

Reporter Reviews Progress, History of University Theatre

by Kent Axtell.

The University Theatre is one of the oldest and best-known traditions of the University of Nebraska.

If anyone delves "way back" into the 80 year history of Huskerland, he will discover this for himself.

It all began in the early part of the century with the pioneering of Miss H. Alice Howell, the director of the dramatics department. In 1908, Mortar Board Howell started a new organization. Its name was the University Dramatic Club. Primary purpose, according to news clippings, "to bring a series of plays before Nebraska students." This was the embryo of our present-day theatre.

Deciding that the university

needed a more extensive drama organization, Miss Howell developed the University Players in 1915. Their first play was given Nov. 3, 1915 and its name was "Ghosts," by Ibsen. A news article of the day stated, "A small but appreciative audience attended." This was the first successful attempt at a permanent organization.

In 1920, the new body tried its hand at Shakespearean drama. "Twelfth Night" a surprising success, was a triumph for director Howell who said nothing would top Shakespeare.

Popular Play

One of the most popular plays ever given on the Temple stage was, said Miss Howell, "Believe Me, Xantippe." The play was the outcome of a brainstorm by a

former University student, Fred Ballard. The production was so successful on Nov. 19, 1915, that it was given 21 more times by the Players.

A scrapbook of the Theatre's caprices of that day, complete with photographs, revealed comedy in the old clothing styles. Predominant among the male thespians were high cravats, tight-fitting trousers, and uncomfortable collars. Loose-fitting gowns and oversized straws were characteristic of the women.

"Winter Tale"

In 1921, came one of the drama students' greatest successes, "Winter Tale." An interesting letter prejudiced against competing movies said, "May I felicitate (congratulate) you and the Players on that superlative product of the "Winter's Tale." Especially now that the motion picture has completed the debauch of our show houses, one is still proud to know that his University can

still rise to the best in Anglo-Saxon drama."

With the spring of 1928, came another enthusiastic addition. Upon the "greens" of the campus, was constructed the Little Green Theater. Such action continued the Players season for five weeks.

Growing Pains

Growing pains became evident in 1926 when a new system, the Temple Stock Company, was organized, under control of the Fine Arts department. In an old ad, this move was justified because "the University Players recognize the just popularity of vaudeville and moving pictures, yet they feel that there are many people in Lincoln who would also enjoy the legitimate drama."

However many actors were professionals. This was not representative of University talent and the desire for a new Theatre building is nearly 20 years old. A 1930 clipping stated, "The players have always been handicapped by inadequate stage space but despite

this have managed to design stage settings realistically. It is a dream of the group to some day have a theater of their own."

One of the largest "casts" in the history of the Theatre was in 1928 when the University Players did "Porgy" by DuBose Hayward. In all, 50 persons took part in the show, including 30 colored singers of Lincoln.

Fencing Practice

Records have it that fencing practice for the 1933 production, "Romeo and Juliet" took several casualties. Among those was Herb Yenne, one of the leading actors who got stabbed by a too-sharp foil. He was only slightly hurt, however, and recovered to later become author of "3 Suns West" which was given by the Theatre.

Favoring dramatic students was a system discarded in 1939 for the present method of inviting all sophomore students, eligible for extra-curricular activities, to try-out for the plays.

"TO MY FRIENDS AND FANS I

RECOMMEND CHESTERFIELD

...IT'S MY CIGARETTE"

Barbara Stanwyck

STARRING IN

"THE FILE ON THELMA JORDON"

A HAL WALLIS PRODUCTION
A PARAMOUNT PICTURE



Always Buy CHESTERFIELD

They're Milder! They're Tops! -

IN AMERICA'S COLLEGES
WITH THE TOP MEN IN SPORTS
WITH THE HOLLYWOOD STARS