

I find this monograph difficult to start as I want to present generalities which will be of interest to everyone and not an autobiography of my 30 years with the Dramatic Club.

### HISTORY OF MAYNARD DRAMATIC CLUB

Let's start at the beginning of the school year in 1936 when William Reynolds was an English Teacher in Maynard High School. Eager to make friends in the town and very interested in the theatre, he would stop in at Ledgard's Paper Store to talk with William Ledgard, whom he learned had been active in the local high school plays and after graduation had appeared in the Maynard Teachers Club and Maynard Players productions. The two "Bills" heard that the late Hazelle Cameron also was interested in the theatre having been active in stock productions, etc., before coming to Maynard. They would wander across the street from the Paper Store to Hazelle's Cosmetic Shop, to talk about the theatre, with the hope of reviving the Maynard Players.

From these talks they contacted members of the inactive Maynard Players, young people who had been active in high school dramatics, church groups and the Finnish Dramatic Clubs and an organizational meeting was held at the home of William Ledgard. The Maynard Players were unable to be active due to family and business commitments and were reluctant to turn over their treasury or the name "Maynard Players" to the "younger" element figuring that they wouldn't do justice to their nearly 25 years in the theatre.

Therefore, a new group, to be called the MAYNARD DRAMATIC CLUB was organized on November 19, 1936 with William Ledgard as the first President and the late J. Leo Comeau as Treasurer, an office he held for over 28 years until the time of his death May 12, 1965. The original membership of 13 included: William Ledgard, J. Leo Comeau, William Reynolds, Leo Mullin, Walter Denniston, Richard Nelson, Huldah Nelson, Peg Martin, Hazelle Cameron, Constance Dawson, Clara Grieve, Laura Aho and Helen Mark Ketola. Its membership through the years, over 200 persons, has consisted of people from all walks of life, drawn together by an interest in the theatre and a desire to express themselves on the legitimate stage plus continuing the cultural interests of Maynard. Its membership has been a regular "league of nations" including, English, Irish, Finnish, Polish, Italian,



Russian, Scottish, Jewish, Armenian, Swedish, etc., nationalities.

Of the original charter and longtime members still active, 1936 - Huldah Nelson, Peg O'Connell, Helen Mark Ketola, Leo Mullin; 1937 - Ahti Jaakkola; 1938-Sirkka French as a non-participating member; 1939 - Samuel Micciche; 1946 - Roy Helander; 1947 - Lilian Holmes; 1957 - Vera Leithead. Now we have the second generation becoming active as M. Thomas French, son of Sirkka French is our current President. Children of members have also performed in our plays.

In the beginning, membership dues were 50¢ per year and at present they are only \$2.00 per year and for a few years we didn't charge any dues. At first meetings were held at members homes to save money, then as the club membership grew we started renting the Elks Hall, Eagles and for many years the meeting room at Parker Street Hall.

The first few plays were rehearsed at the home of J. Leo Comeau to save on expenses until we started rehearsing at the Elks, Eagles and Parker Street Hall and at one time we used a room at the old Town Building across from the mill. Back in 1937, rental for a hall to present a play was \$18.00, then in 1938 to 1941, \$25.00. In 1945 combined costs for all rehearsals and performance was \$75.00 and in 1946-1948 with rehearsals and two performances \$115.00. During the many years that the club held their meetings, rehearsals and performances at the Parker Street Hall, the Finnish Workingmen's Society was more than generous. We were allowed the use of their scenery, properties, costumes, etc., without any additional charge and even had one of the sets to do with as we wished.

When the Maynard Lions Club started to sponsor the plays in 1960, the performances were held at the Green Meadow School mainly for the convenient larger parking area. Last year we used the new High School Auditorium for the first time and I assume that the performances will be there from now on. Samuel Micciche acted as spokesman for the club at the building committee meetings and the Dramatic Club, through his efforts, ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> instrumental in seeing that the new high school stage was well equipped with excellent lighting and other facilities. To save expenses for the Maynard Lions Club, all rehearsals were held at the home of Helen Mark Ketola but last year the members felt that it was imposing too much on <sup>her</sup> the home life to tie up their home for rehearsals, therefore we started to rehearse at Parker Street Hall again.



