

Nutley Little Theatre | Nutley Yesterday · Today - 1961

NUTLEY LITTLE THEATRE

IVOR WATTS

A GROUP of young men connected with Grace Episcopal Church had attacked the problem of leisure time by organizing an amateur theatrical group, believing that this type of activity was a valuable morale-builder.

They called their group the Parish Players. Several years later, in 1934 to be exact, two mainstays of the Parish Players, Ivor Watts, of 446 Prospect Street, and Alfred Eville, of 210 Rutgers Place, realizing the need for a larger group from which to cast, and a lack of gray heads to carry more mature roles, met with Mr. and Mrs. Robert Winternitz to discuss the possibility of extending the activities of the Parish Players to a wider circle of members.

Watts recalls that as a result, an invitation appeared in *The Nutley Sun* in September, 1934, for all interested residents to assemble at the Public Safety Building. The backers of the townwide theatrical movement were delighted with an attendance of 65 prospective thespians at this initial meeting of what was to be the future N.L.T., presided over by Horace "Doc" Tantom. In 1938 the membership rolls stood at 650.

The Nutley Sun in 1934 reported that a nominating committee including Charles Hammond, Helen Chappie, Walter Ryan, Arthur Dickenson and Claire Williams was appointed.

This nominating committee named an executive board of 13 members to control the policies of the guild. Those 13 guiding lights were: Dr. Horace Tantom, Robert Winternitz, Dr. and Mrs. Theodore J. Berger, Harry Carland, Mrs. George J. Stanford, Harry Libby, Ivor Watts, Carleton Saunders, Jr., Emil Tauchert, Robert O'Loughlin, Miss Jessie Feland, and John Dobbs.

The board of directors elected Watts, president; Dr. Tantom, vice president; Miss Feland, secretary; and O'Loughlin, treasurer.

The unhappy experience with the first set brought home the fact that something drastic must be done about housing this rapidly expanding organization. After scouting around town, a former jam factory, then in the throes of being turned into a garage and machine shop but ruled unlawful by the town fathers, turned up in Erie Place beside the railroad tracks. Though quite unpretentious in appearance, leaking in innumerable places, and lacking any method of heating, "The Barn" as it was christened, was deemed an appropriate place to construct scenery. The group promptly rented it for that purpose.

The Barn was actually purchased from the town for taxes in 1938 for the munificent sum of \$930 under the guidance of "Doc" Tantom. The debt was to

be paid off on a monthly basis over a period of three years. In 1943 the Barn became the sole property of the Nutley Little Theatre and most appropriately "Doc" presided at the burning of the mortgage on the Barn Grounds.

The Nutley Little Theatre obtained a corporate status as a civic non-profit organization under the laws of New Jersey in 1936 and has continued to operate on that basis.

During the war years from 1942 to 1945, the Nutley Dramatic group, like all civic groups, labored under difficulties but used their ingenuity to select plays with larger female casts. Performances were usually for the benefit of the American Red Cross or for the Essex County Camp and Hospital Service Council.

As a result of three benefit performances in 1942, '43 and '44, the group raised \$1,500 for the Service Council. Continuing their plan of civic cooperation, they expanded their activities in 1950 by making one act plays available as entertainment for local groups all year long. This activity is known as "NLT on the Road."

In addition, Nutley Little Theatre is a member of the New Jersey Theatre League which comprises 73 dramatic companies throughout the state.

For those residents of Nutley and surrounding communities who find it inconvenient to catch many Broadway shows, the N.L.T. offers high level dramatic entertainment right in its own community. Its success is a tribute to the professional standards which have guided the organization.

The present officers are: president, Salvatore Musco; vice president, Paul Browne; secretary, Mary Brown; treasurer, Marjorie Peizer.