

*A History of Community Theatre
in the Colchester Area, Nova Scotia
with Thoughts and Reminiscences.*

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*First Edition
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*This document is dedicated to the memory of Shirley Harrison, whose invitation
gave me a lifetime of involvement in amateur theatre.*

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Introduction and Acknowledgments

I developed an interest in local history. I was also involved in amateur and community theatre, from the age of 15, in high school with the Colchester Players and the YMCA Drama Club. Since then I have been involved with other groups as well, particularly Hubtown Theatre Society. In 1996, I decided to write a history of Hubtown Theatre, mainly to preserve a record of activities. People sometimes expressed an interest in what plays we had done and it seemed reasonable to publish the record on the Internet.

Besides my own recollections, and my wife Marlene's, I drew on play programs and the minutes of the meetings of the Board of Directors and the General Membership. Almost all of these survive. I supplemented the history from time to time. I then decided to write a history of the Colchester Players. It was as accurate as I could make it. This group was a direct predecessor of Hubtown Theatre Society and it was still in the memories of a few of those involved with Hubtown Theatre. I did not have enough concrete information to prepare a proper record.

This changed when I encountered Holly Irving. Her parents, Patricia and Alden Irving, had been major organisers within the Colchester Players. Holly provided me with most of the resources I needed. I have drawn on the minutes of that group, from 1965 to 1974, their financial records and an array of newspaper clippings. I could also supplement these with my own recollections for a couple of their later endeavours, particularly the three-week summer school in 1972, given by Jack Medurst. Later she provided me with additional resources that included many of the original programs. These provided a great deal of additional information, which I used to create a "second edition".

Sometime later, I decided to add as much information as I could on theatre in the Truro area before 1960 (when the Colchester Players were formed). At first, I used the information I had and scanned some old copies of The Daily News at the Colchester Library. I checked the Archives at the Colchester Historium.

After my retirement from the teaching profession, I decided to merge, expand and rewrite the various histories I had written, a reboot so to speak. That is why I am calling this the first edition of a new document. I went back to the Library and the archives at the Historeum and did some more research. I added photos within the text¹. I also acquired information on other recent groups. Thanks are due to Jennifer Johnson for providing some information on this. This time the document is a bit more personal. I am including a few of my own experiences. The emphasis is still on Hubtown Theatre but I have tried to include information on other groups as much as possible. This is the result. I hope you find it of interest.

This document is intended to cover community theatre in the Colchester area. For the purposes of this history, amateur theatre refers to any theatre group or endeavor where the actors are not paid, while community theatre refers to a local amateur group that is open to anyone. In other words community theatre is theatre by and for the community, theatre that is inclusive to everyone. For example, a school drama club is an amateur group but it is not a community group. Therefore, with

¹ Individual photo credits are not available. Some are from my personal collection, others come from the collections that had been held by Holly Irving and therefore must be credited to the Colchester Players. Some of the very old ones may have also appeared in newspapers but I cannot be sure which. Some of the later ones are taken from public Facebook pages. I would like to express credit to Ed Lockhead and Janice McCurdy, who I know have taken some of them.

some exceptions, this history was not intended to be about professional or school groups. The exceptions will include some personal reminiscences as well as an occasional mention of school related and professional activities. In cases where an individual's name has been changed I will use the name in use at the time, acknowledging any other name, when known, in the first reference. There may be some repetition as some items may come up in different contexts.

This is not an academic work. Sources will not always be given. There is no bibliography. If you are writing a formal paper, this document may not be of use to you. If you are interested in the story of community theatre in the Colchester area, you may enjoy this. I hope so.

Before the Colchester Players (up to 1960)

Performance art has a long history in Canada. The First Nations people had many performance traditions. It was an important part of their social and spiritual activities. They made use of masks, costumes and props². Theatre was common in French Canada in the 1600s, often promoted by the military religious orders such as the Jesuits. However, its development was slowed after the production of Molière's *Tartuffe* in 1694. In 1606, Marc L'Escarbot presented "Theatre de Neptune" at Annapolis Royal. This play was a satire on religious hypocrisy. The Bishop was against the play and denounced the lead actor, Sieur de Mareuil, denying him the sacraments. When the play was first presented in France in 1664, it was banned. By the 1690s it was produced freely, but not in Quebec. There was little theatre there until the conquest of 1763. The British military in Montreal presented live theatre and local francophone groups started productions.

At about this time, theatre started in the Atlantic area, often in taverns. All male casts were used initially and the British Garrisons promoted theatre. In Halifax, they build the New Grand Theatre, which opened in 1789 with *The Merchant of Venice*. During the 1800s, proper theatre houses started to be built in various locations in Canada. Resistance to theatre houses was common among different religions. One writer in the Nova Scotia Chronicle compared them to brothels³. Canadian Theatre in Canada in the 1800s was predominantly amateur. However, as the population increased, the new market encouraged American entertainers (and later, European) to come north. These included music acts, circuses and of course plays. By then there were more venues available.

Theatre productions have had a presence in Canada for a very long time. Theatre activities in Nova Scotia followed the same basic pattern as they did in the rest of Canada, and elsewhere.

In the early 1900s there were no movie houses. When they came along, there were still no televisions, Internet or streaming video. Today live theatre may need to compete with this, but it does have a following. Those who regularly go to community theater go for different reasons. They may come to see their friends, relatives or community members onstage. On the other hand, they may have simply experienced the excitement, immediacy and spontaneity that live performance provides and that can never be truly replicated on screen or in a recording studio.

Today there is a strong industry presence that provides entertainment on an ongoing basis and from increasing sources. Much of it is extremely good. Some of it is not so good. Of course the same is

² In 1948, Forest Theatre at Six Nations Reserve began an annual dramatic pageant. Native theatre entered the Canadian mainstream in the 1970s, notably with the classic play, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* by George Ryga, which featured the well known actor Chief Dan George in the role of Rita Joe's father.

³ January, 1770

true of all entertainment. In the past, there was a market for shows and concerts that was often a bit different than it is today. You had to go out to be entertained. There were dances and concerts. Professionally, as said, there were occasional travelling shows. These would be anticipated and enjoyed but were not frequent.

There was a motivation for local people to provide entertainment for the community. People would perform music at local gatherings. It seems natural that they would want to put on plays. Across Canada there were community theatre companies in every city, many towns and some villages. In the early 1900s the population of Truro was around 7000. Concerts and social evenings were common in local churches. These shows would consist of choruses, solos, comic songs, dramatic readings and other forms of entertainment. This sometimes still happens today.

Before The First World War, there was a theatre above a store on Inglis St. called the Old Opera House. Professional companies often used it. These included the W. S. Harkins Company and the Jere MacAuliff Company. Also on Inglis St. was the Orpheum Theatre. The proprietor was F.G. Spencer and the manager was G.F. Todd. Spencer owned several theatres across the Maritimes. These houses would bring in professional entertainers including magician and escape artist Harry Houdini⁴. When moving pictures came along, they would install screens in these structures so they could be used for both film and live performances. Some of these locations would offer a venue for amateur community theatre. As late as the 1960s, movie theatres were still built to include a stage to allow the option of using the space for live shows.

Originally, schools or church groups did theatre productions locally, providing an option for interested persons. Being involved in a play is a rewarding experience for many people. After leaving school, most of us do not become actors. But the urge remains for some. The sound of the applause (hopefully) and the experience of performing is exciting. The accomplishment of facing one's fears on the stage can be rewarding. For a small community, which may not have many opportunities to see professional stage actors, there is pleasure in being a part of the excitement. Therefore, there is community theatre.

In the first half of the 1900s, almost all Canadian theatre was amateur theatre. Although there were touring groups from other places, there was almost no local professional theatre. This was the situation in the late 1800s until the early 1950s. Americans and Europeans would bring professional theatre to Canada. On the other side, Canadian actors who wished to become professional went to the United States or Europe. Imports during the first half of the century started to decline and Canada had no significant professional theatre base. This changed with the founding of the Stratford Festival in 1953. This was the start of a proliferation of professional theatre companies. Neptune Theatre, in Halifax, was formed in 1963. Eventually, the forms of professional companies expanded to include Alternate Theatre, Fringe Theatre, Dinner Theatre and others. However, the basis for all of this came from a solid amateur theatre foundation, promoted by the Dominion Drama Festival, which we will return to later.

In the early 1900s, Mrs. Kaulback, who was the wife of the Anglican Vicar at that time, organized a group of young girls into a concert group that would perform music at St. John's Anglican Church⁵. They expanded this to include recitations. Some of these young women went to the Emerson School of Oratory in Boston to learn elocution. The group had expanded from music to dramatic readings.

⁴ This took place early in his career, before he became well known, in 1896 at Gunn's Opera Hall, also on Inglis Street.

⁵ "Drama in Truro in the Early 1900s", Vera Parker Fairweather, 1963

With the help of Mrs. Wendell Semple, they started adding dialogues. They decided that they wanted to do plays and started reading one-acts. They read many plays, looking for ones that would require six or seven girls. They called themselves the St. John's Dramatic Club. The goal of the group was to raise money for a church hall. Many years later, this was accomplished and the result was Kaulback Hall. The performances were held on a platform in the basement of the Church. Curtains were added. Reflectors holding candles provided footlights and admission was 25 cents.

After a while, the group moved to the stage of the Colchester County Academy (Academy Hall). Other concerts were held at the high school at this time. The first production the St. John's Dramatic Club performed here was a three-act play called *Remember*. For the first time they had to use actors who were not members of the church. This practice would continue and St. John's Dramatic Club became a community theatre group.

Young men started to join the group. I am sure this added considerably to the plays that they could choose. One of the young men was Donald Wetmore, who would be appointed Drama Advisor to the Department of Adult Education in 1947. Mr. Wetmore would also be involved with both the Colchester Players and Hubtown Theatre Society. There were others in the group who eventually became a part of the Colchester Players many years later. The group tried a tour by taking a play, by train, to Stewiacke.

The Town of Truro built a new civic building in 1912, on the corner of Prince and Young Streets, and used the upper story for a theatre. This location had theatrical lighting, wings, sloped seats and the ability to drop set pieces. It was named, "The Princess". Several different groups, including the St. John's Dramatic Club, used this space.

A play was presented by the club for a Fireman's Benefit Concert, called *Three Wise Fools*. I am not sure of the exact year it was presented⁶. By this point the St. John's Dramatic Club were regularly doing three act plays and involved many people not necessarily connected with the church.

At this time professional groups, who had usually used the Old Opera House, started coming to the Princess Theatre. These groups included the W.S. Harkins Company and the Jere MacAuliff Company. As movies became more popular, the professional touring theatre companies started to dwindle although they never disappeared completely.

During the First World War, money was raised for the Red Cross by providing an evening that consisted of a film followed by a one-act play presented by the St. John's Dramatic Club. This would sometimes be followed by musical entertainment. The group was also involved with the YMCA or the Local Council of Women to raise money. On occasion, a visiting director would be brought in to direct a major show. One of these productions was called *The Big Musical and Four-Act Drama*. A great many people were involved. The musical portion was directed by Mrs. Carl Bigelow, who would later be involved with the Colchester Players. I have no information on exactly how long the St. John's Dramatic Club was active but it seems to have lasted well into the 1920s or beyond. It was active after the original members had moved on to other things. There were many more productions than the few listed here, some of them quite elaborate. Live theatre audiences appreciated a great range of entertainment options. Although today Hubtown Theatre audiences seem to prefer comedies, we also provide a range as much as possible. Today we have more technical options for

⁶ The program includes an ad for a show by the Imperial Welsh Singers which was held at the Princess Theatre and put on by the Auspices Truro Philharmonic Society.

staging a play and although I would not trade lights for candles, I cannot help but think of the fun they must have had.

The YMCA Drama Club⁷ presented a play called *Nothing but the Truth* in 1924, directed by Dr. Wallace Hopper. It was performed at the Princess Theatre. The Princess Theatre would eventually disappear. If we discount venues involving schools or universities, there would be no locations dedicated to live performances until the Marigold Cultural Centre was created in 2005, ironically by renovating a movie theatre that had closed down.

In those days there was no unifying Provincial resource for amateur theatre groups. Through the Department of Education, Don Wetmore would provide for courses. Still later the play festival would come to be a part of the calendar of most amateur groups, with the help of the Nova Scotia Drama League.

In the first half of the 1900s there were many small drama groups in various communities. Many of these were associated with Churches but not all. Sometimes an independent group would find support from churches, schools or the municipality, often in the form of providing a venue for performances. The following will seem somewhat sketchy for these decades. It is based on the information I have available. Unfortunately, for most plays I do not even have the name of the author.

In 1904 the DJTA Dramatic Club performed *Crawford's Claim*. Comedian Albert Brown appeared at the Old Opera House in 1916. The Westville Dramatic Club presented *Cupid at Vassar* in 1919 at the Princess Theatre. Also in 1919, Tom Marks Company presented *The Girl From Over There* at the same location (This was probably professional).

The I.O.D.E.⁸ was involved in both sponsoring groups and presenting concerts and shows. In 1928 or 1929 they presented the musical *Let's Go*. They also presented a musical concert in 1936. I have a record that they may have been involved in the operetta *The Lady Says Yes* but I have no year for this. In 1946, the Glenholm Players presented a play with a cast of about 12 (2 or 3 were in sailor costumes) at Kaulback Hall.

In 1949, an Academy Hall students group presented the operetta *Cinderella* at The Colchester Academy/Old Normal College. The second floor contained a stage/gym. This building is the current location of the Colchester Library. There are records of other groups using this facility to stage productions. For example, the I.O.D.E. had presented musical concerts there (I have records of one such event in 1936). Eventually the building housed the local YMCA. The facilities were made available to various groups including the Colchester Players and The Colchester YMCA Drama Club in the early 1970s. Also in 1949, the Stewiacke Community Players performed the play *I Remember Mama* in the auditorium of the newly opened Stewiacke School. In 1950 a play called *Seventeen* was performed but I do not have a name of a group connected with this show.

There are other plays for which I do not have a year, such as *I Can't Afford It* presented by the Onslow Dramatic Club and *Nothing To Do*, a comedy by the Clifton Church group. In River John, the Legion hosted or presented the play *Tales of the Molasses Well*.

⁷ The YMCA Drama Club has been active more than once. We will return to this later.

⁸ Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire

During the 40's, Don Wetmore and Ross Hamilton⁹ participated in local comedy, music and drama. They were part of the YMCA War Services Concert Parties. In general, amateur theatre in Canada declined during the Second World War. After the war ended, there was a surge in amateur theatre as well as a movement toward establishing professional theatre companies. In Nova Scotia, a Community Services program was set up to promote cultural wellbeing in rural areas. The initiatives included annual summer schools that involving instruction in drama and improvisation. The drama advisor was Don Wetmore, who was previously involved with St. John's Drama Club in Truro. In the late 1950s, workshops were held in the district high school in Tatamagouche. Wetmore also did workshops at New Glasgow, Truro, Halifax and Lunenburg.

In the late 1940's, the Truro Community Players was formed. This group was one of the charter members of the Nova Scotia Drama League, which was created in 1951. In that year the Truro Community Players sent the one-act play "**A Cup of Coffee**", by local Molly Boresford, to the Dominion Arts Festival.

The Belmont Players was formed in 1953. In 1954, the play "**Aunt Jeusley on the War Path**", was performed in Tatamagouche. I have records of this play having been performed before this as well.

The Truro Players Guild was established at some time in the early 1950s. In 1955, they presented two plays, *The Man Who Came to Dinner* by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart and *The Late Christopher Bean* by Sydney Howard. They were presented in the old Strand Theatre which was located on Prince Street across from Arlington Place.

In 1957, Ross Hamilton directed a community play in Brookfield. I do not have a record of its name but cast members included Shirley Hamilton (aka Shirley Harrison), William Sears and Ted Carter. Ted played a corpse in this play. Also in 1957, Stratford brought *Hamlet* to Truro. A year later, they returned with *Man and Superman*. It is clear that locally community theatre and other forms of live entertainment were prolific during the first half of the last century.

The Colchester Drama Guild was formed in 1956 to combine the local resources of eight groups that were spread throughout Colchester County. They held their first meeting in Stewiacke with Bob Drew of Hilden presiding. Their meetings were held in different communities in subsequent years including Londonderry and Truro. During the first year, workshops were organized. Topics included improvisation, lighting, play production and makeup. Their activities included a one-act play festival in March of 1957.

In 1957, they also assisted the Brookfield Festival Committee in hosting a one-act play festival. Later executive members included Ernest Colbourne, Shirley Hamilton and Patricia Irving. Patricia, and her husband Alden Irving, would become extensively involved in the Colchester Players. However, the only records of the guild's activities I have show the group being involved in festivals and workshops, not plays. Perhaps the group was attempting to work as the local equivalent of the Nova Scotia Drama League, but this is speculation.

⁹ Hamilton had been a member of the Dumbbells, which was a First World War (and post war) comedy and music group.

The Nova Scotia Drama League and the Dominion Drama Festival

I would like to take a moment to address the importance of the “play festival”. Later I will be referencing various play festivals but would like to mention the impact that these events had on amateur theatre everywhere in Canada. One-act and full-length play festivals were common across Nova Scotia and often organized by the Nova Scotia Drama League. A local group would sponsor these festivals. They would be held in different communities across the Province. The NSDL was a major coordinator of theatre in Nova Scotia at that time. In 1967 Patricia Irving was president of the NSDL and Shirley Hamilton was vice-president.

The NSDL was first formed in 1951 by an act of Provincial legislation. It was created to support amateur, community based, theatre. It would organise workshop opportunities, hold play festivals and lend support in other ways. They published a periodical called the Callboard that contained news, reviews and other matters of interest. It was possible to be an individual or a group member. In 2001, the Nova Scotia Drama League merged with the Nova Scotia Professional Theatre Alliance (formed in 1991) to form Theatre Nova Scotia. This new group serves the needs of both professional and amateur groups.



School of Arts, 1961 in Tatamagouche, front centre is Patricia Irving

The NSDL assisted in helping provide drama schools. No matter where they were held in Nova Scotia, there was an opportunity for people from any area to take part. In the 1960s they held the Community School of Arts in Tatamagouche¹⁰.

Summer schools in Tatamagouche spanned at least fifteen years. They were held at the local high school in the summer and were attended by some of the members of the Colchester Players. Professionals were often brought in to give the workshops. In the summer of 1971 the NSDL organised a ten day drama workshop in Wolfville, aimed at young people. Some of the students were from Colchester County and I was fortunate enough to be one of them. Besides lots of great instruction, we had the chance to attend some plays at the Theatre Arts Festival International (TAFI). This was done in exchange for acting as ushers. It was the first time I ever saw black box theatre. I also remember attending at least a couple of weekend workshops by the NSDL. One was in Bridgetown and another in Wolfville, where I took a workshop from Evelyn Garbary of Mermaid Theatre. She gave us mime instruction among other things. There were also many play festivals back then.

Unfortunately play festivals do not seem to be as common as they used to be¹¹. These festivals were a lot of fun. They allowed us to meet other theatre people from across the Province. The festivals

¹⁰ There may have been theatre school activities at the Atlantic Christian Training Centre as well, in Tatamagouche.

¹¹ It may seem strange today but cigarette companies often sponsored them. I remember attending a reception at one where someone was circulating with a tray of free cigarettes.

also encouraged the production of one-act plays by providing a venue. Although Hubtown Theatre does do occasional one-act plays, they are not frequent, and lately they are rare indeed. The reason for this includes the decline in the number of play festivals and the increased cost of sending a play to the ones that do exist. Play festivals offered an outlet for groups to experience the positive benefits of doing one-act plays, including a way to introduce new directors and a way to provide a greater number of major roles to actors. One-act plays were often done in more than one location.

