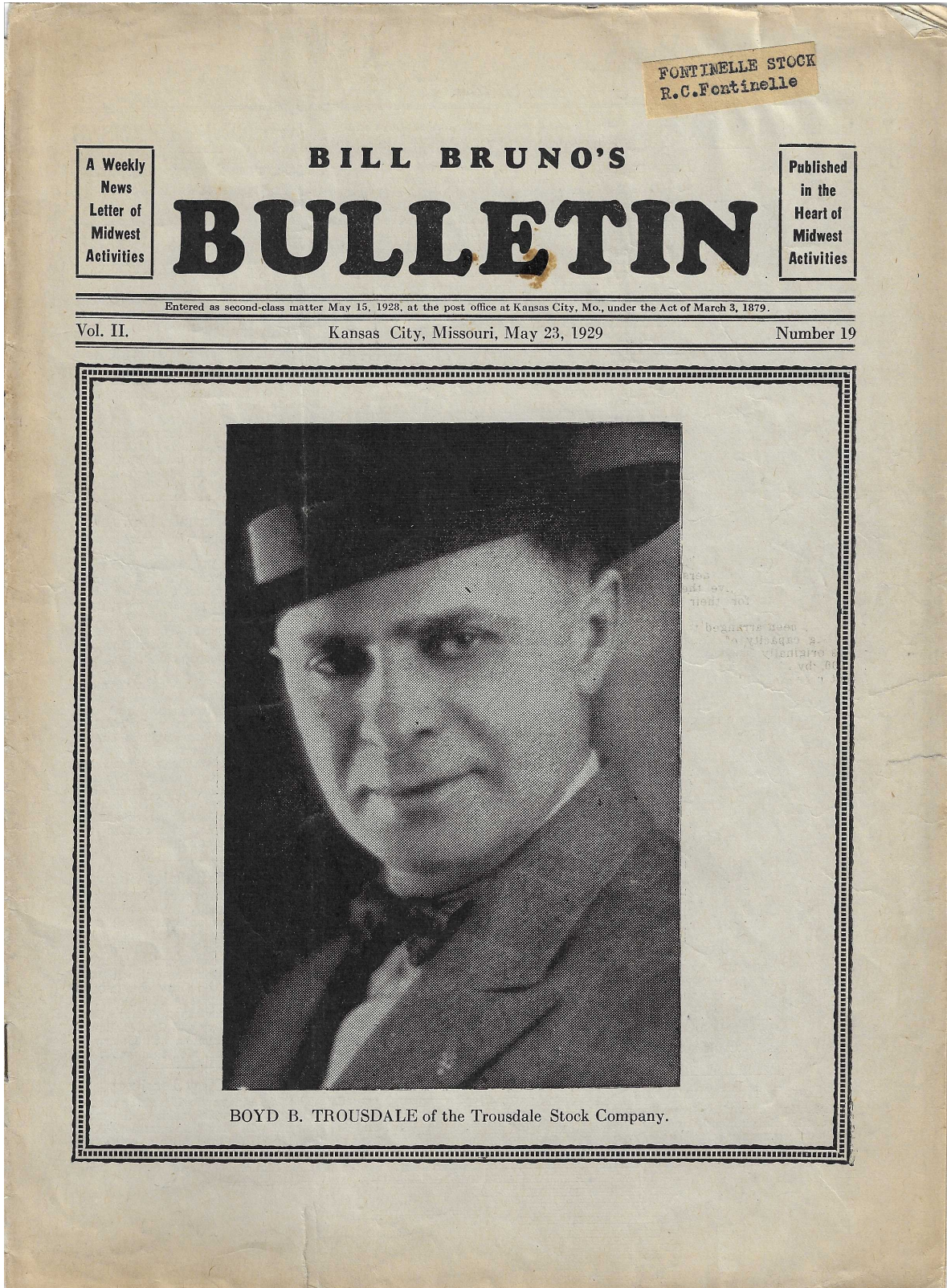


Winging It

The Newsletter of the National Society for the Preservation of Tent, Folk and Repertoire Theatre

Volume 32, Issue 23

Fall 2025



**The National Society
for the
Preservation of Tent,
Folk
& Repertoire
Theatre**

The Theatre Museum

Officers:

President
Mark Peper

First Vice President
Mrs. James V. Davis

Second Vice President
David Wagaman

Treasurer
Mrs. James V. Davis

Secretary
Bob Mueller

Museum Hours:
Memorial Day
to Labor Day :
Thursday,
Friday, & Saturday
10:00-4:00

Fall to Spring
Open by
appointment

**Winging It
Editor:**
Grace Swank-Davis

Contributors:
Grace Swank-Davis
Mark Peper
David Wagaman

Contact us at:
E-mail:
theatremuseum@yahoo.com

Telephone:
319-385-9432

Website:
theatremuseum.com

405 E. Thresher Road
Mount Pleasant, IA
52641



President's Letter

Hello Troupers and Society Members,

What an amazing time we had during the Midwest Old Threshers Reunion.

It amazes me the number of people who have been to the Old Threshers grounds for years but never made the trek over to the South side to see us. The displays were well-received, and we addressed numerous inquiries regarding our theatre history.

I want to thank Grace Davis, David Wagaman, Bob Mueller, Chris Fuchs, and Claudia Streeter for hanging out in the box office/museum to welcome all our guests. Two years ago, we decided the evening performances in the Museum Theatre downstairs were just not what we needed to promote the museum.

This year, we tried something a little different. We did a 45-minute performance that included singing, vaudeville acts, jokes, and a performance of the hilarious Hillbilly Hitchin'.

I want to thank David Forrester, Brian Iles, Ashley Hobbs, Monie Hayes, Dean Beckman, Wanda Jennings, Scott Jennings, Becky Morey, and Chris Fuchs for making this production such a success. Thanks to Grace Davis for getting the candy sales boxes together for us.

Special thanks to board member DP Wilson for feeding the cast both days. It sure made it easier not to find food between shows. The Society raised money through Candy Sales and a Freewill Donation. The total raised was over \$1,800.

I am already working on next year's expanded performance. If you are a former trouper and want to make a trek to Mt Pleasant during Old Threshers, let me know. You never know where/when/how you might end up on stage.....LOL.

I believe one of the best things that happened during the performance was the addition of 16 new Society Members. I was the host of the performance and asked the audience to join the Society along with their Freewill Donation. If you are one of those that joined during our performance and this is your first newsletter, I thank you sincerely.

For 45 years, I've been part of the Society, and it warms my heart that we all came together once again for a successful presentation both upstairs and downstairs to represent a part of our lives that we have such great memories.



Spotlight on The Lew Henderson Players

Lew Henderson (1891–1966) began his show business career in 1908 as a vaudeville performer, showcasing acrobatics, juggling, and balancing acts in movie theaters, small shows, and as a free act at fairs. In 1914 he married Alice Foreman (1895–1991), and just two years later the couple launched their own tent medicine show.

By 1926, the Hendersons transitioned into repertory tent theatre, first under the name *The Ideal Players* and later as *The Lew Henderson Players*. Their troupe toured until 1938, presenting plays across northern Iowa during the tent season and in Minnesota opera houses during the winter. The Hendersons took pride in offering audiences the latest productions, often fresh from Broadway—including a 1929 staging of the acclaimed hit *Rain*.

The company featured professional Actor's Equity actors plus musicians and the canvas men who put up the tent, in addition to the Henderson family. Lew and Alice raised eight children on the show, Edna, Anna Marie, Ruth, Peggy, Billie, Lew Jr., Alice & Richard. All of whom grew up in the business, performing as singers, dancers, and doing novelty acts.

When their repertory years ended in 1938, Lew created a juggling and hand-balancing act with daughters Ruthie and Peggy. After Ruthie's marriage, she was replaced by her sister Billie. When Peggy and Billie also married and left the act, Lew and Alice briefly left the road, running a beachside concession stand in Galveston, Texas.

But road called them back. In 1951, Lew purchased a chimpanzee, trained him to juggle and perform on the trapeze, (Billie always said she was replaced a chimp!) and returned to the stage—this time with circuses. He continued performing until his death in 1966 at the age of 75.