In the formulative years members purchased tickets for the plays even though they performed and did all the necessary work in preparation for the performance. The cast not only acted but helped with scenery, handled publicity, collected ads, sold tickets, etc.

Royalties for the first plays was \$15.00 then it jumped to \$20.00 in 1939, \$25.00 in 1940, \$35.00 in 1941 and thereafter have been \$50.00 just for the privilege of producing a play. We did obtain reductions from the authors for two of the plays, but most of them today are reluctant to reduce the set rate; therefore, it is impossible to produce any first-rate Broadway production for less than \$50.00 for the first performance and \$35.00 for the second performance.

For the enjoyment of its members, outings were held at the Twilight Club at Lake Boone (the club no longer being in existence and the club-house is now owned by an individual), Annual Banquets were held at the Marlboro Country Club and Wildwood Inn, Marlboro. Halloween parties were always well attended with members appearing in the most fantastic and original costumes. Cast parties were held after the productions of plays at Parker Street Hall meeting room and for the past six years, when the Lions Club started sponsoring them, at the home of Helen Mark Ketola.

The club has held a membership in the New England Theatre Conference and entered "Double Door" and "Kind Lady" in the Greater Boston Little Theatre Tournaments. The club sponsored an Oratorical Contest in 1939 for the students of Maynard High School, a Costume Party & Dance for the benefit of the local Servicemen's Fund was held at the George Washington Auditorium November, 1945. February, 1947 a dance was held at Parker Street Hall for the Emerson Hospital Fund. Donations have been made to M.H.S. Screech Owl, Maynard Music Festival, High School Library Fund, Emerson Hospital, Heart Fund, American Red Cross, Christmas Seals, Metropolitan Opera Association, Boy Scouts of America, Salvation Army and in 1940 to the Finnish Relief and remembrances sent to our members in Service in 1942.

To date 36 plays, "the best of Broadway", have been performed for the enjoyment of the public with the club producing 25 on their own; sponsors of single productions have been the L.D.Wilson Chapter, Order of DeMolay; F.J.DeMars Unit #235 American



Legion Auxiliary; Maynard Post #1812 VFW Auxiliary; Maynard Teacher's Club; Band Parents Instrumental Club and since 1960 the Maynard Lions Club has sponsored the plays with their receipts going to their Scholarship Fund.

Special performances and benefits have been given for the American Red Cross, Cushing Veteran's Hospital at Framingham, Sudbury Methodist Church Building Fund, Cub Scouts of Hudson for two years. One-act plays have been performed for various organizations including: Maynard PTA Pops, First Unitarian Church of Northboro, Union Congregational Church Couples Club and Service Group; United Co-op Society Annual and Semi-Annual Meetings, Women's Co-op Guild, St. Christopher's Guild, All American Club, Rodettes, Maynard Emblem Club, Rebecca's of South Acton, Magdalene Chapter of Eastern Star and the Hovey Players of Waltham.

Services as Presidents of the club after Bill Ledgard have been Emylee Lerer, Edward Hannon, Henry Tatler, Peg O'Connell, Samuel Micciche, Louis Fava, Frank Primiano, James Fava, Ann Duclos, Tony Sottrines, Ray Van Vorse, Helen Mark Ketola, Richard Colleton, Philip Murphy and at present M. Thomas French.

Items of interest of various plays :

The first play presented by the Maynard Dramatic Club was "THE LATE CHRISTOPHER BEAN" directed jointly by William Reynolds and Leo Mullin and sponsored by L.D. Wilson Chapter, Order of DeMolay. The cast included: John Murphy, Constance Dawson, Kathryn Bariteau, Margaret Murray, Laura Aho, Murray MacKenzie, William Ledgard, Richard Elson and Walter Denniston. Richard Elson today is better known as the Editor of Confidential Chat in the Globe and Bill Ledgard is attending a University in Pennsylvania for his Masters Degree and working as a Librarian at University of Pennsylvania.

