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THE DULUTH PLAYHOUSE
A CASE STUDY IN COMMUNITY THEATRE
STRUCTURE, POLICY, AND PRACTICE

DISSERTATION
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By
Fred William Meitzer, B.A., M.A.

* * * * * *

The Ohio State University
1966

Approved by

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PLATE I

Frontispiece

Entrance to the Duluth Playhouse

(Photograph by Ken Moran)
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many persons contributed time, energy, and talent to help me complete this report. Frances was invaluable as research assistant, typist and wife. Dr. Charles Ritter was helpfully demanding as editor. Ken Moran was a generous friend as photographer. Mrs. Elizabeth Green, the Director of the St. Louis County Historical Society, and her staff could not have been more helpful. The Board of Directors of the Duluth Playhouse co-operated fully, offering helpful leads and materials as well as encouragement. Presidents Dr. Robert Kanter and Mrs. Elizabeth Green were particularly helpful. I am especially grateful to Mrs. Heath Finch Morton, a gracious woman and a talented director who first interested me in the Duluth Playhouse.
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All photographic work by Ken Moran, Head of the Photography Laboratory, University of Minnesota, Duluth.

Historical materials courtesy of St. Louis County Historical Society, Mrs. Elizabeth Green, Director.
INTRODUCTION

The Duluth Playhouse celebrated its fiftieth anniversary on November 17, 1964. The program included a revival of *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, by George Bernard Shaw. Shaw's short play premiered in America at the opening of the forerunner of the Duluth Playhouse, the Little Theatre of the Duluth Center of The Drama League of America. The opening of the Little Theatre, an event of national importance in 1914, should be of interest to students of theatre today. It marks the official beginning of one of the oldest community theatres in America, a producing organization that was directly influenced in its formative years by such prominent persons as Harley Granville-Barker, Lady Gregory, Percy MacKaye, and Thomas Dickenson, and that was led in later years by men who gained national reputations for their work in community theatre, Maurice Gnesin and John Wray Young.

A number of studies could be written based on the information available that is directly or indirectly concerned with the origin and development of the Duluth Playhouse. This report is limited to discussing the development of the organizational structure, the management policies, and the production practices of one of the most interesting and durable community theatres in the United States. It is offered as a case study in these aspects of community theatre.
There were two distinct phases in their development in Duluth. The first phase is considered in Chapters I through V. In these chapters, some of the events and conditions behind the founding of the Little Theatre are described, the policies and programs of the early organization are discussed, and the policies and practices that contributed to the collapse of the Little Theatre are analyzed. In Chapter I, to place the founding of the Little Theatre in historical context, there is a brief account of early theatre activity in Duluth, from about 1850 to 1900. Chapter II contains a review of some unfortunate conditions in American theatre during the first decade of the twentieth century and an account of the efforts to correct them in Duluth by forming a center of the Drama League of America. The activities of the Duluth Center from 1912 to the opening of the Little Theatre in 1914 are described in Chapter III. Highlights of the first three seasons at the Little Theatre are presented in Chapter IV. In Chapter V, the weaknesses in structure, policies, and practices that contributed to the closing of the Little Theatre in 1920 are analyzed.

The second phase is considered in Chapters VI, VII, and VIII. Changes that were made in the organizational structure in 1926 are analyzed in Chapter VI. In Chapter VII, the administrative policies that were established in the 1926-27 season are discussed. Chapter VIII contains a description of the efforts between 1921 and 1929 to establish open tryouts, technical workshops, and other practices of play production at the Little Theatre. The name of the organization was changed to the Duluth Playhouse in 1941, but the organizational structure, the administrative policies, and the practices of play
production established between 1926 and 1929 were not changed. They are still in effect, as is indicated in Chapter IX, in which the present conditions and future hopes of the Duluth Playhouse are discussed and some conclusions are drawn from this study.

Research for this paper was conducted during the five years the researcher was Director of Theatre at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, from 1961 to 1966. An abundance of primary material was available at the Duluth Playhouse, the St. Louis County Historical Society, and the Public Library. The Minutes of the Duluth Center of The Drama League of America and complete scrapbooks for the Little Theatre, both dating back to 1912; diaries and other first-hand accounts of life in the early settlement; and a complete file of newspaper clippings, letters, programs, photographs, television scripts, personal memoirs and unpublished manuscripts about theatre in Duluth were available at the St. Louis County Historical Society. The Public Library also had a complete file on early theatre activity. The Playhouse had complete records and scrapbooks. Many persons who had been, or were still involved in the activity were available for interview. In addition, the researcher had direct experience at the Playhouse—acting in one production, directing another, and designing and building the set for a third.

A case study such as this is useful in that it can provide a close look at some selected aspects of community theatre. This close look can deepen one's appreciation and understanding of these aspects and of the unique contribution a community theatre makes to the cultural life of a city.
PLATE II

Scenes from Fiftieth Anniversary Program

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1. Refreshments after the show.

2. Reception line, Mrs. Elizabeth Green, President of the Duluth Playhouse, stage right of Dr. Frank Whiting, Director of Theatre, University of Minnesota.

3. Fred Meitzer in Beefeater costume calling audience back from intermission.

4. Anniversary cake.

5. Scene from winning play, one-act contest: The Happy Shadows, by David Sapp.

6. Mrs. Heath Finch Morton as Queen Elizabeth in The Dark Lady of the Sonnets.

(Photographs by Ken Moran)
CHAPTER I
ENTERTAINMENT ON THE FRONTIER

In 1895, William F. Leggett and Frederick J. Chapman published *The City of Duluth and Environs*, a picture book with commentary about the city of Duluth, in which is written: "Duluth has four theatres, the Lyceum, the Temple, the Parlor, and a summer theatre named 'The Pavilion' which sits on the brow of the hill."¹ All four theatres seem to have been kept busy.

When the old timers speak of the "good old days" and the reference is to the theatre, they really have something to boast about. For then, before the days of high transportation costs and tremendous salaries, Duluth was the mecca of the nation's grandest theatrical productions, and seldom did a week pass without the names of dramatic notables on the boards.²

The author of the article quoted above was writing in 1932 about the theatre in Duluth at the turn of the century. This was the Golden Age of theatre in America; Duluth was willing and able to take part in the general prosperity. Sarah Bernhardt made the first of three Duluth appearances in 1895. Charlie Chaplin made his American debut there in 1908. Many notables of the day made regular appearances, including Edwin Booth, Anna Boyd, Richard Mansfield as "Beau


²Duluth News Tribune, October 24, 1932.
PLATE III

Stars who played Duluth in the Gay Nineties

(St. Louis County Historical Society)
The Gay Nineties in Duluth

John Lanigan Recalls 'Famous Fellows I Used to Know'
Brummel," Fisk O'Hara, David Warfield, Walker Whiteside, and Anna Held.3 There were many memorable moments for Duluth's theatre lovers during the Golden Age, but it was not the first boom in theatrical enterprises that the city had experienced. The first had been cut short when the financial crash of 1873 caused the population of Duluth to drop from 5000 to 1300 in sixty days.4

The people of Duluth and the people of the country never dreamed that so strong a firm as Jay Cooke and Company was in the least danger of becoming financially embarrassed, but, on the 18th day of September, 1873, like a clap of thunder from a clear sky, came the announcement that all of Jay Cooke and Company's banks had gone to the wall, and the result was that their failure precipitated one of the greatest panics in history.5

The year, 1873, had started with the promise of ushering in a cultural millennium: nine men meeting for mutual artistic pleasure formed the first symphony orchestra; the first professional theatre building was opened; a second theatre was under construction; and touring companies began adding Duluth to their circuits.6

Duluth's first professional theatre building, The Dramatic Temple, opened on May 17, 1873. Since that was Norwegian Independence Day, the event was celebrated by a parade of the newly immigrated Norsemen. The theatre was on the second floor of a building

3Duluth News Tribune, March 23, 1927.


5Ibid., p. 243.

6Elizabeth Green, "Entertainment on the Frontier," Speech manuscript, delivered at various times to groups in Duluth.
built by Peter G. Schult at Second Avenue West and Superior Street. The first floor was a restaurant. The theatre was an auditorium, fifty-four feet by thirty-two feet, seating five hundred on one level, with a small raised stage, twenty feet deep, at one end. Programs at the Dramatic Temple included engagements by the Plunkett Dramatic Company.

A two week run was scheduled to close August 9, 1873, with a performance of "Under the Gaslight," but applause was so vigorous, the cry for more so persistent that the stay was extended two more days with "Othello" the attraction. The editor of the Minnesotian became the first drama critic in Duluth with his comments about the company: "They went off satisfied that when good theatricals hold forth in Duluth, they will be sustained by our people."8

The Plunketts returned later that summer with a bill that included such favorites as Ten Nights in a Barroom, Lady Macbeth, and Uncle Tom's Cabin. Even though the panic following Jay Cooke's collapse had already begun to affect the community, it was reported that the Plunketts played to great crowds.9

Although the financial crash did not stop the Plunketts, it did halt construction on what would have been Duluth's second professional theatre building. The Banning and Branch Opera House, as it would have been named, would have made the Dramatic Temple seem primitive by comparison. Construction on the Opera House was started diagonally across the street from the Dramatic Temple, on the northwest corner of Second Avenue West and Superior Street.10

7 Duluth News Tribune, March 23, 1927.
8 Duluth News Tribune, July 29, 1956.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
The builder, William Branch, announced plans to use Fon du Lac brownstone throughout as the building material. The theatre, which was to occupy the third floor, was to have a fourteen-foot ceiling over an auditorium, fifty feet by ninety feet, designed to seat six hundred on the main floor and three hundred more in a gallery. Only the first two stories of the building were completed when Jay Cooke's banks "went to the wall." The third floor was never added, but the two stories were used until 1961 when it was torn down to make room for the new building of the Northwestern Bank of Commerce.

The crash of 1873 brought to an end a boom that had begun late in 1869 with the announcement of plans to bring the railroad to Duluth. An eyewitness who lived in Duluth before the boom began described it like this:

The haphazard, scraggly, and repellant settlement of that time, a mixed combination of Indian trading post, seaport, railroad construction camp, and gambling resort, altogether wild, rough, uncouth and frontierlike, bore not the remotest resemblance, physical or otherwise, to the city as it now is. Nor did it seem within the range of the wildest imagination that a city could ever be built there.

Superior Street at that time was a continuous succession of hills and gullies, connected its entire length by a four-foot plank sidewalk, with the planks laid endways, bridging the ravines and tunneling the hills. To walk it was hazardous in the daytime, and sure death after dark. To find a place for crossing the street was a question of great deliberation and caution, and to actually cross was an act of recklessness, forfeiting your life insurance.11

After the plans to run the railroad into Duluth were announced, things began to change rapidly. Suddenly the town was overrun with hoards of what would look to us today like extras in a Hollywood.

11Van Brunt, I, p. 186.
Western. Settlers, businessmen, lumberjacks, laborers, professional men, adventurers—the whole cast for a frontier epic was assembled in Duluth.

In the latter part of 1869, and in 1870, the people just came flocking in; in a few months there were two or three thousand people added to the population. There was no place to put them. There was not a hotel in the place, and every family had taken in as many as it could accommodate, and yet there were thousands to be provided for. They lived in tents; they put up the rudest kinds of shacks for a temporary shelter, until they could erect houses. As fast as the sides and roof of a building were completed, and before doors or windows could be supplied, the place would be rented for lodgings. The owner would take a piece of chalk and mark off on the floor space sufficient for a man to lie down, number the space and rent it out. Tenants had to provide their own bedding and blankets. They would buy a piece of ticking, sew it into a bag, and go out and fill it with straw, shavings, sawdust, leaves, anything that would answer the purposes of a bed, and then buy their blankets. They would do their own cooking over fires in the open air, or, if they were fortunate, they would get some of the inhabitants to give them table board.\(^{12}\)

Reading of Duluth in the boom days of '69 and '70, is like reading an action-adventure Western. There were vigilantes who took care of troublemakers. And there were troublemakers who murdered vigilantes to get even.\(^{13}\) The editor of one of the histories of the era tells the story of one great street fight that was broken up in the nick of time by one of the town's leading citizens, who gave an impromptu speech on the defense of womankind which so touched the hearts of all that the roustabouts turned over the chief trouble maker

\(^{12}\)Ibid., p. 190.

\(^{13}\)A full account of the most famous frontier killing in Duluth may be found in *Minnesota Murders*, by Walter N. Treperry (St. Paul: The Minnesota Historical Society, 1962), pp. 53-61.
in their midst to the vigilantes, who, in like spirit, turned him free with a warning to get out of town. He goes on to tell another incident.

It might be permissible here to refer to an incident vouched for by one of the reliable 'sixty-niners, who stated that one day he noticed the village marshal, revolver in hand, chasing an escaping ruffian. The pioneer haberdasher (who later developed an immense business in Duluth) also watched the chase and was greatly excited and apprehensive. "Shoot low," he shouted to the constable, "shoot him in the pants, the coat and vest belong to me."14

The settlers seemed to meet life with primitive responses. It is reported that the town was nearly torn apart in June of 1870 when a boat arrived with the first billiard table. It arrived on the steamer Norman, and was placed in Finkel and Farrell's Hall. Civilization had arrived.15

Later the same month, the Buffalo Concert Club arrived. There was no celebration comparable to the arrival of the billiard table, but three of the men in the group were so favorably impressed with the cultural possibilities that they decided to make their homes in Duluth. They pitched a tent on Park Point and began to charm the residents regularly with their singing. They also were instrumental in organizing other cultural events, in which they often took part. For example, the arrival of the fourth piano in town, ordered from Boston by the wife of a pioneer trader, sparked a major event—a concert in the new store building of Ingalls and Shaw. This building which was opposite the dock on Lake Avenue was the scene of many such events in the

14van Brunt, I, p. 190.

15Elizabeth Green, loc. cit.
early days of the community. It has a fair claim to being the first theatre in Duluth. The concert in honor of the fourth piano could be considered a success:

From Oneota and Superior they came and from along the lake. The program included the men from the Buffalo Concert Club and a friend to make up a quartet, violin selections by Dr. Walbank of Superior, and a Mrs. Jaecning, individual selections by A. F. Leopold, by A. D. Newton and by individuals from the quartette.\(^\text{16}\)

The program was so successful that another was given in July. Proceeds from both performances went toward the building fund for the First Presbyterian Church.

With evidence such as this of the growing demand for cultural events in the expanding community, it became obvious to a few far-sighted gentlemen that a civic auditorium was needed. Their leader was George P. Hansen, known as "Big Red," who, besides being an early patron of the arts, was known in the community as a wife beater, confidence man, knife wielder and professional gambler.

Big Red was not destined to be identified in the chronicles of the North as a public benefactor. When his wife shot him dead, while the two were visiting her parents in Marshall, Iowa, the jury commended her skill in the womanly art of self-defense and brought in a verdict of not guilty as the courtroom spectators stood and cheered.\(^\text{17}\)

Big Red's money, however, helped to put up Duluth's first theatre, The Theatre Shed.

The Shed was an unimposing building, standing a few rods west of the most elegant structure on the street, the

\(^\text{16}\text{Ibid.}\)

\(^\text{17}\text{Duluth News Tribune, July 27, 1956.}\)
Clark House... It was a shed, as the name implied, and nothing else. It had a gable front, a shingle roof, and an unfinished interior. Seating consisted of two banks of plank benches. There was a stage, but no curtains, and when the hall was used in the evening, kerosene lanterns were strung across the stage and along the auditorium walls.18

There was no heat in the Theatre Shed, but, during those few months when heat was not needed, it was available to anyone who wanted an audience for any purpose. Because of the many uses to which the hall was put, it is variously identified as the Opera House, the Pine-Clad Shed and the Political Wigwam, as well as the Theatre Shed. It was the scene for riotous political quarrels, virtuous temperance rallies, fervent evangelistic meetings, and a few theatrical performances.

An itinerant troupe of actors played the Shed late in June, 1871—Madame Vito Viti's "troupe of world renowned artists"—and this troupe of travellers in all likelihood can be placed in the record books as having given Duluth its first dramatic productions.19

One theatrical event at the Theatre Shed which is particularly memorable is the first Shakespeare Cycle in Duluth, which ended with the Shakespeare Riots of July 9, 1871. The rioting began near the end of the first performance by a Shakespearean troupe which arrived on July 9, aboard the lake steamer, Northern Lights. The advance publicity for the troupe promised the community "Entertainment that will not fail to gratify all and not offend the most fastidious."20

18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
As it happened, the entertainment did fail to gratify all. The most fastidious were not offended but a group of Scotsmen were not completely happy about seeing nothing but plays by that Englishman. If the play had been Macbeth instead of Othello, there might not have been any trouble, but scenes from Othello were given and, when the actor-manager came out at intermission to ask the audience what they would like to see next, the Scotsmen began shouting for Rob Roy or the poetry of Bobbie Burns. The players were adaptable. They gave the Scotsmen what they wanted. Unfortunately, this catering to the Scots did not go over too well with the Scandinavians in the audience. The riots were an inevitable result. When the troupe returned to Duluth later that summer, they seem to have abandoned Shakespeare as too controversial. "They open Monday night in the Opera Shed," said the editor of the weekly Minnesotian, "with The French Spy and Handy Andy, a very choice bill indeed."21

The Theatre Shed was torn down the last week of May, 1872, to make room for the Banning and Branch Opera House, which was never completed because of the panic of 1873. By the time the Theatre Shed was torn down, many of the functions which might have taken place there were being held in Branch Hall, a two-story brick building—the second brick building in town—with "decidedly the largest and best public auditorium in town" on the second floor. The twenty-five by seventy-five foot public hall, opened by William Branch on December 31, 1870,  

21Ibid.
did not have a stage, but it is still numbered with the early theatres in Duluth. It is still standing at Fourth Avenue East and Superior.\textsuperscript{22}

The first program in Branch Hall was a New Year's Eve speech by Dillon O'Brien, a temperance and political orator from St. Paul.\textsuperscript{23} The fact that an important out-of-town speaker was speaking on New Year's Eve to an audience in a brick building is, in itself, evidence that a fundamental change had taken place in the town of Duluth that year. Imported bricks for construction were not practical and winter visitors were not possible in Duluth before the opening of the railroad.

The coming of the railroad to Duluth meant that, for the first time, the community was free from its complete dependence on Lake Superior. Sidney Luce, the mayor of Duluth in 1873, when the Jay Cooke panic nearly killed the community, recalled an earlier financial panic.

The Commercial Crisis of the season (1857) was a great setback to our calculations and prospects, and caused quite a stampede from the country, men without families generally left, those with families were generally compelled to stay. I had invested more than my all, and consequently became a permanent fixture.\textsuperscript{24}

The threat of a winter cut off in an isolated area had caused the "stampede from the country." Before the opening of the railroad, Duluth was almost completely cut off from contact with the rest of the

\textsuperscript{22}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{23}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{24}St. Louis County Historical Society, Old Settlers Association MSS, Section 1, p. 91.
world while Lake Superior was frozen over. As late as the spring of
1870, the arrival of the first boat had been so anxiously awaited be-
cause of the shortage of materials that Rev. Mason Gallagher's sermon
at the First Episcopalian Church, interrupted in mid-sentence by the
steamer *Keweenaw*'s whistle, ended with an incomplete sentence. The
church cleared in an instant. That evening, Rev. Gallagher announced
"Service next Sunday morning at half past ten, Providence permitting,
and if the whistle of the *Keweenaw* doesn't blow."\(^{25}\)

The first train arrived in Duluth from St. Paul on August 1,
1870. The celebration to meet it was the grandest since the arrival
of the first billiard table. There was even a brass band, decked out
in uniforms that had been bought second hand from Boston. The band and
the uniforms were a source of great civic pride. Dr. Thomas Foster,
the editor of the *Minnesotian*, who had a reputation for ruining the
good times of the people in town with his snide remarks, did not pass
up this opportunity to make his usual picky criticism. "Such shows
are a little premature," he wrote. "We won't be ready for them until
the forest is cut off the streets."\(^{26}\)

Perhaps one reason the Duluthians were so proud of their brass
band was because it was their brass band. It was their own people, and
they were proud of them. On the frontier, entertainment—even the
majority of theatrical entertainment—was primarily a do-it-yourself
project. Self-entertainment flourished in Duluth and even before there
was a settlement.

\(^{25}\)Van Brunt, I, p. 206.

\(^{26}\)Van Brunt, I, p. 206.
PLATE IV

Figure

1. Duluth, 1871, looking east from Lake Avenue.

2. Branch Hall, 5th Ave. E. and Superior, first brick building with an auditorium built in Duluth.

3. Branch Hall as it looks today.

(St. Louis County Historical Society)
The peninsula known as Minnesota Point had ever been a favorite resort for the Lake Superior bands. Here ascended the blue smoke of their camp-fires, here their grand medicine dances were held, and here they made the night hideous by their yells and the beating of the drums at their scalp dances, which occurred whenever a Chippewa had been so happy as to kill a Sioux. The scalp was sent from band to band, and everywhere greeted with the same kind of festivities.

The Point was also a resort for the citizens of Superior and picnics innumerable took place beneath the shadow of its whispering pines. A platform for dancing, over which a broad canvass spread its protecting wings, was erected nearly opposite the town and swings were suspended from the over hanging trees. At evening, parties of ladies and gentlemen visited this shore, crossing the placid waters in boats and canoes, to the music of flute, violins and guitars, mingled with the voice of song.

In this description, written by Mrs. J. L. Smith in a letter to the editor of the Duluth Minnesotian dated September 1, 1869, the sentimental tone was because "these things had the flavor of passing on," and she wanted everyone to take one last fond look at the past before they moved on into the future. "There was one Scotchman whose name I never knew," she wrote, "who used to float out upon the waters in his boat, alone, save for his national bag-pipe, which, with its droning melody no doubt in fancy took him afar over the ocean wave."

While many early Duluthians entertained themselves by dancing scalp dances or by playing bagpipes on the bay, some of the settlers, from earliest times, leaned toward a more intellectual form of

27St. Louis County Historical Society, Old Settlers Association MSS, "Who Named Duluth," by Mrs. J. L. Smith.

28Ibid.

29Ibid.
self-entertainment. In 1860, the population of Duluth was a mere 80 and there were only 406 in St. Louis County, but the Oneota Literary Society was already three years old.\(^{30}\) The minute books of the Society on file in the St. Louis County Historical Society, reveal a very active group. They were mostly men, at first. They met weekly during the winter months at the schoolhouse to entertain themselves with oratory, the reading of essays, the speaking of pieces, and solo and ensemble declamations and dialogues. The main event of the meeting was a debate on one of the burning issues of the day:

---War is never justified.
---Brutus was justified in killing Caesar.
---Commerce has done more to civilize and enlighten the world than Christianity.
---Shaving the face is a moral, physical and social evil.
---Love of wealth has more influence over mankind than fear of eternal punishment.
---Dissolution of the Union would be beneficial to the slave-holding portion thereof.
---Europeans were justified in colonizing as they did in the American continent.
---If a man has a grizzly bear by the tail it would be better policy to hold fast than to let go.\(^{31}\)

Judges and critics were appointed from members of the group for each program. Comments on grammatical form and elocutionary ability were given to the performers. Questions for debate were assigned two weeks in advance to give the contenders time to research and organize a winning case.

The Oneota Literary Society grew to include more women members, and the program was expanded to include more different kinds of

\(^{30}\)Mrs. Green, loc. cit.

\(^{31}\)Minutes of Oneota Literary Society, Duluth, Minnesota (in the files of the St. Louis County Historical Society) (Various meetings 1860-1864).
activities. By 1863, full scale social affairs with refreshments were presented. Reading home-made essays on such topics as "Patience" replaced the debate at some meetings. The declamations, dialogues and pieces spoken might be considered the first amateur dramatic performances in Duluth. On February 27, 1864, "an essay was read by Miss Martha Ayers, a declamation was delivered by Andrew Merritt and Lizzie W. Wheeler." The declamation may have been a scene from a play.

The Oneota Literary Society was neither willing nor able to provide the amount or kind of entertainment required when the population explosion of 1869 hit frontier Duluth. Thousands of men crowded into town, and a chalked area in an unfinished building was not a home. It was a place to sleep when sleep was absolutely necessary. For these men, a grand assortment of enterprises sprang up overnight which promised them excitement and diversion.

The most famous of the entertainment moguls who catered to the lumberjacks, miners, sailors, and railroad roustabouts who would come to town with a season's wad of bills and an unquenchable thirst for drink and women, was Ole Olsson. Olsson ran a combination theatre and saloon in a frame building just above the alley on the west side of Second Avenue West. "It was Barbary Coast and the Old West with Paul Bunyon as the barkeep," wrote Nathan Cohen, who interviewed many old timers who swore that there had never been a dull night in Olsson's in two full decades.33

32 Ibid., February 27, 1864 meeting.

33 Duluth News Tribune, July 29, 1956.
Ole's Parlour Theatre was strictly a man's place. The only women were the wine room girls, who worked around the clock, and the female entertainers, who danced in the chorus during the stage shows and let men buy them drinks during the intermissions. Ole provided a means whereby a man could buy all the drinks he could afford for the girls and they would never get drunk. The chairs were fitted with hollow tubes into which she could pour the drink while she whispered something in the gentlemen's ear. When he was beyond the point of no return, she would whisper something about "getting out of here...my apartment...the key." As she whispered, she would slip a key into his hand and tell him to meet her outside. There are no statistics on how many suffered severe frostbite waiting, while the girl was buying a new key from the manager.34

The Parlour Theatre, built in 1882, had been run by a St. Paul Syndicate as the Duluth Theatre until Olsson bought it in 1884 for $10,000, cash. Cohen described it.

The front was one story and the rear, which housed the theatre, was three stories high, a main floor and two balconies. There was a cheap plank stairway leading to the theatre. A small store at the south was used to build and paint scenery, the store to the north was the saloon... There was an outside balcony, and in the summer time, the band played concerts from that vantage point.

In the auditorium, the main floor was filled with tables and chairs. There were four boxes on either side of the first balcony. A second balcony provided seating for those who merely came to see the show. And, adjacent to the two balconies were eight wine rooms, for small parties.

It was an impressive place of entertainment. The auditorium was 75 feet wide and 90 feet deep. The stage was 35 feet deep. Kerosene lamps were used to light the

34 Ibid.
stage and the auditorium until they were replaced by incandescent lamps. Sussman and Langmen of Chicago made him the finest stage curtain obtainable. There was an orchestra pit large enough to hold seven or eight musicians.\textsuperscript{35}

The shows Ole Olsson brought to his Parlour Theatre were the best vaudeville acts of the day. He paid top prices for top entertainment and took pride in putting on a good show.

By 1896 Duluth had outgrown its need for the "longest bar this side of San Francisco, and the toughest bartender east or west of here,"\textsuperscript{36} and the Parlour Theatre closed and reopened as the Peoples Theatre. By then, Duluthians were pointing with pride to some of the finest theatres built west of Chicago, and remembering one or two that had burned to the ground.

The first luxury theatre in Duluth was the Grand Opera House, a magnificent $100,000 structure at Fourth Avenue West and Superior Street, which opened on September 20, 1883, with a production of Martha by New York's Emma Abbott Opera Company. The Grand Opera House was a huge building, 150 feet by 120 feet. The 50' x 80' auditorium seated 1200. The stage was fifty-four feet wide, thirty feet deep. A tragic fire on January 28, 1889, burned the Grand Opera House to the ground.\textsuperscript{37}

In October of the year the Grand Opera House burned, the Temple Opera House was built in conjunction with the Masonic Temple at Second Avenue East and Superior Street. The entrance to the Temple Opera House was on Second Avenue East. It opened on October 21, 1889.

\textsuperscript{35}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{36}\textit{Ibid.}

PLATE V

Program, opening of Grand Opera House,
September 20-22, 1883

(St. Louis County Historical Society)
OPENING OF THE
GRAND OPERA HOUSE
DULUTH,

BY THE
EMMA ABBOTT OPERA COMPANY.

VOL. I. NO. 1—4. DULUTH, MINN., SEPTEMBER 20—22, 1883, SEASON 1883-4

BEFORE THE OPERA
A. & B. RESTAURANT,
Fresh Candies,
Oysters!
AFTER THE OPERA,

SKEEL & HUNTINGTON,
Dealers in
GENTS' FURNISHINGS!
Hats, Caps, Etc.
West Superior Street.

LADIES' WRAPS.
W. W. SPALDING.
Practical
2000 Garments, 200 Designs;
Watchmaker and Jewelers.
Particular attention paid to repairing
fine watches.

FLYNN BROTHERS.
POPULAR CASH DRY GOODS HOUSE.

D. CALL AT:
H. F. WILLIAMSON

NO BETTER LINE IN THE NORTHWEST.

D ONNELL 182-3
PLATE VI

Duluth Theatres before 1900

Figure

1. Duluth, 1883, looking east from a hill overlooking Seventh Ave. West, showing Grand Opera House and People's Theatre.


4. Program, opening of the Temple Opera House, showing earlier theatres: Grand Opera House (1883) and Dramatic Temple (1870).

5. Auditorium, Temple Opera House.


7. Entrance to Orpheum Burlesque, former location of Temple Opera House.

(St. Louis County Historical Society)
There is not a seat in the theatre which does not command a complete view of the stage. . . . Including the loges there are twenty boxes, which, strange as it may seem, are arranged so that the occupants can see the stage as well as the audience.38

The Temple was heated by steam, lighted by both gas and electricity. A fire wall protected the adjoining Masonic Temple when the Opera House burned October 21, 1895. In its place was built the Orpheum, Duluth's leading vaudeville house. Today, with considerable remodeling, the old Orpheum building houses Duluth's luxury moving picture house, the Norshore.

Duluthians in the 1890's took most pride in pointing to the Lyceum Theatre. The description in The City of Duluth and Environs is typical of the language used to speak of that hallowed building.

The first stone of this beautiful building was laid September 12, 1890, and the offices were ready and its gorgeous theatre opened August 4th, of the following year with Charles Frohman's Company in "Wilkinson's Widows."

The Lyceum Theatre is one of the very finest in America. The decorations are simple but enchanting in their simplicity. They are in plastic relief work, the coloring being in varying shades of ivory, cream, orange and gold. The entire design is in pure Indian style, the boxes which are ten in number being facsimiles of bay windows in Aenhabab, India.

The beautiful drop curtain, also representing a scene in India, is covered with asbestos, insuring absolute safety in case of fire. The seats throughout the entire house are exceptionally roomy and comfortable.

The stage is one of the largest in the United States being more than sufficient for the biggest spectacular productions in the largest cities. The dressing rooms, too, are beautifully furnished, and large and complete, with every convenience.