The biggest play festival at the time was the Dominion Drama Festival¹², which first started in 1933 in Ottawa (with a break during the war years). In those years play festivals were usually competitive. The Dominion Drama Festival originally divided Canada into regions and smaller festivals would be held there. The winners would attend the National Festival. Trophies would be given out and categories would be used such as best director, best actor, etc. The various festivals would be held in different locations each year. For example, in 1962 the Dominion Drama Festival's Nova Scotia Regional Finals was held at Prince Arthur Jr. High School in Dartmouth, NS. Groups represented included the Halifax Theatre Company, The Dartmouth Drama Club, The Theatre Arts Guild of Halifax and The Greenwood Players¹³. In other years, The Colchester Players, The Cathedral Players and university groups would also be represented. The winner would be invited to the Final Festival which was held in Winnipeg that year.

In 1968 the NSDL decided to end competitive festivals. After that time festivals would simply be adjudicated with someone providing a private critique to each group. In 1971 the Dominion Drama Festival followed suit and changed the focus of the National Festival from competition to showcase. The organization was renamed Theatre Canada, although the festival was still referred to as the DDF. Attendance at the National Festival would be by invitation and an attempt was made to represent different forms of drama. In 1971, I was involved with a school group called The Attic Players. We had presented a child participation play called "**The Duke of Nibleton**", by Jocelyn (Jockie) Bishop (aka Jocelyn Loamer-Kruger), at a local festival. We were invited to take the play to The Dominion Drama Festival in Ottawa, at the National Arts Centre¹⁴. This provided a very exciting week for a dozen or so high school students. We were able to see many of the plays¹⁵.



The Attic Players outside the Parliament Building

It turned out that this was the penultimate Dominion Drama Festival as the festival ended after the next year. The 1972 festival was the last one and Theatre Canada was shut down in 1978. A primary reason was money. When the festival started, there was very little professional theatre in Canada. The DDF provided a way for Canadian culture to be expressed in performance art. It was the force behind Canadian theatre. It also created the stage for the development of a professional theatre presence in Canada. Canadian professional theatre became the competition for amateur theatre, from which it found its roots.

¹² An account of this festival can be found in the book, *Love and Whisky*, by Betty Lee. In 1907 a similar festival, called the Earl Grey Music and Drama Competition was formed but it only lasted until 1911.

¹³ At the time of this writing, The Greenwood Players, in Kings County, have been operating for over 60 years.

¹⁴ The Arts Centre was first opened in 1969. It has been extensively renovated since then.

¹⁵ A few years later, South Colchester High School would again have drama clubs under the direction of Peter Wirtanen, Andy Smith and possibly others.

The Colchester Players

I do not have a record of what happened to the Colchester Drama Guild. There was clearly a reboot of sorts as many of the same people went on to be a part of the Colchester Players. The Colchester Players was formed after members of some of these previous groups were involved in the play *Londonderry Heirs* by Don Wetmore, who also directed the show. The play, about the early settlement and development of Londonderry and the surrounding area, was staged in August 1960. It was prepared for a bicentennial celebration. Some of the participants held a public meeting in September 1960 (attracting about 50 interested persons) to discuss forming a new theatre group. The Colchester Players was the result. It seems to have been part of a change from local individual communities to a more regionally based community theatre. However, some older groups, such as the Belmont Players, continued to operate.



Londonderry Heirs, context not known



Scene from "Orange Blossoms", centre;
Shirley Hamilton

The Colchester Players was organised by the members by electing an executive and a "Board of Management". At their first meeting Alden Irving was elected as president. Eventually, a constitution was prepared and adopted. Cost of membership was \$1.00 per year.

In November 1960, the group presented their first play. It was the one-act play, "**Orange Blossoms**", directed by Robert Drew and presented at a one-act play festival at Annapolis Royal. The comedy involved a wedding that almost doesn't happen because of the meddling of in-laws. Members of the cast included Patricia Irving and Shirley Hamilton. Shirley was extensively involved in theatre over many years and was one of the founders of both the Colchester Players and Hubtown Theatre.

In late December of the same year, they performed a three-act biblical fantasy drama, *Noah* by Andre Obey. It was directed by Don Wetmore and presented in Truro at St. Mary's Auditorium. It involved a large cast that included animals for the ark (paper mache masks were made by art students at Central Colchester High School.). In March of 1961 it was presented at a regional drama festival in Halifax. These two endeavors were prepared, more or less, at the same time with rehearsals overlapping and allowing for the involvement of a large number of people.

In late May they presented the farce, *Love Your Neighbour* by Albert Johnson, directed by Patricia Irving, at the St. Andrews Church Hall. *Love Your Neighbour* had a cast of twenty. They also presented the one act play, "**The Happy Journey**" by Thornton Wilder, directed by Alden Irving. It was performed at the Provincial Play Festival in 1961, hosted by the Colchester Players and held at the Truro Legion. "**The Happy Journey**" won the award for best play at the festival. During their time, The Colchester Players and its members won several awards at regional festivals.



Preparing the old post office theatre

In 1962, Don Hamilton was elected as president. In early April, the group presented the play, *The Late Christopher Bean* by Sydney Howard, directed by Alden Irving. The play, set in a country doctor's home in the 1930s, was performed at the Legion Hall.

In August, the group presented the 30 minute one-act Canadian comedy "**Let There be Farce**" by Norman Walsh, directed by Patricia Irving. It was shown a second time at the Nova Scotia Festival of the Arts in Tatamagouch. Here, Shirley Hamilton is listed as directing and being in the cast, with Patricia Irving and John MacElhinney.

During this year, the Colchester Players acquired the use of a building on the corner of Prince Street and Lorne Street that had been vacated by the post office. The post office had moved to a new location¹⁶. During the fall, and with the help of donations of money and materials, the group worked on extensive renovations to the building, creating a theatre with a capacity of approximately 70 persons. Alden Irving did most of the design, and a significant amount of the work. This was the start of five highly productive years for the group. It was a high point. Signs for current plays were made and placed outside. I saw one of the old signs recently, stored at the Marigold Centre.

Aileen Cooper became president of the group in 1963. The first show in the "Old Post Office Theatre" was delayed because of the preparation of the space. It was *Life with Father* by Clarence Day, directed by Patricia Irving. The play is a light comedy about an 1880's family. Rehearsals overlapped with construction, but both were completed and the play went on in early June 1963 (six performances: June 3, 6, 8, 19, 20)



Cast of *Life With Father*

Because of the small capacity of the theatre, the performances were held over a two-week period. This is an ideal situation for an amateur theatre group. Although the experience of playing to a large audience is valuable, the intimacy of a small house provides the actors with the kind of feedback that



Life With Father, left to right; John Bain, Shirley Hamilton (Harrison), Gunther Eisler

can reinforce their performances. In addition, there is a greater sense of satisfaction in having a chance to experience several performances, particularly after the amount of work that has gone into the rehearsals. This can be contrasted with the situation faced by a group that must rent performance space. For example, Hubtown Theatre pays a significant percent of its budget on theatre space that has a much larger seating capacity per show. Currently, the numbers effectively limit the group to four consecutive performances for most shows.

In the fall the Colchester Players presented the one-act

¹⁶ The building later became the Truro Police Station for some time and is now a government building.

play "**Junk Yard**" by Lewis John Carlino at the Nova Scotia Drama League Play Festival, held in Dartmouth and hosted by the Dartmouth Drama Club in November. Shirley Hamilton directed it. The play is about a man and his daughter who collect unwanted "junk" and restore it for sale. When they hide a robber from the police, they try to reform him.



Scene from *Teach Me how to Cry*, at right is John

Patricia Irving became president of the group in 1964. The Truro Legion hosted another performance of "**Junk Yard**" in January, along with a play by The Cathedral Players from Halifax. Both groups had won awards for their plays at the Provincial Festival the previous fall.

The Colchester Players' first play of the year was the Canadian drama *Teach Me How to Cry*, by Patricia Joudrey, directed by Alden Irving. The play, about teenage angst and relationships, had won the best play award at the 1956 Dominion Drama Festival. It ran for

seven performances in the Old Post Office Theatre in February. This play gained some publicity. Alden Irving won a Canadian drama award. He also received an award for his work in renovating the Old Post Office Theatre.

In late November of 1964, Shirley Hamilton directed the full length play *My Three Angels* by Sam and Bella Spewack, a light-hearted comedy about three French convicts in French Guinea and a family they help (seven performances). Members of the cast included Peter Crow, who appeared in many Colchester Players Plays as well as the YMCA Drama Club.



My Three Angels, centre is Peter Crow

Patricia Irving continued as president in 1965. In early June the group presented the classic full-length play, *Lost Horizon* by Ann Coulter Martens and Christopher Sergel, directed by Patricia Irving (six performances, at the Old Post Office Theatre). Cast members included Alison Mowbray, Brian Ferguson, Norman Hines and Jocelyn Bishop. The price of a ticket was \$1.75 for adults and \$1.00 for students.



Lost Horizon, on the right is Norman Hines

In November of 1965, the Colchester Players prepared two one-act plays. They were "**Dreams**" by Norman Williams, directed by Ann Green, and "**Cobbler Stick to Thy Last**" by local writer Kay Hill, directed by Shirley Hamilton. The plays, along with a musical number "The Ballad of Springhill" were put together as a full production and presented at the Old Post Office Theatre (three performances: Nov 18, 19, 20). They were also taken to the Nova Scotia Drama League's annual one-act play festival, in October.

In the winter of 1966, the one-act play "**Coffee House**" was performed. Shirley Hamilton directed it. Other activities at around this time included hosting the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and theatre workshops organised by Jocelyn Bishop.

The children's play "**Gentle Dragon**", by Jenny Archibald and Elizabeth Pearce, was performed in the winter. It was directed by Ann Green (four performances: Jan. 2, 27 and Feb. 3, 24).



The Blood is Strong, standing on the right is Shirley Hamilton

The full-length play, *The Blood is Strong* by Lister Sinclair was presented in the spring. The play, about a family of emigrant Scots who came to Cape Breton in 1810 and their adjustments to pioneer life, was directed by Patricia Irving and performed in the Old Post Office Theatre (six performances: May 19, 25, 29, 30 and June 1, 2). It combined drama with some light comedic relief.

This show was well received by the Truro audiences. Play budgets, at this time, would run to between \$300 to \$700 and there were considerable expenses incurred from the renovations and maintenance of the Old Post Office Theatre. The group was operating on a shoestring. Of particular interest is the importance of the group to the members, shown by the records of personal loans that members made to the group. At around the time of *The Blood is Strong*, they had achieved some solvency and the personal debts had been repaid.

In the fall of 1966, two one-act plays were taken to the Nova Scotia Drama League's annual one-act play festival. They were "**The Visitor**" by Ann Green, directed by Shirley Hamilton and "**The Courting of Marie Jenurini**". These plays were also presented in Truro at the Old Post Office Theatre (four performances: Nov. 5, 7, 9, 10). Also in 1966, the Colchester Players sponsored the Royal Winnipeg Ballet.

In 1967, the Colchester Players presented the *Blood is Strong*, again directed by Patricia Irving, for competition in the Dominion Drama Festival, held in March at Neptune Theatre in Halifax. The organisers of the national festival decided to restrict the plays to those written by Canadians, with Canadian themes, to celebrate Canada's Centennial. *The Blood is Strong* was a natural consideration and the group had started planning for it the previous fall. Festivals were competitive in nature at the time (a practice later dropped). The winner, or winners, would go to another festival in St. John's, Newfoundland. Patricia Irving again directed the play and many of the players retained their roles.

Before taking the play to Halifax they performed it again at the Old Post Office Theatre (six performances: Feb. 24, 25, 26 and March 3, 4, 5). Although the group did not take the play to Newfoundland, it was well received in Truro. A comparison of newspaper reviews suggests the play had improved, with additional character development. Another group from Ottawa performed the same play at the festival in Newfoundland.

At the Annual General Meeting in June, Shirley Hamilton was elected as president of the group (Patricia Irving had been president since 1964). On November 18, 1967, the NSDL held their annual one-act play festival at the Truro Legion Hall. Plays were presented at 2:00 PM and then again at 7:00 PM. The Colchester Players contributed "**Battle of Wits**" by Norman Williams, directed by Allison Mowbray. This festival was also attended by groups from Acadia University, Saint Francis Xavier University, the Theatre Arts Guild and Saint Mary's University. The actor and teacher, Jack Medhurst acted as adjudicator.

In February of 1968, the Colchester Players received a letter from the town council giving 30 days notice to vacate the Old Post Office Theatre. They were in the middle of rehearsals at the time. The group had put a great deal of work and money into the location over the previous five years and had enjoyed much success there. Without knowing the exact nature of the original arrangement with the town, it might not be appropriate to judge the council for what appears to be insufficient consideration for a group that provided a great deal to the culture of the community. Regardless, the Colchester Players expressed thanks for the location and worked expediently to move on. Meetings started being held in individual homes. The old library building (which also housed the YMCA Drop-in Centre) was used temporarily for rehearsals¹⁷.

This was the start of some frustrating years for the group. To have a dedicated location is much different than looking for rehearsal space and performance venues. It should be noted that very few theatre groups have had their own space. One that comes to mind is Curtain Call Theatre, based in Moncton, New Brunswick. For many years, the town provided a building which was shared by the theatre group and a local boxing club. The Colchester Players had grown accustomed to having their own location and started to look for a new permanent home.

In the late fall of 1967 or early winter in 1968, the group presented the play, *Dark of the Moon*, by Howard Richardson and William Berney. *Dark of the Moon* mixes a bit of music, dance and comedy with some very intense drama. With a mixed age cast of about 20 to 25, it is a story of witches and hillbillies. Unfortunately, I do not know exactly when, or where, the play was performed, or who directed it. It was not performed at the Old Post Office Theatre. It may have been the play that was interrupted by their eviction. Also in 1967, the group performed the “**York Nativity Play**” at various churches.

At the 1968 annual general meeting, Mac Mowbray was elected as president of the group. There would be no full-length productions during the rest of the year. However, there were plays. Jocelyn Bishop prepared her children's play "**Captain Thunder**" in the fall. It was performed eight times in different locations in Truro and New Glasgow. Jocelyn wrote many child-participation plays, where relatively small audiences of young children would be able to take part in the action of the play. Also in the fall of 1968, the Nova Scotia Drama League held their one-act play festival in Antigonish. The Colchester Players submitted "**The Dock Brief**" by John Mortimer, directed by Shirley Hamilton and "**A Slight Ache**", directed by Allison Bishop.

Early in 1969, the Colchester Players left the old library building. During the year, they assisted Neptune Theatre in bringing in their production of *Charley's Aunt*, by Oscar Wilde and in August, the group took three one-act children's plays to the Festival of the Arts in Wolfville.

Lloyd Hoar was elected as president at the annual general meeting. The records show that the group was investigating ways to reorganise themselves at this time. More specifically, they had formed a committee to find options for changing their constitution. The Colchester Players had more flexibility in their organisation than Hubtown Theatre would later on. This is because Hubtown Theatre registered as a society with the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies as well as an organised charity, both of which involve constraints on the group's actions.

During this year, there was also discussion on forming an Arts Council for the area. Part of the reason for this was to have a separate group that would, among other things, try to find a location for

¹⁷ This is not the library that was replaced in 2016 but the one before that. It would have just been vacated at this time.

an Art Centre that would include a performance space. Some years later, an Arts Council was formed and there were many attempts to create an Arts Centre. This was finally accomplished with the creation of the Marigold Centre in 2005.

By the end of the year, there had not been a full-length show for at least a year and a half. Because of the abrupt change in the group's situation, resulting from the loss of the Old Post Office Theatre, it is not surprising that they had difficulties. The Colchester Players were faced with two options. They could focus on finding a new location that would serve as both rehearsal and performance space. Or they could rent space for rehearsals and then rent auditoriums (such as at the Legion or the Teachers College) for the actual performances. Artistically, the former option is better in most cases. It gives a group a great deal of flexibility and small (or even large) productions can take place more spontaneously, and more often.

Later, Hubtown Theatre would use the second option. Besides the considerable difficulty in finding a permanent theatre space in Truro, part of the reason is that Hubtown Theatre is able to rent a superior performance space, albeit at significant cost. As stated before this has limited the number and flexibility of Hubtown Theatre's productions at times.

However, the Colchester Players faced problems. There were some in the group that pressed for finding a new location as quickly as possible. In January 1970, the Colchester Players purchased a building on the Old Halifax Road, from the Salvation Army. It was in need of repairs before it could be used as a theatre.



Our Town, center: Heiner Pillar, right: Sherry O'Brien

The group selected the play *Our Town*, by Thornton Wilder. Unfortunately, it could not be prepared right away because of problems with repairing the new building. It seems that the costs were greater than had been anticipated. The group looked into ways of raising additional funds. The stress within the Colchester Players increased as their problems increased and there were many disagreements which made it difficult to reach any kind of consensus. At the annual general meeting, the Nominating Committee recommended that the group be dissolved. The recommendation was not accepted and John Brennan was elected as president.

All of these problems were interfering with the group's purpose, which was to put on plays. A theatre group must do plays to keep the interest of the participants and the patrons. By the end of the year, the group decided to attempt to sell the building. Meanwhile, the Progressive Conservative Association, on Ingles Street, provided them with rehearsal space. During the fall of 1970, Patricia Irving held workshops there twice a week.

I have no record of any plays being done during 1970. There was a one-act play festival held in the fall at the Nova Scotia Teacher's College, but I have no record of any connection with the Colchester Players or if it was the Nova Scotia Drama League's annual festival. Although I have tried to cover as many full-length and one-act plays as possible, there were many other skits and activities that were performed at different venues, for different people. For example, I know there was one skit done for a nursing home. There were undoubtedly other skits and possibly children's plays that I have not covered.

In the winter of 1971, The Colchester Players held a benefit concert to help the Attic Players raise money to attend the Dominion Drama Festival in Ottawa, in May. As stated before, the Attic Players were a high school based theatre group, run by Shirley Hamilton. They presented the children's play "**The Duke of Nibleton**", by Jocyln Bishop.

In the spring, the Colchester Players presented ***Our Town*** by Thornton Wilder, directed by Patricia Irving (two performances: April 5, 7). The show, simultaneously a light look at small town America and a darker look at the human condition, included a cast of 30 and a choir. It was presented at the C.E.C. Audio Visual Room. Richard Brezet produced it, with musical direction by Trevor Jones. Heiner Pillar¹⁸ was brought in to workshop and assist on a couple of rehearsals. It was performed at Cobequid Educational Centre's new audio-visual room. The venue included a large stage (with a seating capacity of about 1000). The size was the reason for the smaller number of performances from previous shows. Rehearsal space was at the PC meeting rooms on Inglis Street.

The production made a profit of \$11.07. What was important was that it brought quite a few people together to do theatre, bringing the group back on task¹⁹. It was the start of some increased activity for the Colchester Players. I found it interesting that the group published a full statement of the budget, with receipts and revenue, in the local paper. This had also been done previously when they were performing at the Old Post Office Theatre. At that time, it had been in response to public criticism on the price that the group charged for tickets. The fact is that the Colchester Players were pressed to meet their costs. They never had a significant reserve fund.

I feel that a group should have enough capital to take a total loss on two consecutive shows before going into the red. Besides relieving stress, it makes it possible to take a chance on some riskier shows now and then and even budget for a deficit occasionally. After some tumultuous years, Hubtown Theatre achieved this level of security.

By the end of the 1971, the Colchester Players received a grant from the Nova Scotia Drama League to help them continue operations. Also, by the end of the year, arrangements had been made for the sale of the property on the Old Halifax Road. The Annual General Meeting was held in November with Patricia Irving elected as president. Other activities during the year included some workshops and a float that was entered in the Christmas Parade.

During the winter of 1972, workshops were held on each Wednesday and the Easter Pageant, "**All In An Evening**", directed by Patricia Irving, was held at the First United Church. The Church provided space and partial sponsorship during 1972.

One of the events that was organised by the church and the group was a summer theatre school. A relatively ambitious undertaking, Jack Medurst, Professor of Theatre Arts at Ryerson College, was hired to teach a three-week school. Classes were held at the church hall each weekday morning, afternoon and evening with extras on the weekends. Drawing on personal recollections, as one of the students, I can say that it was an intense and valuable experience. Several of the students would continue with the Colchester Players and some would later become a part of Hubtown Theatre.

