along with her work at

\(^{122}\)Picavune, January 25, 1926, p. 6.

\(^{123}\)Personal interview with Esther Hall Zollinger, August 17, 1972, New Orleans, Louisiana.

\(^{124}\)Production programs for the performances from the personal scrapbook of Esther Hall Zollinger, New Orleans, Louisiana.

\(^{125}\)Zollinger interview.
the St. Charles, her training and good looks, provided her and her mother with the incentive to go to New York after her graduation from high school. In 1930, she did so and was granted an audition with Ziegfield and Shubert. The latter gave her a small singing, dancing and speaking role in his musical production of Franz Lehar's *Prince Chu Chang*, an operetta based on the play *The Yellow Jacket*. The musical opened in Newark, then played in Hartford and New Haven before opening on Broadway at the Shubert Theatre. Hall stayed with the company in New York until her father's ill health required her to return to New Orleans. There she taught dancing at the New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art, where years earlier she had received most of her dramatic training. Later she opened her own dancing school.

By 1926, vaudeville and the moving picture were gaining more and more of the audiences from the legitimate theatres. This year legitimate theatres would need to produce the best plays with the best casts and productions if they were to survive. However, this season at the St. Charles was probably the most dismal yet. As director for the season Walter Richardson, the former leading man, did not raise the players to their previous heights of excellence.

He opened with *Pomeroy's Past*, starring Eve Nansen and John Lorenz. Frances Woodbury and Dillion Deasy played the second woman and second man; Margaret Mitchell played the ingenue; and Richard Bartell, Betty Ross, Joseph Lawrence, Joe Echezabal, and Richard Bishop formed the rest of the cast. The *Picayune* review praised

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126 *Picayune*, September 26, 1926, sec. 4, p. 1.
the leading man, predicting that he would become a favorite, but politely dismissed the leading lady with a few words.\textsuperscript{127}

The next play, \textit{The Night Duel}, was a "serious play played a little too seriously," according to Knoblock.\textsuperscript{128} Richardson successfully directed and acted in the third play and Knoblock called it "the best play of the season."\textsuperscript{129}

As the season continued, the leading man and lady were not the only ones to receive notice in the \textit{Picayune} reviews. The review of \textit{Ladies of the Evening} said that Mildred Mitchell stole the show.\textsuperscript{130} In the next play, \textit{Pyramids}, termed a "bad play" by the reviewer, Dillion Deasy gave the only good performance.\textsuperscript{131} In \textit{The Poor Nut}, the "first hit of the season," Mildred Mitchell again stole the show from the leading lady.\textsuperscript{132}

By the November 4 production of \textit{White Cargo}, there was no mention of leading roles in the advertisements. Nansen had the only female role, and Richardson cast himself in the leading character role. The leading lady was said to be "good."\textsuperscript{133}

\textit{One of the Family} and \textit{The Gorilla} received fair reviews, although the latter, a repeat performance, was not considered as

\textsuperscript{127}\textit{Picayune}, September 27, 1926, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{128}\textit{Picayune}, October 17, 1926, sec. 4, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{129}\textit{Picayune}, October 18, 1926, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{130}\textit{Picayune}, October 25, 1926, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{131}\textit{Picayune}, November 1, 1926, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{132}\textit{Picayune}, November 8, 1926, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{133}\textit{Picayune}, November 14, 1926, sec. 4, p. 1.
well done this time.\textsuperscript{134}

In his review of \textit{The Fall Guy}, Knoblock said Eve Nansen, the leading lady, overacted.\textsuperscript{135} However, Knoblock said the next production, \textit{Alias the Deacon}, was a good vehicle for the players and that Nansen's "histrionism has been a trifle tamed and the result is that she is far more true to life than she has been in many plays in the past."\textsuperscript{136} In \textit{Laff That Off} she was said to be "more lovely than at any time,"\textsuperscript{137} and in \textit{Square Crooks}, Knoblock said that she was improving.\textsuperscript{138}

In his review of the next play, \textit{Kongo}, Knoblock criticized the director's interpretation and the entire production. He said that Richardson "deliberately injected sensationalism of the Lincoln Carter school of Melodrama." The play was "bungled at the first performance."\textsuperscript{139}

Some of the players groped for their lines, lights were slow in answering their switches and, on the whole, the production obviously that of a stock company inferior in its standards to those normally held to at the St. Charles.\textsuperscript{140}

In \textit{To the Ladies} Lorenz was "immensely suitable," and while the play was "splendidly acted," Nansen continued to be "far from

\textsuperscript{134}\textit{Picayune}, November 29, 1926, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{135}\textit{Picayune}, December 6, 1926, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{137}\textit{Picayune}, December 20, 1926, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{138}\textit{Picayune}, December 27, 1926, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{139}\textit{Picayune}, January 3, 1927, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{140}\textit{Ibid.}
convincing."141

After Spooks, a mystery-comedy, Mildred Mitchell and Walter Richardson starred in The Patsy. The original leading man and lady were no longer in the cast. Obviously Richardson was looking for replacements, for Frances Woodbury, originally the second woman, was cast in the lead of the following production, The Ghost Train.142 Eventually he chose Mitchell, on the basis of her past performances, as the leading lady of the company and Orris Holland, who had been in earlier productions at the St. Charles, as leading man. Knoblock said that "the production was almost as poor as the script."143

Mitchell and Holland starred in Naughty Cinderella, but in the next production, My Son, Woodbury performed the lead, and the new leading man and lady performed in character roles.144 Sure Fire was "well done,"145 but Knoblock described White Collars with Mitchell, Holland, and Woodbury, as "the most slovenly performance given by the St. Charles players in months," and accused Woodbury of overacting.146

142Picayune, January 30, 1927, sec. 4, p. 1.
143Picayune, February 7, 1927, p. 12.
144Picayune, February 21, 1927, p. 10.
146Picayune, March 7, 1927, p. 18.

Welcome Stranger welcomed the return of Richardson, who was still directing, as leading man opposite Mitchell. Holland's name no longer appeared in the cast listings. This time Knoblock criticized Richardson's acting. He said that his "treatment of the central character is disappointing though he has done nothing in the past at the St. Charles to indicate his fitness for its portrayal. His voice is decidedly not adapted to the dialect... and he did not make a good Hebrew comedian." Richardson and Mitchell continued as leads in the remaining productions of the season, which included Love in a Mist, The Butter and Egg Man, The Old Soak, and The Home Towners.

Difficulty in casting leading actors and actresses and generally poor direction produced a season which did not rise to the usual standards of the St. Charles players. Knoblock summarized the 1926-1927 season's accomplishments by saying that "this has been far from the best season."

