

ST. LUKE'S PLAYERS¹

Founding and Early Days

Founder – Flora Nicholson (mother of Tony Nicholson) – died 1960. Was known as ‘Nicky’. She commenced with a group known as the Doncaster Players and produced one play using the school’s premises.

Mrs. Blossom Johnson, now a resident of Oak Bay Manor, was in the cast.

Through Canon Pike of St. Luke’s Church, ‘Nicky’ was INVITED to form a group to be known as St. Luke’s Players (year would be probably 1949). With her tremendous drive and expertise, the players soon became a strong thriving organization, often producing 7 or 8 plays during the year, entering festivals with winning plays, and often presenting shows in local establishments (Empress Hotel Ballroom (Little Nell) and several places a little way out of town she produced one-act plays, etc.)

Sometime during the middle ‘fifties’ at a meeting of the players Canon Pike expressed his appreciation of the players, saying that prior to the latter publicizing the name, he had very few weddings and christenings, but ‘now I have more than I can handle’!

The thriving coffee concession was handled by Mrs. Freda Gibson (wife of Capt. Gibson), Mrs. Lillian Hayden (wife of Noel Hayden, the original treasurer), and Mrs. Ivy Lukey (wife of Cmdr. Lukey) and Mrs. Joan Key (wife of Peter Key, the later treasurer). These ladies were church members and their husbands were members of the church committee. The ladies also served in other capacities – prompting, costumes, etc. Joan Key also directed several plays. She presently lives on Bushby Street.

Syd Brooker, excellent lighting man who along with Horace Whiteoak (deceased) were responsible for many fine lighting effects. He resides on Scolton Road. His daughter, May, not only did makeup, but also performed.

Members who joined during the earlier fifties were Margaret Martin, Evanne Murray, Tony Nicholson, Cliff Clarke, Harry Harrod (now resident of San Francisco), Alec Hutchins.

Later in the fifties Betty Jeanpierre, Barbara Grant (Longworth) John and Betty Drean joined followed by Clo Dowling, Marge Bridgeman, Bert and Elsie Farr, Dorothea House (now a resident of Tillicum Lodge).

After the death of Mrs. Nicholson, the players were grateful to Cmdr. Harry Lukey who gathered up the reins and directed several plays in addition to performing. He was followed by other capable people who offered to direct.

¹ The original of this document was found among some papers in the props cupboard in the women’s dressing room. It was written by Evanne Murray, August 9, 1988. Retyped 2008.

It should be mentioned that at the beginning, 80% of the proceeds from St. Luke's Players was established to be given to the church. Nicky figured she could start the next season with 20%.

And now in a lighter vein! During a play directed by Harry Harrod (probably Cinderella?), Capt. Gibson was in the wings to help Margaret Martin with a quick change from a ball gown to rags underneath. However in the rush, he not only whipped off her ball gown but also the rags and she had to bounce back on to the stage in her slip! (Now...today, when fewer slips are worn, her return to the stage could have been sensational!)

The following anecdote does have somewhat tragic overtones. At a rehearsal of Shop at Sly Corner, Cmdr. Lukey died and fell over a table face down. As a former Navy man he often wore his blue blazer with a couple of eversharp items in the breast pocket. In my great grief, I threw myself over the 'lifeless form'. I did not know until the next rehearsal when Cmdr. Lukey walked in bandaged around his chest area that I had broken a couple of ribs by pressing down on his back which of course drove the pen and pencil set into his body. I must say, in retrospect, he took the incident like a good sport. But believe me, it was a lesson in how I should treat my fellow actors - !

And then there was the comedy wherein I was one of two unmarried sisters who were chasing a fellow who had returned from America after making a fortune (Alec Hutchins). We were sitting on the love seat which had been used in many St. Luke's plays, I turned and gave Alec a big hug, threatened him with a kiss (only threatened, you understand, being St. Luke's!) he pulled back and ... well ... the love seat broke in two pieces and my great love scene was finished among the ruins on the floor! This was during a performance and of course we carried on. There were many who thought that was part of the play – a great comedy touch and performed so naturally!

Personal Note

It is satisfying that in spite of the ups and downs, St. Luke's has managed to stay alive. Several years ago when the organization was threatened with closure due to lack of interest and perhaps poor management, one realized that the death of St. Luke's Players would be a drastic loss. The supreme effort certainly revived the troubled waters and once again St. Luke's is an important part of community theatre.

Evanne Murray
August 9, 1988.