¹⁸ From Neptune Theatre

¹⁹ It was also my first time in a Colchester Players play, in a small role.



"The Game" in Rehearsal

The first week was a fast course on voice, stage movement, characterisation, improvisation, stagecraft, and other items. The second and third weeks were filled with rehearsals for an assortment of short pieces that culminated in two productions on the Saturday and Sunday of the last weekend. By using several short pieces, Medhurst was able to give almost everyone at least one significant scene and involvement in several others.

On Saturday night, the students presented a selection of short plays by the cartoonist Jules Feiffer. These were essentially jokes acted out on stage that ran anywhere from 10 seconds to 5 minutes. They were done with all props and costumes in black, white and shades of grey, to simulate a cartoon atmosphere. The students would have multiple costume changes for different roles, as well as stagehand duties for the many quick changes. Timing was critical. This was followed by six one-act plays, which ran about 10 minutes each. Saturday's show was done in the complete round with four entrance points to the slightly elevated stage. It was performed for the public, for a nominal fee, at the church hall.

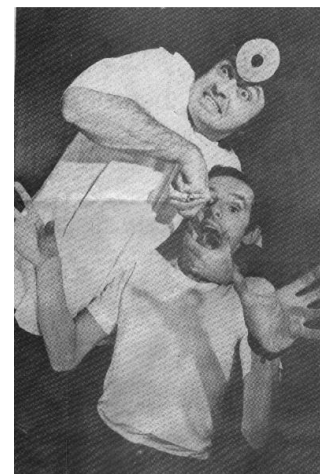
On Sunday, the students presented three one-act plays, with religious themes, in the main part of the church. They were "**The Game**", "**The Good Sam**" and "**The Mustard Seed**" (The latter was performed again in the following fall). All three were modernised dramatisations based on biblical parables.

During these times the Colchester Players were acting as an important resource for theatre education, for anyone with such an interest. Outside the professionals who were brought in, such as Jack Medhurst and Heiner Pillar, they had developed their own local "experts". People such as Patricia Irving and Shirley Hamilton had taken numerous courses. They were teaching the "best practices" of stagecraft. Local amateur theatre was, at its best, approaching professional levels of quality.

In the fall of 1972, the Colchester Players prepared the drama, "**The Brick and the Rose**" by Lewis John Carlino, directed by Patricia Irving. The play, about a teenager growing up in the slums of a city and his problems with drugs and life, was a voice play, without blocking. The characters sat on stools holding small screens in front of their faces. They would drop the screen whenever they were active in a given scene.

On Tuesday, November 14, "**The Brick and the Rose**" was presented at the First United Church Hall as part of a variety evening. The show also included music and a few mime skits. The mime skits were; "**The Terrible Tooth**" (farce), and "**Rendezvous**", directed by Patricia Irving and "**Moses**" (a religious mime), directed by Mac Mowbray. Brian Ferguson, a local man with a flair for mime, was in each of the skits. In November, all of these plays were presented at the Nova Scotia Drama League's "Festival 72", held in Wolfville.

In May of 1973, the Colchester Players presented the musical comedy *Song in the Wind*, directed by Kevin J. Chisholm. Two performances were held at the audio-visual room at Cobequid Educational Centre in May. In the fall, the Colchester Players



"The Terrible Tooth", Brian Ferguson (left) and Peter Crow

presented a variety show called "**Showcase 73**" (one performance, October 22) at the audio-visual room at Cobequid Educational Centre. During the winter of 1973, the Colchester Players held dance classes, directed by Donna Duffy. Rehearsals during the year were held at the PC rooms on Inglis Street.

During the year the Colchester Players made the decision to suspend their constitution. Changes to the constitution had been discussed for the previous three years. I do not have any information on how this effected the management of the group. The last president of record was Patricia Irving.

In the winter of 1974, the Colchester Players presented another variety show, "**Showcase 74**" (one performance, February 6), also at the audio-visual room at Cobequid Educational Centre. I do not have any records of any of the acts in either "Showcase 73" or "Showcase 74" with one exception. The latter show included the comedy skit "**The Teddy Bear's Picnic**" by Muriel Tucker, who lived in Brookfield.

From March 25 to 30, the Colchester Players organised and, with the help of the Department of Recreation, sponsored the Central Nova Scotia Drama Festival. Eight groups brought plays, which were performed at Cobequid Educational Centre. Workshops and other activities were also held.

The Colchester Players contributed the morality play, *Everyman*. *Everyman* is a classic example of a type of play with its origins a few hundred years ago (although there are modern morality plays), in which the characters in the play personify the forces of nature, emotions and morals. In this one, the character Everyman represents the human race. It is an old play with a religious theme. Patricia Irving directed it and the part of Everyman was played by Walter Langille.

Other performances at the Central Nova Drama Festival included "**The Devil and Miss Appleby**", presented by the South Colchester High School Players and directed by Andrew Smith and "**The Great American Goof**" by William Saroyan, presented by the Colchester YMCA Drama Group and directed by Shirley Hamilton and Nancy McPhee. In April, the Colchester Players presented *Everyman* again for one performance at Cobequid Educational Centre.

In late February and early March of 1975, the Colchester Players again organised the Central Nova Scotia Drama Festival. This time there were nine groups participating. The Colchester Players presented an excerpt from *I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running*, featuring Muriel Tucker and Ken Campbell and "**The Visit**". They may also have presented "**The Closing of the Curtain**" at this time. The latter play was written by Ann Greer, who was a former member of the group.

The next production of the Colchester Players had been planned for August 1975. However, the production was delayed until January 1976. The play was *Dashing Through the Years*, by Don Wetmore. It was directed by Winston MacDonald (three performances: January 29, 30 and 31). It was produced by Patricia Irving and presented at Cobequid Educational Centre. Containing a large cast, *Dashing through the Years* told the story of the settlement and early history of Truro. It was prepared to help celebrate the town's bicentennial.

The Colchester Players became inactive after *Dashing Through the Years*. It is interesting that the group, which started after Don Wetmore's *Londonderry Heirs*, would end with another of his plays. It is also interesting that four years later, Hubtown Theatre would start up after some of its founders were involved in another Don Wetmore play, *Where Rivers Merge*.

There was an attempt to revive the Colchester Players in 1980, the same year that Hubtown Theatre started rehearsing their first show. At that time the Alumni Theatre at the Agricultural College had just become available for rental. The Colchester Players, with the help of the NSDL, held theatre workshops there in the winter of 1980. This was the last activity of the group that I have any record of.

When Hubtown Theatre started in 1980, it was not a change of groups as much as it was a change in management and perhaps a reorganisation, a fresh start, another reboot of sorts. There were some of the same people involved but also many new people. I think that the similarity between the two groups outweighs the differences. Both represented (and represent) a commitment and goal to provide live theatre to the Truro area and an opportunity for the residents to get involved with live theatre, with a structure to maintain a continuity of purpose and resources.

Sometime after Hubtown Theatre Society was well established in Truro, the remaining funds of the Colchester Players, held in care and trust by Patricia Irving, were donated to Hubtown Theatre.

Other Local Groups – Part One

From the mid-sixties to the present, there have been many sources of live theatre in the area. The local high school has provided elaborate musicals each year. A list of other groups, active during the early part of this period, would include the Colchester YMCA, Theatre Truro, Tin Ear Theatre and many others. As I have stated before, the YMCA had drama clubs on more than one occasion. I have mentioned a production in 1924 as well as the YMCA War Services Concert Parties in the 1940s.

At around 1970 or 1971, Shirley Hamilton started teaching drama in local schools outside of class time. I have already mentioned the Attic Players from Brookfield but there were others. This was handled through government grants from the Province. At about this time the Colchester YMCA had established a drop in centre aimed at young people. It included a coffee shop. This was located on the first floor of the Old Academy/Old Normal College, where the Colchester Library is now. At this location she started holding workshops. Although aimed at young people, these were open to anyone. Several people were involved with both the Colchester Players and the YMCA drama group during the time it was active. There was a nominal charge for the year. Workshops included acting technique, improvisation, masks, sensitivity training and production.

These workshops would lead to productions and therefore the group became the YMCA Drama Club. Plays were varied and I will cite just a few examples. I have already mentioned the one-act play "**The Great American Goof**" which was taken to the Central Nova Drama Festival. Cast members included Peter Mattatall and me. Both of us are now retired teachers²⁰. There were a couple of children's participation plays by Jockie Bishop. These included "**Captian Thunder**" and "**Hildigard**". I recall that we did the one-act play *Crawling Arnold* by Jules Feiffer, which was about a family who had an adult child who had regressed and was crawling on the floor. It seems rather dated today. I remember there was a psychologist in it²¹ who was manipulated by Arnold, as well as a domineering house keeper. I remember developing temporary knee problems from that

²⁰ I do not have much source material for this group other than my own memories. Plays I list are often ones I was in but there were others.

²¹ Played by Janice Nelson (aka Janice McLeod, both she and her husband Doug McLeod were involved with Hubtown Theatre in its early years)

role. It was also taken to "Festival 72". The YMCA Drama Club also presented the three act play *Dark of the Moon*, by Howard Richardson and William Berney. The show was previously done by the Colchester Players. It combined comedy, drama, dance and music and involved witches and hillbillies. It was performed at the audio-visual room at Cobequid Educational Centre²². This version of the YMCA Drama Club existed for around five years.

Sometimes there would be one offs. By this I mean plays put together by communities themselves and not by specific theatre groups. Sometimes the intent would be celebrate or commemorate a specific historical event. I have already mentioned *Londonderry Heirs* and its influence on the Colchester Players. In 1983 it was presented again by the Cobequid Arts Council with Norman Hines directing. This play had a very large cast and included many members of Hubtown Theatre, which had been formed a couple of years before.

The musical *We'll Meet Again* was presented in 1986 to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of the Royal Canadian Legion. This play also involved several members of Hubtown Theatre²³. The play was light in nature and combined music with comedy. The setting was a pub in England where a group of soldiers are rehearsing for a show.

The community of Brookfield, to celebrate its bicentennial, presented the play *The Brookfielders* in 1984. This play told the story of the history of the community. It was written by Art Lindsay, Rita Dunn and Don Wetmore and directed by Shirley Hamilton. It had a very large cast made up almost entirely of, well, Brookfielders. A couple of years later, in 1986, The United Church would present the religious musical drama, *The Fouth Cross*, also directed by Shirley.



The Brookfielders

I have a record of a group from Upper Stewiacke, called the Covenant Players, but I only have a record of one play. It was *The Parson's Predicament*, written by Brian E. Hornick and Paul Seagrave and directed by Shirley Harrison. It was a musical farce about a church community and the role of the Parson was played by Harry Gesner. Musical direction was provided by Marg Archibald.

Although this is a history of community theatre, a brief exception will be made for the Cobequid Educational Centre Musicals. Norman Hines had arrived at CEC in 1970, when it first opened. CEC was a very large school compared to the previous high schools it replaced. Students there were coming from different areas, rural and from the town of Truro. It was his idea to try to unify these groups by involving them in a musical. In the event, the choice was *West Side Story*. This choice was aimed at helping with problems these different groups of students were having in getting to know each other. The CEC musical tradition continued for 46 years until a labour dispute resulted in its cancellation in 2017. However, the tradition was preserved when Lenore Zann²⁴ organised the production of *Rock of Ages*, which was carried out outside the school setting. Over the years the

²² The audio-visual room at Cobequid Educational Centre provided an option for amateur productions at that time. Although it was a bit overwhelming with a capacity of about 1000, it was a good theatre. Unfortunately years later the price had increased dramatically such that it was no longer an option for community groups.

²³ A year or two later, Hubtown Theatre would do the show again.

²⁴ Zann was a sitting MLA at this time. She had appeared in CEC Musicals as a student and went on to work in professional theatre and on screen.

musicals would have a unifying effect on the school. It was not uncommon for teachers to have roles in these productions. Norman Hines directed the productions for years, until his retirement. After that the job was taken over by other capable teachers.

On the topic of high school musicals, I would like to add a personal memory. In the year 2000, Stellarton High School had not done a musical in many years. I was teaching there that year and was approached about directing one. The choice was *The Wizard of Oz* by Harold Arlen and E. Y. Harburg. Musical direction and choreography were handled by Heather Van Ek, assistant director and stage manager was Eva Calder and the director of the Munchkins was Margie Beck.

There were many people involved, staff and students. I recall the set change and prop people were lead by a science teacher and the industrial arts department handled the set. These were complex jobs. We had a rotating house that was half cut out so that Dorothy could be seen during the tornado when stagehands would come out and spin the set. It was tedious work at times but as the production drew closer the energy of the whole school intensified. It was presented at the deCoste Entertainment Centre and in the end; it was one of the most rewarding experiences of my teaching career.

Hubtown Theatre Society – Part One

In 1980 a United Church ministers' organization asked Shirley Harrison (aka Shirley Hamilton) to direct a play written by Don Wetmore. The play was called *Where Rivers Merge* and was about the history of Tatamagouche and the Atlantic Christian Training Centre. Shirley had significant theatre experience. As previously stated, she had worked with Ross Hamilton (no relation), Don Wetmore, the Colchester Players, the Colchester YMCA and several other organizations, both professionally and non-professionally.

This fairly large production was performed in Sackville, New Brunswick at a United Church ministers' conference, in the spring of 1980. Some of those involved with the show - Don McLeod, Shirley Harrison and others - decided to form a theatre group. They felt that there was a need for a regular theatre outlet, which would be open to everyone, as The Colchester Players were inactive. Both of these groups started because of the efforts of individuals who had recently been involved in historical plays by Don Wetmore.

In the fall of 1980 and the winter of 1981, Hubtown Theatre was formed, with Paula Harris as the first president. Rehearsals for the first show began sometime during the fall of 1980. It was the comedy *The Curious Savage* by John Patrick and directed by Shirley Harrison. The play involved the residents of a home for people with mental health issues, or perhaps it would be better to say eccentricities. After some delays, it was performed March 11 and 12 (Wed. Thurs.), 1981. It was presented at the Alumni Theatre of the Nova Scotia Agricultural College. This well designed theatre, with very comfortable seats, holds about 400 people. It would become Hubtown Theatre's main stage for a number of years. The total cost was \$716.92 and the profit from the show, at two dollars a ticket, was \$415.08.

Hubtown Theatre's next main stage production was put together much more quickly. *The Lighter Side of Life* was presented June 24, 25 and 26 (Thurs. Fri. Sat.), 1981. This show consisted of four

one-act plays with four different directors and stage managers²⁵. The idea was to give as many people as possible some experience in these key roles. Graham Whitehead, a professional director, was contracted for one rehearsal to workshop the plays. A one-day stage management workshop was also held.

The show was produced by Doug McLeod and coordinated by Lorraine Tedford. The four plays were: the dark comedy "**Save Me a Place at Forest Lawn**" by Lorees Yerby, directed by Brian Sears, the comedy "**A Thing of Beauty**" by Maurice Berger, directed by Janice McLeod and Tim MacPhee, the comedy/drama "**The Happy Journey**" by Thornton Wilder, directed by Marcel Aucoin and the comedy "**Not My Cup of Tea**" by A. F. Croff, directed by Maggie Tattrie. "**Not My Cup of Tea**" was performed again in Victoria Park, but I do not have a record of when it was done.

During this year, the basic structure of Hubtown Theatre was established. General membership would be open to all persons. From this membership, a Board of Directors would be elected that would be composed of an executive and members at large.

On Sept. 8, 1981 the first Annual General Meeting was held. Doug McLeod was elected as president. During the next few months, Hubtown Theatre went through the process of incorporation. It became a non-profit organization and Hubtown Theatre became Hubtown Theatre Society, registered with the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies. The fiscal year was established (June 1 to May 31) and a constitution and by-laws were approved. Membership dues were officially set at \$5.00 per year. The Board of Directors could consist of between seven and fifteen members. Six persons would constitute a quorum for a board meeting and twelve for a general meeting. At that time, Hubtown Theatre Society received a small start-up grant from the Department of Culture, Recreation and Fitness.

As such a society, Hubtown Theatre's actions are governed, first, by The Societies Act (Provincial legislation), second, by The Memorandum of Association and, third, by the By-laws of Hubtown Theatre Society. The By-laws can, and have been, amended by following the procedures that are described in the Act and the By-laws.

Hubtown Theatre's first mainstage production of the 1981/82 season was the drama *Wings of the*



Some of the cast members of *Wings of the Dove*, left to right Lynn Pye, David Brown, Sheila Campbell (aka Sheila Newell) and Glen Freeman

Dove by Guy Bolton, directed by Marcel Aucoin. This show was performed Nov. 26 and 27 (Thurs. Fri.), 1981. This play might seem dated today as it dealt with an earlier time and people of the upper class and their relationships, but this type of entertainment did have a following.

The second mainstage production of the season was the romantic comedy *On Golden Pond* by Ernest Thompson, directed by David Rundle-Woolcock. It was performed April 2 and 3 (Fri. Sat.), 1982. Two shows, one a matinee, were presented on the 3rd.

²⁵ This was the first Hubtown Theatre production I was involved with, although I had a couple of roles in *Where Rivers Merge*.

This was quickly followed by the third mainstage production of the 1981/82 season, the drama *All My Sons* by Arthur Miller, directed by Brian Sears. It was performed May 27, 28 and 29 (Fri. Sat. Sun.), 1982. The play involved a man who becomes alienated from his son because he took short cuts in munitions manufacturing during the Second World War, costing some young pilots their lives. Brian Carver played the role of the father. He was in his 20s at the time but was aged appropriately. This type of aging was done in *On Golden Pond* when Royce Townsend played the much older Norman Thayer.



Scene from *All My Sons*, left to right: Maggie T Craig, Steve Arnold, Sherry Madigan, Sheila Campbell

Several other activities took place during this season. In the fall, the children's play "**Captain Thunder**" by Jocelyn Loamer-Kruger (aka Jocelyn Bishop) was performed at various schools. Shirley Harrison directed it. As well, promotional performances were done at one of the malls. Two radio plays were recorded and broadcast on local FM near Christmas. They were: "**A Christmas Carol**", directed by Lynn Pye and "**The Elves and the Shoemaker**", directed by Lorraine Tedford.

Workshops were held during the year. Jim Gow, of Theatre New Brunswick, provided a two day technical workshop in February. Graham Whitehead gave a forty hour directing workshop in January and February. Whitehead's workshop was very valuable. I remember that he put us into groups of three and each member of the group would direct the other two in a short scene. A one-day stage management workshop was also held at around this time.

In April, Hubtown Theatre sponsored Neptune Theatre's *Private Lives* by Noel Coward. A few months later, Hubtown Theatre sponsored Stage East's production of *One Night Stand*.

During the summer of 1982, Hubtown Theatre performed the one-act play "**Memo From Jupiter**" by Dennis Snee. This light comedy was directed by Paula Harris. It was performed in the band shell at Victoria Park. During the same summer, renovations were made to the third floor of the TAAC building on Prince Street, which Hubtown Theatre started to use as a rehearsal space and later as a storage space. The building was shared with the rugby club. Eventually it deteriorated and had to be destroyed.

The 1982/83 season began with Doug McLeod continuing as president. The first mainstage production was the comedy *Plaza Suite* by Neil Simon, directed by Sheila Newell (aka Sheila Campbell). This play was one of several by Simon that tell three or four different stories but using the same setting. In this case it was a hotel room. It was the first play for Marlene LeBlanc (aka Marlene Sears), who would stay with the group for many years, often directing plays. It was performed on Oct. 12, 13, 15 and 16 (Tues. Wed. Fri. Sat.), 1982.