The St. Charles stock season for 1927-1928 was probably the most erratic of all the seasons with a mixture of good and bad

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147 Picayune, March 14, 1927, p. 12.
148 Picayune, April 10, 1927, sec. 4, p. 2.
149 Picayune, May 9, 1927, p. 14.
plays. In spite of the failure of the previous season, Walter Richardson continued as director of the company. With the help of William H. Gueringer, assistant general manager of the Saenger Theatres, Incorporated, he selected for production the best dramas and the most humorous comedies of the Broadway season.150

Gladys Hurlbut, who had played the East and Middle West, and appeared in several Broadway productions, arrived to play opposite the leading man, Selmer Jackson. They performed in Sinner, which was well done technically;151 Loose Ankles; Hell's Bells; New Brooms; The Enemy, which the reviewer described as having "good acting wasted on a bad play";152 and Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, which drew the "largest matinee audience of the season,"153 after which, Hurlbut left the company. Knoblock described these plays and the situation in the following manner:

Up to the time of the departure of Mill Hurlbut there was not a single good play produced, a fact that reflected in the end on a competent actress, now starring again on Broadway, by the way.154

While awaiting the arrival of the new leading lady, Richardson directed Donovan Affair, playing the leading role of the mystery melodrama himself, probably out of necessity. This was the first and only time this season that he took the lead in a play, which

150Picayune, September 25, 1927, sec. 4, p. 6.
151Picayune, October 11, 1927, p. 30.
152Picayune, November 8, 1927, p. 10.
153Picayune, November 14, 1927, p. 20.
154Picayune, April 8, 1928, sec. 4, p. 1.
may account in part for the better quality of the productions.

The new leading lady, Miami Campbell, arrived making her debut in *Two Girls Wanted*, which was the "best play of the season." 155 This was followed by *Cheaper to Marry* and *The Green Hat*, called the "most sensational offer of the season." 156

By the time Campbell and Jackson performed in *Steve*, there was hope that at last the season might be a "brilliant" one. Knoblock thought that the actors at the St. Charles were as good as any on Broadway or the road. 157 Campbell continued to receive consistently excellent reviews. In *If I Was Rich*, she was at her "absolute best" and billed as the "New Sweetheart of New Orleans." 158 There was hope that she would build a following like Leona Powers, a former leading lady at the St. Charles theatre.

It took a "sniggering farce naughtily meant," 159 *Cradle Snatchers*, to draw the most successful box-office of the season. The company seemed to be growing in its abilities with this play, and the reviewer judged they were achieving standards quite beyond any which they had previously set.

The audience continued to grow somewhat, and the next play, *Paid in Full*, drew a larger matinee house than the *Cradle Snatchers*. A number of comedies and melodramas finished the month

155 *Picayune*, November 28, 1927, p. 20.
156 *Picayune*, December 11, sec. 4, p. 1.
159 *Picayune*, January 1928, p. 23.
of January and the first week in February. These included Crime, The Love Bandit, Beware of Widows, and The Noose.

February 12, marked a departure from the program of stock Broadway plays which was usual fare at the St. Charles. The theatre presented A la Creole, a play written by the New Orleans author Flo Field. Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré first presented the play in 1927, and it was revised considerably for the production at the St. Charles. Mrs. Field and Mrs. Sanborn re-created their original roles in the play, and the review indicated that they were great in their roles, while the professional players did the best they could with the "foreign" roles. The cast performed a "ragged matinee." The next night the performance was still "somewhat uneven . . . halting, laggard, frequently inaudible performances almost by every person on the stage." Despite the poor performances, the box office did exceptionally well, the mayor and other notables attending on opening night. The performance had been timed with the carnival season, and the ushers wore costumes to enhance the New Orleans flavor of the play.

This merger of a local artist with the professional theatre must have been an interesting experiment for everyone. There seemed to be a need to keep the dying theatre alive, and the

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160 Flo Field, a native of New Orleans, went to New York at the turn of the century where she had some of her first stories published by Cosmopolitan and associated herself with such literary figures as O. Henry, Eugene Field, and Vachel Lindsay. Upon returning to New Orleans, she wrote A la Creole, a comedy about Creole life in New Orleans. Picayune, October 1, 1972, sec. 1, p. 20.

161 Picayune, February 13, 1928, p. 16.
professionals were seeking the community's help. Richardson conceived an idea for doing this by forming an organization to be called the New Orleans Dramatic Association. Its object would have been to search for and develop outstanding abilities in the dramatic arts. The plan was for a loosely knit organization of theatre chapters formed by commercial institution employees to meet, study, and rehearse plays to be presented to the general membership. The plan was that each week Richardson would choose a member or members who showed dramatic promise and cast them in the following week's production at the St. Charles. Once a month the best play presented by the chapters would be performed at the St. Charles in its entirety with the original cast.\textsuperscript{162} It is quite possible that the performance of \textit{A la Creole} was a product of this idea.

Knoblock continually pleaded through his newspaper column for the St. Charles to attempt something besides their usual stock melodramas and comedies. He suggested that it was worth an experiment to attempt a play by Shaw, Shakespeare, or Ibsen. It is quite possible that the St. Charles management thought seriously about his idea, because on February 26, 1928, the theatre presented Eugene O'Neill's \textit{Anna Christie}.

One of the problems inherent in any stock group is that the period of rehearsal is short and must take place during the day.
while the company performs another play in the evening. Anna Christie opened at the St. Charles after only five rehearsals and less than a week of study. The cast found the lines most difficult to memorize, being such a departure from the standard stock drama.163

The audience, more used to farce, had difficulty adapting to this new type of play and giggled at times. Although Jackson was "splendid" and gave the "best performance of his career," the rest of the cast was "unusually, but excusably ragged," and Campbell was "unprepared, but lovely in her calico dress."164 Neither the direction nor the settings were quite up to St. Charles standards. However, the attendance was excellent, especially for Lent, the slow season in New Orleans.

Knoblock was pleased that the group had produced Anna Christie. However, a New York drama critic in a letter to Knoblock commented unfavorably on the production:

Better by far, said he, never to attempt plays as difficult as this than to have them as faultily performed as the night I saw it at the St. Charles.165

Knoblock's reply was that even a good play done with mechanical competence only is far preferred to a cheap play done brilliantly, because it encourages the writing of good plays.166

163Picayune, February 27, 1928, p. 20.
164Ibid.
166Ibid.
The little theatre also presented Anna Christie during this same season, overlapping their choice of plays with the professional group. The dubious success of the O'Neill play at the St. Charles did not prevent the management from experimenting again. After two plays, Is Zat So and Simon Called Peter, they produced a Shaw play.

George Bernard Shaw's Candida opened on March 18 and was termed a "fiasco."¹⁶⁷ Paul Swan's performance as Marchbanks ruined the show. Swan was an amateur actor best noted in New Orleans as a portrait painter, sculptor, and exponent of interpretive dance. Knoblock felt that the production was ruined by Swan who gave a "fancy dancer's performance," with "physical action from the school of ballet," and "gestures in the Delsarte tradition."¹⁶⁸

After Twelve Miles Out, the St. Charles utilized local amateur actors such as Warren Lyle, William Shreve, and Irma Carriere in some of the bit parts in Potash and Perlmutter.¹⁶⁹ The players finished the season with The Wasp's Nest¹⁷⁰ and Outcast. Joseph Echezabal took a curtain call on the last night, and his settings were said to be "pleasant."¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷Picayune, March 25, 1928, sec. 4, p. 1.
¹⁶⁸Picayune, March 19, 1928, p. 18.
¹⁶⁹Picayune, April 2, 1928, p. 12.
¹⁷⁰Picayune, April 9, 1928, p. 27.
¹⁷¹Picayune, April 16, 1928, p. 20.
Knoblock summarized the season in the following manner:

The St. Charles Players have had some of the worst plays in their history and some of the best, but the production standards in the main have been higher than ever before. In Miami Campbell and Selmer Jackson the theatre has a lead team as good as any, if not better, and what is more important, a team that has achieved a great deal of popularity.172

At the end of the 1927-1928 season, the legitimate theatre was beginning to die and attempts were being made to find a way to save it. One such plan for survival was explained in the February, 1928, Picayune. The plan was to establish a circuit of stock theatres in eight Southern cities to be operated by the firm of Prothero and Welch as a plan for the continuation of legitimate theatre in the South. The plan was to operate in the following manner:

In each of the eight cities a company will be organized headed by a name star or stars, and rehearsed in an important play of the times. The companies will open simultaneously and at the completion of a week's engagement, move on to the next theater of the circuit, continuing in the same play but, of course, playing to a new audience. At the end of the tour each company will have a new play ready for production, devoting about the last three weeks of the tour to rehearsals. Four play changes are planned for each company at present, five in each city a season of thirty-two plays. The buying power of the circuit will make it possible to acquire better plays than the average; production standards will be high; star names will glitter—and popular prices will prevail.173

The proposed circuit of stock theatres already included Memphis, Tulsa, Oklahoma City, Dallas, Houston, and Birmingham with

172Picayune, April 8, 1928, sec. 4, p. 1.
hope that New Orleans and Atlanta would also be included.\footnote{Ibid.}

In spite of the well-laid plans, the stock circuit theatres proposed at the end of the previous season were not established. The outset of the 1928-1929 season found the St. Charles dark, and E. V. Richards, manager of the Saenger interests, announced that the St. Charles would have no stock company that season. The theatre had made a profit for only fifty-seven weeks of the six years in which they operated as a stock house.\footnote{Picayune, September 23, 1928, sec. 4, p. 1.} It was a common experience of stock companies in other large cities that although the first years were successful the audiences tired rapidly of stock, and the management continued to lose money. The St. Charles management attempted to alleviate this problem by presenting quality actors and giving the patrons practically a new list of leading actors each season. Although the selection of plays for the 1927-1928 season was particularly bad, Knoblock never felt that they were bad enough to warrant the financial loss which Saenger Incorporated took.\footnote{Picayune, October 7, 1928, sec. 4, p. 1.}

A number of other factors contributed to the closing of the St. Charles. Besides the fact that it was operating at a financial loss, the audiences had continually grown smaller, the general financial situation was poor, and the cost of stage labor had risen. Then too, sound pictures were attracting the audiences away from
legitimate theatre. Knoblock stated:

The darkness of the St. Charles leads directly to the fact that its neighbor theater, the Liberty, will be reopened soon, with sound equipment. The Strand also is expected to end its eclipse in the near future.177

Although film houses were demanding sound systems and Western Electric was a year behind on installations, Knoblock, in his fervent desire for the return of legitimate theatre, probably reflected the feelings of others that there was not much future in talking pictures.

. . . to some of us the average "talking picture" of the crook melodrama sort continues to be an abomination and a business trip of doubtful expediency, since the novelty value of inane chatter cannot long endure. The value of "sound" pure and simple, meaning synchronized orchestration and "effects" is unquestioned. It is a perfect welding of the two of the most perfectly mated of the arts, the pictorial and the musical. But "talk" is alien, as ridiculous and inartistic as a blatant title appended to a great painting. In silence, motion picture photography has achieved occasional miracles of effect. In chatter such miracles may never be repeated.178

Knoblock and others like him were not willing to see legitimate theatre in New Orleans die. Since the circular stock plan idea had not materialized, he suggested an alternate plan involving an "art" management of a stock theatre. He represented his plan as an interesting experiment and no less successful than the business management plans of the past.

In effect it would pledge itself to the production of dignified plays only, rather than trash, expected to prove popular and more often than not failing to do so.

177 *Picayune*, October 7, 1928, sec. 4, p. 1.

178 Ibid.
There are hundreds of relative classics untouched by either stock or the touring companies, their production surely could be made profitable in a city having the quality of New Orleans.\textsuperscript{179}

However, Knoblock’s plan for saving legitimate theatre in New Orleans did not materialize either.

Later in the season, half-hearted attempts were made to return legitimate theatre to the St. Charles. In January, 1928, The Edward Ewald Company, with Ewald as leading man and producer, pledged a season of repertoire at the theatre. Knoblock was hopeful that repertoire would foster the production of more interesting and challenging plays and encourage experimentation.\textsuperscript{180}

The group opened with \textit{The World and His Wife}, a three-act drama adapted by Charles Nirdlinger from \textit{El Gran Galeoto} by Jose Echegeray. Knoblock called it a "splendid" play with "food for intellectuals, drama lovers, even hoi polloi whether they be stuffed or starved!" He found the company praiseworthy and the direction the most distinguished seen in New Orleans in any theatre.\textsuperscript{181}

In later reviews, however, Knoblock hinted that the production standards had fallen. For the next week’s attraction, \textit{The Cinderella Man}, the leading man, Ewald, and the leading lady, Joan Lowell, had "settled down" and were more in tune than they were the opening show of the season.\textsuperscript{182} In \textit{Old Heidelberg}, a

\begin{itemize}
\item[{\textsuperscript{179}}]\textit{Ibid.}
\item[{\textsuperscript{180}}]\textit{Picayune}, January 13, 1928, sec. 4, p. 1.
\item[{\textsuperscript{181}}]\textit{Picayune}, January 15, 1929, p. 22.
\item[{\textsuperscript{182}}]\textit{Picayune}, January 22, 1929, p. 18.
\end{itemize}
non-musical version of *The Student Prince*, the company utilized the Loyola University Glee Club as extras.\(^{183}\) This might well have been an attempt to attract an audience, for by the next play, *The Jest*, there were only two hundred in the audience.

According to Knoblock, production standards at the St. Charles had begun to fall, and the productions lacked professional polish.\(^{184}\) He severely criticized the acting in *The Hawk* and found *Pauvrette*, the following play, made a "pitiful" ending to their season.\(^{185}\)

On February 24, the St. Charles management announced the closing of the theatre. It did not open again until the first week in April when the Powers-Miller Company continued its run of plays at the St. Charles after transferring from the Tulane theatre. They closed fifteen weeks of stock, which had begun February 3 at the Tulane, on May 6, 1929, at the St. Charles with the play *Coquette*. By this time the theatre had opened its gallery for Negro patrons and the price list read: 25¢, 50¢, 75¢, $1 Nights; 25¢, 50¢, 75¢ Sunday Matinee; and Gallery for Colored Patrons 25¢.\(^{186}\)

The Powers-Miller company returned legitimate theatre to New Orleans, at least temporarily; brought back to the stage the once-popular Leona Powers, former leading lady of the St. Charles stock company; and even more important, gave local talent an

\(^{183}\) *Picayune*, January 29, 1929, p. 30.

\(^{184}\) *Picayune*, February 10, 1929, sec. 4, p. 1.

\(^{185}\) *Picayune*, February 19, 1929, p. 36.

\(^{186}\) *Picayune*, April 30, 1929, p. 6.
opportunity to work with professionals again. Some of the community people who made their debut in the company's final production were Stan Cowley, one of Jesuit High School's outstanding dramatic students, Seth Lurie of the Menorah Guild, and Laure Cazenavette, who had performed with the St. Charles stock company and had recently returned from playing stock on the Pacific coast.187

On May 10, 1929 the St. Charles theatre closed once more. It was used intermittently by local amateur groups, but never housed legitimate theatre again during the decade of this study.