The second play - "HENPECKED HERO" The club considered this one a "lemon".

The fourth play - "THE GHOST TRAIN" was directed by Rev. Halsey Andrews who at the time was the minister at St. George's Episcopal Church. The sound effects of the approaching storm and depicting the ghost train were very realistic. Our beloved late J. Leo Comeau had his first and only part and had only three <sup>words</sup> ~~words~~ to say, "BOOZE AND DOPE", on cue. By the time he was to make his debut he was so flustered that another member of the cast came to his rescue and said them. Leo vowed then and there not to be



in another play but would handle all the scenery which he did with perfection. Sirkka French portrayed an inebriated spinster very convincingly and the audience marveled at her portrayal and sympathized with her as she lay flat on her back on a long, hard bench for two acts of the play.

The fifth play - "NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH" Kal Kansanniva not only directed the play but also acted in it. His timing was perfect, his ability to remain in character during the entire production was excellent and his voice range and playing only with and for those on stage made him semi-professional. Kal is in charge of the Drama Department at the State College in Lowell.

The seventh play - "KIND LADY" was entered in the Greater Boston Little Theatre Tournament along with such popular amateur theatrical groups as the Quannipowett Players of Reading; Tavern Players of Lynn; Milton Players, Winchester Group Theatre, Peabody Playhouse of Boston to name a few. Huldah Nelson appeared in the leading role of "Mary Herries" convincingly portraying a kindly, middle-aged lady, suffering at the hands of a crafty gang of crooks and proved to be an actress possessing marked ability and professional skill. Henry Tatler played opposite Huldah in the leading male role of "Henry Abbott", the head villain in a cast predominated by villains and he also handled it with professional skill and was successful in winning the scorn of the audience. The late Hans Miller from Concord, who had been one of the judges for this Tournament attended one of our club meetings after the competition and mentioned that there had been a three way tie for second place with Maynard among one of the three. Henry Tatler directed four more plays after that and also performed in them. Henry also performed in Summer stock in New Hampshire plus appearing in the Broadway production of "FOLLOW THE GIRLS" in 1945 starring JACKIE GLEASON. He started out in the chorus line but upon the illness of one of the top performers was given his part. At present Henry is working for Dun & Bradstreet in New York and is the Director of Music at St. Pauls Evangelical Lutheran Church in New York and for years has planned and directed their Christmas Choral Festival.

The 11th - "CHARITY BEGINS" - the stage setting was superb with the help of Doris Miller with her professional skills in Interior Decorating. Doris also did the



make-up for many of the club performances.

The 14th - "THREE'S A FAMILY" - our 10th Anniversary, was a story of a New York family during the war having troubles with the maid situation, the draft, housing shortage, and most important "production line problems". Leo Mullin portrayed the aged, nearsighted Dr. Bartell who was recalled from retirement due to the shortage of doctors to deliver the baby's of the expectant mothers. The funniest part of the play was at the end when he comes out from the bedroom walks over to the spinster and takes her hand saying "Next" and pulling her to the room. The spinster was played by Ann Swanson.

The 15th - "LADIES IN RETIREMENT" was directed by Roy Helander. I portrayed the aging but still lively actress, Leonora Fiske and spent half of the play on stage and really had a chance to emote. Rita Foley, now Mrs. Gately was tremendous as the housekeeper who murdered me at the end of the act while I sat playing the piano and singing. (Must have been my singing that caused her to "murder" me.) The back wall scenery was an old dutch oven and Rita "stuffed" my dead body there and when the door was opened to the audience you could see that the opening had been bricked up.