Scene from *My Three Angels*, left to right: Jane Foote, Loyd Rector, Brian Sears, Brian Carver

This was followed by the comedy *My Three Angels* by Sam and Bella Spewack, directed by Shirley Harrison. This show was performed Dec. 9, 10 and 11 (Thurs. Fri. Sat.), 1982. The Colchester Players had previously done

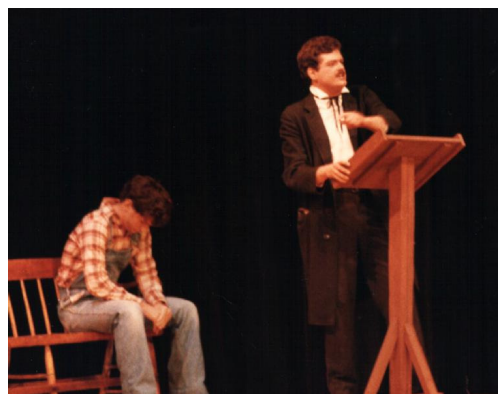
this play. Hubtown Theatre entered a float in Truro's Christmas parade that year, featuring characters from the show. Over the years since then, Hubtown Theatre has occasionally made entries in the parade.

Hubtown Theatre did not produce a show during the winter and spring of 1983. At that time the local historical play *Londonderry Heirs* by Don Wetmore was in rehearsal. The Truro Community Players previously performed *Londonderry Heirs* in 1960. Although this was not a Hubtown Theatre show, several members became involved. As the play developed, Hubtown Theatre began assisting the Cobequid Arts Council in producing the show and was compensated for doing so. It was performed in July, 1983. It would not be the last time that Hubtown Theatre would help, and be helped by, other groups and organizations.

In the fall of 1982, Hubtown Theatre organised a two-day workshop on movement and speech. It was given by Ellen Pierce. Hubtown Theatre continued supporting tours by professional groups. On April 7, 1983, Hubtown Theatre sponsored Neptune Theatre's *Special Occasions*.

The 1983/84 season began with Shirley Saywood as president. The first mainstage production was *Dark of the Moon* by Howard Richardson and William Berney, directed by Shirley Harrison. As stated previously, this story, about witches and hillbillies, combines comedy, drama and music. It was performed Nov. 5, 6, 9 and 10 (Sat. Sun. Wed. Thurs.), 1983. Shirley had previously directed it in 1973 for the Colchester YMCA. It had also been done by the Colchester Players. It was during this show that Brian Carver (aka Bryan Carver), who was in many plays before moving to Ontario to study theatre, fell off the stage during a staged fight. It was at the Alumni Theatre, which has a four-foot high stage.

He simply got up, without breaking character, and went back on stage and completed the scene.



Scene from *Dark of the Moon*, seated; Brad Filippone, standing and preaching; Brian Sears

The next mainstage production was the romantic comedy *Barefoot in the Park* by Neil Simon, directed by Brian Sears. It was performed Feb. 24, 25 and 26 (Fri. Sat. Sun.), 1984.

Hubtown Theatre sponsored Rising Tide Theatre's production of *Joey*, a play about the life of Joey Smallwood, on Oct. 10, 1983. Hubtown Theatre also sponsored Neptune Theatre's production of *Mass Appeal* on March 20, 1984. This was the first show connected with Hubtown Theatre that would include the word, "fuck". By this time small amounts of swearing, such as "shit", or "damn" or "God" would be used sometimes²⁶ but there were some complaints about the usage of "fuck". It was a Neptune Theatre show and we had to wonder if there were any complaints in Halifax. Hubtown Theatre always used substitutions for the stronger words and it would be sometime after 2010 when theatre would mature enough in the Truro area that we would avoid censoring plays.

The 1984/85 season began with Brian Sears as president. There were no mainstage productions in the fall of 1984. Hubtown Theatre did sponsor Neptune Theatre's *Moon for the Misbegotten* by Eugene O'Neil at around that time. Sponsorships of professional groups eventually became rare. These groups would ask for a set fee resulting in Hubtown Theatre taking all of the financial risks. They

²⁶ However, for some reason there was some uneasiness when we used "God Damn".

often wanted us to provide workers to assist with the setup and strike and provided a limited amount of promotional material. Hubtown Theatre would be responsible for advertising and theatre rental. The reality was that, with only one performance night, we generally lost money.

The only mainstage production of the season was the classic comedy *Arsenic and Old Lace* by Joseph Kesselring, directed by Shirley Saywood. A significant amount of work went into the set which included a partial stairs. It was the first play that included Robin Saywood, who would be involved with a great number of shows. Eventually he moved to the Halifax area where he became involved with the Bedford Players. *Arsenic and Old Lace* was performed March 7, 8 and 9 (Thurs. Fri. Sat.), 1985. A lighting design workshop was held in Feb. 1985. During the spring of this year, several members attended a two day workshop in Halifax on improvisation and theatre sports. Theatre sports was a new idea at the time using improvisation in the form of competition, scoring points, having tag team matches, etc. If you have ever seen the TV show "Whose Line is it Anyway" you will get the idea, except Theatre Sports had much more of a competitive edge.



Scene from *Arsenic and Old Lace*, left to right; Jackie Yarn, Brian Sears, Kevin Chisholm and Sheila Campbell (aka Sheila Newell)

The one-act play "**My Lady Greensleeves**" was performed on Aug. 12, 1985 at the band shell in Victoria Park. Lynn Pye directed it. It was also performed at the 1985 Annual General Meeting, as entertainment for members and friends.

In Oct. 1984, several members of Hubtown Theatre were involved in the play *Edward J. Hyde* by Barry Stagg. Theatre Truro produced this play. Theatre Truro presented a small number of plays in the mid 80's.

The 1985/86 season began with Brian Sears continuing as president. The first mainstage production of the season was the comedy *The Savage Dilemma* by John Patrick, directed by Bill Mabey. This play was a sequel to Hubtown Theatre's first production, *The Curious Savage*. It was presented Sept. 21, 25, 26, 27 and 28 (Sat. Wed. Thurs. Fri. Sat.), 1985. The first of these shows was done as a benefit for Charles Street House and the Hospital Building Fund.



Scene from "The Termination", left to right; Rebecca Roberts, Sandy Anthony

The second mainstage production was *A Trilogy of Fate*. This show was composed of three one-act plays and was produced and coordinated by Pat Monette and Brian Sears, respectively. The plays were; the farce "**The Termination**" by Samuel Birkant, directed by Brian Sears, the comedy "**Schubert's Last Serenade**" by Julie Barasso, directed by Kevin J. Chisholm and the drama "**The Summer People**" by Shirley Jackson, directed by Peter Wirtanen. The show was performed March 6, 7 and 8 (Thurs. Fri. Sat.), 1986.

During 1986, the Royal Canadian Legion was celebrating its 60th anniversary. They produced the musical *We'll Meet Again* by Paul Gaffney and Nancy Turner. It was

directed by Shirley Harrison and performed May 9, 10 and 11 (Thurs. Fri. Sat.), 1986. Although it was not a Hubtown Theatre production, Hubtown members were prominently represented among the cast and crew.

On Oct. 5 and 6 of 1985, Hubtown Theatre sponsored Neptune Theatre's *Don Messer's Jubilee*. Hubtown Theatre performed "**Schubert's Last Serenade**" again, at the NSDL play festival "On Stage - Back Stage", on the weekend of May 15 to 18, 1986. Although by now much less common, play festivals had not completely disappeared. On July 18, 1986, several Hubtown members attended a three day workshop, given by Gay Hauser, at the Kipowa Festival in Parsboro. In Oct. 1985, several members were involved in Theatre Truro's *The Mudlark* by Barry Stagg.



Scene from *The Odd Couple*, left to right; Bruce Moore, Les MacKenzie

The 1986/87 season began with Bill Mabey as president. The first mainstage production was the classic comedy *Harvey* by Mary Chase, directed by Shirley Saywood. It was performed Oct. 25, 26, 29, 30 and Nov. 1 (Sat. matinee Sun. Wed. Thurs. Sat.), 1986.

The second mainstage production was *The Odd Couple* by Neil Simon, directed by Jane Klein Geltink. It was performed March 1, 5, 6 and 7 (Sun.-matinee Thurs. Fri. Sat.), 1987. An excerpt was recorded by Eastlink and shown on the local cable channel. During the early years of Hubtown Theatre, we often did interviews with the local cable channel and with local radio. The local radio connection lasts until this day.

The third mainstage production of the 1986/87 season was *We'll Meet Again*. It was produced as a Hubtown show this time, sponsored by the Legion. It was directed by Shirley Harrison and was performed May 14, 15 and 16 (Thurs. Fri. Sat.), 1987. It was also taken to a play festival in Sydney.

The "**York Nativity Play**" was produced in Dec. 1986. Shirley Harrison directed it and it was performed seven times in various churches in the area. This classic play, written in verse, is noted for a rather comical scene in Herod's court.

Hubtown Theatre sponsored Mulgrave Road Co-op Theatre's *Beinn Bhreagh* on Oct. 1, 1986. This play is about the life of Alexander Graham Bell. During that year, work was started on amendments to the By-laws of Hubtown Theatre. These amendments concerned the structure of the Board of Directors and added the position of Second Vice President. It was during that year that sweat shirts, featuring show logos, became available for some productions.

The 1987/88 season began with Robin Saywood as president. The first mainstage production was *Bill Boram* by Don Wetmore. This musical, set in a Lunenburg fishing village in the 1920's, was directed by Carol Walling. It was the first time Hubtown Theatre contracted a professional to fully direct a show. The show was performed Oct. 10, 11, 15, 16 and 17 (Sat. Sun.-two shows Thurs. Fri. Sat.), 1987. It was also performed twice at the Cunard Street Theatre in Halifax, later in October.

The second mainstage production was the comedy *Absurd Person Singular* by Alan Ayckbourn, directed by Marlene Sears. It was performed March 3, 4 and 5 (Thurs. Fri. Sat.), 1988. The third

mainstage production of the season was *Cabaret 88*. This was a collection of skits and music. It was produced and coordinated by Jane Klein Geltink and Bill Mabey respectively and performed May 28 (Sat.), 1988. The "**York Nativity Play**" was performed in Dec. 1987 at local churches again. It was directed by Jane Klein Geltink.

Hubtown Theatre sponsored Barry Morse on Oct. 18, 1987. Morse has a list of credits that go back several decades and include roles in the television series "The Fugitive" and "Space 1999". He performed his one-man benefit show *Merely Players*.

The 1988/89 season began with Doug McLeod as president. The first mainstage production of the season was the very British comedy *No Sex Please, We're British* by Anthony Marriott and Alistair Foot, directed by Shirley Saywood. It was performed Nov. 24, 25 and 26 (Thurs. Fri. Sat.), 1988. A British couple accidentally receive a package of pornography in the post. This farce was very well received.

The fact is that Hubtown Theatre had been steadily losing money for the past few seasons and had found itself about \$10 000 in the red. Doug McLeod, who had significant experience in business, took on the project of reforming the group's practices. As well as a greater scrutiny of finances, there was a focus on publicity and promotion. Additionally, the group started to learn that they could fill the house by producing sex comedies, especially those of the British farce type. This would eventually develop into what I will call "the formula". We would occasionally do dramas, musicals or mysteries but we would need to do lots of popular comedies to stay solvent. In the event, that was the focus for the next couple of seasons. Eventually we would realise that we could do comedy/dramas as well, such as those by Neil Simon or Canadian Norm Foster, with success.

The second mainstage production of the year was also a British farce. It was *See How They Run* by Philip King, directed by Shirley Saywood. This play, about mistaken identities and misunderstandings in the home of a local vicar and his wife, a former actress, was presented on March 30, 31 and April 1 (Thurs. Fri. Sat.), 1989.

There were several other activities during the season. Shirley Harrison directed the children's play "**Captain Thunder**" by Jocelyn Loamer-Kruger. It was performed at the North Shore Octoberfest in Tatamagouch on Sept 24, 1988. For several years after, Hubtown Theatre would assist the organizers of the Octoberfest. In the fall of 1988, "Community Magazine", a show on local cable, taped a twenty minute segment on Hubtown Theatre. For this, we prepared two interviews with past-presidents and an excerpt from *The Odd Couple*, complete with a mini set²⁷.

Several members were involved in a directing workshop given by Michael Ardenne and sponsored by the Department of Culture, Recreation and Fitness. Hubtown members also assisted Greco Restaurants in the making of employee training videos. Hubtown Theatre co-produced, with The Cobequid Arts Council, a sponsorship of Buddy Wasisname and the Other Fellers, a singing comedy group. It was held on April 22, 1989. A Benefit night, for Hubtown Theatre, was held on Feb. 9 at the Engine Room.

The 1988/89 season was the beginning of an extended period of financial stability for Hubtown Theatre Society. Within a year or two we were in the black as much as we had been in the red before. Audiences increased in size and, for the most part, stabilized. The group would never be in

²⁷ I believe the same mini-set was used as had been used previously for Eastlink.

the red again. Eventually Hubtown Theatre would always have a reserve investment adequate to completely finance at least three shows.

Technical aspects of productions started to improve with higher quality equipment and better designed sets. The quality of the printing improved as well. Photos started to be routinely used in the programs. It is not an over-statement to say that Hubtown Theatre came to provide some of the finest and smoothest amateur productions in the Province.



Scene from *Hildegarde*

The 1989/90 season began with Earl Monette as president. The first mainstage production of the year was the children's play *Hildegarde* by Jocelyn Loamer-Kruger, directed by Shirley Harrison. *Hildegarde* was a play that included a number of children in the cast. The play was intended for children but was not a participation style play. It was performed Oct. 20, 21 and 22 (Fri. Sat. Sun.-matinee), 1989.

The second mainstage production of the year was *Love, Sex and the I.R.S.* by William Van Zandt and Jane Milmore, directed by Marlene Sears. It was performed March 1, 2 and 3 (Thurs. Fri. Sat.), 1990. This play was a British comedy in a style similar to *No Sex Please, We're British* and *See How They Run*. Hubtown Theatre was bringing in consistently larger audiences. The formula was working.

Fundraisers were continued. Christmas wreaths were sold and another benefit night was held at the Engine Room on Feb. 9, 1990. Hubtown Theatre sponsored Neptune Theatre's production of *Brass Rubbings* by Gordon Pinsent, on May 21, 1990.

Also in 1990, the By-laws were amended again. This was to change the membership year to the calendar year. Previously, membership expired at the end of the Annual General Meeting, held at the end of the fiscal year.

The 1990/91 season began with Marlene Sears as president. The first mainstage production of the season was the mystery *Ten Little Indians* by Agatha Christie. For this show, Hubtown Theatre contracted the professional actor and director John Dunsworth. It was performed Nov. 8, 9 and 10 (Thurs. Fri. Sat.), 1990. Dunsworth also held a workshop on directing, at the same time that the play was in rehearsal. The Department of Tourism and Culture provided a grant to pay part of the cost of hiring Dunsworth.

The second mainstage production of the season was the comedy *Bedroom Farce* by Alan Ayckbourn, directed by Paula Harris. It was performed on Feb. 28, March 1 and 2 (Thurs. Fri. Sat.), 1991. This play tells three different, but overlapping stories involving couples.

The third mainstage production of the 1990/91 season was the comedy/drama *Luxury Cruise* by Fred Carmichael, directed by Marlene Sears. It was performed April 24, 25 and 26 (Wed. Thurs. Fri.), 1991. Hubtown Theatre sponsored Neptune Theatre's production of *Driving Miss Daisy* by Alfred Uhry on May 12, 1991.

On the weekend of Aug. 17, 1991, a ten-year reunion celebration, organized by Paula Harris, was held. The all day event included a barbecue, dance and entertainment. Guest speakers included Graham Whitehead (who was moving back to England after almost ten years as artistic director of Mermaid Theatre), John Dunsworth and Don McLeod, one of the founders of Hubtown Theatre. A lifetime membership to Hubtown Theatre was bestowed upon Shirley Harrison in recognition of years of devotion to live theatre and, specifically, for her part in creating Hubtown Theatre.



Scene from *Pass the butler*, left to right; Paula Harris, Robin Saywood, Lynn Pye, Gordon Jeffery, Shirley Saywood, Joel Ross

The 1991/92 season began with Shirley Saywood as president. The first mainstage show of the season was the farce *Pass the Butler* by Eric Idle, directed by Paul Menhennett. A quirky, but “formula play”, it was performed on Oct 17,18 and 19 (Thurs. Fri. Sat.), 1991. The second mainstage production was the mystery/thriller *Deadly Nightcap* by Francis Durbridge, directed by Marlene Sears. Mystery plays had some popularity though not as much as farces. It was performed Feb. 27, 28 and 29 (Thurs. Fri. Sat.), 1992. Although Hubtown Theatre had found the most popular type of show, there was still a desire to present productions of other genres. It would continue as a balancing act for many years, combining the light and popular with drama and suspense.

Two one-act comedies were prepared in the spring of 1992. They were, "**Final Dress Rehearsal**", directed by Robin Saywood and "**Between Eleven and Thursday**", directed by Tony Brine. They were performed for the IODE on May 30, 1992. These plays were presented for the public at Kaulback Hall²⁸ (St. John's Anglican Church, Church St.) on June 5 and 6, 1992. The show was called *Comedy Capers* and the profit was donated to the Church, to put toward roof repairs. The plays were later taken to the Amherst Arts Festival, which was being held that summer.

On Nov. 23, 1991, Hubtown Theatre sponsored The Gilbert and Sullivan Society. They presented two one act plays: "**Trial by Jury**" and "**Unexplained Delights**". This was done as a benefit for the Colchester Regional Hospital.

Hubtown Theatre continued to work toward producing shows of consistent quality. The sets, which had always been good, became more efficient. Mostly lightweight and reusable, the sets were constructed in one or two days and strikes could be accomplished in one or two hours. Earl Monette, who constructed many of the set pieces, usually coordinated this.

During the 1991/92 season, some of the profits from the shows were used to purchase a higher quality sound system. Extra lights started being rented and eventually purchased. Headsets, and sometimes a video monitor, were also routinely used to aid in production. Production became more streamlined and efficient during the first half of the 90's, with Darlene Spears acting as producer for most of the shows.

Rehearsal space was always a problem for Hubtown Theatre. Several shows had been rehearsed in the clubhouse. However, this space was inadequate, being poorly heated and usually lacking running

²⁸ This was the hall that was created with some assistance from The Saint John Players many years previously.

water. Many other locations had been used during the years. During the 1991/92 season, rehearsals started being held at Kaulback Hall.

The 1992/93 season began with Tony Brine as president. The first mainstage production was the comedy farce *Run For Your Wife* by Ray Cooney. Hubtown Theatre contracted the professional director Wally MacKinnon to direct the show. It was performed Oct. 22, 23 and 24 (Thurs. Fri. Sat.), 1992. This British farce involved a taxi driver (played by Robin Saywood) who is married to two women and his efforts to conceal one from the other.

The second show of the season was the family play *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* by Barbara Robinson, directed by Marlene Sears and Tony Brine. It was presented Dec. 4, 5 and 6 (Fri. Sat. Sun. matinee), 1992. This show involved several young people as actors.

The Nova Scotia Wood Producers Association requested that Hubtown Theatre perform *Run For Your Wife* as entertainment for their convention. Hubtown Theatre decided to accept the contract. One of the main characters had to be recast. Because of this and an interval of three months, during which some people were involved with *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*, considerable re-rehearsal was required. Wally MacKinnon was again contracted to direct.

Run For Your Wife was performed, with a simplified set, on Jan. 21, 1993, at the Glenderry Inn and then again on the mainstage for the general public on Jan. 22 and 23 (Fri. Sat.), 1993. This made it the third mainstage production of the 1992/93 season as well as the first. These shows were sold out a week before the performances. On March 13, 1993, the play was taken to Oxford, where it was performed twice.

The fourth production of the 1992/93 season was the comedy *The Odd Couple, The Female Version* by Neil Simon, directed by Robin Saywood. This play, almost identical to the original except for the gender reversal, was performed on March 24, 25, 26 and 27 (Wed. Thurs. Fri. Sat.), 1993.

In the spring of 1993, Hubtown Theatre prepared three one-act plays for performance at Kaulback Hall. The production, like the similar one the previous year, was called *Comedy Capers*. The plays were, "**Hooray for Adam Spelvin, He is Perfect**", directed by Tony Brine, "**Visitors From Forest Hills**" (an excerpt from Neil Simon's *Plaza Suite*) and "**Tangled Snarl**", both directed by Sheila Newell. This show was also performed at Kaulback Hall.

