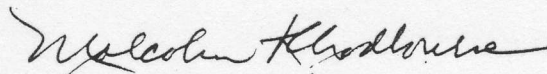


FOREWORD

The following pages reflect the highlights of the first 25 years of the Somers Village Players. Much of the information came from secretary's minutes. Obviously, much that goes on in a community theater group never gets recorded in the minutes. Production programs, my diaries, and newsletters were other good sources. Finally, I made some use of personal memories, especially Joanne's and my own. Therefore, I emphasize two things: first, no attempt was made to write a "complete" history. Secondly, this has to be considered more like a personal memoir. I am sure that, for every person who has been involved in the VP, his or her separate "history" might read quite differently from mine. Therefore, I encourage anyone reading this history to add his or her reflections.

I acknowledge greatly the efforts of my wife, Joanne and thank her profusely for all her help. She proofread and made suggestions which made this history not only grammatically correct but also much more readable.



Malcolm K. Chadbourne
Editor

December 23, 1995

SOMERS VILLAGE PLAYERS

THE FIRST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

BEFORE THE BEGINNING

It sounds like a cliché--"Let's get together and put on a play." That's pretty much the way the Village Players started. Larry Browne (perhaps fondly remembering his former days as a Somers Players⁽¹⁾ stalwart) called his friend Nina Davis and said "Let's start a Little Theater in town." Larry, Nina, and her husband Harry as well as Gene and Sylvia Burdette and a few other friends met. The enthusiasm grew. One can imagine a comment such as "Maybe there are others bitten by the theater "bug" who would like to join in the fun." The word spread. And, on January 15, 1971 a public meeting was held at Evie and Harry Phillips' house on Beverly Drive. Sixteen theater enthusiasts met and readily agreed that Somers "needed" a theater group. Hence, the Village Players of Somers was "born."

THE REAL BEGINNING

Once the decision was made to start, it was necessary to elect officers. Protesting that he just "wanted to have fun," Carl Anderson who had been active in a Massachusetts theater group in the past and who could supply a copy of that former group's by-laws, reluctantly agreed to be the first president. Sylvia Burdette was "elected" as secretary and Malcolm Chadbourne as treasurer. None of the folks assembled wanted to be vice president. (This was an unknown foretelling of what was to become a recurring challenge to Village Players' nominating committees throughout the twenty-five years, even though, at that time, the vice president was not also the producer.) Evie Phillips went across Beverly Drive to the house where the Tylers now live and "convinced" her friend Tom Knox (who had never been bitten by anything close to a theater "bug") to join the Players and become its first vice president. Harry Davis readily agreed to be the first producer.

(1) Somers Players, operating as the "Somers Playhouse," was a professional summer theater owned and directed by Herb and Priscilla Wells. It ran from 1949 to 1959 with productions in what was

previously known as Piedmont Hall. This is the building now located just east of the Somers Town Hall.

UNDERWAY-THE FIRST YEAR

An organizational meeting held on Feb. 12, 1971 brought the "little" but eager theater group to the place that was to become its meeting and rehearsal place for many years--the Somers Town Hall which at that time still had a stage and full auditorium seats. The first play was selected. "Generation," a comedy came highly recommended by a couple who had seen it the summer before at a Rhode Island summer theater. Other important decisions made: dues would be \$5 for adults; \$2.50 for students; \$7.50 for families; regular meetings would be held on the third Friday of each month except for July and August when no meetings would be held.

The immediate challenge became how to raise funds to finance "Generation." Members looked to friends and acquaintances who were community leaders for gifts. (Minutes of the 3/17/71 meeting show \$75 in the treasury and the annual treasurer's report as of 12/31/71 reflects an "anonymous loan" of \$700.) The program for "Generation" lists twenty-five Sponsors and Patrons. The Republican Womens Club was solicited to help to sell tickets with the 4/23/71 meeting minutes indicating 1056 tickets were distributed. (What optimists those early Village Players were!)

"Generation" ran for three nights at Somers High School on May 20, 21 & 22, 1971. (There is no record of how many of the tickets which cost \$2.50, were sold, but the treasurer's report shows a loss of \$114.68 for the play.) Malcolm Chadbourne, Jennifer Long(Cleaver), and Mike Riley had the leads with Vern Drayton, Bob Gaines and Jim Hart rounding out the cast. Larry Browne designed the set and lighting (providing lights from his own collection.) Clyde Sayles of Springfield directed the show with Virginia Rafetto(Wilbur) as Stage Manager. The program lists about fifty people involved in the production! (Obviously, the Somers Village Players had been speedily "launched" with many hands "getting together and putting on a show." The dreams of Larry and his friends had materialized.)

Since this was long before the days of Millpond Playhouse, a place for constructing and storing sets became an ongoing challenge. Lloyd Hunt, an associate of Harry Davis and Gene Burdette in the old Somersville Mill (at this time defunct) was enlisted to take charge of set construction which for "Generation" took place in the garages at the mill. Later, sets were constructed and stored in such varied

places as the Somers Inn barn (before it became a banquet hall), individual garages, the Hutton potato storage barn on Ninth District Road, and the Hurlburt barn off Four Bridges Road.

Polly Stevenson, the first Membership Chairman, spent the first year recruiting members. May 15, 1971 was set as a cutoff date for being designated as a "charter" member. Of the 42 charter members only **Mal. Chadbourne, Jane Legg, & Marianne Myracle** remain as members. (Larry Browne was designated an Honorary Lifetime Member in 1991.) Six charter members (**Carl Anderson, Ann Clark, Nina Davis, Herb Legg, Harry Phillips, & Bill Sutcliffe**) have died.

Summers in those early days before *Aya-Po* were "intermission" times for the Players but they became active again with an entry in the Four Town Fair parade. In September there was a party at Larry Browne's house, when it was announced that the fall production would be "Twilight Walk"--with 23 people in the cast. A first resignation occurred in the Producer slot with **Harry Davis'** departure, due to added work pressures. **Gene Burdette** and **Jack Bennett** quickly "filled Harry's shoes" and work was underway to mount "Twilight Walk." It was to be held again at Somers High and again with Thursday though Saturday production dates--Dec. 28-30, 1971. Team contests were started among the Players to see who could sell the most tickets. (The team of **Lee MacKay & Rita Cook** won the prize--whatever that was. There is no record of the prize.) Again there is no record of total ticket sales for "Twilight Walk" but the treasurer's report reflects a slight "profit" of \$179.06--"before payment of high school custodial service overtime."

At the end of its first year, the treasury balance stood at \$221.52.

THE SECOND YEAR-1972

January, 1972, found the new theater group ready to celebrate its first year's accomplishments. Sixty-five members/guests gathered at a dinner costing \$5 apiece (including an open bar) at the Somers Inn to review the year and elect new officers. The only officer re-elected was **Malcolm Chadbourne** as treasurer with **Carl Anderson** designated an ex-officio board member to ensure continuity. **Joan Gaines** became the second president. Playreading chairman was **Larry Browne** who reported at an early meeting he had recruited 23 members for his committee. They quickly chose "Plaza Suite" as the Spring production. (There are no records on ticket sales or the success of "Plaza Suite.")