In a 1965 letter to fellow showman Neil Schaffner, Lew reflected on his 58 year showbusiness career: *"I'll say one thing—regardless of the hardships we experienced at times, we have enjoyed all the years we have been in the business."*



SPOTLIGHT ON TRIXIE MASKEW (1896–1965)

This issue's spotlight shines on one of the true veterans of the tent and stock show era—**Trixie Maskew**, whose remarkable career spanned more than six decades under canvas and on the stage.

Trixie was born into show business—her father was a musician, and her mother an actress—so it's no surprise that she was carried on stage as a baby. By the age of two and a half, she was already performing specialties like the Cakewalk and the Serpentine dance before the acts of the play. But as Trixie liked to say, since she didn't draw a salary for those early appearances, her real show business career didn't begin until she was five years old—when she earned her first paycheck with the Spooner Stock Company.

The first tent show Trixie remembered *working on* was *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in Texas, produced by O.T. Crawford. The show was lit by gasoline torches known as “banjo lights,” which cast a flickering glow around the big top. One stormy night, disaster struck—a sudden cyclone swept through the lot, lifting the tent high into the air. The canvas twisted and billowed before catching fire, and within moments, the entire tent was gone—nothing left but smoking embers falling to the ground. It was a sight that Trixie never forgot.

A couple of years later, Trixie and her mother were performing with another *Uncle Tom's Cabin* company, this time in California. They left that troupe to join the Jolly Della Pringle Show in Nebraska. When they arrived, they were stunned to learn that San Francisco had just been devastated by the massive 1906 earthquake. Had they stayed a few more days, they might well have been caught in the destruction that claimed over three thousand lives.

When Trixie wasn't performing dramatic parts alongside her mother, she joined a kiddie act and played the Gus Sun vaudeville circuit—always ready to jump into a new role, sing a song, or dance a number.

Over her 65 years in show business, Trixie performed with dozens of well-known tent and stock companies, including the Aulger Bros., Bisbee, Brooks, Bruce, Boyes, Fox, Hila Morgan, Doc Ricker, Dubinsky Bros., Brunk's Comedians, Harley Sadler, and Tilton shows, as well as the Dixie Queen showboat. Her last engagement was with the Sauline Players before retiring to her home in Kansas City, Missouri.

She also appeared in permanent stock companies in Texas, New Mexico, Washington, and Arkansas.

Two wonderful, in-depth interviews with Trixie—conducted by the writer George Eells—are preserved in her file in the museum's Caroline Scheffner Research Library. Reading them is like hearing Trixie herself tell stories from a lifetime in show business. From her first paycheck at age five to her final curtain call, Trixie Maskew truly earned her title as a *real trouper*.

Her story is part of the rich legacy preserved here at the Theatre Museum of Repertoire Americana, where the spirit of the tent shows lives on.



Cast and crew of the Bisbee Comedians, circa 1945. Standing, left to right: Cliff Malcomb, [unknown], Boob Brasfield, Jess Sund, Dot Sund, Kitty Ferrin, Jimmy Ferrin, Cille Ferrin, Eddie Ferrin, and Leo Lacey. Seated, left to right: **Trixie Maskew**, Jess Bisbee, Mary Bisbee, and Maxine Lacey.

Ad Libs

by Grace Swank-Davis

Greetings from beautiful downtown Mount Pleasant, Iowa

Well, the summer season is over, and the museum is closed until Memorial Day, 2026. Of course, we are open by appointment, and we are always available to take any size group, 1 to 101, on a fun-filled tour of our fabulous museum.

The photos on the front and back pages of the *Winging It* are from the 1929 issue of *Bill Bruno's Bulletin*, a weekly publication for and about the tent show community. The museum has an incomplete collection of the *Bulletin* from 1928 through 1940. I'm planning on writing an article on the *Bulletin* in the near future. Too bad we don't have a conference anymore; it would make a great paper.

This year was the 75th anniversary of the Midwest Old Threshers Reunion! The Reunion ran from August 28th to September 1st, and the weather was perfect. Attendance on Saturday was over 11,000, and the museum, of course, benefited from the big turnout. We had standing room only on Saturday for the entertainment in the James V. Davis Performance Center in the lower level of the museum. So much fun. Brian Iles returned to play Toby. Everyone was glad to see him, and he did a great job as always. Thanks to Mark Peper and everyone who worked hard to make the show a success.