During the season, Hubtown Theatre started an annual scholarship. Hubtown had occasionally sponsored students before. A total of \$1000.00 was made available to a local person or persons attending a recognized post-secondary institution, for the study of the performing arts. Scholarships were first presented at the 1993 Annual General Meeting. Also at this meeting, Hubtown Theatre donated funds in support of Charles Street House and Transition House.

The 1993/94 season began with Robin Saywood as president. The first mainstage production was the comedy *Move Over Mrs. Markham* by Ray Cooney and John Chapman, directed by Wally MacKinnon. A British farce about infidelity, it was the second play that MacKinnon had been contracted to direct for Hubtown Theatre. It was performed Oct. 21, 22, 23, 28, 29 and 30 (Thurs. Fri. Sat. Thurs. Fri. Sat.), 1993. It was also the first play that Paul Gamble would be involved in with the group. Gamble would go on to direct and act in many Hubtown Theatre Plays. He would also be extensively involved in the management of the group for many years.

The second mainstage production of the season was the family play *Charlotte's Web* by E. B. White, directed by Shirley Harrison and Tony Brine. It had a cast of nearly thirty adults, young adults and children. Many actors played animals and the costumes were elaborate. Set changes were expedited by the use of flying flats in and out. This technique would be used again. The Alumni Theatre has a cat walk above the stage with lots of room and the needed rigging to do this²⁹. The play was presented Feb. 3, 4 and 5 (Thurs. Fri. Sat. matinee), 1994. The third mainstage production of the 1993/94 season was the classic suspense/drama *Dial M For Murder* by Frederick Knott, directed by Marlene Sears. It was performed March 24, 25 and 26 (Thurs. Fri. Sat.), 1994.

The 1994/95 season began with Susan Chisholm as president. The first mainstage production of the season was the musical *We'll Meet Again* by Paul Gaffney and Nancy Turner, which Hubtown



We'll Meet Again in rehearsal, on piano; Nigel Firth, left to right; Ken Wood, Susan Gamble, Tony Brine, Mike Dupuis, Paul Gamble, Brian Sears (others in background)

Theatre had previously produced in 1987. It was directed by Shirley Saywood and Shirley Harrison and was presented Nov. 3, 4, 5, 9, 10 and 12 (Thurs. Fri. Sat. Wed. Thurs. Sat.), 1994. On Remembrance Day, some of the songs from the show were presented at the Royal Canadian Legion.

The second production of the 1994/95 season was the farce *Sinners* by Norm Foster, directed by Brian Sears. It was performed March 22, 23, 24 and 25 (Wed. Thurs. Fri. Sat.), 1995.

Production on this show had just started when Hubtown Theatre was notified that the Alumni

Theatre might not be available for a period of several months to a year or more. The building was being renovated. The Colchester Regional Hospital generously offered an alternate location. Arrangements were underway when the mainstage again became available. This was the first Norm Foster play to be done by Hubtown Theatre. There would be many more.

Previously in this history, I noted the budget for Hubtown Theatre's first show. The changes are interesting. The budget and profit from *Sinners* were representative of shows we produced at that time. The budget was \$5935.00 and the show made a profit of \$4156.74. Ticket prices were \$9.00 advance and \$10.00 at the door. During the fourteen year interval between the two shows, the budgets increased by a factor of ten while the ticket prices increased by a factor of five. Over the years, membership dues had been increased to \$15.00 per year³⁰.

The third mainstage show of the 1994/95 season was the variety concert *On With The Show*, produced by Darlene Spears and coordinated by Lenny Spears. Containing mostly music, with some comedy and dance, the show was a benefit for the Colchester Regional Hospital Foundation. Rehearsals were held in



Posed scene from *Sinners*, back left to right; Richard Groves, Gordon Jeffery, Marlene Sears, Margot Begin, front top; Joanne Cullen, front bottom; Paul Gamble

²⁹ The Marigold Centre does not have this capacity.

³⁰ They would later be reduced back to \$5.00 to encourage membership.

the hospital auditorium and the show was presented June 2 and 3 (Fri. Sat.), 1995.

Hubtown Theatre held two workshop sessions during the season. On Sept. 18, 1994, Frank Lambert gave a six hour workshop on movement, characterization, interpretation and improvisation. On April 25 and 26, 1995, workshops were given on voice, movement, characterization and set decoration. This was done through the cooperation of the Nova Scotia Drama League. On May 10, 1995, Hubtown Theatre assisted Neptune Theatre with the Truro performance of their production of *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare. Members helped with set-up, strike and house duties. Over the years, we had sponsored many Neptune shows. As previously stated, it was rarely a profitable venture. The problem was that Neptune, and other groups, always wanted a set fee. They did not want to take any risk. Their prices were not low for a single performance. It was generally felt that, with the continued success of our own shows, Hubtown Theatre did not need to take on the risk. However, on this occasion, Neptune Theatre contracted for a per ticket fee, with no risk of loss.



Scene from *It Runs in the Family*, left to right; Tony Brine, Gordon Jeffery, Brian Sears, Lenny Spears

The 1995/96 season began with Marlene Sears as president. The first mainstage production of the season was *It Runs in the Family*, a comedy, in the British style, by the popular Ray Cooney. It was directed by Marlene Sears and was presented Nov. 15, 16, 17 and 18 (Wed. Thus. Fri. Sat.), 1995. A successful doctor finds himself with a problem when an ex-wife and an unknown son show up at the worst moment. The play was very well received.

This is the play where Gordon Jeffery and I set what may have been the record for line jumping in a performance by Hubtown Theatre³¹. It was just the two of us in a rather frantic dialogue, of a common type in farce, where we were trying to get out of some sort of problem. It happened that this act one scene was similar to another scene in act two. As you are already guessing, we jumped to the act two scene, thereby cutting out at least half the play. I do not know who made the first jump. I do know that after we realized something had happened there was a repeated attempt to feed each other lines to bring us back. Backstage, the stage manager was trying to decide if she should send out the next entrance (which would have worked). However, we did manage to get back to act one and all was well.

The second production was *Opening Night* by Norm Foster. This play might be described as a romantic comedy with moments of farce. It was directed by Brian Sears and was presented March 27, 28, 29 and 30 (Wed. Thurs. Fri. Sat.), 1996. This was a play within a



Scene from *Opening Night*, left to right, seated; Andrew Keilty, Susan Giffin, Mark Mercer, standing; Sheila Newell, Geoff Smith, Janice Hale, David Rann

³¹ In this context I mean a situation where an actor mistakenly says a line from further on in the play, the other actors follow along and part of the play, possibly including important plot points, are missed.

play with things going wrong, to the frustration of the director. The play was staged so that the action of the inner play and the outer play could be seen at the same time allowing Foster to include onstage audience reaction as part of the humour.

Both plays of the season were reasonably successful financially and were well received by the public. Several new people demonstrated their skills for Hubtown Theatre. Rehearsals for both shows were held at the Colchester Regional Hospital Auditorium.

Two half-day workshops were held on June 9, 1996. One was on make-up and the other was on characterization. Hubtown Theatre awarded two scholarships to students studying the performing arts. Each student was awarded \$500. The group was again hired by the Bavarian Society for the Harvestfest. During the season, three newsletters were published. Newsletters were a regular thing back then. Now, with e-mail and Facebook being ubiquitous, they have not been issued in some time.

The costume committee (chaired by Joan MacDonald) made significant progress in the maintenance of the costumes. Costumes, which had been stored in the old club room in the TAAC building (then used just for storage) had begun to deteriorate because of the condition of the room. Those costumes that could be saved were dry cleaned and moved to a new storage location, generously donated by Snook Group. Some period costumes, which were unsuitable for stage use, were donated to the Colchester Museum.

For the third time since incorporation, the constitution of Hubtown Theatre Society was amended. At a general meeting in December 1995, it was agreed that the constitution and goals of Hubtown Theatre would be reviewed. Copies of the Society Act, Memorandum of Association and the By-laws of Hubtown Theatre were made available to all members. A constitution committee was formed. It was open to all members and was chaired by Brian Sears. The committee made several recommendations, which included increasing the number of shows and workshops per year, exploring a greater variety of show types and increasing the age range of characters for potential players.

Based on a recommendation of the committee, the policies of the group were researched and reviewed. They were then amended, rescinded or affirmed by the board. It was agreed that active policies would be kept up to date in a document made available to members. At the Annual General Meeting in June 1996, a special resolution was passed amending the constitution, also based on recommendations of the constitution committee. Changes included removing the position of the second vice-president as well as other matters concerning meetings and play selection. With Hubtown Theatre just a few months away from 15 years of activity, the 1995/96 season ended, with Marlene Sears selected to continue as president for the 1996/97 season.

There were no productions in the fall of 1996 because of uncertainties as to when the Alumni Theatre would be available. The theatre had been undergoing extensive renovations, primarily to the lobby area. The renovations included an elevator connecting the main lobby to the back of the house and the other floors. Before the end of the season, improvements were made to the lighting system.

Hubtown Theatre's only mainstage production of the year was the farcical comedy *Rumors*, by Neil Simon and directed by Robin Saywood. It was performed March 19, 20, 21 and 22 (Wed. Thurs. Fri. Sat.), 1997. Robin had been away from Hubtown Theatre for a while but had remained active with theatre groups in the Halifax Metro area, both acting and directing. The play was well received, filling the house on Friday and Saturday. Although the ticket prices were raised by one dollar, advance, the attendance was one of the largest on record. A more ambitious set was built this time that included a partial second floor.



Scene from *Rumors*, left to right; Paul Gamble, Joe Conway, Gordon Jeffery, Brian Sears

Although there was no fall show, Hubtown Theatre assisted the Nova Scotia Drama League with their production of *The Sound of Music* in November 1996. This production was their annual Fantasy Frolic. It was their first attempt at touring the show. Held at the C.E.C. Auditorium, Hubtown Theatre assisted by helping with costumes, loading and unloading, helping the crew, working at the door and in other ways. Some of the members helped by appearing on stage as extras during a ballroom scene. The Cobequid Arts Council helped the NSDL by running a box office for them. Although Hubtown Theatre did not have a specific financial arrangement with the NSDL, the group benefited from the publicity they provided. The play was well received by the audience.

There were several other activities during the year. Amanda Murphy gave a workshop on musical theatre, on September 15, 1996. Hubtown Theatre continued the tradition of assisting with the Octoberfest. Two newsletters were published during the year. The Play Reading Committee was active, reading one-act, full length and Christmas plays. Hubtown Theatre's annual scholarship was presented in June 1997. For the first time the full award of \$1000.00 was given to one student. The recipient, Darcy Harvey, had auditioned and been accepted to Acadia University's theatre program. The costume committee continued to clean and organize costumes. During the summer of 1996 Hubtown Theatre acquired a grant to hire university students to help out. In the spring of 1997, Lew Rose donated military uniforms to the group.

During the year, Hubtown Theatre established policies regarding procedures for charitable activities and started looking into the establishment of policies for the use and handling of properties owned by the group. At the Annual General Meeting of June 25, 1997, the membership of Hubtown Theatre added an additional one-year board position, bringing the total to twelve. The position was not filled at the meeting but was created to provide the board with flexibility in their regular activities. The season closed with plans to organize a director's workshop early in the fall.

Over this, and the previous, season, the Cobequid Arts Council and the Truro Arts Society had been looking at properties with the idea of restoring one to be used as an arts centre. Because such a centre could include performance space or a studio for rehearsals, Hubtown Theatre was asked for input. Although no significant progress had been made at the end of the 1996/97 season, Hubtown Theatre remained open to any options. There were some concerns as to how the renovations at the Alumni Theatre would affect the cost of using the space. Neptune Theatre cancelled their plans to present *The Glace Bay Miners Museum* because of the cost of using the facility. Fortunately, Hubtown Theatre was not affected by rising costs to any significant degree.

The 1997/98 season began with Art Macumber elected as president. The first production of the year was *The Bean Tree* by Margot Bégin, presented on November 19, 20, 21, 22 (Wed. Thurs. Fri. Sat.). There were two shows on Saturday, one a matinee, for a total of 5 shows. Margot, a member of the group, also directed the play, with the assistance of Paul Gamble. Margot choreographed the show and Paul took on the role of assistant director. The musical comedy, based on the style of the British pantomime, was a family show that was a take on the traditional Jack and the Beanstalk tale. It combined comedy with dance and music. With a large cast, the play involved some younger players as well as adults. Several interesting and inventive sets were used.



Cast of *Playing Doctor*, left to right, standing; Margot Bégin, David Rann, Gordon Jeffery, seated; Roddy McKinnon, Sue Giffin, Nicole Reeves, Brian Sears, Tony

Brine

The second production was *Playing Doctor* by William Van Zandt and Jane Milmore. It was directed by Marlene Sears. This was Marlene's eight play, as a director for Hubtown Theatre. It was presented on March 25, 26, 27, 28 (Wed. Thurs. Fri. Sat.). The play was a farcical comedy about a young writer whose parents think he is a doctor. When they arrive for a visit, his roommate, an actor wannabe, pretends to be his patients. The latter part involved 14 costume changes, some of them rather quick. I believe it was the most costume changes in a Hubtown Theatre play.

Darlene Spears produced both shows, which were rehearsed in Margot Bégin's dance studio on Prince Street. In the fall, Hubtown once again assisted with the Octoberfest. In the winter, Hubtown Theatre co-sponsored a two day workshop on directing, given by Jennifer Overington and held at Margot's studio.

Hubtown Theatre Society's 1998 scholarship was awarded to two students. Ruth Phillips, of Debert and a graduate of Dalhousie University, received a \$500.00 scholarship to help her continue her music studies. Shiela Pearson, of Truro, also received a \$500.00 scholarship. She had been accepted to begin a theatre arts program in the fall.

Through the year, there had been an ongoing discussion of Hubtown Theatre's declining membership. At the end of the season it was down to 16 members. At the 1998 Annual General Meeting, it was decided to reduce the membership fee to \$5.00 per year, starting in 1999. The benefits of membership, besides those defined in the bylaws, would be placement on a phone list, for notification of meetings and auditions, and a mailing list, for newsletters³². The 1997/98 season ended with Art Macumber elected to continue as president.

During the 1998/99 season, Hubtown Theatre produced two plays. The first was the Musical Drama *West Side Story*, by Arthor Laurents and Leonard Bernstein, performed on the 18th, 19th,



The cast of *West Side Story*

³² E-mail was not yet common enough to use exclusively.

20th, and 21st of November (Wed to Sat). The play was directed by Ken Shipley and choreographed by Margot Bégin. Shipley came in as a guest director, travelling from Bedford. He had significant experience acting and directing in the metro area, particularly with the Bedford group, All Saints Players. His understanding of all aspects of the play's story and intent was a considerable asset. Margot Bégin's work on the dance in the play was inspired. Working with limited space, and other resources, she created, and sometimes improvised, dance numbers that complemented both the action and the mood of the play.

The show involved several younger adults, who were new to the group, including Cory Bowles who would move on to professional work³³. This was part of the intent in performing a musical of this type. The revenue did not meet the considerably higher budget (particularly for royalties). However, this was expected from the start. There was a general feeling that Hubtown Theatre could afford to do this occasionally in order to provide some variety in productions and to involve people who might not normally have an outlet for their talents³⁴.

The second production of the year was the farcical comedy, *There Goes the Bride*, by Ray Cooney and John Chapman. Performed on the 24th, 25th, 26th and 27th of March (Wed to Sat) it was directed by Marlene Sears. The cast of eight, and the crew, worked smoothly together to bring the play to the stage. *There Goes the Bride* was a formula play, a farce of the type that had proven to be the most popular among Truro audiences. Attendance at the show was at a record high for a Hubtown Theatre show³⁵. The play also realised a profit more than sufficient to cover the activities of the year.

During the year, a donation was received from the estate of Patricia Irving. This represented the remaining funds of the Colchester Players, which had become inactive around the time Hubtown Theatre started up. It was her wish that the money be turned over to Hubtown Theatre, which had filled the spot left by the Colchester Players. Irving was one of the founders of, and a major contributor to, the Colchester Players. As mentioned previously, Patricia and her husband Alden were important influences to local theatre from the late 50's to the early 70's.

Hubtown Theatre sponsored John Brown to give a lecture on musical theatre on April 28 at the Colchester Library. Unfortunately, the lecture was poorly attended, mainly due to the timing of the event. A lighting workshop was held in the fall. It centred on the use of the new programmable light board at the Alumni Theatre. This was done partly in anticipation of the production of *West Side Story*, with its numerous light cues.

There were several applications for Hubtown Theatre's Annual Scholarship. Two scholarships, each for \$500.00, were awarded to Charlene Rockwell (attending Dalhousie University, majoring in theatre) and Sarah Lennerton (attending Acadia University, in the music program).

Hubtown Theatre also helped out at the Octoberfest again in the fall. Although the membership of the group had not increased much, Hubtown Theatre Society ended the 1998/99 season secure and stable, with tentative plans started for 1999/00.

³³ He would later work with John Dunsworth, who had a Hubtown Theatre connection, and others in *The Trailer Park Boys*.

³⁴ This was the first Hubtown Theatre show for Laurence Tuttle, whose knack for visual comedy would prove useful to the group many times. He would also become involved in the management of the group, particularly those involving financial matters.

³⁵ At their best, shows could reach a total attendance of over 1200. Today, 700 is considered a good result.

The 1999/20 season started with Art Macumber continuing as president. The first play of the season was the comedy *How the Other Half Loves*, by Alan Ayckbourn, directed by Marlene Sears. It played on November 17 to 20, 1999³⁶. With a cast of six, it contained both old players and a few new to the group. For this play, Ayckbourn used the technique of overlapping two distinct locations on the same set and combining the actions of different places, and even different times, in the same scenes. This was the first show for Nicola Scales, who would go on to direct several plays and to contribute to the management of the group. It was also the first show for Lisa McBurnie (aka Lisa Gamble).



How the Other Half Loves, standing; David Elliot, Marlene Sears, seated; David Rann, Nicola Scales, Lisa McBurnie (aka Lisa Gamble), Joanna Christianson, Brian Sears

Hubtown Theatre's second production of the season was the light comedy *Kiss or Make Up*, by Jack Sharkey, directed by Robin Saywood. It was presented on March 22 to 25, 2000. It was the second time Robin was invited to come up from Halifax to act as guest director (the first being *Rumors*).

During the year, play readings were held on a semi-regular bases and as the end of the year approached; members started looking at ways of marking the next year's twentieth anniversary. The group also began looking at possible uses of the Colchester Player's fund, in particular ways that might connect with the up-coming anniversary. The general feeling was that the group should use these opportunities to bolster involvement in the group. Workshops on directing were considered as a possibility as well as doing three shows in the next season.

Hubtown Theatre presented the Annual Scholarship again. The Committee selected Dustin Harvey (from Elmsdale, who graduated from Acadia University and would be attending the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art) and Gordon Miller (from Truro, attending the National Theatre School of Canada). Each student was awarded \$500. During the year, Hubtown Theatre reviewed the Annual Scholarship and made minor changes to the format and requirements. The season ended with Marlene Sears elected as president for the 2000/01 season.



Scene from *My Darling Judith*, left to right; David Fineberg, Sheila Newell

Before Hubtown Theatre began its twentieth Anniversary season, the members of the board of directors agreed that it should be a special year. A committee was formed to explore possibilities and many suggestions were made. It was decided that our financial success over the previous few years allowed us the luxury of doing a bit more than usual, as well of the option of doing something a bit different.

Several ideas were discussed. Some that did not come about included a back stage open house for our audience and a Colchester Players display. However, there were a

³⁶ This was on a Wed. To Sat. This became the standard for a four performance run.

few things that were done.

Hubtown Theatre's first show of the season was *My Darling Judith*, by Norm Foster, directed by Brian Sears. It was presented on November 22 to 25 (Wed to Sat) at the Alumni Theatre. A romantic comedy, the play combines humor with interpersonal drama. It was Hubtown Theatre's third Norm Foster play.

