

PRESENTING OREGON:
FORMATIVE FORCES OF
THE OREGON UNIT OF THE FEDERAL
THEATRE PROJECT

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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During the Great Depression President Roosevelt's New Deal brought relief to Americans through the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The Federal Theatre Project (FTP) was formed in 1935 under the WPA to lift spirits, educate, entertain, and put unemployed theatre artists to work. The FTP was national in scope, but administered at the state level. In the State of Oregon, former Portland Civic Theatre director, Bess Whitcomb, pulled together theatre professionals qualified for work relief to form the Oregon Unit. Ironically, the first productions of the Oregon Unit were not examples of Whitcomb's legitimate theatre work with the Portland Civic, but an expedient recouping of older forms. Vaudevillians were the first unemployed actors hired by the Oregon Unit because they qualified for relief and were ready to place their talents in front of an audience.

This study historicizes the productions of the Oregon Unit of the Federal Theatre Project from 1936 to 1939 and examines the way its leadership negotiated with three forces existing in Portland and the Pacific Northwest. The forces include: the tradition of vaudeville, made up of unemployed professionals; the Little Theatre movement, through Bess Whitcomb's relationship with the Portland Civic Theatre; and finally, the government, at the state and federal level, which used the Oregon Unit as a mechanism of propaganda, to produce regionally based theatre which promoted the

agenda of the New Deal while representing Oregon to Oregonians. Whitcomb negotiated through these forces to create a wildly popular vaudeville-based performance group. The vaudeville nature of the troupe conflicted with a need on the part of the FTP nationally to present “legitimate” scripted performances. The need to produce legitimate theatre brought Whitcomb to transform the Oregon Unit and start a “rehabilitation” program for the vaudevillians, effectively purging the vaudeville performance style. The legitimate mission placed Whitcomb in the middle of negotiations to create a WPA Art Center in Portland. This study places Whitcomb’s negotiation in context of the Great Depression, and calls for a re-centering of her position as a theatrical pioneer in Portland, Oregon.

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For Bess

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“The Federal Theatre at its best was working toward an art in which each region and eventually each state would have its unique, indigenous dramatic expression, its company housed in a building reflecting its own landscape and regional materials, producing plays of its past and present, in its own rhythm of speech and its native design, in an essentially American pattern.”
Hallie Flanagan, *Arena*¹

In an address to Congress in 1935, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) outlined an aggressive plan to get the country back to work. The Emergency Relief Appropriations Act of 1935 passed by Congress set out to rebuild the country and preserve “not only the bodies of the unemployed from destitution but also their self-respect, their self-reliance and courage and determination.”² The bill also brought FDR’s relief efforts under the department of the Works Progress Administration (WPA). WPA Director, Harry Hopkins, included the arts as part of the WPA plan to revitalize the economy, forming the Federal Theatre Project (FTP) in 1935 to lift spirits, educate, entertain, and most importantly put unemployed theatre artists and technicians to work. Started in August of 1935, the FTP was the first and only federally – organized, funded and executed theatre in the history of the United States. The FTP was unique among national theatres, such as those found in the capitols of Europe, because it did not consist of a central theater building. It was instead a regionally-based group of federally-funded theatres operated and administered at the state level. This structure led to a great deal of autonomy for state FTP directors, who worked under a branch of the WPA titled Federal

Project Number One, or “Federal One.”

Hopkins appointed Hallie Flanagan, professor of English at Vassar College and director of the Vassar Experimental Theatre, to head the FTP. Flanagan brought leadership, vision, passion, and a new theatrical aesthetic to the FTP, informed by her study of the “new stagecraft” inspired by European and Russian theatre forms. She gained notoriety early in her career as the first woman to receive a Guggenheim Fellowship, which gave her the opportunity to tour and write about the theatres of Europe and Russia.³ Flanagan did not come from the professional theatre, but from the halls of academia where she freely experimented with European theatre forms such as German Expressionism and *auteur* director Gordon Craig’s work with Symbolism. Her experimental theatrical work at Vassar College, the popularity of her play *Can You Hear Their Voices*, produced at several regional American theatres, and her friendship with Hopkins, gave Flanagan instant credibility. As Barry Witham writes, Flanagan “believed in the *idea* of a Federal Theatre,” and she also believed in the power of theatre to change society.⁴ Her ability to imagine the possibilities of the FTP, and to deliver a plan for implementation, was the reason Hopkins made her FTP Director.

Flanagan decentralized the FTP, dividing the organization into states run by state directors with oversight and guidance provided by regional directors. This meant that state directors administered FTP rules and regulations created by administrators in Washington, D.C. with regional assistance. State WPA administrators were in charge of divvying up federal WPA funds, with FTP state directors in charge of personnel, budget, and theatre programming. Larger FTP Units in cities such as New York and Los Angeles had their own directors, while smaller FTP Units, like the Oregon Unit, often covered a

wide geographic area, traveling great distances to entertain around the state. The FTP was the largest of the Federal One divisions (accounting for just one percent of the total WPA budget at its height) and the scope of the project was vast.⁵ Across the nation, in 40 cities over 22 states, theatrical units of unemployed workers from the entertainment industry performed in: children's theatre; puppet and marionette theatre; dance theatre; American pageants; radio drama; language drama in Yiddish, Italian, Spanish, French and German; African-American theatre (Negro Unit); modern drama; Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC) theatre; the Living Newspaper; circus and vaudeville.⁶ Flanagan's theatrical aesthetic influenced many of her state director appointments, but she left the hiring of the state director of the Oregon Unit to Oregon WPA Administrator, E.J. Griffith.⁷ To lead the Oregon Unit, Griffith hired Bess Whitcomb, a theatrical force in Portland and the only woman to hold a state director position in the FTP.

Whitcomb was a prominent and popular leader within the Portland theatre community in the 1920s, and like Flanagan, early in her career, worked in academia. A Midwesterner from Illinois, she graduated from Oberlin College in Ohio, trained at a dramatic academy in Boston, and moved with her husband, a decorated war hero, to Oregon to teach at Portland's Reed College in the early 1920s.⁸ At Reed College, she worked in a government post-war G.I. education program and began freelance directing in high schools and at Albany College (now Lewis and Clark) through 1926. She co-founded the Art Theatre Players in 1926, directing their first full season of plays, and later created the Bess Whitcomb Players in 1928 under her direction as well. The two theatre companies merged in 1929 to form the Portland Civic Theatre (Portland Civic).⁹ Although she resigned as Director of the Art Theatre Players in 1927 and as a leader in

the Portland Civic in 1930, she remained a prominent acting instructor in the Portland Civic Theatre School and returned to direct an outdoor production of *Alice in Wonderland* for the Portland Rose Festival in 1934 and '35.¹⁰ Her prominence as a Portland Civic stage director and administrative negotiation with the City of Portland in the Rose Festival, prompted Griffith to hire her as the state director of the FTP in 1936, a post she retained until June of 1939, when an act of Congress closed the FTP.*

This study will historicize the productions of the Oregon Unit of the Federal Theatre Project from 1936 to 1939 and will examine the way their leadership, under Whitcomb and Griffith, negotiated three forces existing in Portland and the Pacific Northwest at the time of its formation. These three forces: vaudeville, the Little Theatre movement, and government, both at the state and federal level, were present when the Unit formed and were constantly working on the production and personnel choices within the troupe. The three forces dominate important decisions Whitcomb made, often turning the entire company of 55 actors, stagehands and administrators in entirely new directions. This study will isolate the three forces in order to understand how Whitcomb negotiated the Oregon Unit's survival during the Great Depression.

The tradition of vaudeville was central to the study because unemployed professional vaudevillians desperate for work made up a majority of the Oregon Unit actors. The zenith of the West Coast vaudeville circuits passing through the large downtown theatre palaces of Portland in the 1920s declined as the downtown palaces

* Whitcomb (1887-1976) worked in the WPA Arts Project for a short time after the FTP closed in 1939 and before she pursued her Master's Degree from the University of Iowa, under department chair E. C. Mabie, who figures prominently in this writing. After completing her Master's Degree Whitcomb worked as an acting instructor for the Gellar Theatre School in Los Angeles for many years, where she trained several Hollywood stars. She was one of the first professors hired at Diablo Valley College, a junior college in Walnut Creek, CA at the age of 66, where she worked until months before her death in at 89 years of age.

transformed from live vaudeville entertainment to film. By 1936, there was one surviving vaudeville house in Portland, the Capitol, which primarily featured comedians and dancers from the East Coast. The West Coast circuit vaudevillians who called Portland home after the collapse of the vaudeville industry in the beginning of the 1930s, had few prospects for employment, but when the FTP formed in 1935, their employment history qualified them for work relief. An eclectic band of actors with theatrical experience included aerialists, jugglers, dancers, a clown, a strongman, a whistler, and singers. It was from this diverse pool of talent that Whitcomb chose the initial company, and their talents brought entertainment immediately to schools, halls, auditoriums and clubs around Portland. The first productions of the Oregon Unit were not examples of Whitcomb's work with the Portland Civic or the Bess Whitcomb Players, but an expedient recouping of older forms (and older actors). The marriage of vaudeville performers to the Oregon Unit defined the type of productions that they could mount and Whitcomb began putting the vaudevillians together in wildly popular vaudeville productions.

Whitcomb descended from the tradition of the Little Theatre movement in Portland, which was part of a larger movement around the country during the Progressive Era. Little theatres were designed to be staunchly non-commercial, producing theatre and new plays that were topical, socially significant, and strived for the betterment of society.¹¹ Although there were as many reasons for the theatres to form as there were Little Theatres, the people involved in the movement saw a need for theatre in their communities, or as Dorothy Chansky writes, the need to create "a public belief in the importance of theatre in civic and personal life."¹² The creation of the Art Theatre, the Bess Whitcomb Players, and finally the Portland Civic in the 1920s focused on the

enrichment of society through theatre art and, therefore, was part of a national Little Theatre “multipronged phenomenon” during the Progressive Era.

The Little Theatre movement in Portland filled a void in live theatre performance following the collapse of commercial stock theatres such as the Baker Stock Company, the Dufwinn Players, and the Helig Theatre chain (from Eugene, OR to Spokane, WA). Many of the Portland elite who popularized Portland’s stock companies supported the Little Theatre tradition in Portland. The financial support and artistic personnel of Little Theatres, like the Portland Civic, came from the upper class, and their audiences often served the upper class. Companies like the Art Theatre and the Portland Civic had a very specific expectation that for theatre to be “high-art” it must be text-based “legitimate” performance. The notion of legitimate theatre dates back to England’s Licensing Act of 1737, which gave permission for “illegitimate” theatres to perform melodramas and music hall entertainment, outside of the two licensed legitimate theatres in London. Within the context of the Little Theatre movement of the 1920s and 30s, the word “legitimate” referred to theatre based on a play text that was not variety or vaudeville performance. The Little Theatre movement is vital in understanding the tension Whitcomb faced personally as she worked with the distinctly non-text based vaudevillians, who were often naturally gifted and learned their craft kinesthetically from other vaudevillians. Whitcomb’s negotiations with the Portland Civic, which runs through the entire Oregon Unit timeline, were tainted by Little Theatre elitism on the part of the Portland Civic Board of Directors that stemmed from a Little Theatre preference for legitimate theatre, viewing vaudeville as ‘lowbrow’ performance.

Many administrators from the Little Theatre Movement worked in the FTP and

brought an ethical obligation to continue the work of the Little Theatre: create socially significant drama, promote new works, and make a difference in the community. This belief permeates speeches given by Flanagan about the FTP, saying, “no person can work effectively in the Federal Theatre unless he cares increasingly about the theme engaging science and industry today—that is, a better life for more people.”¹³ Whitcomb’s artistic expectations of the Oregon Unit came from her Little Theatre tradition, with all of the trappings found in the Portland Civic Board of Directors. Whitcomb aesthetically desired the “high-art” and serious drama presented by the Portland Civic, but had to present Oregon Unit performances developed around the specialized talents of vaudevillians. With many FTP administrators across the country coming from the Little Theatre Movement at the national level, the FTP stressed the need for regional units to retrain, or “rehabilitate” vaudevillians for the legitimate stage, moving away from what was perceived as “lowbrow” performance. As the Oregon Unit moved closer to legitimate performances, the Oregon Unit vaudevillians appeared in fewer and fewer productions, but with the popularity of vaudeville in Portland, Whitcomb found moving completely away from vaudeville “schtick” proved to be a difficult task.

The government at the federal level under the FTP administration used the Oregon Unit as a mechanism of propaganda to promote the New Deal agenda that was distinctly left-of-center in the politically conservative state of Oregon in the 1930s. There was little national oversight of the Oregon Unit for the first year of operation, but in 1937 the FTP Summer Theatre Conference brought Whitcomb’s work into the national spotlight. Her willingness to make the troupe into a testing ground for new FTP ideas moved the troupe towards her legitimate theatre goals, while eliminating jobs for the

original vaudevillians that brought the Oregon Unit into prominence. The administration nationally used the Oregon Unit to promote their agenda, which by 1939 was moving from the political left to the political right.

The state WPA administration represented by Griffith used the Oregon Unit as propaganda to highlight WPA programs that were helping Oregonians. Anti-New Deal Democrats in Oregon and the conservative wing of the House of Representatives in Congress saw the New Deal platform as communist and wanted to eliminate any hint of “red” activity in the WPA, starting with the FTP. This political backdrop is vital in understanding Whitcomb’s negotiation over the course of the Oregon Unit, supporting the liberal plays selected nationally for the troupe by the FTP, while appealing to the conservative politics within the state of Oregon.

The three forces, vaudeville, the Little Theatre movement and government, were “formative” like a volcano, pushing the Oregon Unit into shape through constant change. The three forces shaped the plays and performances, the type of sponsoring organizations and supporters Whitcomb was able to generate, the personnel from vaudeville to legitimate, the troupe performance venue and, finally, the dream of what the Oregon Unit could become. Just when the troupe seemed to settle, performing vaudeville, gaining legitimate talent for scripted productions, or conforming to FTP administration, an eruption from one of the three forces would create a new landscape for Whitcomb to negotiate. By separating the forces this study will allow analysis of how each piece pushed on the other to form the Oregon Unit.

Chapter Two paints a picture of Whitcomb’s struggle shaping the vaudevillians in the Oregon Unit to achieve Hallie Flanagan’s agenda within the FTP. The chapter

contextualizes the West Coast vaudevillians that made up the Oregon Unit against the history of vaudeville, as popular entertainment in Portland. Viewed within the Portland theatre community as “low art” because of its vaudeville roots, the Oregon Unit fought for recognition. Whitcomb had to hire actors qualified for WPA relief, and national FTP rules only qualified recently employed actors. As a result, vaudevillians from circuits running through Oregon were the only actors recently employed, while talented actors working for Whitcomb and the Little Theatre movement were unpaid, pursuing “art for art’s sake.”[†] The vaudevillians were consummate professionals—out of work like many Americans, while the WPA considered actors and technicians from the Little Theatre Movement “amateur,” pursuing theatre as an unpaid art, as many in the Little Theatre movement did in the 1920s. My investigation follows the class biases implicit in the distinctions between “professional” and “amateur,” and shows how these class-based tensions shaped the organizational structure and artistic products of the Oregon Unit

The Oregon Unit’s vaudeville performance at the formation of the company identified a performance style, but the lack of a theatrical home led, ironically, to the Unit’s connection to Portland’s East Side neighborhoods, grounding the performers in the working class. I argue that the Oregon Unit retained performers because of a connection to Portland’s East Side working class. Many in the Unit lived in neighborhoods on Portland’s East Side, where former middle class families were struggling to pay bills and were losing their homes due to foreclosure in middle of the Great Depression. The

[†] An article in *Time* magazine in 1935 places the 300 agit-prop plays exploding across the country against the Little Theatre movement’s productions of the 1920s, with the conclusion that in 1935, at the beginning of the FTP, the artists were hungry for more than art for art’s sake, and needed a meaning behind their art. (*Time*. “The Theatre: Agit-Prop” June 17, 1935.) The phrase here refers to members of the community in the Portland Civic, who were creating theatre without a profit motive, purely for the sake of working together and creating great art.

vaudevillians of the Oregon Unit served these working families by performing lighthearted comedy, acrobatics and acts that astounded the young and old alike primarily in parks serving East Side communities. With their action and service, the men and women of the Oregon Unit were a part of the labor movement: as members of the unemployed, as residents of the East Side, and as relief from the weary reality of the labor struggle in Oregon.

Chapter Three follows how competing national and local forces used the Oregon Unit's position to build an Art Center in Portland and become the training ground for the rehabilitation of vaudevillians. The Oregon Unit was shaped into a "model" FTP Unit by sometimes converging and sometimes conflicting national and regional aims. Many of these aims centered primarily on securing an indoor venue and creating solutions to national FTP problems, stemming from a perceived lack of talent (by administrators) in the smaller Units. Whitcomb worked with top administrators in the FTP on ideas to strengthen the talent pool of smaller units, while using the Oregon Unit as an FTP testing ground. The WPA rewarded her ideas and experimentation by moving the Unit into the Elks Temple Theatre in downtown Portland and supporting Griffith's plans for a permanent WPA Art Center Theatre. As notoriety of the Oregon Unit increased so did the Griffith's focus on his plan for a WPA Art Center and State Theatre, which would be a partnership between the Oregon Unit, the Portland Civic and the University of Oregon.¹⁴ With Congress threatening to defund the FTP, Whitcomb saw the Arts Center as a potential lasting legacy to theatre arts in Oregon.

While plans for the Art Center moved forward, under the direction of Whitcomb, the Oregon Unit proceeded to transform into a model FTP theatre according to Flanagan.

By borrowing actors, technicians and managers from larger FTP Units like San Francisco and Los Angeles, the Oregon Unit produced legitimate (script-based) drama, children's theatre, and Living Newspaper productions. As the Oregon Unit performed a role on the national stage as a model FTP theatre with a large permanent home, the pressure from the FTP administration in Washington, D.C. increased. The help that Whitcomb needed to move the company into legitimacy meant borrowing directors and prominent actors from larger units, which removed vaudevillians from performances. By conforming and embracing the demands of the national FTP administration, Whitcomb created a resource and testing ground for new administrative ideas.

Chapter Four tracks the trajectory of change in Oregon Unit New Deal propaganda from its formation, with plays like *The Yellow Harvest*, to the last planned performance of *Paul Bunyan*. As a vehicle of New Deal propaganda the Oregon Unit produced the "leftist" production *Power*, which calls for the adoption of municipal power distribution across the country. As the House on Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), began its attack on communism in the ranks of the FTP, the Oregon Unit changed its productions to "right-of-center" or apolitical plays. Propaganda in the plays *Power* and *The Yellow Harvest* are set against the historically based *Tapestry in Linen*, and anti-union character of *Paul Bunyan*. All of the productions supported New Deal programs in Oregon, such as the WPA, Public Works Administration (PWA) and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), but the message changed in response to the HUAC investigation and conservative politics in the State of Oregon.

This study responds in part to Barry Witham's call for additional close studies of regional FTP units, and builds on the analysis of Elizabeth Osborne's chapter

dedicated to the Oregon Unit in *Staging the People*. Digging up archival information about the Oregon Unit proved difficult. Controversy surrounding the FTP, in productions such as Orson Welles and John Houseman's *The Cradle Will Rock* in New York and the *Ethiopia* censorship outcry and ultimate resignation of Elmer Rice, left a goldmine of correspondence in the National Archive in Washington, D.C. The relatively small and quiet Oregon Unit left less of a trace and has required archival research beyond the National Archive. Osborne, in her first article about the Oregon Unit, (what she calls the "Portland unit,") states:

Unlike the New York, Chicago, Atlanta, and Boston units, which generated controversy so continuously, the Portland unit seldom required FTP officials to mediate or intervene in its activities, which meant that records for such exchanges were never created in the central administrative records.¹⁵

Past historians looking into the Oregon Unit, such as Osborne and Karen Wickre, had a rough chronology, but were unable to provide a clear production history of the company.¹⁶ Flanagan's attempt at completely cataloging the work of the FTP in *Arena* gives a general overview of the Oregon Unit, while missing many productions because of her vaudeville bias and lack of information from Whitcomb to FTP administrative offices in Washington D.C. The lack of information and the need to fill the historical gaps created a need to find information at the local level. The University of Oregon's central location in the state and vast Oregon newspaper archive has provided the opportunity to uncover information throughout the state. Local sources of information provide a treasure-trove of accurate information about the workings of a local theatre. Creating a clear historic picture through local sources, what University of Oregon associate professor Theresa May calls a "methodology of place," helped paint a clearer picture of how the FTP functioned, how it reflected local values while responding to national (centralized)

dictates, and how it balanced local talent with a new national sensibility among its artistic leaders.¹⁷ Through a methodology of place, which places central significance on local archives and the political and aesthetic choices they reveal, I will show how the class battles within Portland's political and social landscape transformed the fledgling Oregon Unit.

Whitcomb was instrumental in the success of the Oregon Unit and this study constantly questions her motives. Theatre historian Thomas Postlewait points out how agents like Whitcomb shape the writing of history,

The specific statements of agents carry their local, even unique meanings, yet in an accumulative manner the historian may be able to trace how the thoughts and motives of agents, as expressed in their statements, may participate in expansive conditions and contests of ideologies, mentalities, discourses, belief systems, and philosophies that operate within and sometimes across an era.¹⁸

Whitcomb was the primary agent in the Oregon Unit, and the “accumulative manner” in which this study uses her words has provided a window into the formation of smaller FTP Units and the social and political arena of theatre in Portland during the Great Depression. Her Midwestern background, allegiance to Hallie Flanagan's FTP mission, and personal frustration with her cast and crew are central to the story. Primary sources containing her voice include the E.C. Mabie papers at the University of Iowa, which contained personal correspondence by Whitcomb about the Oregon Unit, as well as the Portland Civic Theatre archive at the Oregon Historical Society. Her frantic penmanship and eloquent Midwestern colloquialisms give a sense of the power and command she had over a room. A poignant interview with Whitcomb, the only piece of her archive left at Diablo Valley College in Pleasant Hill, California, where she served as a speech professor from her late 60s to her death at the age of 89, underscores her centrality in the

Oregon Unit story. In the Diablo Valley College interview taken from her hospital bed months before her death Whitcomb recalls her negotiation through life. She said,

My theatre, the [Federal Theatre], had its own professional actors, had its own professional stagehands, who were only too grateful to have a job. Had limitless costume department because the sewing project then, which was not one of the arts—but there it was—skilled women who needed the work, were on relief and my problem in budgeting for costumes was material because that cost money. But if I could wrangle the material, I could have all the workers I needed. ¹⁹

This study follows Whitcomb’s “wrangling” and her ability to bring disparate talent together, from vaudevillians and legitimate stage actors to Little Theatre and WPA administrators, created a new paradigm of what theatre could be in Portland, Oregon. As Whitcomb says of her Federal Theatre days, she could “put a play on in a waist basket,” which defines her struggle as Oregon State Director, and her strength as a theatre producer. While the Oregon Unit was comprised of 55 actors, musicians, technicians and administrators, this story will continually fall back to Whitcomb’s presence or absence, asking for her thoughts while making her presence known.

I started this exploration because of my interest in the FTP and my personal connection to the Pacific Northwest. As I dug deeper into the life of Bess Whitcomb, I realized she and I shared many of the same hopes and dreams about how theatre can transform communities during tough economic times. This is a story about how a small troupe of vaudevillians, led by Bess Whitcomb—a Little Theatre leader—could create a model Unit prized by FTP administrators. In America’s darkest hour, the Oregon Unit brought professional theatre back to the stage in Portland, and ignited the dream of an Oregon State Art Center.

Notes

¹ Hallie Flanagan, *Arena: The Story of the Federal Theatre* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce), 371.

² Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "Annual Message to Congress (1/4/1935)," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=14890>.

³ Joanne Bentley, *Hallie Flanagan: A Life in the American Theatre* (New York: Knopf, 1988), 30-31 and 48.

⁴ Barry Witham, *The Federal Theatre Project: A Case Study* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2.

⁵ Flanagan, *Arena*, 44.