38Leggett and Chapman, pp. 125, 126.
PLATE VII

The Lyceum

Figure

1. Exterior, under construction.

2. Auditorium.


4. Stage, set with stock interior.

5. Main Entrance.

(St. Louis County Historical Society)
PLATE VIII

Advertisement for *Ben Hur* at the Lyceum

(St. Louis County Historical Society)
en Era Of Drama 35 Years Ago
apbook Recalls 'Way Back When;' Heavy December Stage Program Highlighted by 'Ben Hur'

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The scenery of the Lyceum is already famous among theatrical people as being fine, as varied and as plentiful as has any theatre in the metropolitan cities. The capacity of the Lyceum is 1,500, and it might be said also that the theatre, in addition to the building, is fire-proof in every sense that the word implies. The building is magnificent in all its appointments. It is throughout rich, safe and enduring.39

Duluthians were legitimately proud of their Lyceum theatre, which had a stage large enough to accommodate the most pretentious of the colossal extravaganzas that toured America in that Golden Age of the theatre.40 Gil Fawcett’s unpublished history of the theatre in Duluth offers a bright look at life at the Lyceum in its finest hours.

All the great stars played there to packed houses. . . . Maude Adams, Fritz Scheff, Lillian Russell, Anna Held, DeWolfe Hopper, Otis Skinner, Guy Bates Post, Walker Whiteside, Joseph Jefferson, James O’Neill, the star-studded list is endless; and in the summers there was Willard Mack’s distinguished Stock Company, with its beautiful and talented leading lady, Maude Leone. Probably the crowning event of all, though, was Klaw and Erlanger's spectacular production of the General Lew Wallace Biblical drama "Ben Hur" that played the Christmas Day matinee at the Lyceum in 1903.

The supreme thriller in that hey day of spectacles, "Ben Hur" boasted a large cast of Broadway stars, the company numbering three hundred and fifty people, twelve carloads of scenery, eight horses and two camels. . . . When it was announced that "Ben Hur" would play in Duluth, the town buzzed with excitement. The person buying the first ticket made history by standing in line for eighteen hours. At that Christmas matinee the walls of the Lyceum fairly bulged, and as breathtaking spectacle after spectacle unfolded, there was thunderous applause. . . (sio.) the Wise Men in the desert and the wonderous star that began with a pinpoint of light and grew and grew until its unearthly effulgence flooded the stage . . . the terrifying galley scene and the shipwreck, and finally the tremendous chariot race . . . the horses

39 Ibid.
40 Gilbert Fawcett, "Theatre in Duluth," MMS (in the files of the St. Louis County Historical Society).
galloping on the treadmills . . . the moving cyclorama of the Roman Circus, the shouts, the cracking of whips, the wheel of the evil Messala's chariot flying off, and Ben Hur, with the white horses galloping to victory. From parquet to peanut gallery that immense audience stood up and cheered themselves hoarse. What a Golden Era of the theatre that was.  

The Lyceum was still being used for live dramatic productions in 1964, by a local amateur group that specialized in musical comedies, but it was used primarily as a motion picture house, showing second run double features. It was torn down in January, 1966, to make room for a mall that will run between the government buildings at Fifth Avenue West and First Street and the new Arena Auditorium on the waterfront.

The frontier town that began its transformation into a city when the plan to build a spur line of the railroad into Duluth was announced in 1869 was at the height of its powers when the Lyceum opened in 1890. In just twenty years the frontier settlement with fewer than one thousand people—many of whom had heard Indian war dances from the site that became the heart of the city, had celebrated the arrival of the first pool table, and had taken part in the activity of the Oneota Literary Society—had become "The Zenith City of the Unsalted Seas," with a population of 90,000 still growing, and unlimited faith in the future. From the same drive for theatrical entertainment that filled Ole Olsson's Parlour every night and had caused the building of the Theatre Shed and the Dramatic Temple, came three magnificent theatre buildings: The Grand Opera House, the Temple Opera, and the Lyceum.

41 Ibid.
At the turn of the century, the Lyceum stood as an impressive symbol of the Golden Age of theatre, in the nation as well as Duluth. It had the best in physical facilities and presented the finest attractions in the land. It did not last long. The decline of the Lyceum is a depressing example of the effect of a decay that was beginning to eat its way through the American theatre in the early years of the 20th century.

An attempt to delay the passing of the Golden Age of Theatre in Duluth gave rise to the movement from which the Duluth Playhouse has evolved. A survey of the conditions in American theatre that prompted the movement and a review of the early activities of the group that was organized in Duluth to save the theatre will be the subjects of the next chapter.
CHAPTER II

THE DULUTH CENTER OF THE DRAMA LEAGUE OF AMERICA, 1900-1912

On Christmas day, 1903, the lyceum was packed for *Ben Hur*. Almost ten years later, on the last day of February, 1912, the attraction at the lyceum was Dr. Richard Burton, a Professor of English at the University of Minnesota, the author of many magazine articles on scholarly and cultural topics, and an officer in the Drama League of America. There was not a full house. The Duluth *Herald* credited him with an audience that half filled the theatre, but it is likely that there were not quite that many in attendance for his lecture. The minutes of the Duluth Center of the Drama League of America, November 12, 1912, reported that "Dr. Burton's lecture was very good and enjoyed by the few who were at the theatre that evening."\(^1\)

The occasion for Dr. Burton's address was a rally of the members of the Duluth Center of the Drama League of America. The purpose of the rally was to interest people in joining the Center. It achieved its purpose. "This mass meeting was quite a success," the secretary recorded in the Minutes, "for from it our membership jumped from about 30 to 107."\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Minutes of the Duluth Center of the Drama League of America, meeting of November 12, 1912, (In the files of the St. Louis Co. Historical Society), p. 6.

Dr. Burton succeeded in arousing interest in joining the Duluth group by pointing with scorn to the state of American theatre in general, and Duluth theatre in particular.

We have no right to drive the hordes of young people who come out from stores and mills in the evening weary in body and mind, to cheap dance halls or the saloon with a wine room attachment, or the brothel, because there is no other place where they can get amusement. They do not want to see dreary high-brow plays. They want and should get wholesome entertainment, the best melodramas and the best in farce comedies as well as the best tragedies, and it is our place to get such entertainment for them.³

Not quite ten years had lapsed between the record-breaking production of Ben Hur and Dr. Burton's appeal for theatre reform. The house of hits had become a lecture hall and, before long, would be remodeled for motion pictures. This was not just a local problem. What happened to the Lyceum in Duluth happened to similar theatres in cities all across America.⁴ In 1918, William Lyon Phelps, Lampson Professor of English Literature at Yale, offered some graphic illustrations of the depressed state of the theatre.

Outside of New York City—the only town where the drama can be studied in America—the conditions of theatrical art seem to need improvement. I remember not so very long ago reading at the head of the dramatic column in a newspaper published in Massachusetts:

³Duluth News Tribune, March 1, 1912.

⁴An analysis of what happened can be found in Footlights Across America by Kenneth MacGowan (N.Y.: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929).
CHOICE WEEK IN HOLYOKE

Holyoke Opera House to Hear Some of Best Independant Productions

--Attractions of the Week--

HOLYOKE OPERA HOUSE
Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings

--matinees daily--

Washington Society Girl's Extravaganza Company

EMPIRE THEATRE

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings

The Two Johns

Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings

--matinees daily--

High Rollers Extravaganza Company

Now if this is a choice week in Holyoke, what do you suppose is the local conception of an average sennight?

It was obvious that something needed to be done, and in 1912 an association with the Drama League of America was generally considered to be the most effective means available to actually do something about improving theatre. It was a flexible, workable, national organization, with simple and effective methods for achieving worthwhile goals.

The purpose of this committee is the support of good drama by inducing attendance early in an engagement, upon any play on which the committee issues a bulletin. This official statement of the drama league is independent of any outside influence. The fact that a bulletin is issued on a play indicates that because of its artistic

merit or the timely and vital nature of its appeal, the committee deems it worthy of support. 6

The Drama League of America had been organized in 1910. It began in Chicago and spread rapidly from city to city. Its purpose—to organize audiences for the support and encouragement of better drama—was applauded by serious critics and commentators of the theatre of that time. William Lyon Phelps had many kind words for the League in The Twentieth Century Theatre.

The Drama League has a healthy existence in the United States. In the comparative absence of repertory theatres, with nearly every town lacking a stock company, its efforts have not been as fruitful as they might be with a better system of play production. But the League is gradually spreading sound doctrine, and its main work is devoted to the education of audiences. Both managers and dramatists are glad to have the League's endorsement; it means increased business. The League flourishes in every part of America. I have attended enthusiastic and crowded meetings in Chicago, New Orleans, Birmingham, Pittsburgh, and many other cities. The League is a vital force, and its influence is steadily widening and deepening. 7

Percy MacKaye was just as enthusiastic about the League as Mr. Phelps. His book, The Civic Theatre, was published in 1912, the same year the Duluth Center was formed. In it, he says of the League:

The purpose of the League is the organization of audiences for the support and encouragement of better drama. Though not as yet concerned with any radical ideas for the solution of theatrical problems, the League is already a progressive leader in many communities, and the nature and aim of its organization make probable its ultimate adoption of radical aims. Even now it is fitted to become a vital instrument for the spread of the civic.

6Duluth Herald, February 16, 1912.
7Phelps, op. cit., pp. 68-69.
theatre idea. All other organizations in the interest of the theatre should certainly associate their membership with it.8

Not all critics were enthusiastic about the work of the Drama League of America. Sheldon Cheney wrote:

... it seems futile to organize audiences and community theatre associations before there are companies aiming to supply the demand for better dramatic fare. Drama League Centers and drama circles of women's clubs have missed half their opportunity by neglecting the creative element in their local theatres. The organizers recognized the deplorable condition of the American stage, and they stirred up people to form audiences and demand better drama; and then, having nothing but an outside knowledge of the theatre, they asked the tradition-bound and unenlightened commercial manager to step in and supply some art.

The result is that the country now has an immense audience for written drama, which is a mighty good thing in its way; and this audience is demanding the best in produced drama, but has had little training in recognition and appreciation of what that best will be.9

The Duluth Center did fit Mr. Cheney's description for a short time after it was organized. The earliest entries in the minutes of the Duluth Center have several passages which glow with self satisfaction at having done something to help improve attendance at worthwhile productions, or which shine with pride for having been complimented by the manager of the Lyceum, Mr. C. A. Marshall, for their work in support of a production, or which record modestly the words of a famous theatre personality who spoke glowingly of the work and mission of the League. While they were going through this stage in

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their development, the Duluth Center was trying to reach the theatre-going public with the message of their mission with publicity articles like this:

Let it be repeated that the purposes of the Drama League are purposes important to every patron of amuse­ments who attends any sort of theatre in the city.

Let it be reiterated that the scope of the League embraces comedy, farce, melodrama, tragedy and problem plays, modern society drama and burlesque.

The effort is to make the viewpoint of the theatre patron as appreciative and critical as is the ear of the music lover after it has become accustomed to the best and most classic melodies.¹⁰

There is little doubt that the leaders of the Drama League of America believed in what they were doing, and were convinced that they had the answer to the problems which beset the American theatre. Marjorie A. Best, the president of the National League when Duluth organized its center, wrote an article which was later reprinted in the Duluth Herald on April 7, 1912, in which she tells of the ray of hope that the League was bringing to Duluth.

It was my privilege to help this month in the in­auguration and founding of branches of the League in Duluth, Minnesota, and Superior, Wisconsin. These two cities of considerable size and importance are particularly unfort­uneate in their theatrical conditions.

Owing to the fact that they are on a long spur of the railroad, they are not usually included in the St. Paul and Minneapolis circuits for the better productions.

With the exception of worthless plays, most of what they get comes from Winnipeg about three years after we have it in Chicago, if it has survived so long. This is not a necessary condition, and if the League plan can be

¹⁰Duluth Herald, December 6, 1912.
put into operation in this particular instance their situation might be materially bettered.11

Other leaders were just as optimistic as Mrs. Best in their thinking about the mission of the League. M. Benedict Papot, a member of the League's advisory board from Chicago, was brought to Duluth by the Duluth Center in January, 1912, to direct and star in a play called The Adventurer. In an interview with a reporter for the Duluth News Tribune, he revealed his feelings as to the effectiveness of the League approach.

"Chicago was one of the poorest dramatic centers of the world," said M. Papot, "until quite recently, when the branch of the League in that city took hold of things with a firm grasp and organized systematically to fight the poor and vicious plays and see only clean plays of undoubted dramatic excellence were produced in Chicago. The result has been so marked that only a few months ago, a play which failed in New York came to Chicago and was so supported by the League that it became an immediate success and is now about to return to New York where it will without a doubt have a long and successful run.22

M. Papot's statement reveals what might have been the fatal flaw in the Drama League's approach to improving conditions in the American theatre. As he saw it, the League's purpose was to insure that only clean plays of undoubted dramatic value would be produced. His emphasis on clean plays is restated in a comment he released to the press while he was in rehearsal for The Adventurer.

The rehearsals have been going on for only one week, but the play promises to be one of the most finished productions ever given by local talent. The Adventurer is an

11 Duluth Herald, April 7, 1912.

22 Duluth News Tribune, January 21, 1912.
absolutely clean play with a plot which is very ordinary... It is a good moral play and typical of the conditions of the French people at the present time.13

Not all of the leaders of the League agreed that cleanliness was the most important consideration in deciding the merits of a play. In his lecture at the Lyceum, Dr. Burton made it clear that he meant to do away with highbrow plays.

Neurasthenic nuisances like Hedda Gabler are not the type of plays that the Drama League is seeking to further... That word Highbrowism has much to answer for. I dare say if it had never been coined, this theatre would have been filled tonight. It has caused many worthy movements to be treated in a cynical contemptuous way.14

The method of the Drama League of America was a form of censorship, and their attempt to cure the ills of the theatre through censorship had two obvious weaknesses. In the first place, it could operate only on what was offered. If all of the plays of any season were bad, the League would approve the best of the bad lot. Secondly, whenever the solution to a problem involves censorship, sooner or later the difficult question of deciding who should be the censor is bound to come up. What would have happened if Dr. Burton and M. Papot were on the play selection committee and it came down to a choice between a clean highbrow play and a dirty lowbrow play?

The question of who should be the censor may have been partly responsible for the disaffection with the League that the Duluth Chapter experienced. There was evidence of a problem as early as

13Duluth News Tribune, January 20, 1912.
14Duluth Herald, March 1, 1912.
September 16, 1913, when the minutes reported, "The question as to whether we should receive our bulletins from New York or Chicago was brought up for discussion. Motion was made and passed that we have our bulletins from the New York Center." On October 7, 1914, the Duluth Center voted to receive the bulletins of the New York Center committee and to take out one membership in the Chicago Center in order to receive the bulletin of that center also.

Besides the problem of choosing between the New York committee's choices and those of the Chicago center, the members in Duluth sometimes found themselves supporting plays which were not chosen by either center.

Mrs. Holden passed out notices, which were sent over from the theatre announcing the coming of Melba and Kubelik and Walker Whitesides in the "Typhoon," which is not a bulletined play.

The problem of deciding on a censor came to a head just ten days after the Duluth Center opened its Little Theatre.

Following the reading of a letter to the president, informing her that bulletins from New York must in the future be ordered and paid for in advance, it was moved that the motion that the Duluth Center receive its bulletins from New York for this year, be rescinded. On motion it was decided that the Duluth Center receive bulletins for the year from the Chicago Theatre.

This entry indicates that the choice of a censor in Duluth was not based on the quality of judgment. The Duluth Center continued to

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15 Minutes, September 16, 1913, pp. 17-18.
16 Minutes, October 7, 1914, p. 46.
17 Minutes, September 16, 1913, p. 20.
18 Minutes, November 24, 1914, p. 53.
cooperate with the League censorship plan until 1919, when they dissolved their affiliation, but enthusiasm for this kind of activity diminished as the Center sought and found different and more productive outlets for their energy and enthusiasm.

From the beginning, the Duluth Center tried to define its service to the theatre as something broader than a local distributor of national propaganda, or the local arm of a national censor. They were very much in tune with Dr. Burton when, in the climax of his Duluth address, he said:

The drama wave is upon us. You can get in and help it along, or you can sit on the bank and wait until the rising tide sweeps you along with it, but you can't stop it.

I would like to make a prediction. You may laugh at me now, but if you do, I retain the right to have a laugh if my prediction comes true. I believe that ten or fifteen years from now the large American cities will all have municipal play houses which will be self-supporting. They should be placed on an equal footing with our libraries, and our art galleries, and our museums.

You can't neglect this phase of life. It is an intensely practical and human and vital problem as the tariff or the trusts. It is not the dream of an idealist.¹⁹

In his criticism of the Drama League of America, Sheldon Cheney had commented that, "with notable exceptions, they have been neglectful of creative dramatic enterprises in their own districts."²⁰ The Duluth Center was one of the exceptions. It was the first affiliate of the Drama League to take what Cheney called "the first normal step toward a community theatre . . . some such obscure venture as a little

¹⁹Duluth News Tribune, March 1, 1912.
²⁰Cheney, op. cit., p. 212.
theatre working on an experimental basis, amateurishly at first, but with intelligent growth toward an ideal.21

Something had definitely been wrong with the theatre in 1912, and the Duluth Center of the Drama League of America had been organized to do something about it. For two years the members sent out bulletins, read and studied plays, listened to speakers on various aspects of dramatic literature and production techniques, and engaged in various other activities. The Duluth Center had a desire to do more than passively support good theatre, which led to their taking "the first normal step toward a community theatre" on November 17, 1914. This step and the people behind the events leading to it are the subjects of Chapter 3.

21Ibid.
CHAPTER III

THE OPENING OF THE LITTLE THEATRE, 1912-1914

In Europe the revolt against the established theatre has as often as not grown out of the vision and determination of amateurs, artists, outsiders, ... but there have been great figures rising out of professionalism, too ... The secessionists from the regular theatre in America are few ... and so almost the complete story here is about outsiders. It remained for them to divine the universal significance of the Craig-Appia-Reinhardt phenomenon, and to begin in their inexperienced way the building of a new theatre.1

"An organization meeting of the Drama League to establish a Duluth Center was held February 26, 1912, at the Endion Methodist Church." This note in the minutes of the Duluth Center of the Drama League of America marks the beginning of the movement toward building a new theatre in Duluth. At the time of the meeting, it is doubtful whether the members realized what they were doing. They thought they were rallying to save the old theatre, believing it could be saved, and that they could save it. They knew it would be a big job, but they were not afraid to tackle big jobs in Duluth.

Duluth is emphatically a city of big things. People breathe a wider air than elsewhere; they go at their business, their improvements, their culture, in a pushing way characteristic of nowhere but the head.


2Minutes, February 26, 1912, p. 3.
of Lake Superior and the head of Lake Michigan. It is this spirit, assisting the natural location . . . that has made and is making Duluth.3

This description was written in 1890, but the same spirit was still very much alive in the founders of the Duluth Center of the Drama League of America. They believed they had energy and enthusiasm equal to the task. They were confident of success. Energy, enthusiasm and confidence are all reflected in the summary of their first year's activities that may be found in the Munutes.

Since the organization meeting the League has done quite a number of important things. Through its influence the eminent English actor, Forbes-Robertson, came to Duluth and gave that great allegorical play "The Passing of the Third Floor Back." Forbes-Robertson gave the League members and the public an excellent lecture on the drama and what the League had done to foster good drama.

To raise money to bring a lecturer on the Drama League to Duluth, we gave an amateur performance of "The Adventurer," a translation from the French play of that name, with M. Papot acting as coach and taking part. The performance proved most successful in every way, not only gaining for us enough money for our purpose but also showing what excellent talent we have in Duluth.

With the money we brought in Dr. Burton, who is an authority on the drama and very much interested in the work of the League, being one of its officers. His lecture was given at the Lyceum where we had a rally of the members to get people interested. This mass meeting was quite a success for from it our membership jumped from about 30 to 107. Dr. Burton's lecture was very good and enjoyed by the few who were at the theatre that evening. His visit was at rather an unfortunate time of the year when so many people are away.

The luncheon given for Mrs. Best was a decided success for about 60 ladies were there and Mrs. Best gave a splendid talk on "One Night Stands" and the work of the League Centers to bring good drama to those centers.

3Duluth Illustrated, p. 1.
Mrs. Holden and Mrs. Marble attended the convention in Chicago in April and witnessed the Shakesperian pageant given by school children of Chicago. A report of the convention has been sent to every member of the Center.

The different attractions which the League has worked to bring to Duluth the past year are Forbes-Robertson, "Buntie Pulls the Strings" and "Kindling," with Margaret Illington as star. For the last two of these we sent out 2,000 bulletins for each one in order to get out a good audience. The theatre reported that we had saved the day, so to speak. The reception given for Miss Illington was most entertaining and enjoyable. Both she and her husband, Edward J. Powers, stood in line to greet the League members and their friends. Everyone was charmed with her and her audiences showed that we had not worked in vain.

We now have a membership of 112. For the first year's work, this seems pretty good but we need members. Every member should feel it her duty to try to bring in new members. Most of the dues of this center fall due in February. Beginning then we want all the members to renew their dues and with new memberships we will have money to carry on our work. But we must have more members in this worthy league.

Elizabeth Morris Whyte, Secretary

Because of the significant results of their efforts the first year, when the Duluth Center met on November 12, 1912, to discuss plans for the second year, they were confident that they were ready to try to solve the problems of the theatre with projects that were more ambitious than mailing bulletins, attending receptions, and meeting to read and discuss plays. They were pleased to listen as "Miss Frankenfeld, who was the League's guest at this meeting, gave a splendid informal talk on the need of the League from the actor's standpoint," but the

4Minutes, November 12, 1912, pp. 5, 6 and 7.

5Ibid.
subsequent actions of the Duluth Center indicate that they were much more interested in what Mrs. Robert Morris Seymour of Minneapolis had to say.

Mrs. Holden then introduced Mrs. Seymour who had just recently been appointed State Organizer of the Drama League. She gave us an inspiring talk on the idea of the League, on cultivating the emotions as well as the intellect, on creating discrimination among children, and on Pageantry.6

In discussing "cultivating the emotions as well as the intellect," Mrs. Seymour suggested that new values could be realized in the study of plays by acting them out. Subsequent actions of the Duluth Center in response to this suggestion led to the founding of the Little Theatre. Mrs. Seymour's remarks about pageantry heralded a movement, instigated by the Drama League, that resulted in the writing and producing of a pageant in Duluth in 1915. What she said about "creating discrimination among children" might be considered a preamble to an active program in children's theatre undertaken by the Duluth Center.

Mrs. Seymour did not originate the idea for a children's theatre program, but she did confirm their wisdom in having already begun to work in this area. At the same meeting when Mrs. Seymour spoke of cultivation of emotions of children, "Mrs. George Morgan, as chairman of the Educational Committee, gave an excellent report on the establishment of Junior League chapters in the various schools and the giving of little plays by the children."7 At the meeting of February 11, 1913,

6Ibid.
7Ibid.
they heard "an able talk on 'The Child and the Theatre.'" The full extent of their program was outlined at the meeting of February 26, 1913.

The report of the Educational Committee showed plans for the Junior League, a plan for a class for play production, a training class to work with the children in the town and to give a play at Xmas time put on by children and acted by them, which would be an annual affair.

Children's theatre activity included the production of Rackety Packety House, a play for children, in July, 1914. Children's theatre was well established by the end of the second year. When the plans for the Little Theatre were announced in the Duluth Herald, October 8, 1914, a provision was made for children's theatre activity.

The home of the Drama League will be like the Little Theatres of New York, Chicago and Boston in that it will make possible the staging of plays studied by the League or of plays that otherwise would probably never be produced . . . Not only the grown persons of the city will be benefitted by the undertaking but the children as well, as performances for children and by children will be an important part of the work.

As is the case of the children's theatre program, the pageant idea did not originate with Mrs. Seymour, but her speaking about it encouraged the League to continue a course it already believed was important. "Pageantry was then at its height," wrote Kenneth MacGowan. "It had originated in Sherbourne, England, in 1905, and had spread so

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8 Minutes, February 11, 1913, p. 110.
9 Minutes, February 26, 1913, p. 11.
10 Duluth Herald, October 8, 1914.
rapidly that by 1913 at least 46 pageants, festivals, and masques had been produced in 15 American states.\textsuperscript{11}

Activity toward a Duluth Pageant began at the November 12, 1912, meeting, when Mrs. George Morgan, the chairman of the Educational Committee, "laid before the League the idea of a pageant based on the picturesque early history of Duluth. A motion was made and seconded that the Educational Committee take it up with the Commercial Club, Boat Club and other civic organizations interested to work out a pageant for the children of Duluth. This motion was carried."\textsuperscript{12}

The next significant step toward the Pageant came on February 11, 1913. "A motion was made, seconded and carried to bring Percy MacKaye to Duluth to lecture before the League at $1.00 a ticket and to be interviewed as to the possibilities of Duluth for pageantry."\textsuperscript{13}

At that time, Percy MacKaye was pageantry's "finest propagandist and philosopher."\textsuperscript{14} Since his visit in February, 1913 may have had considerable influence in shaping the policies and activities of the Duluth Center, it might be useful to review briefly his background and his attitude toward theatre.

Percy MacKaye was born March 16, 1875, in New York City, where his father, Steele MacKaye, was a renowned innovator in theatrical production and architecture. Percy graduated from Harvard

\textsuperscript{11}MacGowan, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 156.

\textsuperscript{12}Minutes, November 12, 1912, pp. 7 and 8.

\textsuperscript{13}Minutes, February 11, 1913, p. 10.

\textsuperscript{14}MacGowan, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 156.
University in 1897. While at Harvard, he studied playwriting under George Pierce Baker. His work as a playwright earned for him a considerable reputation in his day. Today, he is remembered as only a minor playwright. His reputation, historically, is as a major propagandist of pageantry. The reason for this is suggested by one of his biographers, Thomas Dickinson.

From his very first work the young poet had a vision of the theatre not alone as a place of entertainment but as the assembly room, the academy, the laboratory, the temple of peoples . . . He is constitutionally unable to consider life apart from the theatre or the theatre apart from life . . . He has never been able to conceive of playwriting as the one and only medium of expression of his ideas.¹⁵

Neither Sheldon Cheney nor Kenneth MacGowan, in their well known accounts of the building of the new theatre in America, gave much weight to the influence of Percy MacKaye. MacGowan seemed to laugh him off as the Johnny Appleseed of Pageants and admitted, "I am myself a little cold on pageantry."¹⁶ Cheney dismissed him as a significant influence on the development of the new American theatre altogether.

"Community theatre" is at best only a relative term. As most of us use the phrase it has nothing to do with the "civic theatre" of Percy MacKaye, in which community participation on the stage is the test. His civic theatre associations would have nothing to do with the purveying of art for the people, but would only use the art form as a convenient medium for developing a wholesome civic consciousness, through bringing many people shoulder to shoulder in play—which, like an Iowa picnic, is an excellent thing in its way, but has little do do with art enjoyment.¹⁷

¹⁷Cheney, op. cit., p. 213.
Cheney and MacGowan may have been hasty in their judgment of MacKaye, dismissing him too quickly because they did not agree with either his beliefs or his practices or both. An estimate of his probable influence on the development of American theatre practice that may be closer to the truth was made by Thomas Dickinson.

Percy MacKaye has all the defects of his virtues, the virtues of his defects. No man can be all things. He has tried to be all things. I hold for him that he is possessed of the most fecund imagination in the American stage today. Against him I hold that this very imagination, this superfluity of energy, this belief that he can set all things right has led him into activities that have ill served his cause. He has surrendered to the fallacy that by lecturing the people he can create a people's art. With much of the patience of greatness he has much of the rashness too. He would see all in his own lifetime.

The work of Percy MacKaye symbolizes the course of American drama during a generation. With half the energy, and with twice the judgment he could have accomplished ten times as much. And so could our theatre.

Whatever may be the true estimate of Percy MacKaye's influence on the development of theatre in general, there is little doubt that he influenced the activities of the Duluth Center of the Drama League in two ways, in encouraging their determination to stage a pageant in Duluth, and in inspiring their decision to open a Little Theatre.

Work on a Duluth Pageant got under way immediately after Percy MacKaye's visit. Within two months, a complete and detailed outline of the proposed pageant had been prepared by W. E. Culkin, the founder of the St. Louis County Historical Society. This outline and an explanatory story appeared in the Sunday News Tribune of Duluth.

18 Dickinson, op. cit., pp. 53-54.
April 20, 1913. It comprised the complete first page of the magazine section and it made no secret of MacKaye's influence on the project through the Drama League.

Now the Drama League has had in mind for some time the proper preservation of the city's history in pageantry. Last February the local center brought Percy MacKaye here to assist in the preparation of such an open-air production. MacKaye is the master hand responsible for the beautiful Celebration of the Roses which was held at Los Angeles some time ago. This piece of work was viewed both in histrionic circles and by the layman as one of the most successful pageants ever held in America.19

After a strong start, the movement for a pageant seemed to come to a stop while the members of the Duluth Center tried to interest other civic organizations in the project. A whole year passed before the first official action of the Duluth Center directly connected with the actual production of a pageant was taken. On March 20, 1914, "the Board appointed a committee from its members... as delegates to the assembling of the various organizations for the purpose of getting up a pageant."20

At the annual meeting on May 5, 1914, the Educational Committee reported, "The pageant is growing in popularity and is really coming."21 At that same meeting, the president, Mrs. Holden, reported upon the Central Committee for the Pageant. She said that "the credit for the Pageant was entirely due to the League and we claimed it."22

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19Duluth News Tribune, April 20, 1913.
20Minutes, March 20, 1914, p. 23.
21Minutes, May 5, 1914, p. 25.
22Ibid.
The idea of the Pageant taking the history of Duluth as background and being presented as tableaux was discussed, but the consensus of the meeting was that the "League wants not tableaux but a masque written by a poet."23

The minutes of the annual meeting make it clear that the Pageant was the most important matter considered and that the League's insistence upon a masque rather than tableaux was the most important factor in the discussion as far as they were concerned. These points were further emphasized in their news release about the annual meeting, in which about a third of the space was devoted to the pageant. In the release, Percy MacKaye was again recalled as the fountain-head of the activity leading toward the pageant.

To the league is given the credit of being first to advance the idea of the pageant and masque which it is now planning to give here during the summer of 1915. Almost two years ago the League brought Percy MacKaye here to look over the ground and local features, and give his opinion as to the advisability of planning a pageant. St. Louis, it is pointed out, has gone far afield in search of talent to assist in giving her pageant and masque fittingly, and Drama League members hope to call upon genius other than local, not only in writing, but in staging the pageant here in 1915.24

Percy MacKaye was probably the "genius other than local" they hoped to hire, since he was involved in the St. Louis Pageant mentioned in the release.25 The repeated use of the terms "pageant and masque"

23 Ibid.
24 Duluth Herald, May 7, 1914.
25 MacGowan, op. cit., p. 156, writes: "MacKaye with the aid of Thomas Wood Stevens... presented The Pageant and Masque of St. Louis on a stage 1000 feet long and 200 feet deep with a cast of 7500 St. Louisans and to an audience of 150,000 a night."
in the news release may be just a coincidence, but it raises the probability that Percy MacKaye had influenced the thinking of the leaders of the Duluth Center in the matter of pageantry, at least.

Besides encouraging Drama League of America activity in the area of pageantry, there is reason to believe that Percy MacKaye may have inspired their decision to open the Little Theatre. It is likely that he would have shared at least this much of his philosophy on the Civic Theatre with his Duluth audience:

No issue, political or industrial, before the people today exceeds in immediate importance, or prophetic meaning, the problem of public recreation. New as the voicing of this issue is in the nation, one may yet, with confidence, predict that it will soon rank among the foremost in the platforms of social and political campaigns—and be recognized at the seat of government—for its need is as dire as the problems of industrialism which cause it.26

It is possible that Percy MacKaye started the thinking about opening the Little Theatre, since such an action is within the limits of what he meant by Civic Theatre.