Hubtown Theatre's next show was a combination of two one-act plays, "**Laundry and Bourbon**" and "**Lone Star**" both by James McLure. It was presented on March 2, 3 and 4 (Thus to Sat) and March 8, 9 and 10 (Thurs to Sat). Directed by Sheila Newell, this production gave the group a chance to try a couple of ideas. The plays tell complementary, but independent, stories involving "down to earth" Texans. The show was presented cabaret style and patrons were offered wine and cheese. The venue was changed to Jenkins Hall at the Agricultural College for this show. Additional performers were placed in the house to provide an assortment of colorful characters to the setting. These "extras" performed skits and music that had been developed during workshops. This gave Hubtown Theatre a chance to involve a greater number of people than usual, many of them new to the group.



"Laundry & Bourbon" & "Lonestar"
Residents of Maynard Texas / Hubtown Theatre, March, 2001

Over the previous few years, Hubtown Theatre often produced two shows per year³⁷. For the twentieth anniversary season it was decided that we would try to organize a third show. Hubtown Theatre presented the comedy-mystery, *Exit the Body*, by Fred Carmichael. It was directed by Marlene Sears and presented on April 19 to 22 (Wed to Sat) at the Alumni Theatre. Set in the fifties or sixties, the play included a number of lighting cues and timed entrances. Lower than normal attendance may have been caused by the lateness of the show in the season. This would be an issue we would often deal with. For example, we did not want to conflict with the CEC musicals.



Scene from *Exit the Body*, left to right; David Rann, Brian Sears, Tanya MacPhee, John Clarke, Laurence

There were also other activities. On Fri and Sat, Sept 15 and 16, Hubtown Theatre sponsored Toadstool Productions' *Chickens*. A delightful light comedy, the cast (which included Leanna Todd from Onslow) acted as actors, singers and musicians in a show that highlighted their versatility and energy. Although the attendance was not what we might have hoped for, there were positive reactions from the audiences.

Also during the fall, Laurence Tuttle organized "**The Great Train Robbery**". This was a mostly improvised simulation that was commissioned by a group of insurance brokers as part of a train trip. Several Hubtown Theatre members were involved.

³⁷ At an earlier time, three, or even four, shows were common.

To mark twenty years, a common theme was used for the programs and posters for the season. Sheila Newell designed the layout. It included a reproduction of a painting by Audrey Hanrahan that showed young people performing outdoors in a homemade theatre. The original was given to a member of the audience (Mrs. Alice Watt) by drawing a name during the last performance of *Exit the Body*.

Although from a financial perspective the year was not the best, artistically it rivaled any of the past. It was considered an investment in the presence of the performing arts in Truro, then and in the future. We had often considered ways to increase public involvement in the group, not so much in paid members as in active members. The year resulted in many new people becoming involved as well as an increase in membership.

Hubtown Theatre Society awarded its ninth annual scholarship to Candace Cattani, of Truro. The season ended with Marlene Sears elected to continue as president for the 2001/02 season. In the previous season, Hubtown Theatre Society had decided to extend its reach as a way celebrating its first twenty years. As stated, the group chose to mark the anniversary by doing, and sponsoring, a greater number of shows with a greater diversity in styles. This was treated as an opportunity to try to expose audiences to a more varied theatre experience, knowing that this might result in a loss for the year. Because this happened it was decided that for the 2001/02 season there would be a narrower and more intense 'formula' focus by producing two shows with broad appeal. In addition, a greater emphasis was placed on publicity and public relations. This allowed Hubtown Theatre to make back the loss from the previous year, plus.



Scene from *Let's Murder Marsha*, left to right; Cheryl Nasson, Brian Sears, Marlene Sears

The season saw the production of two highly successful shows. In the fall, Laurence Tuttle directed the comedy, *Let's Murder Marsha* by Monk Ferris. It was presented at the Alumni Theatre on March 21 to 24 (Wed. to Sat.). In this play a woman overhears a conversation which, taken out of context, leads her to believe that her husband is plotting to kill her. I would like to tell a story of another Hubtown Theatre situation that I was involved in. My wife, Marlene, played Marsha and I played her husband. This might have been our longest ad lib to date. During one performance, things went off the rails. Everyone was making up lines as we tried multiple times to bring it back. Eventually the entire cast except me and Marlene had found a way to exit the scene. The play had not concluded. There had been no resolution. Marlene saved the situation by creating an exposition and dialogue with me that explained the resolution points of the story, using lines that might begin with something like "I know what must have happened ..." I must point out that this was her work. She was the leader and I followed until the audience had been told the ending without seeing it. The phone rang about then and as I went to it, I noticed it was off the hook. Anyway, we created a way to end the play that the author never heard of and the lights mercifully went down. No one broke character at any point.

In the winter, David Rann directed the comedy *Suitehearts* by William Van Zandt and Jane Milmore. This show was presented at the Alumni Theatre on March 20 to 23 (Wed. to Sat.). Each of these plays involved people new to the group. Both were very well attended. It was the first directing experience for David and Laurence after acting in several Hubtown Theatre plays. The Annual

Scholarship for 2001/02 was given to Jennifer Spicer to attend Ryerson to study dance. The season ended with David Rann elected to serve as president for the 2002/03 term.

Hubtown Theatre produced two main stage productions during the season. The first was the farce *Funny Money* by Ray Cooney, directed by John LeBlanc and presented on Nov 20 to 23, 2002 (Wed to Sat). John, who was employed by the local radio station, had previous experience in theatre, although this was his first time working with Hubtown Theatre. The second show was the British comedy *When the Cat's Away* by Johnnie Mortimer and Brian Cooke, directed by David Rann and presented on March 19 to 22, 2003 (Wed to Sat).



Cast of *When the Cats Away*, left to right front; Marlene Sears, Tammi Hepworth, Cheryl Nasson, Nicola Scales, back; Brian Sears, Paul Gamble

Both of these plays were formula shows, which would all but guarantee a good reception and little chance of losing money. Hubtown Theatre still did not have a "home" and use of the Alumni Theatre incurred significant expenses. During the season, it was decided that an extra push should be made in selling these shows. Some of this involved considerable legwork by David Rann (president) and many others. There was an increase in radio coverage. Voice ads were used. A sign was prepared for the Octoberfest, which the group again served.

This work resulted in a noticeable increase in attendance during the year. The attendance at *When the Cat's Away* included full houses both Friday and Saturday. There was an interest in exploring other genres, as there had been for some time. During the season, there were a significant number of play readings held. These plays consisted of various combinations of mystery, suspense and light comedy although one of the plays read was *Caught in the Net*, the sequel to the memorable *Run for Your Wife*³⁸.

During the year, the group was involved in other initiatives. Hubtown Theatre decided to support the United Way fundraiser, Escape Reality on February 9 by organizing the attendance of several members. Shelia Newell and Nicola Scales prepared a flyer to use at various functions to make the group visible to people wanting to be involved. The group decided to look into other items such as lighting improvement and insurance assessment. It was noted at about this time that Darlene Spears had given a great deal of time to the group. She had previously produced many of the plays over 22 years and was involved in most of the others. She often did many of the thankless tasks and had, in fact, only been on stage once in a one line role.

Laurence Tuttle suggested an initiative that had been discussed but never acted on. It involved two problems that could be considered complimentary. First was the desire to involve a greater number of people, particularly young people. The second involved the constraints of using the Alumni Theatre in terms of the number and types of productions that could be done. The suggestion was to organize a second branch of the group that would use smaller and cheaper locations (and ticket prices not incidentally), involve more people, do a greater variety of productions and increase Hubtown Theatre's offerings to the public. Many members discussed this idea at length. Leah Johnston was awarded the annual scholarship of \$1000.00. The 2002/03 season drew to a close as a very

³⁸ To date, this play has not been produced by Hubtown Theatre.

successful two show season. It provided a clearer image of what the group could, and hopefully would, do in the future.

The 2003/04 season of Hubtown Theatre began with David Rann continuing as president. The first show of the season was the horror/suspense spoof, *It Was a Dark and Stormy Night* by Tim Kelly. It was directed by Sheila Newell and introduced some new players to the audience as well as featuring some regulars. Attendance at the show was very good and the play was well promoted. It was performed Wed. to Sat. at the Alumni Theatre on November 19 to 22.



Scene from *It was a Dark and Stormy Night*, left to right: Mike Benjamin, Janice Hale, Marlene Sears.

The second production was the comedy *Noises Off* by Michael Frayn. It was performed Wed. to Sat. on March 24 to 27, with Paul Gamble directing. The play was a play within a play, about a group of people doing a farce called *Nothing On*. It was a significant challenge as the setting for Act One and Act Three was the *Nothing On* set, while the Act Two setting was back stage. This was accomplished by rotating the back walls of the set 180 degrees. Additional time was booked in the theatre to accommodate the more advanced set. Although the play was an artistic success, the attendance dropped a bit. After the show was completed, the board reviewed methods of promoting shows, adopting policies to provide greater chances of improved attendance in the future.



Cast of *Noises Off*, left to right; Marlene Sears, Cheryl Nasson, Nicola Scales, Ralph Bastarache, Sheila Newell, Laurence Tuttle, Matthew Beebe, Brian Sears, Gordon Jeffery

Throughout the year, there were attempts to organize workshops. The problem of a lack of scholarship applications occurred for a second time. The deadline was extended. The award was later given to Sarah Hunter. Hubtown Theatre was again involved in the United Way's Escape Reality event.

The 2005/06 season started with Nicola Scales continuing as president. The season saw the production of three shows. On September 29, 30 and October 1,2 (Wed. to Sat.) the group presented *Noises Off* by Michael Frayn for an additional four night run. The consensus was that the play had become tighter and more effective the second time.

On December 1 to 4 (Wed. to Sat.), Hubtown Theatre presented a show consisting of two plays. The first was the one-act light mystery "**The Sitter**" by Norm Foster. The second was the comedy/farce "**Murder at the Howard Johnson's**" by Ron Clark and Sam Bobrick. Brian Sears directed both. The plays went over well with those in attendance and both provided an opportunity for new faces to become involved. In addition, "**The Sitter**" allowed us another chance to extend beyond its usual fare of fast comedies. Rehearsals were held in the old Centennial Cinemas



Cast of *Murder at the Howard Johnson's*, left to right; Paul Gamble, Sharlene Whealan, Ralph Bastarache

building which had closed. It would soon become the Marigold Centre

The season ended with the comedy, *Run for your Wife*, by Ray Cooney, directed by Marlene Sears and presented on April 13 to 16³⁹. Hubtown Theatre had done the show before in 1992 and 1993. Marlene had played Barbara in those shows. *Run for your Wife* proved again to be the extreme (and extremely popular) farce that always seems to go over so well.

It is interesting that all three shows were presented in months not usually used. In fact, there were poor turnouts for plays done in December and April in the past. For whatever reason, the first two shows did not do well, resulting in a loss on both. However, *Run for your Wife* surpassed all expectations and did very well, with record or near record profits.

There had been discussions in the past about when a given play could be redone in the same community. When Hubtown Theatre had redone shows that had previously been put on by the Colchester Players, about twenty years had passed and this seemed reasonable. In fact the interval could be a bit shorter. The Annual Scholarship was awarded to Keelin Flemming. The season ended with Nicola Scales continuing as president.



Listening to direction, *Run for your Wife*, left to right; Laurence Tuttle, Sharlene Whelan, Andre Myette, Mike Benjamin, Jeff Westlake



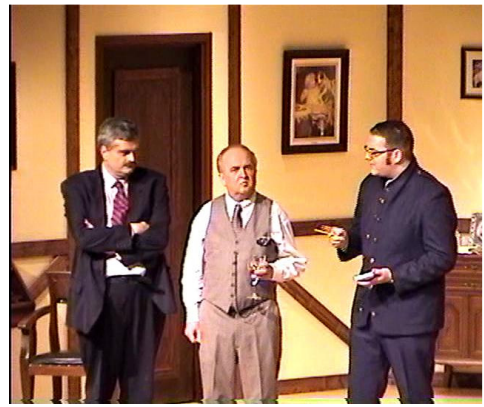
The Was Show, left to right; Cory Blanchard, Paul Gamble, Neil Molloy, Laurence Tuttle, Andre Myette, Brian Sears

The first production of the 2005/06 season was *You'll Get Used to It, the War Show*, by Peter Colley. Directed by Marlene Sears, the run was extended to six shows on November 10, 11, 12 and 17, 18, 19 (consecutive Thurs. Fri. Sat.) The show contained elements of music, dance, comedy and drama. Although the show contained many light hearted moments, the author also included moments of drama and even terror. The play followed the lives, and fates, of six Canadian World War Two soldiers, from training to the end of the war. Only

one survives and he opens and closes the show as an old Legionnaire recalling the War. The show involved a significant level of complexity including a great many sound effects and light cues. A screen using rear projection showed appropriate images during parts of the play. The play involved a larger cast and crew than usual. Authentic uniforms were borrowed from the Tattoo in Halifax. Although the budget was significantly higher than normal, increased attendance allowed the group to come relatively close to breakeven. For me, it was a great pleasure to play the part of "Pops" who was an older than normal soldier and who had previous war experience. It was not one of the larger parts but it did allow me to do a death scene. Pops is one of the men storming the beaches on Dieppe. He shares the horror of the experience in a monologue to the audience. When he is shot, the war becomes much more personal to his comrades.

³⁹ From here forward assume that Hubtown plays are presented Wed. to Sat. Unless otherwise stated.

The second show of the season was *Murdered to Death* by Peter Gordon. It was presented March 29, 30, 31 and April 1. The show, a comedy spoof on mystery plays, involved bumbling Inspector Pratt, his assistant Tompkins and Miss Maple as they try to solve two murders in a house containing quaint and sometimes unusual characters. The play was directed by Paul Gamble. Attendance was very high for this show and with a relatively modest budget the play did well.



Scene from *Murdered to Death*, left to right; Brian Sears, Laurence Tuttle, André Myette

During the year the Cobequid Arts Council, and others, made significant progress, on the development of a local arts centre. The old Centennial Cinema was purchased and renovations were started. Many local investors were involved, including Hubtown Theatre Society. As the summer of 2006 approached work had begun on the new centre. It was designed to contain one performance space with a seating capacity of about 200, half of the capacity of the Alumni Theatre. The building would also include a small arts display room, a sports memorabilia space and room for offices.



Cast of *Don't Dress for Dinner*, left to right, seated; Sheri-Lynn Faulkner, Nicola Scales, Ralh Bastarache, Sharlene Whelan, standing; Paul Gamble, André Myette

Hubtown Theatre was invited to perform at the centre and the group agreed to present one show during the 2006/07 season. Because of the more limited capacity, the group decided to perform seven shows. As well, because the physical size of the stage was smaller than that at the Alumni Theatre, we decided to select a play with a relatively small cast and modest set and technical requirements. Hubtown Theatre picked the farce *Don't Dress for Dinner* by Marc Camoletti, directed by Marlene Sears and presented on November 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 24, 25 (Thurs. Fri. Sat. Tues. Wed. Fri. Sat.), 2006.

The year's Annual Scholarship was awarded to Meredith Nicholson who was to enter her second year at Acadia University.

The 2006/07 season started with Sheila Newell elected as president. *Don't Dress for Dinner* did very well in sales at the new venue, selling out on several shows. Costs for this show were not significantly different than they were for any other show. It was noticed that the Marigold Centre staff, perhaps understandably, were very conscious of keeping control over the space and the process of producing the play⁴⁰. This caused some feelings of caution within Hubtown Theatre. Although it was felt that we should do additional plays there, there was also a feeling that we should continue doing shows at the Alumni Theatre as well, so as not to “burn our bridges”. There was some uncertainty about the long term viability of the location. At the time, Hubtown Theatre was encouraged by the Marigold Centre to do all of our plays there.

⁴⁰ Both groups were cautious with the situation. Over time the relationship between Hubtown Theatre and the Marigold Centre would develop into one of mutual trust and respect.

For the second show of the season Sheila Newell directed *London Suite* by Neil Simon. Like *Plaza Suite* before, the comedy was a series on individual stories taking place at different times at the same hotel. This play, performed March 21 to 24, was held at the Alumni Theatre.



Scene from *London Suite*, left to right; Lisa MacBurnie, Shannon Fielding

It was about that time that Hubtown Theatre started renting space from the Boys and Girls Club. The previous costume location had deteriorated and rehearsals had been held at various locations, including the Colchester Hospital for awhile. The group was able to rent storage and meeting space on a yearly basis as well as rehearsal space on a play by play basis. The Marigold Centre would become very adaptable over time offering rehearsal space, when possible, for no extra fee. Meanwhile, over the previous years the Alumni Theatre had become less and less accessible except for purchased rehearsal time which was expensive. To be fair, they still provided space to store the set pieces, although this would change.

Over the next several years the Boys and Girls Club allowed the group to establish stability in rehearsal space. The pattern become one of alternating show locations between the Marigold and the Alumni and using the Boys and Girls Club, as needed. The year's Annual Scholarship was awarded to Brent Yorke to attend Sheridan College.



Cast of *The Melville Boys*, left to right, seated; Sharlene Whelan, Rod Deviller, standing; Lisa MacBurnie, Paul Gamble

The 2007/08 season began with Sheila Newell elected as president. It was an ambitious year with four productions, two at the Alumni Theatre and two at the Marigold Centre. The first production was *The Melville Boys* by Norm Foster and directed by Brian Sears. It was presented seven times in October, 2007 (11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 19, 20) at the Marigold Centre. Norm Foster plays were popular with both the group and our audiences. This would continue into the coming years to the point that Hubtown Theatre would do at least one Foster production most years.

The Melville Boys, one of Foster's better known plays, combines significant elements of drama with comedy. It concerns two brothers, one of whom is terminally ill. Unfortunately, it was not as well attended as the first Marigold play. Eventually, runs at this venue would usually be for just four shows to save on costs.

In November, Hubtown Theatre returned to the Alumni Theatre to present *The Sykes Upon Thump Theatre Company's 15th Annual Farewell Performance of Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol* by Mark Landon Smith and directed by Sheila Newell. This "play within a play" was presented November 21 to 24. The comedy centered on a group of actors and crew performing the classic. The parody program for the inner Sykes play was inserted into Hubtown Theatre's program.

In February and March of 2008, *A Touch of Danger* by Francis Durbridge and directed by Marlene Sears was presented at The Marigold Centre. It was performed six times (28, 29, 1, 6, 7, 8). The play was a suspense / mystery and attendance was about the same as it was for *The Melville Boys*.



Scene from *A Touch of Danger*, left to right; Shannon Fielding, Ralph Bastarache

California Suite by Neil Simon and directed by André Myette and Mike Benjamin was the final show of the season and was presented four times in May (21 to 24) at the Alumni Theatre. Like some previous Simon comedies performed by the group, the play consisted of four separate stories. Each of the two first time directors took charge of two of them.

During the season a change in the Hubtown Theatre business year was planned and executed during the next year. Previously, the year ended in April and as a result the Annual General Meeting had to be held within three months or before the summer. This made it difficult to arrange such things as the Annual Financial Report because of how busy things were at this time. The change was to move

the end of year to the end of June. This allowed the Annual General to be held in September, and provided time during the more relaxed and less busy summer to organize. A side effect was that one business year consisted of a three month interval and that extra general meetings were needed to pass the required special resolution.



Scene from *The Foursome*, left to right back; Brian Sears, Paul Gamble, André Myette, front; Ralph

The 2008/09 season began with Paul Gamble elected as president. The first play of the season was *The Foursome* by Norm Foster and directed by Marlene Sears. It was

presented on October 15, 16, 17, 18, 2008 at the Alumni Theatre. The comedy required minimal set as the setting was the tee off box for eighteen holes on a golf course. The only changes needed were the position and direction of the tee off box. The atmosphere was created with the use of slide projection showing a different golf scene for each hole.