⁶ *Ibid*, 377-436.

⁷ Hallie Flanagan, "A Brief Delivered by Hallie Flanagan, Director, Federal Theatre Project, Works Progress Administration, before the Committee on Patents, House of Representatives: Washington, D.C. February 8, 1938," *Library of Congress American Memory*, < <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=ftadmin&fileName=farbf/00040002/ftadmin.db&recNum=2>. >

⁸ Bess Whitcomb, interview by unnamed Diablo Valley College speech instructor, recorded c. 1975 in a hospital room, Diablo Valley College, Pleasant Hill, CA.

⁹ Cecil Matson, *The Way It Was: A Kaleidoscopic Look at Early Theatre in the Oregon Country and A View of the Changing Pattern of Theatre in the Early Years of the Twentieth Century into the Present Day* (Portland, Or.: printed by author, 1988), 165-168.

¹⁰ Bess Whitcomb Resignation Letter, August 4, 1927, Portland Civic Theatre Records, Mss 2965, Box 9, Folder 5, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

¹¹ Dorothy Chansky, *Composing Ourselves: The Little Theatre Movement and the American Audience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 2.

¹² Chansky, *Composing Ourselves*, 8.

¹³ Federal Theatre Project (U.S.), and Pierre de Rohan, *Federal Theatre: First Summer Theatre: A Report* (New York: Federal National Publications, 1938), 12.

¹⁴ Letter from Bess Whitcomb to E.C. Mabie, May 28, 1937, Papers of Edward Charles Mabie, Box 2, Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, RG 99.0188, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Iowa.

¹⁵ Elizabeth A. Osborne, *Staging the People: Community and Identity in the Federal Theatre Project* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 200.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Osborne, "Disappearing Frontiers and the National Stage: Placing the Portland Federal Theatre Project," *Theatre History Studies* 29 (2009), 103-121.

¹⁷ Theresa May, personal conversation, January 15, 2013.

¹⁸ Thomas Postlewait, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 231.

¹⁹ Bess Whitcomb, interview by unnamed Diablo Valley College speech instructor, recorded c. 1975 in a hospital room, Diablo Valley College, Pleasant Hill, CA

CHAPTER II

SLOPING WEST TO THE BARD:

HOW VAUDEVILLE SHAPED THE NASCENT OREGON UNIT OF THE FTP

“Vaudeville is not only coming back, but it is back.”¹
- Dancer Patti Moore, 1937

“Our bill has received enthusiastic acclaim from the Portland public...
I am convinced that Portland is vaudeville minded.”²
- Impersonator Syd Chatton

The City of Portland, Oregon, was a vaudeville town. Following the collapse of the vaudeville industry across the nation, and through the darkest economic times of the Great Depression, vaudeville in Portland hung on, rebounded and thrived. As the depression wore on, commercial interests in vaudeville increased and the number of vaudeville houses grew. This would portend well for the new Federal Theatre Project in Oregon.* The announcement of the formation of the Federal Theatre in the summer of 1935 as an arm of the WPA meant that administrators were quickly picked to lead the large government bureaucracy. The challenges were many, including finding performance venues, artistic and managerial staff, and, most importantly, qualified performers.

Under the FTP instructions and the rules of the WPA, only skilled professional actors on the relief rolls qualified for assistance. Across the country, and with the Oregon Unit, the bulk of these out-of-work performers were vaudevillians. While regional and

* One vaudeville house in Portland, The Capitol, remained opened through the 1930s, with several new houses opening from 1937-39. The Capitol was not a straight vaudeville house – few theatres in the Pacific Northwest ever were – and the later performances ran into the evening, the racier they became. The midnight vaudeville performance at the Capitol often advertised an “East Coast headliner” of a fan, bubble or “exotic” dancer.

state WPA administrators faced mountains of red tape that accompanied running a federally-funded assistance program, hiring vaudevillians into the Oregon Unit solved one problem: getting productions before the public quickly. Playing to working-class audiences, vaudevillians hired by the Oregon Unit were ready with performances that had already been tested in theatres on the West Coast vaudeville circuit, from San Francisco to Winnipeg, Manitoba.

In this chapter, I argue that the marriage between vaudeville and the FTP was not merely one of convenience. The values of the FTP – regionalism, service to working class audiences, and an emphasis on labor– were aligned with those of vaudeville. Vaudevillians across the country were used to tailoring their acts as they moved from place to place; they were used to playing in whatever venues were offered and available, and they fed the entertainment appetites of working-class Americans with stories, skits and celebrations of local history and local color. As I will show in the pages that follow, each of these qualities was consistent with the goals of the FTP and would form the fiber of the unit in Oregon. In a speech made to FTP state leaders at a Summer Theatre Conference in 1937, FTP director Hallie Flanagan observed:

Such a federal theatre places upon us the obligation of studying many things normally ignored by theatre workers. We must know geography—our regional and state differences, tastes, history. We must see how our theatre can give value received to various communities. We must develop the theatre in relation to recreation, industry, therapy. In short, it is only through preserving the local and regional characteristics that we can create a strong Federal Theatre.³

Bess Whitcomb, perhaps more than any other state director of the FTP, took Flanagan's regional message to heart, constantly fashioning productions that utilized skilled vaudevillians to tell the story of Oregon to Oregonians, in productions like *Tapestry in Linen* (about the Willamette Valley), *Timberline Tintypes* (set in an 1890s Oregon dance

hall) and *Sloping West* (about Southern Oregon), rather than simply reproducing shows that had originated in New York. The first Oregon Unit productions consisted of free vaudeville skits in Portland parks, setting a pattern which established the Oregon Unit as one that took performances to the “great outdoors” with ease and vigor.⁴

Flanagan saw the “problem of vaudeville” as a dead industry, not worth reviving, yet the numbers of unemployed vaudeville professionals flooding the WPA relief rolls could not be ignored. These professionals, much like the professionals working with Whitcomb in Portland, had a single “shtick” (a Yiddish word meaning bit or piece) around which they made a living, and this single talent did not play well when inserted into legitimate stage performances in the 1930s. The FTP and the Oregon Unit tied themselves to the vaudeville talent available for WPA relief from the first auditions, and this bound the Unit, especially its large cast productions, to a style of performance infused with a vaudeville aesthetic. In Oregon, vaudeville performance had always taken on a distinctly regional flavor. The folk history and factual history of the Pacific Northwest figured strongly in the vaudeville acts that played Portland and the region from the late 1880s into the 1930s. Because of its vaudevillian roots, the Oregon Unit was characterized by attention to local and regional history and identity. Flanagan’s description of the early Oregon Unit as one consisting of performers from “vaudeville, tab show, and circus” retrained to perform legitimate drama, was accurate.⁵ Beginning with a vaudeville performance at the Portland Shrine Hospital in June of 1936, and continuing throughout its existence, the Oregon Unit was marked by the aesthetics, players and productions of the West Coast vaudeville circuit.

In his book *The Federal Theatre Project: A Case Study*, Barry Witham describes

the line of applicants, some qualified for relief and some not, auditioning for the Seattle Federal Theatre Unit as “assorted refugees from the Pantages and Keith-Orpheum vaudeville circuits” who had retired and were trying to resurrect their careers. While the University of Washington professor organizing the Seattle Federal Theatre, Glenn Hughes, desired a company dedicated to the production of new plays, he came to realize the talent (i.e., vaudevillians) available could not support such a dream. In order to compensate for the lack of available talent, the Seattle Unit quickly split the company in two, one unit covering “variety” and the other “revue.” Unlike Hughes, Whitcomb did not split the Oregon actors into vaudeville and legitimate revue units (and, judging from the list of professional variety entertainers in the Oregon Unit, the parade of talent was similar to that of Seattle.) Whitcomb choose instead to work with whoever was available.⁶ Chronicling the popularity of the Oregon Unit players with the public, from the first sketch to their Shakespearian vaudeville, can help define the difficult road to “legitimate drama” Bess Whitcomb and he troupe had to travel.

Federal Theatre Units across the country moved away from vaudeville performance toward legitimate text-based theatre in the last two years of the Federal Theatre, and the Oregon Unit was no exception. The FTP wanted legitimate plays, but in the rush to bring theatre to the stage, they settled for vaudeville performances that were performance-ready. The Oregon Unit began the negotiation of replacing vaudeville acts with scripted plays, trying to please the vaudeville performers and audience alike. After only a year, the Oregon Unit would move from performing vaudeville schtick to scripted classics such as *Taming of the Shrew* and Anton Chekov’s one-act play *The Boor*. However, as I will argue, the period of vaudevillian incubation, from 1936 to 1937, was

never lost as they moved to legitimate theatre. I will show the forms and values of vaudeville – thematic, economic and aesthetic –marked the Oregon Unit and would shape its work in the coming years. How and why this occurred was a product of convenience, available talent, and synergies between the vaudeville and the goals of the FTP.

The Common Values of Vaudeville and the Oregon Unit

Harry Hopkins' infamous quote, that the FTP would be “free, adult, and uncensored,” haunted him as the head of the WPA.⁷ Censored FTP productions across the country proved the government had the ultimate say in what the FTP could stage. Productions like *Ethiopia* and *The Cradle Will Rock* in New York, or *Lysistrata* in Seattle, fell under censorship at the state and federal levels of the WPA, and a fan dancer in the Midwest was removed from an FTP unit for wearing a revealing costume while in the employment of the government.⁸ Within the vaudeville industry “blue” material, including swear words, such as “God” and “Hell,” as well as bawdy physicality, not allowed with vaudeville's emphasis on family entertainment. The term blue, meaning “tawdry,” was taken from the color of the warning cards or envelopes issued by vaudeville managers to performers overstepping the rules of stage conduct.⁹ If a performer received a blue envelope, they had to change their routine, and the information would be wired to the other theatre managers so they too could watch the performer. If there were repeat violations, the performer and act would no longer be booked in the circuit, and the word spread quickly through management to other circuits, leading to the end of a career in the vaudeville industry. State leaders and national WPA representatives targeted sensitive subject matter and inflammatory conduct from the FTP stage just as

vaudeville managers had maintained the rules of conduct for the industry. Censorship came to protect the reputation of the institution of the WPA and state, just as the blue envelope protected the institution of vaudeville as family entertainment.

Vaudevillians always found ways to bend the rules however, telling working class jokes that appealed to a portion of their audience, and that was equally true with the Oregon Unit. Many vaudeville comedians challenged blue material rules using sexual and racial innuendo. The extent of blue material in a given act (how far the comedian could bend the rules) depended on the popularity of the performer. In a similar way, Oregon Unit vaudevillians tailored the amount of blue material to their working class audiences. Performers pushed against the established strictures to perform blue material in the company of adults, particularly when performing in clubs or fraternal organizations such as the Masons or the Knights of Pythias where the audience were largely adult men.

The Oregon Unit often had to negotiate carefully between the preferences of the national administration and the desires of its local audience and performers. Whitcomb faced this very problem during Fleet Week in August of 1936, when U.S. Navy battleships and frigates sailed up the Willamette River to dock in Portland for the crews' shore leave. The thousands of Navy officers and sailors that Fleet Week brought ashore needed to be entertained, and the Oregon Unit performed in "the smoker," a stag party for 2500 sailors and 1000 American Legion Men put on by the American Legion at the Armory in Portland.¹⁰

Opportunities to break the rules of conduct allowed Oregon Unit vaudevillians latitude when performing for an adult audience that they had not enjoyed on the West Coast vaudeville circuit. Heckling was a central component within the act of a lead clown

in the American circus, beginning as far back as 1840, when premiere clown Dan Rice (1823-1900)[†] continually disrupted the pompous circus ringmaster with mocking derision. Oregon Unit clown Al Adams brought this rule-breaking circus style to his vaudeville performances. While performing his signature ball-balancing act, called the “globe trotter,” for Fleet Week, Adams heckled the other vaudevillians, rolling through various acts and the audience in the Armory production.¹¹ The *Sentinel-Mist* wrote, “Adams appears in his own startling act on the rolling globe...and adds to the hilarity of the performance by heckling the other members of the company during the show.”¹² In “The Circus” written in 1856 for *Life Illustrated*, Walt Whitman supports the purity of the off-color antics in Dan Rice’s big tent. He wrote, “As a rule, the clown’s jokes and the master’s grandiloquent speeches are extremely virtuous and intensely patriotic—which makes it all the more desirable that the faintest appearance of indecency should be absolutely forbidden.”¹³ Clowns like Rice and Adams crossed the line of decency, but because of their wild antics during the production, audience members like Whitman did not take offence. Adams had a pronounced history in the entertainment industry with his father the proprietor of the Great Southern Railroad circus. Adams grew up in greasepaint, packing and unpacking the circus across the South. Adams’ globetrotter act was a classic routine that pre-dated him; pictures of the act in artwork from early advertisements and illustrations of the P.T. Barnum circus of the late 19th century, give a better idea of what it looked like. The illustration shows clowns all around a circus ring balanced on enormous balls, avoiding elephants, lions and acrobats.¹⁴ As a function of circus performance, a clown’s heckling offers a through-line to the disconnected variety

[†] Not to be confused with T.D. Rice, the originator of the “Jim Crow” character, though Dan Rice was also a popular blackface minstrel.

or circus acts, but with the added blue material in the vaudeville act, Adams was breaking the rules for the all-male Navy audience. The vaudevillians had to negotiate the vaudeville and FTP rules before each audience.

Oregon Unit vaudevillians had to worry about remaining employed and on relief, as well as placing the best face on the WPA as the government's representative in Oregon, but the material they could present changed depending on their audience. With many performances occurring in Portland parks, attended by children as well as adults, the vaudevillians largely conformed to the values of the WPA. So, who was censoring the Oregon Unit vaudevillians, outside of Whitcomb and their own self-censorship? Censorship of the Oregon Unit by the FTP was not as much of an issue as it was in larger cities like Seattle, Chicago or New York. State WPA Director Griffith did not meddle in Whitcomb's decisions as head of the Oregon Unit, and in fact supported her efforts. Due to the size and scale of the Oregon Unit, FTP administration in Washington, D.C. paid little attention to their actions. Whitcomb also did not seek controversy, and her Midwestern morality and oversight may have caused her to choose shows – outside of the unit's vaudeville productions – that would not enrage the public.[‡] There was a balance between performances open to the public and those sponsored by fraternal organizations such as the Knights of Pythias that allowed blue material. The vaudevillians had worked for years with moral oversight by vaudeville managers, and thus the FTP's standards were nothing new.

Outside of the shared negotiation of moral values and censored blue material on stage, the operation of the FTP and vaudeville had shared economic values. The goal of

[‡] For example, when other FTP Units across the country were simultaneously opening *It Can't Happen Here*, a play about fascism in the America, Whitcomb chose to open *Night Beat*, the Christmas story featuring Lee Grigsby.

the FTP was to engage a large working class audience by producing a wide variety of plays and productions, from children's theatre to legitimate drama. As an industry, vaudeville wanted to attract working class audiences offering clean family entertainment for children as well as adults. Vaudeville pioneer B.F. Keith, as early as 1898 was the first to offer popular priced tickets for with a four-a-day or continuous structure, running the same performers on stage in rotation through the performance day.¹⁵ Keith's strategy was to draw a high volume of patrons through the performance day, continually rotating acts through the day and changing acts weekly. Like vaudeville, the FTP goal was to draw working class audiences with popular ticket prices.[§] For example, the FTP offered a "popular price" structure, with many performances having a vaudeville-like gate price of ten cents.

While the financial structure was the similar, the primary difference between the financial structure of vaudeville and the FTP was the profit motive, with Keith drawing a high volume of clientele to pay his performers and investors, whereas the FTP used gate receipts to pay for "other than labor costs" for productions. The FTP was about employment, not keeping the theatre in the black, and at the beginning of FTP operations, many performances were free to the public because the WPA could not figure out how to account for gate receipts. An accounting system was set up, and for over a year, the money went back to the federal government and could not be used for local Unit operations. The primary financial difference was how labor costs were paid, with vaudeville pulling labor salaries from gate receipts and the FTP receiving labor salaries

[§] The government used box office revenue to pay for all of the other expenses of theatrical production outside of labor costs, while vaudeville industry paid for labor and gave the profit to investors.

from the WPA.**

The Oregon Unit also shared aesthetic values with vaudeville, and followed a similar “two-a-day” or “four-a-day” continuous structure. The Oregon Unit would often perform multiple shows in a day, but rather than staying at a single venue, the troupe would move between locations. The Unit also experimented with a continuous structure, bringing back classic vaudeville performance. In 1937, the Oregon Unit resurrected a pure continuous bill for one week at the Highway Theatre in South Portland. Ten acts of vaudeville played continuously for twelve hours, with the Eddie Cantor film, *Ali Baba Goes to Town*. In the film, Cantor portrays a hobo who falls asleep on the movie set of *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, and wakes in Baghdad to become a political advisor to the Sultan, creating an employment relief program like the WPA. West Coast vaudeville grew up with film, and at the Highway Theatre vaudeville acts were placed before and after the film and “between reels” as they were changed. The Oregon Unit’s vaudeville and film production featured legendary vaudevillians in a comedy about FDR’s New Deal along with local vaudevillians, and ran continuously from 11 a.m. to midnight.

Aesthetically the vaudeville performances of the Oregon Unit have much in common with standard vaudeville fare through history. *The Oregon Daily Journal’s* descriptions of the acts presented by the Oregon Unit describe the kind of variety offered during the golden age of vaudeville. “Included among the acts,” the *Journal* wrote, “were Larson and Johnson, jugglers; Ernest Carrier, strong man; Lee Grigsby, Negro singer; Louigi Ragan, accordionist; Al Adams’ Punch and Judy show. Mischa Pelz and his 12-

** While this distinction seems evident, it calls into question the financial structure of the FTP. If the FTP was able to slowly transfer the cost of labor from the WPA budget to gate receipts, creating theatre that were independent of the Federal budget, could the FTP have survived?

piece orchestra...”¹⁶ If the audience didn’t like one performer, all they had to do was wait five minutes for the next act. As Keith had said of vaudeville, “There was something for everyone,” and this was also true with the Oregon Unit. The skills and aesthetic qualities of the performers, from the singers to the acrobats working in the Oregon Unit, connect directly to a lineage of classic performance seen at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries in the U.S.

While the economic and aesthetic similarities are evident between the Oregon Unit and vaudeville, the most endearing thematic similarity was the relationship the performers had with their audience. Vaudevillians came from the people and were a part of a working-class tradition that embraced a rags to riches theme. Anybody in the vaudeville audience could practice a talent, and with hard work and persistence, become a star. Vaudeville was “the voice of the city” because anybody, no matter their economic or social background, could make it to “the big time” (a term referring to high paying East Coast vaudeville circuits). Thematically, the vaudevillians in the Oregon Unit endured themselves to the people of Portland in much the same way. They came from a working-class tradition, and continually performed in benefits that helped the local community. The Oregon Unit’s first noted performance at the Shrine Hospital for Crippled Children on July 21, 1936, started a long line of community benefits. The *Oregon Daily Journal* noted, “Uncle Sam sent a new kind of tonic to crippled children... when the vaudeville Unit of the Federal theatre of Portland, a WPA project, put on a real old-fashioned vaudeville show for the little patients.”¹⁷ The location of the performance and audience demographic was significant, because as a first performance, Whitcomb was making a statement about the kind of work the Unit was going to do for Portland.

Playing for the benefit of the public, and in this case crippled children, endeared the vaudevillians to the hearts and minds of the Portland populous. The *Journal's* description of the event gives a flavor of the fast-paced, lighthearted comedy of the vaudeville performance: “Bursts of laughter mixed with gasps of amazement as the professionals went through their tricks at the hospital.”¹⁸ Obviously, the children enjoyed the performance, but the description also suggests the vaudevillians’ professionalism. The press, throughout the Oregon Unit’s existence, constantly emphasized the professional nature of the company, either because the Oregon Unit was the only professional local theatre in Portland, or the Oregon Unit press releases stressed their professional status. Vaudevillians, whose shtick, songs, and antics were a mark of their long-honed professional careers, were a product of the people, connecting thematically to the working class and bringing their seasoned stage experience to the public as employees of the WPA.

The forms and values of vaudeville and the Oregon Unit—thematic, economic and aesthetic—aligned for different reasons. The primary difference was that vaudeville was a business, and although there were business aspects to the FTP, the Units did not operate with a clear profit motive. The goal of the FTP was employment, and it was through the vaudevillian’s WPA relief status that the distinction from vaudeville becomes clear. As relief workers, the Oregon Unit vaudevillians could relate with the ranks of the unemployed and families on relief in Portland. At the same time, relief had a negative connotation, expressed by FTP director and former vaudevillian, Eddie Dowling, that the actors were not good enough to hold a job on the dwindling vaudeville circuits.¹⁹ A tension existed in the vaudeville roots of the Oregon Unit between what was perceived by

FTP administration as useless talents in a dying art and the outpouring of support for Oregon Unit vaudeville performances by a public needing to be entertained in a truly depressed and depressing time. Highlighting the individual skills and talents of the Oregon Unit vaudevillians demonstrates the tension between their dying art and their popularity in Portland. The Oregon Unit vaudevillians also bear out similarities between the values of the FTP and vaudeville through their service to working class audiences, their aesthetic emphasis on labor and a Pacific Northwest regional aesthetic.

Ernest Carrier: Working Class Aesthetics

The West Coast vaudevillians had to transform their acts to accommodate their audiences, giving their performances a regional aesthetic. In the book *No Applause-Just Throw Money*, Trav S.D. describes the vaudevillian's inseparable connection to the audience: "Vaudeville was an industry in which success could be measured scientifically and instantaneously using the world's most ancient form of marketing survey: applause." The measure of an act's worth was simple and immediate, and changed depending on where you were in the country. S.D. continues, "Vaudevillians emerged from the people, were a creation of the people, in a sense were elected by the people."²⁰ While Adams as the clown upended the values (and at times the morals) of vaudeville with his circus-based performance, no performer in the Oregon Unit represented labor on stage more than the strongman, Ernest Carrier. Carrier's acts of strength, like the performance of Adams, were pulled directly from early popular entertainment while tapping into the labor of Portland's working class.

Carrier is a great example of how vaudevillians negotiated their acts through the

Pacific Northwest region and the West Coast circuit. The iconic strongman type adapted to the audiences needs in the Pacific Northwest, through his physical appearance and stage equipment. As a vaudeville routine, the strongman was a specialty “dumbshow” act, often placed as the opening act after intermission.²¹ The Oregon Unit featured Carrier in every vaudeville performance, following the tradition of Eugene Sandow, one of the first strongmen who had performed at end of the 19th century. In his book, *On With the Show*, Robert C. Toll describes Sandow flexing through classic muscle-bound poses accompanied by a piano player: “Sandow lifted the pianist high in the air with one hand, put him down to applause, and then nonchalantly lifted the piano.”²² Carrier was not the perfect specimen that Sandow had been advertised to be, but the former had an “everyman” quality that connected to the audience. Carrier represented the labor of the WPA, physically performing feats of strength and endurance that amazed his audience. While Carrier follows Sandow’s type, his rugged lumberjack frame and West Coast style broke with Sandow, emphasizing how the audience transformed the West Coast vaudeville performer.

Carrier, a man who looked like he could have come from the Oregon woods, used the familiar to create “gasps of amazement.”²³ While his physical muscle-bound attributes did not fit the Adonis qualities of Sandow, Carrier’s act highlighted his ability to withstand pain and his unbelievable strength. The *Portland News Telegram* described Carrier breaking and bending items commonly found in the Portland, such as “bursting an inner tube by lung power and breaking a bridge spike.”²⁴ Portland was, and still is, a city connected by bridges, and Portland audiences were familiar with the rigidity of the one-inch thick, one-foot bridge spike that held many of the older bridges around the city

together. Carrier negotiated what a strongman might look like in Oregon, embracing the image of a working class Oregonian incorporating common items found around the city into his act. His skill delighted audiences while the tension of the FTP transition from vaudeville to legitimate scripted work lies in his act. As Whitcomb began inserting scripted plays into the repertoire Carrier had to adapt, changing from a “dumbshow” strongman to a legitimate stage actor.

