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NO. 10. THE CIVIC THEATER MOVEMENT IN KALAMAZOO AND THE
KALAMAZOO CIVIC AUDITORIUM

by

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CIVIC THEATER MOVEMENT IN KALAMAZOO
BACKGROUND TO THE ORGANIZATION OF THE KALAMAZOO CIVIC THEATER

The Kalamazoo Civic Players had its first faint glimmering of existence in the person of Mr. Howard Chenery, long-time director of 1 dramatics at Central High School. A few years after the completion of the Central High School Auditorium in 1922, Mr. Chenery organized a group of interested non-professionals known as the Kalamazoo Players. The purpose of this group was to present plays in the new auditorium with the idea of obtaining money to buy new equipment for the school stage. Thus, it was purely a civic group with the purpose of civic improvement and not monetary profit. Although the Board of Education had approved the plan, there was strong disapproval of the Board from the religious groups in the city, especially members of the Dutch Reformed Churches, for condoning the production of plays in a public institution for public consumption and attaching the term "theater" to the schools. In spite of the fact the Players were functioning under this pressure, they were extremely successful, averaging four to five thousand people at every performance. Thus, it was early proven that a community drama group was in demand in Kalamazoo and could be a financial success if put on the basis of performing for profit.

In 1925 Mr. Chenery became affiliated professionally with the William H. Wright Company, which was one of the biggest professional groups of road companies of this early period, and where he became closely associated with Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Kohl, and the Kalamazoo Players group 2 lapsed.

In 1928 came the final collapse of the legitimate theater

1 Mr. Chenery has been at Central High School from 1921 to 1927, and from 1929 to 1948.
2 This background information was obtained from a personal interview with Mr. Howard Chenery at his office in Central High School on Nov. 12, 1948.
with the advent of the talking picture. Thus, there was a practical need for local entertainment, because in 1927 "Tank Towns", or cities of less than 200,000 people, which included Kalamazoo, were dropped from the schedules of road companies from New York and Chicago because of increased costs. Thousands of actors were out of work and legitimate houses were forced to close. Mr. Chenery, wishing to stay in theater work, realized that he would have to prove his theory, which he had predicted eight years before in a published article, that the theater would have to return to a community institution if it wished to survive. Therefore, Chenery returned to his native city of Kalamazoo early in the spring of 1929.

The popular acting team of Arthur Kohl and Francis Hall (Mrs. Arthur Kohl) out of work as far as concerned the professional stage, returned to Kalamazoo in June of 1929 to visit friends. Mr. Chenery conceived the idea that due to the popularity of Kohl and Hall in Kalamazoo when they were here in a stock company three seasons previous, he would use them as a nucleus of a company supported by local talent to produce a series of six plays during the summer months. If these plays were successful, it would prove to the local citizenry that the non-professional theater was the answer to the entertainment shortage of the period and that it could be made to pay as a civic enterprise.

As Mr. Chenery had a long-respected professional association with the Kalamazoo Board of Education, the latter consented to the use of the Lincoln High School Auditorium in which to conduct his experiment. The Board of Education would also gain from this, for in return

1 Kalamazoo Gazette, July 13, 1927
2 Article published by Chenery in the Gazette about 1921.
3 Interview with Howard Chenery
4 Ibid.
for the use of the auditorium, Chenery had promised to improve the stage facilities there and to leave, for the future use of the school, a lot of the props and scenery which his group would construct. There was great enthusiasm on the part of the Kohls about the project for they and Chenery shared in a three-way split of the profits. Thus, this project had a nucleus of professionals supported by interested amateur talent, using a civic building and operating for the profit of Chenery and the Kohls. This was justifiable, for they were professional people who were devoting their full time and talent to the production of the plays and therefore should gain the profit. Mr. Chenery admitted that they were out to make money, and it was not a civic enterprise in any way except that they used local talent, which was so enthusiastic that it would work for nothing.

The first play was produced in the early part of July of 1929 and was greeted with great enthusiasm. The audiences were good, the town was enthusiastic, and some of the more prominent people of Kalamazoo became interested in the project. Chenery was convinced that the undertaking could succeed as a civic enterprise.

Mr. Chenery, being extremely busy with the direction and extensive details that a production demands, had not time to organize a civic drama group. However, the Kohls, knowing there was no employment for them in the professional theater, were so inclined and with other interested Kalamazoo people formed the Kalamazoo Civic Theater. Thus, at the end of the six week summer experiment, on September 22 Chenery was surprised to learn that a civic organization had been organized with Dr. Allan

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1 Ibid.
2 Kalamazoo Gazette, July 16, 1929.
3 Ibid., August 22, 1929
4 Interview with Howard Chenery.
Hoben, president of Kalamazoo College, as president of the group, Arthur and Francis Kohl employed as directors, and Mr. Norman Carver, a close friend of the Kohls, as business manager. The brain-child of Chenery's had proven a success, but not for him. As the organization had been formed with the obvious exclusion of him, Chenery wished to leave the impression that he had not intentionally been excluded after all his successful work in the Kalamazoo Players and the summer stock group, so he manufactured the excuse that "it is necessary to return to New York for a fall production and it would be impossible for me to participate in the future activities of the Kalamazoo Civic Players."  