The next play was *Nunsense* by Dan Goggin and directed by Sheila Newell. The musical was enhanced by using ushers dressed as nuns who acted in the appropriate character. The show was presented on November 19, 20, 21, 22, 2008 at the Marigold Centre.



Cast of *Holiday Snap*, left to right; Sabrina Crowell, Mark Hazelhurst, Laurence Tuttle, Brian Sears, Sharlene Whelan, Claudette Priddle, Rod Deviller, Karen Carrol

The final show of the season was the British

comedy *Holiday Snap* by Michael Pertwee and John Chapman, and directed by Marlene Sears. It was presented on April 1, 2, 3, 4, 2009 at the Alumni Theatre.



Scene from *Sadie Flynn Comes to Big Oak*, left to right; Paul Gamble, Nicola Scales

Dane Stewart, a CEC graduate, was the recipient of the year's scholarship to attend McGill University. The 2009/10 season began with Paul Gamble continuing as president. There were just two plays presented during the season. The first was *Sadie Flynn Comes to Big Oak* by Norm Foster and directed by Rod DeViller and Paul Gamble. The comedy was presented four times in December (9, 10, 11, 12), 2009 at the Marigold Centre. From this time on, plays were presented no more than four times at this venue. The next show was *Perfect Wedding* by Robin Hawdon and directed by Mike Benjamin. It was

performed four times on March 24, 25, 26, 27, 2010 at the Alumni Theatre.

During the year Hubtown Theatre decided to purchase a laptop computer, primarily for the purposes of sound effects. The system used previously was a mini-cd and cassette decks. This was used with a mixer, amp and a set of speakers. Brian Sears was placed in charge of acquiring the new system. The laptop was an Asus, purchased from G and G running Windows XP. The system was configured to prevent shutdowns, system noises or any other interruptions. This was necessary to prevent problems during a show. The software "Cue Player Premium" was purchased and installed allowing for the automation of cues and the pre-setting of levels. When playing at the Alumni Theatre, the laptop connected through the existing mixer and amp. When playing at the Marigold centre, the laptop could be plugged directly into their system. During the season the new sound system was being used in shows. A few years later, a portable speaker set was purchased to use at rehearsals.

The 2010/11 season began with Paul Gamble continuing as president. The first play of the season was *Home Games* by Tom Ziegler and directed by André Myette. It was presented on October 13, 14, 15, 16, 2010. The four shows were performed at the Marigold Centre. This play was a comedy/drama with much of the comedy coming from the character Anton, who has long monologues with the audience, thinking they are spectators at a baseball game. Anton suffered from an injury and reverted to his days playing for the New York Yankees. The drama comes to a head near the end of the play when Anton's daughter has to decide if she should send her father to a home and Anton starts to relive the death of his wife many years ago. Fortunately, he reverts to happier times. I had the pleasure of playing Anton and must say it was one of my favorite roles.



Scene from *Home Games*, left to right; Brian Sears, Lisa McBurnie



Cast of *Bedtime Stories*, left to right, front; Paul Gamble, Monica Bailey, André Myette, Mark Hazelhurst, Shannon Fielding, Raph Bastarache, back; Brianna Boulder, Tanya Bosworth, Laurence Tuttle, Lisa Meers, Karen Carroll, Bill Morgan

The second show was the British comedy *Wife Begins at 40* by Ann Sultan, Earl Barret and Ray Cooney and directed by Laurence Tuttle. It was presented four times in December (8, 9, 10, 11), 2010 at the Alumni Theatre. The third show of the season was *Bedtime Stories* by Norm Foster and directed by Brian Sears. It was performed four times on March 2, 3, 4, 5, 2011 at the Marigold Centre. This play used a style sometimes employed by Foster where there are a series of connected stories that reference characters in other scenes. The final scene brings back some of the previous characters. There is even a radio playing that has the voices of the two

characters that are in the first scene. The radio is turned on occasionally and sometimes there are interesting plot connections. To transition the scenes, radio music thematically connected to the scenes was used, with the actual change in music done by simulating the turning of the dial in an old style analogue radio.

Taylor Shive was the recipient of the Hubtown Scholarship to attend the Randolph School for the Performing Arts in Toronto to study acting, voice and dance. The 2011/12 season began with André Myette elected as president.

The first show of the season was the mystery *Casting for Murder* by Elizabeth Elwood and directed by Susan Chisholm. It was presented four times on November 2, 3, 4, 5, 2011 at the Marigold Centre. This was a heavily plotted play and it was not always easy for the cast members to be sure of what was happening.

The second play was *Aspirin and Elephants* by Jerry Mayer and directed by Marlene Sears. It was presented four times in February and March (29, 1, 2, 3), 2012 at the Alumni Theatre. Marlene had been a director for Hubtown Theatre many times over the years. *Aspirin and Elephants* is about a middle-aged couple who are on a cruise with their two daughters and their daughter's husbands. The father has a heart condition and he is trying to adapt. Relationship problems add both comedy and drama. Nicole Baillie was the recipient of the 2012 Hubtown Scholarship to attend the Randolph Academy for the Performing Arts, in Toronto.



Scene from *Casting for Murder*, left to right; Lisa McBurnie, Brian Sears, Rod Deviller, Lisa Richardson

Other Local Groups – Part Two

At over thirty years, Hubtown Theatre was becoming an old theatre group in the Colchester area. In Nova Scotia overall, there were many groups that had been functioning for some time. For example

Centre Stage Theatre had been active at least as long as Hubtown Theatre and the Dartmouth Players for much longer than that. As mentioned, the Greenwood Players had been active since at least the mid sixties. In the Colchester area, Hubtown Theatre had developed a following and a reputation for quality theatre. However, there were other theatre activities throughout the decades.

Other community theatre groups have already been mentioned⁴¹. There were theatre schools as well, such as NOSCO⁴². Shannon Fielding and others had been providing dinner theatre in Debert for several years after 2000. The Village Follies would do an annual production of comedy, written by Shannon, along with music. Because involvement in the group was by invitation, it was not a community group, based on the definition I have been using. This group is still active at the time of this writing.

A young person's group called Theatre on Ice did at least two dramatic ice skating shows at the arena. One of these was *The Nutcracker* in December, 2012. The Marigold Centre was providing a venue for other amateur groups. In addition, they were bringing in professional music and other acts. This resulted in a higher level of competition for audience attendance. It provided more choices and theatrical enrichment for the area.

In 2008, a local music group called the Truro Cantabile Singers, under the direction of Ross Thompson, created a youth group called the Spotlight Youth Theatre. This group performed an assortment of musical productions, usually at the Marigold Centre. Early in 2017, the group was taken over by the Marigold Centre directly and became Spotlight Marigold Youth Theatre. In July of 2017, the group presented the musical *James and the Giant Peach Jr.* It was directed by Emily Robertson and produced by Jennifer Johnson (aka Jennifer Appleby). At the time of this writing, the group is preparing for production of Disney and Cameron Mackintosh's *Mary Poppins Jr* for July 2018. It is being directed by Nekki Forbes and has a cast of 32, ages 10 to 15. The summer program also includes workshops on props and sets.

This was not the first time the Marigold Centre had been involved in producing theatre aimed at young people. In 2009, Jennifer Appleby (aka Jennifer Johnson) and some of her former CEC classmates collaborated with The Marigold Centre to present *Little Shop of Horrors*, by Howard Ashman and music by Allen Menkin, directed and produced by Jennifer. They created the group The Marigold Student Theatre Company. It was presented in August, 2009.

In 2010 Jennifer Appleby directed *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder, produced by Lenore Zann. It was presented at the Marigold Centre in July. This play had previously been done by the Colchester Players in 1971. The next summer, Jennifer directed *The Secret Garden*. It was co-produced by Jennifer and Lenore Zann. Their production incorporated the use of animal puppets, provided by the local professional company, Maritime Marionettes.

In September of 2011, Lenore Zann and Nicholas Boyd formed a community theatre group called the Truro Theatre Society. From the beginning, the organization of this group was expedited by the use

⁴¹ Regretfully, this history will probably miss groups. Perhaps a future edition will include some more of them.

⁴² NOSCO was a for-profit tuition based school and is outside the scope of this history.

of social media. Facebook would be used as a communication mode for all members of the group⁴³. In fact, their Facebook page was my primary source for this group. Therefore, I do not have a lot of information on individuals involved but some of the major organizers would include Stephanie MacNeil, Leanna Todd and Darlene Blair. The stated purpose of the group was to offer options to anyone in the area with an interest in any aspect of theatre with no age restrictions. This is very similar to Hubtown Theatre but in practice Truro Theatre was more expansive and included public play readings, more theatre workshops and, especially, more opportunities for young people. Hubtown Theatre sometimes used young people as cast members but, except for the Hubtown Youth Players, it really focused on adults.



Alice in Wonderland, in rehearsal

I will mention some of Truro Theatre's productions, but there may be others. A public play reading of *Crimes of the Heart* by Beth Henley and presented at the Nova Scotia Community College was held in October, 2011. The second endeavour was a reading of *Peter Pan* which seems to have started as a play reading but then was fully presented at the Marigold Centre and directed by Leanna Todd, in January of 2012⁴⁴. *Alice in Wonderland* was presented in September of 2012.



Scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, left to right; Sasha Brake, Jody O'Brien

A new endeavour for the Truro area was the presentation of Shakespeare plays in Victoria Park in the summer. An original aspect of this was that the play would take place in different locations and the audience would follow the action, which took place in and around the watchers. The first of these was *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 2013. It started an annual tradition of Shakespeare in Victoria Park with *Romeo and Juliet* following in 2014. In this version the two opposing families were represented by the British and the French during the time of the expulsion of the Acadians.

In 2015, the group performed *Hamlet*. Then in 2016, it was followed by *The Taming of the Shrew*. This play was modernised and interpreted to deal with the somewhat misogynistic nature of the original. There was no Shakespeare play in the summer of 2017. However, Truro

Theatre Society had contributed to the CEC student production of *Rock of Ages*, as previously noted. At the time of this writing, Truro Theatre Society is preparing Shakespeare's *Macbeth* for the Summer of 2018.

⁴³ This can be contrasted with Hubtown Theatre, where Facebook is set up more as a publicity and announcement site.

⁴⁴ Paul Menhennet, who had been involved several times with Hubtown Theatre, played the role of Captain Hook. Peter Pan was played by Eamon McCarron.

A Truro One Act Play Festival group was formed and presented festivals in 2015 and 2016 at the Marigold Centre, both produced by Jennifer Johnson (aka Jennifer Appleby) and presented in September. This group focused on plays written by locals. In 2015 the plays were: "**The Seussification of Romeo and Juliet**" written by Peter Bloedel and directed by Jennifer Appleby, "**Parasite's**" written by Paul Zann and directed by Jennifer Appleby, "**Luna Chick**", written and directed by Leana Todd, "**Last Thoughts**", written and directed by Craig Johnson and Jennifer Appleby, "**Proud**" by Rod Lutz and directed by Margot Bégin and "**Five Minutes to Curtain**" by Ann Foster and Sam Madore and directed by Cathrine Yuill. In 2016 the plays were: "**The Wild Things**" written and directed by Jennifer Johnson, "**Hope**" written and directed by Shannon Feilding⁴⁵, "**Kitty's Bound for Broadway**" by Kerry Miller and directed by Lauren Fiander and "**Ain't It Funny**" written and directed by Samantha Madore. The festival also included an event that saw local artists reciting poems and monologues.

In October of 2017 the play *Goodnight Desdemona*, by Ann-Marie MacDonald, was produced by Bliss Productions and performed at the Marigold Centre. It was a first production by this independent company which was the creation of Sam Madore and others. It was directed by Darlene Blair who had been involved with the Truro Theatre Society. It was a comedy involving an assistant professor, Constance Ledbelly, who had a theory that Shakespeare had lifted the stories that were the basis of *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* and that the originals had been comedies and not tragedies. Constance, played by Sasha Brake⁴⁶ is transported into both of these plays and finds she is in the original versions. She seeks out the author. This play was very well received by the audiences.

Another independent production in 2017 was *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller. This classic drama was directed by Beth Terry and presented at the Alumni Theatre in October. With a cast of 20, it was a play that Terry had wanted to produce. She did triple duty taking on the role of director and stage manager as well as producer.

As these groups started producing plays in Truro the result was an enrichment of theatre opportunities. Of course, this was also more competition for Hubtown Theatre. Different groups also created a greater range of entertainment styles in Truro. School groups such as ones connected with CEC and the Dalhousie Agricultural Campus⁴⁷ were also active. Now we will return to where we left off with Hubtown Theatre.

⁴⁵ Shannon had been involved extensively with Hubtown Theatre.

⁴⁶ Sasha had previously been involved with both Hubtown Theatre and Truro Theatre.

⁴⁷ The AC Theatre Society had been run by Kent Loughhead for some time. They performed at the Alumni Theatre as had Hubtown Theatre. The two groups often shared resources.

Hubtown Theatre Society – Part Two



Scene from *Looking*, left to right; Brian Yorke, Shane Buchanan

The 2012/13 season began with André Myette continuing as president. The first show of the season was *Looking* by Norm Foster and directed by Rod DeViller. This comedy, focusing on relationships, was presented on October 3, 4, 5, 6, 2012 at the Marigold Centre.

The second show was *Steel Magnolias* by Robert Hartling and directed by Nicola Scales. The all female comedy/drama was presented four times in November and December (28, 29, 30, 1), 2012 at The Marigold Centre.

Sound was a bit more complex in this show and the new computer sound system was found to be highly effective.

Both of these plays had some departure from the "formula" having higher levels of drama. We found that this could work and be popular; especially when there were elements of comedy, such as is common with Norm Foster plays. *Looking* is a romantic comedy while *Steel Magnolias* has definite dramatic elements. Of course, plays like *Steel Magnolias* have, as a drawing card, a well-known title.



Scene from *Steel Magnolias*, left to right; Marlene Sears, Sheila Newell, Sarah Matheson, Shannon fielding, Jacqui Alexander

For the third play of the season, Hubtown Theatre picked a pure farce⁴⁸. Norm Foster had become somewhat of a tradition with the group, with usually one Foster play per year. *Self Help* by Norm Foster and directed by Marlene Sears was the second Foster show of the season. *Self Help* was presented four times in February and March (28, 28, 1, 2) 2013 at the Alumni Theatre. There were no scholarship applications during the year.



Scene from *Self Help*, left to right; Paul Gamble, Brian Sears

The 2013/14 season began with Rod Deviller elected as president. During this year, for the first time, all shows were presented at the Marigold Centre. Relations with the Alumni Theatre were becoming strained and it became difficult to access materials kept in storage. In addition, costs were increasing with heightened security concerns. The purchase of the Agricultural College by Dalhousie University may have been a factor.

⁴⁸ One of the advantages of doing three or more plays in a year is that you can provide more variety. If you are just doing two, there is a tendency to pick formula pieces.

It came to a head when, during the year, the group was asked to remove all items stored at the Alumni Theatre, which included all set pieces. Considering that these had been stored there for over thirty years, the insistence that it be done relatively quickly was arguably not reasonable. It was felt by some that Hubtown Theatre was being pressured into severing relationships with the Alumni Theatre. The set pieces were moved to the Marigold Centre, which granted storage space and many of the props were stored at the Boys and Girls Club. The group had been in the process of replacing the old flats, which had become worn and cracked from repeated use. A great deal of material was discarded. Ironically, sometime after that, the AC Theatre Society asked for the loan of set pieces. We had always been very accommodating in the past but this made the situation somewhat difficult where we had had to discard the old flats.

The season included two Norm Foster plays. The first show was *Here On The Flight Path* by Norm Foster and directed by Monica Bailey and Rod DeViller. It was presented on December 4, 5, 6, 7, 2013 at the Marigold Centre. This play used a method, sometimes employed by Foster, where a character, in this case Paul Gamble, tells some of the background of the story directly to the audience.

The next play was *Jenny's House of Joy* also by Norm Foster and directed by Marlene Sears. In was performed four times in February and March (26, 27, 28, 1), 2014 at the Marigold Centre. The all female play, about a house of prostitution in the late 1800s, involved both elements of comedy and drama.

The final play of the season was *A Few Good Men* by Aaron Sorkin and directed by Sheila Newell. The drama was presented three times in late March, 2014 at The Marigold Centre and contained a large cast. It was to have been done four times but unfortunately one evening had to be cancelled because of a snow storm.



Cast of *Jenny's House of Joy*, left to right; Lisa Richardson, Sacha Brake, Sarah Patterson, Monica Baily, Leanna Todd

During the year, financial considerations created a necessity to look at ways and means. One of the results of this was a decision to discontinue most donations, including the Annual Scholarship. The 2014/15 season began with Rod Deviller continuing as president.

The first show of the season was the play *Humbug* by John Wooten and directed by Jeff Westlake. It was performed four times in November (26, 27, 28, 29), 2014 at the Alumni Theatre. *Humbug* was the last play to be presented at the Alumni Theatre. Although it is possible that the venue may be used again, it seems unlikely at this time. The play is a send up of the classic Scrooge story and used a gender change with the main character being female.



Scene from *Skin Flick*, left to right; Paul Gamble, Nicola Scales, André Myette, Joshua Creelman, Janice McCurdy

The next show of the season was *Skin Flick* by Norm Foster and directed by Brian Sears. It was presented on March 11, 12, 13, 14, 2015 at the Marigold Centre. Here Foster again uses the method, as in *Here On The Flight Path*⁴⁹, of having one character tell the story to the audience. However, this time he raises the bar by giving the narrator/character the ability to control the other characters, apparently by rewriting the script. For example, one character uses the word 'fuck' three

times in a row. The character steps out of the play and apologizes to the audience. From then on whenever anyone says fuck, they mouth the word but make no sound. The others notice and react to this. At one point in the play, another character tries to take over the narration.

On rare occasions, and only in the last few seasons, Hubtown Theatre had used the so-called “F” word. In this case there was some consideration of the fact that this was a play primarily about pornography. In the event, Foster’s comedic sense and skillful handling of the material resulted in the play going over very well and few raised eyebrows. Phrases such as "contains adult themes" started to be used in advertising and posters when appropriate. This may actually have helped promote these shows.

During this season, two members, Sacha Brake and Leanna Todd, approached the group about creating a subgroup within Hubtown Theatre focused on young school age players. This group would be involved in workshops on theatre throughout the year and would present a play near the end of the season, sponsored by Hubtown Theatre. This idea had been considered by the group before. When they were ready for production they were called “The Hubtown Youth Players”. This group performed the last production of the season.

It was *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde and directed by Leana Todd and Sacha Brake. It was performed twice on May 9, 2015 at the Marigold Centre.

The 2015/16 season began with Brian Yorke elected as president. The first play of the season was *Four Weddings and an Elvis* by Nancy Frick and directed by Nicola Scales. It was presented four times in November (25, 26, 27, 28), 2015 at the Marigold Centre.

The scene was a wedding chapel in Las Vegas. This play was similar to some previous plays in that it told three different stories with only one character in all three. This made the rehearsal schedule easier on most of the actors. There was a fourth scene at the end where most of the cast return for the last story. Hubtown Theatre was



Scene from *Four Weddings and an Elvis*, left to right; André Myette, Joshua Creelman, Holly Beeler, Lisa Richardson, Paul Gamble, Sacha Brake, Sheila Newell, Brian Sears

⁴⁹ Again the narrator was played by Paul Gamble



Cast of *Sex Please We're Sixty*, Clockwise from upper left; Brian Sears, Marlene Sears, Monica Baily, Vickey Gourley, Laurence Tuttle, Claudette Priddle

approached by a private company to present the show at a dinner held at the Glengarry Hotel. Because the show was not really designed for this type of venue, there were some concerns. In the event though, it turned out reasonably well.

In an effort to involve cast members from the ages of the late fifties to late sixties, the next show chosen was the farce *Sex Please We're Sixty* by Michael Parker and Susan Parker and directed by Sheila Newell. It was presented on March 23, 24, 25, 26, 2016 at the Marigold Centre. With a cast of four women and two men the farcical elements become extreme near the end. The men

take several pills, which they mistakenly think are Viagra, but are in fact a drug that induces menopausal symptoms in men.