The Civic Theatre idea, as a distinctive issue, implies the conscious awakening of a people to self-government in the activities of its leisure. To this end organization of the arts of the theatre, participation by the people in these arts (not mere spectatorship) . . . these are chief among its essentials, and these imply a new and nobler scope for the art of theatre itself.27

No one can say for sure just how much influence Percy MacKaye had on the policies and activities of the Duluth Center. He was directly

26 MacKaye, op. cit., p. 15.
27 MacKaye, loc. cit.
involved in their efforts to produce the Pageant of 1915. It is only speculation that he influenced their decision to open a Little Theatre.

A national figure who had a more direct influence on the decision to open the Little Theatre was Thomas H. Dickinson. Kenneth MacGowan refers to Thomas H. Dickinson as "a far more powerful factor in our dramatic progress than many realize."28 He was, according to MacGowan, the first philosopher and propagandist of the little theatre movement. Dickinson was a professor at the University of Wisconsin. In 1911, he had founded the Wisconsin Dramatic Society, which produced plays with local talent in both Madison and Milwaukee, Wisconsin.29 He delivered a series of lectures to the members of the Duluth Center in the fall of 1913. He was invited back for a second series of lectures in 1914. The first, on "The Influence of Craig and Appia in Modern Theatre," was delivered on October 14, 1914, about a month before the formal opening of the Little Theatre. The last two lectures, "Bernard Shaw" and "The Influence of Russia on Modern Drama," were presented in the Little Theatre on November 20 and 21, just one week after the grand opening.

Cause and effect relationships are difficult to prove to everyone's satisfaction. The Duluth Center did not open the Little Theatre


29 Dickinson directed the program at Madison; Laura Sherry was in charge at Milwaukee. Besides producing plays, the Wisconsin Players, as they were later called, went in for such activities as the cultivation of original plays, some of which they published in The Playbook, a periodical they edited; touring their productions to other communities; lecturing to groups with kindred interests such as the Duluth Center of the Drama League and encouraging the reading of plays.
because Percy MacKaye and Thomas Dickinson suggested they should, but, in the first formative years of the organization, men who were regarded as "the finest philosopher and propagandist" of pageantry and "the first philosopher and propagandist" of the little theatre movement would probably have had some effect.

Whether or not Dickinson and MacKaye were directly or indirectly responsible for the action, it is a fact that Duluth was the first Center of the Drama League of America to open a Little Theatre, and did so in spite of the national organization, which did not approve of the idea and even opposed it at first.

Whatever the extent of their influence, it is unlikely that either MacKaye or Dickinson could have caused the Duluth Center to break precedent in direct opposition to the policy of the national organization, unless there had been strong leadership in the local center. The Duluth Center had strong leadership. Three women in particular can be credited with supplying the initiative and the leadership to open and operate the Little Theatre: Mrs. Stanley R. Holden, president, Mrs. F. A. Patrick, chairman of the Play and Players Club, and Mrs. George Morgan, chairman of the Educational Committee.

Mrs. S. R. Holden was the wife of a prominent Duluth dentist. In later years she was given the title "Mother of Duluth drama" because of her work in the Drama League, and especially for her part in opening the Little Theatre. A legend has grown up about Mrs. Holden in Duluth. It is commonly believed that she was the first
person to use the term "little theatre" to describe local amateur theatricals. When the story of how "Mrs. Holden Defied Drama League Edict" is told, one is convinced that she should be classed with Florence Nightengale and Carrie Nation as one of the truly great women of history. The liveliest version of the story was written by Nathen Cohen, drama critic for the Duluth Herald.

In the summer of 1914, Mrs. Stanley R. Holden was the revolutionary figure in the Drama League of America.

She stood up in national convention of the high and mighty of the noble League, dedicated to the development of culture in the country, and told the delegates she was going to start a Little Theatre in Duluth, policy or no policy.

PRESENT PLAYS? HEAVENS NO!

The Drama League had been established to foster an interest in the theatre. But its policy was against the actual production of the drama. That, the League dictated, was the job of the professional theatre. Drama groups affiliated with the central organization could read and discuss plays. Lecturers could speak, the home town folks could discuss the current season or go back to the days of Aristophanes and Sophocles, and consider the drama since Ibsen took hold of it in his realistic manner. But present plays themselves, heavens no!

The edict started Mrs. Holden on her way to revolutionary fame.

That summer, serving as president of the Duluth Center of the Drama League, she spread the theory of a producing theatre in which Duluthians not only could talk about the drama but could present it. All through August and early September, 1914, she was at work, preaching the gospel of a Little Theatre. Front page headlines were about the rumblings of war in Europe. In Duluth, the only news for Drama League members was the news which was to break in the papers on September 9, 1914, that the League had purchased the old Christian Science Church, a handsome little frame building at Ninth Avenue East and First Street, and that it was to be remodeled into a theatre.

30Duluth Herald, October 24, 1932.
Mr. Cohen's style is melodramatic, but his facts are essentially correct. Mrs. Holden's plan to open a Little Theatre was discouraged at the national convention, she did come back from the convention determined to open it in spite of them, and she did spearhead the drive to purchase and remodel the church for use as a Little Theatre. The details of her plan were discussed at the September 8, 1914, meeting.

The board discussed in detail and with much enthusiasm the plan of the beginning of a Little Theatre in Duluth, and it was unanimously voted to instruct the president to begin negotiations for the old building of the Christian Science with a suitable site, to be known as the Little Theatre, to be owned and operated by the Duluth Center of the Drama League.31

The details of this plan were ironed out in three subsequent meetings. On October 7, the board agreed on the type of programs that would be presented in the Little Theatre and appointed a committee "to act with the president in negotiations relative to the purchase of the Little Theatre."32 At the October 13 meeting, "it was resolved to instruct the board of directors of the Duluth Center to proceed to the purchase of the building and to have it put in order for the use of the society."33 Also at that meeting, "it was decided that the Duluth Center of the Drama League incorporate for the transaction of the necessary business of the project."34 On October 20, Mrs. Holden and

31Minutes, September 8, 1914, p. 45.
32Minutes, October 7, 1914, p. 48.
33Minutes, October 13, 1914, p. 49.
34Ibid.
Mrs. George Morgan were named trustees for the Duluth Center until the corporation papers were ready and "it was moved to instruct the president to pay fifty dollars earnest money on the purchase of the building to be remodeled into the Little Theatre."  

Only three months had passed since her plan to open a Little Theatre had been rejected by the national organization, and Mrs. Holden was authorized to pay fifty dollars earnest money on the purchase of a building to be used by the Duluth Center as a Little Theatre. Looked at from almost any perspective, this must be regarded as an impressive feat of leadership.

The leadership of Mrs. Holden was effectively supplemented. Less than one month from the date the earnest money was paid, the Little Theatre was ready to open, an impressive event made possible by the able leadership of Mrs. F. A. Patrick and Mrs. George W. Morgan. It could be argued that they, more than Mrs. Holden, were responsible for the opening of the Little Theatre, because the activities they led within the League had created the desire to have one.

Mrs. Morgan wanted a place to produce plays for study; Mrs. Patrick wanted a laboratory theatre to train performers. The program for the Little Theatre that they agreed on at the October 7, 1914 meeting reflects the leadership of both ladies.

The regular meetings of the League to be held in November, December, January and February will be given over to scenes from plays or one-act plays to be staged, rehearsed and presented under the responsibility of one

35 Minutes, October 20, 1914, p. 50.
PLATE IX

Leaders of the Little Theatre Movement in Duluth

Figure

1. Mrs. F. A. Patrick, seated, with Margaret Culkin Banning and Francis J. Webb.

2. Mrs. George Morgan.


(St. Louis County Historical Society)
member, the work to be regarded as study work. The April–March meeting will be the first annual performance of the Play and Players. 36

The distinction between the plays produced for study by Mrs. Morgan's Educational Committee and the activity of Mrs. Patrick's Plays and Players Club was emphasized in the news release about the October 13, 1914 meeting.

Another important phase of the work of the Drama League will be the production of four one-act plays at regular meetings. These plays will probably include Shaw and Lady Gregory dramas and will be given very simply. They will serve to show the talent of members of the organization who take part in them and will make it possible for those with the greatest ability to be selected for the play to be given in March under the direction of the Plays and Players, a department of the local League. This department, of which Mrs. F. A. Patrick is the chairman, plans to make this production professional in all details, in contrast to the one-act plays that are to be regarded as study work. 37

If a play were to be written about the founding of the Duluth Playhouse, much could be made of a rivalry between Mrs. Morgan and Mrs. Patrick, but it is not important, here, to try to prove it existed. Both women were respected for their talent as performers and both were able to exercise effective leadership that was instrumental in creating a need for the Little Theatre.

Mrs. Patrick had been a professional actress before becoming the second wife of one of Duluth's leading businessmen, Fred A. Patrick, founder of Patrick-Duluth Company. Her stage name had been Kate Beneteau.

36 Minutes, October 7, 1914, p. 47.
37 Duluth Herald, October 14, 1914.
For several years she had been leading woman of the Brady I. Grismer forces, and for Walker Whiteside, Robert Edeson and James A. Herne. Her mother had been an actress, Eliza Hudson, and was still remembered for her association with Maggie Mitchell, not only as an actress in her company, but as an inseparable friend.38

Both Mrs. Patrick and her mother, Mrs. Wolfarth, had been active in the Duluth Center from the beginning. Mrs. Wolfarth later began the Little Theatre’s costume shop by donating all of her stage costumes to the organization. Mrs. Patrick had performed in The Adventurer, the play that had raised the money to launch the Duluth Center. She directed and played the lead role of Queen Elizabeth in the premiere performance at the Little Theatre of Shaw’s The Dark Lady of the Sonnets.

Mrs. George W. Morgan, the wife of a prominent Duluth attorney, also had had professional experience, but was not as well known outside of Duluth as Mrs. Patrick. Her talent was well regarded in the League, at least by the secretary, who made reference to it recorded in the minutes on three separate occasions.

The League listened to the splendid reading of "Riders to the Sea" by Mrs. Morgan.39

Mrs. Dancer gave a most interesting and instructive prologue to Bernard Shaw’s HOW HE LIED TO HER HUSBAND which was read by Mrs. Morgan in her usual charming manner.40

Mrs. Morgan gave a charming reading of Cooper C. Pater’s soul drama in one act, AS WE FORGIVE THOSE.

38Minneapolis Journal, November 18, 1914.

39Minutes, February 11, 1913, p. 10.

40Minutes, October 7, 1913, p. 19.
and Mrs. Rockwell ably discussed an article by Maurice Browne on the Drama.41

Mrs. Morgan became the second president of the Duluth Center in 1916. She had to resign in the middle of her second term to move away from Duluth. She later helped found a Little Theatre in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Both Mrs. Patrick and Mrs. Morgan helped to provide leadership for programs that created a need for a Little Theatre in the Duluth Center. Later, with Mrs. Holden, they led the efforts to satisfy the need.

On November 17, 1914, the Little Theatre opened. It had been just a little over two years since the Duluth Center of the Drama League of America had held a membership rally at the Lyceum and had listened to Dr. Richard Burton say:

Five years ago people wanted to hear about fiction all the time; now they will have nothing but drama. Five years ago the theatre question was not raised, now in every city the size of Duluth and in many smaller ones, from one end of this country to the other, the agitation is going on; drama league centers are being formed, clubs and classes for the study of modern drama conducted, theatres endowed and high class amateur performances given. It is in the air.42

Less than a year later the members of the Duluth Center were searching for ways to expand their service to include more ambitious projects than issuing the bulletin of the national organization.

They began a Children's Theatre program in the schools with the Junior League and sponsored a full length play for children entitled

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41 Minutes, February 20, 1914, p. 22.

42 Duluth News Tribune, March 1, 1912.
Rackety Packety House. They aroused public interest in producing a pageant for Duluth by bringing Percy MacKay to Duluth to encourage the project and to give advice, and later organized the executive committee of representatives from the Commercial Club and other interested groups that planned and produced an historical pageant in 1915. Their search for new areas of service was climaxed by their announced intention to open the Little Theatre.

National leaders like Percy MacKay and Thomas H. Dickinson may have influenced the thinking at the Duluth Center, but it took vigorous local leadership from women like Mrs. S. R. Holden, Mrs. F. A. Patrick and Mrs. George Morgan, acting against the advice of the national organization, to buy the chapel of the First Church of Christ Scientist and convert it into a little theatre where they could produce plays for study.

The opening of the Little Theatre in Duluth was an event of national importance and historical significance. It was the first Center of the Drama League to take such a step, but soon others were following Duluth's lead. It was a dramatic, imaginative step taken by dedicated leaders of a vigorous organization. It opened many new avenues of service for the Duluth Center and it created some serious problems. These services and problems will be the subject of the next chapter.
CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST THREE SEASONS, 1914–1917

The Little Theatre of the Duluth Center of the Drama League of America opened on November 17, 1914. The details of the event were described in the local newspaper.

LITTLE THEATRE IS A SUCCESS

Triumphant Opening of Studio Playhouse
Justifies Enthusiasm of Drama League

Members of the Duluth Center of the Drama League hoped that the opening of their Little Theatre would be a success. It was more than that,—it was a triumph. The charming little auditorium that not long ago was the old Christian Science church was filled to its capacity yesterday afternoon when the Little Theatre was formally opened to the League and its guests.

Knowing that the preparations had been completed hastily, patrons were ready to make allowances. Allowances, however, were not necessary. A part of an artistic old blue window curtain slipped from its moorings, and some of the costumes were a trifle late in arriving, but no one minded that, because everyone’s most intimate acquaintances were present to exclaim over the charm of the Little Theatre. Besides, there was an opportunity for Brandon Tynan, the Joseph of "Joseph and his Brethren," to give an extra talk, which closed with a fitting tribute to his fellow-worker and co-star James O’Neill.

Mrs. S. R. Holden, president of the Drama League, made the opening speech in the Little Theatre. This was as it should be, for no one has worked so hard or so indefatigably as has Mrs. Holden to make the Drama League and the Little Theatre a success. Mrs. Holden would have been justified in making much more of a speech than she did, but perhaps she was overcome by the happiness and gratification of the moment. Certainly she had the good wishes and the congratulations of all present.
Miss Dorothy Shoemaker, leading woman of the Baldwin Players, spoke on "What the Drama League Means to the Profession." Miss Shoemaker delighted her hearers by her address and gracious manner. "The Drama League," said Miss Shoemaker, "has been of equal value to the theatre and to the community. If there is of late years a better class of plays in our theatres, it is because people have demanded them, and it is the Drama League that has stimulated and expressed this demand. Again, it has helped to establish the dramatic profession and its members on a more dignified basis. That is what I was expected to say this afternoon, but for my own part, I want to congratulate from the bottom of my heart all who have had anything to do with this glorious success."

Said Brandon Tynan: "I want to express to the Drama League the thankfulness of the dramatic profession for the interest it is taking in the welfare of the theatre. The theatre of today, no matter who says aught to the contrary, is more vital than it has been at any point in its history. It represents all the ologies and isms of our topsy-turvy existence, having as its province holding the mirror up to nature."

"The things of the spirit" said Tynan, "have been neglected. They have been taken out of our dealings with mankind. To lose the sense of the spirit in art is to lose the sense of delicacy and beauty." Mr. Tynan closed with a plea for the sweet, simple plays as opposed to the problem drama.

Mrs. George Morgan, in a brief talk, brimful of witticism, gave an outline of George Bernard Shaw's play "The Dark Lady of the Sonnets," the leading feature of the afternoon, and the old-blue curtains were drawn apart to show Walter Dacey, resplendent in a gorgeous red suit as a warden, outside Elizabeth's castle. Dacy's impersonation was perfect.

Shakespeare with a difference, Shakespeare in humorous guise and by no means a hero, was delineated in true Shavian style by R. S. Walker. While making no pretensions to the actor's art, Mr. Walker brought out with telling effect the points Shaw intended to make in his brilliant little episode—one could scarcely call it a play—and he delighted his audience.

Mrs. F. A. Patrick played Queen Elizabeth with a fine regard for the idea Shaw wished to convey—her remarkable penchant for well-turned phrases, which could not have been otherwise than a great inspiration for the playwright. Mrs. Patrick put mentality into
the part, and invested it with a dignity that even the Queen's susceptibility to flattery could not quench. Mrs. J. E. Gardner, Jr. had the role of the "dark lady"—and though her speeches were new, she handled them most acceptably.

As Mrs. Holden said in her opening talk, the Little Theatre is a delightful thing with which to experiment. Yesterday's interesting program proved that it will be ideal, to use Mrs. Holden's expression, as a studio theatre.¹

It is doubtful whether the Duluth Center could have chosen a more appropriate play to present at the opening of the Little Theatre than The Dark Lady of the Sonnets. Written by Shaw for the express purpose of gathering funds for the establishment of a National Theatre in England as a memorial to Shakespeare, it had been first performed on November 24, 1910, at the Haymarket Theatre in London, with Granville-Barker as Shakespeare. The first performance of the play in America was at the opening of the Little Theatre in Duluth, an event of national significance which many observers interpreted as being a step toward establishing the theatre in America on a sounder basis. This interpretation was attached to the event in a Harper's Weekly editorial, December 12, 1914, entitled, "Forward Duluth!"

This country is large, at any rate geographically; its cities lie far apart; theatrical travelling expenses are therefore high; the drama has been handled in the main by men with more knowledge of finance than of literature; hence a system of producing plays in New York and then exploiting them through the land. Long chains of theatres, built to make this system possible, have to be fed, in bad times as in good, and there follows feverish over production.

Certain signs are beginning, recently, of healthy local centers, such as have existed on the continent of Europe, notably in Germany, and have given variety and

¹Duluth Herald, November 18, 1914.
Figure

1. First home of the Little Theatre.

2. Scene from first production in the Little Theatre, *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, Mrs. F. A. Patrick as Queen Elizabeth.


(St. Louis County Historical Society)
PROGRAM

"The Little Theater,"
Mrs. S. R. Holden.

"The Drama League and the Stage,"
Miss Dorothy Snowman.

Introduction to the Play,
Mrs. George Morgan.

PROGRAM

"The Dark Lady of the Dinner"

Setting
Miss B. Brown
Wchester
Miss S. Silver
The Pink Lady
John D. Johnson

Chorus Director
Miss E. E. Fane


seriousness to the drama over there. Duluth is the latest. Her Little Theatre, promoted by the Drama League, has just opened with Shaw's characteristic skit, "The Dark Lady of the Sonnets," not before seen in this country.

The Little Theatre movement, as started in San Francisco, Philadelphia, Chicago, Boston and Pittsburg, has various manifestations, but all are valuable, since they make toward local energy, and away from the standardized commonplace sent out from New York. The theatres in Harvard, Dartmouth and other colleges will have a similar advantage.

In Duluth the Little Theatre is for amateurs, but the distinction between what is done by amateurs and what is done by professionals is not important. The point is what is done. In the preface to "The Dark Lady of the Sonnets," Shaw says; "This writing of plays is a great matter, forming as it does the minds and affections of men in such sort that whatsoever they see done on the stage they will presently be doing in earnest in the world, which is but a larger stage."

Americans have plenty of brain, underneath, to apply to drama. Centralization has kept it down. It is now giving indications of popping up.²

The editorial in Harper's Weekly was not the only national attention paid to the opening of the Little Theatre. Newspapers from coast to coast carried the story. Most of the accounts are similar. With slight variations in some of the phrasing, most of the stories were like the account carried in the Minneapolis Journal under the headline, "Duluth's Little Theatre."

Duluth now has a Little Theatre--thanks to the enterprise of its branch of the Drama League. A quaint little structure has been made over from a former church, wherein the study of the drama may be carried on through the production by such talent as is available of the sort of plays which the ordinary manager fears to produce least there be a loss to stand, but which repay in an intellectual and artistic way the energy, time and money spent in visualizing them.

The first play given was Bernard Shaw's "Dark Lady of the Sonnets," in which Shavian wit and philosophy are devoted to giving a human picture of Shakespeare as well as of Queen Elizabeth and other great personages of that era. The irreverent Shaw, of course, has fun with the Bard, just as in other plays he has had fun with Caesar, Cleopatra, Napoleon and other historic persons.

The leading part, that of Queen Elizabeth, was played by Mrs. F. A. Patrick, formerly Kate Beneteau, for a number of years leading woman of the Brady I. Grismer forces, and for Walker Whiteside, Robert Edeson and James A. Herne. She is a daughter, it will be remembered, of Eliza Hudson, for many years associated with Maggie Mitchell, not only as an actor in her company, but as an inseparable friend.

Brandon Tynon, who happened to be in Duluth at the time with "Joseph and His Brethren," made an amusing and interesting speech at the opening, the substance of which was that American women are responsible for the present popularity of the so-called "morbid, problem plays," and expressing the belief that in the study of the drama made possible by such theatres as this and such organizations as the Drama League lay the hope for better things on the stage.3

All of the accounts in the various newspapers across the country carried the pedigree of Mrs. Patrick, using almost the exact wording in most cases. Most made a point of emphasizing Brandon Tynan's alleged remarks about American women and morbid problem plays. Some came up with interesting embellishments of the details in the raw account of what happened which they received. One of the most interesting embellishments was dreamed up by the copy editor of the New York Telegraph, who transformed the remark, "A quaint little structure has been made over from a former church," into:

The architectural appearance of the theatre is calculated to reassure even the Puritanic elements of the lake city, now in the first and well-known spasms of dramatic melioration and futurism. It bears a strong resemblance

3Minneapolis Journal, November 18, 1914.
to a New England meeting house,—so much so that many, who might be on their way to their devotions, might fall into the theatre by mistake, and once there forget their austerer mission. 4

The opening of the Little Theatre received its share of national recognition, and the editors of the Duluth newspapers were equally aware of the significance of the step taken by the local chapter of the Drama League. The editor of the Duluth Herald, in saluting the opening, expressed the hope that, in addition to serving the cause of the national theatre, the Little Theatre would serve a more important cause in the community, the rescue of the "T.B.M."

When undirected and untrained, the average person quite naturally seeks the ten-twenty-thirty thriller in preference to Ibsen or Shaw, or Irving Berlin to Tschaikowsky. He prefers his thrills raw, and his harmony unadorned. In fact the average American man is prone rather to pride himself that he keeps his culture in his wife's name along with his religion. He looks upon himself as a Tired Business Man, too mentally fagged at the end of the day to chase the illusive in literature, art, or the drama. He prefers to be spoon-fed mentally.

The Little Theatre, which opened this afternoon under the auspices of the Duluth Branch of the Drama League, will, it is to be hoped, serve as a mental prod to the T.B.M. aforementioned. 5

The program of the first season at the Little Theatre was well designed to serve the high purposes of the national theatre and to give the T.B.M. a mental prod at the same time. An impressive bill of plays was produced. The Dark Lady of the Sonnets was followed December 18 by a play about a tired business man, James M. Barrie's The Twelve-Pound Look. 'On-O-Me-Thumb, by Fenn and Price was


5Duluth Herald, November 17, 1914.
presented January 29, 1915. There was a last minute substitution made for the February meeting. *The Workhouse Ward*, by Lady Augusta Gregory, was presented to coincide with her appearance February 11, 1915, before the Duluth Center to lecture on "Ireland and Worlds Unseen." The climax of the play production season was the big play at the Orpheum Theatre, matinee and evening, June 18, 1915: *Her Husband’s Wife*, a three-act comedy by A. E. Thomas, staged under the direction of Mr. Willard Webster, the Little Theatre’s first professional director.

In addition to the production of the plays for study at the Little Theatre and the big play by the Plays and Players Club at the Orpheum, the Drama League sponsored other activities of significance that first season. A series of lectures by Prof. Thomas Dickinson was presented. There was a benefit performance of scenes from *Othello*. The visit and lecture by Lady Gregory was the climax of the work of the Education Committee.

The scenes from *Othello* were performed by Miss Dorothy Shoemaker and her husband, Louis Leon Hall, both leading actors in the Baldwin Players, a resident stock company which performed at the Lyceum in the summer. Their performance for the benefit of the Drama League did not come up to expectations. After voting to issue only 273 tickets so as not to oversell the Little Theatre, it was probably a surprise to the managers that only 72 tickets were sold. Additional expenses to make it a "bright cultural event"—installation of a spotlight and paying an operator to run it—ran the costs up. The League realized the sum of $13.15 from the benefit. This particular type of fund raising
plan was never tried again. It was the first and last benefit performance by professional actors in the Little Theatre.6

The lecture by Lady Augusta Gregory was more profitable, financially, and more significant, historically, than the benefit performance. "The Little Theatre of the Drama League was totally inadequate to accommodate all the Duluthians who wanted to hear Lady Augusta Gregory deliver her lecture on 'Ireland and Worlds Unseen' last evening," reported a local critic. "Even after chairs had been placed in both aisles of the little auditorium and along the rear, what standing room was left was also in demand."7

Admission to the lecture was $1.00 for everyone, League members and outsiders. This had been decided at the meeting January 5, 1915, when the original plan to charge 75¢ to members and $1.00 to outsiders had been rescinded. Lady Gregory's fee would have been about $200.00. With an overflow crowd that could have numbered as many as 350,8 the Drama League would have realized at least $100.00 profit from her appearance. Even if she had earned no profit for them, she would have made an invaluable contribution to the League. She greatly enhanced the League's prestige in the community with her comments to reporters about her reactions to what she had seen at the Little Theatre.

"I have had such an exciting day," she said. "I scarcely knew which way to look. On one side I could see wonderful snow-clad Lake Superior, and on the other three delightful young people were rehearsing

6Minutes, January 5, 1915, p. 56.

7Duluth News Tribune, February 12, 1915.

8Minutes, January 5, 1915, pp. 47 and 57.
my one-act play, "The Workhouse Ward," I feel that I have gained two new countrymen and one new country woman, so faithful is their delineation of the characters in the little play."9

In her lecture, Lady Gregory took time to encourage the work at the Little Theatre by recalling her experience with William Butler Yeats in starting the National Theatre Society in Dublin. "Mr. Yeats had long seen the need of such an enterprise," she said. "Ireland had no drama, no actors."

At first we had to be content with seeing Irish plays, written by Irish writers, performed by alien actors.

For three years we tried this experiment; then, in 1901, we started with the Irish players, our own actors and actresses who would always be with us, who would love the work they were doing. The players were recruited from various circles in Dublin, all very young and with the enthusiasm of youth. It was well; for a long time the Abbey Theatre was not a paying institution and they received no salaries, acting as a side issue and supporting themselves by other means. But they kept their zest, even when playing to an audience of but ten persons; and later when a bit of prosperity came, we organized the regular company, paying salaries and requiring the whole time of the members.

Some of the first recruits dropped out, when it came to a choice of the stage as a regular occupation. But the interest was awakened and others came to be trained.10

Lady Gregory's dream for America was for each community to strive to accomplish something similar to what they had done at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, thereby creating our own national theatre. "A national theatre is perfectly possible for you," said Lady Gregory in her address.

9Duluth Herald, February 11, 1915.

10Duluth News Tribune, February 12, 1915.
Each little center can be developed, just as you are doing here with your Little Theatre. Let each community strive to express itself in its play and its players. Then there can be a central theatre—a sort of clearing house, in New York, for instance. As each center becomes sufficiently proficient—has something really worth while to offer—it can make a journey to New York and to other centers so that each may see what the others are doing. Thus a traveler arriving in New York from Europe, for instance, may go to New York's Little Theatre and see a genuine slice of life from one locality or another.

I believe you will attain better results by developing an indigenous drama, then by giving different plays by different schools, all of which is entertaining enough, but leads nowhere. At first, in the Abbey Theatre, we were required to confine ourselves to Irish contemporary plays, so that we should not interfere with the other theatres. That very fact has been our salvation. It has made us different. It has forced the development of our individuality and has been an inspiration to our writers. It has built up a living drama. The postman who brings our letters writes a bit of it. We all feel that we are part and parcel of the whole scheme of things. It is something like this that I hope you will do here in America.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}

What Lady Gregory hoped for in America was very much like what Thomas Dickinson was trying to achieve in Wisconsin. Both exerted their influence in Duluth for a grass roots drama, written and produced by and for the people of Duluth. The playwriting contest sponsored by the Drama League, which they considered their most important achievement in the second season of activity may have been the flowering of seeds planted by Professor Dickinson and Lady Gregory. The contest was for the best one-act play submitted by a member of the League—no outsiders. The fact that ten plays were submitted—one for about every fifty members—argues strongly for a predisposition...
for this kind of activity that probably had its origins in the influence of these two leaders in the little theatre movement.

The 1915-1916 season at the Little Theatre was just as exciting as the first. An interesting critical review of the activities of the second season was in the report of the Educational Committee, delivered at the annual meeting, July 5, 1916.

The work of the so-called Educational Committee ... assisted by many workers of the League, resulted in the production at the Little Theatre of seven one-act plays, the coaching and acting being the work of the League's own members. In addition, Mr. Granville-Barker, the brilliant young English dramatist and producer, was presented in a lecture at the Little Theatre in October.

The plays produced were "The Will" by Sir James Mathew Barrie ... not Mr. Barrie at his best, but at least in an interesting phase. The tired business man is not an unknown element among the patrons of the Little Theatre and protests at drama not in its pleasantest mood are not unheard. "The Will" is Barrie's dramatic picture of the age old sorrow of gaining the world and losing one's soul. The play required the most sustained effort, probably, of any attempted during the year, and it was presented with intelligence and sincerity. . . .

It was followed in December by a double bill for the holiday season of "The Maker of Dreams" by Oliphant Downs, given by Drama League Players, and "Holly and Mistletoe," in which the Junior League made its debut. . . .

In January was given one of the whimsical and imaginative bits of Lord Dunsany, "The Lost Silk Hat" being chosen and with it the smart little sketch by Cosmo Gordon Lennox, "The Impertinence of the Creature." Two of the one-act plays of Lord Dunsany were given for the first time this season in New York, introducing the delightful art of this talented Irishman to the metropolis in the same season that the Little Theatre here offered one of the examples of his drama to League members. . . .

In February was announced the name of the two plays chosen out of the ten enlisted in the Drama League contest and after serious and earnest effort the two plays were presented for three performances, March 1, 2 and 3. The
play contest was probably the most interesting effort that the Little Theatre has accomplished in its existence, the opportunity of trying for the prize which carried with it the opportunity of a production of the play, enlisting the active interest of ten amateur playwrights. . . .

The program as outlined scheduled a performance of Synge's classic, "Riders to the Sea" for April, and later a bill including a performance of "Helena's Husband," the satiric piece which has been so successful a feature of the Washington Square Players' repertoire, was announced. As several players were not available at this time and both plays could be adequately cast at a later date, the productions were postponed. It is planned to present the Moeller comedy in September and the exquisite lyric tragedy is a possible study for the future.12

As to the playwrighting contest, the Secretary's report at the annual meeting did not go so far as to call it "the most interesting effort that the Little Theatre has accomplished in its existence," but did say, "Doubtless the most interesting feature of the year was the contest, which took place during the winter."13

The first official action leading toward holding a playwrighting contest was taken at the meeting of September 10, 1915.