On October 23, 1932, the Pratt estate announced the opening of the theatre as a first run picture house with prices of 10¢, 15¢, 25¢, and a special 10¢ balcony for Negroes. In 1933, the management experimented with family films on the week-ends and those for "adults only" during the week in an attempt to keep the theatre in operation.

Knoblock never got his wish to see all the Shaw, Shakespeare, and O'Neill that he wanted to see on the legitimate stage at the St. Charles, but it is perhaps ironical that the film which broke house records in November, 1933, at the St. Charles, was Eugene O'Neill's Emperor Jones.188


188 Item, November 12, 1933, p. 8.
Tulane Theatre

Built on Baronne between Canal and Common in 1898, the Tulane theatre housed performances by a great number of famous actors and actresses until it was demolished in 1937 to make way for a parking lot. The period between 1925 and 1935 marked the decline or what Sadie Faye Head called the "decadent period" of the Tulane. The following section traces that period in which the Tulane declined in popularity as a legitimate stage which housed road companies.

The 1925-1926 season opened optimistically enough. The road, which appeared to be dying, was attempting a comeback. The Picayune predicted that the Tulane's season would be one of the best of the recent years. The audiences demanded musicals, and more and more of the straight plays or spoken dramas would be left in the hands of repertoire and stock companies at the St. Charles. Since the cost of staging and transporting musicals was continually rising, audiences had to be satisfied with abbreviated road versions or give up expecting New York companies and settle for companies of inferior quality.189

The rising popularity of motion pictures and the attractions of vaudeville drew audiences from the legitimate houses and the road began to decline. Then too, cities themselves imposed


190 Picayune, February 7, 1926, sec. 4, p. 1.
restrictions on the shows that they would accept. Farces and musical comedies were most in demand with little call for dramatic shows. The managers wanted known successes only and would not book in the middle of the week or on Saturdays for fear of losing money on vaudeville and picture business. By this time there was no call for a small show to play a small town of less than 5,000 population.

In 1910, the report shows, there were fifteen theatres open to road shows in the state of Louisiana. Today there are eleven, a majority being under strenuous restrictions as to open days and types of productions wanted. The state is better off than any of its neighbors at that. 191

The Tulane's 1925-1926 season which lasted twenty-four weeks, was one of the most successful seasons "that the legitimate stage has seen under the thirty-year regime of Colonel Thomas C. Campbell." Three weeks of this season were devoted to operettas and four weeks comprised the "greatest season of grand opera since the burning of the old French Opera House." 192

The Student Prince company arrived in its own train which carried twenty-six principal actors, forty-six male choral singers, twenty female singers, and a crew all totaling one hundred. 193 It was the biggest and most costly attraction ever sent on tour in the history of the American theatre, and one of the most popular

191Ibid.

192Ibid. French Opera House burned in 1919.

attractions ever to play the Tulane theatre.\textsuperscript{194}

Never in the history of the Tulane theater have audiences so applauded a singing chorus as did the highly representative capacity house that viewed and enjoyed the opening performance of Messrs. Shubert's \textit{The Student Prince} Sunday night.\textsuperscript{195}

In fact, the musical was so popular with the New Orleans audiences that the engagement was extended for another week.

The second musical attraction, near the end of the season, was Sigmund Romberg's \textit{Blossom Time}. This musical was not as popular as the \textit{Student Prince}, probably because it had played New Orleans more than once before during other seasons. The reviewer found the Shubert company "excellent" although he found the musical "sentimental"; "effeminately so."\textsuperscript{196}

Other musical attractions included in the season were \textit{No, No, Nanette}, which played for two weeks, \textit{Lady Be Good}, and \textit{My Girl}. The "revue" type of shows included \textit{George White's Scandals of 1924}, \textit{Greenwich Village Follies}, and \textit{Artists and Models}. The \textit{Picayune} advertisement for \textit{Scandals} best explains the nature of this last category of musical offerings.

All that one looks for in a musical revue--beautiful settings and costumes, an excellent cast, comedy of all varieties from the clever quip to buffoonery, high class dancing and agreeable singing--will be found in \textit{George White's Scandals of 1924}, which opens at the Tulane Theatre for this week beginning tonight with the

\textsuperscript{194} \textit{Picayune}, January 3, 1926, sec. 4, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{195} \textit{Picayune}, January 12, 1926, p. 12.

\textsuperscript{196} \textit{Picayune}, March 8, 1926, p. 12.
usual matinees on Wednesday and Saturday.\textsuperscript{197} Field's Minstrels made its usual tour and proved to be as popular as ever.\textsuperscript{198}

Only six plays without music were offered. These included: \textbf{The Rivals}, \textbf{Give and Take}, \textbf{Mr. Wu}, \textbf{White Cargo}, \textbf{The Gorilla}, and \textbf{The Show-Off}. Three of the plays brought three important stars to the theatre. Mrs. Fiske performed in a revival of \textbf{The Rivals}, which played for two weeks. \textbf{Give and Take} starred Louis Mann, and Walter Whiteside performed in the anglo-Chinese melodrama, \textbf{Mr. Wu}. His leading lady was Sydney Shields of New Orleans.\textsuperscript{199} \textbf{White Cargo} played to standing room only on opening night and proved to be an above standard production for the road. This was a return production which had performed in the city the previous year and had "worn well."\textsuperscript{200} Two other dramatic productions included \textbf{The Gorilla}, a mystery farce, and \textbf{The Show-Off}, probably the most popular dramatic offering.\textsuperscript{201} \textbf{Oh, Oh, Nurse}, a musical comedy, was the only show which did not meet with the popular approval of the New Orleans audience.\textsuperscript{202} This was one of the last full seasons of theatre that the Tulane patrons would witness. It lasted twenty-four weeks and included fifteen productions.

\textsuperscript{197}Picayune, January 3, 1926, sec. 4, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{198}Picayune, April 4, 1926, sec. 4, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{199}Picayune, February 14, 1926, sec. 4, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{200}Picayune, February 1, 1926, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{201}Picayune, March 28, 1926, sec. 4, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{202}Picayune, April 4, 1926, sec. 4, p. 11.
The 1926-1927 season at the Tulane emphasized musicals. Several were repeats from the previous year. *No, No, Nanette* returned with Madeleine McMahon again in the lead. It proved to be just as good a production as it was the year before.\(^{203}\) *The Student Prince* also returned with an "excellent company" and proved not to be "shop worn."\(^{204}\) *Blossom Time* made another farewell tour, the fortieth annual edition of Field's Minstrels made their appearance, and *George White's New Scandals*, boasting sixty beautiful chorus girls, played to "one of the rowdiest balconies in local history."\(^{205}\) *Earl Carroll's Vanities* and Irving Berlin's *Music Box Revue*, which was staged by John Murray Anderson and reviewed as "clean, beautiful, elaborate,"\(^ {206}\) completed the list of popular musical offerings for the season.