OTHER 1972 HIGHLIGHTS

The Village Players:

- ° established a scholarship for Somers High graduating seniors and awarded \$100 to **Sandy Coyne** and \$25 to **Mark Henrich**;

° started a childrens' theater directed by **Judy Burmeister**;
(There is little recorded about this enterprise.)

° produced "All Because of Agatha" for two nights--eliminating the Thursday production because of poor attendance at the three previous shows. "Agatha" was the first play directed by a Village Players member--**Larry Browne**. It featured **Shirley DaCosta** as Agatha. (Editor's note: Subsequent program notes describe "All Because of Agatha" as a "smash hit." This was largely because of Shirley's efforts at ticket sales from her very visible position as the main clerk in Somers Drug Store--at that time the only store in that shopping plaza. Shirley had an infectious, pleasing personality that made it easy to say "yes" to her ticket sales suggestions. She was a well-known Somers figure and her appearance on stage created an ideal draw for this rather bizarre comedy. This production also exemplified the true meaning of "community theater" because Larry Browne cast some people not so much by audition but because of his knowledge of the people and what he perceived as their "theater" potential. One thinks of **Mary Oliver** and **Millie Wesson** who had never thought of themselves as "actors" but, with Larry's persuasion and direction, took on character roles much to the delight of people in the audience who knew them.)

° changed the "theater year" from January-December to July-June and elected new officers in mid-year with **Ewart Lockyer** as the third president.

° showed a treasury balance on 9/22/72 of \$9.24; there are no other financial records for the year.

1973 HIGHLIGHTS-PRODUCTIONS

° APRIL--presented "Haunted Honeymoon"--directed by **Larry Browne**, with setting and lighting designed also by **Larry Browne**. The following is a quote from the program notes for this comedy--"with a rare combination of talent (both amateur and professional) available to a small local theatre group, the Village Players have enjoyed critics acclaim for the exceptional quality of their presentations. Enhancing the excellent staging, acting, and professional lighting, unique and elaborate sets of "Broadway" quality are eagerly anticipated by playgoers at each succeeding production." (Editor's note: much of the credit for the "Broadway" quality must go to **Larry Browne** for his strong hand in design as well as execution. His

years with the old Somers Playhouse as well as his deep personal interest in all aspects of theater made a unique and extremely valuable contribution to the Village Players.)

MUSICAL WORKSHOP HELD--On June 22, 1973 Somers Town Hall was overflowing with cheering patrons for a musical revue assembled by Shirley DaCosta and Betty Hall (Hibbs). (Editor's note: this was not strictly speaking a "Village Players" production. Shirley and Betty were trying to promote the idea of the Players putting on a musical. The audience response was certainly positive but it would be five more years before the first Village Players musical--"South Pacific.")

"DON'T DRINK THE WATER"--directed by Waldo Goodermote, a versatile director from the Springfield area--with a cast of 17. (An interesting little tidbit gleaned from the program: Mark Rivard is listed under "set construction"--along with his father, Gil and Mark's two brothers.--How old were you, Mark?) Minutes reflect no details about audience numbers. It was again a two-night production, on Nov. 9 & 10. Notation was made that each VP-er was allotted 5 tickets apiece to sell. Marianne Myracle created tags to be worn as play advertisement. A "profit" of \$353.49 suggests that this Woody Allen comedy was well attended.

1974 HIGHLIGHTS-PRODUCTIONS

"The Curious Savage"--a comedy directed by Bill Poleri, Springfield theater activist, Bill was to become a prime mover of CTA, the community theater association of Western Massachusetts. Village Players joined this group and were active in it until Connecticut formed its own group. (More about these organizations will appear later in this history.) "Curious Savage" was presented on two nights in May, 1974 at Somers High. Minutes note that this play "lost about \$80.

"Sabrina Fair"--a play on which the movie "Sabrina" was based. Presented on November 22 and 23, it was a precedent-setting performance as it was the first of many plays directed by Herb Legg. (Editor's note: it is almost impossible to overstate the contributions Herb made to the Village Players. He was an inveterate optimist--a supreme "can do" worker. Nothing seemed beyond his capabilities and interest when it came to the world of theater. He could act--and very well--both comic and serious parts! He had an instinct for directing that appeared to arise spontaneously and effortlessly at his rehearsals. Technical aspects of theater did not daunt him and he was always there whenever the Players had a job to do. What a legacy Herb left and what big "shoes" he left to fill!) "Sabrina Fair" had a spectacular set designed by Larry Browne assisted by Jim Anthony, with a distinct emphasis on "less is more." Incomplete set pieces were deliberately designed, constructed, and lighted not as realistic representations but as "suggestions" of

of what the set pieces were supposed to represent.

This year an audience survey was conducted with results showing 25% favoring dramas; 20% wanting to see musicals; and 54% liking comedies. (Apparently, 1% was undecided.)

No treasury balance for 1974 is available.

-1975-

Two productions were presented--one, "The Seven Year Itch" has the distinction of being the only Village Players play that was so well received that it was held over for an unplanned second week-end. (Here's a quote from the JI review: "Supporters of the Village Players can be justly proud of this theater group's delightful presentation..." The review continues, "Herbert Legg does a splendid job as Richard Sherman and some of his facial expressions have to be seen to be believed..." Also, receiving critical praise were Caroline Penna as The Girl, Maggie Harrison, Jan Budington, Lorraine Moses, Tim Dailey, and Gene Polchlopek. (Editor's note: this was truly an exceptional production which established Herb as a much sought after actor. It was in this play that we first heard his inimitable "heh, heh.")

The second production of this year, "Night Must Fall," produced on November 7 & 8, contained three things worth noting. It was the first play with **Martha Butler** in the cast. (Martha had been very helpful in providing publicity for the Players---a hard-found commodity in those early years--through her widely-read column in a free newspaper of the time, The Northern Connecticut Bazaar.) Also, in this play, **Jane Legg** made one of her rare stage appearances. Finally, it is the first of many plays where **Wendy Peterson** was the very capable stage manager. .

In these days before the advent of the dinner theater at Aya-Po, the Players still struggled for financial support. A new idea

(whose?) surfaced in 1975: build a booth and sell meatball grinders at the Four Town Fair. There are no records as to who designed or built the booth. It had the appearance of a small circus tent with a small triangular "flag" flying at the top. Kay McNamara made the meatballs and many of the Players, at assigned times, sold the grinders. The location was ideal and the activity continued at a profitable pace for several years.

1976 GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS

GOOD NEWS

The only production in 1976 was "Blithe Spirit"--an ambitious attempt to present this challenging Noel Coward comedy. It was successful both artistically and financially. This was the play in which Dee and John Moak made their Village Players' debuts.

Other good news: The Four Town Fair booth resulted in a profit of \$325.

BAD NEWS

Martha Butler, who was cast as Madame Arcati in "Blithe Spirit," fell during rehearsal and injured her ankle. A director, somewhat out of touch with the reality of the situation, asked Martha to stand on a chair being used in rehearsal in lieu of a couch. The chair moved and she fell. Martha was a super good sport about the incident and went on bravely with remaining rehearsals and the show--always with her infectious smile, despite her pain.