The question of offering a prize for the best one-act play to be written by a Duluth author and member of the League, and if accepted by the committee to be produced at the Little Theatre in February, brought out considerable discussion. A motion was made by Mrs. Baldwin, seconded by Mrs. Patrick, to offer $50.00 prize money, which carried. It was also decided to charge an admission of 50¢ to this play.14

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12 Minutes, July 5, 1916, p. 78.
13 Ibid.
14 Minutes, September 10, 1915, p. 69.
On January 4, 1915, at the Board of Managers meeting, "Mrs. Holden reported 10 plays in on the contest." At that meeting, a committee to read the plays in conjunction with the Educational Committee was named. Mr. George Morgan was appointed chairman of a special Contest Play Committee. On February 7, 1915, he reported:

Of the ten plays presented, all of which were excellent, the committee was unanimous in the selection of two plays for presentation, which were very much ahead of the plays rejected.

Since all of the entries had been submitted by members of the League, the language used in announcing the winners had to be carefully chosen. Also, to make some sort of amends to those who had had their work rejected, Mr. Morgan announced that "the Committee had decided to visit the authors and talk over their efforts, in view of helping them in such work in the future." The last part of the report was concerned with the production of the winning plays.

The Committee recommended that the plays be given two or three evenings, also that great publicity be given them. Mr. Webb is to take charge of the productions and the plays are now being cast. Mr. Webb wished to have the dates of the plays left open until the preparations were well under way. Miss Williams moved that the dates of the plays be left to the discretion of the contest committee.

15Minutes, January 4, 1915, p. 72.

16The reading committee was, "Mrs. George Morgan, Chairman; Mrs. Banning (being unable to serve Mr. Claude Washburn appointed in her place), Mr. Webb, Mrs. Woolforth and Mrs. Patrick."

17Minutes, February 7, 1915, p. 72.

18Ibid.

19Ibid.
The dates were announced: March 1, 2 and 3. The contest plays were given great publicity. Every day for two weeks prior to the opening a notice of some aspect of the program appeared in the newspapers to help prepare the potential audience. For example, the article for February 25, 1915, explained the procedure for making the final choice.

AUDIENCE WILL SIT AS JURY ON PLAYS

"You each do swear that you will impartially try the issue in this case and a true verdict give, according to law and the evidence given in court, that your own counsel and that of your fellows you will duly keep, you will say nothing to anyone concerning the case nor suffer anyone to speak to you about it and will keep your verdict until you deliver it in court, so help you God."

This is the oath you take if you would be a juror in a civil action. If your neighbor's cow has been kept in duress vile by a third neighbor and you are a juror chosen to establish justice, then you take an oath like the foregoing.

It is not the exact oath that the members of the Duluth center of the Drama League are pledging themselves to, but as upon them the verdict rests as to which of the two plays to be presented at the Little Theatre, Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings of this week, will receive the prize of $50.00, the voters are urged to come to the performance ready to analyze which of the two plays is the better.

The judges are to remember to be unswayed by emotion and to bring cool and critical consideration as to the qualities of playwriting involved in "Her Sacred Duty" and "What it Gets Down To."

After each of the performances members may vote on their choice of play. After the performance on Saturday evening the ballot box will be opened, the votes counted and the prize awarded.

Another release during the week of production proclaimed it:

MOST INTERESTING WEEK IN HISTORY OF LITTLE THEATRE21 A third release tried to build tension through suspense: "... the authorship of two plays chosen for presentation this year is the subject of much speculation and comment and the Little Theatre will undoubtedly be filled for the performances."22

Finally, by a vote of 82 to 59, the choice was made. "The locked boxes in which members of the League had cast their ballots after the performances, were opened Saturday night, and Mrs. Stanley R. Holden, president of the Drama League, opened the envelopes containing the names of the playwright."23 The name of the winning play was Her Sacred Duty. The author was Margaret Culkin Banning, who has gone on to earn a national reputation as a writer of fiction.

The first annual playwrighting contest was a success. $110.75 was taken in at the box office. There were requests for additional performances of the two winning plays which had to be turned down.24 At the August meeting of the Board of Managers, a second contest was proposed for the new season.

Mr. Sinclair moved that the prize of $50.00 be offered again this year under the same general conditions as last year, and the Play and Players Committee have authority to publish the announcement stating any change and incorporating in the announcement the statement that

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21Duluth Herald, February 27, 1915.
24Minutes, March 6, 1915, p. 75.
the League reserve acting rights of the winning play, also rights to publish the winning play in the year book. Mr. Sinclair's motion was carried. However, the playwriting contest was not destined to be established as a permanent and growing activity of the Duluth center. No scripts were submitted for the second contest, and playwriting activity was suspended in Duluth until 1927.

Next to the playwriting contest, the most significant event of the second season was the lecture by Granville-Barker. He was the last in the line of well-known theatrical figures personally to try to influence the activities at the Little Theatre in Duluth. Newspaper accounts of his lecture on October 15, 1915, indicate that he said most of the right things to launch the second season on a note of high enthusiasm. His reaction to what he saw of the Little Theatre should have been encouraging to the members.

When he was asked how the Little Theatre might be improved, how lighted and what were the possibilities for scenic productions, he insisted the theatre was all right as it was. "There is infinitely more to be gained by doing this thing yourselves," he said, "than from the advice of all the experts of the world.

"It is the things actually done which count in furthering the drama. Your experiment here, the fact that you have a playhouse of your own and actually give performances is worth more than acres and acres of talk."

"This theatre is all right," he said, looking around. "I'd undertake to stage 'Henry V' or 'Julius Caesar' here without the slightest hesitation."

"But how could you represent the two armies at the battle of Phillippee on a stage sixteen feet wide?" he was asked.

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25 Minutes, August 1, 1915, p. 84.
"Easy. One man with a banner and another with a drum are sufficient for an army. That's all Shakespeare ever used."26

Described in the Duluth newspapers as a "youngish man of excellent appearance and ideals as exquisite as his English," and given credit for being the producer "who was responsible to a great extent for the success of Shaw and who has planned some remarkable presentations of Shakespeare," Granville-Barker was reported to have "held his audience for nearly two hours with one of the most interesting lectures heard in Duluth in recent years." Barker was on a lecture tour of the United States following his productions at the New Theatre in New York, which had "stimulated the American theatre in many directions, all good."27

The title of Harley Granville-Barker's address at the Little Theatre was "Ideas in the Theatre." The ideas he presented, which were recorded in two long newspaper accounts of his appearance, reveal an attitude toward the theatre and its problems in a modern commercialized world and an approach to the solution of these problems that were not fully compatible with the aims and approaches of the Drama League of America. In a way, his approach could be described as being anti-Drama League.

What is the real thing in drama? I do not know. But do keep a bright lookout for the real thing. Train yourself to be sensitive and you will recognize it when it comes. Don't be serious about it. Don't join clubs

26Duluth Herald, October 15, 1916.

27Ibid.
and talk about it. Do it. I don't know what it is—but do it. Artists never talk about art; they do it. You don't talk about life and food; you live and eat.  

Barker told the members of Duluth Center that it was futile to pin any of their hopes on the output of the commercial theatre. "All your visiting companies will get you nothing," he said. "You must have a theatre of your own and produce something vital to your own city. Only so will the drama become truly the part of your civic life that it should be." While he was discouraging many of the activities of the Drama League, he was enthusiastically in favor of the Little Theatre experiment for the opportunities it offered the people of Duluth to do something, specifically, to act.  

Acting is not pretending; it is interpreting by the medium of your own personality.  

When I was rehearsing for a play in London, an old lady, who called upon my mother, asked where I was. My mother told her I was very busy rehearsing and that I was not at home much of the time. "Oh, they try it out before, do they?" she said. That is the ideal state of mind in which to attend a play.  

For many years acting was just as much an expression of the ordinary things as persons talking around a dinner table or children playing, and the game of pretending to be this person or that person is a favorite with children.  

The theatre is the community's natural way of expression. You cannot tell me it does not matter whether a community takes its drama good or takes it bad. We had better have a corrupt legislature and a corrupt press than a corrupt drama. Most of those who go to plays are between the ages of 15 and 25. They receive indirect influence from the theatre. They learn their manners and  

28 Ibid.  

29 Duluth News Tribune, October 15, 1916.
their morals at it. If we would only pay as much attention to the theatre as we pay to whisky!  

Harley Granville-Barker tried to impress on the audience that what was needed to produce plays was not technique but imagination.

Little minds are fond of measuring things off and speaking of technique. Turner's reply to a woman who told him when she looked at a sunset she never saw the colors he painted was, "No, madam, but don't you wish you could?" Technique is the wrong thing to judge by. In the arts it is the spirit alone that counts. Art and the response to art come from the innermost center of a man. When a cook makes a tart and adds the extra little bit of pastry, that little extra flourish is art.

In life as in art, the tragic mistake is the exploiting of the concrete thing instead of the spiritual thing; letting the material master you instead of your being master of the material. If in this community, you have not enough of what you call art, even with political freedom and prosperity—perhaps you are not happy and spiritually free.

This wasteful war is due to the lack of imagination in the people of Europe. To cultivate the imagination of man is the royal road to learning. Colleges do not educate. You might better sit down with an encyclopedia. But people with a fine imagination will reject the cheap wherever found. I implore you here tonight to realize the importance that this country should begin to express itself and become articulate. It is dangerous not to. To evade it means revolution—-a civil war of class against class as is imminent in England. I do believe that the cultivation and fostering of living art is the only answer democracy can give.  

The message by Harley Granville-Barker, which had launched the second season at the Little Theatre, expressed his high ideals for theatre, encouraged their efforts in pursuit of these ideals, and urged constant reevaluation of both motives and actions by all who were

30 Ibid.

31 Duluth Herald, October 15, 1916.
sincerely interested in doing something about the future of theatre. It was an inspiring note on which to begin. Later that season, the playwrighting contest had been a creative step in the right direction. Nevertheless, the second season ended with the April and May programs either cancelled or postponed. It seemed that after two years of experimenting in their studio theatre, the members found the novelty of play production replaced by a responsibility for play production, and with this awareness of the tremendous drain on time and energy that went with the responsibility.

Because of this new awareness, the third season at the Little Theatre is historically important primarily because it saw the introduction of a new element into the structure of the Little Theatre, one which promised to help immeasurably in maintaining the highest ideals of the Drama League, while at the same time minimizing the severe drain on the time and energy, and the strain on the nerves of the leaders. This new element was the professional director.

The first professional director to work in the Little Theatre was Miss Florence Harrison who arrived in Duluth on September 4, 1916, from Minneapolis to rehearse the casts of The Far-Away Princess and Helena's Husband, scheduled for September 14, 15 and 16. Miss Harrison had been hired on this occasion because the second annual production by the Play and Players Club, originally scheduled for May, 1916, had been cancelled. At the annual meeting on July 5, Mrs. Patrick reported for the Play and Players Committee. She explained that the reason for not giving the three-act play or the other plays
planned for May, was the failure to secure trained players. Training actors was one of the jobs the amateur directors at the Little Theatre were either unwilling or unable to handle. Professional directors, like Miss Harrison, thought of it as part of the job, and not the worst part.

Miss Harrison enjoys working with amateurs and is enthusiastic over the way in which the members of the cast take their parts.

"There is no reason why amateurs should not play just as well as professionals," said Miss Harrison. "Players like the members of the Drama League have an understanding and give plays a broader reading than the average professional, and they have an advanced attitude.

"The drama has a greater appeal than anything else. Deep down in everyone's heart he or she wants to act, and such productions as those of the Drama League give them the chance."

The terms under which Miss Harrison had been hired were laid down at a meeting on May 5, 1916.

Mrs. Rockwell of the Educational Committee, reported that as it had been impossible to give the April program, the committee recommended that about the 29th or 30th of May, the League present two one-act plays, "Helena's Husband" and "Modesty," and hire Mr. Wallace of Minneapolis as coach, with a salary of $50.00 a week and expenses. It further recommended that this serve in a measure as a substitute for the customary three-act play given at the end of the year and that the three-act play open the season next year.

The gentleman they had planned to hire, Mr. Wallace, may not have been available in the fall. Assuming that Miss Harrison probably

32 Minutes, July 5, 1916, p. 81.

33 Duluth Herald, September 5, 1916.

34 Minutes, May 5, 1916, p. 77.
was hired on the same basis that had been proposed for Mr. Wallace, she would have earned $100.00 plus expenses for two weeks work as the first professional director to work in the Little Theatre. A resume of her professional background was printed in the Duluth Herald.

Miss Harrison was a member of the Northampton players their first season. Northampton, Mass., has the distinction of having the first Municipal theatre in this country. The next year she was with John Drew under Frohman management, but after playing things she didn't like she decided to put on plays of a higher standard. She has been with the Wisconsin players of Milwaukee, an organization like the Drama League, and has coached many plays in Minneapolis, among which were a Russian, a French and an English play that were given last winter for Wells College.35

A feature writer for the Duluth News Tribune was very impressed with Miss Harrison's ability to work with the amateur actors at the Little Theatre.

Duluth dramatics have now passed that amateurish stage where in order to keep people happy, everyone in the cast must be given equal praise. At an early rehearsal of the present plays, at the Little Theatre, it was gratifying to notice that Miss Florence Harrison, while coaching the actors, did not find it necessary to resort to untruthful encouraging or constant patting on the back. She credited her actors with sufficient sincerity of purpose to mention only their shortcomings and to improve these by indicating herself how a part should be done. Often she would say, "Oh, no, that won't do at all. Do that over." And the actors were consistently big enough to forget themselves and try again.36

By today's standards, this would hardly seem to be a matter for great rejoicing, but it may have been a giant step forward at that time. One of the first secretaries of the Drama League, Marie

d'Autremont Gerry, wrote a short history of the Little Theatre in 1939 in which she tells an anecdote that points out just how serious the problem of hurting the actors' feelings was for an earlier director who had been hired by the League.

It seems Willard Webster was at one time called to direct a play, and whether the fact that he had been with Otis Skinner in "Kismet" or the fact that he came as an impersonal outsider, purely unconcerned with the 400, and only concerned with putting on a good show, influenced his actions, is unknown. But, what is known is that he raised a havoc with the actors that resulted in tears, recriminations, in one case actual nausea and in another a letter from an irate husband challenging him to a duel, because he had told the wife she had a face like a millpond, or words to that effect. All because Mr. Webster was determined to put on a good performance, and he did. But had it not been for the mediation of Mrs. Holden, the director under fire would have made a faster trip home than he had made coming to Duluth and there would have been no performance.

After Miss Harrison, the Duluth Center returned to local amateur direction for one more production. Francis Webb directed three one-acts for the nights of October 19, 20 and 21. The plays were: The Glittering Gate by Lord Dunsany, The Green Coat by A. DeMusset and Emile Augier, and The Carrier Pigeon by E. Phillpotts. Mr. Laceby was hired to direct Milestones, the big play for the year, to be presented at the Lyceum, December 14, 15 and 16.

37Marie d'Autremont Gerry The Little Theatre of Duluth, (unpublished manuscript in the files of the St. Louis Co. Historical Society, dated 1939). Willard Webster was the first director hired to work for the Duluth Center of the Drama League of America. He directed Her Husband's Wife, by A. E. Thomas, the first annual production by the Plays and Players Club, that had been presented at the Orpheum on June 18, 1915. He never directed in the Little Theatre. Miss Harrison was the first director hired to direct a production in the Little Theatre. The first director under contract for more than one production, and the first under contract for a season was W. E. Laceby.
They had no idea whom they would get to direct *Milestones* when they announced the production, but they promised, "A professional director, the best the Drama League can secure, will be in charge of the production." The story of how Mr. Laceby came to be chosen was explained in a publicity release.

It was only by a very fortunate chance that Mr. Patrick was able to procure Mr. Laceby as coach for "Milestones." Mr. Laceby is the only producer of the play in this country. The original London company under Frank Vernon came to America and made a tour of "Milestones" in 1912.

At that time Mr. Laceby was supporting Billie Burke in a play of Pinero's. Previous to that he had played in musical comedy under George Edwards' management in England and South Africa and had also acted in Australia with the famous cellist Van Bien in a little play written for the latter.

After his engagement with Billie Burke, he produced "Milestones" himself, taking the part of "Pym" and touring with it as far as San Francisco. Altogether he has had a professional career of 20 years, his present coaching in Duluth being the first break. Upon writing to New York for information regarding an adequate coach for the Duluth production, Mrs. Patrick was directed at once to Mr. Laceby who fortunately was at that time taking a short rest after an engagement.

Under the terms of Mr. Laceby's first contract with the Duluth Center, he directed three one-act plays in the Little Theatre on November 30 and December 1, 1916, as well as *Milestones* at the Lyceum on December 15 and 16. The one-acts were: *The Master of the House* by S. Houghton, *Lonesome Lure* by H. Brighouse, and *The Philosopher in the Apple Orchard* by A. Hope. For the two productions he received

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38 *Duluth News Tribune*, October 7, 1916.

39 *Duluth Herald*, November 17, 1916.
$525.00. Just after the close of *Milestones*, "The Drama League accepted Mr. Laceby's proposition to remain here for balance of season at $700.00.‖

He directed three more programs of one-acts and the full length production of *Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines*, by Clyde Fitch, as a benefit for the Red Cross, before the end of the third season at the Little Theatre. The one-acts were produced January 23 and 24, February 27 and 28, and March 29 and 30. The plays were: *The Last Visit* by H. Sudermann, *The Beau of Bath* by Constance MacKay and *Fancy Free* by S. Houghton in January; *The Monkey's Paw* by W. W. Jacobs, and *Sprawling the News* by Lady Gregory in February; and *Food* by Wm. D. DeMille, and *Pater Noster* by F. Coppes in March. The Clyde Fitch play was presented May 2 and 3, 1917, at the Orpheum.

During his tenure as the first resident professional director, W. E. Laceby directed eleven one-act and two full-length plays.

In 1917, when Constance D'Arcy MacKay wrote her "complete survey of one of the newest, freest, most potent and democratic forces in the art of the American stage--the Little Theatre," Duluth was a model operation to point to with pride.

... The Little Theatre of Duluth has thriven from the start because it has set art before the people at prices comparable to the movies. The Little Theatre of Duluth is one of the most financially successful Little Theatres in the United States. And it is artistically successful also.

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40 Minutes, December 17, 1916, p. 88.

After only three years it owns its own theatre building, and this without any endowment or contingent fund to smooth the way. It has hoed its own row, and instead of asking favors of its townsfolk has bestowed favors upon them, a truly independent spirit!

In a word, the Little Theatre of Duluth tries to be (and is) the intellectual whetstone of the community. Both Granville-Barker and Lady Gregory have manifested their keen interest in its progressive spirit and definite artistic accomplishment.42

If Miss MacKay had waited one year, until 1918, to publish *The Little Theatre In The United States*, there probably would have been no section devoted to "The Little Theatre of Duluth." There may not have been even a mention. Other than one Christmas program by the Junior League on December 15, 1917, there was no Drama League activity in the Little Theatre for two and a half years, and the attempt to revive the activity after World War I did not succeed.

The Little Theatre of Duluth opened with a flourish on November 17, 1914. It produced three glorious seasons of exciting programs, including lectures by such prominent persons as Thomas Dickinson, Lady Gregory and Granville-Barker, and the successful playwrighting contest of 1915. All told, twenty six one-act plays, two full-length plays and two programs of children's theatre had been produced by the Duluth Center. Three professional directors had served the group, the last, W. E. Laceby, assuming the position of resident director, which would become the typical pattern in little theatres in later years. When Miss MacKay's book came out, the Little Theatre gave

every outward appearance of being a vigorous, successful organization with much to be proud of and on its way to greater accomplishments. Yet, the Little Theatre failed. Some of the reasons for this failure will be examined in the next chapter.
CHAPTER V

THE CLOSING OF THE LITTLE THEATRE, 1917-1920

Claude Merton Wise, the author of *Dramatics for School and Community*, a textbook published in 1934, looked upon the little theatre movement as a transition between "the decadent commercial theatre and the nascent art theatre," but it did not appear to him to be a smooth transition.

These efforts are deserving of the highest praise, but, with the notable exception of those of the Guild, are likely to be sporadic and fluctuating. At best, they ordinarily represent too slow and uncertain a growth. Outside of New York at least, only some new organization, with the high ideals of the little theatre, but with practical business methods, can gain a sure foothold and endure. . . . This art theatre must retain all the developments and advantages of the little theatre and of the amateur spirit, but must professionalize these to the point of efficiency: for the lack of definite policies are the faults that will, if not remedied, bring about the loss of much that the movement has gained.¹

If the leaders of the Little Theatre of Duluth had not recognized the deficiencies in their practices of business management, in the instability of their organizational structure, and in the confusion in their operational policies, and if they had not corrected these faults when they reorganized in 1926, everything that had been gained by the Duluth Center of the Drama League of America might have been lost.

The fault that was most difficult to recognize, or acknowledge, was the lack of definite policies. When the Duluth Center was organized in 1912, the members knew what they stood for and what they intended to do to save the theatre in America. It was not until they opened their Little Theatre that the lack of definite policies became a problem. The problem developed because they did not have a clear answer to the question, Why do we produce plays?

They were always careful to distinguish between the plays produced for study at the Little Theatre and their "more pretentious" productions each year by the Plays and Players Club, in order to reassure everyone that they were not trying to compete with regular entertainment enterprises. This defensive attitude stood in the way of their making a firm commitment to play-production as an end worth pursuing for its own sake and left them without a clearly defined policy.

Because there was no policy regarding play production, the members were not sure what their attitude should be toward the plays produced. Privately, they may have looked upon their activity with an attitude similar to that of the secretary of the Educational Committee.

This committee would bespeak for all the workers that are to come a sympathetic audience and one which realizes its responsibilities in making the Little Theatre the place of fun that it may be. The idea is not at all that the plays attempted here are to be presented in a manner that cannot be excelled, but merely that from the large literature of one-act plays, an interesting form of dramatic art which is practically cut off from the local public so far as professional production goes, are interesting in themselves, well worth the time spent in producing them, and they are then offered for the pleasure of the Little Theatre patrons, through the interpretation of their own
player. . . . The work will not be of even excellence the year through, but for the most part it will be earnest and sincere and the Little Theatre should provide much pleasure and some little value in the community life.\textsuperscript{2}

While privately believing that they would be satisfied with work of uneven excellence as long as it was earnest and sincere and the Little Theatre remained the place of fun it ought to be, they probably would have been pleased to have the public read such things as this:

It is not to be imagined that these persons are dreamers who dabble in a lot of dreary offerings by dubious playwrights. Quite to the contrary, they choose with discrimination from the best, give to their presentations an enviable earnestness and not unlike New York's Washington Square Players, they are succeeding in their purpose to provide worthy portrayals of playlets that otherwise would remain in comparative passivity.

Further, they would have the reviewer of their work forget the usual role of amiable adulent, for they seek to deserve serious consideration rather than silly praise.\textsuperscript{3}

Many amateur theatre organizations suffer from this dual standard attitude toward their productions. At the Little Theatre it was more than an annoying affectation. There it was a symptom of a general confusion about the policies of the organization that was partially caused by a continued affiliation with the Drama League of America and a continued endorsement of its policies even when they were inappropriate to the situation at Duluth.

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The Duluth Center of the Drama League of America was inactive for two and a half years during World War I. When activity was resumed in 1919, it was apparent that the League approach was not going to work. "The Drama League of America has had an unsuccessful career in many cities of the country," commented the editor of the Duluth Herald in welcoming the local center's return to active duty, "Its efforts have been idealistic and have lacked practical direction, and in some cases there has been a lack of sympathy and co-operation that has caused theatre managers much trouble."4

The editor either did not know or had forgotten that the League was supposed to cause theatre managers trouble when they did not co-operate with the League's idealistic efforts. The editor was pleased to note that the Duluth center was more sensible in this regard. "The leaders of the League here seem to have grasped the vital points necessary for practical work."

There is one difficulty that the League will have to combat: there will be a coming together of commercialism and idealism. If the theatre managers and the League are to co-operate, there must be considerable diplomacy exercised. The theatre management will cater to the public as a whole, as its purpose is to make money while the purpose of the League is to promote entertainment that appeals largely to its own class of theatre-goers.5

As ever, the editor was solidly behind any effort to help people accept things as they are. He concluded his praise of the local center:

There is no use mincing words; Duluth's legitimate stage has gone into a slump. There is one reason for

4Duluth Herald, September 17, 1919.
5Ibid.
The action taken yesterday is the consummation of a plan that has been under discussion by the old Drama League members for more than a year and was unanimous. The question of severing the connection between the local institution and the national organization was brought up at the first meeting held during the present season. The Drama League of America is an organization established some years ago for the promotion of theatre going. The Duluth branch began with the same academic plan but under the leadership of its first president, Mrs. S. R. Holden, soon branched out into what was then regarded and has

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6 Ibid.
7 Minutes, September 16, 1919, p. 106.
8 Minutes, December 1, 1919, p. 110.
since been proved to be a much larger field. The Little Theatre of Duluth, which was established through the enthusiastic efforts of Mrs. Holden and her associates, was the first institution of the kind ever attempted. . . .

The Duluth Little Theatre prospered season after season largely because of the enthusiasm and hard work of the original officers and members. Around it was built the nucleus of an acting organization that made a name for itself in the city.

This year it was the desire of the founders of the enterprise to give it even larger scope than it had enjoyed heretofore. One of the big questions to be decided was, whether or not the per capita tax paid by all members to the national organization could not better be used at home in the furtherance of its broad program. Considerable correspondence passed between the officers of the local organization and the national officers and final decision to sever connections was reached yesterday afternoon.

The policies of the Little Theatre of Duluth were no clearer after withdrawing from the national organization. The only change was that they now kept all of the money paid for dues, but the Drama League philosophy and attitude still prevailed. They did not yet have a clear commitment to play production as the primary function of their Little Theatre organization. There was no evidence of a change in policy in the "Important Notice" that was printed on the back page of the first program in the Little Theatre by the newly named organization.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

The Little Theatre of Duluth has become the official style and title of the organization which has assumed charge of the activities hitherto carried on by the Duluth Center, Drama League of America.

9Duluth News Tribune, December 3, 1919.
Its aims and ideals are directed to the building up in Duluth of a real and sound interest in the theatre, the carrying on of educational work in the schools, the promotion of legitimate amusement enterprises throughout the city—in short to make the theatre a real power in the community for both entertainment and enlightenment—here in the Little Theatre, in the commercial theatres and motion picture houses and in the concert, school and recreational centers of the community.

Special Note One of our big aims is to make the legitimate theatre pay. We cannot do that unless wholesome, entertaining performances like "Tillie" are patronized...10

The "Special Note" made it quite clear that the Little Theatre was not attempting to compete with the legitimate theatre. The point was re-emphasized in a publicity release:

The limitation of admission to performances to members only is due to the small capacity of the Little Theatre and the fact that the organization does not wish in any way to be considered a competition of regular amusement enterprises.11

With a new name and the same old policies, the Little Theatre of Duluth launched what would be a spectacularly unimpressive season on a note of high enthusiasm.

A. F. Ferguson, president of the League, has had much practical experience in theatricals and knows the problems that a manager has to contend with. He is eminently qualified to pilot the activities of the League here and we believe he will do a great deal for the stage here. Other members of the organization are intelligent followers of theatricals and prominent in business and social life of the city. They should have a remarkable influence for good.12

10Program in Scrapbook of Little Theatre of Duluth (on file at St. Louis County Historical Society).

11Duluth News Tribune, November 3, 1919.

12Duluth Herald, October 19, 1919.
The leadership of Albert M. Ferguson was as warm and personal as it was ineffective. His notices to the membership began, "Dear Old Friend," and ended with his personal signature on each. The style was that of a friendly letter. For example, his announcement of the first program of the season ended:

You'll be there of course. Either Monday or Tuesday night. You'll get a real welcome. At least I'll try to make it as real as I can and feel it should be and as I think it—'cause that's my job.13

Ferguson took personal pride in the accomplishments of the organization during the first months he headed it. In one letter he wrote:

Someone has informed us that we've had very good luck in recommending commercial shows this season. Of course we haven't thought about it as luck. We've rather flattered ourselves on our unerring judgment! However—what is one man's amusement bores another to tears and one of these days our own super intelligence will slip a cog. While we look forward to that sort of thing once in a while it isn't going to happen next week when the Gallo opera establishment will be represented here by Jeff D'Angeles and his associates of the light opera bunch.14

Ferguson proved right in his prediction—about his super intelligence slipping a cog not about the success of the light opera company. He was not as good a sport about his faulty predicting as one might have expected. "Our familiarity seems to have bred a certain amount of contempt for the opinions we have thus introduced," he wrote

13Letter from Albert M. Ferguson, president, Little Theatre of Duluth, to the members October 30, 1919. (In scrapbook of the Little Theatre on file at St. Louis County Historical Society.)

14Letter, Ferguson to members, January 10, 1920.
on January 15, 1920, "because there were several persons we have so addressed who were not among those present at the Gilbert and Sullivan revivals this week."15

One week after scolding the membership for "not holding up our end of the bureau of providing amusements of the city," his letter contained the first hint of disillusionment. He wrote:

It occurs to the promising department of the Little Theatre that a statement was made at the beginning of the season when the glamour of the opening bill quite swept all the members into a state of happy expectance—plus a certain amount of confidence in their ability to bring expectation to fruition—that efforts were being made to bring Souther and Marlowe to Duluth for one or two nights. The efforts availed nothing.16

He went on to explain that the two stars were coming to Minneapolis and that it might be worth missing a day's work to go see them there and at least save the theatre in that city. Ferguson's disillusionment was complete by the time he wrote his last letter on April 20, 1920.

Dear Old Friend,

The Little Theatre set out at the beginning of this season to make its work felt in a variety of places and we feel we are betraying no confidence when we say that we had much to do with the selection of the leading lady for the High School Senior Class Play.

Being responsible for at least a part of it, therefore, and because we are pledged to do everything in our power to promote the work of these High School boys and girls who are coming into our own plays from time to time—we had two of them in the last program—we should give all the support we can to this production.


16Letter, Ferguson to members, January 22, 1920.
P. S. Just because we haven't said anything about the American Legion Band for some time it doesn't mean we are not thinking of it. We haven't any illusions about the band at all. It needs practice and rehearsal. But it needs enthusiastic support from everybody in Duluth too and the practice and rehearsals will result from the kind of enthusiasm Duluth can show if it puts its mind to it. The Little Theatre members owe it to music generally and to Duluth particularly to do everything in their power to promote the success of this organization.17

On December 1, 1920, Albert Ferguson "submitted a written report on the present bad condition of the League, and its failure to accomplish anything or put on any plays since last spring, and personally took the blame for the situation."18 The failure of the Little Theatre of Duluth to accomplish anything in the 1919-1920 season was not due to the failure of Ferguson's personal leadership, unless he can be blamed for the lack of definite policies, a fault they had had since opening the Little Theatre. The worst he can be blamed for is not creating new policies. He did his very best to administer the old.