ORGANIZATION OF THE KALAMAZOO CIVIC THEATER

The group, headed by Dr. Hoben and composed of other prominent civic leaders such as Otis Earl, Mrs. Dorothy Delano, Mr. Walter Taylor, and Miss Alice McDuffee, formed the nucleus for the formation of a non-profit corporation and proceeded to elect a Board of Directors and form the by-laws of the company. Dr. Hoben was elected President of the Board with Mr. Lorence Burdiok as First Vice-president, Mrs. Dorothy Delano (now Mrs. Howard Dalton) as Second Vice-president, Mr. Stanley Morris as Secretary, Mr. James Shackleton as Treasurer. Mrs. Lorence Burdiok, Mr. Otis Earl, Miss Alice Louise McDuffee, Mrs. Roswell Bogue, Mrs. Charles Dibble, Mrs. Ernest B. Harper, Dr. Dwight Waldo, Mr. Norman Carver, Mr. Leon Miller, and Mr. Walter Taylor completed the members of the original Board of Directors. Dr. Hoben,

1 Ibid.
2 Ibid.
3 Interview with Mr. Otis Earl.
4 Kalamazoo Gazette, October 16, 1929.
because of his geniality and intelligence, acted as a balance wheel of the Board and settled many of the difficulties which arose between various factions on it. Mr. Otis Earl and Mr. Walter Taylor, both prominent attorneys, worked out the original by-laws of the group. Mr. Taylor prepared the Articles of Incorporation, which had to meet certain State requirements and be filed with the State government in Lansing after being approved by the Board of Directors.

The Kalamazoo Civic Theater was organized under a joint-stock and membership plan as a non-profit corporation. The Michigan State law required that $1,000 in cash be put up as capital; shares were sold at $10.00 par value to those interested enough in the project to support it financially. The total capitalization at the time of incorporation was $35,000 and the majority of this had been subscribed by Mrs. Delano, Miss McDuffee and Mr. Otis Earl. The total capital stock was to be divided into thirty-five hundred non-assessable shares of $10.00 each. The original intention of the Board was to continue to sell stock and create a building fund, but after $2,000 worth of stock had been sold, the treasurer, Mr. James Shackleton, announced that a local financier was trying to buy up the stock and get control of the valuable property on the corner of Rose and Park Streets on which the Civic Theater had taken an option. Therefore, the sale of stock was discontinued. However, it had been the policy in recent

1 Interview with Mr. Otis Earl.
2 Ibid.
3 Kalamazoo Gazette, October 16, 1929.
4 Interview with Mr. Otis Earl.
5 Article I, Section I of the By-laws of the Corporation as amended and adopted from the original By-laws on May 28, 1935.
6 Interview with Norman Carver.
years to sell an occasional share of stock to someone particularly interested in the advancement of the group. One of the first official acts of the Board of Directors was to change the name from the Kalamazoo Civic Theater to the Kalamazoo Civic Players.

Thus, there was a stock and membership corporation formed and both of these elements are represented on the Board of Directors of the Kalamazoo Civic Players. Although there were sixteen members on the original Board, this was cut down to twelve. According to the By-laws of the corporation:

The Board of Directors shall consist of twelve members, four of whom shall be elected from the Stockholders of record at the Annual Stockholders' Meeting and four of whom shall be elected by the members of said Corporation at the Annual Membership Meeting, and four of whom shall be appointed by the elected Directors for a term of one year. The term of office of the elected Directors shall be two years, except that the first year this amendment is in effect two Directors from the Stockholders and two from the Members shall be elected for the term of two years, while the Directors of the retiring Board whose terms of office do not expire and for whom no other provision shall have been made shall be considered the appointed Directors for the ensuing year. 3

The jurisdiction of the Board covers all activities of the Civic Players and business affairs of the company. A quorum of the Board has the final word on all action concerning the Players. Little is known of the actual issues that have confronted the Board and how they have been settled, except by the immediate members of the Board, for while the minutes of the Board's meetings are in exis-

1 Ibid.
2 Record Book of the first 15 Seasons of the Civic Theater of the 1930-1931 Season Summary.
3 Taken from Article III, Section 2 of the By-laws.
tence they are not open to public examination. At one time in re-
cent years a plan for eliminating the stockholders was considered. 
The plan was rejected, however, for it was felt that in an organiza-
tion of this type, it is necessary to rely on a small nucleus who 
retain the ideas of the original purpose and also it is easier to 
1 decide issues in small groups.

Two of the important functions of the Board of Direc-
tors are to appoint a production director and to appoint a business 
2 manager. Both are ex-officio members of the Board. The business 
manager of the Civic Players since its beginning has been Mr. Norman 
Carver. Mr. Carver is employed by the Civic Players as business 
manager and by the Civic Auditorium Trustees Corporation to manage 
the building; these two groups jointly supply his salary. Mr. 
Carver has a broad enough background to handle both jobs success-
fully, for he has had professional stage experience, is a construc-
tion engineer, and has had extensive business experience. Seeing 
that Mr. Carver was one of the founder members of the Civic Players 
and the Civic Auditorium Trustees Corporation, he knows the original 
objectives of both groups and can keep them coordinated in meeting 
the problems of both units. It has been suggested that Carver has 
5 been guaranteed a life-time job by the Upjohn family, which forms 
the kernel of both enterprises, but there is no corroboration for 
this premise. However, there is a strong possibility of it, for while 
others have come and gone in rapid succession, Carver remains in spite 

1 Interview of Norman Carver.
2 Article III of the By-Laws.
3 Interview with Mrs. Howard Dalton.
4 Interview with Norman Carver and Mrs. Dalton.
5 Interview with Howard Chenery.
of any or all opposition, which means he must have strong backing on the Board, probably because of his numerous qualifications and lengthy association. Another one of the basic reasons for this strong backing is the increased membership and civic interest in the Civic Players during Carver's management. The Players do not operate to make a profit but just to make expenses and keep up improvements. Carver has accomplished this.

