

The Drama Society Goes

"From The Footlights To The Limelight"

There are probably few clubs on campus that can match the variety of the Drama Club, either in their history or in their present activity. A charge of long-haired cliquishness sometimes arises from the fact that small groups of electricians, carpenters, publicizers and, of course, actors must work closely together for a couple of months if a slick show is to be produced. But let's just take a look at the records . . .

Engineers may note that the 1898 show was produced by one of their professors and all the proceeds (perhaps not surprising-ly) went to the Engineering Department. Meanwhile Québécois might be interested to know that the 1901 production was *Ici On Parle Français*. Students from Woodstock will be surprised to learn that in 1902 and 1903 their town welcomed presentations from the society. That was before American TV, of course.

During the 1907-8 season the Ladies Society presented W. S. Gilbert's *Pygmalion and Galatea*. Perhaps it is about time the Maggie Jeaners gave us a revival. Athletes should know that in 1924 audiences saw a show staged for the benefit of the UNB Amateur Athletic Association. The records do not show how many football jerseys this provided! Finally I wonder how many chemists realize that the 1931 play saw Dr. Toole conduct the college orchestra during intermission? Yes, the society has had a varied enough history.

But to return to the beginning. The earliest reference to a play on campus comes in the *University Monthly* during the 1896-97 academic year, though apparently drama had existed previously. The play *College Chums* was held in conjunction with the UNB Glee Club, as were all productions at the turn of the century. The students of 1902 who liked to gossip (or even study) in the library (not quite like the Bonar-Law Bennett!) had to compete with the society as it did its first show there independently of the Glee Club.

In addition to the library drama shows were put on in the City Hall, in the old Opera House, the High School, Teachers' College and even in the gym of the Brunswick Street Baptist Church! Today all presentations are put on in Mem Hall. In the last fifty years plays have been taken to just about every town in the province. Recently the group went first to Edmonton, Alberta, then to Halifax, Nova Scotia.

There is an idea among some members of the faculty that campus actors always flunked their exams. That impression could easily have sprung from the 1909 staging of a *Mid-Summer Night's Dream* on the anniversary of Shakespeare's birthday. That happens to be April 23rd! Either exams were later in those days or somebody flunked pretty badly!

It appears that, unlike the Red N' Black this year, there were no Provincial education officials backstage in 1916. A *Bachelor's Romance* was the play and the *University Monthly* wrote: "the ladies were voted to be superior to the gentlemen. The male members . . . feel they have some excuse since . . . the ladies had been indulging in a stage tonic in preparation for the event!" It is hardly surprising then, when prohibition came a few years later, drama went out. Again the *Monthly* wrote that "now like most reminders of the good old days, drama has taken its place in the junk heap with Crowned Heads of Europe, John Barleycorn and others"

It was not until 1930 that drama once again came into its own. This was when Prof Cattley became director and regular productions were planned. On February 23, 1933 the headlines of the *Brunswickan* read: "Prof Cattley Confers With Bessborough". The latter who was then Governor-General established the Dominion Drama Festival in the same year. Before Prof Cattley withdrew from active membership he presented a trophy to be awarded to the person doing most for the Society during each year. During the 30's three one act plays and one three act play was the usual program per season.

Prof and Mrs Smethurst directed the productions in the mid 40's. At the same time the Society was putting a number of plays over the local radio—as they may be able to do again when Radio UNB rules the hillside airways. For a few years a play was produced on the occasion of Founders Day. It was in 1947 that the Society presented an all-Faculty production of one of Ibsen's plays. Regrettably this idea has never been repeated although it would obviously be popular with the students. Prof Hicklin directed drama until his production of *Golden Boy* won the New Brunswick Festival in 1950.

Prof Shaw took over as Faculty Advisor in the early 50's. In 1953 he was appointed a governor of the Dominion Drama Festival. At that time the Society adopted the policy of producing a light-hearted play one term, and a serious drama (to be submitted to the N.B. Festival) the next. However it was not until the year 1956-57 that the Society began to flourish.

The Story
of the UNB
Drama Society
by
John Drew
Brunswickan
Drama Editor

In that year work was begun on the Drama Hut (which stands next to the Art Centre) so that equipment could be stored properly and so that the organization could have a base. 1956-57 saw *Dangerous Corner* receive an invitation to the Dominion Festival in Edmonton, Alberta, following its success in the Provincial Festival. At the DDF the year's eight best amateur plays in Canada are presented.

Audiences and active membership in the Society began to grow in the following year when *Journey's End* first won the Regional Festival and then received an invitation to the Dominion Festival in Halifax, Nova Scotia. An invitation twice in two years was an unprecedented honor and it helped to publicize the Society.

Yet perhaps the most successful drama production to date won no festivals. This was *A View From The Bridge* last year. It caused many students to change their ideas about drama and Mem Hall began to fill up for the show. Last fall a full house saw the opening night of *Mousetrap*. No comment is needed when one realizes that exactly ten times as many were present then as had been for the first night of the fall production three years previously.

What of the future? Thanks to growing student support over the last few years the Society has invested in excellent equipment and can put on increasingly polished shows. The Drama Hut will have to go this summer and it is probable that the Society will be based in Mem Hall, which will be conveniently close to the stage itself. Meanwhile, rehearsals are going well for *The Summer Of The Seventeenth Doll*, a hard-hitting play to be shown in March.

At present there is only one problem. After *A View From The Bridge* last year one Engineer wrote to the *Brunswickan* commenting on the fact that he had been pleasantly surprised to find the play worth seeing. Now if too many engineers become interested they may point to the precedent of 1898 and demand that proceeds of *The Summer Of The Seventeenth Doll* be given to the Engineering Society! But that is something we will have to let the 60's sort out.



Shown here are Mike Gordon and May Anne Keith in a scene from last year's Drama Society production, *A View From The Bridge*. This play, says Mr. Drew, "caused many students to change their ideas about drama and Mem Hall began to fill up for the shows".

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