Values of the FTP Reinscribe Ethnicity in the City of Portland

Not every actor with the Oregon Unit looked like Carrier, a Caucasian muscle-bound Oregonian. Between the turn of the century and the 1920s, Portland audiences had seen few minorities on the stages of the Portland Civic or in the stock theatre companies like the Duffwin Players and the Baker Stock Company. Most of the African American performers that came through Portland graced the vaudeville stages of the city, performed for a few days and moved on. The entertainment onstage reflected the city itself, and the accepted homogeneity separated the ethnically-diverse Oregon Unit from the other theatres in the city. While the Oregon Unit worked to help disrupt racial stereotypes in Portland by presenting the talents of non-white performers, much of the content of the performances chosen by Whitcomb reinforced and reinscribed racial stereotypes. The Oregon Unit did not separate out a “Negro Unit” like many Units in larger cities, nor did it exclude performers based on race, ethnically mixing the Unit. In the Oregon Unit, the tension between the opportunity to perform and portrayal of ethnicity, while at the same time including African Americans and Native Hawai’ian performers, suggests another negotiation Whitcomb undertook in the creation and presentation of vaudeville acts

before a working class Portland audience.

The performers of the Oregon Unit, because of their vaudeville background and path to the WPA relief rolls, were often more diverse than their Portland audiences. Discrimination was an accepted condition in Oregon during the Great Depression, and minorities faced little hope of improving their condition. According to 1940 U.S. Census data, whites made up 98.7 percent of the population of Oregon, with African Americans at 0.6 percent and “other races” (which the census defined as Indian, Japanese and Chinese) at 1.0 percent.²⁵ According to population maps from the mid-1930s in E. Kimbark MacColl’s book *Growth of a City*, concentrations of African Americans lived on Portland’s East Side near the Burnside Bridge, and Japanese and Chinese populations concentrated on the Willamette River on Portland’s Westside. Portland’s Realty Board actively campaigned for racial exclusion in white Portland neighborhoods, evidenced by a statement made in a 1939 Portland realtor training manual by Vice President of Commonwealth, Inc., Chester Moores:

We were discussing at the Realty Board recently the advisability of setting up certain districts for Negroes and orientals [sic]. We talked about the possibility of creating desirable districts which would actually cater to those groups and make life more pleasant for them. After all, they have to live too, the same as youngsters.²⁶

The racist stereotype of non-whites as “youngsters” was seen in literature throughout the 1930s, with minorities often described as children unable to take care of themselves and the white race seen as a parent or guardian. By presenting non-whites on stage in Portland, Whitcomb was leveraging a mandate by Flanagan to include all races, working to undo racial stereotypes. Within Portland real estate, such acceptance of non-whites in a white community was severe. Realty Board members in Portland were expelled if they

sold a home to non-whites in a white neighborhood and did not stick to the unwritten racist rule.²⁷ Property ownership in the wealthy neighborhoods on Portland's West side was controlled exclusively by whites, with the first Japanese-American property owner purchasing a large home in the King's Hill district as late as 1951, though this was "much to the horror of many nearby residents."²⁸ With minorities concentrated in areas of the city, and taking into account their low census numbers, white Portlanders could go about their day never experiencing another race or ethnicity. For this reason, the Oregon Unit was an anomaly, featuring a Native Hawai'ian quartette and a "negro baritone," the Unit was more ethnically diverse than other Portland theatres. Whitcomb never shied away from the Oregon Unit's difference, however, and she prominently placed the Hawai'ian performers as an opening act and featured the Unit's diversity by highlighting the talents of Lee Grigsby, the negro baritone.

African American performer "Lullaby" Lee Grigsby would play a vital role in the Oregon Unit until 1938, when the company shifted to legitimate performance and he moved back to Los Angeles.^{††} Grigsby was a featured artist with the Oregon Unit and the inclusion of Grigsby in the cast pushed against the practices of segregation found in many branches of the New Deal bureaucracy, including the Negro Units of the FTP and the Civilian Conservation Corps. As the only African American hired by the Oregon Unit, and the only African American regularly on stage in Portland, he was a pioneer.

Grigsby's inclusion in the Oregon Unit demonstrates Whitcomb's negotiation around race, which other New Deal programs such as the CCC and the WPA, "solved" by segregating the work force. By not only including Grigsby, but featuring him

^{††} Lee Grigsby and Theresa Grigsby are mentioned in the May 1939 *California Eagle* article, where he was performing in Hamilton Methodist Church for the 12th Street YWCA branch Business and Professional Women's Club.

prominently in starring roles, Whitcomb was disrupting the expectation of FTP administration, who had segregated within the FTP by creating the Negro Units. The Negro Theatre Project was located in 23 cities across the nation, and although the plays were often made up of an entirely African American cast, whites, such as Orson Welles who famously created his *Voodoo Macbeth* with the New York Negro Unit, were often charged with directing. Cities such as Seattle, Los Angeles, Chicago and New York had a large enough African American population to support a Negro Unit, but smaller southern Negro Units such as Raleigh and Durham, North Carolina, as well as Birmingham, Alabama, were mandated by WPA administration in Washington, D.C. to keep FTP units segregated. The Oregon Unit was able to work outside the rules of segregation imposed on the New Deal programs because of its small size and inability to form a Negro Unit, the support offered to Whitcomb by WPA State Director Griffith, and, most importantly, Grigsby's singing and performing abilities, which were applauded by Portland audiences.

Grigsby's employment at a resort outside of Portland prior to joining the WPA relief rolls helps open our understanding to the type of work vaudeville performers had to do in the years following the collapse of the vaudeville industry. Vaudevillians like Grigsby moved to smaller venues, performing at nightclubs or vacation resorts across the country. Portland clubs, resorts and summer recreation facilities, such as the Oaks and Janzen Beech, employed many Portland entertainers.^{‡‡} Grigsby had been a Portland resident for five years by the time he was hired by the Oregon Unit. Evidence in a 1931 report from the Los Angeles *California Eagle* notes Grigsby on vacation from the "Buros

^{‡‡} The move of vaudevillians to alternative forms of entertainment and smaller venues is an area of popular performance history that deserves further study. Ultimately, this move is one that allowed vaudevillians to continue performing through the Great Depression, bridging the move to television and film for many entertainers into the 1940s and 1950s.

Challet” country club outside of Portland, Oregon.

Lee, one of the best singers in the business left [Los Angeles] a year ago taking a small band that he organized on short notice and booked them as ‘Lullaby’ Lee and his Happiness Boys. Since then they have been working steadily at the high-class pleasure resort, where they have gained great popularity and are highly lauded by patrons and owners both for their work and excellent deportment... Lee was one of the singers under contract at R.K.O. studio for several months during the filming of *Dr. Arrowsmith* and several Movietone features. §§

Two brief scenes in the film *Dr. Arrowsmith* feature Grigsby’s baritone voice, where he plays an “island native” singing in a funeral march. His connection with R.K.O. suggests his vaudeville past with the Keith-Albee-Orpheum circuit, where he may have crooned across the country. Grigsby was able to stave off the Great Depression by working at the high-class Buros Challet country club. The fact that he was able to work for a country club for several years into the economic downturn demonstrates his presence and talent as a performer.

Whitcomb’s adaptation of the plays to the talents of the performers became a trademark of success that carried through all of the productions by the Oregon Unit. While the descriptions of the productions in local papers tell of a distinctly vaudevillian flavor, the move towards text-based performance inched the company closer to Whitcomb’s hope and vision for the troupe. After initially touring the zany and startling group of performers standard vaudeville faire around Portland, the challenge for Whitcomb was weaving their talents into a coherent production around a central theme.

§§ The film *Arrowsmith*, directed by John Ford and starring Ronald Colman and Helen Hayes, was released just after Christmas in 1931. The connection of Lee Grigsby to RKO studios may indicate his vaudeville connection to the Keith-Albee-Orpheum circuit, which in 1930 was sold to the Radio Corporation by Joe Kennedy to become Radio Keith Orpheum (RKO) Studios (Stein, *American Vaudeville*, 335-6 and 371). The vaudeville stars on contract with the Keith-Albee-Orpheum circuit transferred to RKO, and many vaudevillians moved to Los Angeles in order to continue working. This corporate transfer away from live performance and towards motion pictures and radio broadcasts along with the transfer of vaudeville to film houses, created massive unemployment in the vaudeville industry and a great migration of entertainers to Southern California (*California Eagle*, 10/2/1931, 10).

She (and the FTP administrators above her) wanted the FTP to produce legitimate scripted material, but her performers had talents in very specific areas that did not include acting. Training a crooner, a clown and a strongman in the art of acting would come only by small advances, allowing the Unit to add to their scripted repertoire one play at a time.

Two productions, *Night Beat* and *Sloping West*, used the talents and skits of vaudeville performers in the Oregon Unit to generate content for the productions, while moving the troupe closer to text-based performance. *Night Beat* was a one-act Christmas play that told a distinctly African American tale, while *Sloping West*, set in rural Southern Oregon, suggests a focus on regionalism embraced by the New Deal, featuring a one-act play by Arthur Hopkins as the centerpiece of the performance. Both productions endeared themselves to the struggling working class of Portland, focusing on survival of the lower class during the Great Depression.

Night Beat: An Unemployed Working Class Story

In December of 1936, the Oregon Unit featured Grigsby in *Night Beat*, based on a monologue written by short story author and novelist Roark Bradford. The production, the first adaptation by the Unit, was significant because it has distinctly African American themes, centered on “negro spirituals,” performed for a largely white audience. The play resonated with the extreme poverty seen across Portland, such as the shantytowns constructed under the N.E. Grand Avenue Bridge in Sullivan’s Gulch.²⁹ The power of the play was its hopeful Christmas message, a message that allowed Whitcomb to pull several of the Oregon Federal One projects together in a single “community sing” for the City of Portland. Despite the positive message and the presentation of minorities

on stage, the racist overtones presented in Bradford's poem reinscribed the position of African Americans as uneducated children.

Roark Bradford in the late 1920s and '30s found acclaim writing African American stories and characters, and *Night Beat* was part of a long line of Bradford's work adapted for the stage. Bradford's 1931 novel *John Henry* was adapted from the popular African American folk tale, and Marc Connelly adapted *Ol' Man Adam an' His Chillun*, into the play *The Green Pastures* with an extended run on Broadway in 1928. *Night Beat* was adapted from Bradford's "The Christmas Sermon" published for the Christmas edition *Esquire Magazine* in 1936.³⁰ In many of his writings African American characters are stereotypical, what literary critic Sterling A. Brown called, "burlesques" of African American life.³¹ Bradford used the cadence and slang of the minstrel show in his portrayals, and, indeed, Bradford's work was part of a long line of minstrel portrayals of African Americans, from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to *Huckleberry Finn*. In the case of *Night Beat*, whites were not smudging burnt cork on their face to become the minstrel performers. Eric Lott, in his investigation of minstrel performance, called Connelly's highly successful *The Green Pastures*, a "near minstrel show," and Bradford's pattern of speech in "The Christmas Sermon" is identical to that in *Ol' Man Adam an' His Chillun*.³²

Brown has criticized Bradford's short stories for "dividing Negroes into three types, 'the nigger, the colored person, and the Negro—upper case N,'" and "The Christmas Sermon" continues in this vein. "Bradford takes his stand by the first type, and though delighted to be in his company, sees [the black man] solely as primitive and uproariously funny," Brown wrote.³³ This can be seen in "The Christmas Sermon" with the types not only written into the text, but also personified by *Esquire Magazine* artist

Eric Lundgren as the minstrel characters Zip Coon and Jim Crow. Bradford, like other writers in the 1930s, such as Constance Rourke, celebrated the American folk tradition of the minstrel show. In Rourke's chapter on minstrelsy, defined by Lott as "the people's cultural position,"³⁴ Rourke identifies the comic nature of the minstrel, lacking what she perceives as any negative emotions, portraying only a comic spirit:

Minstrelsy was of course white masquerade; and the double use of the mask seemed to create a profound satisfaction for American audiences, as if the sheer accomplished artifice aroused an instinctive response among them. The mask might be worn as [...] a front against the world in any of these impersonations, concealing a childish and unformed countenance: but it was part of a highly conscious self-projection.³⁵

Rourke sees the minstrel as a deliberate African American countenance; a deliberate mask but fails to see anything wrong in the way a white man was portraying African Americans. Similarly, Bradford's characters in "The Christmas Story" both conceal what Rourke describes as "a childish unformed countenance."³⁶ While the characters speak in Bradford's childish uneducated manner, the content of *Night Beat* was serious, reverend and humorous. In the stage adaptation of the poem, Grigsby's "down and out" character was not only looking for spiritual guidance, but asking for a reason to live. The nativity scene gave Grigsby guidance through the Christmas sermon and hymns. Bradford wrote:

And I can see Poor Mary
A-layin' back on de hay
A-groanin' and travailin'.
Joseph had done what he could do
But dat wan't dardly nothin'.
De hotel man wouldn't take 'em in,
But said, 'Go to Charity Hospital.'
Now, Joseph was a Jew and a Jew couldn't vote,
So hit wan't not room at Charity.
De Community Chist had done closed for de day,
And de Welfare was too busy.³⁷

Bradford's sermon on the Nativity begins with a bar of music from the hymn "Wasn't It a

Grand Day—When Jesus Christ was Born,” with language taking on the African American types outlined by Brown, thrown into a modern context.

Night Beat, told through dialogue and song, “places the story of the nativity through ordinary common people in New York’s Central Park.” Grigsby plays “a down and outer who tells the story of Christmas in the form of a monologue; a group of Central Park idlers furnish a background of carols and Negro spirituals.”³⁸ Descriptions and criticism of the production of *Night Beat* highlight the qualities of the poem, with Lee Grigsby given backhanded praise by *The News Telegram*:

Though Grigsby is a student of operatic music and has played in motion pictures, his portrayal of the part is simple and unaffected—he knows and feels the negro’s child-like conception of the Christmas story.³⁹

The tension in the description of Grigsby’s skilled performance (and the author’s racism) demonstrates the way in which the Oregon Unit was disrupting audience expectations. The “child-like” racist reference by the *Telegram* reporter was typical of many articles found in Portland newspapers in the 1930s and echoes the writing of Rourke, Moore and many authors of the time. At the same time the Oregon Unit was disrupting audience racial expectations, Bradford’s poem was reinscribing racial stereotypes. The *News Telegram* critic was responding to the simple character presented in Bradford’s poem, spoken in a minstrel dialect, which did not disrupt the audience racial stereotype. Despite Grigsby’s training, which for the reporter should be a detriment to his performance, he is “simple and unaffected,” while his race places him in touch with a “child-like” understanding of the nativity. Bradford’s poem shines through *Night Beat*’s adaptation, with Grigsby taking on Sterling’s “Negro—capital N” type. The play was seen by a Portland’s white population, and although it features an African American in the lead, a

stereotypical type was reinforced even as the virtuosity of Grigsby argued against it.

Night Beat, like Connelly's adaptation of *The Green Pastures*, was a hit and the Oregon Unit had an entire month of bookings through the month of December. The play was presented in a wide range of venues across economic and social classes, traveling to Camp Chapman in the town of Scappoose run by the WPA; to Portland area schools; to the Studio Theatre on the top floor of the Studio Building, St. Helens Hall in downtown Portland; and to high-class private clubs such as the Women Club and the Men's Resort.*** The troupe would add their vaudeville bill to the beginning or end of many of their private evening performances of the play to create a full-length production. The response to the performance was overwhelming. In a single weekend, *Night Beat* was seen by 6,000 patrons, and added to its numbers by performing for the Elks Club in Oregon City, the Order of the Eastern Star in Forest Grove and in the Pythian Building in Portland.⁴⁰ The Oregon Unit performed *Night Beat* over 33 times in 23 days, and was seen by over 10,000 people, an impressive figure in a city with a population of 300,000.††† *Night Beat* was scripted text-based performance based on "The Christmas Sermon" and moved away from the vaudeville acts the Unit performed for over a year.

Although the play reinscribed rather than disrupted racial stereotypes, the overwhelming popularity of the play across the classes, and the incorporation of the work into several Federal One programs around the holiday season, provided an ethnically-

*** The Studio theatre was located on the 9th floor of the Studio Building on Taylor Street and 6th in Downtown Portland. The Studio Building was constructed to support the arts, with many dance and art instructors operating out of the offices. In the office on the 9th floor the iron doors to the original theatre are extant, complete with comedy and tragedy masks. The Guild theatre is attached to the building on the first floor, with an entrance on through the Studio Building on Taylor Street.

††† I have come to the number 10,000, by taking the 6,000 patrons documented by the *ODJ* who attended the four Auditorium performances, and added at least 100 students, club members and patrons attending each of the additional 29 performances.

diverse program that told a story of hope and promise for an unemployed working-class audience in Portland. In *Night Beat* Whitcomb pulled together several divisions of Federal One in Portland in 1936, including the Federal Orchestra and Federal Band for the only “Community Sing” in the Oregon Unit’s three year run. This is significant because while all three divisions—the band, orchestra and theatre—were prolific in Portland, they rarely played together in a single public performance. The Community Sing occurred free of charge just before Christmas at the Auditorium, an enormous public theatre operated by the city of Portland. Included in the performance were a 150-piece WPA harmonica band, made up of WPA professionals and anyone in Portland that could play harmonica, and the 30 voices of the WPA Negro chorus, which may have helped in the spirituals within the *Night Beat* production. The diversity seen on the Portland stage was significant in a majority white community, separated the work of the Oregon Unit from other theatres in town, and moved Grigsby into a featured position among the vaudevillians. The Oregon Unit was supported by the large pool of sponsors underwriting the production, but the most promising outcome of the successful Christmas show was the support of the *Oregon Daily Journal*, which would offer Whitcomb a temporary home for the Oregon Unit.

Sloping West: A Play with Regional Values

The Oregon Unit’s production of *Sloping West* in February 1937 represented regional values found in the New Deal, with Whitcomb presenting characters from Oregon. Whitcomb was responding to a call by Flanagan to utilize vaudeville talent in new and dramatic ways,

If the plays do not exist we shall have to write them. We shall have to work more closely with our dramatists. We cannot be too proud to study our medium. By this I do not mean only the technique of dramatic writing [...] I mean specifically, our own FEDERAL THEATRE companies and our own FEDERAL THEATRE audiences. I mean, specifically, the problem of vaudeville and how the valuable techniques of the vaudeville can be reused.⁴¹

Flanagan was speaking to New York producers working with the Federal Theatre who saw the stagnation of vaudeville, both economically and socially. Flanagan was a strong proponent of regional identity within the FTP, and to that end wanted the Units at the state level to respond to the needs of the people at the local level, in much the same way FDR saw the formation of the national government to be a product of the grassroots, from the bottom up.

FDR outlined his thoughts on a regionally-based system of governance in a speech given in September 1937 at the inauguration of the Bonneville Dam. The bill creating such a system was working its way through Congress, seeking to create “regional planning boards to be set up for the purpose of coordinating the planning for the future in seven or eight natural geographic regions.” FDR wanted to apply the same regional thinking to the entire nation that went into the CCC and the WPA, and with it the FTP. He sought a decentralized form of governance where “the responsibility of the Federal Government for the welfare of its citizens will [...] progress to the National Capital from the ground up – from the communities and counties and states which lie within each of the logical geographical areas.”⁴² Regional thinking permeated the FDR administration, with the hope that the same regional framework that gave strength to the FTP could be applied nationally.

With the production of *Sloping West*, Whitcomb heeded a mandate laid down by Flanagan to incorporate new regionally-inspired theatre into the framework of the Oregon

Unit. The FTP itself was set up with a regional structure with the Western Region based in Los Angeles. Cooperation between state agencies was encouraged at the national level because of this regional identity. The sharing of personnel between FTP Units across state lines, as I will describe below and in the next chapter, came about because of the support of regionalism within the administration.

The Oregon Unit's move away from touring vaudeville performance and towards the structured performance of *Sloping West* came in the middle of winter, after the Unit had toured their vaudeville act extensively around Portland at clubs, societies and fraternal organizations. The Oregon Unit had reached a saturation point, where every willing organization needing entertainment that supported the Federal Theatre cause saw the performance. Vaudeville's popularity had hinged on "the circuit," a string of theatres linked together by an individual owner, like the Pantages or the Sullivan-Considine chain in the West, or by a contractual alliance, like the Western Vaudeville Managers Association, which was an early conglomeration of circuits and talent nationally led by the Orpheum circuit at the turn of the 20th century.⁴³ Circuits hired vaudevillians to travel from theatre to theatre, city to town, often staying in a single location for three days to a week. The constant variety of entertainment, filling 10-14 acts on a vaudeville bill, meant that the performer would be employed for the same act for 20-30 weeks at a stretch. If the act was popular, little would have to change before the audiences on the circuit saw the performer again. While the rotation of performers worked for the circuit because of its comparatively vast geographic area, the movement of performers around Portland by the Oregon Unit meant that audiences often became bored seeing the same bill in the same rotation, no matter how mesmerizing. With a fixed group of performers on relief,

Whitcomb decided to adapt the vaudeville routine by using her varied performers and a central theme to create a single production.

Moving the performers in such a direction required rehearsal and training. Constantly transferring the Unit from venue to venue, making arrangements, finding space and booking performances took time and energy away from rehearsals. The opportunity to gather the company together and rehearse, while slowing down the touring schedule and performing in a fixed location, came in 1937, when the WPA was offered a “demonstration space” on the second floor of the Portland Public Market. The Unit was able to use a space converted into a small theatre at the Market that placed them in a fixed location for an extended period, prompting WPA State Director Griffith to come up with the idea of a permanent theatre for the Oregon Unit, which is a focus of the next chapter.

The Portland Public Market was enormous, filling two long blocks on the downtown waterfront with parking for over 650 automobiles. While the construction of the Market was supported by the downtown business community and had political backing, the merchants from the open-air makeshift Yamhill Market, which the Public Market was supposed to replace, were never given a voice in the process and did not care to be removed from the Yamhill Market. Yamhill Public Market stalls, closed after the Portland Public Market opened, prompted Yamhill merchants to open a cooperative in another building on Yamhill Street. At the opening of the Portland Public Market, ten days before Christmas in 1933, the tenant quota was never full. The City of Portland lost the waterfront building due to lack of planning and public support in 1936, and the *Oregon Daily Journal*, a company sympathetic to FDR’s New Deal, eventually purchased the property in 1948 for \$750,000.⁴⁴

In February 1937, a newly constructed stage in the Portland Public Market, on the western shores of the Willamette River, allowed all Federal One organizations in Portland to display their work to the public. The *Oregon Daily Journal* leased the building from the city and in an effort to increase customer activity, the WPA was offered a performance space for the Oregon Unit, the WPA Band and Orchestra on the nearly vacant second floor. Through a “progress and planning exhibition,” the WPA sought to increase their public support by emphasizing employment statistics, costs and beneficial WPA projects; the Timberline Lodge, the Wolf Creek highway and coast highway projects, as well as plans for the Portland-Columbia Airport and Bonneville Dam.⁴⁵ The WPA programs benefited the entire Northwest region of the country, and the Oregon Unit’s production of *Sloping West*, on the Portland Public Market stage every day at 1:30 p.m., highlighted the Oregon Unit’s participation in this regionally-based idea. *Sloping West* was another wildly popular production with the *Oregon Daily Journal* reporting the “five-act variety show on the third week was seen more than 80 times.”⁴⁶

Sloping West was the first play by the Oregon Unit that responded to a regional New Deal value, pulling from the talents of vaudevillians while focusing on people in Southern Oregon. *Sloping West* was organized around a one-act play by Arthur Hopkins and once again pulled the company closer to text-based performance. *Sloping West* was “a Hillbilly musical set in Southern Oregon,” offering “a curtain raiser of Mexican music, a one-act play by Arthur Hopkins, a skit satirizing old-fashioned melodrama and many dances and hillbilly songs.”⁴⁷ Every vaudeville act transformed their work for the production to fit in a rural setting, “laid in the Oregon backwoods.”⁴⁸ Featured were comic rope tricks and “unusual cowboy dances by Dan Feely, a bullfight with Lee

Grigsby as a toreador who tames ‘Ol’ Snorty,’ the bull, with a pitchfork and a razor.”⁴⁹

The play placed the people of Southern Oregon in a comedic light for Portland audiences.

