

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Salem Community Theater Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 813

CATHY OSTARCHVIC

Interviewed

by

Arlene Hasson

on

June 8, 1982

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Salem Community Theater Project

INTERVIEWEE: CATHY OSTARCHVIC

INTERVIEWER: Arlene Hasson

SUBJECT: officers, tickets, attendance, membership, maintenance,
Madrigal Feast

DATE: June 8, 1982

H: This is an interview with Cathy Ostarchvic for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the Salem Community Theater, by Arlene Hasson, on June 8, 1982, at 8:45 p.m.

Cathy, where were you born and raised?

O: I was born in Alliance, Ohio and I was raised in Minerva, Ohio.

H: You graduated from Minerva High School?

O: Yes.

H: Did you do theater or drama while you were in high school?

O: I did very little drama. I was in two plays on stage with very minor roles.

H: After you graduated from high school what did you do next?

O: I went to school four years at Kent State University.

H: Did you do any theater work there?

O: No.

H: What was your major?

O: English.

H: You graduated and decided to do what?

O: I graduated and decided to teach English at Salem High School.

That was 1971.

H: How many years did you teach there?

O: Two years.

H: Were you married by then?

O: Yes. I was married the third year in college.

H: You taught what level English?

O: Sophomores and juniors.

H: You left because you were having a family?

O: Yes. I was pregnant my second year.

H: How did you come to be involved in community theater?

O: The first thing I did was go to a luncheon held at the Timberlands, which was derived mainly to get more people interested in the theater.

H: Was that while you were still teaching?

O: No, after I was home looking for something to do to occupy my time.

H: What year was that?

O: It must have been 1978.

H: Do you remember if the dinner was to promote a particular play?

O: It was a promotion of a play.

H: Do you remember the first play they did?

O: I'm not sure, but I think it was "Jesus Christ, Superstar".

H: Who invited you to go?

O: JoAnn Miles.

H: She was the speech teacher at the high school?

O: Correct.

H: What did you do at that first dinner?

O: I think they just showed an excerpt of the play and we had our meal. We were asked to sell tickets to promote the play.

- H: That was basically what the guild was for?
- O: At the beginning that's really all the guild did do was try to be some sort of a promotion for the theater to sell tickets.
- H: Were there any officers for the guild at that time?
- O: Not at that time. They were just trying to get people involved at that time.
- H: Did you sell tickets for that play?
- O: A few.
- H: As time went on did you just continue to attend luncheons or did you actually join the guild? Was there a membership fee?
- O: At that particular time there wasn't a membership fee, but what they did was ask the people to come and be an usher or hostess just primarily to make the people feel welcome when they came in the door.
- H: About how many people were in the guild?
- O: At one time, before they had actual officers, there were at least 100. After a couple of years it was weeded out; the people who were going to be interested in giving their time and those that just wanted to go to the luncheons.
- H: When did the guild first get more organized? Do you remember how long it took them to set up officers?
- O: Very shortly thereafter the first slate of officers was voted upon at a luncheon. I believe that was the first year that Nancy Fediaczko was president. Doris Knuckles was an officer and the Haverstat lady was also an officer. That was the first full year that they were organized and really worked as a support for the theater.
- H: Did they do anything other than usher and sell tickets and work the candy concessions?
- O: At that point, no.
- H: Where were the community theater productions being presented?
- O: At that time they were being presented at the high school.
- H: What kind of promotional act did the guild do?
- O: At that time the organizers of the guild saw the guild as a mouthpiece for getting friends and neighbors to come see the productions.

H: What kind of turnouts did they have in the early days of the community theater?

O: Initially the turnout was very great. In fact, the one production I can remember, "Jesus Christ, Superstar," there were many times it showed fifteen times. It was almost sold out every night.

H: Was there any particular thing that you remember about "Jesus Christ, Superstar?" Were you involved in the guild at the time?

O: Yes.

H: Do you remember the publicity that was part of it?

O: I remember the problems concerning the religious aspects. As a promotion technique they did invite the ministers for a pre-showing on a Thursday night before the production was to begin on a Friday night.

H: After the guild was organized what role did you play?

O: The first year they had officers I was just a member. At that particular time they had no dues. The primary function was to come to the luncheon, take your packet of ten tickets and sell them, turn in your money, and hopefully talk other people into going to see the plays. Also one of the other duties was to go and usher as well as sell concessions.

H: What was the price of admission at that time?

O: I think it was \$3. The second year of the officers, Nancy Fediaczko was president; Caroline Mallesy was vice-president; I was secretary and I believe Julieann Moss was treasurer. That may not be correct exactly. At that particular point then we started charging dues of \$3. This was simply to pay for the postage of sending a mailer to someone to let them know when the luncheons would be held.

H: How did you go about inviting new people to join the guild?

O: That was a problem when we were doing the luncheons at the golf club because people had to be invited; that was the big, traumatic event. After problems with having luncheons at the golf club we decided to have them at another place where we could have an open invitation for people to come. The problem with the golf club was that we couldn't announce it in the paper beforehand; we had to wait until after the luncheon. Then we could put publicity about it.