The straight drama schedule offered a number of stars in an interesting variety of plays. Walter Whiteside returned for his annual visit, but this time in his own play, *The Arabian*. Margaret Anglin appeared in two fine comedies. She performed in Somerset Maugham's *Caroline* for the first half of the week and in George Bernard Shaw's *Candida* for the second half of the week. Charlotte Walker and Norman Hackett performed in a romance entitled *The Green Hat*, William Hodge in *The Judge's Husband*, and Robert B.

\(^{203}\) *Picayune*, November 1, 1926, p. 19.

\(^{204}\) *Picayune*, December 27, 1926, p. 4.

\(^{205}\) *Picayune*, October 11, 1927, p. 17.

Mantell and Genevieve Hamper with a week of Shakespeare completed the season at the Tulane.

Besides four weeks of grand opera there was a comic opera entitled The Bohemian Girl presented by May Valentine's Comic Opera Organization. But neither the plays nor the operas were drawing the crowds. Instead the motion picture Ben Hur and especially The Big Parade drew large crowds and had to be held over for another week.\(^{207}\)

The season was short, lasting only from October to March with a couple of weeks dark, and prospects for the road companies surviving in New Orleans were not promising.

The 1927-1928 season was the poorest season thus far for legitimate theatre at the Tulane. There were only four straight plays and several musical shows. The first play, Maugham's The Constant Wife, did not make its appearance until January. It starred New Orleans' favorite matinee idol and film star, Lou Tellegen. The southern tour included two ladies from the South; Charlotte Walker, a popular Southern-born actress, and Emma Bunting, a favorite with Orleanians,\(^{208}\) who had operated and performed with her own Emma Bunting Players in New Orleans years before.\(^{209}\) Also in the cast was Norman Hackett, a matinee idol leading man.

\(^{207}\) *Picayune*, October 3, 1926, sec. 4, p. 1.

\(^{208}\) *Picayune*, January 8, 1928, sec. 4, p. 1.

The other plays of the season included Broadway, "the masterpiece of the season,"210 The Barker, and Abie's Irish Rose, which remained for two weeks.

Outstanding among the "several acceptably good"211 musical comedies that played the Tulane were Hit the Deck and Queen High. However, the revues making up the bulk of the season were "usually bad."212 The Civic Opera Association sponsored performances, but films filled the remainder of this short season.

Knoblock and other theatre advocates were concerned about the season and suggested remedies for the theatre's sickness.

"... Arrangements could doubtless be made under some "civic association" guarantee plan for a Theater Guild repertoire next season, the Guild having sent out its first road companies recently, play as far South as Louisville. Eva Le Gallienne also is likely to be available for a time; public demand could bring both these repertories to New Orleans.213

Always when the prospects were the most dismal for theatre, Knoblock, perhaps more than anyone else, saw hope and continued to suggest ways for continuing legitimate theatre in New Orleans.

On the whole, with the South in a better state by fall than it has been since the flood, the prospects for next season are quite good, the colonel is likely to return from his annual New York trip in late summer with an unusual list of legitimate attractions. The producers are beginning, what with metropolitan failures, to awaken to the call of the road again.214

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210*Picayune*, April 8, 1928, sec. 4, p. 1.
Although the 1928-1929 season witnessed straight dramatic plays, to which the Powers-Miller Stock Company and the New York Theatre Guild contributed, audiences continued to dwindle. *Abie's Irish Rose* returned to the Tulane and continued to displease Knoblock with its success. This time his review was mostly concerned with how nice the theatre looked with its fresh new coat of paint on the inside. In January, the actor Walter Whiteside made his annual visit, this time in *The Royal Box*. He expressed his optimism about the relationship between theatre and motion pictures, stating that the talking pictures would help to "re-educate the people to theatre." Mrs. Leslie Carter performed in *Rio Rita* and an "excellent production" of *The Shanghai Gesture*.

Leona Powers returned to New Orleans with the newly organized Powers-Miller stock company. Powers had been an extremely popular leading lady at the St. Charles in the early 1920's. In fact, her stock engagement there was the only financially successful year of stock in the recent history of New Orleans theatre. There was probably hope that her popularity would help to make this stock engagement successful also. However, even though the plays, and Powers, received excellent reviews, the performances were not well

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218 *Picayune*, February 3, 1929, sec. 4, p. 1.
attended. Although Edward Ewald's company was playing at the St. Charles, it was thought that the two companies were not in competition for audiences, since the Powers-Miller Company was performing modern plays and Ewald's company was dedicated to repertory. However, the Lenten slump was beginning and audiences were small.

The Powers-Miller stock company performed *This Thing Called Love*, *The Big Pond*, *Dulcy*, *Broadway*, *The Trial of Mary Dugan*, and *Miss Nelly of N'Orleans*. *Mary Dugan* did the best business. Knoblock felt that this showed that Orleanians liked drama better than comedy.220

The season closed with the New York Theatre Guild, sponsored by the Junior League, presenting three plays in three days. These included *The Doctor's Dilemma*, *Ned McCobb's Daughter*, and *John Ferguson*. Even those productions were not well attended.

The slim 1929-1930 season brought amateur productions to the Tulane. William Fulham, a native Orleanian, premiered his play about Louisiana entitled *Last Island*, before "unusually brilliant social patronage"221 at the Tulane in mid-December. Jessie Tharp directed the play, and although there was some pleasant singing of old Creole songs, the reviewer felt that Fulham was "not a

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219 See St. Charles section.

220 *Picayune*, March 17, 1928, sec. 4, p. 4.

great success as a mystery play author," and the production was not "possessed of the enthusiasm and spontaneity necessary to make the show a success."  

Journey's End was the only professional drama presented this season at the Tulane. Although the reviewer thought that it was "the most powerful drama of the past few years," he noted that there were only "a mere handful of theatre-goers" present for the event.  

The only other shows were The Vagabond King, an operetta; A Connecticut Yankee, a musical comedy; an international musical revue; and Padlocks of 1929, which drew the "season's largest audience." The season had certainly been a slim one and lacked some of the optimism of the past seasons.

The 1930-1931 season was marked by a notable increase in the number of straight plays—there were six—and a decrease in the number of musical productions. This season also introduced a French repertory company to the city.

Strictly Dishonorable, starring Elizabeth Love and Cesar Romero, was said to be a play which would determine whether or not New Orleanians really wanted professional road companies. "Those with their ear to the ground predicted that if this production clicked from the box office viewpoint, many other big-time

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222 Picayune, December 17, 1929, p. 33.

223 Picayune, December 23, 1929, p. 23.

224 Picayune, December 30, 1929, p. 17.
dramatic smashes would come here." Whether or not this show proved to be the barometer predicted is difficult to say, but other big names did come to the city this season.

Banky and LaRocque, both film idols, packed the theatre with people who wanted to see the stars in person. The play, *Cherries Are Ripe*, in which they performed, was distinguished by the author's use of double entendre, Banky's loveliness, La Rocque's "clothes-displaying aptitude," and the advertising value of both their names.

Oddly enough, the reviewer found this play to be a tribute, not to theatre, but to the motion picture, for the play made "clear how much greater mechanical resources it has than does the spoken stage." He continued by saying:

Done on film with the theme song, a chorus of proportions, several directors and continuity writers, engaging scenic effects and smart subtitles—*Cherries Are Ripe* would be passable entertainment, perhaps more, for the movies have a way of supplementing here what it lacks there.