Also, the first and only cancellation of a play occurred. It had been almost totally cast and was in final design stages by the director, **Carl Anderson**. Unfortunately, an appropriate actor could not be found for a key role and "Born Yesterday" was never produced. 1976 was to go down in history as a "one play year" for the Village Players.

1977-A YEAR OF "FIRSTS"

Following are the "firsts" that occurred in 1977:

*"Arsenic and Old Lace" became the first VP play produced by a committee and the first directed by a woman--Sue McConnell.

*In March, the first Village Players stationery with the distinctive VP logo (which had been designed by Carl Anderson) was printed.

*At Sue McConnell's suggestion, the VP meetings began to be held for the first time in members' homes rather than at the Town Hall.

*In October, it was voted to go ahead with the first musical. It was to be produced by an ad hoc committee consisting of Betty Hall (Hibbs), Marie West (Reardon), Marianne Myracle, Sandy Rogers (Kowalski), Gene Allard, Carol Ekenbarger, Jan Stevens, & Jim Rogers. They set a tentative production date of May, 1978.

The Four Town Fair booth profit this year was \$198.

The Treasury balance at year's end was \$2100.96

The year ended with a production of "Last of the Red Hot Lovers" directed by Herb Legg and featuring Arnie Woods of West Springfield in his VP debut. (Arnie was to direct and appear in several succeeding VP shows.)

-1978-

PREMIER EVENTS

This year was to become noted for two new types of productions. In May, "South Pacific" became the first of many musicals. Secondly, in the fall, "Forty Carats" took its place as the first of eighteen (to date) dinner theaters at Camp Aya-Po.

SOUTH PACIFIC

The statistics: Directed by George Dawson; produced by Sandy Rogers (Kowalski) & Jan Stephens; choreographed by Liz Canfield; musical accompaniment by Jonny Marks, who played piano for all rehearsals, as well as the production, and Colin Hamlin, who played bass for the production. Joe Kolwicz starred as Emile with Sue McConnell as Nellie, and Gene Allard as Billis. The chorus consisted of eleven women and six men. Marianne Myracle & Paul Sonski began their set design/construction collaboration with this show. Costumes were designed, made or assembled by Joanne Chadbourne & Blair Walker.) (Editor's note: those of us lucky enough to be involved in this production remember our "work" not as work but, for the most part, "fun." "South Pacific" is full of great music and, with the really talented singers, rehearsals often rang out with applause. Work parties to build sets or to make costumes were also filled with the optimistic spirit engendered by the play and its cast and crew. Any doubts about the ability of the Players to put on a musical were quickly dispelled. Audiences responded very positively and the precedent was set for the easy selection of subsequent musicals as a right play selection for the Players.)

FORTY CARATS

Unlike producing a musical, which had been under consideration for several years, the idea of doing a dinner theater arose quite suddenly. Betty Hall (Hibbs) & Marie West (Reardon) had been at a wedding reception at Camp Aya-Po and became captivated with the idea of using Avery Hall at the camp for a dinner show. The stage, kitchen, and hall were there ready to be transformed into a

theater. Betty and Marie's enthusiasm held sway against any naysayers. John Moak was enlisted as "Magic Chef," as he was listed in the program. "Forty Carats" was selected as the play to be presented on two week-ends (four nights) at a ticket price of \$6.50. In the first years, the price included hors d'oeuvres provided by members. Beer and wine at 50-75 cents a glass were sold from an unlicensed bar. One of the cleverest bits of publicity for the show was an entry in the Four Town Fair parade. Several VP-ers dressed as "carrots" and marched in a line. (Another early publicity gimmick was a large banner announcing the plays from the upper porch of the Somers Inn.) With records showing a profit of \$1420.71 for the first dinner theater, it was obvious that the Players had found a successful way to finance its operations.

OTHER 1978 NOTABLE ITEMS

* Nov. 17 Shirley Courtois (Warner) was introduced as a new member. Shirley had been previously active with Enfield Stage Company-recently defunct because of a fire.

*December 15: Shirley arranged for a gift to the Players of theater lights previously used by Enfield Stage Company.

*December 29: Larry Browne gave a parcel of land behind his house to the Players. At the same time, it was voted to investigate the possible purchase of some pre-fab school buildings no longer needed by the town of Newtown, Connecticut. They were soon bought by the Players for \$350 apiece and arrangements were made to move them to the land Larry had donated.

-1979-

THE YEAR OF THE BUILDINGS--THE TAKING DOWN, MOVEMENT, AND RE-CONSTRUCTION-- THE "AGONY AND THE ECSTASY"

To put it simply, the school buildings were dismantled in March and the re-erection began in April. Such a straightforward statement doesn't begin to describe the work entailed. It sounds so simple. "Take apart the pie-shaped pieces of the roof and floor. Disconnect the rectangular-shaped wall panels. Move the pieces to Mountain Road, Somers. Put it all back together." Enthusiasm for having our own buildings on our own land helped to motivate the workers for quite awhile. Ask Gene Allard, Bill Marsele, Malcolm

Chadbourne, Bruce Tyler, John Moak, or anyone else involved in the project. What started out as "fun" soon became just plain "hard work." The Players were able to get the first building in place but the energy just wasn't there to finish the second. An independent contractor was hired to erect and finish it. (As an ancillary benefit, some school furniture that came with the buildings was sold to All Saints Church for \$200. Also, fluorescent lights from the school buildings were used later in Millpond Playhouse.)

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OTHER 1979 EVENTS

*The first of several skating parties in subsequent years was held at Moaks' this winter.

*"A View From The Bridge" was produced in an innovative production designed and directed by Larry Browne. The basement of the Town Hall was transformed into a semi-theater-in-the-round.

(Editor's note: much could be written about this production. Again, as in moving the buildings, a lot of effort was expended to make the basement a "theater" to show the different scenes from the play set on the Brooklyn waterfront. This play is also notable as the one where George Schissel first appeared in a character part.)

*"Guys and Dolls," produced in June, became the second successful VP musical. Again, innovative staging by Marianne Myracle and Paul Sonski created exciting backdrops for the 17 scenes. Thirty-eight cast members under the direction of Blair Walker were assisted backstage by at least that many workers. (The play showed a profit of \$1657.17)

*"Dial M For Murder" became the second dinner theater and ran for three two-night week-ends. (Profit: \$1583.91)

*Lynn Peiczarka was awarded a scholarship--no record of the amount.

-1980-

*Land gifted by Larry Browne assessed by town at \$17,000.

*Treasury balance in January: \$5805.

*Produced three plays during the year:

"How the Other Half Loves"--four nights in February & March;

"How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying"--four nights in May;

"Cactus Flower"--dinner theater on three week-ends in fall;
(Raised ticket price to \$9; profit \$1775.)

*Decided to do only two shows a year in the future;

*Received \$1483.88 gift from defunct Enfield Stage Company;

*Received \$200 gift from Aetna to be used to make a road into the Mountain Road buildings;

*Entered the Springfield CTA (Community Theater Assn.) drama festival for the first time in May with "recognition scene" from "Anastasia"; directed by M. Chadbourne, starring Shirley Courtois (Warner), Sandy Rogers (Kowalski) & Gene Polchlopek. Won award for "Best Set Design" for the festival.