The Little Theatre of Duluth might have survived the lack of sound operational policies if it had not been for the lack of sound practices of business management. The first impractical decision made in regard to the Little Theatre was made in September, 1914—the decision to buy it. The venture from the beginning was more a glamorous stunt than a carefully planned business venture. The order in which the events happened indicate an almost carefree attitude toward launching the business of owning and operating a little theatre.

17Letter, Ferguson to members, April 20, 1920.

18Minutes, December 1, 1920, p. 114.
It was not until after the decision to buy the Church and remodel it for use as a little theatre had been made that it was decided to incorporate in order to be able to be legally qualified to own property and do business. Only after these decisions were made did they decide that the project would be financed by issuing bonds.

Even though they had no idea of how much demand there would be for such a facility, the members of the Duluth Center believed when they purchased the Little Theatre that it would support itself through rent paid for its use by other groups for meetings and the like. On November 24, 1914, one week after the grand opening, "the matter of the renting of the Little Theatre was thoroughly discussed."

On motion the following scale of prices, for the renting of the auditorium, was adopted subject to the discretion of the Theatre committee; evening meeting, $20.00; afternoon meeting, $15.00; morning meeting, $10.00; for club purposes on season's contract, one meeting a month, $10.00, two meetings a month, $15.00.19

Rental of the Little Theatre by other groups never came up to expectations. A complete report is not available, but the few mentions of proposals to rent it which appear in the minutes give the impression that the renting business was not profitable. Only four tenants, or potential tenants, were mentioned:

August 23, 1915: On motion officers to negotiate with representatives of Congregational Church for the renting of the Little Theatre for two religious services a week until the new building was erected.20

19 Minutes, November 24, 1914, p. 53.

20 Minutes, August 23, 1915, p. 68.
January 4, 1916: The Little Theatre was rented by the Theosophical Society for four nights at $55.00. (It was regularly moved to endorse this action.) This rate is $25.00 less than the rate previously set for evening meetings.

October 31, 1916: Mr. Silberstein moved that the Little Theatre be rented to B'nai Brith for the sum of $20.00 for the night of November 27, 1916. Meeting was later changed to December 11.

The last mention in the minutes of a potential tenant was made on September 16, 1919. A letter was read from Miss Marie Clark requesting terms to use the Little Theatre for her dancing school. The letter was referred to the House Committee with power granted to act for the League in reaching an agreement with Miss Clark.

While proceeds from renting the Little Theatre building never came up to the expectations of the owners, the cost of maintaining the building after it had been remodeled for use as a theatre was beyond their wildest dreams. A built-in recurring expense that was obviously not given careful consideration was the matter of renting the lot on which it stood at Ninth Avenue East and First Street. Rent of $200.00 a year was paid for the first two years. When that option ran out, since there was no provision in the lease for renewal, the rent was raised twenty-five per cent. On August 24, 1916, "Mr. Sinclair moved that the officers of the club be authorized to accept the proposal of Mrs. Baker to renew the lease at $250.00 a year for three years with the privilege of a two-year extension of lease at same price."  

22 Minutes, October 31, 1916, p. 86.
23 Minutes, August 24, 1916, p. 82.
Another expense that was not carefully considered was the cost of remodeling a church hall into a theatre. Much needed to be done.

The building has been repainted and interior has been redecorated in tones of tan and blue. The stage has been rebuilt, two dressing rooms have been constructed in the basement and footlights have been put in. This was a large order of remodeling to begin with, and the dressing rooms still had to be heated so the building could be used in the winter.

As it turned out, the entire heating system for the building had to be replaced, costing close to $1000.00 in the first year of operating the building. Other improvements were made. The stage was deepened; new drapes were installed. By December, 1916, the outstanding debts of the Duluth Center were $890.00. That total included a loan of $500.00 from the First National Bank taken out in November for thirty days to cover current expenses. The League leaders probably were beginning to realize that owning and operating their Little Theatre was a very serious business—not the fun they had anticipated.

Faced with the outstanding debt of $890.00, Mrs. Holden appointed a committee of three to solicit aid in diminishing it. On January 3, 1917, the committee reported back with a plan to issue eight more bonds at $100.00 each, and to have the proceeds of a big

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24 *Duluth Herald*, November 17, 1914.


play given each fall and each spring, beginning fall, 1917, to go into a sinking fund for refunding the bonds. The chief significance of the second part of the committee's report lies in the fact that there had been no provision for refunding the first issue of bonds by the Little Theatre and these would be maturing in just three years.

The bonds were sold, but the plays were never produced and the bills did not stop. May 23, 1917, bills totaled $657.71. There was $111.79 on hand. Even if the big plays had been produced it is doubtful whether they would have made any substantial difference in the balance sheets. The big play of 1915, Her Husband's Wife, had netted the League only $259.19. Milestones, in the fall of 1917, had been more profitable, but Mr. Laceby's fee for directing it was $500.00. There seemed to be no way to turn the Little Theatre into anything but a losing proposition.

The effect on the members of maintaining their Little Theatre always in the red can be inferred from the final words in the minutes of a meeting held on May 29, 1917. Mrs. Holden was acting secretary. "10 P.M. No further business appearing, a motion to adjourn prevailed," she wrote, then added in block capital letters: "PEACE AND HARMONY IN EVIDENCE."  

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28 Minutes, January 3, 1917, p. 89.
29 Minutes, May 23, 1917, p. 91.
30 Minutes, June 6, 1915, p. 66.
31 Minutes, May 29, 1917, p. 94.
The minutes do not record any meetings for any purpose between October 15, 1917 and July 1, 1918. When the League met July 1, "Mr. J. L. Washburn spoke on the confused condition in which the minutes and all the records of the League had been found."32

At the time of that meeting, the League had been without a president for about nine months. Mrs. George Morgan, who had succeeded Mrs. Holden as president in 1916 and had been reelected in 1917, had moved from Duluth in October, 1917. An executive committee of three prominent Duluth businessmen—F. A. Patrick, E. A. Silberstein and J. L. Washburn—had taken control for the remainder of her tenure. Mrs. Holden was returned to office at the July meeting, when there was still more bad financial news.

Mr. E. A. Silberstein reported for the Treasurer whose office was reported vacant, and said that the total outstanding indebtedness amounted to $1334.74. Mr. Washburn moved the acceptance of the Treasurer's report and move further that it be spread upon the minutes with a detailed statement of receipts and disbursements during the past year. The motion was carried.33

It was a day when everyone had bad tidings. The membership committee reported they "had made an effort to obtain new members and retain old members and that only 100 members had been enrolled to date."34 Even the banks were deserting the sinking League. Mr. F. A. Patrick "spoke of effort to raise the indebtedness of the Duluth

32Minutes, July 1, 1917, p. 96.

33Ibid.

34Ibid.
Center of the Drama League and told that by a final effort the Committee had obtained $1325.00 for the purpose of liquidating this indebtedness.\(^{35}\)

The final blow to the pride of the leaders and to the prestige of the organization was delivered at that July 1, 1918 meeting. It had been a source of real pride for them to have begun their Little Theatre with the announcement that they had asked nothing from anyone. Constance MacKay had boasted for them that:

> After only three years it owns its own theatre building, and this without any endowment or contingent fund to smooth the way. It has hoed its own row, and instead of asking favors of its townsfolk has bestowed favors upon them, a truly independent spirit.\(^{36}\)

At that meeting, the executive committee announced that they had begun to solicit contributions for a Deficit Fund. To save a little face, "it was suggested that subscribers to the fund to liquidate the indebtedness of the Duluth Center be considered subscribing members of the League."\(^{37}\) In contributions ranging from $50.00 to $250.00, the Deficit Fund reached $1075.00 by July 6, 1918.

When the unhappy meeting of July 1, 1918 adjourned, the Duluth Center was on its way to solvency, but it was not self supporting. On the recommendation of the Executive Committee, play-giving was suspended for the duration of the war. It was agreed "that the Little Theatre should be used for lectures, rehearsals of local dramatic events

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\(^{35}\)Ibid.

\(^{36}\)Constance D'Arcy MacKay, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

\(^{37}\)Minutes, July 1, 1918, p. 96.
unconnected with the League and for events of a patriotic nature." 38

The end result of the bad business practices of the League was that for two and a half years they could not afford to use their Little Theatre for its primary purpose—to produce Drama League plays for study.

When, after the war, the League made one last try at operating in their Little Theatre, they tried to be more business-like. On August 22, 1919, a House Committee was authorized, and Mrs. Holden, Mrs. Cullum and Mrs. Ferguson were appointed to work with chairman Lawrence R. Plank. The duties of the House Committee, as defined at the meeting of September 16, 1919, "were in every respect similar to that of the resident manager of a theatre, the Plays and Players Committee standing in the position of the company on tour." 39

Reopening brought added expenses: more fire insurance, increasing it to $4000.00 on the building and $1000.00 on the contents, had to be purchased; the lower part of the building became unusable and had to be sealed up at a cost of $88.00. By May 20, 1920, there was a deficit of $540.00. It was estimated that the League needed at least $600.00 to liquidate its deficit and the Treasurer was authorized to borrow it. 40

This time the Little Theatre could not be rescued by soliciting a deficit fund as had been done in 1918. Another issue of bonds was

38 Ibid.
39 Minutes, September 16, 1919, p. 104.
40 Minutes, May 20, 1920, p. 113.
out of the question. There was only one course of action open to the League. A motion to take that step was made at the meeting of the Drama League held, "pursuant to special call of the president and notice duly sent to the members," on December 6, 1920, at 12:15 P.M. at the Commercial Club. A special committee reported:

that they had carefully considered the situation and had found it practically impossible to obtain the people necessary to undertake the work of reviving the activities of the League and that so far as they could see the only solution was to sell the Little Theatre building, pay the debts of the League, and discontinue operations for the present.

After some discussion and various suggestions, it was moved that the League discontinue active operations for the present, and that its affairs be placed in the hands of an Executive Committee of three, to wind up the affairs of the League, and to represent the League during its period of dormancy, and to make preparations for reviving it in the Fall of 1921.41

An amendment to the motion was made and carried to adjourn until December 14, 1920, at 4:00 P.M. at the Little Theatre building. All members were to be notified of the meeting and its purpose. The News Tribune of December 15, 1920, described the events of the last meeting of the Drama League in their Little Theatre.

"It sort of breaks one's heart to see the old place go," said Mrs. S. R. Holden, who was the first president of the Duluth Little Theatre and who has since been one of its stanchest supporters. "But then, some day we'll build a place twice as big."

Seven members of the 400 enrolled in the Little Theatre organization were present at the annual meeting at the Little Theatre yesterday afternoon. F. A. Patrick suggested that as all members had been informed that the meeting yesterday was to determine whether the Little Theatre should discontinue its activities this

41 Minutes, December 6, 1920, p. 116.
winter because of financial deficit left over from last season, a meeting of the board of directors be called by A. F. Ferguson, president, to decide the disposition of the Little Theatre building at Ninth Avenue East and First Street.42

Since a quorum of eleven was needed to do business at a general meeting of the League, action on the motion could not be taken at that time.

On December 21, 1920, at the meeting of the Board of Managers with Albert F. Ferguson presiding, the action was finally taken.

Upon motion duly made, seconded and carried the following resolution was unanimously adopted:

RESOLVED: That the affairs of the corporation be, and they are hereby placed in the hands of a committee of three Trustees, who are authorized to conduct its affairs and dispose of the property known as the "Little Theatre of Duluth," and its contents in such manner as they see fit, and to take such further action toward promoting the interest of the corporation as may in their judgment seem appropriate.

RESOLVED FURTHER: That the acceptance of the appointment to the committee by the persons named will terminate the administration of the officers and Board of Managers of the corporation; such officers, however, to remain nominally in office until their successors have been elected and have qualified, or until the corporation is legally dissolved. All records, correspondence, minute books and accounts of such officers will be turned over to the Chairman.

RESOLVED FURTHER: That the personnel of this committee be as follows: Mrs. S. R. Holden, Mr. F. A. Patrick, Mr. A. C. LeDuc.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned.43

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43 Minutes, December 21, 1920, p. 118.
Selling the Little Theatre building was the first sensible business decision the League had made in its short history. The building was a liability they could not afford to carry. Moreover, the trustees proved to be good stewards. What was left after the debts were paid was invested wisely and the funds increased. The Little Theatre of Duluth had three faults that brought the original operation to a stop in 1920 after only six years: confused policies toward play production, impractical business practices, and an unstable organizational structure. When activities were resumed in 1926, a thoughtful revision of the articles of incorporation and the by-laws defined a clear policy toward play production and provided a stable, workable structure with which to manage the affairs of the Little Theatre of Duluth, Inc., according to sound business procedures. These revisions in the constitution and by-laws will be discussed in the next chapter.
Revival of interest in the Little Theatre of Duluth was greeted by an editorial in the Duluth Herald, November 19, 1926.

It is good news that the Little Theatre movement, which was so lively here a few years ago and which got dropped along with many other interesting things when the war swept over the world, has been revived and will be made again a living and fruitful factor in the community life.

The pending reorganization under which the Little Theatre will be revived and will take over the work—and the accumulated fund—of the Drama League is accompanied by a very promising show of enthusiastic interest that promises well for the future of this movement.¹

It was a very promising show of enthusiastic interest when nearly 100 people turned up at the informal meeting called to revive the Duluth Center of the Drama League of America on November, 1926. The meeting was held in the Chamber of Commerce room at the Hotel Duluth. In the absence of the president, Mr. Albert Ferguson, who had moved permanently from Duluth, Mrs. S. R. Holden, the first vice-president, presided. After announcing the purpose of the meeting, she called upon James G. Nye, the secretary pro tem for that meeting, to discuss the questions involved in reorganizing.

Mr. Nye stated that in view of the fact that there was a substantial sum of money which belongs to the old

¹Duluth Herald, November 19, 1926.
organization, and which is now being administered by the Board of Trustees appointed in 1920, consisting of Mrs. S. R. Holden, F. A. Patrick, and A. C. LeDuc, it would be necessary to have a legally called meeting of the old corporation, and as the present meeting was an informal one, no actual business involving the corporation could be transacted at this time.\(^2\)

Although no actual business could be transacted, Mrs. Holden called upon Mr. F. A. Patrick, who had served as treasurer of the Trustees, to report for the information of those present on the business activities of the Duluth Center during its years of dormancy and its financial condition as of that moment.

There was in the treasury of the organization the sum of seven dollars, but on January 13th, 1921, the committee received the sum of two thousand dollars from the sale of what was known as the "Little Theatre" building.

The debts of the organization were $937.47 and when these were paid there remained in the treasury $1069.53. U. S. Liberty Bonds were then selling much below par, and your committee purchased for $887.96 Liberty Bonds of the par value of $1,000.00. These are of the fourth issue and bear 4\(\frac{1}{2}\) per cent interest. There was left in the treasury the sum of $181.57.

On March 28th, 1921, interest coupons to the amount of $53.86 became due, thus giving us a balance in the treasury of $235.43. We then purchased for $223.92 similar bonds of a par value of $250.00. We therefore held Liberty Bonds of $1250.00 par value, and there remained in the treasury a balance of $11.51.

During the next two years we collected interest coupons to the amount of $106.25 and bought $100.00 (par value) of Liberty Bonds. They had so risen in value that we paid $98.60. We then had left in the treasury $18.55.

We have followed a similar policy ever since, buying bonds as interest accumulated, until we now have $1,550 of these bonds par value and a balance of $58.45.

\(^2\)Minutes, November 9, 1926, p. 119.
in the treasury. The present value of the bonds is about $1583.00. The First National Bank of Duluth has them in charge.3

After the financial report, a motion was duly made, seconded and carried to create a temporary organization to act until a legal meeting could be held. Francis J. Webb was nominated and duly elected as chairman, and James G. Nye was nominated and duly elected secretary.

As chairman of the temporary organization, acting under the authority of three separate motions—all duly made, seconded and carried—Mr. Webb appointed three special committees:

1. "To take charge of the production of a play early in December, 1926."4

2. "To perfect plans for the reorganization of the Duluth Center of the Drama League of America, to make recommendations for changes in the articles and by-laws, and to attend to the details of calling and holding a meeting for organization purposes."5

3. "To consider and suggest nominations for such vacancies as shall be found to exist in the old organization, such nominations to be presented at the first meeting called for the purpose of reorganizing."6

After appointing the committees, Mr. Webb opened the meeting for remarks from the floor concerning the proposed revival of the Little Theatre movement in Duluth. First to be recognized was Mrs. Holden, who spoke briefly on the history of the local movement. Mrs. Holden's talk was followed by "helpful and encouraging remarks" from

3Minutes, November 9, 1926, p. 120.
4Ibid.
5Ibid.
6Ibid.
Mrs. F. A. Patrick, Miss Nell Ames Horr and Miss Lida T. Priest.

There being no further business, the informal meeting adjourned.

Revival of the Little Theatre was almost certain. Everyone concerned was happy at the outcome of the meeting, especially Mrs. Holden, who was reported to be jubilant. "It is remarkable that the organization should have been brought to life after its long inactivity," she is reported to have said. "The demand for it shows that it cannot die."\(^7\)

The committee on reorganization appointed by Francis Webb wasted no time in perfecting their plans. Within two weeks of the informal meeting, all members of the League, according to the last roster of members, received this letter:

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE DULUTH CENTER OF THE DRAMA LEAGUE OF AMERICA

After a period of dormancy of five years the above named organization is about to be revived and re-organized.

The undersigned, as first vice-president and in the absence of the president, hereby calls a special meeting of the Duluth Center of the Drama League of America to be held at the Chamber of Commerce in the Hotel Duluth, Duluth, Minnesota, Friday evening, November 26, 1926, at 8 o'clock.

The purposes of said meeting are as follows:

1. To elect such officers as shall be necessary to fill vacancies which shall exist at the time of said meeting.

2. To consider and adopt such changes, if any, in the Articles of Incorporation as shall be necessary or advisable.

3. To consider and adopt such new by-laws or changes in the old ones as shall be deemed necessary or advisable.

\(^7\)Duluth News Tribune, November 19, 1926.
4. To consider such other and further business as may come before the meeting.

Mrs. S. R. Holden, First Vice President
Duluth Center of the Drama League of America

Thirty people were present on November 26, 1926, for the special meeting of the Duluth Center of the Drama League of America. A quorum being present, the meeting was called to order. The minutes of the informal meeting of November 9 were read and approved, and the letter which had been mailed to all of the members was read to formally announce the purpose of the meeting.

The first order of business was the election of officers to fill vacancies that existed at the time of the meeting. But first it had to be determined which offices were vacant. In determining this, Mrs. Holden announced that letters of resignation had been received from all officers still residing in the city of Duluth, and that her own resignation and that of the secretary, Mr. Washburn, had also been submitted and were to take effect immediately upon the election and qualification of their successors. It was then moved, seconded and passed that offices held by persons permanently removed from Duluth, whose resignations had not been received, be declared vacant. Thus it was determined that all offices were vacant.

Mrs. Holden then called for the report of the committee on reorganization. The committee recommended the following procedure for conducting the election of new officers for the corporation:

1. That a president and secretary only be now elected under the present organization to take charge of the meeting.

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8Minutes, November 26, 1926, p. 123.
2. That if the suggested changes in the Articles of Incorporation and by-laws, the same to be submitted, were adopted in substance, then the president and secretary to resign on the adoption of such changes.

3. That after the election of presiding officer and secretary, the League proceed to consider the recommendations of the re-organization committee regarding Articles of Incorporation and by-laws.

4. That if the proposals of the re-organization committee were accepted in substance that election be had of a new Board of Directors.9

The plan suggested by the committee was followed. Frank Webb was nominated for president. Since he was not present at the meeting, James Nye was elected first vice-president to preside in his absence. Following the procedure agreed upon, he called upon Mrs. Sheldon Shepard to submit the recommendations of the committee on re-organization as to changes in the Articles of Incorporation and the by-laws which they thought were necessary or advisable. Mrs. Shepard prefaced the suggestions of the committee with an explanation of the procedure they had followed in arriving at their report.

Immediately after its appointment, the committee commenced a study of the problems of reorganizing and gave special attention to the experience of Little Theatres in other cities. In view of the fact that the Little Theatre of Dallas, Texas, has been eminently successful both financially and from the standpoint of its plays (having won the Belasco cup at the Little Theatre tournament in New York several times), this committee finally determined to follow the general plan of organization which exists in the Dallas Little Theatre. Numerous changes in details have been made, but the general plan has been accepted in principle.

In general this plan is as follows: To create a city wide organization of sufficient members to insure success of the project; to make the basis of the organization opportunity for all who desire to make use of

9Ibid.
this means of self-expression as an avocation or diversion; to give as large a number of persons as possible an opportunity to work both as actors and in the producing end of the work; and lastly to create a form of government which would relieve the membership almost entirely from the necessity of attending business meetings and of being burdened with the details of the work.

With these objects in view, your committee has prepared a resolution amending the articles of incorporation so as to conform to these objects. Under the old form of organization, the membership was made to a large extent responsible for many of the details. The government was vested, however, in a Board of Managers, so-called, consisting of the officers and the heads of numerous committees. The articles of incorporation were quite loosely drawn and the by-laws very loosely drawn. The name of the organization was Duluth Center of the Drama League of America, but at one of the last meetings of the old Board of Managers it was voted to change the name to Little Theatre of Duluth. The committee has therefore included this change of name in its recommendations.10

At the conclusion of her remarks, Mrs. Shepard submitted the following resolution and moved its adoption:

RESOLVED: That the articles of Incorporation of Duluth Center of the Drama League of America are hereby amended so as to read as follows, commencing with Article I.11

The amendments to the Articles of Incorporation were read and discussed. The resolution passed with no changes from the floor in the recommendations of the committee on re-organization. The amended articles of incorporation, with the exception of the name of the organization which was changed in 1939 to The Duluth Playhouse, have stood for thirty-six years, and are still in effect. Together with

10Ibid.
11Ibid.
some comments on the changes from the earlier version, the Articles of Incorporation of the Little Theatre of Duluth, Inc., are as follows:

ARTICLE I

The name of this corporation shall be Little Theatre of Duluth, Inc.

Its general purpose shall be to stimulate an interest in the best drama and to awaken the public to the importance of the drama as a social force, and to its general educational value if maintained on a high level of art and morale, and to work for the social, moral and educational advancement of its members and of the community.

Its plan of operation shall be to present plays, lectures and other entertainments and performances; to acquire such land, buildings and other property, real and personal, and any and all estates therein, as may be required for the purposes of its organization, and to do any and all things necessary or incidental to the carrying out of said purposes.

Its location shall be in the City of Duluth, in the County of St. Louis and State of Minnesota.

The most significant change in Article I, other than the change of the name, is the wording of the plan of operation. In the 1914 articles it said, "Its plan of operation shall be to conduct classes of study and to present lectures, plays and other entertainment or performances." Elevating play production to first place from third, and eliminating the conducting of classes is clear evidence of a pronounced change of direction based on a decided change of attitude toward the production of plays. The ambiguity in policy that had handicapped the first organization was checked by this amendment

\[12\text{Changes are underlined and will be explained after each article.}\]
in the wording of Article I. The implications of this change are more fully developed in the amendments to the by-laws.

ARTICLE II

The terms of admission to membership shall be the payment in advance of such sum as the Board of Directors shall by resolution prescribe from time to time, not less, however, than $1.00, nor more than $50.00 per year. The Board of Directors may by appropriate resolution provide that a club or other association may become a member of the organization and may prescribe the terms and conditions of its membership. It may also provide for such other classes of membership as it may deem desirable, including honorary membership, patron membership, life membership, all upon such terms and conditions as to dues and other matters as may to the corporation seem proper.

Said Board shall have the power to reject any application for membership, either through its own action or through its membership committee, without stating the grounds for such rejection.

Said Board may also prescribe the time of payment of annual dues and adopt such rules as it may deem necessary in regard to the expulsion of members for the nonpayment thereof.

The outside limits for dues under the old articles were $1.50 and $5.00. The significance of Article II lies in the changes which read "Said Board" rather than "The corporation by its by-laws." These changes in wording go a long way toward the committee on re-organization's goal of creating a form of government which would "relieve the membership almost entirely from the necessity of attending business meetings and of being burdened with the details of the work." Under the new provisions, Mrs. Holden was named the first Honorary Member of The Little Theatre of Duluth, Inc., at the first meeting of the Board of Directors. When the membership was controlled by "the corporation by its By-Laws," this would have had to come
before a meeting of the members for action. The changes in Article III are even more significant in regard to transferring responsibility for governing the organization from the membership to "Said Board."

**ARTICLE III**

The officers of the corporation shall be a President, and one or more Vice-Presidents (the number to be prescribed from time to time in the By-Laws), a recording secretary and a treasurer. The Board of Directors may also elect an auditor and a corresponding secretary who may or may not be members of Said Board.

Under the 1914 articles, the offices of Secretary, Assistant Secretary and Historian were also part of the administrative structure, but there was no provision for employing professional help—an auditor and a corresponding secretary. These two appointed offices, which one could attain and hold only through professional competence, were designed to provide stability and objectivity to the management structure of the Little Theatre.

The foregoing officers, except as above stated, shall be elected from and by the Board of Directors at the first meeting of said Board after the annual meeting of the corporation in May (which meeting of said Board shall be held within ten days after said annual meeting), and such officers shall hold office until their successors shall have been elected and shall have qualified.

Before, officers were elected directly by membership at the annual meeting, "to be held on the first Tuesday in May, at ten o'clock A.M., at Duluth, Minnesota." Under the first constitution, the election of the leadership of the corporation was not a business decision made by the managers, but a popularity contest decided by the members.

The Board of Directors which shall conduct the transactions of the corporation and shall have general
supervision of its affairs, shall consist of eighteen (18) members who shall be elected annually at the meeting held the first Tuesday in May, which shall be designated the annual meeting, and said directors shall hold office until their successors have been elected and have qualified.

Substituting "Board of Directors which" for "Board of Managers, who" is an indication of a basic change of attitude. The affairs of the organization were placed in the charge of an impersonal administrative structure, rather than in the hands of elected officials. The new Board of Directors was more directly responsible to the membership than the old Board of Managers, which consisted of "the officers of the corporation," who were elected, and "of the Chairman of such standing committees as the officers may from time to time deem necessary and may select by a majority of all officers present at any meeting."

Under the first constitution, there was nothing to prevent the Board of Managers from rising to 100 members, if that many standing committees could be invented, and only six per cent of the Board would have had to have been elected. It was a potentially dangerous system.

In the amended Article III, the Board of Directors was given two important powers that the old Board of Managers did not have:

Said Board shall have the power and authority to fill all vacancies occurring in its membership by resignation, death or inability to act until the next annual election held in accordance with these articles and such by-laws as may be adopted.

Said Board of Directors shall also have the power, when in its judgment cause exists, to remove any officer of the corporation from office and declare such office vacant.
Because the Board of Managers had not had the power to replace someone who had to leave office when Mrs. Morgan resigned in 1917, they had had to create an executive committee to administer her office. The formality of having written resignations from all officers of the old corporation who were still in town and a motion to declare offices of absent officers vacant was necessary because the Board did not have the second power.

There were only three articles in the 1914 document. The amended version contained six articles. Article IV provided for the appointment of a temporary Board of Directors until the annual meeting in May, 1927. Article VI said "This corporation shall have no corporate seal." The important new article was V.

**ARTICLE V**

The corporation by its by-laws may provide for the appointment of an executive committee which shall be vested with such powers as said by-laws may prescribe.

The executive committee created a business nucleus within the Board of Directors, making it possible to transact most of the normal affairs of the organization without having to resort to the cumbersome machinery of formal meetings. The composition of the executive committee was changed a couple of times by the by-laws, but its functions remained constant.

Like the articles of incorporation, the amendments to the by-laws adopted at the special meeting of November 26, 1926, were based
on the by-laws of the Dallas Little Theatre. Briefly, they provided for the following:

ARTICLE I MEETINGS OF MEMBERS
ARTICLE II MEETINGS OF BOARD OF DIRECTORS
ARTICLE III QUORUMS
ARTICLE IV DIRECTORS AND DUTIES OF DIRECTORS
ARTICLE V OFFICERS AND DUTIES OF OFFICERS
ARTICLE VI MEMBERSHIP AND DUES
ARTICLE VII ELECTIONS
ARTICLE VIII EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
ARTICLE IX PRODUCING DIRECTOR
ARTICLE X COMMITTEES AND DUTIES OF COMMITTEES
ARTICLE XI AMENDMENTS TO BY-LAWS

The by-laws provided a structure to govern the Little Theatre of Duluth, Inc., which made the Board of Directors responsible to the membership for their actions but not dependent upon the members to act. In view of the organization's commitment to play production as its primary function, the most important provisions of the by-laws were Articles IX and X, which provided for the hiring of a producing director and established a Production Committee, with six subcommittees—Play Reading, Costume, Stage, House, Tickets and Program, Music and Publicity—to see to the production affairs of the organization.

The earlier by-laws of the Duluth Center of the Drama League of America, contained no direct provision for play production, but responsibility for some activity of this type was delegated indirectly to the Educational Committee.
ARTICLE III

DUTIES OF COMMITTEES

Section 1. The duties of the Educational Committee shall be to educate the popular taste for sound and vital drama, and aim to introduce serious drama study in schools.

What was considered to be the major effort in play production, the annual play by the Plays and Players Committee, was not even mentioned in the by-laws.

The amended by-laws created an entirely different type of organization than had been created by the old. The by-laws adopted in 1914 were rules for conducting the affairs of a woman's club which had a few business obligations in connection with a building they had purchased, called the Little Theatre. The by-laws adopted in 1926 for The Little Theatre of Duluth, Inc., provided guidelines for conducting the business affairs of an organization established for the express purpose of producing plays.

Although the by-laws adopted at the re-organization meeting provided adequate guidelines for beginning the work of reviving play production activity by the Little Theatre of Duluth, Inc., before the end of the first season, the experience of managing the affairs of the organization made it necessary to revise some of the by-laws again, especially those directly concerned with play production.

The most significant changes were: the addition of Section 9 to Article V, "Officers and Duties of Officers," creating the job of Business Manager; an amendment to Article IX, giving the Producing Director a staff, and an amendment to Article X, reassigning four
subcommittees of the Production Committee to the newly created Business Committee. Under the provisions of the by-laws adopted in November, 1926, and slightly revised June, 1927, the structure established to govern play production activities by The Little Theatre of Duluth, Inc., was as follows:

ARTICLE IX

PRODUCING DIRECTOR

Section 1: There may be appointed by the Board of Directors a producing director at such salary as the Board of Directors deems proper. Such producing director shall be selected for his expert knowledge of the promotion of the dramatic art. He shall not be a member of the Board of Directors, but shall attend all meetings thereof, except when requested by the Board of Directors to be absent. He shall be ex-officio chairman of the Production Committee.

Section 2: The Producing Director shall have a staff of assistants to be known as the Producing Director's Staff, the same to consist of the following: Production Manager, Stage Manager, and three Casting Assistants. The members of said staff shall be selected by the President and their names submitted to the Board of Directors for approval before appointment; they shall at all times, however, be subject to the approval of the Producing Director, who may appoint such additional assistants he may deem necessary.

