

Lincoln bar doubles as theatre

By Jim Williams
A bar—that's all the Gas Light, 322 S. 9th, looks like at first. There's a bartender and beer and rancid smoke, coin-operated pool and foosball tables, a tired pinball machine—and a theatre in the back room.

They do melodrama at the Gas Light. The current season will open May 11 with *The Drunkard*, playing Wednesdays through Saturdays at 9 p.m. until June 4.

Paul Baker, a native Lincolnite and UNL graduate, came back from Colorado to direct this season's plays. He acted in *The Drunkard* at the Gas Light 12 years ago.

"It's a chance to get rowdy and let your hair down and have a good time," he said. "It's not serious theatre—you're not coming to be instructed or to watch a dramatic event. You're coming to watch people do farce and you can drink, you can throw popcorn, you can boo and hiss and cheer—it's a chance for people to really let it out and have a good time."

The Drunkard is a kind of mid-1800's "Reefer Madness"—a serious temperance play made silly by the passage of time.

"It was written around 1844," Baker said, "was produced in Boston, banned there, and later enjoyed a very successful run in New York." Boston banned it for showing drunkenness too explicitly, Baker said.

Not seriously
"We're not going to do *The Drunkard* seriously at all. As a matter of fact, I'm adapting the thing and re-writing it to draw the humor out. Of course, there's a lot of natural humor there."

The Gas Light isn't like a plush dinner theatre—but neither is the price. \$2 weeknights and \$2.50 Friday and Saturday admit you into a big room with rough tables and kitchen chairs seating about 200. There's a bar in a back corn-

er, naked pipes and ducts hanging from the ceiling, and a stage projecting into the room. There is no proscenium arch, no curtain, and the footlights are bulbs masked by black-painted cut-out coffee cans. But it's enough for Baker to get his plays on.

Decent place
"It's a decent little facility," he said. "It's air conditioned—we sort of make do with what we've got. It's not a professional theatre, and it's not-funded like a professional theatre. More

than anything else it's just a good time for the people involved and for the people watching."

Two UNL students have leading roles in the play. Senior Greg Wagner plays imperiled hero Edward Middleton, and junior Robert Skokan plays villain Lawyer Cribbs.

Cribbs corrupts Middleton "through the effects of demon rum."

"The tragedy affects Edward's virtuous wife Mary and their beautiful daughter Julia, kills Mary's mother

and incites the hero's brother to rage.

"The villain hounds the troubled family through the streets of New York from bar to bar until finally a temperate soul enters to put everything to rights and make for a happy ending."

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