-TENTH ANNIVERSARY YEAR-1981-

The year began with a festive tenth "birthday party" on January 17 at the Somers Inn Barn. About 100 VP-ers gathered for "goodies" and were entertained by a show consisting of 15 skits, songs, dances, and nostalgic bits and scenes from VP productions done to date. (Copy of program attached.)

Other 1981 Highlights

*First Investment (\$5000) in Mutual Funds under advice of Al Nosal.

*CTA entry, selection from "All My Sons," directed by Gene Polchlopek; starring Herb Legg, Shirley Courtois (Warner), Wendy Peterson, and Bill Marsele. Received Honorable Mention for Set, Production, Director, and Actor (Herb); selection went on to Regionals in Nashua, N.H. because the Winning CTA entry declined to go to Regionals.

*Productions this year:

"Oklahoma!" on three week-ends in April and May;

"Exit the Body" on three week-ends in Sep. and Oct.
(Ticket price raised to \$10; profit:\$3237.43; menu featured turkey tetrazzini).

*Scholarship of \$250 awarded to Judy Shaver.

*First pool party at Moaks-on Aug. 22.

*Innovations for publicity included a new sign created by Marianne Myracle placed on the CBT (now Fleet) bank lawn; part of the cast of "Oklahoma!" appeared in Womens' Club fashion show.

*George Orme reported at a November meeting that the "Legion Hall" might be available for the Players to use.

*Minutes reflect on December 6 that an agreement between the town and the Players is being worked on to secure VP use of the "Legion Hall."

-1982-

HIGHLIGHTS

*Productions:

"A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum"
(Editor's note: a "good news"--"bad news" show;
"good news"--who can forget John Moak doing
"Everybody Ought to Have a Maid" or Norm Pease
as Erronius? "bad news"--a cast change where the
director had to take over a principal role after
rehearsals had begun.)

Productions in 1982 (cont'd.):

"California Suite" (had two directors: **Wendy Peterson and Bill Marsele**); first time in the five years of dinner theaters a permit was secured for the bar. Lions Club assisted with the last week-end, since a club can only get permit for two week-ends. Profit: \$4100.

- *\$250 scholarship awarded to **Matthew Butler**.
- *Two workshops presented for meeting of Friends of the Library.
- *First meeting held in "Legion Hall" on Aug. 20, 1982.
- *Float in Four Town Fair parade was a model of "Legion Hall."
- *Voted in October to rent a post office box.
- *Voted on Oct. 15, 1982 to rename the "Legion Hall"

-MILLPOND PLAYHOUSE-

-1983-
HIGHLIGHTS

- *Missing Stage Lights came to the attention of the Players.
- *Evening of One Acts presented at Mabelle B. Avery School on Feb. 4 & 5. (These were plays or segments produced with minimal sets and lighting. Shows: "Vanities"; "Black & Silver"; and "Next.")
- *"Little Ki and the Serpent"--a Childrens' Theater production directed by **Kathy Welch** and presented in February at Somers Town Hall.
- *Signed first contract with town for lease of Millpond Playhouse (Rent: \$1/year).
- *Bought new lights, spending \$2679.14; received insurance claim in the amount of \$3000 for missing lights; turned over \$2023 of the insurance amount to **Larry Browne** as some of the missing lights belonged to him.

- *Voted to buy a Bulk Mailing Permit.
- *Became a member of Act/Conn--new community theater association in Connecticut.
- *Awarded a \$250 scholarship to Rhonda Ventura, Somers High Senior and gave a \$50 bond to Maureen McMann, a student at Somers Junior High.
- *Established Millpond Playhouse Association to care for physical properties owned/leased by the Players; also, this association is used to apply for bar permit for the third week-end at Aya-Po.
- *Peg and Stanley Mulak donated a piano which was used in the dinner theater ("No Mother to Guide Her") and then it was to moved to Millpond Playhouse.
- *Voted to install a telephone at Millpond.
- *In addition to productions already mentioned, also put on a Spring show on two week-ends in May. It was called "Thieves" and is largely remembered for the well-known "Meester" line by Bob DeDaulniers.
- *Joanne Chadbourne established, as Ways & Means chairperson, a new record for moneys donated to the Players--\$1000. She sent 100 letters and got 36 positive responses--16 patrons and 20 advertisers. This record has yet to be broken.

-1984-

HIGHLIGHTS

- *January--Telephone installed at Millpond.
- *February--"Bus Stop" produced for two week-ends at Somers High; (Editor's note: as the director, I will never forget the night that I had to hold the opening curtain to allow time for the lead actor to return to Springfield from the high school to get the boots he left at home. Obviously, the boots were very much a key part of his costume. The time elapsed was probably about a half hour, but it seemed like an eternity to me!).
- *April--Sharon Burr and Jay Baker put on a make-up workshop at Millpond as a meeting program. Sharon and Jay were active members of the Windsor Jesters.

- *April--Took cutting of "Bus Stop" to Act/Conn resulting in Best Actor award for **Michael Martin**; Best Supporting Actor award to **Herb Legg**; and Best Set award to **Marianne Myracle** and **Tim Welch**.
 - *May--Bought 100 chairs which **George Orme** discovered as surplus property of Hamilton Standard. Purchase of these chairs made it no longer necessary to "beg, borrow or steal" chairs for Aya-Po. They were also put into immediate use at Millpond Playhouse which had become the meeting place for the Players. Later on it would also be used as a small theater.
 - *May--"Kiss Me, Kate" produced six times at Somers High. First attempt to do a matinee with this show drew a small audience. It was fun to do with period costumes/wigs. Who could forget "Brush Up Your Shakespeare" with **Herb** and **Norm**? And the tarantella nearly did us "dancers" in!
 - *May--Linda Gray Kelley directed a very moving workshop production of "Spoon River Anthology" at Millpond for the Players. Linda involved six players in multiple roles and made dramatic use of lighting by candles to illuminate the actors' faces.
 - *Summer 1984--**Herb Legg** and **Shirley Courtois** (**Warner**) dressed in period costumes and read letters from Civil War times, as part of Somers' 250 birthday celebration.
 - *Summer--Voted to spend up to \$110 to buy a cattle gate to keep trespassers out of the Mountain Road property.
 - *June--Awarded a scholarship to **Tina Larocque**; **Kathy Welch** made a Village Players flag; authorized purchase of an answering machine for use by the Tickets chairperson;
 - *Sep./Oct.--Presented seventh annual dinner theater--"Harvey" directed by **Herb Legg**. This was another in the series of shows attracting greater and greater audiences at Aya-Po. (Profit: \$3101.67).
-

-1985-

- *March--Published a brochure about the Players to try to recruit new members.
- *March 10--Act/Conn entry: "The Devil and Daniel Webster"; this festival entry has the distinction of being the last play in which **Herb Legg** acted before his untimely death in May of this year.