The 16th - "CHICKEN EVERY SUNDAY" had the largest attendance - over 600 people for two nights. That is very good considering that Parker Street Hall only seats about 300 comfortably. The husband and wife was played by Leo Mullin and Huldah Nelson with Huldah's son Paul and Paul's cousin Joanne Kangas playing their small children. In the play the wife was renting rooms in their home to make money so the family had to set up cots in the living room. This scene was very hilarious as Leo stepped back of a folding screen to take off his trousers and put on a nightshirt. A mirror had been hung on the back wall and the audience could watch his actions. The audience was in hysterics and Leo didn't know what they were laughing at and he breezed along in his own inimitable way. At one time he sat on the cot and then got up and started walking round the stage and as he did his nightshirt caught up between the cheeks of his rear which added more hysterical laughter from the audience. I was watching from the side-lines back stage and tears streamed down my face as I laughed so heartily.



The 17th - "BLITHE SPIRIT" - Marion Ruggiero and Amy Reynolds appearing as the "spirits" with their ghostly wanderings about the stage in their flowing gray chiffon dresses, gray powdered hair and white make-up made you feel as if you were "one step beyond". Pat Farrell was a hit as Madam Arcata the medium.

The 18th - "KISS & TELL" - Ray Van Vorse as Dexter Franklin the gangling youngster with a changing voice was excellent <sup>at that part</sup> and started his long association with the club.

The 20th - "THE CAT & THE CANARY" - A mystery with people disappearing, bookcases opening and hands reaching out with the ominous atmosphere heightened by the excellent lighting under the guidance of Samuel Micciche which was especially frightening in the second act when huge shadows swayed across the ways of the bedroom as the characters moved about. When a closet door was opened and Forrie Nelson fell out as if he were "dead" you wonder how he did it without getting hurt. This was the last time we had the dress rehearsal as a performance for the children. The youngsters screamed so much that it was difficult to say the lines.

The 21st - "THE 15th ANNIVERSARY FESTIVAL OF PLAYS" - similar to what we are doing this year as our 30th ANNIVERSARY. For the first play "A HAPPY JOURNEY", the curtain opened to a bare stage. The play was about a motor journey a family was making to visit their daughter in Trenton. The automobile was portrayed by four chairs. Leo Mullin was the father and Helen Ketola the mother with their small son and daughter sitting in the back seat of the car. The second play "LUCK PIECE" was a drama with a very drab, dreary setting with Huldah Nelson and Roy Helander having the main parts. The third, a comedy "GOODNIGHT PLEASE" had a much cheerier setting.

The 22nd - "SUDS IN YOUR EYE" - Peg O'Connell as Mrs. Feeley, the owner of a junk yard who befriended Miss Tinkham, a retired school teacher played by Huldah Nelson, and Mrs. Rasmussen played by Helen Ketola who got tired of living with her daughter and son-in-law. The three were delightful, taking life as it came and touching up the dull spots with just a "sip" of beer and using the empty beer bottles to make a fence.

The 23rd - "LADIES IN WAITING" had an all female cast.

The 25th - "HENRIETTA THE EIGHTH" - Christine Lampinen now Mrs. Molloy and Philip Murphy appeared for the first time and have been valuable additions to the club ever since.



The 27th - "MIRANDA" Pat Wehkoja now Mrs. Donahue not only directed the play but also did the make-up and was instrumental in having the "fish-tail" outfit made for the mermaid portrayed by Christine Molloy.

The 31st - "GIRLS IN 509" - started our relationship with the Maynard Lions Club. The selection of the play was excellent and the subject matter was timely, since politics was the theme. Although politics is a universal theme of interest at this particular time, on the eve of our national elections the impact was tremendous. The story hinged around a stalwart but eccentric woman and her niece who were die-hard Republicans and when the Democrats came in office in 1932, Aunt Hettie and Mimsy decided to remove themselves from society and they became recluses in a New York Hotel. When the hotel was being remodelled the hermit ladies are discovered in one of the back suites. Both the Republicans and the Democrats try to "woo" them to come out to vote. Ahti Jaakkola played a dual role as both the Republican and Democratic National Committeemen. The curtain at the Green Meadow School doesn't go all the way up so that the trap set-up was in view of the audience. The audience thought it was a basket-ball cage pulled up out of view of the stage and didn't realize it was a trap until it was sprung during the play.