In a discussion of the production director we arrive at one of the weak spots of the Civic Players. According to the By-laws:

The Board of Directors shall have power to employ or appoint a Director or Manager of Production who shall be responsible only to the Board of Directors. Commencing with the fiscal year of 1935, no contract between the Corporation and a Production Director shall be renewed unless by affirmative vote of three-fourths of the Directors present and voting.

The director's salary is $4,000 for eight shows or nine months work. This is considered a good average salary for a community the size of Kalamazoo and considering that the Players is not a subsidized organization. If this is true, then why has there been such dissatisfaction and trouble with the directors of the Civic Players? One hypothetical answer to this question was that there was too much interference on the part of the business manager. This is a logical possibility, but not being able to interview personally the past directors, the writer will have to consider it as only a possibility.

In a discussion with the writer regarding the past dir-

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1 Interview with Mr. Norman Carver.
2 Article III, Section 15 of the By-laws.
3 Interview with Mr. Norman Carver.
4 Ibid. and interview with Mr. Howard Chenery.
5 Interview with Howard Chenery.
The actors of the Civic Players, Mr. Carver revealed some of the facts for the change of directors. The original directing team of Kohl and Hall stayed from 1929 to 1935, when personal disagreements, culminating in their divorce, ended their directorship of the Players. Mr. Paul Stephenson of the Grand Rapids Civic Players took over, hailed by Mr. Carver as one of the greatest directors of the country, but Stephenson apparently could not get along with people and had a great deal of trouble during his stay. In April of 1937 he retired because of "ill health." The English actor, Cyril Delevanti, took over the 1937 to 1938 season, but did not even last out the season. "He was a tired old man," so the Board of Directors paid the balance of his salary and the Players had guest directors for the rest of the season. Lester Lang only lasted a season, too, and left for Dallas, Texas where he had been offered more money. Another short-termer was Robert C. Schnitzer, in the 1939 to 1940 season. Sydney Spayde, former faculty member of several universities and colleges, actor, designer, musician, lasted the longest and remained director through the 1945 season, when he resigned to be replaced by Gerhardt Linde- mulder.

An often-voiced criticism of the Players has been that they lack direction. Great stress is laid on detail and effect in their productions and not enough on the actual performance. The actors are bogged down in atmosphere and the play is not allowed to come through. Even though the actors used in the Civic Players are

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1 Interview with Mr. Norman Carver.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Record Book, summary of 1940-1941 season.
5 Interview with Howard Chenery
6 Ibid.
non-professionals, a good director should be able to build talent beyond their capabilities. A widely recognized professional director of the drama, in evaluating the directors of the Civic Players, feels that this has not been done to any great extent. It is felt by many of the local citizens, both professional and non-professional, that with all the facilities available to the Civic Players, there is still a margin for improvement, especially in the area of direction.

Another important function of the Board of Directors is to appoint the Standing Committees, which form the working groups for Civic Players' productions. These Standing Committees are the Membership Committee, the Play Selection Committee, the Finance Committee, a Hospitality Committee, a Casting Committee, a Production Committee, a Publicity Committee, a Wardrobe Committee, and the Music Committee. The functions of these committees are self-explanatory.

The Civic Players, following their above-mentioned organization in the late summer of 1929, presented four plays in September to December of that year in the Lincoln High School Auditorium. The plays were well attended by the drama-hungry community. The Players now appealed for public backing in the form of memberships. In February, 1930, the first membership drive took place, when Secretary Morris called for the first sustaining members. In order to do this, the Board of Directors had to set up a policy regarding memberships. This was done under Article II of the By-laws.

1 Ibid.
2 Ibid.
3 Interviews with Mr. Otis Earl and Mr. Howard Chenery.
4 Article III, Section 12 of the By-laws.
5 Kalamazoo Gazette, November 14, 1929.
6 Record Book Summary of the 1929 to 1930 Season.
The price of the membership had to be in keeping with the policy of being suitable for all classes, for this was a community project and all strata of society in the community had to be considered. The policy of setting the price so that "everyone could afford to go to the Civic" was adhered to. To further promote this policy the Junior Chamber of Commerce sponsored an added performance on Tuesday nights of each show, with a low price scale to tap new audience levels. This started in the 1941 season.

The Civic Players, as a group, has always placed strong emphasis on membership drives. These became an annual affair every fall. Teams were formed which worked in competition. These teams worked through the colleges (Kalamazoo, Western Michigan and Nazareth), the public schools, and local civic organizations, in addition to the local citizenry, during the campaign. This method was so successful that at the time of the opening of the Civic Auditorium in 1931 the Players had 1,147 affiliated members. During the pre-war years, the Players did their campaigning through personal contact by the various team members, but during the war, the wartime restrictions of no gasoline and lack of telephone service were capitalized on, and a new membership campaign policy was adopted. Each old member was sent a letter and a card which automatically renewed the membership when it was filled out and returned. There was also included a card for any new members that the old member might solicit.