At the center of the Southern Oregon skits was Arthur Hopkins’ play *Moonshine*, set in the backwoods in a moonshiner’s shack.^{†††} The text is an example of how Whitcomb negotiated the vaudevillians in the Unit towards legitimate text-based performance while appealing to the regional New Deal philosophy embraced by Flanagan. The play is about Luke Hazy, a backwoods moonshiner, who has captured and plans on killing a man he believes is a revenuer, a government agent charged with tracking down and destroying moonshine stills. Luke’s nemesis is Jim Dunn, a legendary revenuer who Luke fixates on hanging, and he has pinned a stick figure drawing of the hanging on the upstage wall of the shack. Luke offers the tied up revenuer a last drink and cigar, which the man refuses, stating he wants nothing more than to end his life. The revenuer tells Luke that he has tried to commit suicide without success and has attempted to put his life in danger by walking across a busy street and getting in fights with thugs in the city without success. Convinced that the man was just trying to commit suicide, Luke lets him go, giving him his only horse. As a parting gesture, the man leaves his address for Luke to look up when he visits the city, having to write his name on the picture of Jim Dunn hanging on the wall. After the man leaves, Luke slowly reads the man’s signature—“Jim Dunn”—grabs his shotgun, and runs out the door too late: the hillbilly was duped.

^{†††} The *Journal* report cited a “one-act by Arthur Hopkins” within the performance, but the national archive index does not give credit to Hopkins for the play. What is available within the National Archives is a folder with photos of an Oregon Unit production of Hopkins’ one-act *Moonshine*, written in 1924. *Moonshine* is a play that was never credited to the Oregon Unit by the *Telegram*, *Journal* or the *Oregonian*. Judging from production photos and the Hillbilly content of the one-act, it is my supposition that the play *Moonshine* was used in the production of *Sloping West*.

The Twenty-First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ending prohibition in the United States, was signed into law by FDR in 1933, four years before the production of *Moonshine* by the Oregon Unit. With the decline of the Oregon timber industry in the mid-1920s, the residents of Southern Oregon had few job prospects, and distilling illegal moonshine in the backwoods was a product of survival. While the play is a comedy and mocks the character of Luke, the connection and understanding Whitcomb had to the residents of Portland and their feelings about the people of Southern Oregon, was demonstrated in the selection of the play.

Whitcomb's move to the Public Market gave rise to the first regionally-based production in a line of such productions by the Oregon Unit. Her negotiations to get the Unit into the Public Market were also the beginning of a relationship with the owners and editors of the *Oregon Daily Journal* that would lead to great publicity for the Oregon Unit. Performances in the Public Market gave the performers a regular, warm space to perform in the winter months, tied the vaudeville troupe to the WPA in the public eye, and most importantly began moving the players away from vaudeville and towards legitimate text-based performance. While the attendance numbers in the Public Market were impressive (10,000+ patrons over four weeks), they would pale in comparison to a production that would place the Oregon Unit firmly in legitimate Shakespearean drama—*Taming of the Shrew*.

Into the Parks: *Shrew* Serves the East Side

The Oregon Unit production of *Taming of the Shrew* in August 1937 represented the values of FTP, serving working class audiences in Portland's East Side

neighborhoods by moving the production to community parks and offering free entertainment for all. Whitcomb negotiated with the Portland Parks Department to not only provide performance spaces in city parks, but for the city to supply a portable stage with settings on a flatbed trailer that were moved easily to area parks. The communities served were the hardest hit by the Great Depression, with an audience who demonstrated their approval by attending the *Shrew* performances en masse. The Oregon Unit's commitment to the working class was a part of its vaudeville roots, while Whitcomb's ability to move the vaudevillians to a Shakespeare text placed the vaudevillians firmly in legitimate text-based performance.

The Oregon Unit vaudevillians had a relationship with the audiences that went beyond the stage, with many of the actors and administrators also living in Portland's East Side neighborhoods. The East Side was primarily made up of working-class neighborhoods, and the Oregon Unit's performances reflect a connection to the worker, performing where the audiences lived.^{§§§} These audiences had been middle class before the Great Depression, but with the collapse of the economy fell into desperate times. Trying to uncover the middle-class dynamics just prior to the Great Depression, University of Illinois History professor, Robert D. Johnson in *The Radical Middle Class* explores the contours of class in Portland. According to Johnson,

When historians have looked for a middle class, they have far too often tended to allow a professional elite to serve as a proxy for the entire middle class. In Portland, however, the more numerous, and ultimately the more politically significant, part of the middling population was its lower segment. This "lower middle class" of small-scale merchants and manufacturers, clerical workers, and lower-level professionals had a solid material base in the city's economic structure.⁵⁰

^{§§§} The Oregon Unit performed in Mount Tabor, Powell, Columbia, Mount Scott, Duniway, Belmont and Grant parks on Portland's East Side from 1936-1938.

In the years before the Great Depression, in the Progressive Era Portland of the 1920s, the “lower-level professionals” made up a majority of Portland’s population, and as the Great Depression worsened joined many failing small businessmen who made up the bulk of the unemployed. This East Side neighborhood population made up the Oregon Unit audiences for *Taming of the Shrew*. Whitcomb and other performers in the Unit who called the East Side home chose to serve the unemployed where they lived, connecting the labor of the WPA theatre to the throngs needing free entertainment. **** Whitcomb’s work, directing performances to the needs of the people, was exactly what Flanagan and the administration in Washington, D.C. hoped for when the FTP was organized. Flanagan wrote:

...we must develop in ourselves and our projects powers equal to the gigantic task of bringing to people across America, hitherto unable to afford dramatic entertainment, a theatre which should reflect our country, its history, its present problems, its diverse regions and populations.⁵¹

While the stated goal of the FTP was employment for theatre professionals, when it came down to performing for destitute Americans, the reward for members of the Oregon Unit was measured in more than dollars and sense. The players were performing for an audience that they were a part of economically, morally and socially. It was the connection of the troupe to the audience that accounted for the retention of performers in the Oregon Unit, whose acts provided a civic duty entertaining the Portland masses.

The performers were ready and eager to perform in the outdoors, judging by the retention of the cast over several years, and perhaps the answer lies in the resilience and adaptive ability of the West Coast vaudevillian. While many Orpheum and Pantages

**** Bess Whitcomb and Oregon Unit dance choreographer, Jack Biles lived in Northeast Portland Neighborhoods according to 1936-38 Portland telephone directories.

theatres touted their marble splendor and beautiful décor in the lobby, backstage was often a different story. The West Coast circuit, like the string of Orpheum Theatres connected to Portland, took vaudevillians into frigid and unclean backstage areas. Poor conditions led to so many outbreaks of tuberculosis among vaudevillians that the National Vaudeville Artists founded a lodge for vaudevillians to convalesce.^{††††} J. C. Nugent, in his autobiography *It's a Great Life*, recalled the Orpheum Theatre in Edmonton, Canada:

This was one of our ungodly icy stands on the way to Vancouver, Victoria, Seattle, Portland and 'Frisco. The Edmonton audience sat in overcoats and furs. The temperature outside was thirty below. While the theater was supposed to be warmly heated I could feel the cold penetrating the floor of the stage as I stood there driving my monologue out at them despite a bad cold and chilling feet.⁵²

While many featured at the top of vaudeville's bill made a small fortune performing across the country, the conditions for most performers, from travel to lodging to performance, were deplorable. The vaudevillians in the Oregon Unit stayed with the troupe working in inclement conditions because they had experienced far worse on the vaudeville circuit and were happy to be employed.

Whitcomb faced what she perceived as an inability on the part of vaudevillians to perform in a full-length scripted performance, let alone a Shakespearian production, and she actively campaigned to acquire seasoned actors. Her frustration and perception of the vaudevillians' performances will be covered in more detail in chapter two, but her negotiation as the head of the Oregon Unit with FTP administration to get *Shrew* into performance changed the course of the Unit for the rest of its existence. Two events occurred in 1937 that allowed skilled legitimate theatre actors to join the ranks of the

^{††††} The lodge at Saranac Lake is now the Will Rogers Hospital, founded in 1927 by the NVA and transferred to the Will Rogers Memorial Commission in 1936. <<http://www.wrinstute.org/history.aspx>>

Oregon Unit. Her negotiation to increase non-relief personnel in the Oregon Unit, while simultaneously borrowing talent from larger FTP Units in the Western Region, such as Los Angeles and San Francisco, quickly transformed the Oregon Unit from vaudeville format into legitimate scripted performance.⁵³ Whitcomb's idea of acquiring actors from other Western Units took time to work through administration, but by the end of May 1937, Regional Director J. Howard Miller agreed to allow actors from other Western Region Units to temporarily transfer to the Oregon Unit. In order to take advantage of the short Oregon summer, however, Whitcomb also had to obtain skilled talent through different means.

The total number of relief workers in the Oregon Unit was determined by a percentage of total WPA workers in Oregon. The increase in WPA relief workers on large works projects such as the Timberline Lodge and Bonneville Dam in 1937, increased the allotment of relief workers in the Oregon Unit by ten. The extra relief workers filled carpenter and scenic artist positions, but, more importantly for Whitcomb, the allotted increase allowed the number of non-relief professionals to increase as well.

The *Instructions* for the Federal Theatre stated:

... when it is necessary to complete the personnel of the project unit, or to insure the professional excellence of a project unit, and when the necessary talent is not available on relief lists in nearby districts, non-relief workers may be employed. The total number of workers employed from non-relief sources [...] may not exceed ten percent of the total number of workers employed by Federal funds.⁵⁴

With the new hires the number in the Unit swelled to 50, and Whitcomb could hire two extra non-relief positions. She hired Portland actors Don Porter and Madge Wynne, who she had trained at the Portland Civic Theatre School, to play Petruchio and Kate in

Taming of the Shrew.^{††††} The popularity of the two actors, who had graced the PCT stage in several successful productions, combined with the limitless seating available in the scheduled outdoor park venues, shattered the previous Oregon Unit attendance records set by *Night Beat* and *Sloping West*. Unfortunately, the shift to non-relief and borrowed actors was not a positive move for everyone in the Unit. The change moved many of the Oregon Unit vaudevillians to supporting roles that had previously performed prominent roles before *Taming of the Shrew*, such as Grigsby in *Night Beat*. It also moved the FTP away from its “primary aim,” which was “the reemployment of theatre workers [...] on public relief,” a fact that Whitcomb herself acknowledged, and to which I will return in the next chapter.⁵⁵

While *Taming of the Shrew* was not positive for all the vaudevillians in hindsight, what was successful and enjoyed by all of the Oregon Unit actors was the popular response from the Portland audience. The descriptions of the *Taming of the Shrew*, opening at Laurelhurst Park on July 6, 1937, highlight the crazy antics found in previous vaudeville performances, condensing Shakespeare’s script into a form that was similar to a vaudeville production of *Taming of the Shrew* produced by the Theatre Guild in New York in 1935 starring Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne.⁵⁶ The Theatre Guild production of *Shrew* barnstormed across the country, leading up to and following a long run on Broadway. The production was described as Shakespeare in “circus trappings,” and prominently featured acrobats and dwarfs with actors in the cast interacting with the audience throughout.⁵⁷ Whitcomb applied and expanded the Theatre Guild production

^{††††} The Internet Movie Database highlights Don Porter’s acting career from 1939-1988, where he acted in several World War II combat and spy films (starring in *Madame Spy* in 1942), and Westerns, before a long career in television working on successful shows such as *The Love Boat*, *The Bionic Woman*, and *Hawaii Five-O*.) [www.imdb.com/name/nm0692093]

concept to the talents of the Oregon Unit vaudevillians, pulling from the structure and antics devised by Alfred Lunt, while including “such things as strongman acts between-the-acts.”⁵⁸

Whitcomb recruited people she had worked with at the Portland Civic to help with the production, including James Beard, the popular chef, who designed “skillfully executed” costumes constructed by the Grout School WPA sewing division.⁵⁹

Whitcomb’s negotiations with city government played a vital role, with the Portland Parks bureau allowing different park locations to perform as well as a portable stage.⁶⁰ The settings on the portable stage, designed by Peter Marroney and constructed by the Oregon Federal Theatre stage crew, were “something to rave about.”⁶¹ With 800 seats supplied by the Park Bureau, “the theatre capacity [was] as limitless as space—admission ... as free as the air” and attendance figures topped an estimated 15,000.⁶² Amplification by “a public address system” which made it possible to “hear the dialogue plainly within a hundred yards of the stage” allowed the large capacity crowds to hear the show over a vast area. Newspaper accounts of the Oregon Unit production focus on Don Porter’s Petruchio and the antics of the vaudeville actors. The *Journal* reported,

Juggling, an aerial act, music and dancing will be special intermission numbers during the production... the ‘Shrew’ will be the first full length legitimate play to be given by the Oregon Federal Theatre, which has hitherto offered only one-act plays and variety shows.⁶³

Like Lunt’s Broadway production, the intermission was filled with acrobatics and performance. For the reporter at the *Journal*, who may have seen many productions of *Sloping West* in the *Journal*’s Public Market a few months earlier, the move towards legitimate full-length drama is a mark of progress for the Oregon Unit.

The Oregon Unit’s production of *Taming of the Shrew* was a product of many

victories and milestones for Whitcomb, and the beginning of the end for straight vaudeville performance by the Oregon Unit. The production incorporated experienced vaudeville talent with the classically trained professional actors and produced a legitimate Shakespearean comedy inspired by a New York Broadway production rather than vaudeville schtick. Whitcomb was able to negotiate with the regional office on the matter of employment in the Unit's favor, and able to book parks in and around Portland, while getting the Parks Department to sponsor and supply a mobile stage, allowing the booking of multiple shows on a single day. With support from the government, from sponsors like the Portland Parks, and from her Portland Civic friends, Whitcomb raised the bar on the quality of performance with *Taming of the Shrew*, representing a transition towards legitimate theatre while pulling together theatre forces within Portland. Her actions, as we will see in the next chapter, solidified a home for the company and almost gave Oregon a permanent State Theatre.

Speaking to a fellow professor in an interview taken in a hospital bedroom at the end of her life, Whitcomb spoke of the resilience and tenacity of her "Federal Theatre days." She equated her perseverance with her work in the FTP, saying, "I could put a play on in a waist basket." Indeed, the Oregon Unit performed in a wide assortment of borrowed venues and parks until their move to the Elks Temple Theatre in 1938, and this was primarily due to Whitcomb's ability to negotiate with clubs, fraternal organizations, theatres, schools and the City of Portland for performance space.⁶⁴ Newspapers measured the Oregon Unit's success by attendance figures, with the three plays featured in this chapter *Sloping West*, *Night Beat*, and *Shrew* topping 35,000 patrons, respectfully. The story behind the vaudeville performances in the parks lies in the East Side communities

they served, embracing the FTP and New Deal values of regionalism and service to a working class audience. Whitcomb and her actors were a part of the working class, and their resilience and resolve to make their neighbors laugh in desperate times harkens back to an earlier age when vaudevillians came from the people as “the voice of the city.”⁶⁵

Notes

¹ “Vaudeville ‘Back,’ says Dancer,” *Oregon Daily Journal* (Portland), June 8, 1937, 14.

² “Vaudeville Liked Here Says Actor,” *Oregon Daily Journal*, June 30, 1937, 6.

³ de Rohan, *First Summer Theatre*, 10.

⁴ Flanagan, *Arena*, 134 and Whitman, Willson. 1937. *Bread and circuses; a study of Federal theatre*. (New York: Oxford University Press.), 31.

⁵ Flanagan, *Arena*, 297.

⁶ Witham, *Federal Theatre*, 33.

⁷ Flanagan, *Arena*, 67.

⁸ Flanagan, *Arena*, 65-7, 202-3, 304, and Witham, *Federal Theatre*, 35.

⁹ Andrew L. Erdman, *Blue Vaudeville: Sex, Morals and the Mass Marketing of Amusement, 1895-1915* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2004), 60.

¹⁰ “The Smoker,” *Oregon Daily Journal*, July 27, 1936, 1.

¹¹ “Performance for Navy,” *Portland News Telegram*, August 5, 1936.

¹² “‘Here You Are’ To Feature Clown.” *St. Helens Sentinel-Mist*, May 6, 1938, 1.

¹³ Robert M. Lewis, *From Traveling Show to Vaudeville: Theatrical Spectacle in America, 1830-1910* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 123-4.

¹⁴ Robert C. Toll, *On With the Show!: The First Century of Show Business in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 63.

¹⁵ Charles W. Stein, *American Vaudeville As Seen By Its Contemporaries* (New York: Knopf, 1984), 15-20.

¹⁶ “WPA Entertainers At Shrine Hospital.” *Oregon Daily Journal*. July 22, 1936, 28.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ de Rohan, *First Summer Theatre*, 31.

²⁰ Trav S.D., *No Applause-Just Throw Money* (New York: Faber and Faber), 90.

²¹ Lewis, *Traveling Show*, 336.

²² Toll, *On with the Show*, 298.

²³ “WPA Entertainers At Shrine Hospital.” *Oregon Daily Journal*. July 22, 1936, 28.

²⁴ “Strongman to Feature WPA Show Saturday,” *Portland News Telegram*, October 24, 1936, 11.

²⁵ U.S. Census Report, 1940, Bureau of the Census, 964.

²⁶ Real Estate Appraisals, A Transcription of Lectures and Discussions Given at the Real Estate Classes of the General Education Division, Oregon State System of Higher Education, in Cooperation with the Portland Realty Boart, 1939, Moores Papers, 144, quoted in E. Kimbark MacColl, *The Growth of a City: Power and Politics in Portland, Oregon, 1915-1950* (need pub info), 539-40.

²⁷ MacColl, *Growth*, 539.

²⁸ MacColl, *Growth*, 199.

²⁹ MacColl, *Growth*, 535.

³⁰ Roark Bradford, “The Christmas Sermon,” *Esquire*, New York. December, 1936, 62.

³¹ Sterling A. Brown, “A Century of Negro Portraiture in American Literature,” *The Massachusetts Review* 7.1 (Winter 1966), 74.

³² Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press.), 7.

³³ Brown, "Negro Portraiture," 74.

³⁴ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft*, 7.

³⁵ Constance Rourke, *American Humor: A Study of the National Character* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1931), 100.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Bradford, "Christmas Sermon," 62.

³⁸ "Federal Theater's Latest Free Play Awaits Bookings," *Portland News Telegram*, December 2, 1936, 8.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ "Play to Thousands," *Oregon Daily Journal*, December 22, 1936, 12.

⁴¹ Federal Theatre Project (U.S.), *Highlights of the First Production Conference of the New York City Unit of the Federal Theatre* (New York: Play Bureau, Federal Theatre Project, 1936), 4.

⁴² Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Address at Bonneville Dam, Oregon (September 28, 1937)," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15469>.

⁴³ Will Rogers, Arthur Frank Wertheim, Barbara Bair, Steven K. Gragert, and M. Jane Johansson. 1996. *The Papers of Will Rogers*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 295.

⁴⁴ MacColl, *Growth*, 496.

⁴⁵ "Federal Theatre's Play to Continue," *Oregon Daily Journal*, February 9, 1937, 10.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ "Federal Theatre Play Draws Many," *Oregon Daily Journal*, February 17, 1937, 11.

⁴⁸ Ibid and “Daily Performances Set for WPA Musical Comedy,” *Portland News Telegram*, February 15, 1937, 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Robert D. Johnston, *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 62.

⁵¹ Flanagan, *Arena*, 45.

⁵² J.C. Nugent, *It's a Great Life* (New York: Dial Press, 1940), 188.

⁵³ “Borrowing Authorize.”, *Oregon Sunday Journal*, May 30, 1937, section 4, 2.

⁵⁴ Hallie Flanagan, *Instructions: Federal Theatre Projects* (Washington, D.C.: Works Progress Administration, 1935), 10.

⁵⁵ Flanagan, *Instructions*, 1.

⁵⁶ Alice Margarida, “Two ‘Shrews’: Productions by Lunt/Fontanne (1935) and H. K. Ayliff (1927)” *The Drama Review: TDR* 25.2 (1981), 87-100.

⁵⁷ Roy S. Waldau, *Vintage Years of the Theatre Guild, 1928-1939* (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1972), 211, and Jared Brown, *The Fabulous Lunts: A Biography of Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne* (New York: Atheneum, 1986), 223-225.

⁵⁸ “Present Comedy by Shakespeare,” *Portland News Telegram*, July 13, 1937, 3.

⁵⁹ “*Shrew* Opening at Laurelhurst Park.”, *Portland News Telegram*, July 7, 1937, 15.

⁶⁰ “More Show Gossip”, *Oregon Sunday Journal*, July 11, 1937, sect 4, 2.

⁶¹ *Portland News Telegram*, July 7, 1937.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Whitcomb, interview.

⁶⁵ Trav S.D., 74

CHAPTER III
THE MAKING OF THE MODEL UNIT

“Know your right, then forge ahead and let shoe-pinched critics yowl where they may.”¹
Hallie Flanagan, November 1937

Ralph B. Lloyd was a Portland outsider, a multi-millionaire oilman from Ventura, California, who saw Portland as a land of promise and investment opportunity, especially on the East Side, where landmarks like the Lloyd District and the Lloyd Center bear his name today. In his book *The Growth of a City*, E. Kimbark MacColl called Lloyd’s actions “the most ambitious program of urban land acquisition by one person in Portland’s history.”² Lloyd’s dream was to “build America’s greatest ‘little city within a city’” in a residential development that would include a grand hotel, golf course, shopping center, a professional baseball stadium and a civic art center. Lloyd had an architect draft the “Proposed civic center for the City of Portland, Oregon” in 1931 to gain public support and private investors for his plan.³

Lloyd’s civic art center and the entire “little city” was intended for the high class elite, with Portland businessmen working on the West Side living in the East Side. Lloyd struggled for years to find investors for the idea at the beginning of the Great Depression, but by 1937, with over \$3 million invested in the land and development, the only structure completed was the golf course and an excavated pit where the grand hotel was supposed to stand. State WPA Director Griffith embraced Lloyd’s idea of an art center shortly before the completion of Timberline Lodge and with the Oregon Unit needing a space to perform, he began looking into such a building in Portland. By 1937, the Oregon Unit had proved they could draw tens of thousands of patrons, and Griffith saw a need,

not to serve the elite, but instead the masses needing to be entertained in Portland.

Lloyd's plan for an Art Center in Portland seemed the perfect next step for the Oregon Unit.

This chapter will follow the formation of the idea of the WPA Art Center and the steps Whitcomb and Griffith took to gain WPA approval. Like Lloyd's dream, the WPA Art Center had to overcome many obstacles in Portland to gain the support of investors and sponsors. For the Oregon Unit, a theatre space would relieve the pressure of constant touring, provide a place where actor training could take place, and give a dedicated performance venue where the company could produce legitimate theatre worthy of the borrowed professional FTP talent coming to the Oregon Unit from California. The negotiations that Whitcomb would enter into with the Portland Civic and the University of Oregon to obtain the Art Center held the promise of security for the Oregon Unit, even if Congress eliminated the FTP budget. The plans elevated the importance of the Oregon Unit in the minds of Oregon State WPA administrators and national FTP administration, transforming the troupe into a model unit for the rest of the country. Out of the negotiations, Whitcomb reconceived what theatre in a WPA Art Center would look like, attempted to preserve a piece of Flanagan's dream, and maintain a job in the WPA, after the demise of the FTP.