The 32nd - "YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU" - We selected this for our 25th Anniversary year mainly to break the "jinks" as we had started rehearsals on this twice but for some unforeseen reason had to cancel production. About a year after we had performed it, it was revived on Broadway and as Elliot Norton, one of the best drama critics said in his review "it is a play that will live on forever".

The 33rd - "MY THREE ANGELS" - Anne Darling of the Acton Little Theatre Group volunteered her costumes and services for this production. The three angels were criminals in a French colony who took over to make the Christmas of the Ducotel family one to be remembered. Pete Hogan was the star of the show and was assisted by the other two angels played by Philip Murphy and John Boothroyd.

The 34th - "ANNIVERSARY WALTZ" - Roy Helander and Rose Drinkwater superbly portrayed the husband and wife celebrating their fifteen anniversary with Gail Huhtamaki and Frances Rizzo as their youngsters. Both youngsters showed a definite flair for the



theatre and should go along way in dramatics.

The 35th - "COME BLOW YOUR HORN" - Pete Hogan so natural, lively and snappy - with his natural style making his characters live. Newcomer Fred Mallonee, tall, handsome and extremely boyish in appearance and mannerisms so in contract to his brother played by Pete.

The 36th - "MARY, MARY" - the first produced at the New High School Auditorium. The performance was truly a masterpiece which held the audience attention from opening curtain until the end. The excellent cast included Christine Molloy and Ahti Jaakkola long time favorites plus Fred Mallonee who made his debut in "Come Blow Your Horn" and newcomers Janet Lankiewicz and M. Thomas French. Both Janet and Tom were naturals on stage and drew the acclaim of the audience.

The Maynard Dramatic Club is always on the look-out for more members as we feel that the club is a "community" project which helps to serve the cultural interests of the town. We certainly hope that more towns-people will join to continue the work done in the 30 years so that we will continue to flourish and not become extinct like our predecessors. Today we would perhaps be celebrating our 60th Anniversary if the original Maynard Dramatic Club would have been continued by the Maynard Players and we to have continued from there thirty years ago.

An invitation is extended to YOU to join the Dramatic Club so why not turn your "after 5 p.m." interests to areas of cultural endeavor. Interests in the arts span a variety of activities. As outlets for self-expression or relaxation, as a change of pace or just plain fun, why not "make-believe" on stage. Turn to acting to overcome shyness - create self-confidence. There is a place for YOU in the Dramatic Club besides acting such as directing, assisting back-stage with make-up, costuming, scenery, staging, properties, sound-effects, lighting, prompting or handling publicity.

May I at this time extend an invitation to you to attend the clubs 30th ANNIVERSARY FESTIVAL OF PLAYS, three one-act plays to be presented at PARKER STREET HALL on SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 1966 with curtain time at 8:15 P.M. Donation only \$1.00 per person.

"NOT ON THE PROGRAM" directed by Helen Mark Ketola and Cast: Christine Molloy, Susan Paakki, Helen Mark Ketola, John Merriam, M.Thomas French and Ray Van Vorse.



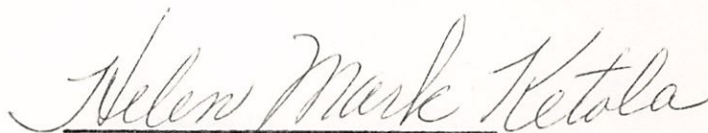
"AIR TIGHT ALIBI" directed by Fred Mallonee - Cast: Carole Mallonee and Colin

Pitblado.

"GEORGE" directed by Roy Helander - Cast: Lorraine Freidenfeles, Mary White, Richard Fardy and Roy Helander.

Continuing our 30th Anniversary Year we will present the Broadway Comedy "SEE HOW THEY RUN" on Saturday, March 4, 1967 at the High School Auditorium sponsored by Maynard Lions Club for their Scholarship Fund. Reserve this date.

Thank you for your attention and for the privilege of speaking to you about my first love - MAYNARD DRAMATIC CLUB.



MRS. HELEN MARK KETOLA

READ AT MAYNARD HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
MEETING - OCTOBER 26, 1966