1 Interview with Mr. Norman Carver.
2 Record Book Summary of the 1941 to 1942 Season.
3 Interview with Mr. Norman Carver.
4 Kalamazoo Gazette, October 13, 1931.
This method was a boon to the busy businessman. The results of this new method were astoundingly good and it has continued up to the present day, when membership figures reached close to the 4,000 mark in 1948. According to Mr. Norman Carver, Business Manager of the Players, the organization has never been subsidized, but has worked on a pay-as-you-go basis. Therefore, memberships were the lifeblood of the organization.

There were several types of memberships which were set up by the By-laws. Under the non-stockholding memberships were three classes. The Annual Members paid an annual fee of $1.00. The second type are the Subscription Members, who pay an annual fee of $1.00 and purchase one course ticket or more. The course tickets are of two types: the Class A type, which costs $7.00 for a single and $13.00 for a double per year, and is good anywhere in the auditorium on any night. The Class B type, which costs $5.00 for a single and $9.00 for a double, has a seat restriction. The third class of non-stockholding membership is the Sustaining Membership, for those who make an annual contribution of $25.00 or more depending on their interest in the Players. The Board of Directors has the power to increase or decrease the annual fees, provided the minimum is $1.00 for the Annual and Subscription members and 25.00 for the Sustaining members.

Late in 1929 the Civic Players had taken an option on the property at 347 W. South Street, on the site of the present Civic Auditorium. They were using the twelve room house, which was on the property at 347 W. South Street, on the site of the present Civic Auditorium. They were using the twelve room house, which was on the site of the present Civic Auditorium.

1 Interview with Mr. Norman Carver.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Taken from Article II, Section 1 of the By-laws.
5 Interview with Mrs. Howard Dalton.
property, as headquarters after February, 1930. The house had been
remodeled into rehearsal quarters, offices, clubrooms and residence
quarters for Mr. and Mrs. Norman Carver. The play productions of the
group continued to be presented in the Central High School Auditorium,
whither the group had moved its productions in January of 1930 in
order to accommodate the crowds.

PURPOSE OF THE KALAMAZOO CIVIC PLAYERS

In regard to the purpose of the Kalamazoo Civic Players, in
the mutual stock subscription agreement adopted by the Board of
Directors, it is stated that the objectives of the Players will be:

To promote and stimulate an intent
in the spoken drama by the presentation of
worthy plays and such other activities as will
further that end; to promote and stimulate
wholesome entertainment in the community; to
promote and stimulate dramatic study; to pro-
mote and stimulate participation of non-pro-
fessionals in dramatic arts, and to aid gen-
erally in the cultural development of the com-

Dr. Allan Hoben said, in regard to the purpose of the Players:

The one thing the Players want to do
for Kalamazoo is to guarantee to the community
the survival of the legitimate drama which has
gradually appeared to become limited to met-
ropolitan areas.²

ACTIVITIES OF THE KALAMAZOO CIVIC PLAYERS

The Kalamazoo Civic Players put on eight monthly pro-
ductions a season, starting in October and ending in May. The
Standing Committees mentioned above form the working groups for each
production. The major step to be accomplished when starting a month-

1 Interview with Mr. Norman Carver.
2 Kalamazoo Gazette, October 13, 1929.
3 Ibid., October 13, 1931.
ly production is to select a play.

The Play Selection Committee consists of not less than three members and the director is allowed one vote. This is a self-perpetuating group which attempts to have the community, ministry and local colleges represented. For several years Dean Hinckley of Kalamazoo College was the college representative on the Play Selection Committee, but when he left Kalamazoo and the Players no one from the colleges was appointed to replace him.

The one hundred and eighty-five plays which the Players have produced during their nineteen-year existence run the gamut from tragedy to comedy and include most of the famous modern plays by such playwrights as Maxwell Anderson, Noel Coward and Eugene O'Neill, and many of the classics by Shakespeare or Ibsen. The Play Selection Committee selects a play and the Board of Directors has to approve it unanimously. The Players cannot present a play that is running in New York or Chicago or is on tour. Consequently, they have to wait several years before presenting a play that has been a hit on Broadway. Many times a hit play will not be released until the movie rights are sold. The Players pay a royalty on all the plays they produce except the classics (such as Shakespeare or Ibsen). The plays are generally secured from the agents of the playwrights, who usually buy the plays from the authors and give the author a royalty fee whenever they rent a play out for production to such groups as the Kalamazoo Civic Players.

1 Article III, Section 12 and 15 of the By-Laws.
2 Interview with Mr. Norman Carver.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
Generally, the community as a whole has approved the plays which the Civic Players have produced. On one occasion there was dissension in regard to the presentation of "Family Portrait," which was a biblical play produced in March of 1940. The play had already been approved and production started when the local Catholic Church raised a strenuous objection to it. By that time it was too late to change the schedule. The controversy continued in the schools and the Gazette. The Catholic men's groups picketed the Civic Auditorium and guns were shot off in back of the theater as a warning. However, the play went off as scheduled and was a great success. Many people came to see what the controversy was all about, so actually it was excellent publicity for the play. At various times there has been some opposition from the Board of Education, especially under its president, Otis A. Earl, who tried to prevent the Civic from putting on plays the community would object to, such as those containing immoral situations or extensive use of profanity. As many of the hit plays were in this category and people wanted to see them, the opposition did not get very far, as can be surmised by observing the plays that were produced and the audience records of same.