Merging Little Theatre Amateurs with Professional Vaudevillians

For 23 months, from July 1936 to May 1938, the Oregon Unit did not have a theatre space, but instead moved their productions daily from place to place, sometimes performing in theatres and auditoriums, but more often in schools, gymnasiums, fraternal

clubs, parks and hotel ballrooms. At the same time, the Portland Civic was also homeless, performing primarily in auditoriums and theatres, but as the numbers of available theatre spaces decreased with theatres in Portland becoming dedicated movie houses, fewer good performance venues were available. In February 1937, around the time the Oregon Unit was performing the play *Sloping West* at the Portland Public Market to attract patrons to a WPA informational display, Whitcomb and Griffith began negotiations into the possibility of a merger with the Portland Civic.* The Oregon Unit was popular, with ten thousand patrons drawn to the *Sloping West* performances at the Public Market, so negotiations began with the Portland Civic about a shared permanent space that would culminate into a WPA Art Center proposal. The month-long run in the Public Market (the Oregon Unit's longest run in a single location at the time) allowed Whitcomb and Griffith time to draft and present an Oregon Unit merger proposal to the Portland Civic board of directors. The theatre troupes needed to stop spending energy moving scenery and costumes from place to place and focus their attention on producing theatre.

Both theatre troupes were desperate to find a permanent space in which they could perform as well as a space where Portland Civic drama classes and Oregon Unit vaudevillian "retraining" could take place. The Portland Civic Board of Directors discussed the merger proposal drafted by Whitcomb and Griffith in February 1937. Under the terms of the plan, the Portland Civic "would present [...] plays as before, under the name of the Federal Theatre, and the Federal Theatre Project would pay rent, directors' salaries, production expenses, etc." The board "unanimously resolved" to create a committee "to work out further details with the WPA office and report back."⁴

* The play *Sloping West* is covered at length in Chapter Four.

The board's acceptance of the possible merger, and the formation of an exploratory committee, indicated a willingness on their part to connect with the Oregon Unit at an opportune time for both theatres. However, within ten days, at a special meeting of the Executive Committee, Portland Civic Board President Mrs. Charles Hart explained the deal was doubtful, "owing to changes in policies contemplated by WPA headquarters in Washington."⁵ The "changes" were due to drastic cuts to the FTP budget, making the merger between the theatres tenuous.[†] Each year as Congress debated the federal budget, the FTP was under the threat of elimination, and this knowledge may have led the board to question their alliance with the Oregon Unit. This reasoning on behalf of the board may account for many of the near-mergers between the two theatre troupes, with the board members seeing the financial incentive of free FTP labor, but also afraid to attach the Portland Civic to a government agency under the constant threat of elimination.

Whitcomb's first steps in the negotiation, and all further negotiations with the Portland Civic, were fraught with unresolved personal and professional issues which stemmed from her work and departure as Portland Civic Artistic Director in 1930. In *Arena*, Flanagan quotes Whitcomb saying that the Portland Civic Board of Directors were, "... outwardly polite [...] but inwardly the Civic Theatre people look down on us because we're W.P.A. and our project people look down on them because they're amateurs."⁶ Professionally the board was "outwardly polite" to Whitcomb, because she served as an instructor with the Portland Civic Theatre School, was on the Portland Civic Education and Play selection committees and was one of the founders of the theatre.

Personally, Whitcomb felt she had to cope with "jealousy and ensuing petty persecution"

[†] The protests in cutbacks by the FTP in mid-May 1937, due to possible budget cuts by Congress, was highlighted by the famous protest performance of *The Cradle Will Rock* directed by Orson Welles and John Houseman (Flanagan, *Arena*, 201).

from members of the board, constantly “stepping around unreasonable personal feelings” when working with them.⁷ In a letter to E. C. Mabie, Whitcomb writes that the Portland Civic “fails to function in the way I have in mind but would be infinitely dog-in-the-mangerish were anyone else to try to [create a competing theatre in Portland].”⁸

Whitcomb’s literary reference follows Æsop’s fable, where the hungry dog in the manger lays upon the hay, not allowing the horse to eat, while unable to eat the hay himself.

Whitcomb, whose ideas were not accepted by the Portland Civic from the first years of the company, had an idea for the Portland Civic’s community connection, but had no voice to change their situation, even as an instructor in the Portland Civic Theatre School.

Meanwhile, the Portland Civic would not let the Oregon Unit and the WPA change the theatrical landscape of Portland. The “WPA...amateur” tension between the organizations was the same tension found in the FTP administration attitude towards vaudeville performance, which descended from the Little Theatre Movement. Whitcomb and the Portland Civic’s Little Theatre ideals were in alignment about the kind of theatre the community needs and ideas surrounding artistic integrity and the cultural elevation of society through theatre. They wanted theatre to do more than entertain, they desired to elevate and enlighten the community. Whitcomb’s desire to move the Oregon Unit into the area of legitimate theatre created a synergy with the Portland Civic that allowed her to continue to work for the Portland Civic Theatre School and to negotiate the merger between the two companies. Whitcomb’s break with the Portland Civic may have resulted from a difference of opinion about how theatre should serve in the community. Whitcomb believed in performance for the masses, and the artistic leaders of the Portland Civic served the high class of Portland to which they belonged.

Nevertheless, Whitcomb was determined to create ties between the theatres and by March 1937, she returned to the board with a “talent and resource-sharing proposal” for a Portland Civic and subsequent Oregon Unit production of *Taming of the Shrew*. The timing of the two productions of *Taming of the Shrew* were close enough together, with the Portland Civic production scheduled for May and the Oregon Unit production planned for a July opening, that logistically the idea would work. At the same time, the productions were so different, with the Portland Civic’s play classically produced on a proscenium stage, while the Oregon Unit incorporated vaudeville performance into the play on an outdoor stage. Portland Civic minutes in March reflect Whitcomb’s request for the Federal Theatre to furnish “without charge [...] certain music and other assistance in the way of personnel.” The Oregon Unit had its own 14-piece orchestra, an operational scene shop and a team of seamstresses from the WPA Grout school to construct costumes. “In return for this, the Federal Project desired to use the scenery and costumes and use as much of the cast as might be able to serve in producing the same play during the summer months.”⁹

At a time of great need, with the Portland Civic lacking facilities to build scenery or costumes, Whitcomb offered Federal Theatre assistance. The sharing of resources she suggested, would be advantageous to both theatres, since ninety percent of the Oregon Unit’s budget was spent on labor rather than materials, as Whitcomb said in an interview conducted in 1975:

[I] had a limitless costume department because the sewing project then, which was not one of the arts—but there it was.... skilled women, who needed the work, were on relief and my problem in budgeting for costumes was material, because that cost money. But, if I could wrangle the material, I could have all the workers

I needed. There was no problem on costumes.^{‡10}

The deal was also advantageous for the Portland Civic, with skilled WPA seamstresses eager to work on period costumes. Whitcomb's timing of the proposal indicates an attempt to foster a relationship between the two companies, to demonstrate to the board and to Griffith that she was putting her best foot forward. Unfortunately, with the large group of employees to coordinate, including the Oregon Unit orchestra, by March 10, 1937, Hart told the Portland Civic Theatre board that WPA administrators found the "merger would not be feasible."¹¹ Although the Portland Civic was amicable to such a sharing of resources, Whitcomb was unable to work out the logistics among WPA personnel, especially the Oregon Federal Music Project.

Whitcomb's idea to share talent with the Portland Civic was one that she perceived as a necessity. She desired to produce her vaudeville *Taming of the Shrew*, and while she had the talent to incorporate the vaudeville concept and an actress in Madge Wynne who could execute the leading part of Katherina, she felt the talent was not available in the troupe to cast the leading character of Petruchio. She wanted Don Porter to play the part of Petruchio, one of her former students at the Portland Civic Theatre School who was working consistently for the Portland Civic in 1937. She could not hire Porter outright because he did not qualify for relief, and the Oregon Unit had reached their allotment of non-relief personnel. Whitcomb would not let the unsuccessful negotiation with the Portland Civic deter her, and before the onset of summer in Portland, she opened a new negotiation with FTP administration with the goal of hiring Porter. Her vaudeville *Taming of the Shrew* would open with or without a deal with the Portland

[‡] At 88 years of age working at Diablo Valley College in California, Whitcomb was the oldest active professor in the nation (Whitcomb, DVC interview).

Civic.

In May 1937, a plan drafted by Whitcomb and Deputy Director of the FTP and the Western Region, J. Howard Miller, requested the transfer of personnel from large theatre projects to smaller ones. Upon approval by the FTP administration in Washington, D.C., Whitcomb reported to the *Oregon Daily Journal* that up to ten additional actors, dancers and technicians were arriving with the hope “that the effect of the transfers will be a general strengthening of the Federal Theatre throughout the nation.”¹² The intent of Whitcomb’s plan was to strengthen smaller units like Oregon’s with legitimate theatre talent. J. Howard Miller was clear when he assured the *Sunday Journal* that the borrowed actors “will make possible other legitimate productions,” meaning a decrease in vaudeville productions.¹³ The implication of “strengthening” the Oregon Unit through the elimination of vaudeville from the repertoire was significant because Miller was deciding that enlightened legitimate text-based performance was preferable to illegitimate, non-text-based vaudevillian performance. FTP administration, starting with Whitcomb and empowered by Miller, were throwing off the vaudeville performances that helped get the FTP quickly up and running, forming a basis of entertainment that was popular with the public. Whitcomb’s actor-sharing idea was born from a desire to have Porter play the character of Petruchio, but it changed the relationship of the Oregon Unit to its vaudeville actors. With the transferred actors coming straight from legitimate drama in larger cities, Whitcomb’s plan placed legitimate theatre in front of Portland audiences, while reducing and finally eliminating the number of vaudeville productions.

As Whitcomb was working out the deal with Miller, Griffith was working behind the scenes to make the Art Center a reality. He continued to see a potential sponsor for

the project in the Portland Civic and pushed Whitcomb to resume negotiations. In a letter to Mabie in May 1937, Whitcomb wrote,

The ideas of a merger between Federal Theatre and Civic Theatre has remained very strongly in Mr. Griffith's mind ever since he first suggested it. When he spoke of the new building, he again brought up the merger.¹⁴

At the time, the WPA Art Project was constructing all of the furnishings inside the Timberline Lodge, preparing for a late summer opening, and Griffith saw the importance of placing all of Oregon's Federal One projects under one roof. Griffith was trying to work out the same kind of sponsorship deal he negotiated with the Portland Winter Sports Association for the Timberline Lodge, but needed a donation of land, like the land donated by the U.S. Forest Service for the Timberline Lodge, and the backing of a large government entity to get sponsors to financially commit to the idea.

Meanwhile, the University of Oregon had a stake in the success of the Art Center through their educational relationship with the Portland Civic. The Portland Civic Theatre School was affiliated with the University of Oregon, with the students receiving UO credit for their coursework. The Portland Civic's annual meeting report states, "During the scholastic year of 1937-38 The Portland Civic Theatre School held classes in conjunction with the University of Oregon beginning the year with 11 classes, nine of which continues through the three quarters. The highest registration any one term was 275. Besides these classes, there were two children's classes and one high school class."¹⁵ Griffith needed the Portland Civic because the University of Oregon provided the kind of prestige, like that of the U.S. Forest Service for Timberline Lodge, which could bring financial sponsors to the project to make the Art Center a reality in Portland.

Griffith and Whitcomb drew up plans for the Art Center in May 1937 and entered

into negotiations with the Portland Civic and the University of Oregon. With Congress demanding balanced budgets, the WPA looked to sponsorships, with funding for materials for projects coming from organizations like the Portland Civic and the University of Oregon to make up the cost of budget shortfalls, while the WPA supplied labor. Without sponsorships, the Art Center was too costly and would be dead on arrival in Washington, D.C. With the economy in a slight upswing, the Portland Civic was in the middle of a capitol campaign for a permanent theatre space. Under Griffith's plan, which Whitcomb described in a letter to Mabie, the University of Oregon as a sponsor would contribute "a substantial sum to materials" while the Portland Civic would hold off their own plans to renovate a downtown movie house until September 1st, when the State WPA office would know if WPA administration in Washington approved the idea. Once the Art Center gained approval from the WPA, as a co-sponsor the Portland Civic would contribute the money raised from the capital campaign for the renovated movie house to the materials cost for the Art Center. Whitcomb described the facility,

An auditorium seating about 500, with ample and well-equipped stage would be a feature of this building. In addition, I have specified rehearsal rooms, classrooms, and a "Blue Room"; all of this presumably sufficient to care for the rehearsal and production needs of Federal Theatre, Civic Theatre, and Civic Theatre School.¹⁶

"The Blue Room" was a space used by the Portland Civic and was one of the first "theatre in the round" configurations in the United States. By bringing the University of Oregon and the Portland Civic into the plan as sponsors, Griffith hoped to create a facility that would streamline Federal One projects in Oregon, ultimately reducing costs by eliminating all of the rental spaces used by each agency around the city of Portland.

At the time of the letter, the Oregon Unit was producing Anton Chekov's one act, *The Boor*. Dean Alfred J. Powers of the University of Oregon Extension saw the

production as “a model play,” and he told Whitcomb that such examples of Russian theatre could make the Oregon Unit a “demonstration unit” for the Art Center Theatre. The Oregon Unit, they mused, could travel to other WPA Art Centers around the state and engage in “discussion and demonstration sessions,” to educate children and theatre organizations. She wrote, “I shall be prepared to go to some lengths to cooperate with Dean Powers in this idea of his, hoping it is going in the direction of the state theatre which, as you know, interests me deeply.”¹⁷ The idea of using the Art Center as a State Theatre came from Powers, and this idea would permeate the negotiations and grow with the Portland Civic in the coming years. As a demonstration Unit, the State Theatre idea made the Oregon Unit a vehicle to perform and teach theatre in communities throughout Oregon.

As the relationship between Powers, Griffith and the Portland Civic Board of Directors grew, Whitcomb saw an opportunity to continue the Federal Theatre at the state level, writing in 1937, “I also see in it a possible continuance of a portion of Federal Theatre, should the National Federal Theatre close.”¹⁸ statement demonstrates the constant threat of elimination the FTP was under. In the Art Center she saw an opportunity for the continuation of the Oregon Unit after the elimination of the national FTP organization. This was not foresight, but an understanding of a constant budgetary threat by congress. The Art Center was mutually beneficial; it would provide the Portland Civic a permanent theatre that they would fully control if the FTP closed, allow the University of Oregon Extension to increase its presence in the city of Portland, and the Oregon Unit would survive the demise of the FTP taking their work on tour around Oregon. The relationship between the Oregon Unit and the Portland Civic represented a

future theatre running under state, rather than federal, auspices.

All of the parties involved in the Art Center—the Oregon Unit, the Portland Civic Executive Committee, WPA officials and the University of Oregon—attended a meeting at the end of May 1937, and every organization had an opportunity to explain where they fit into the plan. WPA State Supervisor T. J. Edmunds[§] gave an overview of the entire project and how Federal One projects in Portland would use the building, while Powers explained how the University, through the Portland Civic Theatre School, would link University of Oregon coursework to the School’s class offerings.¹⁹ President Hart asked the Portland Civic Board of Directors Executive Committee to approve a resolution in favor of the project, placing further plans for a permanent home for the Portland Civic on hold pending approval of the Art Center by the WPA offices in Washington. The motion was unanimously resolved:

The Board of Directors go on record as favoring the project, and that further plans for the Civic Theatre for any permanent housing be held up at least until September 1st, which was the estimated date on which we might reasonably expect a decision from Washington as to whether or not the project had been approved.²⁰

Edmunds, representing the WPA, suggested the date of September 1, giving what he believed was ample time for WPA administrators in Washington, D.C. to evaluate the proposal. At the same time the Portland Civic had raised some of the money to renovate a downtown building, and many on the Board may have felt that waiting, rather than implementing a capital campaign was a waste of time. The board remained true to the September 1 deadline, a date that proved detrimental to the momentum Whitcomb and Griffith generated for the project.

[§] While the minutes reflect a “Mr. Edmunds of the WPA” gave the plan overview, it is safe to assume that T. J. Edmunds, Oregon WPA State Supervisor, was charged with the job. T.J. Edmunds was in charge of the Historical Records Survey Program and wrote the preface to the WPA text *Oregon, End of the Trail*.

National Attention Transforms Vaudevillians

The summer of 1937 was a turning point for Whitcomb and the Oregon Unit. The vaudeville troupe was finishing its first year, operating up to that point with little national oversight from Washington, D.C., or the FTP Regional headquarters in Los Angeles. With the lack of oversight, the Oregon Unit played 10-acts of vaudeville to sponsoring organizations across Portland, created several productions attended by tens of thousands of Portlanders, and toured in surrounding towns performing plays about the history and people of Oregon. Whitcomb's need to produce the kind of legitimate theatre found in the Little Theatre Movement, coupled with Griffith's need to find the sponsorship for a dedicated WPA Art Center in Portland, prompted tighter associations with FTP and WPA administration which changed the kind of work presented by the Oregon Unit. Following the activities in the summer of 1937, the Oregon Unit would never be the same again.

In July 1937, Flanagan hosted the First Federal Summer Theatre Conference at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York. As a professor, Flanagan had gained national prestige for her Vassar Experimental Theatre at the college before taking on her role in the FTP. The goal of the conference was to bring state directors together in training and rehearsal technique and to discuss issues that occurred over the first year of FTP operation, as well as possible solutions. Two items on the Conference agenda concerned the path of the Oregon Unit, Whitcomb's proposed borrowing plan for actors between Units, and the discussion among administrators of the "vaudeville problem." The conclusion drawn from these discussions changed Whitcomb's decisions on behalf of the vaudevillians in the Oregon Unit, and focused her attention on the needs of the FTP nationally.

Borrowing actors from other FTP units was not easy. A tremendous amount of effort, and paperwork, went into transferring FTP workers across state lines, what Hallie Flanagan called “a flexible working arrangement.”²¹ FTP state directors discussed and formalized Whitcomb’s borrowing plan into an official “loan and coordinating bureau” developed “to facilitate exchange of personnel.”²² Whitcomb would receive assistance nationally from administrators that would help process borrowed actors and directors, freeing up time and effort to seek out the loan actors and move all the paperwork through proper government channels. The approval was significant because the highest levels of the administration supported her ideas and the Oregon Unit would begin to see immediate help from borrowed talent.

Meanwhile, a meeting to tackle the “vaudevillian problem” at the Conference changed the course of the Oregon Unit for the next year. The meeting chaired by Flanagan and attended by several state directors, “began with the premise that it was useless to attempt further to revive vaudeville” and asked how vaudevillians could be “fitted into a new theatre form that will promise rehabilitation in private employment?” The idea of rehabilitation of vaudevillians, which was not part of Whitcomb’s job over the first year, would from then on become part of the Oregon Unit’s mission. William Sully, retired vaudeville dancer and director from the New York Federal Theatre Unit, shared Whitcomb’s belief that half of old-line vaudevillians “were not sufficiently versatile to act in other forms.” Sully, who devised an FTP musical vaudeville review titled *Machine Age* in New York, felt that their rehabilitation into private employment was “not practicable.”²³ Many state directors represented at the Conference shared Whitcomb’s feeling about the vaudevillians, and because they qualified for relief, they

needed a way to utilize their talents in new and modern ways. The solution, which became official following the Conference, was to place the vaudevillians into new work that highlighted their talents, namely children's theatre and Living Newspaper productions.

Flanagan, and many state directors in the vaudeville meeting, saw the vaudevillians as unable to act in scripted performances; children's theatre and the vaudeville-inspired performances of the Living Newspaper were seen as the only useful vehicles for their talents. Flanagan's overall plan for the FTP included the movement of vaudevillians into children's theatre before the state directors raised the topic at the meeting. In the opening speech of the Summer Theatre Conference Flanagan said, "Now we have time to consider plans for our Children's Theatres, our necessity for using vaudeville technique in ways entertaining to a modern audience."²⁴ Vaudeville, it would seem, was entertainment for an older generation and not entertaining to the "modern audience," while the "technique" of vaudeville was a talent only children could enjoy. Personally, Flanagan did not care for children's theatre, as she admits in *Arena*, finding adults acting in children's performances "embarrassing" to watch.²⁵ She and the state directors did not consider straight vaudeville entertainment worthy of the FTP, disregarding the success witnessed by Oregon Unit vaudeville in Portland as well as other FTP vaudeville performances around the nation. As long as vaudevillians were serving the needs of children, with talents that were acceptable to children and not adults, the state directors believed vaudevillians were serving a function in the FTP. Without such theatre forms, the state directors simply saw talented older vaudevillians in their Units as a problem.

The two ideas, borrowing actors and the suggested “rehabilitation” of vaudevillians through children’s theatre, were both detrimental to vaudevillians wishing to continue performing the routines for which they were known. Borrowing actors would limit the amount of stage time for the vaudevillians by increasing the number of legitimate plays. Like rehabilitation programs for incarcerated prisoners, the goal of the FTP rehabilitation was to reform the vaudevillians through [acting] instruction and assist them in starting a normal career [in the legitimate theatre]. With the ability for small FTP Units to borrow actors and talent, Oregon became the testing ground for a children’s theatre solution to the FTP vaudeville problem. Whitcomb’s decision to apply both programs changed the play selection of Oregon Unit, incorporating children’s theatre as well as Living Newspapers, and increased the number of legitimate plays due to borrowed talent.

Whitcomb’s relationships with administrators in the FTP improved because of the Summer Conference, and she became professionally acquainted with Flanagan. In a letter sent on Vassar College letterhead from the Summer Conference, Whitcomb wrote,

Mrs. Flanagan holds up in every respect. She’s grand. More of an experience to me than I had hoped for. Whatever disappointments this session holds for any of us she doesn’t fail.²⁶

Earlier in the letter, she writes of her disappointment with “a survey of Federal Theatre” at the Summer Theatre. This “survey” may be the production of the Living Newspaper, *One-Third of a Nation*, produced by the state and federal administrators, or her interactions with other State Directors at the Summer Theatre. ** While the Vassar College experience was not everything Whitcomb expected, her admiration for Flanagan

** In the letter Whitcomb is asking Mabie to come to Iowa City so they can talk about several items that are weighing heavy on her thoughts. “Ideas for theatre in the West, a survey (to a certain extent disappointing) of Federal Theatre, one very personal thing about a superior officer (not Flanagan) that I would feel like discussing with no one but you. I am bewildered, questioning, inspired, all three.”

rings through the letter. Flanagan understood Whitcomb's struggles as the only woman to hold a state director position. Flanagan also saw potential in the Oregon Unit to become a "model unit" as Miller had suggested earlier in the year. With the possibility of a new Art Center on the horizon in Portland, Flanagan must have seen great promise for the Oregon Unit. Whitcomb returned from Poughkeepsie and Vassar College with a renewed purpose to transform the Oregon Unit, starting with the vaudevillians.

"Rehabilitation" Through Children's Theatre

In the intervening months between May and September 1937, there was no movement at all on the Art Center proposal in Washington.²⁷ The September 1st deadline imposed on the Portland Civic within the Art Center proposal passed without word from the WPA administration. Without approval from Washington, on September 8, 1937, the board sent formal notification to the University of Oregon that it would withdraw support from the WPA project and move forward on a new building capitol campaign.²⁸

The need for a permanent Oregon Unit performance space did not go away when the Portland Civic backed out of the Art Center, but with their exit, the University of Oregon dropped out of the proposal as well. Despite the setback, Whitcomb and Griffith continued to keep lines of communication open and work towards an Art Center deal. Whitcomb served on the Portland Civic Education Committee and as a judge in the Portland Civic full-length play contest, while Griffith worked on a land donation for the Art Center that would lower the cost of the project, bringing the Portland Civic and the University of Oregon back to the negotiating table.²⁹

Flanagan visited the Oregon Unit in November of 1937, and stayed for over a

week with regional director Ole Ness.^{††} The administrators, upon seeing a command performance of *Taming of the Shrew*, called Yasha Frank to Oregon to discuss the Summer Conference decision to place a children's theatre solution on the vaudeville problem. With the inclusion of Frank by Flanagan, the Oregon Unit was used as a laboratory where the children's theatre solution was tested and spread across the rest of the FTP.