A very big thank you to everyone who volunteered in the Joe Mauck Exhibit Hall: Claudia Streeter, David Wagaman, Bob Mueller, and Chris Fuchs. Mark Peper worked so hard getting the show together and seeing that everything went smoothly! It was so nice to have all that help and company! What fun it was.

My late husband Jimmy Davis's niece, Nancy Ryder, and nephew, Bill Ryder, with Bill's wife, Candy, came to visit the museum. Bill spent many summers as a kid with his Uncle Jimmy, on his show, the Schaffner Players. Bill lives in California, and this was his first time touring the museum since the 1970s. It was so nice listening to their stories about being around the show and about Jimmy.

On a personal note, I was so sorry to hear of the passing of our past president's wife, Michelle Ripper. She was always such a pleasure to be around—warm, friendly, and full of good humor. I always enjoyed visiting with her, and she had a way of making everyone feel welcome and at ease. Michelle was also a gifted artist with a wonderful creative spirit. The watercolor of the museum on page 7 is one she did for me in 2014. I'll always remember her lovely smile and her easy, joyful laugh.

Well, that's all for now. Remember, you are always welcome on the lot,

Grace



Our archivist, Spencer Barton, came up with this design, and we're thinking about making it our new logo. What do you think? The back ground should be white, the photo came out darker.

Trouper Tales

This is a new feature of Winging It. Troupers will both answer the same 7 questions each time. In this edition we feature David Wagaman, and Grace Swank-Davis.

Question 1: Your name

Answer: David Wagaman

Question 2: Your current hometown/state

Answer: West Burlington, Iowa

Question 3: Your first interaction with a tent show

Answer: When I was four years old, the Schaffner Players came to West Burlington — that was the first time I ever saw a tent show.

Question 4: Your most memorable experience with a tent show

Answer: The excitement of seeing the show coming into town on all the trucks.

Question 5: The tent show you were most associated with

Answer: The Schaffner Players.

Question 6: What is the one thing people who know you associate you with in the theatre?

Answer: I was best known for being a director for the Cargill Production Company, directing musical shows for women's organizations throughout the country.

Question 7: What is your favorite part of The Theatre Museum?

Answer: The Caroline Schaffner Research Library.

Question 1: Your name

Answer: Grace Swank-Davis

Question 2: Your current hometown/state

Answer: Mount Pleasant, Iowa

Question 3: Your first interaction with a tent show

Answer: My grandparents owned the Lew Henderson Players, and I grew up listening to my mother's stories of growing up on the show.

Question 4: Your most memorable experience with a tent show

Answer: Marrying Jimmy Davis, the owner of the Schaffner Players the last professional tent theatre.

Question 5: The tent show you were most associated with

Answer: The Schaffner Players.

Question 6: What is the one thing people that know you associate you with the theatre

Answer: Does anyone really know me?

Question 7: What is your favorite part of The Theatre Museum

Answer: The whole back wall. It's covered from ceiling to floor with photos of troupers and how they lived on the road.

In Memory of Michelle Ripper



Michelle Ripper entered into eternal rest on July 28, 2025, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. She was born July 21, 1967, to Jesse and Judith Trenter in Quincy, Illinois.

On October 14, 1988, Michelle married David Ripper, who later served as president of the National Society. Together they raised two children, Jordan and Trevor, and were blessed with two grandchildren, Dominic and Rowan, who brought her endless joy.

Michelle graduated from Quincy Senior High School in 1985. She loved reading, singing, camping, and fishing, but her greatest passion was creating art. A truly talented artist and crafting enthusiast, she filled her world with beauty and imagination through the many pieces

she made.

She will be remembered for her kindness, her devotion to her family, and her support of the Theatre Museum of Repertoire Americana. In her honor, the National Society has arranged for trees to be planted, a living tribute to a life that touched so many.

Michelle is survived by her husband, children, grandchildren, and siblings Melissa (James) Spidle, Mary Wand, Pamela Carter, and Jeffrey (Jill) Trenter, as well as many nieces and nephews. She will be dearly missed by all who knew her.

The Theatre Museum extends its heartfelt sympathy to David and his family.



Watercolor of the Theatre Museum by Michelle Ripper. As this lovely painting shows, Michelle was a gifted artist whose talent and warmth shine through her work.