The next step is the casting of the play selected. The try-out and elimination procedure is used and is seemingly effective. However, one of the major points of criticism of the Civic Players is that there always seems to be a small group which is the

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1 Ibid.
2 Interview with Mr. Otis A. Earl.
3 Graphic Summary Record Book, published by the Civic Players in May of 1944.
4 Interview with Mr. Norman Carver.
nucleus and monopolizes the roles. For instance, Larkin Noble, Mrs. Louise Cerver, or Mrs. Lorence Burdick have been frequent performers. Perhaps this is a justifiable criticism, but in a civic drama group certain members will undoubtedly stand out in talent and ability and consequently are used repeatedly. However, there is some justification in the argument, for certain people, who are influential in the Players as an organization, are repeatedly given important roles. Then, too, the audience gets tired of the same old faces. The Casting Committee has seemingly made it a practice to include talented drama students from the local colleges when casting a play. In many cases these students are talented enough to obtain starring roles.

In regard to the properties necessary for their productions, the Civic Players have the use of the adequate facilities of the Civic Auditorium to construct many of their own. Over the period of the last nineteen years of the Players' existence, a lot of properties and wardrobes have been accumulated from previous productions or have been contributed by people in the community. The Players build their own scenery. Many of the props used in a production, such as furnishings or clothing, are readily loaned to the Civic by the local stores. If certain props are needed for a particular play, many times these can be obtained by borrowing from other community theater groups nearby. Thus, by these various means, it can be concluded that the Players have always had an

1 Interview with Mr. Otis A. Earl.
2 Quotation from an interview with Mr. Otis A. Earl.
3 Interview with Mr. Norman Carver.
4 Ibid.
The Children's Civic Theater has become an important byproduct of the Kalamazoo Civic Players. For the origin of the Children's Civic Theater we have to go back to before the formation of the Civic Players. During the early years that he was head of dramatics at Central High School, Howard Chenery put on a series of children's plays in the auditorium at Central. The plays were not performed by children, however, but by adults for children. Later, after the Civic Theater was organized, Francis Hall took up the project of a civic children's theater, but a great deal of opposition arose. Primarily, there was a lot of jealousy between the city schools and the Civic Theater's attempts for a children's theater. There was also a lot of opposition from the Dutch Reformed groups in the city, but generally speaking they have opposed many of the activities of the Civic Players.

Finally, in October of 1942, a Kalamazoo Children's Civic Theater was formulated as a joint project of the Civic Theater and the Kalamazoo Board of Education, with the Board of Education providing guidance and direction as its contribution, and the Civic Theater providing sound production as its contribution. The final agreement reached was that the Board of Education would

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1 Interview with Mr. Howard Chenery.
2 Interview with Mr. Norman Carver.
3 Interview with Mrs. Howard Dalton and Mr. Norman Carver.
4 Preamble to the Constitution of the Children's Civic Theater.
pay the salary of the director of the Children's Civic Theater, but he would have to spend half his time in the city schools supervising dramatic training. The Civic Players furnished the use of the Civic Auditorium, paying the rental on same, the rehearsal time and their staff which constructs sets and supervises the lighting and general stage production. The supervising Board of Directors for the Children's Civic Theater has a chairman representing both the Board of Education and the Civic Players. There are three representatives from the Civic Players and three representatives from the Board of Education.

In play selection and casting the joint project aspect continues. The plays have to be approved by both the Board of Education and the Civic Players. In general the most popular types of play are the fantasy and fairy tales. Four three-act plays are produced throughout the year, in October, December, February and April. One show on tour is presented in the city schools during the year. Performances are scheduled during the children's holidays when ever possible. The basic requirement for all plays selected is that they must have distinction and worth.

There are definite criteria set up in regard to the casting of the plays. Later Elementary and Junior High School children shall predominate. Every child from city parochial schools and Western Training School is eligible to participate. A general try-out and elimination procedure is used in the casting of the

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1 Constitution of the Children's Civic Theater, Article IV, Section A.
2 Interview with Mr. Norman Carver.
3 Constitution, Article V, Section A.
4 Constitution, Article V, Section B, Sub-section 1, part k.
children's plays. When a play has been decided upon, a description of the type of casting needed is sent out to the schools. Every child interested has to meet certain scholastic and talent requirements. The parents of the children have to give their written permission. The rehearsals cover a six to eight week period, which means the children which are cast in the plays have to be good students in order to keep up their school work and the extra work of being in the play.