H: Did you get a better attendance once you were able to announce it in the newspaper?

- O: No. We found out that a lot of people came because it was at the golf club.
- H: With the guild itself then, officers developed and dues, were there other meetings besides the luncheons prior to a performance?
- O: The second year of officers, which was probably 1978, we didn't have regular meetings. We just had the meeting at the luncheons. The third year I was president and vice-president was Bob Ghoul; the secretary was Leslie Coe and the treasurer was Carol Grossman.
- H: By that time men had started to be involved in the guild?
- O: Yes.
- H: Do you know how Bob Ghoul happened to be interested in the theater?
- O: He moved to town and was starting up as an attorney and he wanted to be involved in community activities. I think Tim Smith really talked him into becoming involved in the guild to try to get more men involved.
- H: Because you were beginning to get men involved was there a need to modify the luncheons at all? Were many men able to attend those?
- O: No. We tried changing some of the luncheons to an evening affair occasionally to get families involved. We felt we would be more effective if we could get couples involved, where they could both come and help. It really didn't work out.
- H: As far as the membership of the guild at this time, did it tend to be either a certain age group or a certain social group, or was it a mix?
- O: I think at this time it was a mixture. When it first started out it was a certain social group. Then it started to change and we have a mixture now of young, old, men, women.
- H: By that time did the guild president have a seat on the board of trustees for the community theater?
- O: Yes. I believe it was the first year that we did have officers. Nancy Fediaczko had a seat on the board. The second year she still had a seat on the board. Then naturally when she was going to give up her presidency she was asked by the board to come and fill a permanent seat.
- H: But the vacancy for the position of president of the guild still got a seat on the board of directors?
- O: Right.

H: As president then you also served on the board of directors?

O: Right.

H: Did you have a voting membership just like the other members?

O: Yes.

H: Did you act to tell the board what the guild wanted and to tell the guild what the board wanted?

O: Right. When I was president they started something new to try to get more guild involvement on the board; they started to have different committees to which I appointed guild members.

H: Anything else that you can remember that changed while you were president for the first year?

O: This past year we sat down and made out a calendar of events, but prior to that we tried to meet regularly but it didn't turn out that way always. We would meet four or five times a year.

H: What kinds of extra duties did the guild take on as its membership became more organized?

O: We did very successfully handle the season ticket drive.

H: You were in charge of the entire procedure?

O: Right.

H: What all did that entail as far as season ticket sales?

O: We tried to start a program where initially we wanted ten people to be team captains and have ten people under them to sell so many tickets and call all of the people that were listed on the board of directors' mailer. We would mail a newsletter out to the people to tell them when the productions were coming up and what was going on in the theater. We tried to sell tickets in that particular way.

H: You contacted these people personally?

O: By phone. We gave team captains so many names to work on calling people. We only sold 300, but that was better than they had done in the past.

H: What was the price of the season ticket?

O: I think it was \$18 for adults, \$12 for children. They've gone up quite a bit and I think a lot of people have complained about it. This, too, may be the reason why the shows haven't been

attended as much as they were in the beginning.

H: Other than season ticket sales, what other things were . . .

O: We did have basic fund raisers such as the T-shirts. We sold T-shirts and made quite a bit, \$200 or \$300, on the T-shirt sales.

H: Were these T-shirts just the ones that say Salem Community Theater or the individual play T-shirts?

O: Originally, they were the individual play T-shirts and then we decided we were losing money that way. We would still buy them because the cast members wanted them, but other people weren't buying them and we felt we needed something to advertise and promote the theater. We went to using the logo for the Salem Community Theater onto a T-shirt. That way we didn't have to worry about having a certain group for one particular play; we could order those and have those on hand. We also sold buttons for \$1 with the logo. We had the sheltered workshop in Lisbon do those for us.

H: You were president for two years?

O: One.

H: Did you have any office after that?

O: No.

H: You're not an officer now?

O: No.

H: You're not as actively involved as you were then?

O: No.

H: Any particular reason?

O: Not really. I think someone else should take over. I'm helping with the season ticket drive, but I'm not a captain. When new people are officers they draw newer people in and you get a different group of people all the time, and a new set of ideas.

H: All the money that the guild raised then was turned directly over to the board of trustees for their use?

O: No. The guild's money was basically the guild's money. When the board of directors was trying to get money to purchase the theater, which is what all the money was about, the money was given to them for the renovation; but they needed money for the actual purchase of the theater. The guild did donate so much money for that. We decided to keep enough working cash so

that we could do things with it, but when we had extra money and the board would need something we would donate it to the board.

H: Did the guild play any part in the renovation of the building?

O: Yes, cleaning. Even whenever the different nights of the play go on someone from the guild goes and cleans.

H: Did they acquire the building while you were on the board?

O: Yes.

H: What was the general feeling about it? What were some of the reasons for making this large investment?

O: Basically, I think, because the board as a group felt that Salem needed something like this, something more cultural, a place where you could have many activities going on. In fact, at the time they wanted something bigger than what they have now.

H: Did they consider the purchase of any other building?