*April/May--"Thurber Carnival" presented to small audiences; (Editor's note: as the producer of this show, I was disappointed that more people didn't see director **Linda Gray Kelley's** inspired presentation of this classic--so true to the dry humor of James Thurber. **Peter Moak** created an innovative merry-go-round stage which made scene changes efficient and quick. All ten actors were at top form, especially **Gene Polchlopek**, as a seldom-before-seen comic actor.) This play lost \$1240.65, probably a VP record for a straight play.

*May--**Herb Legg** died; \$1000 donated to the Herb Legg Memorial Fund. (Editor's note: Herb's death resulted in a huge loss, both personally to the members who had known him, and to the group as a whole. As I have commented before in this history, Herb contributed in many, many ways. He was "at home" both on stage and off. One of his last contributions offstage was his stage-set cut-outs drawn in the Thurber fashion for "Thurber Carnival." It is not an exaggeration to say that, to most people, when they thought of the Village Players, the first person they thought of was **Herb Legg**. No matter what the Players were doing, Herb was there. He always said, "No problem!", and he was usually the first to start the project, no matter what it was. Actor, director, artist, "techie", enthusiastic worker, friend. These words only begin to describe **Herb Legg**.)

*June--A scholarship of \$250 was awarded again to **Tina Larocque**. Also, 12 students at Somers Middle School were given certificates for involvement in "theatrical" activities in school.

*Sep./Oct.--"On Golden Pond" became the eighth annual dinner theater at Aya-Po. The production was dedicated to the memory of **Herb Legg**. Ticket price was raised to \$12.50; profit: \$3000. This play is fondly remembered for its very appropriate set designed by **John Quenneville**. Misfortune befell the show in the form of Hurricane Gloria which cut off power to Camp Aya-Po. The middle week-end shows had to be re-scheduled. Tickets Chair, **Sara Moriarty**, "burned" the phone wires and quickly made accommodations to seat those who missed out because of "Gloria" at other performances, including a matinee newly set up on Sunday, October 6.

-1986-

Records of this year reflect the following activities:

*Bought cushions for "George Orme" chairs.

*Presented "An Evening of Workshops" on Feb. 15 at Millpond. (Workshops included "The Plumber's Apprentice," directed by Wendy Peterson and featuring Norm Pease and Jennifer Allard. The second workshop was a cutting from "Morning's at Seven," directed by Malcolm Chadbourne. It featured Kim Buckley, Shirley Courtois (Warner), Bob DeSaulniers, Betty Domer, Dee and John Moak.)

*Act/Conn entry was "Doing A Good Thing for the Red Man." It was a year with very heavy competition. VP entry received Honorable Mention for set design.

*Presented ten certificates to eighth grade students who had been active in drama at Mabelle B. Avery School. Somers High senior, Michael Domer, given a \$250 scholarship.

*The gate at the entrance to the Mountain Road property was installed.

Productions for the public this year were:

"Marlin the Magnificent"--presented on two week-ends in April and May. This play was described as "an original fantasy" and was the only VP play up to that time that featured adults in a play aimed largely at children.

"Caught In The Villain's Web"--a melodrama; the ninth dinner theater produced on six nights in Sep./Oct.

*Stage West Artistic Director, Eric Hill, presented a directing workshop at Millpond Playhouse during this year for nine people.

-1987-

HIGHLIGHTS

*Installed ceiling fans and smoke detectors in Millpond. Also, bought a shop vac.

*Wendy Peterson, president, started a monthly newsletter to keep the Players abreast of "what was going on."

*Wendy started a summer childrens' theater workshop. Twelve kids were enrolled and they put on "Stone Soup" to show what they had learned. (Editor's note: this workshop has continued each summer, growing in numbers of students to the point where "graduation" shows must now be held at Somers High School to accomodate the larger audiences and the more elaborate shows. It has remained pretty much a "one-woman" operation--much to Wendy's credit.)

*Act/Conn entry: "A Little Something for the Ducks," starring **Kathy Welch** and **Norm Pease**. Norm was tied that year for Best Actor. This one-act play was also put on as part of a charity function at the Shallowbrook Equestrian Center in Somers.

*The Spring production was "The Ant and the Grasshopper" a wildly imaginative play featuring adults playing such characters as "Ant 781", "Ladybug", "Spider", "Ant 3512" and, of course, "Grasshopper." Those involved in this production, which was directed by **Blair Walker**, and done at Millpond Playhouse, reported having as much fun doing the show as the audience in seeing it. It even made a profit of about \$700.

*Scholarship recipient was **Stuart Woronecki**.

*In August, the town of Somers voted to spend \$22,000 to fix up Millpond. The VP agreement with the town was that the Players would take care of routine maintenance. Major concerns such as the inadequate foundation and a seriously deteriorated roof were beyond the scope of the Players' responsibility. Broken water pipes and leaks due to holes in the roof were becoming commonplace. The town's action to upgrade the property was most welcome, especially as it signaled the town's intent to keep the property and not raze it, as had been threatened. By this time, the Players had found a "home" and did not want to lose it.

*Six hundred-forty patrons were served at the Aya-Po dinner theater, "Lover's Leap." Profit: \$4481.70.

***Dee and Sue Moak**, **Louise Washburn**, and **Shirley Courtois** (Warner), on behalf of the Players, presented an evening of charades as the Christmas program for the Womens' Fellowship of the Somers Congregational Church.

-1988-

January: Assets were listed as \$16,888.75. (Editor's note: the profitable dinner theaters were definitely paying off. Despite increased costs of maintaining Millpond, the treasury kept growing.)

February: An "Evening of One-Acts" was held to select a Village Players' entry for the March Act/Conn Drama Festival. An adjudicator from Stage West, **Benita Hofstetter**, commented on the two shows--"Where Have all the Lightning Bugs Gone?" and "The Love Course." Benita's comments were very helpful to the Players as the decision on the Act/Conn entry was made by the Players in attendance. They chose "Lightning Bugs" which went on to reward

Peter Moak with a Best Actor award (which Peter shared with another actor) at the festival.

*One-act plays were popular this year. Rather than a regular three-act play or musical, the Players chose to produce another "Evening (or, rather four evenings) of One-Acts" during May at Millpond Playhouse. Producer Sara Moriarty, assisted by Sue Moak, presented the following shows before a total audience of 122: "Final Placement," featuring Sydney White & Kathy Young; "Little Miss Fresno," with Betty Domer & Sue Moak; and "Twigs" with Dee Moak, Norm Pease, & Stuart Sands. Donations for the scholarship fund were accepted in lieu of admission. This permitted the amount of the scholarship to be increased to \$500 and, in June, it was awarded to Somers senior, Jennifer Heim.

*July--It was decided to proceed with use of computerized labels for monthly mailing notices. Also, \$552 was allotted to purchase dinner china for use at Aya-Po. Finally, outside lights were bought for Aya-Po use.

Sep./Oct.--Eleventh annual dinner theater was "Let's Murder Marsha" and it was the first dinner theater that was totally sold out before opening night, despite the ticket price rise to \$13.50. On Sat., Oct. 1, show was delayed for about one-half hour because the gas was off in the kitchen and John Moak had to scramble to find alternate places to cook the food. With the help of the Moak, Marylou Civello, & Somers Congregational Church kitchens, the buffet was made ready. Most of the audience was probably not even aware of the kitchen panic. The bar was extra busy.