The general objectives of the Children's Civic Theater are:

To contribute to the aesthetic development of the community by educating parents in the type of entertainment children should have, by developing a discriminate and educated taste in drama among children, by providing a more elaborate and perfected drama than is available in the schools. Another general objective is to contribute to the development of children by providing a use of leisure time, providing a means of worthwhile use of spending money, by supplementing dramatics taught in the schools.2

The specific objectives of the players in the Children's Civic Theater are:

To provide an extra-curricular activity for children who have a special interest and ability in dramatics to make use of leisure time and otherwise unused energy, to give the children experience in a civic project, and to help them grow in dramatic attainments.3

The Children's Civic Theater also has a specific purpose for its youthful audience. It is:

1 Constitution, Article V, Section E, Sub-section 1, part a.
2 Constitution, Article I, Section A & B, Subsections 2,3,4.
3 Constitution, Article II, Sections A,C,D.
To provide them with a regular and frequent association with drama, to give them training in theater procedure and theater etiquette, to stir them emotionally and intellectually, and to help them grow in the ability to view drama critically.¹

**CIVIC PLAYERS GUILD, WORKSHOP THEATER, RADIO GUILD**

Another one of the activities of the Civic Players was the Civic Players Guild, organized in 1934 to foster playwriting in the Players and ultimately in the community. It was never particularly active and was subsequently abandoned.

A more active project was the Workshop Theater, which grew out of the desire of the Players for improvement within their group. This activity was started during the depression (1933), when people had a lot of extra time and were looking for something constructive to do, and was an outgrowth of the one-act plays presented on members' nights for the sheer enjoyment and entertainment of the Players themselves. Besides providing entertainment without charge it would also be an excellent training ground for prospective actors in the Players. The plays that the Workshop Theater produced were put on in the small auditorium on the second floor of the Civic Auditorium. The group heard lectures by specialists in the various fields of the drama and saw other entertainment programs with the purpose of ultimately improving the Players by obtaining perspective as to what was being done in other areas. The project has lapsed in recent years, however, partially because

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¹ Constitution, Article III, Sections A, B, C, E, F,
² Record Book of the Civic Players First Fifteen Seasons. Summary of the 1933-1934 Season.
³ Interview with Mr. Norman Carver.
⁴ Kalamazoo Gazette, October 14, 1934.
of the war but primarily because the Players do not have the staff to continue the Workshop Theater to any extent.

In 1932 the Players started a program known as the Civio Players Radio Guild, at 2:30 each Sunday afternoon on WZEO. The Players put on short radio dramas and also gave their regular productions advertising.

During the war the Civio Players did their part by attempting to keep up the morale on the home front. Plays which would produce an escape and relaxation, such as "Claudia," "My Sister Eileen," and "Junior Miss" were produced to capacity audiences. Extensive U.S.O. memberships were issued. At every performance the best seats in the house were reserved for a group of the ambulant cases from Percy Jones Hospital. Small units of the Players put on shows at Fort Custer and Percy Jones for those who could not get to the actual performances. It can readily be conceded that the Civio Players did their bit in the war effort by building morale even though it was partially on a monetary basis.

One of the lesser activities of the Players was the road tour which they took during March of every year. They toured a series of from three to five towns in Southern Michigan, such as Niles, Battle Creek, Hastings and Saginaw. The primary purpose of this tour was to supplement the funds of the Players. These visits have generally been a great success, both financially and from the point of view of audience appreciation.

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1 Interview with Mr. Norman Carver.
2 Record Book, 1931-1932 Season Summary.
3 Interview with Mr. Norman Carver.
4 Personal Observation of the writer during the 1944-45 Season.
5 Interview with Mr. Norman Carver.
During the comparatively short period of their existence, the Kalamazoo Civic Players have earned a very reputable place for themselves among community theaters in the United States. On their 10th anniversary the Players were listed third among community theaters in the United States by the editors of Stage Magazine. Howard Chenery, who returned to Central High School in 1931, feels that "The Kalamazoo Civic Players have achieved a very strong place in Civic Theaters throughout the country." Mrs. Edith R. Isaacs, editor of Theater Arts Magazine, said: "The Kalamazoo Civic Theater is one of the new links in the chain which really make the American theater. It is one of the foremost non-professional theatrical organizations." The Players have also received the Spaul award twice, once in 1937 and again in 1941. This award is presented by the Michigan Association of Non-professional Theaters to the community theater which has the best program of plays throughout the season. With the constantly increasing growth of the Civio Players it is feared that facilities of the auditorium will become inadequate.

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1 Kalamazoo Gazette, October 13, 1938.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., April 26, 1941.
4 Record Book, summary of 1940-1941 season.
5 Interview with Mrs. Howard Dalton.
KALAMAZOO CIVIC AUDITORIUM
BACKGROUND TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE KALAMAZOO CIVIC THEATER

Shortly after the Civic Players had taken on option on the property on the corner of Park and South Streets, Dr. William E. Upjohn became interested in the Players' group and more specifically in the erection of a much-needed Civic Auditorium. Upon its completion this was to become the recognized home of the Civic Players although they do not own any part of it. While Dr. Upjohn felt there was a definite civic need for such a structure, he also had several reasons, including a personal one, for sponsoring such a project. His daughter, Mrs. Dorothy Upjohn Delano (now Mrs. Howard Dalton) had been having marital difficulties and had taken such an interest in the Players group and the proposed building of a Civic Auditorium, that Dr. Upjohn went ahead and sponsored it because he was interested in this civic enterprise and he hoped to foster the interest of his daughter so he let the Board of Directors of the Civic Players, led by Mrs. Delano, persuade him to take up the Civic Auditorium project. The group pointed out to Dr. Upjohn that the community would get more benefit from the auditorium for it would benefit more people in the community and more civic organizations than a planetarium, which Dr. Upjohn had been interested in erecting. Essentially, Dr. Upjohn was always interested in bettering the community and this was also a primary factor in his backing the project. He wanted primarily to better and beautify the city, and as the Bronson Park area had not as yet been zoned, Dr. Upjohn was afraid that some commercial interest might buy up the one re-

1 Interview with Mrs. Howard Dalton.
2 Ibid.
remaining lot on the corner of Park and South Streets. The local civic leaders planned to keep the quadrangle of Bronson Park a center of religious, cultural and educational facilities.