Production Committee: Consisting of the Producing Director as chairman, and chairmen of the following sub-committees: Play Reading, Costume, and Stage. Its duties shall be those designated by the Producing Director.

Play Reading Committee: To keep abreast of the field of drama and to recommend to the Board specific plays for productions and the dates of giving the same.

Costume Committee: To see that proper costumes are provided for the plays produced.
Stage Committee: To see that proper settings and properties are provided for the plays produced.

ARTICLE V

Section 9: The president shall select a business manager and shall present his selection to the Board of Directors, for approval, before appointment. The business manager shall be ex-officio chairman of the Business Committee and a member of the Finance Committee, and one of his duties shall be attendance at all meetings of the Board of Directors, unless requested to be absent.

Business Committee: Which shall consist of the Business Manager as chairman, and the chairmen of the following subcommittees: House, Tickets, and Publicity, Music, and its duties shall be those designated by the Business Manager.

The duties of the subcommittees shall be as follows:

House Committee: To take charge of the theatre, and attend to all matters concerning the sub-rental, upkeep and heating of the same.

Tickets and Program Committee: To see that general admission tickets are printed, sold and made available to the public, that proper programs are printed and distributed; that the selling and collection of tickets at the door is taken care of, and that attendants and ushers are provided where necessary.

Music Committee: To see that proper music is furnished at the performance where such music is desired.

Publicity Committee: To see that all matters concerning the press, advertising and other publicity, are given proper attention so as to promote the success of The Little Theatre. No information concerning the productions or official business of the Little Theatre shall be given except through the Publicity Committee.

With a new constitution and by-laws The Little Theatre of Duluth, Inc., was organized in 1926 to take up the work of the Duluth Center of the Drama League of America. Many of the same people who had
organized and operated the Duluth Center were on the Board of Directors, and the capital base was what had been salvaged from the earlier organization's operation of their Little Theatre, but this is the extent of the connection between the two organizations. The amendments to the articles of incorporation and to the by-laws created something entirely new. If after five years of dormancy, the effort had been made to revive the old organization as it was, it is likely that the organization would have failed again.

During the period of dormancy, important changes had taken place in the theatrical situation in Duluth. Legitimate plays had stopped coming altogether and movies had taken over. More important, changes had taken place in the thinking of the leaders of the Little Theatre movement in Duluth. The new organization that emerged from dormancy in 1926 was a result of these changes in circumstances and in philosophy. The pattern of activity in play production that evolved within the new organization will be the subject of the next chapter.
CHAPTER VII

REOPENING THE LITTLE THEATRE, 1926-1927

The revival of activity by the Little Theatre of Duluth, Inc., was a matter of national interest, just as the original opening of the Little Theatre had been. The Christian Science Monitor of December 16, 1926, commented:

The revival has aroused so much interest that it almost amounts to a new movement in the city, although the corporate organization of the old group was utilized, the name being changed from Duluth Center of the Drama League of America to Little Theatre of Duluth, Inc.

For the present, plays will be produced in various places which are available, but the organization aims soon to have a home of its own where all branches of play producing may be carried on.¹

As the article stated, one of the chief concerns of the Little Theatre of Duluth, Inc., throughout the first season was to find a home. Of equal concern was the problem of hiring a suitable Producing Director—a man who was qualified to carry on all branches of play producing, and who would work full time doing it. Experience gained during the first season of renewed activity confirmed the need for both.

While solutions to these two long range problems were being worked out, the Board of Directors concerned itself with the day to

¹Christian Science Monitor, December 16, 1926.

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day problems of producing four programs during the 1926-27 season. The programs were:

January 7, 8, *The Truth* by Clyde Fitch

February 9, 10, Three One-Act Plays

April 1, 2, *The Ship* by St. John Ervine

May 10, *Tweedles*, a one-act play by Booth Tarkington, prepared for the annual meeting of the membership.

Public reaction to the programs—all of which were presented at the Shrine Auditorium, except the production for the annual meeting—was encouraging. The local press was very helpful in generating a favorable response. Abundant and favorable publicity was given to each program, especially to the first. Between December 23, 1926, and January 9, 1927, twenty-three separate items appeared in one or the other of the two local newspapers which either directly or indirectly promoted the production of *The Truth*. The twenty-three items included ten photographs, eleven news stories or feature articles, one editorial, and three reviews—two of the first performance, as is usual, and one of the second performance, which is highly unusual. It was an impressive and encouraging gesture of support. The Duluth newspapers have continued to give reasonably good coverage of activities at the Little Theatre for many years, without equalling the effort put forth for *The Truth*.

The editorial congratulating the cast that appeared on January 7, 1927, was typical of the kind of support the Little Theatre of Duluth received and would continue to receive from the local press for several years.
The Herald is sure that everybody who invests hope in the Little Theatre movement as a way out of the famine in the spoken drama which has come upon the country since the road show virtually went out of existence, and who attended last night's initial performance of the newly reorganized Little Theatre of Duluth, went home very happy and very hopeful.

The best tribute that could be paid to this performance is this: that though for the first few minutes of the play most of those who saw it were thinking mainly of how familiar neighbors were behaving in their respective roles, after that, and to the end, the audience was wrapped up in the progress of the play.

This splendid start is very encouraging. The road has gone, probably for good. Few people, the country over, have a chance to see a play nowadays because mostly they would have to go to New York to see it. That leaves a gap in the life of each community that needs to be filled. And the Little Theatre, as Dallas, Birmingham, and other cities have proved and as Duluth is about to demonstrate can fill the gap.

Just now the Little Theatre is putting on a series of plays. It will continue, given decent support, to do that. But beyond that lies far greater possibilities—a Little Theatre building; the development of a wider range of acting talent among the citizens of Duluth; the development of local play-writing talent; the provision of local supporting casts for traveling guest stars; and the encouragement of good stock companies.

This is a real community service, and everybody who can should help it. As many as possible should join the Little Theatre, getting admission to its plays as a part of their membership privileges. As many as possible should act once or more in the season. And those who cannot or do not care to act can support this fine enterprise by their attendance.

Congratulations to the Little Theatre on this most promising start in its newly organized effort to keep the spoken drama alive in this community.²

In spite of the favorable support of the press and the encouraging response of the public, which brought the membership up to 624

²Duluth Herald, January 7, 1927.
regular members and 63 patrons by the end of the season, the Board of Directors was not satisfied with the results of the first season's efforts. Evidence of their dissatisfaction began to appear in the minutes of the meetings of the Board after the production of the one-acts.

A new special feature had been introduced at that production. "To provide good recreation while the scenery was being changed," a band had been hired to play for "dancing for all between shows."

While the orchestra was tuning up for the ballroom dance feature, a "hot dog" wagon was whirled out loaded with good things to eat. Hoofers were refreshed during the period with sandwiches and coffee.3

Those who attended thought the new feature was admirable, but, in spite of the good publicity and adequate advertising, the box office receipts for the one-acts were almost twenty-five per cent lower than they had been for The Truth.4

Some rather sobering statistics were reported by the treasurer at the March 1, 1927, meeting of the Board of Directors. Box office sales for the one-acts was reported at $145.45. Then the following report was submitted:

COST OF PRODUCTION OF 3 ONE-ACT PLAYS
on February 9 and 10, 1927

Advertising......................... $ 24.00
Printing............................  27.50
Scenery and Drapage.............. 164.93
Costumes...........................  32.03
Properties (estimated)............  39.03
Coaching........................... 125.00

3Duluth News Tribune, February 10, 1927.
4Minutes, March 1, 1927, p. 149.
Royalties (estimated)............$ 40.00
Music................................ 78.00
Rent.................................. 120.00

$652.595

At a special meeting on February 14, 1927, it had already been decided to cancel the proposed program of one-acts that had been scheduled for March and to concentrate instead on the production of a three-act play in April. The play chosen was The Ship by St. John Ervine. After hearing the report of the expenses incurred in the production of the one-acts, the Board decided to take steps to make sure it would be a tight Ship.

1. It was moved that no more than $400.00 be spent for the production of The Ship, this amount to include the director's salary, hall rental, royalties, advertising and all other expenses.

2. It was moved to produce The Ship only one night—April 1, 1927—at the Shrine Auditorium.

3. Julius Nolte was appointed Business Manager to take direct supervision of the finances of The Ship, and was made responsible for keeping expenses within the budget.

4. It was decided that, since $78.00 was a lot of money to pay for musicians, they would get along without them at the production of The Ship. If it turned out that music would be required, it was decided that a student group would be used or "an Orthophonic Victrola."

5. To stimulate ticket sales, it was decided to send one ticket to each member, and with it, an urgent appeal to sell it to a friend.

Not all of the emergency measures were carried out as planned. Within a week Mr. Nolte asked for and was granted an increase of "not

5Tbid.
6Tbid.
more than $100.00" in his budget. When it was learned that having the
play presented for only one performance would cut the potential ticket
sales by fifty per cent, but the rent by only twenty-five per cent, it
was decided to hold two performances. Musicians were not hired. The
performances of The Ship were successful both artistically and finan-
cially.

Most of the credit for the financial success of The Ship was
given to Mr. Nolte and to his newly created job of Business Manager.
This feature of having one person to supervise the financial affairs
of a production and to take personal responsibility for keeping ex-
penses within a given budget was made a permanent part of the admin-
istrative structure of the Little Theatre by an amendment to the by-
laws passed on June 7, 1927. The experience of the first season had
demonstrated the need for this position and the value of finding the
right man to fill it.

Experience also demonstrated the need for a new way of de-
fining the job of the Producing Director. J. Hooker Wright, who had
directed all of the productions staged at the Shrine Auditorium that
season except one of the one-acts, which Mrs. Shepard had directed,
was a competent dramatic coach. He went on to establish the Little
Theatre in Superior, Wisconsin, across the bay from Duluth, in 1928,
and led it for several years. The terms of the employment of J.
Hooker Wright kept a link with the past that had to be broken if the
new Little Theatre of Duluth, Inc., was to succeed.
As in the past, Mr. Wright had been hired to coach the actors for one production at a time, with no concern for other aspects of the production, and with no sense of responsibility to the program of the Little Theatre as a whole. For the production of *The Ship*, Chalmers Agnew was given direct charge of artistic arrangements by the Board of Directors, with the qualification that "J. Hooker Wright would be in charge of details." In this situation there was no clear chain of command to a Producing Director who took complete responsibility for all aspects of the production. There was a similar problem in the production of the three one-acts, when Mr. Wright directed two of the plays and the third was directed by one of the amateurs on the Board of Directors, Mrs. Shepard.

When Mr. Wright did not receive the appointment as Producing Director for the 1927-28 season, some questions were raised. In explaining to the membership the basis for appointing someone else, the need for redefining the job of Producing Director was emphasized.

An appreciation was extended to Mr. Joseph Hooker Wright for the work he has done as coach. Mr. Wright was very much interested in the Little Theatre work showing his willingness to come early and stay late, sometimes putting in as much as seven or eight hours on a dress rehearsal. It was explained that the engaging of a new director was not in any way a reflection on the work that Mr. Wright had done during the year, but that it was felt that we should have someone who had several years training for Little Theatre work, as there are many departments that should be developed, of which coaching and directing of plays was only one, others being a play-writing department; a work shop for the building and painting of scenery; a costume department, and a department for children. Mr. Gnesin who will give his full time to the
Little Theatre work, was selected from fourteen applicants, most of whom had had wide experience in Little Theatre work.7

Maurice Gnesin was hired as Producing Director for the 1927-28 season. While the personal qualities of Mr. Gnesin were to have an important influence on the future of the Little Theatre,8 the choice of any director for the job other than a local person such as J. Hooker Wright represented the change in policy. The Board of Directors was convinced that the goals of the Little Theatre could not be realized with part time directors who had other full time interests in the community, but required a full time, professionally trained person, experienced in Little Theatre work, who would take complete responsibility for the total program of the Little Theatre.

The first step taken officially toward hiring a person like Maurice Gnesin as Producing Director was taken at the February 14 meeting when the discussion had brought out the fact that a director was one of the "two important things needed for the coming year." A motion was passed "that the Little Theatre get a line on a director and that they get a paid stage director for the coming year."9

Less than a month later, at a special meeting of the Board of Directors, a detailed discussion was held in regard to prospective directors with whom Mr. Nye had corresponded. The applicants had been narrowed down from fourteen to six who would be considered at that

8His influence will be considered in the next chapter.
9Minutes, February 14, 1927, p. 147.
meeting. A vote was taken in which each member of the Board wrote his first and second choices on a slip of paper. Maurice Gnesin was the unanimous first choice. The secretary was instructed to offer him the job for no more than $3600.00 for the season.\textsuperscript{10}

To make sure that there would be no misunderstanding as to the full time nature of the job, it was written into Mr. Gnesin's contract that he could "engage in no outside work except private instruction."\textsuperscript{11} Even this was not enough. At a meeting on July 18, 1927, it was moved, seconded and passed that "Mr. Gnesin be held strictly to the terms of his contract."\textsuperscript{12} After passing this motion, a committee was appointed to arrange a reception for Mr. Gnesin. He was due to arrive on August 25, 1927.

By August 25, when Mr. Gnesin arrived in Duluth, the second "important thing needed for the coming year" was almost ready for use. The responsibility for choosing an appropriate home for the Little Theatre had not been taken lightly by the Board of Directors. Their deliberations began at their first meeting, on November 26, 1926.

Mr. Chalmers Agnew reported briefly on the advantages or disadvantages of the use of the hall at Superior Street and 12th Avenue East as a home for the Little Theatre. A motion carried to appoint a committee of five to canvass the situation in view of acquiring a temporary or permanent home for the Little Theatre.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{10}Minutes, March 1, 1927, p. 149.
\textsuperscript{11}Minutes, April 12, 1927, p. 155.
\textsuperscript{12}Minutes, July 18, 1927, p. 170.
\textsuperscript{13}Minutes, November 27, 1926, p. 123.
At the meeting of December 7, 1926, President Frank Webb called getting a new home their most pressing problem and urged each member of the Board of Directors to think hard about it. They did. By January 4, 1927, there were several propositions for a permanent home. After some discussion of the propositions, a motion was made:

That a building fund be started at once by using as a nucleus the funds turned over by the trustees of the Duluth Center of the Drama League of America to the Little Theatre of Duluth, Inc., and that this fund be held intact except by the consent of the Board of Directors.\(^\text{14}\)

It was fortunate that the Board had this capital resource to use as the basis of a building fund. It meant that they could devote their full attention to screening possible locations. No energy would be drained off by a building fund campaign. It also put them in a more advantageous bargaining position. There were many attractive offers to consider.

One of the most interesting choices seriously considered by the Board of Directors was brought to their attention by Chalmers Agnew, who seems to have been the most active member of the committee of five that had been appointed to canvass locations. At the February 1, 1927, meeting he "presented tentative plans for the Little Theatre, which if used would fit nicely with the floor plans of the 5th floor of the Lyceum Building."\(^\text{15}\) Following up this proposal, there was a special meeting of the Board on February 14, 1927.

The Clinton Meyers proposition was discussed at length, which would cost in the neighborhood of fifteen

\(^{14}\)Minutes, January 4, 1927, p. 143.

\(^{15}\)Minutes, February 1, 1927, p. 145.
to twenty thousand dollars. It is the plan of the Clinton-Meyers Company to adapt the fifth floor of the Lyceum Building to Little Theatre purposes with a seating capacity of 325 people.\textsuperscript{16}

At that February 14, meeting, the Directors held a round table discussion of other possibilities. The Garrick Theatre and the ballroom of the Spalding Hotel were discussed and dismissed because they would have been little better than the arrangement at the Shrine Auditorium. There was one interesting proposition to build a new home especially for the Little Theatre.

A proposition which had been made by Mr. Merle Anderson in regard to building a home on a lot at 12th Avenue East and London Road for the Little Theatre at an estimated cost of $25,000.00 was discussed. Mr. Anderson agreed to put up the building for whatever price the Directors of the Little Theatre would be willing to pay and the financial consideration to be paid on a rental basis.\textsuperscript{17}

This proposition was highly favored for awhile. At the meeting of March 7, three weeks after the offer had been made, action was taken.

Mr. Webb made the suggestion that Mr. Nye get in touch with Mr. Merle Anderson and see what could be done about erecting a Little Theatre on the lot at 12th Avenue East and London Road.\textsuperscript{18}

President Webb also asked the Building Committee to prepare a report of their recommendations for the annual meeting, scheduled for May 10. Nothing was settled in time for the meeting, however. In his report to the membership, Mr. Webb stressed the "difficulties surrounding the staging of productions without our own Theatre." The best he

\textsuperscript{16}Minutes, February 14, 1927, p. 147.

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{18}Minutes, March 7, 1927, p. 153.
could do was to inform the members that "plans were being formulated for the new home by a special committee and would be placed before the Board of Directors at a later meeting."\(^1^9\)

Besides those already mentioned, there were two other possible locations discussed in the minutes. Temporary enthusiasm flared for the Winton Garage, but Mr. Agnew "made a report on this and said that an examination of the building showed that it could only seat 190 to 200 people at the outside."\(^2^0\) And on May 17, after the annual meeting, "Mr. Agnew submitted plans showing the proposed changes in the Temple of Music Building."\(^2^1\)

Finally, after seven months of deliberation, the Board of Directors settled on the location they had considered first, the hall at Superior Street and 12th Avenue East. This was Mrs. Holden's choice. A newspaper article of September 16, 1927, quotes her saying she knew this was it the moment she saw it. She had stood by it through all the months of debate over the location of the new home.

The choice of the location had been informally accepted by the Board of Directors by the meeting of July 18, 1927, when a motion passed to engrave a picture of the proposed home as a letterhead on the stationary of the Executive Committee. Official action was taken to secure that location at the meeting of August 2, 1927.

It was moved that the Board authorize the President and Secretary to enter into a lease, on behalf of this

\(^1^9\)Minutes, May 10, 1927, p. 157.
\(^2^0\)Minutes, April 12, 1927, p. 155.
\(^2^1\)Minutes, May 17, 1927, p. 161.
corporation, with the owners of the building at 12th Avenue East and Superior Street, covering the space on the first floor including the necessary storage and dressing room space as contemplated in the blue prints submitted, together with an office on the second floor and the privilege of using the auditorium for rehearsals when it is not in use and when our theatre is in use, said lease to be for five years with the privilege of renewal for such further term as the executive committee decides upon.22

The building chosen in 1927 has undergone some remodeling and redecorating in the last thirty-eight years, but it is still the home of the Little Theatre of Duluth, Inc., now called the Duluth Playhouse. On August 8, 1927, a story in the Duluth Herald announced that the Little Theatre was to have a home of its own, and described the new home.

The new playhouse is next to the Amphitheater and the entrance will be on the avenue side. The theatre will be modern in design and equipment, with 275 seats and space to seat a total of 300. Productions will be presented at least five times so that members and theatre-goers in general may be accommodated. The stage will be twenty-seven feet wide and nine feet high, and there will be dressing rooms and an office for the new director, Maurice Gnesin, who will arrive with Mrs. Gnesin August 25.23

As of August, 1927, with the choice of a home for the Little Theatre made and the work of remodeling it well under way; with Maurice Gnesin, the first full time resident director, due to arrive; and with its by-laws tested and amended to provide for the efficient management of the business affairs of the organization, the Little Theatre of Duluth, Inc., was ready. What they had lacked in 1920—a stable

22Minutes, August 2, 1927, p. 171.
23Duluth Herald, August 8, 1927.
organizational structure, sound business practices, and a clear sense of purpose with operational policies directed toward this purpose—they now had.

Under the leadership of Maurice Gnesin, they would establish a pattern of activity in two seasons—1927-28 and 1928-29—which, with minor variations to suit the individual talent and temperament of ten men who succeeded Mr. Gnesin as Producing Director, has been repeated right up to the present day. Maurice Gnesin brought to the Little Theatre of Duluth, Inc., a philosophy of theatre and an attitude toward production that had a lasting effect on the policies and practices of the organization. The establishment of these policies and practices will be the subject of the next chapter.
CHAPTER VIII

ESTABLISHING PLAY PRODUCTION POLICIES AND PRACTICES, 1927-1929

In 1927, the little theatre movement in Duluth joined forces with another movement destined to have a significant effect on the development of theatre in the United States, the university theatre. In 1929, Kenneth MacGowan wrote:

So far as you can generalize at all, the practice as well as the study of dramatic production in the universities is not much more than ten years old. Like the little theatre, however, it was showing signs of life long before the war. Baker's first work antedates even the Wisconsin Dramatic Association of 1911... By 1920 the colleges were ready to push ahead as vigorously as the communities, and since then their pace has never slackened. The universities have poured knowledge and courage, expertness and ideals, into the little theatre movement.¹

The link between the little theatre movement and the university theatre was established when the Little Theatre of Duluth, Inc., hired Maurice Gnesin as Producing Director for the 1927-1928 season. "The destinies of the Little Theatre of Duluth are in good hands," said a newspaper article announcing his appointment, "and next year promises to be record breaking in achievement." The article gave a short resume of his background.

Mr. Gnesin is an actor, director and playwright. He has studied playwriting and direction at the Yale School of Drama, which is conducted by Professor George

¹MacGowan, op. cit., pp. 130-131.
Pierce Baker, formerly head of the Harvard playshop, which produced many of our leading dramatists. Some years ago Mr. Gnesin won the contest for one-act plays conducted by the Syracuse Little Theatre with a play titled "The Madonna of the Lake," later published in the Phoenix. This year his play, "The Mistress" was published in the first volume of the Yale Drama Series. Last year he was one of the six out of twenty-four, students retained in the school for advanced production.

Mr. Gnesin is an actor of recognized ability. He played with the Russian Repertory company two years in New York, directed the Syracuse Little Theatre three years, organized and directed the Experimental Workshop at the Little Theatre for unusual plays and acted as instructor in acting technique and production for the summer term of the Boston School of Expression in Birmingham, Alabama, and will be instructor at the Middlebury Summer School of English this summer.

He holds the degrees of Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy and at the end of this year will have the certificate of fine arts in Drama from Yale. Mrs. Gnesin is a student of design and will assist in the art end of the Little Theatre.2

During the two seasons he "poured knowledge and courage, expertness and ideals" into his work at the Little Theatre of Duluth, Maurice Gnesin had ample opportunity to display all three sides of his theatrical talent. He, of course, directed all of the productions except the plays for children--ten full-length plays and four one-acts, altogether. His acting ability was displayed in two productions. He played the lead in He Who Gets Slapped in January, 1928, and stepped into the role of Marchbanks in Candida in October, 1928 when the actor playing the part became too ill to continue after the first performance. He directed his own play The Madonna of the Lake in February, and was probably the author of the third place prize winning play in

2Duluth Herald, May 11, 1927.
the Little Theatre's 1927-1928 play-writing contest. The author, a resident of Duluth, insisted on anonymity and returned the prize money, later had it copyrighted in the name of the Little Theatre and submitted it for publication in an anthology of one-act plays edited by George Pierce Baker for the Yale Drama Series.

Maurice Gnesin's attitude toward little theatre activity was revealed in a speech he delivered shortly after his arrival in Duluth at a meeting of the American Association of University Women. The reporter who described his speech said;

He made one feel that unless, as he phrased it, "Creativity steals into you at some time and lifts you out of the humdrum existence of daily life, your soul is indeed dead."³

The subject of his speech was "Theatres in the American Hinterland." He said that the hinterland began in Hoboken, and that although the theatre perhaps existed in New York, it was surely dead in the hinterland. He qualified the existence of theatre in New York with a perhaps because, "you can't go to the theatre in New York unless you are a Westerner on a vacation. The New York theatre is becoming a hinterland within a hinterland because of prohibitive prices."

As for the little theatre movement, he said that he saw it as a training school for authors and actors and stage technicians. "Outside of New York," he said, "there are artists who are going to write, act and design and there is the audience, which in itself is creative and is as essential as the artists." His remarks were concluded with;

³Duluth Herald, October 25, 1927.
I believe the future of the American drama is not where the theatres dot the streets thickly between Thirty-ninth and Forty-eighth streets, but in the great American hinterland, where there is nothing but the Little Theatre.4

The training school philosophy applied to his own program in two seasons at Duluth's Little Theatre, resulting in the development of a pattern of activity that has lasted to the present. Mr. Gnesin's approach also made it possible for the Little Theatre to keep an old promise Mrs. Holden had made to the people of Duluth in 1914. The newspaper quoted her promise in the following context:

The men of Duluth have been vitally interested in the Little Theatre from the very beginning. Mrs. Holden said last evening in her opening talk that any number of men had asked to become members of the Drama League if she would promise them they would be given an opportunity to act during the season.

"I promise you all," said Mrs. Holden, "You shall all act. Why it's in the air. Everybody wants to act. A while ago dancing was the craze. We all tangoed, all ages of us—all creeds. Now we're going to act."5

In those early years at the first Little Theatre, one major obstacle in the way of this promise being kept had been the reluctance of amateur directors to train new actors—either because they did not want to be bothered or because they did not know how to train them. As a result, the same people acted in every play. They were used over and over until the novelty of acting wore off and they went back to tangoing.

4 Ibid.
5 Duluth Herald, December 18, 1914.
When the Little Theatre was reorganized in 1926, one of their stated goals was "to make the basis of the organization opportunity for all who desire to make use of this means of self-expression as an avocation or diversion; to give as large a number of persons as possible an opportunity to work both as actors and in the producing end of the work." At the first annual meeting in May, 1927, President Frank Webb had boasted that during the first season, "forty members had taken parts in these four bills with but two duplications." It was a record to be proud of, but when he accepted the presidency for a second term he stressed "the necessity of keeping the Little Theatre a democratic organization . . . suggesting further that the organization should use in their productions anyone suitable, whether or not a member of the organization."

A review of the 1927-28 season that appeared in the Herald of May 24, 1928, commented on participation.

One of the most commendable things regarding the activities of the Little Theatre this year has been the large number taking part in various productions. Only a few people have appeared in more than one performance and it has been the aim of Director Gnesin and the executives of the organization to give equal opportunities to all. Tryouts for parts have been open to all and selection of players has been based on merit. There has been no red tape or social distinction. With this fact in mind hundreds who are not now associated with the work should gladly join next year.

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6 Minutes, November 26, 1926, p. 126.
8 Duluth Herald, May 17, 1927.
9 Duluth Herald, May 24, 1928.
The effect of the training school approach on participation is illustrated in references to the way Maurice Gnesin helped his amateurs polish their performances so that each person who appeared on stage stood out. For example, James Watts, theatre critic for the Duluth News Tribune, wrote, "A great share of the credit for the success of the organization is given to Maurice Gnesin, director, who has done wonders with the casts of every production." In an earlier article, Watts had hinted that one person's encounter with acting at the Little Theatre had completely changed his life.

Homer C. Fulton has had a change of life and will never be the same again since he played the part of Scrubby in "Outward Bound" at the Little Theatre and later did the same role in Warren E. Green's burlesque entitled "Mr. Pim Passes On" or "Outward Bound; Second Voyage." He is turning down a lot of million dollar court cases and is devoting himself to the study of the stage. He was nominated for office at the annual meeting of the Little Theatre, but he indignantly arose from his cushion and remarked: "I want you to understand I am not a candidate for office; I am an actor." He is practicing a toe dance for next season and may take a few lessons from Ned Wayburn this summer.

Whether Maurice Gnesin deserves credit for that is doubtful, but he did demonstrate that the Little Theatre could offer equal opportunity to all to act without lowering the quality of acting. The policy of open tryouts was firmly established.

Just as important, perhaps more important, to the long range success of the Little Theatre was Gnesin's application of the training school philosophy to back stage activity. In 1927, the workshop

10 Duluth News Tribune, May 27, 1928.
11 Duluth News Tribune, May 17, 1928.
approach to theatrical production was just beginning to become an accepted part of amateur efforts in theatre. Kenneth MacGowan recalled that when he had staged Percy MacKaye's The Scarecrow for the Harvard Dramatic Club in 1912, "the theatre in general had had no inkling of the new stagecraft of Craig, Appia, and the rest, and there was no little theatre movement."12

Of course, making their own scenery was not an innovation at the Little Theatre. Chalmers Agnew had been doing that kind of work for many years. Maurice Gnesin's innovation was to deliberately train and organize a crew of amateurs to build and paint the scenery and to manage it during the performances. Before, it had been assigned as a job to one person; Gnesin made it an activity, like acting, that many could take part in with pleasure. Extra efforts were made by the Publicity Committee to explain the new concept in various news releases like this article from the Herald, September 24, 1927:

When you see the actors on the stage you see but a small part of the work done in presenting a production. The players interpret the drama, but there is scenery to paint, costumes to be designed and made, lighting, shifting of scenery and many incidental features that require highly artistic planning and execution.

While it has been the custom of Little Theatres, more or less, to borrow or rent scenery, the local organization this year will establish its own workshop in which the scenery for productions will be built by Mrs. Sheldon Shepard. The properties for a production will be made in the theatre as far as possible.

All the back-stage work, including shifting of scenery, handling of properties, makeup, costuming, and so forth, will be done within the theatre by members of the organization. For every person seen in a play on the

12MacGowan, op. cit., p. 115.
stage there will be three or four back-stage doing the things that go to make artistic productions. Members who do not feel the urge to act or do not find parts available for them may do work that is just as interesting and valuable by becoming active in the workshop.

The workshop idea is gaining favor over the entire country wherever there is a little theatre and the art of production is receiving attention in dramatic departments of schools and colleges.\textsuperscript{13}

At the end of the first season, it was reported that 175 people had participated in the workshop. The local papers were proud of this aspect of the work at the Little Theatre.

The Little Theatre of Duluth has become a real workshop in which many varied gifts have had an opportunity for expression during the last year. The management has always realized that a "True theatrical production is a unity in which author, actor, designer, director and audience, all have their essential parts."\textsuperscript{14}

Workshop activity is so taken for granted today that it would be easy to minimize the significance of Maurice Gnesin's innovation at the Little Theatre of Duluth in 1927. It was not so lightly regarded, then.

Mrs. Alan Wallace, the wife of the director who was hired to replace Maurice Gnesin in 1929, was hired as art director of the Little Theatre. She said, "Volunteer work in the Little Theatre is the backbone of the entire organization and the essential by which all Little Theatres live or die."\textsuperscript{15} The remark was made in an article she wrote about back-stage work at the Little Theatre for the \textit{Herald}. In the article she gave an idea of how well the workshop plan was working at Duluth.

\textsuperscript{13}Duluth \textit{Herald}, September 24, 1927.

\textsuperscript{14}Duluth \textit{Herald}, May 21, 1928.

\textsuperscript{15}Duluth \textit{Herald}, February 16, 1930.
It is most interesting to note that all the workers in the workshops are volunteers and most of them have expressed the desire to "come back and assist with the next production." A number of these people were not members of the Little Theatre organization, as the workshops are open to all interested in that line. A number of these people were not members of the Little Theatre organization, as the workshops are open to all interested in that line.\(^\text{16}\)

Alan Wallace, who followed Maurice Gnesin as Producing Director at Duluth, was also a student of George Pierce Baker at Yale. He would have carried on the workshop tradition. Possibly the most significant contribution to the little theatre movement of Baker-oriented directors was to establish the workshop approach to production in centers like Duluth.