Yasha Frank was a proven children's theatre writer and director from Los Angeles.³⁰ While trained in the theatre, with an apprenticeship at the Roxy and Capital theatre in New York, Frank made his mark working on children's entertainment under producer B. P. Schulberg at Paramount Studios in Hollywood.³¹ Frank became the National Director of FTP Children's Theatre after transforming Flanagan's view of children's theatre on a visit to Timberline Lodge. Frank had "gifts of legerdemain," according to Flanagan, and was outspoken about the power of theatre to educate.³² Before her transformational talk with Frank, Flanagan had believed "adults acting for children seemed to try too hard, seemed not to realize that here was an audience, ready to believe without external nonsense."³³ Frank convinced Flanagan that the FTP needed to educate children through the art of theatre after a discussion in a broken down car on the cold slopes of Mount Hood. The move to bring Frank to Oregon was the beginning of his national tour with the FTP, spreading Frank's adaptations of classic tales, his ability to use the talents of vaudevillians and skill as a stage director across the nation in such plays as *Pinocchio* and *Hansel and Gretel*. Frank came to the Oregon Unit through Whitcomb's

^{††} The *Telegram* and the *Journal* have Flanagan arriving on November 6, and Flanagan writes of an experience being stuck on Mount Hood with Yasha Frank on a trip to Timberline Lodge (*Arena* 298-99). The *Journal* writes of Frank's arrival on November 13 (*ODJ* 11/13/1937, 5). In order for Flanagan to have a conversation in November with Frank she must have visited Portland from November 6-14.

talent-borrowing plan to start a vaudevillian “rehabilitation program” through children’s theatre that would move around the country to Units facing a similar “problem.” By applying the borrowing program and rehabilitation plan the Oregon Unit demonstrated “model unit” status through its contribution to the greater good of the FTP nationally.

Exactly how Whitcomb felt about losing artistic control of the Oregon Unit is unclear. What is clear is that the decision to place Frank into the position, in the meeting on Mount Hood, was made by Flanagan and Western Regional Director Ole Ness in consultation with Whitcomb. All three attended the Summer Theatre Conference months before, where the idea of using children’s theatre as a vehicle for vaudevillians was explored. Whitcomb knew Frank’s work in Portland was the first step in a larger program to connect children’s theatre to other FTP units, and perhaps, that Frank’s time in Portland was going to be short. It is unknown, in letters to Mabie or in the Portland Civic archive, if she felt pushed aside or enjoyed the break from directing, but she did engage more actively in Portland Civic executive board meetings and in conversations around the Art Center.

In his first Portland newspaper interview, Frank was clear that he was “attendant on complete reorganization of the federal project and a change of program.”³⁴ Frank took over the directing responsibilities from Whitcomb, moving her strictly into an administrative role when he arrived; canceling all planned performances and placing the actors into “rehabilitation” training and rehearsals for his adaptation of *Pinocchio*. Before Frank’s arrival, Whitcomb’s primary job was to direct productions and find venues in which the troupe could perform, which also involved procuring sponsorships from the organizations donating space or money to fund the rental of facilities for performance.

With Frank's entrance, the Oregon Unit focused on training vaudeville actors for children's theatre. The plan to implement children's theatre nationally under Frank and for the Oregon Unit to begin producing legitimate drama required a permanent home. By the end of 1937, Whitcomb's job changed from directing and booking space and sponsors for the touring vaudeville company to creating a legitimate theatre company working to secure a permanent space with the Portland Civic.

With the inclusion of Frank in the Oregon Unit in November 1937, Whitcomb was able to work on the administrative negotiation around acquiring a permanent space, serving on Portland Civic committees and attending board meetings. She had those above her working towards a permanent solution as well, with Griffith acquiring land for the Art Center, and Flanagan personally invested in the success of the entire operation. Unfortunately, as Frank announced his plans to bring his *Pinocchio* to Portland, the Portland Civic objected to the play selection, demanding that the star director choose another work. The demand and subsequent debate over the play brought all the parties involved in the Art Center deal to the table at a very delicate time and split allegiances between WPA administrators in Oregon.

An Art Center Stumbling Block

Portland Civic President Mrs. Charles Hart complained of unfair competition by the Oregon Unit at a meeting with Flanagan on November 10, 1938, while the latter was in Portland. The complaint centered on Frank's production of *Pinocchio*, which conflicted with the production of *Pinocchio* by The Junior League opening scheduled December 1937. Following the meeting with Flanagan, the Junior League of Portland,

working under the umbrella organization of the Portland Civic, lodged an unfair competition complaint with all of the organizations in the Art Center deal, including the WPA, FTP administration, the Oregon Unit and the University of Oregon. The complaint of unfair competition was nothing new for Flanagan, who was “not in favor of [the Portland Civic] continuing with [Junior League] plans,” insisting that the Junior League was the organization who should stop production, not the FTP.³⁵ Flanagan was committed to Frank’s children’s theatre program, and the complaint by the Junior League could derail the plans before they began. Despite Flanagan’s objection, the Portland Civic Board carried a motion to fulfill their obligation to the Junior League and move ahead with plans for *Pinocchio*.³⁶

The board brought Griffith into the conflict, and with all of the parties involved in the Art Center against Frank’s production, he was in a very precarious position. A special meeting of the Portland Civic executive committee was held a week later attended by Dean Alfred Powers of the University of Oregon Extension. The minutes state:

After a prolonged discussion Dr. Powers moved that Mrs. Hart be asked to write a letter to the state administrator of the WPA, Mr. Griffith, pointing out to him that the public implications of a double presentation of “Pinocchio” are not desirable, and that since it is impossible for the Civic Theatre and the Junior League to withdraw their presentation, that the Federal Theatre be asked to make a substitution in their choice of a children’s play.³⁷

Griffith abdicated his decision in a letter read in a subsequent board meeting on November 26. Griffith’s letter stated that he “turned Mrs. Hart’s letter over to Miss Gladys Everett, Director of Women’s and Professional Projects for the WPA.”³⁸ Everett, who worked closely with Griffith on Timberline Lodge, was in charge of the Grout School, which constructed many of the Oregon Unit’s costumes. Griffith may have abdicated his decision from the state (Griffith’s position) to the federal level (Everett’s

position) of the WPA to get around any objection raised by Flanagan, who had the clout to overturn state administrative decisions. He may also have desired to distance himself from the decision to remain in the good graces of the board. Despite Flanagan's support of Frank and the children's theatre "rehabilitation" moving forward, Everett ruled against the Oregon Unit and assured the board and the Junior League that the production would be canceled. The fact that Griffith did not support Whitcomb and the Oregon Unit may suggest how close he was to a deal to acquire land for the Art Center. Above all, Griffith needed to foster relations with the Portland Civic and the University of Oregon, which he needed in order to complete the Art Center. ††

The Oregon Unit lost the *Pinocchio* battle and missed the financial support of holiday audiences, leaving their star director training vaudevillians and exploring new plays. The Junior League opened their production of *Pinocchio* at the Neighbor of Woodcraft auditorium on December 18, 1937, while the rehearsed cast of the Oregon Unit opened nothing new, remounting ten acts of vaudeville and *The Taming of the Shrew* for a couple of performances in December. Considering the Oregon Unit's success with *Night Beat* in 1936, the overruling of Flanagan by Everett and the loss of *Pinocchio* were setbacks. At the same time, the tension created by the conflict between all the parties involved forced the Oregon Unit and Griffith to reassess their situation and look for a temporary space to house the Oregon Unit. The pressure was mounting to place Frank's newly adapted children's plays in a permanent space, so Whitcomb began looking for a building that could take a small step towards Griffith's Art Center plan, housing Federal One organizations under one roof.

†† On the other hand, the move up the chain of command may reflect Griffith's attitude towards children's theatre, with the matter being of little concern to the state director of the WPA. The only available information in the Portland Civic archive on the matter is found in the meeting minutes.

The Elks Temple Theatre: A Legitimate Step to the Art Center

In the midst of the debate over the production of *Pinocchio*, the Oregon Unit was moving forward on plans to acquire a building in downtown Portland. Griffith and Whitcomb sent press releases divulging information about a plan to create a permanent Federal Theatre.³⁹ The *Journal* reported,

A permanent federal theatre for Oregon, to serve as a *small model project* for the nation, has been authorized, according to word received from Washington, D.C. Funds have been appropriated, the local office is advised for the renovations of some now unused theatre in Portland. Like theatres exist in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, and the Oregon theatre is to mirror them on a smaller scale.⁴⁰

A permanent space transformed the Oregon Unit into a “model project” imitating theatres in New York and Chicago. With the announcement made during the clash with the Portland Civic over *Pinocchio*, the Oregon Unit was proclaiming that they were moving forward with or without the Portland Civic’s involvement. The Oregon Unit was conducting the same search as the Portland Civic for a permanent space, with the *Journal* stating, “[Whitcomb] has launched local production managers on an immediate search for suitable quarters.”⁴¹ Plans within the FTP proceeded apace to find a new location, with the *Journal* reporting in April 1938 that the former Elks Temple would house the theatre and many of the WPA Federal One projects.⁴² By housing the Federal Art Project and the Federal Writers Project Griffith was a step closer to an Art Center designed with the needs of all of the Federal One organizations in mind. Publicity of the new Elks Temple Theatre announced a more respectable legitimate offering, “departing radically from previous policies” to offer “a new program which will include among its production works by such renowned authors as Eugene O’Neill and Anton Chekhov.”⁴³ This announcement moved beyond the use of vaudevillians for children’s theatre, and required

the talents of several legitimate actors from larger FTP Units. The Oregon Unit would officially split, with the vaudevillian performers assigned to “a new vaudeville show,” arranged by Whitcomb, titled *Here You Are*, touring area schools and outlying towns of St. Helens, Tualatin and Marshfield (Coos Bay). The vaudevillians, who toured school auditoriums and gymnasiums for almost two years were never able to realize their vaudeville performance in the new WPA theatre.

Whitcomb’s job as the state director had an unrelenting schedule, which affected her will to continue in her position.⁴⁴ The FTP demands on retraining the Oregon Unit’s vaudevillians took her out of the production schedule that fed her creative energy.

Moving the Oregon Unit into a new repurposed theatre space shared by the Federal Writers Project and Federal Art Project, while conforming to strict Portland building codes for theatres was a large job. Her work to appease the Portland Civic Board of Directors by attending board meetings, serving on committees and working the political angles of getting the Art Center going again was extra work in her day. Negotiating with actors borrowed from California units that would work in upcoming productions, while performing the job of directing some of the Oregon Unit productions, weighed heavy on her time and energy. Whitcomb began having thoughts of resignation and in a Western Union telegram sent on May 25, 1938, Whitcomb wrote to Mabie,

AM LOOKING FOR A JOB. ANY PLACE I WOULD FIT THAT HAS A FUTURE. WE HAVE DELIGHTFUL NEW THEATRE AND ENLARGED PROGRAM HERE BUT MY ENTHUSIASM PLUS MY SALARY DO NOT BALANCE. UNCEASING DRAIN ON STRENGTH. NO VACATION AHEAD.⁴⁵

Mabie understood Whitcomb’s dilemma, because it was one he experienced and witnessed in other FTP Units, like Glen Hughes with the Seattle Unit.⁴⁶ Mabie helped

draft the original charter and FTP instructions with Flanagan and worked as Iowa State Director of the FTP for a short time before resigning to continue his professorship at the University of Iowa. Mabie understood Whitcomb's need, but also the important work she was enduring as state director of the Federal Theatre. The Oregon Unit was completely consuming, evidenced by Whitcomb's hiatus from acting instruction at the Portland Civic Theatre School. While little is written about her joy working with students in the theatre, her separation from teaching may have factored in to her desire to quit the Oregon Unit. At the same time, the increased pressure and her sense of responsibility to Griffith at the state level and Flanagan at the federal level, placed her at the fulcrum that would decide the success or failure of the new theatre space and the potential Art Center.

The Oregon Unit was beginning to compete with the Portland Civic by producing quality legitimate work with its borrowed professional actors from California, which forced the Portland Civic Board to take the Oregon Unit seriously and look again at the Art Center proposal. The Oregon Unit's move into the Elks Temple Theatre allowed the actors to begin producing well-attended children's theatre productions as well as legitimate theatre like the costume drama *The Pursuit of Happiness* or the courtroom thriller *Counselor at Law*.⁴⁷ With professionals performing and working with the Oregon Unit, supplemented by vaudevillians playing supporting roles, the quality of their productions increased, moving the troupe of actors above the "low art" of vaudeville. With the Portland Civic unable to fund their own theatre space and the Oregon Unit solidly financed by the federal government, the board changed their minds about future mergers. Because the Oregon Unit moved into the Elks Temple Theatre, the Portland Civic was ready for the possibility of collaboration between the two theatres.

The Art Center Agreement Moves Forward

Constructing an Arts Center in Portland proved to be more difficult and time consuming for Griffith than building Timberline Lodge on Mount Hood. What worked in the rugged and unpopulated area of Mount Hood, moving from proposal to completion in less than two years, did not translate to the political landscape of Portland. The donation of land for the Art Center needed to come through private channels, unlike the land donation from the U.S. Forest Service for Timberline Lodge. With the Portland Civic ready to negotiate after an unsuccessful capital campaign for a new theatre space, and without success from the downtown business community to locate the WPA Art Center in on the West Side of Portland, Griffith turned to for help to the man who inspired his original idea of the Art Center, Ralph B. Lloyd.

As a Portland outsider, Lloyd struggled for over a decade to acquire the ordinance and zoning changes needed to make his “little city within a city” possible on his East Side property. The WPA Art Center offered Lloyd the opportunity to achieve a portion of his dream, attracting further investment and increased infrastructure for his East Side plan from the city of Portland. The Portland Civic was ready to join the deal for the Art Center, and before Lloyd’s land donation was public knowledge the board was privy to the information. The Portland Civic minutes on May 20, 1938, reflect:

Mrs. Hart reported on a conversation with Mr. Drinker regarding a theatre to be built with WPA funds. A plan has been submitted to the office at Washington, DC, but there is no definite word as yet.⁴⁸

A year after the board separated from the Art Center agreement the Portland Civic did not have the funds available to build or renovate a performance space. The tip supplied by Mr. Drinker came three months before Griffith announced Lloyd’s donation in the press,

revealing Hart's connection to the Portland business community.^{§§} Hart's insider information indicates movement between Griffith and Lloyd to finalize a deal on the Art Center as early as May of 1938. Although the Portland Civic had removed themselves from the Art Center deal, the return to the Art Center plan was announced at the annual membership meeting, presented to the entire membership body of the Portland Civic. Mr. Haydon, the Portland Civic Theatre School director, read his report to the membership:

... This year a plan was worked out and started ... for the organization of the Oregon State Theatre, by the Portland Civic Theatre, working in cooperation with the Oregon State system of Higher Education and the Federal Theatre. The object of the State Theatre is the establishment of a library, a demonstration theatre, and a production unit to aid and advise high school dramatic departments and other groups interested in drama ... The state was divided into districts which will be the centers for conferences which will be held from time to time to discuss problem of the theatre.⁴⁹

Within the plan, as envisioned in the Portland Civic minutes and mirroring Dean Powers' idea, the Oregon Unit would travel to Art Centers in Oregon and become a demonstration theatre. Griffith was following the same path to approval with the Art Center as the Timberline Lodge. His inclusion of Federal One music, theatre, and fine arts in the original Timberline Lodge proposal helped move the paperwork towards approval with WPA administration. The approved Art Center proposal mirrored that of Timberline Lodge: to become a performance space for the retaining of Uncle Sam's thespians.^{***} The Oregon Unit would be the example, touring Oregon Art Centers and training rural communities in the theatre arts.

The 1938 WPA Art Center sponsorship agreement for the Portland Civic and the

^{§§} Records from the Portland City Auditor's office indicate that F. B. Drinker was an employee of the Lloyd Corporation in 1960. If this is the same Mr. Drinker, he was a faithful employee retained by Ralph Lloyd for over twenty years to work on the Lloyd Civic Center.

^{***} The proposal for the Art Center also included the construction of all furnishings by the WPA in the Arts and Crafts style, just as Timberline Lodge was fashioned.

University of Oregon was the same as the original proposal in 1937, with the exception of Lloyd's land donation. Art Center plans were drafted, artistic renderings were featured in all the major Portland newspapers and on the front page of the *Oregonian*, and movement was made in the planning department for improvements to Lloyd's property.⁵⁰ Those looking at the original proposal at the WPA administration offices in 1938 may have held their decision until a suitable land donation was presented. At the same time, when the Portland Civic and the University of Oregon backed out of the deal, the WPA never had the opportunity to approve the proposal pending a land donation. If the Portland Civic had remained in the agreement, the land donation may have followed WPA approval. The 1938 agreement was more sure and solid, with Lloyd's land donation, but because the Portland Civic decided to break ties to the agreement, and remove the major sponsor, the University of Oregon, none of Griffith and Whitcomb's work on the Art Center was realized.

By the time the Art Center was approved and moving forward in 1939, the Dies Committee in the U.S. House of Representatives was investigating the Federal Theatre for "un-American activities." When President Roosevelt signed the federal budget in June of 1939 eliminating the Federal Theatre Project, time officially ran out on the Art Center in Portland. Though other WPA Federal One groups not eliminated in the 1939 federal budget were lined up to use the Art Center—such as the Grout School, Fine Arts, Orchestra and Band—without the Oregon Unit, the Art Center plans came to a halt. Had the Portland Civic not removed themselves and the University of Oregon from the Art Center deal one year earlier, approval and the building construction may have been well underway by the time the FTP was closed.

The Grass Roots Theatre and the FTP

As Congress was deliberating the FTP's fate, in June 1939, Whitcomb and her new Assistant Executive Director, Guy Williams, devised a plan that would keep theatre alive within the WPA in Oregon, with or without the FTP organization nationally. Williams relieved Whitcomb from some of the demanding oversight of the Oregon Unit beginning in January 1939, allowing her to administer the Art Center proposal for Griffith. Williams was an experienced FTP leader, starting as an assistant executive director of the Seattle Unit under Glenn Hughes, and finally serving as the Seattle Unit director following Hughes' departure for a short time before his transfer to the position of administrator of FTP Western Regional Touring.⁵¹ Williams was experienced in touring Seattle FTP units to CCC camps in Washington State and he was a presence in the FTP in the Pacific Northwest.

Together they outlined and formalized an idea Whitcomb titled, "Grass Roots Theatre" that would serve Oregonians across the state who she and Williams felt were underserved by the FTP, but whom the FTP was originally intended to serve. In *The Grass-Roots Mind in America*, Conal Furay writes, "the grass-roots mind is non-elite (by self-definition) and [...] it focuses on people, not on ideas."⁵² Likewise, Whitcomb felt the FTP, which started as a people-centered idea, had lost its way, and through the creation of the Grass Roots Theatre, Whitcomb was re-inscribing the FTP's community-centered mission. She wrote, "it seemed to both of us that Federal Theatre has failed to grasp one of its most important opportunities in omitting such activity."⁵³ The founding document, *Instructions for the Federal Theatre* states, "the far reaching purpose is the establishment of theatres so vital to community life that they will continue to function

after the program of this Federal Project is completed.”⁵⁴ By returning to the first article in the FTP founding document, Whitcomb and Williams hoped to create theatre that was vital to communities in Oregon and that would continue well after the FTP dissolved.

Whitcomb saw a need in Oregon to have theatre emerge from local communities and her experience working with the Art Center proposal gave her reason to believe the future of WPA theatre would serve rural Oregon through the existing web of Art Centers around the state. The Grass Roots Theatre would be a “participating theatre for farm and small town people under professional leadership.”⁵⁵ Under Whitcomb’s Grass Roots Theatre plan, WPA professionals through the FTP, or should the FTP close, under the Federal Art Project, would take a unit set, lights and costumes to each of the Oregon WPA Art Centers in Salem, Klamath Falls, Marshfield (Coos Bay), Gold Beach and Hood River. The professionals would direct local townspeople in a legitimate drama while teaching local community members the craft of theatre through classes offered at the Art Center. In the proposal, Whitcomb explores the possibility of financing through the Rockefeller Foundation which, “subsidizes in a few states what are known as ‘state theatres,’ which in operation in each case consists of an acting company which is sent out for production in high schools throughout the state.”⁵⁶ With the idea, Whitcomb was continuing the Oregon Unit’s function in the “State Theatre” plan through WPA Art Center in Portland, but rather than serving only the city of Portland, WPA Art Centers around Oregon would house theatrical plays, performed by local people, for local audiences.

Whitcomb sat down to propose the Grass Roots Theatre to Gladys Everett, state director of Women’s and Professional Projects, and Margery Hoffman Smith, the head of

the Federal Art Project, who offered Whitcomb a position as “State Director of Theatre Activity in Art Centers” under the Federal Art Project.⁵⁷ Upon the closing of the FTP, Griffith supported Whitcomb’s transfer to the Federal Art Project, stating she would have a job with the WPA as long as he was state administrator. Whitcomb assumed the position through June 1940, when pressure came from Congressmen to release former FTP actors and administrators, like Whitcomb, who had transferred to the Federal Art Project after the demise of the FTP. Whitcomb was exploring other opportunities, and was accepted into the Masters of Drama program at the University of Iowa, where she received her degree a year later.⁵⁸ The Grass Roots Theatre represented a return to the roots of the FTP and the Oregon Unit, and the possibility of continuance of their mission to serve the people of the state of Oregon.

Through the Grass Roots Theatre, Whitcomb and Williams worked out a plan that would help preserve a portion of the FTP as an institution through the Federal Art Project. The negotiation Whitcomb underwent to preserve the community-based theatre productions seen with the Oregon Unit, demonstrates the length she was willing to go to continue producing theatre that helped change the lives of Oregonians. Whitcomb’s commitment to the institution of the FTP was seen in her firm commitment in the wake of HUAC’s communist allegations as she transformed the plays presented by the Oregon Unit to help bathe the FTP in a patriotic, non-communist light. In the following chapter, through an analysis of the types of performances created over the course of the Unit, I draw a picture of Whitcomb’s negotiation to help the FTP survive. Like the Grass Roots Theatre, the changes made to the Oregon Unit play selection, from the political left to the right, demonstrate the length to which Whitcomb would go to preserve her Unit.

Notes

¹ “Says Portland to Have Federal Theatre,” *Portland News Telegram*, November 8, 1937, 14.

² MacColl, *Growth*, 325.

³ *Ibid*, 328.

⁴ February minutes, 26 February 1937, Portland Civic Theatre Records, Mss 2965, “PCT minutes”, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

⁵ *Ibid*.

⁶ Flanagan, *Arena*, 297.

⁷ Whitcomb to Mabie, 18 July 1939, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

⁸ Whitcomb to Mabie, 22 March 1939, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

⁹ March minutes, 24 March 1937, Portland Civic Theatre Records, Mss 2965, “PCT minutes”, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

¹⁰ Whitcomb, interview.

¹¹ Executive committee minutes, 10 March 1937, Portland Civic Theatre Records, Mss 2965, “PCT minutes”, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

¹² “Says Portland to Have Federal Theatre,” *Portland News Telegram*, November 8, 1937, 14.

¹³ “Borrowing Authorized,” *Oregon Sunday Journal* May 30, 1937, section 4, 2.

¹⁴ Whitcomb to Mabie, 29 May 1937, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

¹⁵ Annual Meeting - Reports, 24 March 1937, Portland Civic Theatre Records, Mss 2965, Series B: Box 3, Folder 15, “Minutes 1936-”, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

¹⁶ Whitcomb to Mabie, 29 May 1937, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

¹⁷ Whitcomb to Mabie, 29 May 1937, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

¹⁸ Whitcomb to Mabie, 29 May 1937, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

¹⁹ Executive Committee May minutes, 24 May 1937, Portland Civic Theatre Records, Mss 2965, “PCT minutes”, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

²⁰ Executive Committee May minutes, 24 May 1937, Portland Civic Theatre Records, Mss 2965, “PCT minutes”, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

²¹ Flanagan, *Arena*, 301.

²² de Rohan, *First Summer Theater*, 32.

²³ Flanagan, *Arena*, 200, and de Rohan, *First Summer Theater*, 31.

²⁴ de Rohan, *First Summer Theater*, 11.

²⁵ Flanagan. *Arena*, 299.