Another reason was tied up with the conditions which the depressions had brought on. Because of the depression, Dr. Upjohn felt that industry should sponsor events and community activities to put extra leisure time of the worker to good use and to help destroy the pervading gloom of the unemployed worker. The Watchword of the project was coined by Dr. Upjohn; "A happy, worthy use of leisure," and he dedicated the building to the "happy use of leisure, to adult education, to our cultural life and to the widest civic use." There is no record of any dissention either by religious or other community groups to the erection of the auditorium on Bronson Park square.

Therefore in 1931, the Players turned over their option to Dr. Upjohn, who went ahead with plans for the auditorium. The Players moved to headquarters at the Ladies' Library and construction was begun on the building. However, there is no binding tie between the Civic Auditorium and the Civic Players. Dr. Upjohn, as already noted, did not construct the Civic Auditorium for the exclusive use of the Civic Players, but for all community organizations or groups who wished to use its facilities for non-commercial purposes. The Civic Players pay a rental for the use of the auditorium just like other community groups. The amount the Players have

1 Kalamazoo Gazette, October 13, 1931.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
to pay if $1,500 per year plus $40.00 for each dress rehearsal and $65.00 for each performance of a play. Besides the uses that the main Lounge and the Green Room can be put for private parties, wedding receptions, and civic meetings, the facilities of the Civic Auditorium is used by many civic organizations as a meeting place and headquarters. The "I Am" Society, the 20th Century Club, the Izaak Walton League, the United Commercial Travelers, American Association of University Women, the Women's Committee of the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra all use the auditorium facilities for meetings and activities. The Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra also 

CONSTRUCTION

Thus, in the depths of the depression during the early 1930's, Dr. William E. Upjohn provided the entire funds, amounting to approximately $300,000, for the construction of a Civic Auditorium and he gave the building outright to the community. According to an estimate given by Mr. Norman Carver, assistant treasurer of the Civic Auditorium Trustees Corporation, the building could not be duplicated today for $1,000,000.

Dr. Upjohn hired Mr. Aymar Embury III, a leading architect from New York, to draw up plans for the building. Mr. Embury and his engineers made a thorough study of other little theaters throughout the country and drew up three plans before Dr. Upjohn and his committee approved them. In conjunction with Embury, Dr. Upjohn, Mrs. Delano, Mr. and Mrs. Norman Carver and Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Kohl made a tour of the country to see first hand what had been

1 Interview with Mr. Norman Carver.
2 Kalamazoo Gazette, October 13, 1931.
3 Interview with Mr. Norman Carver.
done in architectural design in other areas. This executive committee wanted to keep the design conservative in order to attract all social classes of Kalamazoo society. Even so, the design must have been very modern for its day as the building can still be considered quite modernistic in design nineteen years later. Another problem which arose in the design was to keep the building in harmony with the other structures on the Bronson Park Square with the purpose of further beautifying this center of Kalamazoo civic life. As Mr. Embury had designed and built the Congregational Church, also on the Square, he was very familiar with the requirements.

Mr. Embury, in a speech at the dedication of the Auditorium on October 12, 1931, said in regard to the purpose of the structure's design; "The exterior of the structure was determined by its purpose, combined with a conformity to the other beautiful buildings on the Square. The structure must, after all, look like a theater, though not a theater of the ordinary kind because of its comprehensive use for the community." Mr. Embury carried out the main requirement of community theater structure in regard to size. Little theater work needs the intimate quality of a small auditorium, especially for sound and lighting effects. Embury apparently did not follow any particular pattern in the interior design, but merely arranged it to fit best the requirements of the various uses and purposes.

OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE KALAMAZOO CIVIC AUDITORIUM

1 Interview with Mrs. Howard Dalton.
2 Kalamazoo Gazette, October 13, 1931.
3 Interview with Mr. Norman Carver.
The formal opening of the Civic Auditorium at 2:30 P.M. on October 12, 1931 was a gala affair. There were autumn flowers everywhere and a small orchestra furnished music for the steady stream of curious persons inspecting the new building from 4:00 to 6:00. From 8:00 to 8:30 the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra gave a short recital. At 8:30 the program of speakers began with Dr. Allan Hoben. In succession many prominent civic leaders spoke. These were Aymar Embury III, Dr. Caroline Bartlett Crane, Mr. Harry Parker, Vice-president of the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra, Miss Blanche Hull, president of the Kalamazoo Institute of art, Miss Flora Roberts, City Librarian, Mr. Ellis H. Drake, Superintendent of schools, and Dr. W. R. Brown, of Western State Teachers College. Thus, the speakers represented nearly all phases of Kalamazoo civic life, which carried out the purpose of Dr. Upjohn that the auditorium would be for the use of all in the community. To conclude the program there was dancing on the stage from 9:30 to 11:30.