But upon the bald stage, with two central figures, one of whom finds an anachronism of the consequence if it involves sacrificing a chance to appear in a new double-breasted brown suit, the play does have its shortcomings. However, nobody seems to mind.

Ethel Barrymore considered the first lady of the theatre, appeared in a four-day run of *The Love Duel*. This was her first return to the South in several years, and she commented that when

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227 *Picayune*, December 29, 1930, p. 15.
she was here last there were "seventy-five or eighty traveling
companies playing this section of the world." Her performance,
as late in the season as April, was only the fifth road attrac-
tion in New Orleans that season. The popularity of theatre had
truly decreased.

The other dramatic productions at the Tulane included
Walker Whiteside in Chinese Bungalow and the Theatre Guild's pro-
duction of O'Neill's Strange Interlude, in complete form beginning
at 5:30 and ending at 11:00 with a dinner break between acts five
and six. Only three companies appeared at the Tulane during the
1931-1932 season. The theatre was open for only four weeks. The
first company presented a combination vaudeville and magic show
to an "enthusiastic audience." Only the season, the Tulane
came alive with a repertoire of Shakespearian plays that were so
popular that they were held over for a second week. A new actor,
William Thornton, starred in Hamlet, The Taming of the Shrew, The
Merchant of Venice, and Romeo and Juliet, which his company per-
formed at the Tulane theatre at the end of November.

At the end of January, Grand Grove, Louisiana of the United
Ancient Order of Druids sponsored the Original Herald Square

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228 Picayune, April 5, 1931, sec. 2, p. 6.
230 Picayune, October 26, 1931, p. 6.
Company's musical comedy success *The Hill Billies*. The show was complete with villain, heroine, and sheriff. The reviewer felt that the audience enjoyed it, possibly because it was "so reminiscent of another age."\(^\text{232}\)

The following season theatre was practically nonexistent at the Tulane. The only production performed was Ferenc Molnar's *The Play's the Thing*. The audience was disappointingly small.\(^\text{233}\)

There were only three theatrical events during the 1933-1934 season at the Tulane; *Green Pastures* and Katherine Cornell, Basil Rathbone, and Orson Wells in two productions. *Green Pastures* was inspired by *Ol' Man Adam and His Chillun*, written by New Orleans' own Roark Bradford. The Tulane stage had to be literally torn apart to make room for the treadmills which were used for the Lawd's trips to earth. Even the orchestra pit had to be remodeled to contain all the members of the chorus.\(^\text{234}\) Mel Washburn, then reviewing for the *Item*, described his reaction to the play:

> Once in a lifetime we are privileged to see something so vastly different on the stage, that it sets itself apart in our memory, not as part of our mental catalogue of good plays or good singing, but as something so sweetly simple, so deliciously funny and so endowed with beautiful voices that it will always remain the index that marks the most unusual chapter.\(^\text{235}\)

In April, Cornell, Rathbone, and Wells performed in *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* and *Candida*. The performances were

\(^{\text{232}}\) *Picayune*, January 25, 1932, p. 16.

\(^{\text{233}}\) *Picayune*, December 26, 1932, p. 5.

\(^{\text{234}}\) *Item*, November 19, 1933, sec. 2, p. 6.

\(^{\text{235}}\) *Item*, November 28, 1933, p. 17.
highly praised and well attended, but they ended the season for the Tulane.  

Early in August, there was considerable talk about the possibility of the Tulane housing a permanent stock company for the winter season. Although this never became a reality, there were some performances at the Tulane during the 1934-1935 season. Walter Hampden appeared in a half-week engagement playing in Richelieu, Richard III and Hamlet, to a "well-filled house." In his review, Washburn expressed the "sheer joy of once more having real theatre for our nights and something with life, color and masterly pantomime on which to tune our ears and focus our eyes."  

The surprise of the season was the excellent attendance at the Oxford Players' December, 1934, performances of The Ivory Door, Hamlet, and Romeo and Juliet. The group was a federal acting company sponsored by the government to employ actors. Everyone was pleased that so many people filled the house to see these unknown actors.  

The only other companies to visit the Tulane were Earl Carroll's Vanities with Ken Murray and Walter Whiteside in The Master of Ballantrae. The latter, poorly attended, closed the season at the Tulane.

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236 Picayune, April 18, 1934, p. 2.

237 Item, October 30, 1934, p. 6.

238 Ibid.
Although it was speculated that Ethel Barrymore would return to the Tulane in *The Constant Wife* and revive the road during the 1935-1936 season, Adelaide Hibbard played the piece, and there was little hope that professional road companies would continue. *Three Men on a Horse* played a successful two week run, and *Blossom Time*, the last professional show to play the Tulane, made its farewell tour. A local group sponsored by the W. P. A. federal theatre project performed Boucicault's *After Dark*, and the Tulane theatre closed permanently May 17, 1936.

There were three main factors that influenced the death of the road and closing of the Tulane, which had been designed to house road companies. The rise of the motion pictures, poor quality of the road shows, and the depression.

In 1925 there were twenty-eight motion picture houses in New Orleans showing silent films, some of them including vaudeville on the same program. By 1935 there were approximately forty-five, almost twice as many, showing sound films, some of them in color. The theatre audiences were attracted to films which were a new and cheap form of diversion. As the films grew so did the audiences.

Head says that besides motion pictures causing the death of the road, the stage itself was one of the causes. More elaborate and less sophisticated shows of poorer quality began to replace the fine dramas. These shows attracted the popular entertainment seeker who was easily satisfied with films, when prohibitive

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costs forced the discontinuance of road shows.\textsuperscript{240}

The stock market crash of 1929 gave the theatre a blow from which it never recovered. Lack of funds to finance or pay to see theatre caused the folding of both stock and road companies.

\textbf{Jerusalem Temple and Municipal Auditorium}

The Jerusalem Temple and the Municipal Auditorium were two large auditoriums that served as theatres for various professional road companies and some amateur groups. The Jerusalem Temple, erected in 1916, had a large auditorium that received a variety of professional companies over the years. In January, 1927, a "noted" troupe of Spanish actors, The Guerrero-Mendosa troupe, presented Benavente's, La Malquerida and Zorilla's Don Juan Tenorio there.\textsuperscript{241}

The Freiburg Players of Germany annually presented a passion play, usually in German and usually at the Municipal Auditorium, but in 1933 they presented it at Jerusalem Temple in English.\textsuperscript{242}

In 1935 and 1936 the Ted Shawn Dancers performed on the stage of Jerusalem Temple.

The Municipal Auditorium, one of the largest buildings in the city, seating approximately 12,000, was dedicated on May 30, 1930, to the dead heroes of World War I. However, it was used even before it was formally dedicated. In March, the Chicago Civic

\textsuperscript{240}Head, p. 299.

