

## **A Well Won Success Story: The Huron Playhouse**

*When summer comes to Vacationland, the opening of the Huron Playhouse is a sure sign that it is here. The following article "Huron Playhouse-Oldest Summer Theatre in Ohio Draws Crowds" appeared in the April 27, 1967, Progress Edition of The Reporter.*

"During the summer of 1949, the curtain went up on "John Loves Mary," the first production of the Huron Playhouse, a summer theatre sponsored by the Department of Speech at Bowling Green State University. The company and staff struggled through the season playing to a top audience of 200 in the 570 seat Junior High School auditorium ( McCormick School housed 1-12 in 1949) and a "bottom" attendance of 10.

Eighteen seasons later in the summer of 1969, the Playhouse could boast of an attendance record (11,707) for the season as compared to 3, 613 for 1949, an air-conditioned auditorium, and a company of exceptionally talented young performers.

During the intervening seasons, the Playhouse experienced years of feast and years of famine, frequently skirting the edge of financial disaster, yet tenaciously holding on. During the 1950 –1955 seasons audience response built fairly steadily as the Playhouse began to be recognized as an important Huron area cultural and entertainment institution.

In 1956, the first musical "Oklahoma" was performed and attendance soared over 10, 000 per season mark for 1956-1959. (The record shows that the first musical was "Annie Get your Gun" in 1955) Since that time an annual musical production has been a part of the regular part of the Playhouse program.

From its beginning the Playhouse has strived to three purposes: to broaden the influence of living theatre, to extend the services of Bowling Green State University to northern and eastern Ohio; and to provide a unique educational opportunity for students of the theatre.

A conscious effort has been made to choose plays which would appeal to the potential audience of the area and to keep ticket prices within reach of all residents. During the eighteen seasons of the Playhouse, ticket prices have been only raised once, in 1960 from 1.25 to \$1.50.

More than 500 students-both graduate and undergraduate – have been members of the Playhouse Company. They have come from scores of colleges and universities and have taken memories of their Huron experience back home to New York, Arizona, Texas, Mississippi, Connecticut, and most states in between.

Far from the upstart theatre of 1949, the Huron Playhouse now stands as the oldest continuing summer theatre in Ohio, and one of the best respected in the nation. Much of its success is attributed to its dedicated staff members throughout the years. The Playhouse boasts of former managing directors who now hold significant positions of responsibility including: Dr. Eldon Smith, President of Ohio Wesleyan University; Dr. tonal Kleckner, President of Elmhurst College: and Dr. F. Lee s Miesle, Chairman of the Department of Speech at B.G. S. U.”

*McCormick School opened in 1943 and has always been the home of the Playhouse. The pride and joy of the community McCormick had a first class stage but not air- conditioned auditorium. In1949 when the Playhouse had its first ever opening night, only 13 paying customers showed up. The day had been tropically hot and like equatorial Africa. For many years the company resided in the Morse cottages west of Lake Front Park, but since mid season 1982 “Shawnee School” has served as the dormitory. The show has not go on only once. In 1995, Mother Nature knocked out the power that did not come back on until the next day thus canceling the sold out performance already in progress. Community support and BGSU’s mission to provide artistic experience has resulted in a well-won success story for 58 seasons. Bravo!*

*For more information about the Huron Playhouse, purchase the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary edition of the Huron Playhouse on sale at the theatre.*