To show the appreciation of the people of Kalamazoo for such a worthy contribution, the City Commission placed in the main floor foyer a bronze plaque heavily plated with silver and designed by Mr. Embury. The inscription was as follows:

The Citizens of Kalamazoo have caused this tablet to be placed here as an enduring expression of their affection and gratitude for Dr. William E. Upjohn, whose wise vision perceived the value of this building to the community, through whose generosity it was erected --- Not the least of his gifts in a lifetime devoted to the service of his city.

1 Program for the opening of the Auditorium, October 12, 1931.
2 Kalamazoo Gazette, October 13, 1931.
The facilities of the auditorium consist of a seating capacity of 537 and an "intimate atmosphere for play productions, concerts, and lecture." The size of the auditorium facilitates good hearing and vision from any vantage point. The lounge, to the right of the auditorium, is for social mingling during the intermissions of the plays, but is also available for teas, receptions and other small group gatherings. The rental on the lounge has recently been increased from $15.00 to $25.00. Unique in the use of the lounge is the fact that a particularly friendly note is obtained by the serving of coffee during the intermissions. Also there is always an exhibit of the various works of art contributed by the Kalamazoo Art Institute for the cultural improvement and appreciation of the patrons. The stage of the auditorium is 80' x 30' and is equipped with the latest devices for lighting and manipulation of scenery. An issue concerning the manipulation of scenery arose during the preliminary designing of the building. Mr. Embury felt that the erection of a loft, which is a necessary device for quick and easy manipulation of sets, would spoil the design of the building. However, the committee insisted and the loft was included.

The size of the stage is considered adequate for the types of plays presented. Of course, facilities are a big factor in the original selection of the plays. Backstage are the carpenter shop, the sewing room, and two offices.

On the second floor are a large balcony foyer and a

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1 Program of the opening of the auditorium, October 12, 1931.
2 Interview with Mr. Norman Carver.
3 Interview with Mrs. Howard Dalton.
small auditorium which will seat one hundred and fifty people. This auditorium has a stage and a small library for the exclusive use of the Civic Players, who use it for rehearsing or putting on small productions.

The basement contains the men's coat room and the ladies' dressing room. There is also the Green Room and a kitchen which has complete facilities for luncheons, dinners and dances for one hundred and fifty people. Like the main floor lounge, the Green Room is rented out to private parties. Also in the basement is the Musicians' room, which is to be used by the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra and contains a music library and dressing facilities. Under the entire auditorium in a sub-basement are a trap room, a property room, three costume wardrobes and a storage room.

ORGANIZATION

Upon completion of the building, Dr. Upjohn retired from active interest in the Civic Auditorium because of poor health. He died in 1933, but he left behind him a well-organized, self-perpetuating Board of Trustees for the Civic Auditorium Trustees Corporation. The Board was composed of Mrs. Dorothy Delano Dalton as chairman, Mr. Lew M. Crockett, First Vice-chairman, Mrs. Harold Upjohn as Second Vice-chairman, Mr. Walter L. Otis as Treasurer, Mrs. Donald Gilmore as Secretary and Mr. Norman Carver as an ex-officio member and assistant treasurer. Actually, Dr. Upjohn left the operation of the building in the hands of the Upjohn family, for three of the Board

1 Directory of rooms in the program of the opening of the auditorium.
2 Ibid.
3 Interview with Mrs. Howard Dalton.
4 Ibid.
members; Mrs. Dalton, Mrs. Harold Upjohn and Mrs. Donald Gilmore, were his daughters. Apparently, there has been very little dis-
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densation in the group. The actual building operation is in the hands of Norman Carver. The primary function of the Board is to see that the building is kept up properly, that there are enough funds for that upkeep, and that the purposes for which the building was constructed are adhered to. In keeping with this, the building is entirely redecorated every six or seven years, but replacements and redecoration of some kind have to be made every year, involving considerable expense. In consideration of the financial angle, Dr. Upjohn hoped that the building would be self-supporting from the rentals that it obtained. The rentals were set at such a nominal fee, in keeping with a civic project such as this, and the costs of materials so increased in the latter years, that additional funds had to be secured. In Kalamazoo there is a community fund known as the Kalamazoo Foundation. Each year the residue from the William E. Upjohn estate goes into this, which in turn occasionally reimburses the auditorium when it is in need of money. Within a few years the Upjohn estate will be settled finally, as required by law, and then the Foundation will no longer receive a yearly income from the Upjohn estate and the Trustees of the Auditorium will have to resort to other means of support. Thus far, they have not had to turn to private subscription, but they may have to eventually. Another interesting feature of the

\[\text{Ibid.} \text{ (Here, again, the minutes of the Board meetings are in existence but are not available for public inspection.)}\]

\[\text{Ibid.}\]

\[\text{Interview with Mr. Norman Carver.}\]

\[\text{Interview with Mrs. Howard Dalton.}\]

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
the organization is that Dr. Upjohn stated in setting up the Board of Trustees that if the board plan did not work out satisfactorily that the building was to go to the Board of Education for whatever purposes they so desired.

Although both the Civic Players and the Civic Auditorium are community organizations, there is no municipal control of either group.

1 Ibid.
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3. Copy of the By-laws of the Kalamazoo Civic Players as adopted and amended by the Board of Directors on May 28, 1935.

4. Copy of the Constitution of the Kalamazoo Children's Theater as adopted by the Kalamazoo Board of Education and the Board of Directors of the Kalamazoo Children's Theater on October of 1942.

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