\textsuperscript{241}Picayune, January 2, 1927, sec. 4, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{242}Picayune, January 10, 1933, p. 14.
Opera, consisting of two hundred seventy persons and traveling on three trains, arrived in New Orleans to present two evenings of opera in the new auditorium. It was the first such performance in the auditorium. A group of interested citizens guaranteed the organization $12,500 for each performance and an additional $5,000 for expenses. Any excess money was used for a nucleus fund for a permanent opera organization for New Orleans.243

That same year, the Junior League sponsored the Freiburg Passion Play from Baden, Germany. Local talent filled in the chorus parts and worked with the German group. The presentation was entirely in German, and although the backers predicted that it would break house attendance records,244 the newspaper stated that an "untimely shower" accounted for the "somewhat slender audience." The production was described as "beautiful like passing tapestries," "somewhat long," with ten classic choral numbers by New Orleans voices.245

In October, 1930, eighteen British actors, graduates of Oxford and Cambridge and directed by seventy-five year old Sir Philip Ben Greet, performed Hamlet, As You Like It, and Everyman at the auditorium. The presentations had the endorsements of Dr. J. M. McBryde of Tulane University, Dean Pierce Butler of Newcomb, and Jessie Tharp, then instructor of dramatics at

244Picayune, March 9, 1930, sec. 3, p. 7.
The company presented *Hamlet* on a bare stage using an uncut First Quarto never before used in the United States. Knoblock, then reviewing for the *New Orleanian*, disapproved of the company's use of this version saying, "if a new play needs revisions of performance, why not an old classic." Neither did he praise *As You Like It* very highly. He said for this play to be successful, it "needs brilliant, sparkling playing, something this company could not give it."

The San Carlo Grand Opera performed at the auditorium during the 1934-1935 and 1935-1936 season. The New Orleans Grand Opera Association sponsored this opera company along with other opera events during the season. The Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo also performed there.

In March, 1935, when there was a change of managers at the Municipal Auditorium, Washburn, writing for the *Item*, reminded his readers that the auditorium had housed only a few traveling companies and carnival balls during the previous five years. He thought its facilities should be expanded to include a gymnasium, dance facilities, and even baths available to everyone. He hoped the new manager would provide all this. The auditorium never

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246 *Picayune*, October 2, 1930, p. 8.
248 Ibid.
250 *Item*, February, 1935.
did acquire these facilities, however.

Of course, it is not unlikely that the Municipal Auditorium's construction was motivated by New Orleanians' love of Carnival balls. These balls are elaborately costumed dances in which a king and his queen and court parade on the large ballroom floor. The balls are a culmination of the city's social life and serve to present society's debutantes formally to the public. Before the auditorium was built, Jerusalem Temple and the Athenaeum served to house these Carnival balls. The Athenaeum, the home of the Young Men's Hebrew Association, was used for the balls until about 1928. Since Rex and Comus paraded on the same day and both held their balls on Mardi Gras evening, it was necessary to find another place to hold the second ball since the Athenaeum was not available. While the auditorium was being built, the Comus Club covered the floor of the Orpheum theatre and their balls were staged there. Rex held their ball at the Jerusalem Temple. When the auditorium was completed, Rex and Comus held their balls in separate auditoriums within the Municipal building and joined together at eleven o'clock.

In some instances Mardi Gras festivities prevented touring companies from coming to New Orleans. Mel Washburn explained the situation in his Item column.

The Ziegfield "Follies" wanted to come to New Orleans the later part of February or the first part of March . . . into the Municipal Auditorium, but were discouraged because local impresarios figured Carnival

Week would be a poor week for the "Follies" and the fact that so many Carnival Balls are held at the Auditorium. I should think the opposite would maintain. The "Follies" now on tour should draw well in New Orleans during the Carnival week.  

By 1935, Municipal Auditorium and Jerusalem Temple were the only two facilities which housed occasional professional touring companies. Vaudeville no longer enlivened the downtown stages, St. Charles stock had folded, and the Tulane had closed. By the end of the decade, the entertainers and entertainment had to be absorbed elsewhere. Dance halls and cafes began to use entertainers and, with the repeal of prohibition in February, 1933, numerous beer halls opened which also utilized entertainers. Washburn said in 1934, that "you can’t blame theatre-goers here for wailing and bemoaning the lack of stage fare. If you want to see flesh these days, you’ve got to go to night clubs . . . and even the majority of them are not able to provide the best of talent."  

Summary

The years 1925 to 1935 witnessed the decline and demise of the professional theatre in New Orleans. By 1934 vaudeville had disappeared from the New Orleans stages, pushed aside by the popularity of the motion pictures, the rise of production costs as a result of union pressure, and the scarcity of money due to the economic depression. The St. Charles, the only theatre in

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254 Item, December 23, 1934, p. 7.
255 Ibid.
New Orleans housing a professional stock company at the beginning of the decade, closed its doors in May, 1929. Audiences were no longer willing to pay the price to see mediocre plays carelessly and unimaginatively performed by the same actors week after week.
The number of touring companies booking the Tulane and Crescent theatres continued to decrease during the decade until in 1935 both the theatres were forced to close. The few Shakespearian and opera companies which came into the city were housed in Municipal Auditorium, which could seat large audiences and assure monetary return that would cover, at least, the extravagant costs of the bookings. Even these bookings decreased when they interfered with the Mardi Gras balls held in the auditorium. The lack of professional theatre in New Orleans caused performers to seek employment in night clubs, radio, films, and in the university and community theatres.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The period of 1925 to 1935 was a period of change for educational, community, and professional theatre in New Orleans. At the beginning of the decade, theatre and dramatic programs in the high schools and colleges began to develop. Community theatre, prompted by the Little Theatre movement in the country, became a prominent part of theatre. The number of professional vaudeville, stock, and road companies, however, began to decrease and by the end of the decade were non-existent.

Educational theatre in New Orleans between 1925 and 1935 was produced in the elementary schools, high schools, colleges and universities, and promoted through various play contests.

Historical pageants, May Day festivals, and graduation exercises furnished most of the theatrical activity for the students enrolled in the city's elementary schools. The historical pageants involved hundreds of students and the cooperation of the entire school system. Parents, teachers, and the school board as well as the students participated in the May Day festivals which often provided funds for the school. Some of the graduation programs were educational as well as entertaining and provided an opportunity for the students to participate in skits, playlets, and sometimes plays.
At the beginning of the decade, most of the high schools in the city engaged in some form of theatrical activity. Between 1925 and 1935 New Orleans high schools presented three-act plays as part of the graduation exercises. The public high schools presented more plays than the Catholic high schools, because they graduated students twice a year while the Catholic schools held graduation exercises only once a year. Many one-act plays were presented throughout the school year by dramatic clubs and classes. At the beginning of the decade Jesuit, Holy Cross, and Easton High Schools sponsored dramatic organizations responsible for various theatrical activities throughout the year. In 1928 the public school system incorporated Expression I and II into the high school curriculum, and by 1931 the number of expression classes offered tripled. Expression teachers began to produce more plays to give their students an opportunity to practice what was taught in expression class. Expression classes at Kohn High School of Commerce for Girls, for example, developed a play competition between classes which encouraged the production of a prolific number of plays during the 1934-1935 school year.

The high schools presented a diversity of plays seldom repeating those presented by another school. Most of the plays were chosen for entertainment rather than for literary value or even, in the case of the Catholic schools, religious value. However, a few schools, such as Easton Boys' High School, presented fine productions of some literary or historical merit. McDonogh No. 35 High School for Negro Boys and Girls was the only school to attempt operettas. The choice of plays was not restricted by the
fact that the white high schools were segregated by sex. Boys usually played girls parts or girls, boys parts whenever necessary. Only Easton Boys' High School imported girls from another school.