O: Yes, they did consider purchasing the old Grand Theater, but they had people come in and look at it but they said it was not sound.

H: Was there any opposition to acquiring the State Theater building within the board itself that you can remember?

O: I don't think so. Once the decision was made I think everyone decided to stick by it. Sometimes the going was rough.

H: The community foundation donated a large amount of money, but that cannot be used to pay for the building itself. It did pay for much of the renovation on the inside though.

O: Right.

H: Throughout your work with the guild what were some of the things that made you feel best? What did you think was successful that you did?

O: At the time we were thrilled if the luncheons were well-attended. The growth of the theater itself, especially now with the participation of the children, I think it's growing and becoming established in Salem. It's not just a few plays that are fly-by-night; you can count on something being well done.

H: Being the mother of three boys do you think your boys will ever be involved in the lively arts institute or in the children's theater?

O: Possibly.

H: Do you have any idea how many people take part in it?

O: I don't know, but I do know at one point the dance classes and everything, all the other classes were helping to carry some of the financial load of the theater. I think they said a year ago there were over 100 different children involved in the dance classes and so forth. I don't know if it's still that high. I think a lot of that is attributed to Cathy Verhoff's skills.

H: What do you think is going to happen to the guild in the future?

O: There was a problem last year; some of the people on the guild felt that they were having to do the "dirty" work, cleaning the theater and these kinds of things. Some of the board members made an attempt to change the entire makeup of the Salem Community Theater and have it be not a guild and a board, but one organization.

H: Did the guild members favor that?

O: I didn't want that at that particular time, but I understood what the particular board members that were trying to do this were trying to achieve. They were trying to become more unified. You have those problems in any organization, and I think the problems have really ironed themselves out.

H: Were you involved at all in the Madrigal Feast?

O: Yes.

H: What exactly was that?

O: We wanted to have the Madrigal Feast the year I was president, but everyone was so laid back they were afraid to try it. They wanted to start with something small. Actually, with the lack of participation that we had been having at the luncheons, I was a little bit concerned too. I knew if I took it on it would be an awful lot of work for myself. Cathy Verhoff had wanted it so badly and had said that she would help me, but we let it pass. Then when the new president came in, Vickie Williams, she was very excited about doing it. We had a meeting and were trying to decide one annual thing that we could do to raise money and the Madrigal Feast came up again. She said, "Let's do it and stop talking about it." We decided that night to do it. A decision was made and there were only a handful at the guild meeting. We talked to Cathy Verhoff and she said she would do the music for us. A year prior to this I had gone over to a luncheon with the Canton group that started the Madrigal Feast. They showed us everything; they showed us how they got started--all their props, pictures, financial reports of the first one all the way through to how much money they were making at the end.

I think the first year they made around \$1-something; the last year they had done it--they've been doing it for five or six years--they made \$34,000, but they had a lot more people to pull on. Even so it looked exciting to us because we were really in dire need of money.

H: Where was the Madrigal Feast held then?

O: Vickie Williams was president of the guild last year and both she and I acted as cochairmen for this event. It was our opinion that the only place we really had to choose was the Elks because of what was conducive for a Madrigal Feast.

H: Exactly what did the feast consist of as far as the menu was concerned?

O: Roast beef, plum pudding, and there was a vegetable--green beans--with some sort of dressing on it. There was also wassail, which is something like an apple cider.

H: Who prepared all the food and got things ready for you?

O: A man in town has done the affairs like this for his church in Alliance, so he was quite familiar with the menu and some of the techniques needed for this affair. Somehow we contacted him and he said he would do it for us, for, I believe, \$500.

H: Were the people that attended in costume, or just the people that were working?

O: The people that were working were in costume, the wenches, the ladies from the guild that served the tables. We also had the head table which had people dressed in costume for that time period. Basically the head table was selected by Cathy Verhoff.

H: How many people were able to attend this?

O: I do know that the guild made a profit of \$2200. There was a limit on tickets; we could only handle a certain number.

H: Are they going to do the feast again?

O: Yes. As far as I know they do have the Elks lined up. They would like to do it more than one night.

H: What price were the tickets per couple?

O: I think it was \$15 a person or \$10 a person. There was food and entertainment.

H: What did the entertainment consist of?

O: Basically everything was centered around bringing in Christmas.

- H: With the new director at the theater is the guild going to be as involved in his program for season ticket sales?
- O: I believe so. They are, at this point right now. With the new season ticket drive going on, he is having the guild and the board of directors work with him.
- H: Was there anything else that you can remember that you found particularly outstanding or disappointing?
- O: As with any office that you hold there comes a time when you think that you're the only one doing anything. It feels like you're there every day and every night to do all the little details.
- H: Are you going to be involved in the Madrigal Feast this coming year?
- O: I probably will be.
- H: Did you get to attend last year?
- O: I attended. I did not want to serve. This year I will attend one night and serve on the opposite night if they do have it two nights.
- H: Is there anything else that you would like to share with us?
- O: I can't think of anything.
- H: Thank you very much for your time.

END OF INTERVIEW