

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



**Buckingham Lodge
1861**

Remembering the Village Stage 1977-1990

For over a dozen years Village residents participated in and attended live theater locally. Founded in 1977, as an offshoot of Indian Hill Church musicales, the Village Stage provided solid community theater and cultural enlightenment to many.

Jackie Knapp and Ruth Sawyer were the first volunteers for the group. Initially their goal was to produce one play in 1978, but as interest increased, the Village Stage offered about two plays each year - usually one in fall and one in late winter/early spring. The first drama *Silent Night, Lonely Night* opened in fall of 1978. Auditions for it were held in Indian Hill Village Council Chambers. After the cast was selected, rehearsals were held at the Indian Hill Church. The play opened in early December at Livingston Lodge and ran for three days. About one hundred people attended. Thus began a tradition of engaging residents in theatrical productions.

Early on, there were quite a few one act plays – comedies and classics ranging from *The Philadelphia Story* to Eugene O'Neill's *A Moon for the Misbegotten*. Then the group branched out to mysteries such as *The Real Inspector Hound* and Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap*. The first musical was produced in spring of 1984.

The Village Stage attracted a diverse group of people. A very informal organization at its founding, it grew to have a membership of 70, and later 120. A large percentage of members were active in every production. Individuals took turns at acting, directing, performing technical jobs, creating sets, designing and acquiring costumes and props, ticket-taking, being a dialect coach, and other behind the scenes endeavors. The star of the play one year often wielded a hammer to create furniture for a set the next year. Or a leading lady became a seamstress the following season. One couple developed an interest in lighting and attended a workshop on that skill. Members of the group had great talent and a hodgepodge of abilities, allowing them to cooperate, learn, and create drama.

Livingston Lodge was the venue for most plays, as it was spacious and had an elevated stage. Most of the time plays were viewed on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights at 8:00 p.m. Tickets were \$3.00 to start, and later cost \$5.00. Wine and cheese were served at intermission to the audience. There was always a cast party after each production, hosted by members of the Village Stage. Kudos and toasts were given, and there was lots of laughter about missed lines or makeshift props.

These amateur thespians included a diverse group of Indian Hill residents, along with a few folks from nearby communities. When there were large casts, scheduling rehearsals for employed people, parents, and students necessitated a great deal of flexibility and patience by the producer. Of the many who dedicated their time and talent for years the Stage included (but was not limited to) Connie Barcelona, Teedie & Gene Bates, Barbara Baxter, Jere Evans, Kingston Fletcher, Carolyn & Gordon Greene, Sheila & Bill Jamieson, Glenna Knapp, Frank Koucky, Linda & Paul Krummel, Murf & Ken Mahler, Beth Robinette, Ken Schonberg, Ellie Shepherd & Bill Hartnett, Linda & John Silvatti, Ethan Stanley, and Ann Taylor. Many were married couples. Also, local children were sometimes cast in roles.

In 1984 the Village Stage was formally incorporated as a nonprofit corporation, and it then sought tax exempt status with the IRS. It became a member of the Association of Community Theaters (ACT) in 1987. As its popularity increased, the group took on more elaborate plays. Inspiring dramas included *All the Way Home*, *The Crucible*, and *The Gin Game*, and memorable comedies were *You Can't Take It With You*, *Tom Jones*, and *George Washington Slept Here*. In the late 1980s, the ACT recognized the Village Stage with 12 Orchid Awards (the Tony of community theater) given for directing, set design, set décor, acting, overall effect, and more.

The final play of the Village Stage, *A Voyage Round My Father*, was presented in March 1990. During the organization's 13-year history, 23 productions were performed. For the thespians it was challenging and fun. For the audience, there was entertainment. The shows received rave reviews and copious applause. The members of the Village Stage shared teamwork and camaraderie, and though they were amateurs, they brought excellence to the stage and enriched the community with a wonderful form of art.



Performance at Livingston Lodge