Besides broadening the base of the Little Theatre's activity to give more people a chance to participate, the workshop approach established the economically invaluable practice of training amateurs to design and make their own costumes; design and operate their own lighting effects; and even to make many of their own properties. As much as anything, these practices made it possible for the Little Theatre to be truly self-sufficient.

In addition to open tryouts and technical workshops, there was a third aspect of the training school philosophy introduced by Maurice Gnesin—playwrighting. Future practices at the Little Theatre were not substantially affected by the playwrighting contest held in the 1927-28 season, however, a notice of the contest appeared in The Theatre magazine of December, 1927.

\(^{16}\)Tbid.
The Duluth Little Theatre, which entered its second year in October with five day's performance of Milne's *Mr. Pim Passes By*, announces a one-act play contest, which closes February 1st. A first prize of fifty dollars is offered for the best original unprinted one-act play, a second prize of thirty dollars for the best original unprinted one-act play written by a resident of Minnesota and a third prize of twenty dollars for the best original unprinted one-act play written by a resident of Duluth or Superior. All plays should be addressed to the Contest Editor, the Little Theatre, Duluth, Minnesota.17

The response to the contest was encouraging. On January 14, 1928, it was reported:

Wide interest in the drama is shown by the play-writing contest being conducted by the Little Theatre. Plays have come in from every part of the United States. An average of three a day has been received for the last three weeks and the contest has until January 31, to run. Several plays have come from such distant places as New York, Florida, and California, and several have been submitted by Duluthians.18

An announcement of the results of the contest was released to the press on March 12, 1928.

Miss Rose Buckley of Minneapolis won first prize in Minnesota in the one-act play contest sponsored by the Little Theatre of Duluth, it was announced Sunday by the Associated Press. Her play, "Burnt Offering," also took second place in the national division.

First place in the national wide contest went to Edward Roberts, a student in the Yale School of Drama at New Haven, Connecticut, who submitted a one-act play entitled "Adventure."

In the Duluth division of the contest, the play "The Trojan and the Princely Dame" won first place. It was written by a man who gave the play to the Little Theatre to be copyrighted and who returned the prize money to the organization.

17*The Theatre*, December, 1927 (article in scrapbook of Little Theatre of Duluth on file at St. Louis County Historical Society).

18*Duluth News Tribune*, January 14, 1928.
A total of 78 plays was submitted, 47 of them from Minnesota. They came from so far away as Alaska, Bangor, Maine, Florida, Texas and New Orleans. The largest number, outside of the state, came from students at the Yale School of Drama. 

An unexpected result of the playwriting contest was the production in April, 1928, of the play that provided the sentimental climax of the season and became the most frequently mentioned, most fondly remembered production since The Dark Lady of The Sonnets. On April 2, 1928, it was announced:

There will be a reunion on the stage of the Little Theatre when the next bill goes on immediately after Easter for a week. The members and guests of the theatre will be able to greet again the unforgettable, though very forgetful, Mr. Pim—Carraway Pim. It is no longer a secret that melancholy things have happened to him since his first appearance. He will be seen on board the ship, Outward Bound, in the company of Scrubby and of several other old acquaintances who have graced the stage during the year.

The clever and amusing play of Warren E. Green, who is also Mr. Pim, is called "Outward Bound, Second Voyage" or "Mr. Pim Passes On." It is at least as delightful as A. A. Milne's Mr. Pim, and is not half as melancholy as "Outward Bound." In fact, it is one of the jolliest take offs on two plays it may ever be the fortune of theatre-goers to witness.

Mr. Green's play had received honorable mention in the playwriting contest. "Although the judges found that this was 'the cleverest play received' they decided it could not be considered in the competition since its material was not original." Even though the

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19 Duluth Herald, March 12, 1928.
20 Duluth Herald, April 2, 1928.
21 Minutes, March 6, 1928.
Board of Directors could not award Mr. Green's play a prize, they did not hesitate to produce it instead of the prize winning plays, as had been planned.

There is no clear reason why the playwrighting contest was not repeated in 1928-29. It may have been that, as in 1915, all of the local talent had been tapped in one contest and the Board of Directors was not interested in running another competition for students at the Yale School of Drama. Or, perhaps they felt that the magnificent flowering of the amateur spirit that was Mr. Pim Passes On was a once-in-a-life-time occurrence, better cherished in memory than cheapened by imitation. There would not be another playwrighting contest until 1964, when one would be offered as part of the Golden Anniversary Celebration.

Another way Maurice Gnesin expressed the philosophy of the training school approach to little theatre was through children's theatre. In an address he delivered on November 28, 1927, Maurice Gnesin said:

Last week we of the Little Theatre did our share toward the resurrection of the theatre in America by putting on a play by children, for children. From now on these children will never be wholly satisfied without the theatre.  

Although he stated his belief in children's theatre strongly, Mr. Gnesin did not direct the children's plays at the Little Theatre. Although the Board of Directors of the Little Theatre stated their belief

\[Duluth\ \textit{Herald},\ \text{November 28, 1927.}\]
in it just as strongly, the children's theatre program started in 1927-28 did not last as an activity of the Little Theatre of Duluth, Inc.

Only two children's plays were produced by the Little Theatre---The Wizard of Oz in 1927 and Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs in 1928. There were other children's plays presented at the Little Theatre, but they were produced by the Junior League, which rented the Little Theatre to put on their productions. The Junior League was given no more than three weeks' use of the theatre in return for payment of fifty per cent of the first $100.00 taken in at the box office and twenty-five per cent of everything over $100.00. This arrangement continued until 1932 when the Duluth Children's Theatre was established with Miss Frances Hoffman as founder and director.

Children's theatre was popular. One hundred appeared for try-outs for The Wizard of Oz and one hundred and fifty for Snow White. After its initial production at the Little Theatre, Wizard was re-staged at the Denfeld High School auditorium, drawing a crowd of 1800. Financially, The Wizard of Oz took in more at the box office than any two other plays staged in 1927-28. The press and the public thought children's theatre was the finest service the Little Theatre performed for the community. After Snow White the following article appeared in the Herald:

Last week a group of Duluth young people, under the auspices of the Little Theatre, gave a very pleasing demonstration of the value of a Children's Theatre. They staged in a very creditable manner "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," the parts being taken by children, while the costuming, stage settings and scene shifting was done
entirely by the young people. The production provided excellent entertainment for the adults and the many youngsters who attended the four performances, while the children who were fortunate enough to take part in the performances, or contributed in any way to the staging of the production, learned many valuable lessons.

Duluthians who have been hungry for the spoken drama until the local Little Theatre came to meet their needs are indeed grateful for the splendid productions given by the adult members, but they should be even more grateful for the effort this organization is making to develop a children's theatre and should give it their whole hearted and enthusiastic support. Such work as the Little Theatre has started for the children, if continued, will mean much for Duluth in the future.

In addition to establishing practices that would continue as a part of the activity at the Little Theatre for years thereafter, Maurice Gnesin also experienced most of the frustrations that would forever sadden the lot of the Producing Director. One of these was the inflexibility of a program that had to depend on amateur talent entirely. Extra performances could be arranged from time to time for very popular shows, but as a rule the original plans had to be carried out. For example, he was able to restage his first production Mr. Pim Passes By at the Denfeld auditorium as a benefit for the new dramatic club at the Duluth Junior College, but he could not tour a play to the range cities in 1928 as he wished because of conflicting work schedules in the cast.

Another frustration of the Producing Director was play selection, which was handled by a committee of the Board of Directors, not the director, although he was consulted. During his first season, the plays were chosen one by one, with no total plan for the season. This

23 Duluth Herald, May 12, 1928.
practice was modified by the second season, but changes were often made at the last minute, as had happened in the case of the contest plays, which were cancelled in favor of Mr. Green's burlesque. It was probably frustrating to the director to find that changes in the program could be influenced by a suspicion of unfavorable reaction from the local theatre critic, James Watts. He wrote on February 25, 1928, in his daily column:

The Duluth Little Theatre is getting nationwide publicity for its ambitious plans to present Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" in modern dress. This novel production will come as the last of eight productions on the schedule for 1927-28. It had been planned to present "The Taming of the Shrew" in modern dress, but as this had been done before, the other play was substituted.

There has been considerable scattering about of brains regarding Shakespeare in modern dress. To my mind the melodious blank verse, the quaint and fanciful lyrics and poetic settings and costumes of the great plays are inalienable to Shakespeare, and if one is to strip the plays of their prime characteristics, George Ade or Montague Glass should be employed to revise the text and substitute burlesque and dialect for the blank verse. Then we should have a novelty, indeed. But the experiment is all very interesting, and I had rather read the original text than see a modern version.²⁴

After that opinion appeared in print, Shakespeare, in any dress, was not mentioned again in the minutes of the Little Theatre of Duluth, Inc., or in any press release describing their activities for almost twenty years. Mr. Gnesin would have been discouraged to find the Board of Directors valued the opinion of Mr. Watts more than that of their Producing Director.

Finally, there was the inevitable frustration that both sides experience when artists go to work for business men or when business

²⁴Duluth News Tribune, February 25, 1928.
men go into art. In a speech he made on November 29, 1927, to a drama class of the Twentieth Century Club, Maurice Gnesin said, "I am sus-

picious of art that pays for itself."25 The Board of Directors were doing everything they could to make sure the Little Theatre did pay for itself.

Maurice Gnesin advocated the idea that "the city should build a theatre and set aside a certain amount to run it with a permanent company, producing plays the year around."26 The Board of Directors had no such vision. They did not see the Little Theatre as a step toward a minicipal theatre. They were content to have things go on as they were, even including the old Drama League of America practice of endorsing everything theatrical in sight. On January 25, the Board came out in support of the Orpheum Players, a resident stock company.

The support of dramatic stock is becoming a feature of Little Theatre activity throughout the country. Little Theatres are not only building up a following for the drama within their own field but in other fields as well. Wide regrets have been expressed at the announcement that the Orpheum Players would close, and plans may be worked out so that they will remain. The active support of 1,200 Little Theatre members will go a long way in establishing a permanent dramatic stock company.

The Little Theatre could not engage in a worthier enterprise.27

On this point about stock companies, Maurice Gnesin was in direct opposition to the opinion of the Board of Directors. He said:

I think it is tragic that in a country as rich as America, a city can become a theatrical center merely by

25Duluth Herald, November 29, 1927.

26Ibid.

27Duluth Herald, January 25, 1928.
having a stock company. Stock companies are not creative, they are "reproducing by artists" for there is no time for art. They must produce a play every week. Duluth is one of the theatrical centers of the country because we have a stock company.²⁸

Gnesin wanted Duluth, and other theatrical centers in the country to be built on a more worthwhile base than paying for themselves, or making money. "The theatre is almost dead all over the country," he said. "It died because it became a matter of money."²⁹ The Board would have agreed that this was probably true as far as the commercial theatre was concerned, but not for little theatres which did not have to make as much money to meet expenses. On this point there was little chance of communication, let alone of agreement between the artist and the businessman.

On the record, there were no open clashes between the Board of Directors and Maurice Gnesin. The fact that he was not offered a raise in salary to come back for a second season is not significant, since his wife was hired as art director for $500.00, a job she had done without pay the first season, and this could be considered a raise. They were offered the same salaries for a third season and the note in the minutes that the decision to return or not was "entirely up to him as long as he let them know his decision by February 1st"³⁰ did not seem to be trying to encourage a "yes" decision. The only other business conducted at that meeting was to pass some amendments

²⁸Duluth Herald, November 29, 1927.
²⁹Ibid.
³⁰Minutes, January 8, 1929, p. 178.
to the by-laws. One amendment made the Business Manager a member of the Executive Committee, along with the President, the Recording Secretary and the Treasurer. It may or may not be significant that the Producing Director was not made a member of the Executive Committee.31

Perhaps to keep the Producing Director from becoming more than an employee of the Board of Directors, a change in the by-laws was adopted at the January 8, 1929, meeting of the Board of Directors, which altered the manner of electing the members of the Board. Under the 1926 by-laws, all eighteen members of the Board were elected annually. The amendment to Section 1 of Article 8 changed this as follows:

The Board of Directors at the Annual meeting in 1928 shall be divided into three classes as follows:

Class 1—Six members whose terms shall be one year from their election.

Class 2—Six members whose terms shall be two years from their election.

Class 3—Six members whose terms shall be three years from their election.32

Since then, membership on the Board of Directors has been for a three year term, with six members of the Board elected each year. The amendment was proposed to promote continuity in management by providing a safeguard against sudden and violent disruption of the administrative machinery by voting out all eighteen directors at one meeting. This policy is still in operation.

31Ibid.

32Ibid.
By the time Maurice Gnesin left Duluth, the Little Theatre was completely operational.

Mr. Gnesin, during his service as director and adviser, has built up the Little Theatre on a firm basis, and he leaves it a strongly going concern with a large future before it. Notably he has established it on a very high plane as regards the quality of plays produced. Among the growing members of Little Theatre enterprises in the country there are some that are larger and that have greater facilities, but none, surely, that are producing better plays or playing them better.\(^3\)

The only changes that have affected the activity at the Little Theatre since 1929 have been changes in personnel. Between 1929 and 1956, nine men succeeded Maurice Gnesin as full-time Producing Director.\(^4\) Since 1956 there has been no full-time Producing Director, but a different person from the community has been hired by the Board to direct each show. It is not within the scope of this report to consider the contributions of the full-time directors, since these changes in personnel did not significantly effect the organizational structure, the management policies or the production practices of the Little Theatre. Even changing the name to the Duluth Playhouse in 1941 reflected no important changes in structure, policy or practice. It is possible, however, that the change to local directors hired on a show basis may affect the Duluth Playhouse in the future. The reasons for this change and its possible effects will be considered in the next chapter, along with some other conclusions that might be drawn from this study.

\(^3\) Duluth Herald, May 23, 1929.

\(^4\) See Appendix A for a summary of the backgrounds and contributions to the Duluth Playhouse of the nine directors who succeeded Maurice Gnesin.
CHAPTER IX

THE DULUTH PLAYHOUSE TODAY

In 1912, Percy MacKaye wrote, "The Civic Theatre idea, as a distinctive issue, implies the conscious awakening of a people to self-government in the activities of its leisure." In 1956, by adopting the plan of using a different local amateur director for each show instead of hiring a resident professional director for the season, the Duluth Playhouse moved nearer to the Civic Theatre idea.

It was not an easy move, for, just as is often the case in political situations, the conscious awakening of the people who worked at the Duluth Playhouse led to open rebellion. One of the rebel leaders was Mrs. Elizabeth Green, who served as president of the Board of Directors of the Playhouse from 1963 to 1965. She described 1955 as a year when "feelings ran high."

There was a great deal of mutual misunderstanding. A number of people who worked almost every night at the Playhouse—building scenery, painting and decorating the set, setting the lights, and less glamorous jobs like washing dishes and emptying ash trays—cleaning up in general—these people very often didn't buy a season ticket. Some of them couldn't buy one because they simply couldn't spare $7.50. A season ticket entitles you to vote at the Annual Meeting in June. The result was that many of the people who had the most to do with getting productions ready on time had the least to say about planning the productions.

Percy MacKaye, loc. cit.
A few of the old timers on the Board did not see this as being a serious problem since it had always been like that at the Playhouse. The old timers said the real problem was a breakdown of *esprit de corps* caused by newcomers who were trying to change everything.\(^2\)

Mrs. Green was one of the newcomers. A native of Connecticut, she had heard of the Duluth Playhouse from her husband, whose father, Warren Green, was the author of the 1927 hit, *Mr. Pim Passes On*. \(^3\) She and her husband had been active in Community Theatre work in Connecticut, and, after moving to Duluth in 1952, planned to continue their interest. The opportunity came sooner than either expected.

We arrived on Wednesday. The first paper we read had an announcement of tryouts for *The Silver Whistle*. We had no place to live, but we went to tryouts. We had parts at the Playhouse before we had a place to live in Duluth.\(^4\)

Monty Healy was the director of the Playhouse when Mrs. Green first became active. She expressed respect for the high standards he set and enforced both in production and in conduct off-stage. After Healy, according to Mrs. Green, the standards were not so high, on stage or off. She noted that subsequent directors quickly developed sharp personality conflicts with some of the workers. "A general feeling of dissatisfaction developed because a director would tend to do the same kind of play each time and do it in just about the same way--expected groupings, predictable gimmicks. Audiences became tired of

\(^2\) Interview, August 23, 1965, with Mrs. Elizabeth Green, President, Board of Directors, Duluth Playhouse, 1963-1965.

\(^3\) See Chapter VII, p. 153.

\(^4\) Interview, Mrs. Green, August 23, 1965.
seeing the same people playing the same kinds of roles in every production. Under those conditions, by the end of a season, everyone was exhausted.\(^5\)

In 1955, the rebels acted. "The Annual Meeting of the members of the Playhouse is usually a pretty dull affair," said Mrs. Green. "But not that year. That year the workers actually stacked the meeting in order to elect their own people to the Board."\(^6\)

The rebellion was a success. The six new Board members were able to persuade a majority to adopt the plan of using local directors. It was not an appeal for fair play for the workers that persuaded the Board, however. The Board was searching for some solution to serious financial problems. Mrs. Green explained:

> It was strictly a financial decision. The Playhouse just couldn't afford to pay anyone. At that time, we were paying our directors from $5,000.00 to $6,500.00 for ten months, and it was about that time we began to feel the effect of television on our box office. Membership had dropped off steadily for a number of years. By changing to five local directors and paying each from $300.00 to $400.00 for directing one play we were able to save about $4,000.00 a year in salaries. Over the past five or six years, because of this saving, we've been able to make money—from five hundred to a thousand dollars a season. The Playhouse couldn't have survived financially if the Board hadn't changed to hiring local directors.\(^7\)

The current President of the Board, Dr. Robert M. Kanter, an optometrist, succeeded Mrs. Green in 1965. He shares her enthusiasm for using local people to direct the plays.

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\(^5\)Ibid.

\(^6\)Ibid.

\(^7\)Interview, Mrs. Green, August 23, 1965.
Every director brings his own fresh approach. Every director introduces new techniques. Each one has his own devoted following—people who will work with him, but who might not get involved for anyone else. Audiences, too, have favorite directors. It broadens the base of the Playhouse in active participants and in audience, and for the regular workers at the Playhouse, working with a different director each time is an educational experience in itself.8

Dr. Kanter and Mrs. Green agree that the new system does create some new problems. The two most serious new problems are both related to the matter of technical production: there is a lack of continuity in the management of backstage activity, leading to a waste of materials and effort, and there is a lack of a program to train new people for work in the technical aspects of production.

In an effort to solve the first problem, a technical director is now hired on a season basis to take responsibility for the technical aspects of all five shows. This practice was started in 1964 by Mrs. Green and has been continued by Dr. Kanter. Both are satisfied that this plan is working.

The problem of training new people for backstage work has not been as easy to solve. The resident director, with no other job, had the time and the motivation to operate a workshop. The present position of technical director is a part-time job, and it is usually easier for him to do the work himself than to go to the bother of rounding up volunteers and organizing the work so that they can do it.

The two problems, in a sense, are one—a dilemma. Dr. Kanter explained:

How can we make sure we have the best possible technical show each time and still make sure that the

8Interview, June 28, 1966, Dr. Robert Kanter, President, Board of Directors, Duluth Playhouse, 1965-.
people who are interested in backstage work have an opportunity to work and to learn? That's the problem. If we weren't on a set schedule—we just did a play when we felt like it, we could get by with all volunteer help. It's different when you have a commitment to open five plays at five precise times. You have to pay someone to take that kind of responsibility.  

Mrs. Green agreed on the necessity of paying a technical director, although, coming from Connecticut where no one was paid for anything, she believed that a completely volunteer situation was best. "When you have responsibility for an announced season, you have to pay," she said, and added, "if you have to pay, it's better to pay just one person." For several years, each director hired his own technical director to work his show. "Often this person would have little knowledge of theatre in general," said Mrs. Green, "and even if he did know theatre, he didn't know much about the Playhouse. One person threw out a valuable scrim, thinking it was just an old piece of gauze that was creating a fire hazard."

The Board of Directors is trying to solve their technical production dilemma. The plans for the 1966-1967 season include a new committee to train interested people for backstage work and the technical director has already improved the quality of technical production and has relieved the confusion in backstage operations without seriously discouraging volunteers.

9 Ibid.

10 Mrs. Green, August 23, 1965.

11 Ibid.
"The 1965-1966 season was the most successful season at the box office the Playhouse has ever had. The question is where do we go from here?" said Dr. Kanter, in discussing the future of the Playhouse. He mentioned the possibility of increasing the schedule—adding a sixth director who would specialize in a new area like staged readings, or would expand the program of the Playhouse in the area of children's theatre. His only reservation is that any increased activity might overtax the regular volunteer staff.

Another venture in the near or distant future will be securing new facilities. The Duluth Playhouse has been in the same building since 1927. At the present time, they have no lease and could be required to move out on a ninety day notice. Mrs. Green spoke of the gracious treatment by the landlord and of their cheap rent as compared to that paid by commercial enterprises in the same building. "We've been without a lease since 1945. Most of us have stopped thinking of it as a threat. We've been good tenants and it must be a sobering thought for the managers to calculate the expense of converting the theatre area to any commercial use."  

Dr. Kanter said that a committee on feasibility is "currently working on the problem of locating a new facility—not any more plush than what we have now, but something with more space. We are terribly crowded." Neither Mrs. Green nor Dr. Kanter is particularly

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12Dr. Kanter, June 28, 1966.
13Mrs. Green, August 23, 1965.
14Dr. Kanter, June 28, 1966.
PLATE XI

Scenes from plays of 1965-1966 season

Figure

1. The Fantasticks.
2. Mary, Mary.
4. Never Too Late.
5. Ah, Wilderness.
6. Rashomon.

(Photographs by Ken Moran)
interested in the Playhouse owning its own building. Mrs. Green sum-
med up the case against ownership.

The people who argue that we would save the rent money just don't realize what it costs to own a building. They don't realize how free they are now. Now all we have to worry about is getting the next show ready on time. We don't have to worry about the heating plant breaking down, or leaky pipes, or faulty plumbing. We don't have to worry about security or maintenance or insurance—the Fire Department loathes us. We don't have to make the building pay for itself by renting it out to other organizations and limiting our own use of it. Our main interest is producing plays. If we owned a building, there would be too many bread and butter considerations diverting our attention.\(^{15}\)

The new Duluth Arena Auditorium, opening in August, 1966, has been suggested as a possible home for the Playhouse. Both Dr. Kanter and Mrs. Green are cool to this suggestion. Dr. Kanter said, "I see no real value in the suggestion, since a twelve hundred seat auditorium is not really suitable for our intimate style of production."\(^{16}\) He added that he would not care to add to all of the other problems of running the Playhouse the problem of sharing the stage with the many and varied organizations that would have to co-operate in order to approach the ideal of three hundred and sixty-five days usage.

Mrs. Green and Dr. Kanter agree that the strength of the Duluth Playhouse—what has kept it alive over the years and will continue to sustain it in the future—is its broad base of participation. "Anyone

\(^{15}\)Mrs. Green, August 23, 1965.

\(^{16}\)Dr. Kanter, June 28, 1966.
who gets the bug for theatre can work at the Playhouse,"\(^{17}\) said Mrs. Green. Dr. Kanter went further:

The Playhouse people spread the bug to others. I was literally dragged down to the Playhouse for a small part in *Witness For the Prosecution* seven years ago. That started it. Later, I asked someone about the business end. He explained it to me. I was elected to the Board at the next Annual Meeting. It doesn't matter what you want to do, the Playhouse can put you right to work.\(^{18}\)

The people who are associated with the Duluth Playhouse are proud of the work they do. Mrs. Green described them as a thoroughly cooperative, voluntary, spontaneous group. "It's the most democratic institution in the city, open to all types. All it requires is an interest in the activity to become a part of the group."\(^{19}\)

This observer has worked inside the organization as set designer and technical director for *Romanoff and Juliet*, 1962-1963, as director of *The Wizard of Oz*, 1964-1965, and as an actor in the Fiftieth Anniversary production of *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*. Personal experience has verified most of what Mrs. Green and Dr. Kanter said about broad and enthusiastic participation in the activities of the Playhouse. There is a spirit among the workers that creates a sense of almost instant belonging in newcomers.

On two occasions, this observer was invited to attend the monthly meeting of the Board of Directors--once to announce the plan to prepare this report on the history of the Playhouse, and later to report on a

\(^{17}\)Mrs. Green, August 23, 1965.

\(^{18}\)Dr. Kanter, June 28, 1966.

\(^{19}\)Mrs. Green, August 23, 1965.
proposal to revive The Wizard of Oz, the first children's theatre production by the Playhouse, in 1927. At these meetings there was a sense of instant belonging. The meetings were informal, but well organized to conduct business. The tone of the conversation was friendly, but the subject was Playhouse business.

The two Presidents of the Board that this observer has had a chance to work with have been exceptionally able people. Mrs. Elizabeth Green is the director of the St. Louis County Historical Society. The demands of this job, alone, would be enough to keep anyone comfortably active. Mrs. Green takes it in stride and looks for more work. The Playhouse is her major outside interest. Most of the credit for the success of the Fiftieth Anniversary program belongs to her. A formal celebration, with a revival of the first production, The Dark Lady of the Sonnets, and a one-act playwrighting contest, was her idea and she planned most of the details and made sure they were all taken care of on schedule. She was not one to do only the big jobs, however. There was no job at the Playhouse that she did not accept as her kind of work. She constructed and painted scenery for Romanoff and Juliet and later swept the stage and the auditorium. She helped with refreshments for the children in the cast of The Wizard of Oz and later did the dishes and helped clean the make-up room. She did those jobs with as much zeal and competence as she ran the Board meeting.

Mrs. Green does everything as though she is having a wonderful time but would prefer that no one knew how much she was enjoying herself. She is a straightforward, sensitive, capable and articulate
person. She did a good job for the Duluth Playhouse as President of the Board. Asked if she would continue to work after her term was up, she said, "Of course! Someone has to empty the ash trays. Someone has to say, 'We never walk into the Green Room with our boots on!' Someone has to guard these precious traditions of the Playhouse." 

Dr. Robert Kanter is as dedicated to the Playhouse as Mrs. Green. His office is in a busy shopping center across the street from the Playhouse, where demanding patients give him a busy practice. While this observer was waiting to make an appointment to interview him for this project, there was a patient waiting who seemed very unhappy. "He isn't with another patient," she confided. "He's talking to someone on the phone about the Playhouse. I wouldn't mind being kept waiting for something important." She stomped out a few minutes later, just before Dr. Kanter came into the room. The receptionist told him his patient had walked out and why. He shrugged. "That happens!"

Dr. Kanter is not as experienced in theatre production as Mrs. Green, but he has as much determination to see a project through to the end. The production of Rashomon was in trouble when the scheduled director had to move from town unexpectedly. Some Board members thought the play should be dropped. They had not been enthusiastic about it from the start and believed the problem of finding a new director would be made more difficult by requiring him to take on an unfamiliar and complicated play. Dr. Kanter insisted that, since Rashomon had been announced, it should be presented. After finding a director, Dr. Kanter worked with him to secure a cast and to gather
the special costumes, wigs, and other technical devices, like a revolving stage, required by the script. "This was my first plunge into backstage work," he said. "I really learned. I had to. I have a special feeling for Rashomon, now. I guess I always will."

The Playhouse enjoyed its most successful season at the box office during Dr. Kanter's first term as President. Part of the success was due to the popularity of The Fantasticks. Dr. Kanter was able to take full advantage of this popularity—both financially and from a public relations standpoint. He arranged for an extended run of the production; he arranged for a special performance at the Hotel Duluth for some "visiting firemen;" he donated a major portion of the receipts for a special performance at the university to a drive for funds to support foreign students. His performance as President in his first term was commendable.

The quality of leadership given the Playhouse by Mrs. Green and Dr. Kanter is one of the intangible strengths of the institution. Important as the broad base of enthusiastic workers is to the success of the organization, the future of the Duluth Playhouse may depend more on whether it can continue to attract or develop leaders like them. Mrs. Green and Dr. Kanter each enhances his talent for business and management with a creative attitude toward theatre.

"You have to run it like a business," said Mrs. Green. "But the Playhouse is more than just a business. It's people. You don't run people. You work with them. It's that simple—or that difficult."

Dr. Kanter, going into his second term with confidence born of the overall success of his first, tempers his optimism with the memory of
the problems he had confronted. His attitude is a strange mixture of realism, fatalism and optimism. "What worked last year may not work this year," he said. "We expect new problems. We expect to solve them."

This study of community theatre in Duluth, Minnesota, has raised more questions than it has answered. The opening of the Little Theatre of the Duluth Center of the Drama League of America in November, 1914, was not a carefully calculated venture launched with a clear purpose from a simple motive toward a pure ideal. To understand why it was opened, one must consider the purpose of the members of the Drama League of America, like Dr. Richard Burton, Mrs. A. Starr Best, and Mrs. S. R. Holden, who wanted to free the theatre from commercial slavery. One must also consider the motives of local, trained amateurs like Mrs. F. A. Patrick, Mrs. George Morgan, and Francis J. Webb, who wanted a chance to perform. Finally, one must consider the ideals of dedicated professionals like Percy MacKaye, Thomas Dickinson, Lady Gregory and Harley Granville-Barker, who wanted to find a way to return the art of theatre to the people. All of these purposes, motives, and ideals met and mingled at Duluth, Minnesota, in the first half of the second decade of the twentieth century. The result was the almost spontaneous opening of the Little Theatre.

The reasons for the failure of the first experiment are as complex as the reasons for opening it in the first place. Three factors were at work. First, there was a great deal of confusion in defining a
clear policy toward play production because any hint of competition with professional theatre activity conflicted with the purposes of the Drama League of America. Second, the ladies had gone into the commercial venture of managing a theatre building with business practices more suited to managing a woman's club. Finally, the organizational structure was too cumbersome to put into effect efficient management policies.

When activity was resumed in 1926, after six years of dormancy, these factors were given careful consideration. The new organization was designed to achieve one stated purpose: to produce plays, and both the organizational structure and the business practices were revised to accomplish this end smoothly and efficiently. The fact that only minor changes have been made in the operation since the re-organization indicates that the founders of the Duluth Playhouse were able to learn from their mistakes, and were effective in correcting them.

Several areas for future study have been opened by this research. The era of pageantry in America—just before World War I—may be worth serious investigation. Percy MacKaye may have been more influential than he is generally given credit for in shaping the future of theatre of America by his contributions in this area. Also, the contribution of Thomas Dickinson to the development of theatre should be re-evaluated, first, in regard to the program of writing and producing plays in local centers like his Wisconsin Players, second, in regard to his anthologies of modern drama which were among the first to bring modern European playwrights to the attention of the
American reading public. A third area of investigation might be the people of influence of the Drama League of America. In view of the broad enthusiastic support it received generally at first, and in the light of what this organization started in Duluth, it does not seem just to dismiss the League too quickly as an ill-conceived woman's club activity.