-1989-

*In February the players produced another "Night of One-Acts" to prepare for the March Act/Conn festival. This time, Steve Hays of Springfield was the Adjudicator for the two plays, "Graceland" and "Lilies of the Field." Players voted to send "Graceland" to Act/Conn. It was a fortuitous selection because "Graceland" starring Shirley Courtois (Warner) & Ellie St.Amand was a big winner. It was directed by Malcolm Chadbourne. It was judged as the Best Production and was sent to the regional competition in April in Manchester, N.H., where it was the runner-up for the Best Production. Shirley won Best Actress and Malcolm, Best Director at Act/Conn. At the Regionals, Ellie was given "special recognition" for acting. (Editor's note: this production, in every way,

created a very special "high" for me. Many Players went to Manchester to show support. It was a unique experience. The final recognition was a plaque showing recognition of "Graceland" by the Connecticut state legislature. All VP-ers were honored by a sign that Marianne Myracle painted and put on the Somers Town Hall lawn announcing the "win.")

*March: A new roof paid for by the Town of Somers was added to Millpond Playhouse.

*Spring: Village Players donated \$200 to subsidize a trip to Stage West for 45 Somers High students to see "Macbeth."

*April 7: Somers High jazz band entertained for a VP meeting at Millpond.

*March 22: Sara Moriarty, as president, was featured in the New York Times-Connecticut edition. (Editor's note: This was a well-deserved recognition of Sara who has produced nine, acted as Stage Manager for two, and acted in five shows for the Players.)

*May 19: Reunion/open house held at Millpond as an 18th VP "birthdayparty." Many people who had formerly been active with the VP came to view the many nostalgic exhibits which John Moak, Kathy Welch, and others had set up throughout the building.

*June 16: Charlotte Stenlake was given special recognition for her ten years of serving quietly and efficiently as Hospitality Chair.

*June: Derek Slayton, Somers High senior, was awarded a \$600 scholarship.

*Sept./Oct.: "Answers," a vignette of three short plays, was the twelfth annual dinner theater at Aya-Po. With tickets at \$14, it was very successful financially, yielding almost \$6000.

*October 1 : The new gazebo was dedicated in the Somers Field Road Park with the VP contributing one of the plays from "Answers" as part of the program. Malcolm Chadbourne and Norm Pease appeared in "The Constituent." At this time, Wendy made special remarks about Herb Legg, and Jane Legg accepted a plaque from the town. (Editor's note: funds from the Herb Legg Memorial Fund were used to install lights on the gazebo. Although the gazebo seemed, theoretically, to be a possible new venue for VP productions, the acoustics and general set-up are poor and the gazebo has never been used again by the Players.)

*November 17: Kay McNamara graciously opened her home, the Keeney house, to the Players for a Wine Tasting party. David Lamb of Four Seasons Package Store in Longmeadow was the able expert who guided the guests in a "down-to-earth" review of the wines, their tastes and potential uses. After David's "lesson," VP-ers enjoyed an evening of sampling the varieties of wines described.

-1990-

Assets at the beginning of the year: \$19,726.12.

*JANUARY: Players decided to have their own T-shirts. Paul Washburn designed the logo and Gene Allard arranged for the printing/purchase. T-shirts were given to each member and have since become an added bonus for joining the VP.

*MARCH/APRIL: "The Nerd" presented at Johnson Hospital Conference Center in a cooperative venture with the Johnson Hospital Auxiliary with total profits (\$3824.87) accruing to the hospital. The Shippee amphitheater was a new venue for the VP. It has good and bad points as a "theater." It has excellent sight-lines but very limited backstage area. Nevertheless, the joint venture was a challenge that proved beneficial to both parties involved. To provide adequate lighting, the VP bought two light "trees" which can be used wherever lights need to be added. Gary Carra, a Somers High senior, and friends provided live music for a pre-show lobby party where refreshments were served.

MARCH: Kathy Welch compiled a mailing list from guest books used at recent productions. There were over 400 names on the list which Kathy volunteered to maintain on her computer.

MARCH: A Long Range Planning committee, consisting of Malcolm Chadbourne, Shirley Courtois (Warner), and Tim Welch made a report to the Players recommending that invested funds with Shearson be increased to \$10,000. The committee also made recommendations about increasing the fiscal base as well as the membership total for the years 1990-1995 and 1990-2000. These recommendations were accepted. (The 2000 goals have already been met or surpassed.)

JUNE: Gary Carra was awarded a \$500 scholarship.

JUNE: Act/Conn festival entry was "Limbo" directed by Shirley Courtois (Warner) and featured Sue Moak, Wendy Paterson, Malcolm Chadbourne, and Ginny Zaborowski. Awards received were; Best Set Design and Honorable Mention for Best Costume Design.

SEPT./OCT.: Thirteenth annual Dinner Theater was "Destiny," a satirical comedy directed by Kathy Welch, with a cast of 13. The ticket price was raised to \$15 to offset insurance costs. This was the first year of taking out insurance as protection for the possibility of liability stemming from bar sales.

DECEMBER: Bought four long (banquet) tables for \$22 apiece. These have been used extensively both at Millpond as well as at Aya-Po.

-1991-THE TWENTIETH YEAR-

The year began on Jan. 18 with a twentieth-year "bash" at the Somers Inn Barn. There was no attempt, as for the VP tenth birthday, to put on a show. This was a night for nostalgia with 94 in attendance. Larry Browne, who had moved to Petersham, Massachusetts, could not attend but he was made an Honorary Lifetime Member. Wendy Peterson set up a display of nostalgia pieces from past shows, and Frank Jackson, who had just started rehearsals for "Li'l Abner," the upcoming Spring show, engaged the audience in an impromptu preview of "Li'l Abner."

FEBRUARY: Betty Domer, producer, presented a Night of One-Acts at Millpond. The plays were adjudicated by Pamela Townsend, of Springfield. One of the plays, "Empty Wells," was an original play written by Linda Goodman, who also starred in it with Jim Harriman. This play was the VP Act/Conn entry for 1991. The other play was "Tell Me Another Story, Sing Me a Song," featuring Wendy Peterson and Shirley Courtois (Warner). (This play was presented again in October of this year as the VP contribution to an Art Festival sponsored by the Somers Art Coalition.)

APRIL: "Li'l Abner" was produced on four nights at Somers High. This return to doing a musical introduced some new people to the Players. Lisa Lafford (Scarlett) played "Daisy Mae" and became an active VP-er until she and her husband, Paul, moved to the Worcester area. Peter Boehm, who was a Somers High senior, played "Li'l Abner"; Peter was chosen as the 1991 scholarship recipient with a \$500 award.

SUMMER: Wendy Peterson and Malcolm Chadbourne appeared on the Continental Cable TV show, "Time Out," to publicize the Players and the Fall dinner theater, "Steel Magnolias."

SEPT./OCT.: The fourteenth annual dinner theater had two distinctions: it was the first show at Aya-Po with a matinee. The demand for tickets had increased so much that a seventh performance was called for. A Sunday afternoon show on the middle week-end was added and this practice continues to the present. Secondly, "Steel Magnolias" was the first play with all female performers. It was very well received both with the public and the press. The Journal Inquirer reviewer, Steve Starger, gave it a three star review.

