

Unique Role In Village Life Filled By 'Players'

"The play's the thing," Hamlet soliloquized, and so said a group of Birmingham residents seven years ago, when they put their heads together and decided to organize a group to stimulate interest in the drama.

First, no doubt, by the example of the Little Theater movement, the group decided to follow the same dramatic path. This was in 1924 and although it originated as a Community House project, the first meetings were held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. John J. Gaffill.

Here ways and means were enthusiastically discussed, and after due deliberation, a constitution was submitted. The object of the organization as set forth in the constitution, was "the promotion of interest in the higher forms of the dramatic art."

First Performance in '24
Then came the question of naming the infant organization. To Mrs. J. N. Hadjisky the club is indebted for the name "Village Players," which she suggested at the third meeting. Equipped with a name and constitution, the Players had nothing to do then but cast about for an appropriate vehicle through which to express their various dramatic talents.

"The Maker of Dreams" was the initial production, presented the summer of 1924 at the Community House with Mrs. Raymond Reilly and Rolfe C. Spinning in the leading roles. The curtain went up that night revealing a capacity house. And by "capacity" is meant floor space as well, for many viewed the Player's premiere seated on the floor.

The organization prospered professionally, and three years after its founding moved into its



C. C. Ryan

own playhouse, a unique and distinctive structure of Chestnut street near Adams road. It is a one-story stucco building with a seating capacity of about 300.

Broaden Scope
For the first five years the Players confined their dramatic activities to one-act productions. In 1929 they made their first venture into the realm of the full-length play.

Since that time the program for each season has evolved into the production of three one-act plays a month and one three-act play, the season opening in October and closing in May. Two public per-

formances are given each year, one in May when the three best one-act plays of the year are repeated. Another activity later introduced was the writing of plays to encourage dramatic expression among the Players. A number of successful efforts have been made in this direction, notably among which was the comedy, "The Pink Locomotive," by Julian Case.

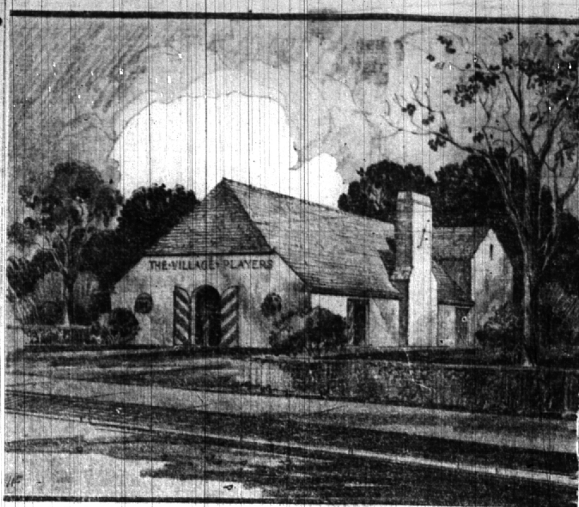
Start Fifth Season
In October of this year the Village Players will begin their fifth season in the playhouse. The program for the year is still under consideration.

C. C. Ryan of Brookside drive in the 1931-32 president, with Mrs. Cecil Charlton as vice-president, Gordon LeFebvre as secretary, Mrs. Harry G. Muehlman as treasurer, and Dr. J. B. Hasbarger, librarian.

While the producing of plays might be called the vocation of the organization, it also has an avocation which is dancing. On some occasions the playhouse is put to another use, when Players happily forget lines to remember the steps of the tango and fox-trot.

The membership of the Village Players now includes 219 devotees of dramatic art, with a membership limit of 250.

PLAYERS' THEATER



THE VILLAGE PLAYERS

Toonerville Recalled By Stories Of First Detroit-Pontiac "Skipper"

By CARL L. BRADT (Walsh, James & Wasey Company)

Many interesting tales are told about the first Birmingham-Detroit railroad service and its operator, one "Salt" Williams, whose experiences in the combined capacity of promoter, engineer, manager, and conductor exceed the humor and incongruity of the

While the northern extremity of the Detroit and Pontiac Road was still under construction, trains were propelled as far as Bayou Oak by horse-power. But in 1839 when the track was completed to Birmingham, which at that time was a busy little industrial city, Williams decided the time had come to replace horses with a locomotive which would be in keeping with the progressive spirit of the community and furnish the type of service the increasing volume of business seemed to require.