One general conclusion might be drawn from this study: enthusiasm and determination are enough to start a community theatre, but its survival demands much more. This point, at least, is illustrated by the history of the Duluth Playhouse. At the Playhouse, at least three things had to be added to the enthusiasm and determination of the leaders and members of the Duluth Center of the Drama League of America to open and operate their Little Theatre before the project was able to succeed: a clear simple purpose to produce plays as well as possible with local talent; a stable and flexible organizational structure; and a creative start in the right direction.

A clear simple purpose—to produce plays as well as possible with local talent. Sponsoring playwrighting contests or one-act play tournaments, encouraging attendance at local professional theatres or by other amateur groups, developing regional playwrights and organizing the leisure of the community—these are all noble and worthy projects, but they make severe demands on the limited resources of time, energy, money, and influence of the group. Percy MacKaye, Thomas Dickinson, Lady Gregory, and Harley Granville-Barker expected too much from community theatre. It was essential to the initial development of community theatre that these early leaders put their influence to
work and promoted their ideas, for this helped to start the fire for amateur theatre production in Duluth, and perhaps in many other places across the country. The leaders of the Duluth Playhouse seem to have learned that they must not spread themselves too thin, that they should be content with a limited objective. Producing the play is the thing. Settling for this limited objective does not minimize the contribution the Playhouse can make. Even if the goals of the Civic Theatre and the Wisconsin Players were being accomplished by other groups, there would still be a need for the unique creative experience that only a community theatre can provide.

A stable and flexible organizational structure. Too much democracy in the administration of its affairs was partly responsible for the failure of the first Little Theatre of Duluth. The reorganization in 1926, patterned after Oliver Hinsdale’s plan in Dallas, gave more administrative power to the Board of Directors. A later revision delegated much of the administrative power to even fewer people—an Executive Committee. The effect of these changes was to give stability to the organization.

To prevent stability from becoming rigidity, the plan of electing six new Board members each year for three-year terms was adopted, and a limit of two consecutive terms was placed on any elected office, including the Board of Directors. The President has the power, however, to appoint to the Board a person not eligible to be elected under the two-term rule. There are two appointed positions always available, and he can fill vacancies. This power is a safeguard against too much flexibility. It makes it possible for the Playhouse to continue to
benefit from the services of some older members, while still making room for the new. This seems to this observer to be an effective way to achieve the delicate balance between stability and flexibility.

A creative start in the right direction. The first Little Theatre of Duluth had a creative start, but it was in the wrong direction. The creative start it was given in 1927 by Maurice Gnesin was in the right direction—toward self-sufficiency in technical production. Ultimately, the credit for this must be given to George Pierce Baker and others, who were pioneering in training programs in theatre arts at universities.

For a period of ten years from 1927, the producing-directors at the Playhouse came from Yale or Iowa, where workshop production techniques were taught. Ulmont Healy, too, emphasized the workshop approach. He was not a university trained man, but, while he was producing-director, he had an informal agreement with Dr. Harold Hayes, Director of Theatre at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, from 1949 to 1960 to use as his technical crews university students who were training for work in the theatre. Dr. Hayes was an Iowa graduate and a firm believer in the workshop approach. He directed two productions at the Playhouse with university students after the change to local directors. It is likely that he did much to keep alive the

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20 When Dr. Hayes was in charge of UMD Theatre, everything the university did was carried on in the Old Main Building on the old campus. Now, everything but theatre activity is on a new campus a half mile away. Sharing the inadequate Old Main stage with everyone for everything from band concerts to common examinations would have made a dedicated theatre man like Dr. Hayes look for ways to give his students opportunities to work in the theatre.
workshop idea--the creative start in the right direction that Maurice Gnesin and other university trained producing-directors had given the Playhouse.

If these conclusions have any validity, the only problem that might have a serious effect on the future of the Playhouse is the weakening of the workshop approach in technical theatre. The leaders of the Playhouse are aware of this problem, if it is a serious problem, and are trying to find a solution. The Duluth Playhouse has continued to exist for more than fifty years because the leaders did not expect the job to be easy. There is reason to hope that, if this attitude prevails in the future, the Duluth Playhouse will be good for another fifty years, at least.
APPENDIX A

PRODUCING-DIRECTORS, 1929-1955

Alan Wallace
1929-30 to 1932-33

Mr. and Mrs. Allan Wallace will succeed Mr. and Mrs. Maurice Gnesin as director and art director of the Duluth Little Theatre organization during the coming season, it was announced Saturday.

The new director, like his predecessor, is a pupil of Professor Baker's Yale theatre. Mr. Wallace is at present working with the New Haven Thespians. He has been connected with college and community dramatics for several years. A graduate of Earlham College, Richmond, Indiana, where he was assistant to the dramatics director, he went first to Friends University, Wichita, Kansas, as assistant professor of public speaking and dramatics.

During his two years at Yale he did major work in two lines of production—directing and lighting. He has also been trained in costume design, scenic design, technical directing and study of forms and development of the drama. Mrs. Wallace has been trained in costume and scenic designing. ¹

Alan Wallace stayed for four seasons as director of the Little Theatre of Duluth, Inc. He built on the work of his predecessor, expanding the workshop idea to include formal training in the arts of the theatre.

A new feature recently developed by the Little Theatre is the workshop, where both prospective actors and producers, costumers, property men and so forth can get training under expert leadership.

¹Duluth News Tribune, May 30, 1929.
At a recent meeting about 100 interested workers met to plan the workshop. It was decided to put on several short plays for the audience of the workshop only. These plays will be criticized by the members of the group and may even be produced at a later date before regular patrons. But the object of the shop is to teach the technique involved in producing a play, and from the group trained in the workshop the regular plays will be able to draw more experienced material.

Alan Wallace was successful in taking the Little Theatre into its first production on the road. He talked of exchanging plays with the Superior Little Theatre in 1930 as he was coming to the end of his first season in Duluth. This plan never materialized, but in April, 1931, he took his production of At Mrs. Beam's, by C. K. Munro, to the neighboring community of Cloquet. Plans to expand the tour to include the range cities had to be abandoned because of previous commitments of the cast. Finally, in May, 1932, he was able to arrange a tour to the range cities. On May 5, the melodrama Fashion or Life in New York, opened in the Hibbing High School auditorium.

Alan Wallace was to work in a newly remodeled Little Theatre auditorium. The Herald announced the plan for remodeling on May 19, 1930.

The Little Theatre has purchased 250 theatre seats, which will be installed this summer to replace the wooden benches that have been in use for the last three years.

The Tribune of October 5, 1930, described the completed job.

The raising of the auditorium floor and the installing of regular seats not only guarantees comfort for the audience but also makes the auditorium very attractive.

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2Duluth Herald, November 6, 1929.
3Duluth Herald, May 19, 1930.
4Duluth News Tribune, October 5, 1930.
Also started during Alan Wallace's first season as director at the Little Theatre was the highly successful and popular social event sponsored by the friends of the Little Theatre to raise funds for its support, the Beaux Arts Ball.

Members of society and the artistic world, many of whom have been active in the preparations, will turn out almost en masse for the brilliant first annual Beaux Arts Ball which is to be held Thursday night at the Hotel. It is the belief of the committee that the events will far surpass any entertainment given in the city.\(^5\)

The Beaux Arts Ball was one first annual sponsored by the Little Theatre that had a second annual. It was a popular social highlight for fourteen years. The Little Theatre's participation in or sponsoring of first annual one-act play tournaments did not fare as well.

The first annual Northwest One-Act Tournament was held at St. Paul, Minnesota, in the fall of Alan Wallace's first season. He prepared a production of *Minnie Field*, by E. P. Conkle, that was good enough to tie for the first prize of $150.00. Mrs. Alex Gerry's unpublished history of the Little Theatre describes her reaction to the contest.

One notable achievement was the presentation of a one-act play called "Minnie Field." Such a success was "Minnie Field" that she was chosen to represent Duluth in a state-wide little theatre contest conducted by the St. Paul Players, in the spring of 1920. The Orpheum Theatre in St. Paul (not abandoned, but at full speed ahead) was the chosen place, with one night allowed to each of the state theatres participating, the Minneapolis Masquers, St. Paul Players and the Little Theatre of Rochester, Winona, and Duluth.

Five of our most respectable citizens took part in "Minnie Field" (it was an all male cast). And I shall

\(^5\)Duluth Herald, January 28, 1930.
never forget the thrill of seeing these solemn five march
onto that great stage, between the snake lady and the
trained seal acts, and do their stunt.6

In 1933, the Little Theatre announced its own first annual one-
act play contest for local amateur theatre groups. Nine groups entered. The contest was held April 20, 21, 22, and 23, 1933. The winner was The Valiant, produced by the DeMolay. The group from the Junior College came in second with The Turtle Dove. Third place went to Duluth State Teacher's College for their production of Evening Clothes Indispensable. There is no record of the Little Theatre either entering or holding another one-act play contest since.

Another activity started while he was director foreshadowed Alan Wallace's future career in radio broadcasting. Beginning April 23, 1930, the Little Theatre of Duluth presented a daily program over WEBC radio. The program of readings by members of the Little Theatre was broadcast at 6:00 P.M. The program continued for several years. Also, in May, 1930, the Little Theatre offered prizes for radio sketches. In 1943, Alan Wallace was reported to be continuing his broadcasting career in Chicago, "as director of daytime serial programs. 'Captain Midnight' was one of his biggest successes."

Alan Wallace had the third longest tour of duty as director of the Little Theatre of Duluth, but he directed the second largest number of plays--a total of twenty-seven full-length productions in four years. The national prestige of the Duluth Little Theatre was advanced by the

6Marie d'Autrement Gerry, op. cit.
7Duluth Herald, May 12, 1943.
publication of the picture of his wife's setting for *Paris Bound* in the December, 1930, issue of *Drama* magazine.

Like Maurice Gnesin, Alan Wallace had the vision needed to lead a program that would be a vital part of the living theatre in America. His training under George Pierce Baker being similar to Gnesin's training was an advantage in that he had no problem taking over and building on what he found, rather than beginning all over. He left Duluth amidst much good feeling and was fondly remembered.

John Wray Young
1933-34 to 1935-36

John Wray Young, newly appointed director of the Little Theatre of Duluth, will arrive here next Monday to begin his work, theatre directors announced yesterday. He will be accompanied by Mrs. Young, who will serve as the theatre's designer.

He received his first dramatic training under Gilnor Brown, founder of the Community Playhouse in Pasadena, California, a theatre where the plays produced in conjunction with the school of drama are considered a criterion for Little Theatre directors all over the country. After his work with Mr. Brown . . . Mr. Young specialized in dramatic courses offered at the University of Kansas, and completed his academic training for the theatre of Iowa University in the largest dramatic school located at a state university. A year's travel in the orient enabled him to study in detail the theatres of the Far East.

In the fall of 1929, he became director of the Little Theatre at Sioux City, Iowa . . .

During his second season one of his own plays "Deadline," won the state playwriting contest, and was given its first production at the state university.

In the fall of 1932, on their return from Europe where they observed the modern trends in the theatres of seven countries, Mr. and Mrs. Young went to Iowa City. There Mr. Young became a director in the Iowa University
Theatre, and Mrs. Young was given charge of the Iowa University Children’s Theatre. Here Gilmore Brown visited them inviting Mr. Young to Pasadena to be guest director at the Community Playhouse for four months last spring.8

John Wray and Margaret Mary Young were the last husband and wife team to be employed by the Duluth Little Theatre. Unlike Mrs. Gnesin and Mrs. Wallace, Margaret Mary Young was not just a technical assistant with the title, art director. She functioned as an associate director, directing four plays herself while in Duluth.

Although he was from the opposite end of the nation from either of the two directors who preceded him, John Wray Young had come into theatre work by the way of the university theatre and operated from its premises just as Gnesin and Wallace had. Young actually went further than any director who worked for the Duluth Little Theatre toward shaping the program in the image of the university theatre, especially in establishing a summer theatre in conjunction with a summer school of theatre at Duluth.

His first summer theatre ran from June 24 through August 1, 1935, with twenty-one performances of four plays—each a recent Broadway hit. The success of the first summer theatre led to Young’s expanding the idea for the summer of 1936 to include formal instruction. The Duluth Herald explained the program.

The curriculum will include acting, stagecraft, directing, costuming, theatre history, voice and diction, playwrighting, make-up, and eurythmics. Classes will be planned to permit the students time for active participation in the four major productions of the summer session.9

8Duluth News Tribune, September 19, 1933.
9Duluth Herald, May 16, 1936.
It probably did not hurt enrollment for the summer program to release the story about the Hollywood talent scout who was planning to catch the shows at the Little Theatre and take screen tests on the spot of whoever he found to be potentially a great star. It was remarked that Mr. Weiser, the talent scout, had been in Duluth the previous summer and had been so impressed with what he saw that he planned to come back that year. At that time fifty pupils were enrolled. On opening day of the session, the papers described the school.

With a number of students from Midwest cities already registered, the Duluth Little Theatre summer school of the theatre—an effort to establish a school of the theatre for the city—will open a six week course today.

Widely advertised by the Duluth Chamber of Commerce and the Minnesota Arrowhead Association as an important summer attraction, the Duluth Summer Theatre School will present courses in nine theatre arts. The faculty includes John Wray Young, founder and director of the school; Ivard Strauss of the New England Conservatory of Boston; Dr. Maurice Gnesin, director of the Goodman Theatre of Chicago; Juliet Baker, voice and diction expert of Chicago; and Margaret Mary Young, associate director of the Duluth Little Theatre.¹⁰

Ivard Strauss, who was technical director for the summer theatre productions and taught the classes in design and stagecraft, was widely advertised as the first "Guest Star" to play at the Little Theatre. He played the lead in Mrs. Young's production of Accent on Youth, by Samson Raphaelson, which opened the season.

At the end of the season Mr. and Mrs. Young left for "broader opportunities" in Shreveport, Louisiana. He is still director there, and has written the most recent handbook in little theatre operation

¹⁰Duluth, Herald, June 25, 1936.
and management, *The Community Theatre and How It Works*, published in 1957. The three years he spent in Duluth were exciting and productive years for the Little Theatre.

Gordon Giffen
1936-37 to 1937-38

Gordon Giffen, graduate of Yale University and recently director of the Civic Theatre in Waterbury, Conn., will be director of the Little Theatre in Duluth for the 1936-37 season. . . .

Mr. Giffen is a native of California and was graduated from Pomona College in Claremont, California, later taking graduate work at Yale in the Department of Drama.

While at Yale he served as director for the Elm City Players and also two other New Haven Little Theatre groups, at the same time teaching public speaking in the New Haven Labor College.

For several summers he has worked in the professional summer stock companies of New England and has gained a wide experience in acting and the production end of the theatre. With the Forty Niners at Whitefield, New Hampshire he has been chief technician and member of the acting company. 11

Mrs. Gerry's unpublished history of the Little Theatre of Duluth was written while Mr. Giffen was the director. She had nothing but good to say about him.

Directors, like ministers, seem to come and go, tend their flocks for a few short years and then pass on to greener pastures. Is this a reflection on temperament, or endurance? There are known cases where temperament has killed little theatres, but Duluth has thrived on it. Each director has had his say, left his imprint and gone on, but none is forgotten: Mrs. Patrick, J. Hooker Wright, Maurice Gnesin, Alan Wallace, John Wray Young and Gordon Giffen. And it is with this last name that we are now concerned.

11*Duluth News Tribune*, September 22, 1936.
As a final figure in our dramatis personae, the present director, Gordon Giffen, cannot be overlooked. Mr. Giffen is too arresting a personality to pass by without a word of appreciation and praise. Somewhere recently I have read to what great heights the sons of ministers often climb, in stagecraft, science and the professions. (Mr. Giffen is the son of a Congregational minister.)

A graduate of Pomona College, where it is rumored he roomed with Robert Taylor, he came to Duluth in the fall of 1936, fresh from three years at Professor Baker's dramatic school at Yale. He, therefore, can speak and direct with quiet authority and does so. In June, Mr. Giffen is to marry Miss True Compton, who is now finishing her three years' course at Professor Baker's school of drama and who is a member of the Junior League of New Haven.

The play which opened March 8th, for a week's run, "Someone at the Door," the 121st for the Duluth Theatre, by the way, included Mr. Giffen in the cast and it was a pleasure to the eye and ear to watch and listen to his work on stage. Each passing month endears Mr. Giffen to the theatre more and more, and his manners even under stress of rehearsal, are those of a gentleman and a scholar.12

Mr. Giffen managed The Petrified Forest, by Robert E. Sherwood, the first production by the Little Theatre to travel outside the state. Performances were staged March 28, in Ashland, Wisconsin and on April 1, in Superior, Wisconsin. He also produced the first premiere at the Little Theatre since The Dark Lady of the Sonnets. The play was Someone at the Door, by D. and C. Christie which opened March 8, 1937.

To James Watts, the theatre critic, Giffen's college acquaintance with Robert Taylor was his chief claim to fame.

Mr. Giffen, the shrinking violet, is to be congratulated that he has not made any attempts to bask in the

12Marie d'Autrement Gerry, op. cit.
reflected glory of handsome Robert. He prefers to travel under his own banner.\textsuperscript{13}

Much as he probably did prefer to travel under his own name, capsule biographies of Gordon Giffen in Duluth newspapers generally identified him as the man who had roomed with Robert Taylor. He left Duluth after his second season at the Little Theatre to go into professional theatre in New York. In 1943, he was reported to have "one of the choice assignments in the country--director of the famous Dock Street Theatre in Charleston."\textsuperscript{14}

Gregory Foley
1938-39 to 1941-42

Appointment of Gregory Foley, former head of Civic Theatres in Omaha and Des Moines, as director of the Little Theatre of Duluth, was announced yesterday by the Board of Directors of the theatre here.

The new director is reported to have acquired an enviable reputation in the field of the theatre, and together with Prof. Edward C. Mabie helped establish the University of Iowa Theatre, one of the foremost college organizations in the country.

He is a graduate of the University of Iowa and served on the faculty of that institution following his graduation. For three years he was director of the Civic Theatre at Omaha and for five years was head of the Little Theatre at Des Moines. . . .

The new director is 36 years old and is married.\textsuperscript{15}

Greg Foley holds second place in longevity as director of the Little Theatre of Duluth, with five seasons to his credit. Reviewing

\textsuperscript{13}Duluth \textit{News Tribune}, June 6, 1937.
\textsuperscript{14}Duluth \textit{Herald}, May 12, 1943.
\textsuperscript{15}Duluth \textit{News Tribune}, July 8, 1938.
his first season's work, Nathan Cohen, theatre critic for the Herald, wrote:

In him, the theatre has one of the best men in the profession. His plays last year were superb. It is seldom that the theatre has experienced a season in which the productions were so uniformly excellent.16

Mr. Cohen was very impressed with Mr. Foley's style when he was in the act of directing a play.

Someday, Mr. Foley should give a public performance as a director. It's an experience watching him work. With a pencil as a baton, he conducts the rehearsals as a conductor leads his orchestra. He beats out the pace. When he wants acceleration, there is an excited, wild waving of the directorial pencil. When he desires the soft touch, he waves his baton as if he wanted the tranquility of a Caesar Franck. And, of course, he has facial expressions to go with each movement.

The job of directing is a tough one, particularly for a director of Mr. Foley's temperament. He lets himself go at every rehearsal. Often he has one play rehearsing on the auditorium stage, and another in the theatre's green room. On top of all this, there are sets to design, flats to paint, properties to collect, and lines to read when a player fails to show up for a rehearsal. And on top of it all, he never knows when he has to jump in and take a part in a play. Last spring, the leading man in "Susan and God" was called out of the city on the eve of the dress rehearsal. The director studied lines all day, rehearsed at night, and went on for the opening performance with such an air of complacency that no one in the audience even suspected that he had placed typewritten lines all over the properties just to make sure he wouldn't mess things up.17

During Gregory Foley's tenure the name of the institution was changed to the Duluth Playhouse. The move to change the name began at a special meeting of the membership, called for August 20, 1941.

16 Duluth News Tribune, November 27, 1938.
17 Ibid.
Business and professional leaders were invited to attend. The day after the meeting, Nathan Cohen wrote:

The Little Theatre of Duluth, a pioneer in the movement to establish a nonprofessional theatre in this country, became the Duluth Playhouse last night. In an effort to widen the scope of their activities, members voted the name change at a meeting in the theatre auditorium.¹⁸

The reason generally given for changing the name was the old problem of "highbrowism." It is more likely that the general lowering of interest in theatre had been caused by the growing tensions over our imminent entry into World War II, but the members believed that the lack of interest was because everybody didn't realize that they were a democratic institution. Cohen wrote:

The majority of the membership has felt for some years that the name "Little Theatre" created an impression among many Duluthians that the organization was a small amateur theatre functioning for the benefit of a few instead of the community as a whole.¹⁹

Other names considered as being superior to "Little Theatre" in conveying a more accurate picture of the real nature of the institution were: Community Playhouse, Arrowhead Playhouse, The Duluth Theatre, The Duluth Civic Theatre. In a run off election the Duluth Playhouse won over Duluth Civic Theatre.

Like his predecessor, Gordon Giffen, Gregory Foley had a famous person in his past. Like his predecessor, he preferred to travel under his own name, rather than bask in the reflected glory of his past associate. As in the case of his predecessor, the past caught up with

¹⁸Duluth News Tribune, August 21, 1941.

¹⁹Ibid.
him. The Duluth Herald reported there was an article in the October, 1940, issue of Photoplay magazine about Henry Fonda, in which the famous actor, in effect, patted a picture of Greg Foley and said, "Everything I am today, I owe to that man!"

Foley had given Fonda a job as assistant director at the Omaha Civic Theatre when Fonda came home, a despondent dropout, from the University of Minnesota. "And from Greg Foley, nervous, intense little Irish dreamer, he began absorbing the technique of the theatre." The Photoplay article was summarized with many direct quotes in the Duluth Herald to let everyone know that there was someone in town who knew a famous person. For as long as he remained in Duluth, his capsule biography in the newspapers was, Greg Foley, director of the Duluth Playhouse, the man who discovered Henry Fonda.

World War II broke out in 1941, with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Foley finished the season and resigned with the intention of entering the armed services. He did not get in but went into defense plant operations. He was reported in 1943 to be "still in ordnance work, training the plant workers in gun powder production."21

Anthony Jochim
1942-43

E. A. Johnson, president, announced that Mr. Jochim had been selected for the position after a half dozen leading candidates had been interviewed in New York City.

Anthony Jochim, whose theatrical associations include the late Florenz Ziegfeld, the Schuberts, Walter Hampton and many other famous names in the American

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20 Duluth Herald, October 16, 1940.
21 Duluth Herald, May 12, 1943.
Theatre, has been named director of the Duluth Playhouse for the 1942-43 season.

He was stage manager for Ziegfeld for two productions of Noel Coward's "Bitter Sweet" and for Ziegfeld's "Three Musketeers," was associated with the Schuberts as stage manager of several musical reviews, and for two years was stage manager for Walter Hampton, the Shakespearean actor.

Although for the last eight years, he has been interested in the nonprofessional theatre in New Jersey, he returned to the New York stage last year to appear in William Saroyan's "Across the Board Tomorrow Morning."

This summer, the new director had the Bergen College Barn Theatre at Teaneck, New Jersey, and before he left for Duluth was invited by the president to return for a second season next year.

He is married and has two children.22

Anthony Jochim stayed for only one season. He directed six plays during the first full season under wartime conditions. The Herald commented on the effect of World War II on the Playhouse.

The Duluth Playhouse, which went into temporary decline during World War I, continues to function during World War II without restricting any of its programs. Board members decided that entertainment plays an important part in morale during a war and the 1942-43 season contains a full schedule of dramatic productions.

The war has placed many difficulties in the path of efficient operation of the theatre. Obtaining men to act in the plays and to work on the technical crews is becoming increasingly difficult. Many of the established players have entered the service and the problem now is to find new talent in the city.23

Perhaps the most significant event of the 1942-43 season was the final Beaux Arts Ball, the fund-raising costume dance that had been a

22Duluth Herald, September 23, 1942.
23Duluth Herald, October 15, 1942.
high point in the social season since 1929. The name was changed in 1943 to the V-Garden Dance, and everyone dressed as a Victory Gardener. The dance has not been held since.

Anthony Jochim was popular during his season in Duluth. He spoke often at meetings, gave a recital at the College of St. Scholastica, and generated good will for the theatre in many ways. He left after one season to join a USO Troupe. In recent years he has been seen frequently in feature roles on television and in movies.

Ulmont Healy  
1943-44 to 1951-52

Duluth yesterday welcomed a new Playhouse director, who was in the movies before Hollywood was born, playing cowboys and Indians in the days of the two-gun celluloid stars Bronco Billy Anderson, and showing up in a mask in the first super movie "Birth of a Nation."

He is Ulmont Healy, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, with 30 years of experience in the theatre. Although he has been active in the Cedar Rapids Community Theatre for many years, he is returning to the theatre professionally this season after having been in business "while the family was growing up."

After leaving the movies, Mr. Healy was with the AEF in the artillery in World War I. When he returned to this country he joined the Coffar-Miller Players, one of the best known touring theatrical troupes in the country. The company did a repertoire of classics. There were no stars and ensemble work was featured. It was this policy which led critics to call the company the logical successors to England's Ben Greet Players, who did so much for the growth of drama in that country.24

Ulmont Healy holds the record for longevity as director of the Duluth Playhouse. In nine seasons, producing six plays a season, he is credited with fifty-four full-length plays, including in almost

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24Duluth News Tribune, September 22, 1943.
every season one play with more to recommend it than having been a hit on Broadway the previous season. *The Rivals*, *Pygmalion*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—the first Shakespeare, the first Sheridan, and the first full-length Shaw play since *Candida* in 1928—these were included in the roster of plays directed by Ulmont Healy at the Duluth Playhouse.

The first local playwright to have a play produced at the Playhouse since Warren Green's *Mr. Pim Passes On* in 1928 was Florence Gail Reque. Her domestic tragi-comedy, *Smith's Castle*, was presented in February, 1946. Another local author, Joe Cook, collaborated with Simon G. Sax in writing *Aaron Shanks*, directed by Healy in January, 1947. Under Healy's guidance the Playhouse seemed to have a renaissance of the production ideal of the old little theatre movement; to offer an alternative to Broadway not just an imitation of it.

Another activity revived by Ulmont Healy was the production of plays for children. The Duluth Playhouse did not produce any children's plays while he was there, but the Junior League produced three in the Playhouse auditorium, and Ulmont Healy directed all three. He was the first director to direct a children's play while he was employed by the Playhouse, even though he did not direct it for them. The three children's plays brought the total number of productions staged by Healy to fifty-seven.

During the war years the problem of getting men to work backstage was even worse than before the war began, when the name had been changed to the Duluth Playhouse in an effort to attract broader participation. Ulmont Healy attacked this problem by helping to
reestablish the workshop plan on a firm basis again. Besides making the matter of building and rigging and painting the set a social affair complete with refreshments on some occasions, he entered into an informal arrangement with Harold L. Hayes, Director of Theatre at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, to use university students who were training for careers in the theatre to man his crews whenever possible.

Nearly every theatre remembers someone as "the grand old man." At the Duluth Playhouse, this honor is paid to Ulmont Healy. Although he was the oldest man to direct for the Playhouse, when he retired in 1952, he did not retire from theatre. He was reported in 1954, to be active in Mineral Point, Wisconsin, trying to stimulate the local interest in drama with productions for the local historical society. That year he directed *A Midsummer's Night Dream.*

Sam Wren

1952-53

Appointment of Sam Wren, New York City, as director of the Duluth Playhouse was announced last night at a meeting of the Playhouse directors.

This season he was director of two summer theatres playing alternately in Atlantic City. He has been associated with the Liebling-Wood agency as casting director, working in many of the current and past successes on Broadway. He has appeared on television with his wife, Virginia Sales, who is currently appearing on the Kate Smith television program.

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25 Wisconsin State Journal, August 8, 1959, Section 3, p. 15.
The Wrens are a theatrical family, even the 16 year old twins, Ginny and Christopher, having appeared in movies while the family lived in Hollywood.26

Sam Wren is remembered as the director who never saw a play at the Duluth Playhouse. He would get the productions ready, then take off for New York to spend the time with his wife while the show was running.27

Ronald T. Hammond
1953-54 to 1954-55

Engagement of Ronald T. Hammond, New York, as director of the Duluth Playhouse for the 1953-54 season was announced today by Dalton LeMasurier. . . .

English-born, Mr. Hammond has had actor-director experience both in England and the U. S. He has been in this country since 1930, and became a citizen in 1942. He has been associated with the College of Mount St. Vincent for the last four years and for the last three summer seasons has been director of the Surry Playhouse in Surry, Maine.

Educated at St. Paul’s College in London, Mr. Hammond has been a lecturer on the English and American theatre for the last 25 years.

In a letter to Mr. LeMasurier, Mr. Hammond said "I am married to a Swedish girl who would love the climate up in your country. I have one daughter still in college."28

A revival of Springtime for Henry with the appearance of Edward Everett Horton as guest star was perhaps the most memorable event of the two seasons Hammond directed at the Duluth Playhouse.

26Duluth News Tribune, August 6, 1952.

27Interview with Mrs. Elizabeth Green, past president of the Duluth Playhouse, July 24, 1965.

28Duluth Herald, August 13, 1953.
Hammond left Duluth to take a teaching position at Wittenburg College, Springfield, Ohio.

Charles T. Morrison, Jr.
1955-56

Engagement of Charles T. Morrison Jr., Mason City, Iowa, as director of the Duluth Playhouse for the 1955-56 season was announced last night.

The 31-year-old new director has a MA degree from Northwestern.

He is the youngest director to be engaged by the Duluth Little Theatre in a number of years.

A veteran of World War II, he has had experience in professional stock and is a member of Actor's Equity Assn.

Members will meet an unassuming, but intense, young man. Dark, with burning eyes, Morrison does not look like an actor of the old school. Of middle height and average weight, he is almost shy.

But Morrison does everything but eat the life of the theatre. He has no hobbies, except "good food," engages in no sports, takes little recreation, reads only plays, technical books and Variety, an entertainment trade paper.

His BA degree from the University of Illinois and MA from Northwestern were in the field of theatre. His first job after finishing college was as an interior decorator, which he left without hesitation when he landed a job in Mason City.

This summer he was the assistant director and designer for the Festival Music Theatre in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

He was technical director of the Salt Creek Theatre, Hinsdale, Illinois and the stage manager of another outdoor stock company, The Mad Anthony Players, Toledo, Ohio.

He married a fellow drama student four years ago. His wife, Marge, will join him here shortly.29

Charles Morrison was the last full-time Producing Director to work at the Duluth Playhouse. When he left the job of director, an era that had begun with Maurice Gnesin in 1927 came to an end. On August 31, 1956, the papers carried the announcement:

The Board of Directors has inaugurated a new plan of play production for the coming season. Local talent will be used to direct the plays, a different director to be engaged for each production.

It was nothing new, of course. After forty-two years, the Playhouse was back where it had started, but with three important differences: the organizational structure was sound, the business practices were practical and workable, and the production policies of a workshop theatre with open tryouts to insure maximum local participation were firmly established.

30Duluth Herald, August 31, 1956.
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