High school theatre activities developed students who later became leaders in university theatre and founders of community theatre groups which assured theatre's continuance when there were no professional companies in the city. Holy Cross developed such leaders as Robert Lacey, Joe Abraham, and Leo Zinser, all of whom were active in Loyola University theatre. Abraham also directed at Fortier Boys' High School during the period, and Zinser worked with Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carre and the New Orleans Group Theatre. At Easton Boys' High School Jessie Tharp and Ben Hanley developed such students as LeVergne Shaw, Hermann Cottman, Audley Keck, Leon Zaine, Abe Manheim and others who worked during this decade in Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carre, and founded the Little Art Theatre and the New Orleans Group Theatre.

Between 1925 and 1930 there were several private acting, elocution, or expression schools operating in the city. Most of these had been founded by promising graduates of Lily Whitaker's New Orleans College of Oratory. By the second half of the decade some of the schools had closed, and others had eliminated dramatics and become dancing schools. Only Ben Hanley's New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art survived throughout the decade distinguishing itself through its diverse curriculum, qualified faculty, devoted graduates, and excellent productions as the finest school of drama in New Orleans between 1925 and 1935.
During the period of this study, some college and university drama groups lacked strong theatrical leadership or sponsorship by an educational department. As a result they were often unstable and disorganized thus producing plays sporadically. Some producing groups were determined to incorporate theatre into the academic curriculum. The colleges and universities in which theatrical activity was not extracurricular but an outgrowth of the academic courses sponsored by the institution presented plays regularly. Some of the institutions of higher learning, such as Newcomb College and Loyola University, performed foreign language plays that were an outgrowth of the foreign language department. By 1930 some of the colleges and universities, such as Newcomb, Loyola, and Xavier, had begun producing operettas, which proved extremely popular and sometimes replaced straight dramatic productions. Newcomb produced puppet theatre for children. However, most of the plays performed at the colleges and universities, like those at the high schools, were chosen for entertainment value only.

By 1934 theatre was becoming a respected part of the academic community. Newcomb College brought to the campus directors and designers from the community theatre to lecture on various phases of theatre. Loyola added a course in public speaking and dramatics along with a course in play production which gave the students an opportunity to learn stagecraft. Tulane hired a professional director for one season and encouraged the school administration to seek a permanent faculty director. Dillard University sponsored the first meeting of the Southern Association of Dramatic and
Speech Arts.

Local and state play contests promoted theatre and encouraged playwriting. The high schools prepared numerous productions for the annual Play Tournament and the state rally in Baton Rouge. The Play Tournament, sponsored by the New Orleans School of Speech and Dramatic Art, gave impetus to the first theatrical production at Fortier Boys' High School and encouraged the formation of numerous theatrical organizations. These contests brought LeVergne Shaw, Hermann Cottman, and Evelyn Soule Ford into prominence as local playwrights.

Community theatre between 1925 and 1935 assured the continuity of theatre in New Orleans near the end of the decade when there was no professional theatre. Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré, recognized as an outstanding organization in the Little Theatre movement in the country, was the only community theatre in the city to survive the depression and operate continuously throughout the decade. Le Petit Théâtre's leaders aided struggling educational and community theatre groups in the city by acting as advisors, working to produce the plays, or lending moral support to these group's theatrical endeavors. Above all Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré provided men, women, and children of the city with an opportunity to develop as performers, writers, directors, and theatre technicians as well as permitting audiences to witness challenging plays performed in an almost professional manner.

At the beginning of the decade several community theatres developed in the city. Ruth Voss founded the Children's Theatre
Guild in 1925 giving children an opportunity to view children's literary classics performed by children. The Guild fostered an appreciation for good literature and developed leaders in educational and community theatre. The Menorah Players Guild founded in 1926 was the most stable of the theatre groups sponsored by religious organizations. Supported by the Jewish community and existing for the edification of its members, the Guild presented intellectually challenging plays, many of them centered around Jewish life. The Uptown Little Theatre and the Little Art Theatre, started in 1925 and 1928 respectively, were both founded by students who had become interested in theatre while in high school. By 1931 all of the community theatres with the exception of Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carre' had terminated unable to survive the country's economic depression.

Not until 1934 and 1935 did further community theatre groups develop. In 1934 the Civic Theatre Players was founded which provided amateur theatricals for a subscription audience. In 1935 the New Orleans Group Theatre organized. It was composed mostly of graduates of Easton High School and active members of Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carre'. These creative young people produced experimental plays of social comment complementing the more conservative offerings of Le Petit Théâtre. The Civic Theatre Players, the New Orleans Group Theatre, Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carre', and various church groups continued to produce plays well into the next decade.

The years 1925 to 1935 witnessed the demise of professional theatre in New Orleans. In 1925 there was vaudeville and silent
films at seven of the downtown New Orleans Theatres. The St. Charles stock company was offering a full season of stock plays and the Tulane theatre booked several musical and dramatic road shows. In 1926 and 1927 the Loew's State and Saenger theatres opened in the downtown area giving significant competition to the other vaudeville-movie houses. In 1928 the Saenger installed sound and other theatres soon followed. This year the St. Charles stock company plagued by low production standards and the lack of audience interest did not open. Rising production costs decreased the number of road companies booking the Tulane theatre.

Between 1929 and 1933 sound films and not vaudeville became the feature attraction. In 1929 the Loew's State management showed a sound film without the usual vaudeville and noted no decrease in attendance. Although vaudeville attempted to regain audience interest in 1932, the stagehands strike and the depression hastened its end in New Orleans. By the end of the 1933-1934 season the vaudeville-movie houses in New Orleans had eliminated vaudeville and included only sound films on their program. Only the Palace and Dauphine, two Negro theatres, continued to offer vaudeville and burlesque intermittently through the end of the decade. With the repeal of prohibition in 1933, numerous cabarets and beer halls opened throughout New Orleans furnishing employment for some vaudeville performers and live entertainment for audiences.

Although newspaper critics, particularly K. T. Knoblock, suggested types of plays that should be provided for the community and openly promoted various methods of reviving professional theatre in the city, by the end of the 1935-1936 season the Tulane
and Crescent theatres closed permanently. Only a few large production companies came to New Orleans at the end of the decade. These were housed in Jerusalem Temple and especially the Municipal Auditorium which seated thousands of spectators and guaranteed enough ticket sales to defray the exorbitant transportation and production costs.

Although at the end of the decade there was no professional theatre in the city, high school expression courses increased interest in theatre developing students who became leaders in educational and community theatre which continued the tradition of theatre in New Orleans long after the professionals had gone.
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VITA

Melvin Howard Berry was born on July 5, 1933, in New Orleans, Louisiana. He completed his elementary education in the public schools of New Orleans, attended St. John's High School in Shreveport, Louisiana for two years, and then graduated from Notre Dame High School in Chattanooga, Tennessee in 1952. He received a Bachelor of Science degree in 1956 and a Master of Arts degree in 1963, from Louisiana State University.

Between 1956 and 1963, he served two years in the United States Army, taught two years in the public school system of Buffalo, New York, and three years in the parochial school system in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. From 1963 to the present time he has served on the faculty of the Speech and Drama Department and as Director of Theatre at Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, Louisiana.
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Title of Thesis:    A History of Theatre in New Orleans from 1925 to 1935

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