Accordingly, Williams advertised in the papers that two steam trins a day would be operated between Detroit and Birmingham after June 1, 1839. And on the appointed day a "sure enough steam train" made its first run to Birmingham. To many, standing with wide eyes and open mouth, it was an awe inspiring sight. To others it was the fulfillment of a Biblical prophecy, while to a few it was only another progressive step in the direction of a greater tomorrow.

Service Improved
Freight and passenger service was greatly improved, but still there were no coaches, no cushy seats, not even benches in the box cars that carried the prominent citizens of Birmingham and Detroit. "Standing room only" was the prevailing mood. The road bed was hurriedly built and poor. Passengers were obliged to stand, some ungraciously, as the engine puffed violently and the cars swayed from side to side.

Another annoyance to railroad men and a source of danger to passengers was the occasional loose strap iron covering of the wooden rails. Steel straps nailed over the wooden rails to protect them against wear would frequently come loose and the ends fly up, lashing the train as it passed, making a great noise, sometimes breaking through the bottom of a car and otherwise damaging the rolling stock and threatening the lives of the passengers.

This was one of the dangers incident to travel by rail that was most feared, although the speed at which this monster travelled, especially down grade, was terrific and fraught with many dangers. The thing might, for example, get out of control and jump the track, the engineer might not be able to stop it, or the engine, they thought, might even explode.

It was a common sight in those days to see at the station a man about to embark on the long and dangerous trip to Detroit, surrounded by his friends and relatives, some of whom were shedding tears and wringing their hands.

Forgets To Stop
Williams conceived the idea of building the Birmingham station over the tracks with large swinging doors at either end to admit the trains. These doors were ordinarily closed at night and opened at train time.

On one particular night, when Williams was at the throttle, he forgot to open the doors, Williams either failed to see them or thought the locomotive, which had begun to look upon as human, would have "sense enough" to stop to be admitted, but it didn't. Instead it ran clear through both doors, smashed them to pieces, and wrecked the whole building.

Another time the train hit and killed a horse whose owner sued the railroad for damages. In court, Williams directed his own defense and maintained that it was "pure negligence" on the part of the horse, for "if the horse had not stopped to look back the train would never have overtaken and killed him."

In that suit for damages, the argument of the defense was substantiated by the fact that Mr. Williams would often assist the engineer in getting the engine started and then go to the barn, leaving the train to Detroit and bent on in time to make provisions for unloading the freight.

DO YOU KNOW?
Floyd S. Buck of 593 Townsend avenue, has been a justice of the Peace in Birmingham for more than 10 years. He was born in East Lansing, Tompkins County, N. Y., and came to Birmingham in 1914. He is the father of Charles E. Buck, a member of the First Baptist Church of Birmingham and of Birmingham Lodge No. 44 F. & A. M.

Amendment
University professor says the world is made up of protons, positrons and electrons. How about the com-ones?—Philadelphia Bulletin

DO YOU KNOW?

Rolla J. Coryell, 1881 West Maple Avenue, has been prominent in Birmingham as a nursery man since 1906 when he came here to open business and to establish his residence. Mr. Coryell was born in Jonesville, October 2, 1881. He is a graduate of the Michigan State College, from which he received his B. S. degree.

Mr. Coryell has also taken an active part in the political and educational life of the village. He served on the Birmingham School Board from 1910 to 1911, and from 1918 to 1930. He was township supervisor from 1930 to 1931.

A charter member of the board of directors of the Birmingham Savings Bank and of the Oakland County Savings Association, Mr. Coryell has also kept in touch with Birmingham's financial and economic problems.

Birmingham's Fastest Growing Electrical Store

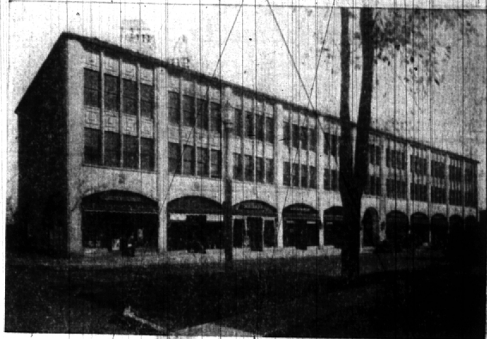
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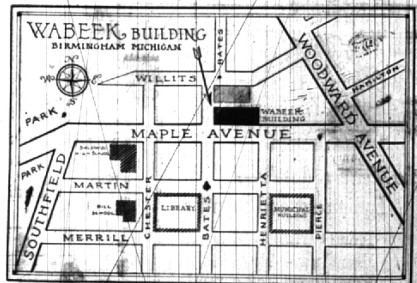
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