**Do You Remember
Away Back—**

When Bob Sherman had out a production of his own play, "My Friend From Arkansas," and claimed the distinction of playing to the smallest gross receipts ever recorded—\$85 on a week of one night stands?—(Helen K. May remembers that.)

When Ezra Kendall played "A Pair of Kids" in the midwest small towns?

When Abe "Slick" Rosewall picked a bunch of daisies for soubrettes on the Premier Bros. Repertoire company at Richmond, Mo.?—(Blame that one on Harry Pamplin, Abe.)

When Luella Morey and Clarence Bennett were featured with the Morey Stock company?

When George Gatts had the Grace Hayward company on the Bell-Olen-dorf airdome circuit?

When Fred LeCompte played slide trombone?

When Karl Simpson played at Tammas Whammond in "The Little Minister" with the Mamie Sheridan-Wolford company on the Crawford airdome circuit?—(A. H. McAdams is charged with this one).

When Harry Gorman took "The Missouri Girl" to the coast with a band and orchestra?

When Richard Foote played the western small towns in a Shakespear-ean repertoire?

When "Tobys" were called silly kids?

When Bob Grandi played juveniles on the R. J. Erwood show in Pennsylvania?

When the actor's working season was from Labor day until Decoration day—maybe?

When a \$25 per week repertoire engagement meant that you played a matinee every day except Sunday and Monday, and sometimes did play one on Sunday?—(Hilliard Wight remembers that one).

When Ben and Cora Warner had "What Happened to Smith" on the one night stands?

When the late Bobby Fountain was in stock at the Wonderland museum in St. Joseph, Mo.?

When Will H. Locke had out "The Kansas Sunflower"?

When the ball team on the Griswold "Uncle Tom" show played its first game of the season at Longmont, Colo., the final score being 39 to 0 in favor of the town team, with the following composing the Griswold team: Hank Marshall, catcher (now has the Marshall Players and was a real catcher); V. C. Westland, pitcher; Jack Claffey, first base; Frank Flesher (of LeCompte and Flesher), 2nd base; Mox Adams (now of Loranger

and Adams), third base; J. M. Stout (for years manager for Bill Patton), short stop; Harry Bulmer (of the Myrtle Vinton company), left field; George (Balkey) Ewers, center field; and Clyde Adams, right field?—(Submitted by Mox Adams).

When Jack Benjamin played juveniles with the stock at Minneaqna Park in Pueblo, Colo.?


When Guy Kaufman gave Leo Blondin drum lessons and so started him in the show business?

When Leo F. Harrison was one of the active one-night stand managers of the midwest, at one time offering one of the dozen "Girl and the Tramp" operas?

When John L. Sullivan was the vaudeville feature act during fair dates one fall with the North Brothers company?—(Hilliard Wight also remembers that one.)

When you could ride on your baggage, have it delivered at the theatre, pay the railroad agent after the show and he would send you on to the next stand?—"Try it now!" says Leo Blondin.)

DON MELROSE
Theatrical Exchange
505 Hall Bldg., 9th and Walnut
KANSAS CITY, MO.
Now Signing People
for Fall and Winter Season
Phone Harrison 5581
Write--Wire--Phone--Call!


Prof. J. Warnesson's
Unexcelled
Make-up Materials
Mail Orders Shipped within
ONE HOUR after receipt.
Home Office: 62 W. Washington Chicago, Ill.
Kansas City Branch: Karl F. Simpson 17 Gayety Building


Bert's
STUDIO
GAYETY THEATRE BLDG.
KANSAS CITY, MO.
Time Now
for your New
Photos for the
winter season.
If you come
into the city,
arrange for an
appointment
in advance.

A Cinderella of the Kitchen
Great Toby and Ingenue
Speed Limit Star fast-stepping comedy
Jenny Steps Out Swell Toby and Ingenue parts.
Solid Plays—All One Set—
Proven Successes—Moderate
Royalty—Get them NOW!
HILLIARD WIGHT
916 East 8th St., Kansas City

Kathryn Swan Hammond
The Oldest Theatrical Exchange in Kansas City
We Issue Equity Contracts Mercer Hotel Phone Victor 8636