NOVEMBER: Bus trip to New York City was arranged by Wendy Peterson under the auspices of a business known as "All At A Discount." There was almost a full bus of VP-ers and guests who had the choice of good seats at various Broadway shows.

NOTE: Bought a new "Light Board" during 1991 for about \$2000.

-1992-

JANUARY: Norm Pease was featured in a Hartford Courant article about how "neighborhood actors escape from real life in local theater."

FEBRUARY: Tim and Kathy Welch gave workshops at the VP meeting on set construction (Tim) and costumes (Kathy).

MARCH/APRIL: A return to the Johnson Hospital Community Medical Education Center to present "The Butler Did It." This was not a joint production (as in 1990) but it resulted in a \$1200 contribution to the hospital building fund. Journal Inquirer review described "Butler" as a "fun and fanciful evening" and gave it three (out of four) stars.

MAY: The tradition of putting on "A Night of One-Acts" at Millpond continued with two shows: "Laundry and Bourbon" and "Committee Meeting." Linda Goodman directed one show and appeared in another. "Committee Meeting," featuring John Lepore, Andy Percoski, Betty Domer, Lindsay Calder, and Wendy Peterson, became the 1992 Act/Conn entry. Andy Percoski received an Honorable Mention award for Best Supporting Actor and Linda Goodman was given an award for Best Costume Design.

JUNE: Helped subsidize a trip to Europe for several performing musicians from Somers High School.

AUGUST: Village Players performed civic duties by manning the plastic recycling booth at Somers Town Hall.

AUGUST: Twenty-seven kids participated in Wendy Peterson's childrens' workshop.

SEPT./OCT.: "Laffing Room Only" generated many laughs and record revenues as the fifteenth dinner theater. Profit: \$5784.07.

NOVEMBER: We co-sponsored a program with the Somers Library. A professional actor, Jim Cook, appeared at the library as "Cal Coolidge" in a free performance for the public.

-1993-

JANUARY: Assets were reported as \$19,302.74.

JANUARY 22: A second wine/cheese party, organized by Pucky and Bill Carter, was held again at Kay McNamara's. No wine expert spoke but VP-ers had a fun evening tasting and talking.

MARCH: Motion-sensor lights were bought for the front and back doors at Millpond. Also, it was voted to buy mini-blinds for the meeting room at Millpond.

APRIL/MAY: A "Week-end of One-Acts" was held at Millpond. Four plays, including an original one by Anne Pié, "The Remarkable Thing About Stardust," were produced. The plays were all different and gave both actors, directors, backstage people, and audience a varied theatrical experience. The Anne Pié play, which featured Betty Domer and John Lepore, was selected to be the VP entry for the Act/Conn festival held in June.

JUNE: Betty Domer was presented with the Best Actress award and Anne Pié was recognized with a special award for "Excellence in Playwriting" for "The Remarkable Thing About Stardust."

JUNE: Scholarships of \$500 apiece were presented to Heather Hight and Melanie Collins.

SEPT./OCT.: "Catch Me If You Can" became the sixteenth annual dinner theater. Tickets were set at \$16. Reservations were accepted beginning on September 1, and Dee Moak's phone never stopped ringing for three days until all 700 reservations were sold. This was a new record in ticket sales.

OTHER 1993 MATTERS: The first president, Carl Anderson, died this year. It had become the custom when a VP member died to buy a book for Somers Library. This custom was carried on in Carl's memory.

A new SONY tape deck was purchased this year.

-1994-

HIGHLIGHTS

JANUARY: Paul Dailey and Kim Collins came to the Board and asked to use Millpond Playhouse for a new venture they wanted to start in Somers. They called it "Night of Tales." Millpond would be used as a meeting place for an evening of storytelling. These would be substance-free gatherings for all ages. The Village Players were not asked to sponsor the activity, but the Board gave the proposal its approval and encouragement.

FEBRUARY: First "Night of Tales" was held on February 5. They continued to be held on the first Saturday night of each month for a year. Paul and Kim reported "GREAT SUCCESS" but decided not to continue beyond that one year.

WINTER: The Cultural Arts Commission of Somers wanted to send fifth grade students to a concert of the Springfield Symphony. Since the commission had no funds, the Village Players donated \$1000 to them with the stipulation that \$500 be used to subsidize the symphony trip.

MARCH: "The Dining Room" was presented at Johnson Memorial Hospital. This was the first time that the VP had produced a play with such an acting challenge. Twelve actors had to portray 50 characters of various ages in 17 scenes. This was the last play with Norm Pease in the cast. (Editor's note: Norm had been in declining health for some time, but, like an old "trouper," Norm carried on, immensely pleasing the audience as he had done in many, many shows. Norm died on December 31, 1994. The production of "Front Street," the Spring 1995 VP production was dedicated to Norm with the following words written by Wendy Peterson: 'With an arch of his eyebrow, a twinkle in his eye and an all-knowing smile, Norman Pease mumbled and grumbled his way into all our hearts. We will miss Norm on our stage and in our lives. Although Norm was a natural comedian, he would have liked to be remembered more as an actor.') "The Dining Room" was a benefit, partially, for Johnson Hospital. \$1000 was donated to them.

MARCH 9: Shirley Warner and Malcolm Chadbourne performed Readers Theater for the Somers Womens' Club reading a one-act play by Arthur Miller, "I Can't Remember Anything."

JUNE: Scholarships of \$500 apiece were presented to Somers seniors, Greg Schuler and Matt Sciaretta.

SUMMER: As Millpond Playhouse gets very hot in the summer, the decision was made to install air conditioners. This required electrical

upgrade. At the same time, a workable electrical hot water heater was installed. Gene Allard, Housing Chair, made all the arrangements, including buying used air conditioners at bargain prices as well as installing the units. Gene also arranged for Mark Rivard to install a new front door at Millpond. (Editor's note: Millpond Playhouse is not the most efficient building but it is "HOME" for a lot of VP activities. The building is used in the summer for Wendy Peterson's Childrens' Theater Workshop as well as tryouts/rehearsals for Aya-Po shows. The "improvements" which Gene arranged were most welcome.)

AUGUST: Wendy Peterson conducted her eighth Childrens' Theater Workshop involving forty-one children. The "graduation" production was held for the first time in the spacious, air-conditioned Somers High School auditorium.

SEPTEMBER: For the first time in many years, a few members rode on a float in the Four Town Fair parade. It was a float jointly sponsored by the VP, Somers High Drama Club, and Marianne Myracle's "Country Costume" shop.

SEPT./OCT.: The seventeenth annual dinner theater, "Lie, Cheat, & Genuflect," produced at a \$17 ticket price at Aya-Po. Some "firsts" involved with this show: 1: After many years of publicizing VP shows with a very visible sign (painted and repainted by Marianne Myracle) on the CBT/Fleet bank lawn, new owners of the bank refused to allow the sign on the lawn. The sign got moved quickly across the street and, with the blessing of Judy Cox, owner of Crossroads, it was erected on the south corner of 83 and 190; 2: the director of "Lie, Cheat & Genuflect" quit after casting. One of the actors, Mark O'Donnell, assumed the directorship; 3: a patron fell outside and had to be taken to the hospital by ambulance. She was not seriously hurt. A new record was set in net earnings for the dinner theater: \$7299.86.