²⁶ Whitcomb to Mabie, 8 August 1937, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

²⁷ May minutes, 16 May 1937, Portland Civic Theatre Records, Mss 2965, “PCT minutes”, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

²⁸ Executive Committee September minutes, 8 September 1937, Portland Civic Theatre Records, Mss 2965, “PCT minutes”, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

²⁹ Education Committee members, October 1937, Portland Civic Theatre Records, Mss 2965, “PCT minutes”, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

³⁰ “New Director for Federal Group Work Here,” *Oregon Daily Journal*, November 13, 1937, 5.

³¹ *Ibid.*

- ³² Flanagan, *Arena*, 299.
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ “New Director,” *Oregon Daily Journal*.
- ³⁵ Executive Committee November minutes, 16 November 1937, Portland Civic Theatre Records, Mss 2965, “PCT minutes”, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.
- ³⁶ Executive Committee November minutes, 16 November 1937, Portland Civic Theatre Records, Mss 2965, “PCT minutes”, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.
- ³⁷ Executive Committee November minutes, 16 November 1937, Portland Civic Theatre Records, Mss 2965, “PCT minutes”, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.
- ³⁸ November Minutes, 26 November 1937, Portland Civic Theatre Records, Mss 2965, “PCT minutes”, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.
- ³⁹ “Says Portland to Have Federal Theatre” *Portland News Telegram*, 1937, November 8, 14
- ⁴⁰ “With Stage Folk,” *Oregon Sunday Journal*, November 21, 1937, section 4, 2.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴² “With Stage Folk,” *Oregon Sunday Journal*, April 10, 1938, section 4, 2, and April 17, 1938, section 4, 3.
- ⁴³ “With Stage Folk,” *Oregon Sunday Journal*, November 21, 1937, section 4, 1.
- ⁴⁴ Whitcomb to Mabie, 22 May 1939, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.
- ⁴⁵ Telegram from Whitcomb to Mabie, 25 May 1938, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.
- ⁴⁶ Witham, *Federal Theatre*, 53, 58-9.
- ⁴⁷ Lawrence Langner and Armina Marshall, *The Pursuit of Happiness, An American Comedy* (New York: S. French, 1934) and Elmer Rice, “Councilor at Law,” *Plays* (London: Gollancz, 1933).

⁴⁸ May minutes, 20 May 1938, Portland Civic Theatre Records, Mss 2965, “PCT minutes”, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

⁴⁹ May minutes, 20 May 1938, Portland Civic Theatre Records, Mss 2965, “PCT minutes”, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

⁵⁰ “Portland Art Center – Long a Dream – Nears Reality,” *The Oregonian*, August 17, 1938, 1.

⁵¹ Witham, *Federal Theatre*, 88 and 106.

⁵² Conal Furay, *The Grass-roots Mind in America: The American Sense of Absolutes* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1977), 4.

⁵³ Whitcomb to Mabie, 22 March 1939, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

⁵⁴ Flanagan, *Instructions*, 1.

⁵⁵ Whitcomb to Mabie, 24 July 1939, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

⁵⁶ Whitcomb to Mabie, 24 June 1939, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

⁵⁷ Whitcomb to Mabie, 24 June 1939, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

⁵⁸ Whitcomb to Mabie, 12 March 1940, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

CHAPTER IV

COOPERATIVE FARMING TO ANTI-UNION RHETORIC:

WHITCOMB'S LEFT TO RIGHT NEGOTIATION OF THE OREGON UNIT

A political assault on the New Deal in 1938 by conservative Democrats and Republicans occurred in the halls of Congress, with the FTP set up as a political New Deal punching bag. Congressional allegations of communists in the rank-and-file of the FTP and the WPA made national news, and were in turn reiterated in Portland newspapers. The conservative elements that spurred this attack nationally were present for years in the state of Oregon, with many prominent Oregon politicians, Democrats and Republicans, denouncing the WPA and work relief even as hundreds of thousands of Oregonians began working for New Deal agencies. The Oregon Unit vaudeville productions early in the Unit's history were strictly entertainment, but as FTP administration charged Whitcomb to train the vaudeville actors to present scripted plays approved by the FTP Play Selection board, she had to negotiate between left of center plays supporting the New Deal and conservative state politics.

The move from left of center New Deal plays to more conservative or apolitical material can be charted by examining the plays produced by the Oregon Unit at a single event over the course of several years. The political content, or lack thereof, in the plays offered over three consecutive years at the Flax Festival in the town of Mt. Angel, Oregon, will demonstrate how Whitcomb negotiated the Oregon Unit through turbulent political waters. Placing the Oregon Unit's most liberal and conservative plays into context of state and federal political attitudes towards the New Deal will demonstrate

Whitcomb's prowess as an administrator, and how vital she was to the Oregon WPA.

The first years of the Oregon Unit were free from Federal Administrative scrutiny and oversight, with Oregon WPA Director Griffith leaving Whitcomb to promote the Oregon Unit as she saw fit. Before the administration of the FTP began inserting itself into the operations of the Oregon Unit following the 1937 FTP Summer Conference, the troupe produced plays, which supported what conservative Democrats and Republicans in the 1930s would have considered liberal or socialist propaganda. Plays like *The Yellow Harvest* and *Power* were about the workers confronting large business interests—real David versus Goliath stories—with the ultimate victors winning through collective action. While Whitcomb was acting without oversight her play selection leaned distinctly to the political left.

By 1938, Whitcomb received administrative help, and her desire to quit the Oregon Unit subsided. At the same time, the increased pressure from various levels of FTP administration and government forced her to make difficult programming choices. Political demands at the federal level, coming in the form of investigations into communist sympathies within the FTP by Congress, required the Oregon Unit to change their left-leaning play selection. At the same time, while Whitcomb was meeting with the Portland Civic to secure the Art Center, she was also trying to meet new expectations of the FTP administration in Washington to produce Children's Theatre and Living Newspaper plays. As administrative programming pressures increased, especially after the FTP Summer Conference attended by Whitcomb in 1937, so did attention on the model Oregon Unit. Flanagan herself, seeing promise in the Unit's activities, visited Oregon several times. The official visits pushed Whitcomb to choose plays approved by

the FTP Play Selection Board rather than plays which originated from the troupe of actors or from local playwrights. The conformity to New Deal politics, while supportive of the WPA, did not align with conservative anti-New Deal Oregon state politics.

At the state level, Griffith expected the use of the Oregon Unit at state functions, such as the Flax Festival, where the WPA was celebrated for their contribution to destitute farmers in the Willamette Valley, and *Sloping West*, which highlighted WPA contributions in Oregon for the Portland public. Griffith used the Oregon Unit as a propaganda tool, to attract attention and put an entertaining face on large public works projects. Oregon conservative anti-New Deal Democrat and Republican politicians saw New Deal relief efforts as a handout from Washington, D.C., that weakened the vitality of the state. Whitcomb had to please the FTP by programming plays approved by the national FTP Play Selection Board, while at the same time not alienating local politicians when the Oregon Unit needed political support to create the WPA Art Center.

Whitcomb's negotiation of the political and administrative waters was made more complicated in 1938 when the FTP, and Flanagan personally, came under investigation by the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC). Often called the Dies Committee in the press after committee chair Texas Representative Martin Dies, HUAC investigated disloyal and subversive activity in the federal government, specifically looking for communists who distributed propaganda while working for the government. One of the committee's first orders of business was the investigation of the FTP as a voice of communist and socialist propaganda and dissent. Although the HUAC hearings brought only former New York Unit employees to the stand, Whitcomb changed the type of plays presented by the Oregon Unit to create a more politically savvy

organization representing American ideals in an Oregonian context.

Two festivals featuring the Oregon Unit demonstrate Whitcomb's negotiation from left-leaning productions that supported WPA projects to right-leaning productions that were patriotically anti-union. The Flax Festival performances by the Oregon Unit in the town of Mt. Angel, Oregon, for example, changed from a battle to save a farmers' cooperative to a patriotic retelling of the history of flax in the Willamette Valley. The most politically dramatic change in programming for Whitcomb comes in the Paul Bunyan Festival in 1939. The Paul Bunyan "American Festival" planned for an amphitheatre at the Timberline Lodge on Mount Hood centered on the anti-union play *Paul Bunyan* by E.P. Conkle. The two festivals promoting Oregon's farms and forests stressed home-grown Americana, with the Flax Festival presenting the struggles of the Willamette Valley farmer and the Paul Bunyan Festival centering on the struggles of the Oregonian lumberjack. Whitcomb's play choices changed as the politics of the situation changed in the anti-communist political climate.

This chapter will follow the trajectory of the Oregon Unit through the performances at the annual celebration of the Flax Festival and Whitcomb's negotiation between state and federal politics of politically charged FTP-approved plays. The Oregon Unit transformation was significant, from promoting government-owned utilities and cooperative farming practices to one featuring logger heroes who denounced unions. Oregon was a hotbed of union labor and socialist sympathy, but the later festival productions in 1938-39 glorified non-union labor. The anti-union sentiment in *Paul Bunyan* was striking considering the strength of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in the mills and logging camps of Oregon. The change by the Oregon Unit following the

ruling by HUAC to clean up the FTP, demonstrating a need by Whitcomb in 1938 to support a patriotic, all-American, anti-communist, anti-socialist model unit.

The Yellow Harvest: Cooperative Propaganda

The first Flax Festival in 1936 was a celebration of WPA efforts to support farmers in Oregon through a cooperative, which the Oregon Unit featured in the socialist melodrama *The Yellow Harvest*.¹ A cataclysmic drought hit the Willamette Valley in the summer of 1935, at the peak of the Midwestern Dust Bowl. Crop yields and the quality of farm goods plummeted in Oregon, leaving many farmers without the means to buy seed, repair equipment or pay taxes on their property. In Oregon, the WPA went to work on several projects to help the unemployed workers and the Willamette Valley farmers, beginning with WPA-constructed flax processing facilities. The processing facilities brought a new crop to market for Willamette Valley farmers, who in turn supplied high quality flax fiber for the production of linen and flaxseed for the production of linseed oil. To celebrate the WPA contribution and the new flax industry, the town of Mount Angel established a Flax Harvest Festival over the first weekend in September 1936.* Griffith, who pushed the processing facilities into being, brought the Oregon Unit to the harvest festival to entertain state dignitaries and local farmers. Griffith often asked Whitcomb to feature the Oregon Unit at events to increase the exposure of the WPA. The performance of *The Yellow Harvest*, supporting the WPA flax facilities in the Willamette Valley was very similar to performances requested by Griffith of *Sloping West* in the Portland Market, highlighting the work of the WPA in Oregon through performances and displays in 1937. On a stage in Saint Mary's Church Auditorium, the Oregon Unit performed their

* The Flax Harvest Festival is the root of Mount Angel's *Oktoberfest* today

signature vaudeville acts and the play *The Yellow Harvest*, which chronicled the story of a Willamette Valley farmer struggling to save a farmers' cooperative that processes flax fiber into linen.[†]

The process and production of flax was on display during the Festival in the town of Mount Angel, educating the public on the production of flax into linen through the celebration. The 1936 Flax Festival performance of *The Yellow Harvest* was part of a long line of entertainment, including a parade with floats draped in flax, a semi-professional baseball game, a concert featuring “a chorus of 100 male voices” and the Oregon WPA band on a stage outside the Mount Angel schoolhouse.² The Oregon Unit vaudevillians put together a performance for the original festival program titled *FLAXIANA*, “written especially around the Mt. Angel flax industry,”[‡] which pulled vaudeville material from their 1936 shtick together with a one-act play, *The Yellow Harvest*, written by Frederick Schlick, performed in the St. Mary’s Catholic Church auditorium.³

The Yellow Harvest is a melodrama soaked with a moral message that the members of HUAC would likely have considered socialist. The play follows similar themes to those in Schlick’s 1932 Broadway flop, *Bloodstream*[§], about African American prisoners and white guards trapped in a prison mine collapse where racial injustice and death are great equalizers.⁴ Schlick continued his morality message with *The Yellow*

[†] Theatre historian Elizabeth Osborne found *The Yellow Harvest* buried in the CCC archive in the Library of Congress and supplies an analysis in her chapter “Fading Frontiers” about the Oregon Unit.

[‡] The *Mt. Angel News* noted that Harry Summerkamp, “Stage Director”, traveled to the town to view the performance facility, calling the performance a “pageant” and “one-act play” a week before the Flax Festival performance. (Mount Angel News, “Flax Festival Schedule”, 8/13/1936, 3, and Mount Angel News. “Many Events to Boost Flax” 8/27/36, 5.)

[§] Though the set was designed by noted designer Jo Mielziner, nothing could not save *Bloodstream*, which ran for just 29 performances.

Harvest, setting the power of despotic property owners against a farmer trying to keep a fragile cooperative from collapsing. The power of God intervenes in both plays, with God manifesting himself as an African American prisoner in *Bloodstream* and operating through a priest and as *deus ex machina* in *The Yellow Harvest*. Schlick's plays explore the disparity between race and class and in a melodramatic fashion championing the common man, the overthrowing of the rich and equality among classes.

The plot of *The Yellow Harvest* centered “on the flax possibilities with the Mt. Angel community as the setting of the play.”⁵ The play's central character, Lee Halmis, a Flax farmer and leader of a Willamette Valley cooperative flax association, is committed to the crop's success. Business speculators James Kells and his wife, Alice, purchase the loan to Lee's farm and intend to do what they can to acquire the land and destroy the flax industry in Oregon. James Kells sees no value in flax or the flax cooperative, which he believes will drive down the profits Lee could gain per acre with a different crop. Determined to obtain the farm at any cost, James and Alice Kells set out to destroy Lee's ability to pay the loan by destroying the cooperative and his crop.⁶

The Oregon Unit's production re-envisioned the history of flax in the Willamette Valley to include the WPA. In Schlick's script, Lee's cooperative was made possible by flax processing facilities supplied by the WPA, paralleling real-life circumstances. In 1935, with a parish full of struggling Mount Angel farmers, Benedictine Father Alcuin Heibel visited Washington, D.C., as the WPA was taking shape.⁷ Griffith heard Heibel's request and placed flax production in the Willamette Valley as a top priority for the Oregon WPA.

When the Oregon Unit presented *The Yellow Harvest* to the farmers in St. Mary's

Church, they were making heroes of those farmers who continued to harvest flax through tough economic times. The character Lee represented those farmers who banded together as a community to bring the crop to market. The story of farmers working flax in the Willamette Valley was one of crop rotation and cooperation. Before the invention of a flax-pulling machine, the crop was pulled by hand, and the production of the crop was limited by the cooperative man-hours available between neighboring farmers.** Flax was a minor crop on diversified farms across the Willamette Valley, evidenced by a 1934 survey taken by the Oregon Experiment Station finding an average of nine acres out of 78-acre farm planted with flax. Bartering for needed supplies substantially fed the rural family farm, and like many farmers around Mt. Angel, Lee Halmis was a subsistence farmer, living crop-to-crop and unable to get ahead.⁸ Lee remembers the struggle to legitimize the flax industry in a story he tells his farmhand, Belden, as he looks out over a flowering field of flax:

Remember in the old days when they tried to make us believe that we couldn't grow flax here? Grow it here!—Why, Belden, old socks, a sight like that is the answer to a flaxgrower's dream!... Now if we can only keep harmony in the cooperation, we'll be on top of the world.⁹

Before the age of mechanized harvest, harvesting flax was incredibly labor intensive, and therefore, not economically viable as a cash crop. After farmers pulled the plants from the ground, they brought their crops together for families to process and extract the fiber that would be made into linen. Flax brought the Willamette Valley farming communities together, but because of the labor intensity, the crop did not represent a large portion of the farm's income. In order to make flax a cash crop the entire operation needed to be mechanized—from the planting, to harvesting, to processing—with facilities provided

** The flax pulling machine was invented in Ontario, Canada in 1924.

through WPA assistance.

Flax was dwindling as a crop in the Willamette Valley before the WPA processing facilities opened in 1936. Before the WPA entered the flax industry, Lee Halmis would have brought his flax to the Oregon State Penitentiary in Salem for processing. The penitentiary was the primary flax processor in the Willamette Valley through the 1920s, but lost much of its production when a 1934 federal law permitted states to prohibit the sale of products created by penitentiaries.¹⁰ Before the age of synthetic materials, linen made from flax was an important fabric, and penal labor processing flax kept the price of linen cost effective. The WPA facilities and the farmers' cooperative, championed by Halmis in the play, were the only ways to keep high quality Oregon flax on the market.

Within the auditorium of St. Mary's Church, the vaudevillian and farmer—prosperous from the turn of the century to the 1920s, but both suffering for different reasons within the economic collapse of the Great Depression—found sanctuary through WPA assistance. Schlick's play presented a welcoming message to farmers in the audience who rotated their fields to flax. The play shows how the advent of the cooperative in 1936 allowed farmers to once again bring flax to market and realize financial security. At the beginning of *The Yellow Harvest*, Lee says:

We've spent five years building [the cooperative] up.—We donated sites for the plants, and the Government built them! Why? Because we believe, and the Government believes in flax!¹¹

Florida State University professor and FTP historian Elizabeth Osborne writes that Lee's impassioned speech “unites the struggling flax farmer with the government” serving “as a visible bridge between the Oregon flax growers and the WPA.”¹² The intended audience

for the play's propaganda supporting the farmers' cooperative were Mount Angel farmers who needed to support the cooperative by committing to the planting and harvesting of flax. If flax was not harvested for processing or if farmers tried to undercut one another by selling flax on the open market, the cooperative would not survive. Economic socialism can be defined in many ways, but the overriding implication of the play was that the growing and harvesting, of flax and the distribution of linen are collectively owned by the community. The farmers watching the vaudevillians in the play at St. Mary's Church needed to "believe" in the promise of prosperity for the cooperative to succeed.

In the dramatic conclusion of *The Yellow Harvest*, James and Alice Kells call in the note that they own on Lee's farm, and while he is away from the farm to find someone to carry his debt until harvest, they attempt to force him into bankruptcy by setting fire to his barn. Farmers feared such fires, a fear that kept many farmers away from growing and storing flax. The fire highlighted the benefits of the cooperative, which stored the farmers' flax and assumed the insurance liability should the flax burn.^{††} In *The Yellow Harvest*, Lee's farmhand saves the crop by chopping down the farm's water tower, dousing the fire.

In the final scene of the play, upon his return to the farm, Lee has extraordinary news. In his search for an answer to his financial crisis, he ascended Mt. Angel where the Benedictine monastery stands today.

Lee: I asked the Lord on my bended knee to save the flax farmers! (*He crosses himself, looks up, continues quietly and simply*) And then I [w]ent out and sat in the garden, and looked at the flowers.

^{††} In 1940, the WPA flax processing facility in Springfield, Oregon burned to the ground in a very similar fire. (Eugene Register-Guard. "Springfield Flax Firm Fire Takes \$5600 Toll". 11/21/40, (144) Eugene, Or: Guard Print. Co., 1)

Kells: (*ironically*) What did the Lord do?

Lee: (*With antagonism*) Father Benedict came out, and sat down. We looked out across the valley, and I told him my troubles. [...] He put through a long-distance call to Salem, and talked to the Governor!.... And tomorrow I'm goin' to get a loan!¹³

In the production, the character of Lee fell on bended knee in the St. Mary's Auditorium, at the base of Mt. Angel, uniting the power of the Catholic Church with the answer to Father Heibel's prayer to help his flock. As Osborne notes, Governor Charles H. Martin was also in attendance at the event, taking credit as the real-life hero of a "federally-funded miracle."¹⁴ The fact that the play glorified Martin, an anti-New Deal Democrat, as the savior of flax may have helped curb his distaste for the play, but the play was never produced at another Flax Festival again.

The Yellow Harvest was a melodrama draped in a socialist message of cooperative farming and may have leaned too far to the political left for the tastes of politicians, administrators and the rural farming community in Mount Angel. The WPA created a cooperative, but presenting a cooperative as savior on stage, financially supported by politicians and morally saved by the church, was pushing the liberal envelope. What the WPA needed for Flax Festival entertainment was a play that wove the WPA into the dramatic history of flax in the Willamette Valley, while de-emphasizing their socialist cooperative.

Tapestry in Linen: Changing from Propaganda to WPA History

By 1937, Whitcomb knew the Flax Festival would be an annual event and decided to change the play presented from *The Yellow Harvest* to an authentic Living Newspaper, *Tapestry in Linen*, written by WPA employee Shotwell Calvert. Calvert does not appear

as a playwright in other Oregon Unit productions, but the historic Oregon narrative of *Tapestry in Linen*, follows the writings in the Oregon guidebook, *Oregon End of the Trail*, suggesting that he was on loan from the Oregon Federal Writers Project, another division of WPA's Federal One.¹⁵ Why Whitcomb decided to change the play for the Flax Festival is unclear. Politicians or administrators who watched the play in 1936, like Governor Martin or Griffith, may have not cared for the socialist connotations of the WPA project in the play, the general audience reaction may have been unfavorable, or Whitcomb's Living Newspaper training at the FTP Summer Conference at Vassar College weeks before the performance may have spurred the change. In a handwritten letter to E.C. Mabie dated the day of the 1937 Flax Festival performance, Whitcomb seems frustrated and excited with the amount of time given to write and produce the script. She wrote:

Monday night Shotwell and I sat down and re-wrote several scenes. Then I rolled up my sleeves and waded in. I made no attempt to be at my desk nor did I even glance at our future beyond today. I have done what I could to get all items of production set in pantomime, so to speak. But we are unable to have even a dress rehearsal. I shall just hold my breath, trust in God and the teamwork of a company who are entirely used to each other.¹⁶

Whitcomb's drive to fix the scenes and polish the production without a final dress rehearsal, was a testament to her belief in Flanagan's message at Vassar College about the power of the Living Newspaper to change lives. In Flanagan's closing speech of the FTP Summer Camp, Whitcomb heard her say, "In a stroke of fortune unprecedented in dramatic history, we have been given a chance to help change America at a time when twenty million unemployed Americans proved it needed changing."¹⁷ Whitcomb brought this determination back to Oregon with fervor that forced *Tapestry in Linen* into existence.

The frantic nature of her penmanship and wording in the letter suggests Whitcomb was under a tight schedule with little time to write. Why would she place extra burden on herself and the troupe and have Calvert write a Living Newspaper based on the history of flax? We know Griffith and conservative democrats, such as Governor Martin, attended the first Flax Festival. If the choice to change the play came from one of the dignitaries who did not care for *The Yellow Harvest's* melodramatic socialist-leaning message, the Oregon Unit's mad dash to place a new play before the Mt. Angel audience may have been a the result of political intervention, or at least trepidation that such intervention might come. Perhaps Whitcomb was changing the play and rehearsing at the last minute in an attempt to negotiate the complex political landscape of the WPA relief efforts in the Willamette Valley.

Unlike *The Yellow Harvest*, the text of *Tapestry In Linen* is not extant, but was described by *The Mt. Angel News* as a “rapid fire musical drama dealing with the history and development of the flax industry in Oregon,” incorporating “dancing, juggling acrobatics and specialty numbers” to tell the story of flax in the Willamette Valley.¹⁸ The play combined “the techniques of radio, theater and ballet” and was moved from the auditorium at St. Mary's Church to an outdoor stage in Ebner Ballpark. The cast had closed *Taming of the Shrew* in Laurelhurst Park in Portland one week prior to the Ebner Ballpark performance and so was used to performing outdoors.^{‡‡} Although the script has not been discovered, the outdoor presentation, use of music, dance and juggling outdoors

^{‡‡} July and August, 1937, were filled with outdoor pageants and performance in Oregon's Willamette Valley. On July 22-24, 1937, the Oregon Trail Pageant took place in Eugene. Coupled with the performance of *Tapestry in Linen* by the Oregon Unit, Oregonians were treated to outdoor free entertainment that celebrated Oregon's history. The Oregon Unit was using a portable stage owned by Portland Parks and Recreation Department for *Shrew*, and this stage may have been transported to Ebner Ballpark for the performance.

on a stage in a baseball field combined the skills the Oregon Unit gained working in Portland area parks set to an Oregon historical narrative found in WPA Oregon guide books.