The final show of the season was *Harvey* by Mary Chase and directed by Leana Todd and Sacha Brake. The Hubtown Youth Players performed it three times on May 13 and 14, 2016 at the Marigold Centre. *Harvey* was previously produced by Hubtown Theatre in 1986.

During this year, Hubtown Theatre acquired accounting software identical to what the group's accountant, Laurence Tuttle, had been using. This allowed for greater portability of the financial records and for the creation of backups. As the season came to a close it was discovered that the Boys and Girls Club would be moving. Negotiations were made with the Marigold Centre to rent additional storage space and outlined plans to move all of our properties.



Scene from *Harvey*, left to right; Anna MacLeod, Emily Dennis

The 2016/17 season began with Brian Yorke continuing as president. The season contained two mainstage productions, both presented at the Marigold Centre. The Hubtown Youth Players was not active during this season. The first production was *Calendar Girls* by Tim Firth, directed by Nicola Scales. It was presented four times on Nov 16, 17, 18, 19, 2016. This play contains elements of comedy and drama as a women's church group decides to raise money by selling a calendar containing semi-nude photos. The play was well received and was a financial success. The group donated one thousand dollars to a cancer charity.

On February 22, 23, 24, 25, 2017, Hubtown Theatre produced the Norm Foster Play, *Mending Fences*, directed by Brian Sears. This play was a comedy/drama. With a cast of three, the play involved a man who has not seen his son in many years. It tells the story of their strained relationship and the attempts of the father's female friend to encourage reconciliation. Although there were many comedic aspects to the play, at its core it was a serious drama. In this show, the players play multiple roles allowing for flashback scenes, which delve into the past relationships that shed light on their



Scene from *Mending Fences*, left to right; Paul Gamble, Monica Baily, Joseph Brown

current problems. Unfortunately the play was not a financial success. However, it was well received.

The budget for *Mending Fences* was over \$7000.00. At this point, tickets cost the buyer \$24.00. Of this, Hubtown Theatre receives about \$17.00. The additional costs go to taxes, TicketPro fees, and Marigold extra fees⁵⁰. Things have changed considerably from the first show where the budget was about \$400.00 and tickets cost \$2.00. Some costs were held fairly static for some time though. Advertising

is supplemented by Facebook, which has a great effect at minimal cost.

During the season, Hubtown Theatre moved, or disposed of, all properties at the Boys and Girls Club. Construction of a storage space was completed at the Marigold Centre, which became more firmly the home of Hubtown Theatre. There were several play reading sessions held through the year. The season ended with Nicola Scales elected to serve as president for the 2017/18 season.

The first show of the season was *Exit Who* by Fred Carmichael, directed by Nicola Scales and presented on November 22, 23, 24, 25, 2017. This play was a sequel to *Exit the Body*, produced by Hubtown Theatre in 2001. These plays could be considered mystery farces. Previously Nicola had played the lead, Crane Hammond, and now had the opportunity to direct its sequel. The play broke about even financially.



The Love List, left to right; André Myette, Lisa Gamble, Paul Gamble

The next two shows were presented in the winter of 2018, the first in late February (21, 22, 23, 24) and the second in late March (21, 22, 23, 24). There was some concern about staging two shows so close together, both for financial reasons and because of an approximately five week overlap of rehearsal time. We decided to coordinate the promotion of the plays and use the first, as much as possible, to advertise the second, such as in the program and in the lobby display.

Hubtown Theatre presented the edgy farce *The Love List* by Norm Foster, directed by Marlene Sears in February 2018. A man decides to help his friend with his love life by going to a mystic who provides a list for them to fill in with the top ten attributes he is looking for in a woman. The scene where they pick out the ten items starts the play off at a high level of farce, which is exceeded when

⁵⁰ This is in addition to the flat rate rental fee. All groups using the theatre pay these fees.



Cast of *Maggie's Getting Married*, left to right, front; Niki Nash (aka Niki Henderson), Christine Finn, Nicola Scales, back; Joshua Creelman, Rod Deviller, Andy Buckley

the "perfect woman" appears. As they change items on the list, her attributes change. A very intensely funny play, it resolves when she creates her own list.

In March, Hubtown Theatre presented another Norm Foster play, *Maggie's Getting Married*, directed by Brian Sears. When Maggie's sister meets her fiancé for the first time, she discovers she has met him before under intimate circumstances. This play could be considered a romantic comedy with some elements of farce here and there.

At this point we had stopped using newspaper ads⁵¹.

Radio ads were still used and the radio station was generous with us. Facebook was being used to maximum benefit. Contests were held offering a draw for free tickets for anyone who shared a post. We also boosted an ad for each show. For both of these two shows we were able to make very high returns. There was no need of concern over producing these shows so close together.

Both of the plays had heavy prop and set requirements, involving a kitchen setting⁵². Mention must be made of the contribution of Janet Soley, who did the triple duty of set design, props and graphic design. Both plays were very well received. The season ended with Hubtown Theatre having performed ninety-five mainstage productions, as well as many one act plays and other theatrical endeavours.

The Hubtown Theatre part of this history has included a sketch of some of Hubtown Theatre's accomplishments. Although it is the group with the most coverage, it is not complete. There are, undoubtedly, smaller endeavours that have been missed. There have been other short plays and skits which, regrettably, I have been unable to include. There were many workshops given by members of Hubtown Theatre that I have not covered.

Hubtown Theatre has helped, and been helped by, other groups over the years. The Cobequid Arts Council assisted Hubtown Theatre many times, especially in the early years. The Town of Truro provided a club room for an interval of time. The Alumni Theatre and the Marigold Centre were very cooperative in arranging theatre rental. The local media have been helpful in supporting the group. There have also been patrons. Of note is the Allen Bruce family. They provided donations in memory of Robert Bruce, who was actively involved with Hubtown Theatre in the early years.

I think it is important to mention that, although outside assistance has been a great help, Hubtown Theatre Society has been financially self-sufficient. We usually covered the cost of rehearsal, performance space and most of the other production requirements. When you consider the scholarships and charitable donations provided by Hubtown Theatre, it is safe to say that, in the

⁵¹ However, we often got valuable coverage and photos in the local paper.

⁵² As you can imagine, kitchens, which were used in the past, are significantly more work.

balance and with one important exception, Hubtown Theatre has provided live theatre without cost to the community.

The important exception is the support of the audiences. In the years to come, it will be important to remember that they must come first. Quality entertainment must consistently be provided. Only a few people have been mentioned by name in this history. There are so many others who gave so much of their time to Hubtown Theatre that I wish I could list them all. However, I would not know where to begin, or end. During the Summer of 2018, Hubtown Theatre is now active with play readings and is planning the next exciting season.

Thoughts on the Art and Craft of Live Theatre

When I look at the whole experience of community theatre over the years, I find far more similarities than differences. It is evident in the stories that come from all sources. People who have walked the boards, at school, in a Church group or a community theatre group, remember the experience for the rest of their lives. Whether it was with terror or intense exuberance, they will remember.

What they will remember the most are the times that it works, when the players and the audience suspend their disbelief and the magic happens. That is why we keep doing it. You don't need cameras, you don't need much technology. All you really need is an empty space. You and your audience will create the rest.

I will conclude this document with a few of my own thoughts, experiences and opinions on the art and science of creating good theatre. What happens when a play takes place? A group of people enter a room and watch another group of people pretend to be something they are not; they watch people 'play'. If, for even a small while, the audience believes in the story they are watching, believes that the concerns and feelings of the players are real, the play has succeeded.

Toward this goal, the actors, at some level, must believe in the play and the characters they are playing. This belief can then be shared with the audience. The director and the technical crew provide the support that they need. However, it is the actors who make the production come alive, or not. One mistake that a director can make is to go into the rehearsal process knowing exactly what he or she wants, and expects to see, as the final result. So, what does a director really do? There are some who have felt that the director is the absolute authority in the management of a play. In fact, this is not the best approach. It is the players who are really in control.

What then is the proper role of the director? First, the director must know and believe in the play. The script must be good. No amount of talent on the part of the cast or crew can save a bad script. The director should know the play, should study it and should be highly motivated to do the play. The director must do his or her homework. The more ideas the director has on design, staging, character, stage business and all the other aspects of the play, the better.

But here's the irony. The director must be prepared to abandon any of these ideas at any time. The play will evolve from the collective creativity of all the participants. Directors with tunnel vision are

not just stifling the creative impulses of the actors; they are missing the opportunity of discovering some exciting possibilities.

Peter Brooks, in his book, *The Empty Space*, tells us that the play development process can be divided into three stages. The first stage is:

DIRECTOR <=> SUBJECT <=> DESIGNER
/ ACTOR

Here the director presents his or her vision of the play, the subject, to the set, costume, sound, lights and other designers. This must be done early to insure that everyone understands the intentions of the director in regards to the play. In amateur theatre, and sometimes in professional as well, the director takes on many of these roles personally, especially the ground plan of the set, which cannot be separated from the blocking of the play. Although part of this should be done before rehearsal has started, much of the design will evolve during the rehearsal process. For example, costumes must fit the character and the characters may not be fully developed until well into rehearsal.

It is traditional that the director has the final authority in the selection of the stage manager, especially in amateur theatre. This job is extremely important. When the run of the show begins, the director is no longer directly involved in the production. The stage manager calls the cues for the show and oversees all aspects of the production except the management of the house. The stage manager is often the only person in the crew who has been to most of the rehearsals. When a judgement call is needed, such as a missed cue line or a sound or light cue, the stage manager is the person best qualified to make the instant decision needed. The stage manager provides the continuity between the rehearsals and the productions. For this reason, it is important that the director and the stage manager have a good working relationship. When the play goes into performance, the stage manager is charged with trying to maintain the interpretation of the show that has been achieved by the director and cast.

The single most important job of the director is the casting of the play. Some people have described it as eighty percent of the job in terms of the final effect on the play. This may well be true. A good cast can make a show, but if you cast poorly your work will be frustrating and the outcome will be in doubt. Once the play is cast, the director must impart to the cast his or her vision of the play. It is important that the director and cast share the same basic interpretation of the play. Is it a comedy? Is it a farce? Are the characters deep and meaningful, simply caricatures or somewhere in between? What is the theme of the play? What is its predominate element? Does the play have a moral? These matters must be understood from the start.

The next stage is:

ACTOR <=> SUBJECT <=> DIRECTOR

During the rehearsal process, the director represents the audience. The actors cannot get outside themselves and watch. Even with video equipment they cannot easily place their work in context.

The actors now present the subject (the play) to the director and modify this presentation based on feedback from the director. Actors cannot be fully creative until certain technical matters are worked out. The play must be blocked and the actors' lines must be learned. Good blocking emphasizes the players' characters and motivations. It drives the story line forward. When dealing with new actors, some of this time will be used in teaching basic movement, stage awareness and other technical aspects of acting. If these matters are done early enough in the rehearsal process, there will be time to work on the scenes.

The actor has some important jobs as well. I have often met patrons in stores or elsewhere who have expressed how much they enjoy our shows. This is very pleasing for me. However, frequently they will say something like, "I could never learn all those lines, how do you do it." This concerns me. I hope they were not thinking about this during the show. Ideally, the words should seem natural as if there is nothing else the character could possibly have said. The goal for the actor is to know the lines so well that the lines are in the unconscious, leaving the conscious mind free to be creative. There are two keys. The first is repeat, repeat, repeat. The fact is that many hours should be spent learning the lines. Personally, I use a tape recorder. I record the other character's lines, leaving a space for my own and drill myself. There is no magic method here. The second is to know the story. You need to learn the story as a progression of events and personal motivations. Write the story down, tell yourself the story, whatever you need to do. This will also help a great deal if things go wrong and you need to ad lib.

If production time comes near and the actors are still uncertain about their lines or if the blocking is not done, then an important opportunity has been lost. This is the opportunity to allow the play to grow. At this point the director's homework will pay off. He or she can provide ideas on stage business, possible humour and so on. However, it is important that the play develops its own identity. The actors will perform the show. They must convince the audience. The actors are the best source for creative input. Of course, it is good that the director is well prepared because ideas will often be needed, but the same director must be prepared to abandon these ideas when the ideas from the cast are better. This might happen often.

A director will sometimes see that an actor's idea simply does not work. That is one of the reasons that a director is needed. A director can guide, try to convince and suggest but, in the end, if the actor does not believe what he or she is doing, then neither will the audience and nothing is gained. If an actor makes a suggestion, it should be tried. If such suggestions are ignored, then the actors will stop making suggestions. Again, there are lost opportunities. If a cast member asks a question, it must be taken seriously. The question usually indicates an unresolved problem. When in doubt, try different ideas. Often 'doing' accomplishes more than 'talking'.

When doing scene work, the director has an important duty. It is to be sure that the actors understand the motivations, or objectives of their characters. Sometimes a lot can be accomplished by asking the question; "What does your character want to do? (or have happen?)" These motivations should be expressed in their most basic form. A common method of rehearsal, when doing scene work, is the three-step process. First, the scene is run once through without stopping. During this run the actors can try any ideas that they might have. The director can take note of any ideas that he or she may

have. Next, the scene is run stop/start trying ideas, working on motivations and making changes. Last, the scene is run once more, without stop, to set the changes in the actors' minds.

As the play nears production, it is important that the director does not accept anything less than an actor's best. The actors must experience the appropriate emotions and not just indicate or demonstrate them. Actors will often shy away from a complete commitment to their parts because such a commitment is a very intense experience. The director will now need to focus on the pacing of the play, concentrating on cue pick up, finding the places where the scenes build and encouraging a high level of energy. In amateur theatre, the director may also wish to remind the cast of certain technical and ethical matters. For example: handling laugh lines, voice projection and the seriousness of upstaging or dropping character.

There is often very little time to join the technical cues to the play, especially in amateur theatre. The technical rehearsal will run more smoothly if a dry technical rehearsal is held first, without the cast. Here, the director goes through the cues, one at a time, explaining them carefully to the crew. The technical rehearsal itself is run with the director in charge. The remaining rehearsals, including the dress rehearsal, are also run by the director. However, the director should start to withdraw from active involvement after the first technical rehearsal. The final dress rehearsal should not be stopped for any reason. Notes can be given and technical problems noted after the rehearsal.

A well-directed play should not appear to have been directed at all. The play should appear spontaneous. It should have its own internal energy and drive. Near the end of the rehearsal process, very little new business should be added. The notes to the cast, given at the end of each full rehearsal, should become less specific and more general. I feel that a director needs to have acted, at least a few times. As I have stated, acting is intense and it is not a trivial matter to 'play' in front of a group of people, mostly strangers. A director must be able to empathize with this. When the production starts, the director has no specific duties. However, it is important that he or she continues to offer encouragement and support to the cast.

The last stage is:

ACTOR <=> SUBJECT <=> AUDIENCE

These are the performances. The audience has now replaced the director. Three of the French words that mean: rehearsal, performance and audience literally mean repetition, representation and assistance. In many ways, this tells the process better than the English words. The audience provides the assistance needed to transform the performance into real theatre. The actors give the audience the assistance they need to, just for a while, believe in something beyond their own lives. However, it is the actors and the audience who create theatre. The director simply helps.

I would like to continue on a light note and talk about comedy. As I previously noted, Hubtown Theatre's "formula" plays were comedies, done frequently because of their popularity. Everything I said above about play production applies to comedies of course, but comedies are in many ways harder to do than drama. Timing, important in all theatre, becomes especially so when doing comedy. However, comedic technique must be invisible. William Ball said, "We must never get

caught trying to be funny".⁵³ I really think this is important. There are forms of sketch comedy where an expert can get away with it but most of the time it is best to let the scene and the situation create the humour.

Consider farce, which is very popular with our audiences. In farce the emphasis is on situation and incident. The humour comes from the comic characters being placed into outlandish and improbable situations. The characters are often extreme, but they are not caricatures. The gag line is important. Sight gags take on a greater significance. The humour is quite broad. However, the actors must play the characters with utter sincerity. As stated by John E. Dietrich, "...the comedy lies in the ridiculous attempts of a ridiculous character to meet a ridiculous situation with tremendous sincerity. The farce character is not the least bit funny if the audience detects any strain to be funny on the part of the actor playing the role."⁵⁴

The players must stay in character and should avoid playing for laughs. If there is a choice between playing the situation and playing for laughs, play the situation. The humour must not appear forced. It must appear to naturally spring from the humour of the situation. Concentrate on being in character and playing what has been rehearsed. If you get a laugh on a line, do not punch the line harder and overplay it the next night. This rarely works.

Most humour is either visual, situational or the result of a gag line. There are two basic types of gag lines, the straight gag line and the throwaway line. For the straight gag line, you pause before the line and punch it (slightly). The pause acts as a pointer to the humorous line; it keeps it from getting lost. For a throwaway line, the pause is usually after the line, which is said with no emphasis. Here the pause points backward, to give the audience time for the line to sink in.

Laughter, like scenes, must build. The audience should not be laughed out five minutes before the climax of the scene. There will be natural places in a play where the audience is given a rest from laughter. This is often near the first of scenes. These intervals also provide the necessary plot set-ups.

For a gag line, keep the set-up clean. The straight person must play it straight. Do not move or do any business on someone else's gag line. This rule is written in stone. Ignore it, and the gag is lost. If a gag fails, move on. Do not try to save it.

An actor must make an effort to handle the audience's laughter properly. It is important not to anticipate laughter. It will change every night. For this reason it is best to rehearse straight and not assume when a laugh will come. At show time we deal with laughter by "riding the laugh". When the audience laughs, pause. Stay in character and do not move. Deliver the next line after the laughter peaks but before it has completely died out. If you lose a line during a laugh, pause and repeat it at the appropriate time. This may not feel natural and sometimes the interval may seem to take forever. The audience wants to laugh, but they do not want to miss anything. If you don't wait for them, they will hold back.

⁵³ In *A sense of Direction*

⁵⁴ From *Play Direction*

Here are a couple of tips that apply to all forms of theatre.

Should anything unexpected happen on stage, it should be dealt with quickly and simply. This applies to any form of theatre. For example, if an object gets knocked on the floor, keep your head, put it back in place and carry on. If you do not, the audience will focus on the unresolved problem, and even become obsessed with it. Fix the problem and move on.

The actor must not upstage the other actors, must not add stage business, new lines or embellishments without considering the play and the rest of the cast. If an actor pulls exaggerated expressions or other movements while someone else has the scene, then that actor is hurting the show, damaging the audience's belief in the play and cheating the other actors. It is as simple as that.

Throughout the theatre world, there are often references to this or that method of acting. Sometimes you may hear a critic refer to someone's performance as being wooden or forced. A performance must seem real, be convincing. It is easy to tell people to use some method or some system but most of us are not ready to study acting methods for an extended period. Being natural on stage comes easily to some people and must be worked on by others. Ian McKellen⁵⁵ stated that to take on a role, just imagine what it is like to be that character, then pretend, and act like that character. It sounds simple. I think that it comes to this. Do not try to 'act'. You must not be seen as acting. Instead, you must 'be' the character. At some level, you need to believe you are that character.

When directing, one of the last things I like to tell actors before going on is to keep their energy up. Energy is not how loud you are saying your lines or how fast you are moving. Energy is the level of intensity you put into all aspects of your part. It is not over-acting either. The energy of the cast is critical to the show and a lack of it is the single most common cause of weak performances. How do you know if your energy is down? If you do not leave the stage feeling drained, feeling that you pushed yourself to the edge, then your energy was down and the performance suffered. Also, remember, energy is infectious.

I have a great deal of respect for anyone who is willing to go out on the stage and pretend, especially when it is without pay in a community theatre production. It is a singular act of courage. Children are naturals at acting. It is because they play. We become adults and sometimes we forget how to play. Then we get a part in a play. Remember, it is called a 'play' for a reason. We are there to play, to pretend. Let your pretension become your reality, just for a couple of hours, and believe. Share your belief and experience the magic.

⁵⁵ Sir Ian McKellen played the role of Gandalf in the movie *Lord of the Rings*, as well as other notable roles.