FALL: The "powers-that-be" decided that the trees in front of Millpond were a threat to the building. They were cut down leaving the building with an exposed look but, apparently, in a safer position.

OTHER THINGS WORTH NOTING: A By-Laws revision committee was formed to address the question of producing plays. The use of the Vice President slot as totally in charge of productions has not worked.

Anne Pié brought an original play, "Front Street" to the Players for possible production. A decision was made to proceed with plans for a Spring 1995 production .

An anonymous gift of a new stereo system was received.

Tim Welch installed shelves in the back room at Millpond.

-1995-

HIGHLIGHTS

Norman Pease recognition: The year began on a sad note with news of Norm's death. In his memory the Players made a financial donation to the Somers Indian Museum. Also, they bought a book on jazz and donated it to the Somers Public Library. (Native Americans and jazz were two of Norm's passionate interests.) At the January meeting, many VP-ers shared their memories about Norm.

"Front Street: From January through March, all efforts were focused on this play. Since the characters in the play spoke mostly with Italian accents, the first challenge to producer, **Betty Domer**, was to select a director able to handle this aspect. Betty was fortunate to locate a resident of Enfield, **Theresa McGoff Ferreira**, who had an Italian heritage and was used to talking with relatives who spoke with an Italian accent. Theresa had extensive theatrical credits, including playing the part of Clairee in the VP production of "Steel Magnolias."

As usual, there was some problem locating enough people to play the ten parts, especially actors who could become comfortable speaking with an Italian accent. (Editor's note: A very happy surprise was finding Paul Rossi to play Rocco. Paul had worked with Norm, and he wanted to pay his last respects to Norm by appearing in this play which Norm had helped select and who wanted to appear in it. Paul used his Italian background to great advantage when playing Rocco.)

Louise Washburn proposed the idea of making "Front Street" a dinner-theater by involving the Somers Food Service students in the dinner portion. She approached **Steve Roberts**, Food Service Director, who agreed to the idea, and plans got underway immediately to serve an Italian meal preceding the play. Since the high school cafeteria accommodates only 125, and the auditorium about 600, two ticket prices were established, one including dinner and one just for the show. As it turned out, the 125 were sold out on all four nights. In all, 778 tickets were sold.

Since "Front Stret" was essentially an original play (it had been produced in the Hartford area some ten years earlier but had never been published), publicity to intrigue a potential audience became very important. The pre-show dinner helped. In addition, a publicity committee arranged a "Meet the Playwright" night at the Barnes & Noble bookstore in Enfield. On March 3, Anne Pié appeared, speaking to a gathering of about 25 about the background of her writing of the play. She also obliged with autographs. Anne attended the show on several occasions and congratulated the Players on the quality of the production.

Special Olympics: Village Players donated \$100 to the fund which had been set up by Somers to help cover the expenses of a visiting Special Olympics team.

Connie Clark as "Emily Dickinson": On April 1, The Village Players and the Somers Public Library jointly sponsored an appearance of Connie Clark, a North Carolina professional actress at Somers Library. Ms. Clark read from many Emily Dickinson poems and spoke about the poet's life. About 50 people attended this fascinating, free program.

Constitution/By-laws revision: An ad hoc committee, consisting of **Donna Allard, Malcolm Chadbourne, and Shirley Warner**, reviewed the current Constitution/By-laws and made recommendations for changes which were unanimously accepted in May. Major changes: the theater/fiscal year was changed to May 1-April 30; new positions were added as follows, Artistic Director, Technical Director, Dinner Theater Food Service Director, and Dinner Theater House Manager. These new positions were designed to relieve some of the duties of the Vice President for Production.

Scholarships: Nine students applied. Louise Washburn chaired the committee which selected the two recipients, **Sarah Welch and Allison Collins**, who received \$500 apiece.

Millpond Park: The Village Players contributed \$500 to the group working on physical improvements to the land immediately in back of Millpond Playhouse. Players assisted in clearing the pond shoreline where trees were planted. One of the trees was dedicated to the memory of deceased VP members.

Millpond theater room improvements: Although the room to the left of the front door had been used for small shows, it was never set up to its best advantage. Sight-lines were poor and lighting was barely adequate. **Tim Welch** made major improvements this fall. He borrowed, on a semi-permanent basis, some risers made surplus by the building of the new high school. Tim arranged the risers as "steps" on which to place chairs. He also moved the stage and arranged theater lights focused on the stage. At the same time, **John Quenneville** painted the walls surrounding the stage black. These changes were tested and proven well done at the November meeting when the one-act play, "The Cat Connection," starring **Joyce Benson and Blinky Calder** could be seen and heard by all audience members. This funny but touching play, directed by **Malcolm Chadbourne**, was well received by VP-ers and, the next week, it was taken to Vernon where it was welcomed by the residents of Rose Commons, an elderly apartment complex.

"Social Security": **George Dawson**, who directed "South Pacific" for the VP in 1978, was brought back to direct this comedy, number 18 in the Aya-Po dinner theater series. **George** had to "wear two hats" before the play opened. One of the actors quit a week before opening night. **George**, without missing a beat, took over the part, memorized the massive number of lines, and appeared as the leading man, in the true theater spirit of "the show must go on." This dinner theater is also noted as the one where, for the first time in 18 years, **John Moak**, turned over his Head Chef's hat to someone else. John remained as "Food Service Director," bustling behind the scenes as always, but the actual cooking was done by **Steve Roberts**, from Somers High.

Treasury balance: At the end of December, 1995, the total invested funds stood at \$14,072 and operating funds totalled \$13,263 for a grand total of \$27,335.

Membership: There were 80 paid members and two honorary lifetime members (Larry Browne and George Schiessl) on 12/31/95.

SPECIAL CELEBRATION

On January 20, 1996, the Village Players will celebrate 25 years of community theater in Somers. They will meet at the Somers Inn Barn for dinner, nostalgia, "roasting" awards, entertainment, door prizes, and dancing.

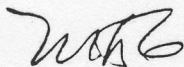
THE FUTURE

The beat goes on. Plans are well underway for the next show. It will be the eighth musical for the Village Players, "Is There Life After High School?" and will be presented at Somers High School on the last two week-ends in March. Luke Olivieri will be in complete charge as musical and book director as well as set designer and choreographer. Wendy Peterson will be stage manager and Sara Moriarty producer. Louise Washburn will coordinate with Steve Roberts, Food Service Director, a pre-show dinner in the high school cafeteria. VP-ers in the cast are Lee Anne Madersky, John Lepore, and Ken Smith.

CRYSTAL BALL QUESTIONS

Can the Village Players look forward to another 25 years? Who can say? Will they get their own theater? Will their storage buildings stand the ravages of time? Will Millpond Playhouse continue to be available? What plays will be presented? Will they be able to attract capable actors and backstage people? Will audiences continue to support their efforts?

The answer to these questions may be in your crystal ball. The rest of us will just have to wait and see.



MKC
1/1/96