The play transformed into a historic retelling of flax and how the WPA was wrapped in the history. Whitcomb describes the historic context of *Tapestry in Linen*,

Some very interesting dances are in the show and the script really does give an interesting resume of the history of flax in Oregon and an exciting challenge as to what is to be done about it without the least taint of the stench of pageantry.¹⁹

Tapestry in Linen included several “dances” choreographed at the FTP Summer Conference including the unveiling of Whitcomb’s *Dance of the Flax Scutching Machine*, a modern dance that demonstrated the processing of flax fiber into linen through the bodies of the actors in the Oregon Unit.²⁰ Following retting, where the flax is soaked in fresh water, the flax plant must dry in the field before the woody stem and flax fiber can be separated from one another through a process called “scutching.” The scutching machine breaks up the woody outside layer of the flax plant to expose the long flax fibers. The invention of the scutching machine allowed a single worker to separate flax fiber more easily, allowing far more flax per hour. The mechanical and modern dance movements by acrobats and tumblers, comedians and clowns embodied the scutching machine, and such choreography must have seemed very modern and edgy to the rural crowd at the Flax Festival.

The play was not a pageant, but rather the embodiment of the physical and historical narrative of flax in the Willamette Valley.²¹ Outside of the scutching machine dances, *Journal* theatre critic Harold Hunt described the historic facts and figures of the history of flax:

...we discovered we knew virtually nothing of the dramatic battle that has been going on more than half a century to put Oregon in its proper place as the producing center of the world's finest flax. And we found that facts and figures, usually dry and unpalatable reading, had life when brought into the interesting panoramic history of the industry.²²

Hunt's *Journal* feature about *Tapestry in Linen* praised the Living Newspaper form as the most important invention of the Federal Theatre:^{§§}

...with crude stage accommodations and effects, we saw and heard "Tapestry in Linen" presentation, [...] and we came away with a feeling we had witnessed something which, given opportunity, might become a potent factor in community and educational affairs.²³

In the play, Madge Wynne, who had starred as Katherina in a performance of *Taming of the Shrew* days earlier in Portland parks, played the character of Juliet Montague Lord (1844-1924), wife of Oregon State governor William F. Lord (served 1885-89), who championed the Oregon flax industry and supported its introduction at the Paris Exposition in 1900. The other Oregon Unit actors portrayed World's Fair judges, farmers, and "various people who, in one way and another were affected" by increasing the production of flax in Oregon.²⁴ By presenting dramatic stories pulled from newspaper and history of Oregonians who saw the possibility of flax and encouraged its production, Whitcomb and Calvert created the first Living Newspaper about Oregon.

The Oregon Unit centered *Tapestry in Linen* on historic campaigns in Oregon to support the flax industry, like that of Elizabeth Lord while linking the WPA facilities to the history of flax production. The last Flax Festival performance by the Oregon Unit in 1938 was titled "Flaxtown Frolics," featuring 14-acts of vaudeville in the St. Mary auditorium. The change in the performance content over three years of the Flax Festival demonstrates a move from the political left to apolitical entertainment simply retelling the

^{§§} Hunt witnessed the rehearsal on August 11, 1937, just prior to the Flax Festival performance.

history of flax the Willamette Valley. Whitcomb's political negotiation—from Schlick's socialist *Harvest* to Calvert's *Tapestry* to the troupe's straight vaudeville—demonstrates the lengths she would go, and put her troupe through, to achieve the performance that would please those in charge.

By August 1938, when the Oregon Unit presented “Flaxtown Frolics,” HUAC was hearing testimony against the FTP. Five months earlier, Whitcomb was willing to brave the political waters and present the Living Newspaper *Power*, which pulled well past *The Yellow Harvest* socialist propaganda by advocating for people to rise up and vote for public distribution of hydro-electric power. The next example of *Power* was propaganda for the FDR administration, and the Oregon Unit production set itself in the middle of the dispute about who should profit from the electricity generated by the newly completed Bonneville Dam.

Power: Socialist Propaganda for the Bonneville Dam

Whitcomb took a risk in presenting a popular Living Newspaper production seen as overtly socialist supporting municipal utilities. By presenting the play *Power* in March 1938, the Oregon Unit stepped into the middle of a debate that was ripping apart the Democratic Party in Oregon and Washington, D.C. Like *The Yellow Harvest*, the play *Power* pushed against the political mainstream in Oregon with its accusations of businessmen who make a profit by cheating the public. Rather than following a heroic character battling an evil businessman as in *The Yellow Harvest*, *Power* created scenes and characters pulled from newspaper headlines. Common people, such as a Farmer and his Wife, a Grocer, and a Barber, were presented in context with Senators and Supreme

Court Justices making the case for public power utilities against the greed of privately-held power companies. Many conservatives in the Oregon and National Democratic Party saw the debate over municipal power distribution as a move towards socialization of private industry. MacColl writes:

More than any other issue, strong differences of opinion over public power prevented the Democratic Party from creating the type of coalition that would have allowed it to challenge effectively the Republican Party's traditional dominance of the state legislature.²⁵

The play *Power* sits at the center of the argument, and was propaganda for the public distribution of electricity. Powerful politicians in Oregon backed by private power companies pushed for the privatization of Bonneville's electricity distribution to large industrial plants powered by the Bonneville Dam rather than supplying power to the rural areas of Oregon. Private power lobbyists worked against rural electrification, which was a primary concern of the FDR administration, and actively opposed municipal power in Oregon by financing campaigns for anti-New Deal Democrats.²⁶ The Oregon Unit engaged both debates in *Power*, which featured the topic of rural electrification.

The completion of the Bonneville Dam and the ensuing debate over the distribution of power in the halls of the State Legislature, the Portland City Council and Mayor's office, and the Governor's office, was set against FDR's commitment to the formation of the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission which championed the creation of the Columbia Valley Authority (CVA), patterned after the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA).²⁷

Power supported the FDR administration's call for the public distribution of power with the construction and regional planning of the TVA. As Barry Witham writes, ...the play was a response to the alarms raised in the private sector over the whole

WPA agenda: that the government meddling would lead to inefficiency, undermine the free enterprise system, and ultimately create a nationalized network of public utilities and industry.²⁸

Power was written as a response to several cases heard by the Supreme Court against the TVA, and highlights the case brought by the Tennessee Electric Power Company (TEPCO), arguing against the TVA's constitutional right to sell cheap power, undercutting the market rate to create what TEPCO argued was unfair competition.²⁹ FDR's position, supported in the play, was that affordable power was in the interest of the people of the Tennessee Valley. With injunctions looming against the TVA, the president pushed for the passage of the Judiciary Act of 1937 in Congress, which required a three-judge panel to rule on injunction cases like TEPCO, with two of three judges needed to place an injunction on government branches like the TVA.³⁰ FDR's passage of the Judiciary Act was viewed by many in the Democratic Party as a move towards the socialization of private industry, and the controversy split the Democratic majority in the legislature in Washington, D.C. By producing the play *Power*, with the legislature in Oregon split on the issue of public power, and many in Congress feeling the President had overstepped his authority by moving the country towards socialism, Whitcomb was creating propaganda for the New Deal agenda.

The political and money interests that controlled electricity distribution in Portland did not approve of FDR's plan to create a regional power authority around the dams on the Columbia River. As a voice for the New Deal, the Oregon Unit would step into the political quagmire with their production of *Power*. In 1935, as the Bonneville Dam was taking shape, Portland's city council and mayor took up the debate around creating a public utility in the city of Portland through the purchase of the Northwestern

Electric Company. The City Council was inactive on the idea until the Commissioner of Public Utilities, Ralph C. Clyde, presented a formal proposal to the City Council in December 1936 stating:

If the people of Portland are to benefit directly from [the Bonneville Dam and the Bonneville Power Authority] then it is absolutely necessary that a publicly-owned distribution system be provided. ³¹

Clyde argued that private utility rates were always going to be higher than public rates because privately-held power companies paid dividends on bonds and to their stockholders, passing all expenses onto the ratepayer. A municipally-owned venture would not have such expenses. By producing *Power*, Whitcomb took sides in city politics. *Power* dramatically portrays how private utilities pass expenses onto the customer to manipulate their rate base. A meeting with a board of directors in scene six is an example of how *Power* portrays private utility businessmen, and argues Clyde's point made to the Portland City Council:

Chairman: Gentlemen, our properties have been appraised at four million dollars.

First Director (*chuckling*): Well, we haven't depreciated much.

Chairman: Do you realize this may mean a rate cut? (*The Directors look disturbed.*) Now I have a proposal... We must hire another firm of appraisers.

Second Director: And pay another half-million-dollar fee?

Chairman: Certainly—and more if we have to! Are you forgetting, gentlemen, that our rates are based on what we spend, on our capital account? (*He raps his knuckles on the table. A pause.*)

Third Director: (*who has been thinking, his chin in his hand*): Say, what about those old trucks we've got piled up at Plant 16?

Fourth Director: They won't run anymore!

Chairman (*suavely*): Gentlemen, they have all been included in the rate base—at the price we paid for them.

Third Director: It seems to me we ought to have some more old junk lying around some place... (*Blackout*)

By presenting *Power*, the Oregon Unit was educating the voting public about the often-underhanded calculation of their electricity rates by private power companies. Clyde's

argument for municipal power was not popular with Portland's Mayor Joseph K. Carson, who openly rejected the proposal. Carson, like many Oregon state politicians – most notably Governor Martin – financed his campaign with the help of private power lobbyists like former Oregon Governor Oswald West, who represented the privately-held Pacific Power & Light Company. Rather than voting up or down on Clyde's measure to purchase the Northwestern Electric Company, Carson convinced the council to transfer the decision to the voting public. At a time of high unemployment and economic uncertainty, the public was asked to vote for a tax levy of \$50,000 for the appraisal of the Northwestern Electric Company properties in a special election. If the voters approved the tax levy then another special election to vote on municipal power would be scheduled. In January 1936, the tax levy was soundly defeated, the city of Portland renewed the Northwestern Electric Company contract as the Bonneville Dam began producing electricity in 1937, and Portlanders never had the opportunity to vote for municipal power.³² By producing *Power* a few months after the renewal of the Northwestern Electric contract, Whitcomb was placing the Oregon Unit firmly against the manipulative vote rejecting the public power option, and advocated for politicians to give Portlanders the chance to vote for public power.

Playwright Arthur Arent's work in *Power* is often radical, calling for audience members to take action with a scene structure pulled from propaganda plays like *Waiting for Lefty* by playwright Clifford Odets. An example of this kind of work is found in Scene 15-A, between a farmer and his wife, Nora, reading by the light of a kerosene lamp. In the scene, the farmer's wife demands that her husband do more than turn up the kerosene wick,

Farmer: What you want me to do, Nora? The wick's up as high as it'll go.

Wife: Never mind the wick! How about a couple of nice little electric lights around here?

Farmer: Now, we been all over that before. And there ain't nothin' I can do about it.

Wife: Ain't there?

Farmer: You heard what Joe Frank said. His farm's bigger'n mine. He can use more lights, and the company told him, nothin' doin'.

Wife: So, you and Joe are getting' up a little club to read in the daytime, eh? (*She rises*) Suppose they told you couldn't have any air, would you stop breathin'?'³³

Power not only equates the rural condition to the lack of electrification, but because of a lack of assistance, rural populations suffer from “poor land, limited diet, insufficient schooling, inadequate medical care, no plumbing, industry, agriculture or electrification!”³⁴ The farmer in the argument is powerless to get the power company to run a power line to his farm, but Arent calls on his audience to take action by banding together in solidarity against the electric companies.

There is a difference in the socialist implications between the power of the individual farmer in *The Yellow Harvest* and the power of collective action in *Power*. In *Power* rural farmers band together, taking control of their situation, whereas in *The Yellow Harvest*, an individual farmer forms a cooperative and as business interests move in to take his land he sets out to find a solution by himself, ultimately discovering salvation in the Catholic Church and the Governor – a *deus ex machina*. At the beginning of the scene, the farmer in *Power* is helpless in his situation with the power company and his wife demands he take action: to get up, get out and make his voice heard.

Farmer: Nora, if they don't want to string lights out to my farm I can't make 'em. (*Farmer rises.*)

Wife: Who said you can't? Who says you can't go up there and raise holy blazes until they give 'em to you! Tell 'em you're an American citizen! Tell 'em you're sick and tired of lookin' at fans and heaters and vacuums and dish-washin' machines in catalogues, that you'd like to *use* 'em for a change! Tell 'em... (*she stops*)... What the hell do you think Andy Jackson you're always talkin' about

would do in a case like this! (*As he stands, convinced, she claps his hat on his head, and gives him a push*) Now go on out and tell ‘em somethin’!
(Farmer *exits*.)³⁵

The farmer and his wife in *Power* echo Joe and Edna in a scene from *Waiting for Lefty* in which the call to action by the Group Theatre brought the audience into the streets in 1935, chanting “Strike! Strike!” at the end of the first performance. Arent was capturing the same leftist emotional message in *Power*, seeking to give voice to the powerless so they would rise up together.³⁶ Schlick’s farmer seeks salvation for his troubles from banks, ultimately receiving a magical loan from the state, whereas Arent engages the farmer’s wife in the struggle, demanding farmer solidarity to rise up and demand action from the corporate giant. The solidarity of action in *Power* make it a far more socialist play than that of *The Yellow Harvest*.

The Oregon Unit only performed *Power* twice on the last weekend in March 1938, when the standard run of an Oregon Unit production, including Living Newspapers such as *One-Third of a Nation*, was at least two weeks. The political pressure against the play came from local politics and not from HUAC, which formed two months after the March production of *Power*. As MacColl writes, for the Oregon politicians, “the thought of a government corporation assuming control over the marketing of federally-generated power was nothing short of socialism.”³⁷ As a solution to the “vaudeville problem” at the FTP Summer Conference in 1937, Whitcomb needed to apply her vaudevillians to a Living Newspaper play. *Power* had nationwide popularity and the topic, so near the completion of the Bonneville Dam, made it a natural choice for the first Oregon Unit Living Newspaper production. Whitcomb walked the line between the FTP’s administrators and local politicians: pleasing FTP administration by selecting the popular

play for production while keeping the run short and limiting pre-publicity so as not to anger Oregon politicians and those opposed to public power.^{***} While production notebooks (featuring reports, photos and reviews) were a common way for state Units to inform FTP administration in Washington about their activity, one of the only Oregon Unit production notebooks in the National Archive is for *Power*. Whitcomb financially justifies the limited run in the production notebook,

“Power” was produced before the project was in its own theatre and the complications of light cues, scene changes and doubling of roles were all intensified by the fact that the project was paying rental for every rehearsal in the auditorium where it was produced; therefore, the company was under the constant strain of working against time.³⁸

The large Benson Polytechnic School auditorium on Portland’s East Side, where the Unit produced the costume drama *The Pursuit of Happiness* in February 1938, had more performances than *Power*, with period costumes, and extensive pre-publicity. The answer to why the run was short lies in Whitcomb realizing *Power’s* socialist sentiment about the hot-button issue would anger some politicians and the public who voted against public power.

Nevertheless, reviews for *Power* were favorable, and featured prominently in the Oregon Unit production notebook. In his review of the play, Harold Hunt suggested:

Naturally there will be many who do not agree with the stand the author, Arthur Arent, has taken. They will find in the production propaganda. But they will find, too, mass of information, from newspapers and records, dealing with a subject that is, at the moment, one of the biggest in interest of any in the Pacific Northwest, the subject of distribution of power produced at Bonneville....³⁹

Power used propaganda to raise awareness of public power for an audience who, according to the press, did not like the idea. While the politics were dicey, Whitcomb was

^{***} While Oregon Unit production announcements were often weeks in advance, the first announcement for *Power* came the Monday before opening. (*News Telegram*. “New Techniques used in ‘Power’ by Federal Theatre”. 3/21/1938,6)

able to demonstrate how the Oregon Unit was utilizing her retrained vaudeville talent while producing topical FTP Living Newspaper productions in the shadow of the Bonneville Dam. At the same time, she received favorable reviews while avoiding controversy that may have grown against the Oregon Unit if the play had an extended run.

Over the next year Whitcomb changed the play selection of the Oregon Unit to not only respond to the politics in Oregon but to the local impression of the FTP at a national level. As the severity of the HUAC investigation hit FTP administration, the play selection by all units had to move away from left-leaning productions like *Power* to mainstream apolitical or even anti-socialist content. Because they were a small troupe working in Oregon political waters, it was far easier for the Oregon Unit and Whitcomb to adapt to a more conservative paradigm than other, larger FTP Units.

Whitcomb's negotiation with Oregon politics around the Oregon Unit production of *Power* was brought into the national spotlight as Flanagan was called in for questioning by HUAC a few months later. HUAC used *Power's* call to action as damning evidence of the FTP's socialist and even communist intentions. In Flanagan's testimony at the HUAC hearings in September 1938, Congressman Dies twisted *Power's* advocacy of public ownership of utilities into hypothetical questions about the possibility of communism in the plays selected by the FTP Play Policy Board. Flanagan defended her board's selections, saying a play should be "a good play, a powerful play, preferably of native materials [...] in accord with general forward-looking tendencies." Dies argued that plays "which champion one side of a controversy" like *Power* were propaganda "that could be used and abused." He questioned whether she would champion a play that called

for “the public ownership of all the property in the United States.”⁴⁰ When she responded in the negative saying, “we would stop with that because that would be recommending the overthrow of the United State government,” Dies countered, “in other words, you would favor doing it by degrees, but not all at once, isn’t that right?” Flanagan countered Dies’ argument, but the news reporters had their headline, and Flanagan lost the fight in the court of popular opinion with many papers labeling her a “Red” and highlighting Dies’ remark.⁴¹

HUAC finalized six months of testimony against the FTP in December 1938, and the Dies Committee Report released a short paragraph a month later, summing up their findings with the damning statement:

We are convinced that a rather large number of employees on the Federal Theatre Project are either members of the Communist Party or are sympathetic with the communist party.⁴²

Content in plays like *Power* and testimony against activities witnessed solely in the New York Unit were the basis of the accusations by the committee.

HUAC’s release corresponded to the planning of an Oregon Unit production of The Paul Bunyan Festival for the summer of 1939 that would push Whitcomb’s politics in a conservative direction. In a hopeless effort to prove FTP’s American loyalties, the play was planned with FTP Western Regional Directors, the Seattle and Los Angeles Units and with Flanagan herself, and would tell the story of an anti-union logging hero.

Paul Bunyan Helps the Oregon Unit Fall to the Right

As HUAC’s findings were released to the press, things were looking up for the Oregon Unit. The Art Center gained approval for funding from the WPA with the

Portland Civic and University of Oregon as sponsors, Whitcomb was directing professional legitimate actors on loan from Los Angeles and San Francisco with favorable reviews in the press, and she received praise from the highest levels of FTP administration, with Flanagan personally invested in the planning of the Paul Bunyan Festival. There was nothing communist or socialist about the lumberjack hero and slice of Americana planned for the Timberline Lodge amphitheatre on Mount Hood. The play *Paul Bunyan* was pulled from folk tales and fit the pioneering theme of the Timberline Lodge. The FTP's need to convince the press, congressional representatives and the American people of their patriotic intent, forced Whitcomb to plan the Paul Bunyan Festival before the play was written by playwright E.P. Conkle. Conkle wrote the play as a response to socialist and communist allegations against the FTP, with Bunyan fighting against organized labor. The play was not written for an Oregon audience, which supported labor unions in Oregon in 1939. The Bunyan Festival was the Oregon Unit's way of proving the FTP was "American" at a time when they were under attack, and while the subject matter was Oregonian, with lumberjacks felling trees in the forest, the sentiment in the play did not conform to the Oregonian political view of union activity.

Paul Bunyan follows the narrative of westward expansion, including the extraction and depletion of natural resources on the edge of a depleted frontier. Conkle follows historian Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 "frontier thesis" to its mythical conclusion, logging the last remnant of pristine wilderness and closing the frontier to the logger-hero forever. For Turner, the frontier defined America and the pioneers, and fostered independence from Europe that helped define who we are as Americans. Bunyan, the folk-hero, followed the lumberjacks westward from the logging camps of

Minnesota into the forests of Southern Oregon.⁴³ Bunyan's logging of the last piece of the frontier symbolized the closing of the West and the end of the endless supply of forest and farmland. In his analysis of Turner's frontier thesis, Roderic Nash explores the historical framework of wilderness and its relationship with the frontiersman. The perception of wilderness changed in the late 19th century from "the villain of the national drama," as Nash writes, to a force that identified what it meant to be a frontiersman. Using theatre as a metaphor, Nash writes, "The villain, it appeared, was as vital to the play as the hero, and, in view of the admirable qualities that contact with wilderness were thought to have produced, perhaps not so villainous as had been supposed."⁴⁴ The wilderness, for Bunyan, created men who were "honest, faithful and true" and as the wilderness closed, with the last bastions of timber forested by Bunyan's men, the wilderness that defined what it meant to be a frontier lumberjack was being felled with the harvest. Like many Bunyan tall tales, Conkle wrote a tragedy closing the last bit of frontier forest with the rise of a modern era that has no use for a logger hero.

The modern era of the late 1930s found delight in the Bunyan tall tale, and the FDR administration used Bunyan's heroics to gain support of New Deal programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Magazine articles comparing the work of the CCC with Bunyan's heroics demonstrate the power and popularity of the logger-hero in the 1930s, saying, "Paul Bunyan has a new job now. He's putting back the forests he skinned with his mighty ax" and that the CCC "adopted Paul Bunyan as its patron saint."⁴⁵ There are many parallels between the CCC and Bunyan's camp, from their work in the woods, the number of camps constructed, ample food supplied to Bunyan's "jacks" and the CCC's "boys," and the salvation of both groups of men through hard physical

labor. Bunyan's popularity in the press, in children's stories, and with the physical connection in Oregon between the CCC and the trails and roads around Timberline Lodge, would place the audience in the play's environment.

Whitcomb's original plan, which grew as regional and national leaders came on board, was to create a Paul Bunyan Festival at the Timberline Lodge amphitheatre on Mount Hood featuring Conkle's play. As the Festival grew, plans were made to bring in dancers from the Los Angeles Unit and incorporate the Seattle Unit in the festivities. Without a script, Whitcomb coordinated with E.J. Griffith to send a Western Union telegram to Mabie, the chair of the theatre department at the University of Iowa, where Conkle was a professor. Whitcomb sent a letter the same day, January 18, 1939, on Griffith's stationary asking Mabie to talk to Conkle about finishing the play. Griffith's telegram suggests the urgency of their situation:

PLANS FOR BUNYAN FESTIVAL NEXT SUMMER HAVE CHANGED. WE ARE INTERESTED IN BUNYAN PLAY BY CONKLE EXISTENCE OF WHICH REPORTED BY WHITCOMB. IF WE CAN USE IT WILL YOU AND HE BE INTERESTED IN AN OREGON PREMIER? WOULD BE GRATEFUL FOR SCRIPT AT ONCE EVEN IF NOT COMPLETE.⁴⁶

The telegram suggests Whitcomb shared the Paul Bunyan Festival concept with Mabie before January 1939. Griffith was requesting rights to *Paul Bunyan* before reading the play, which demonstrates his trust in Whitcomb's opinion about Conkle's work as well as his commitment to the Oregon Unit. In Whitcomb's letter to Mabie, she states that they had expected Yasha Frank to write the play, but he was busy as the National Consultant for the FTP Children's Theatre. Whitcomb's coordinated request, written on Griffith's WPA stationary, stated, "We want one serious script centering on Bunyan and the lumber industry as a main feature of the festival, and fortunately I remembered you mentioned

that Conkle has written on that theme.”⁴⁷ Ironically, the group of prominent Paul Bunyan Festival planners wanted a play with Bunyan as a main character, but without having read the play, were not aware of the play’s anti-union sentiment.

The amphitheatre at Timberline Lodge was an ideal location for the planned production. Seen today, the amphitheatre has a majestic quality, built by CCC and WPA labor a short walk from the Lodge, with a backdrop of Mount Jefferson behind the stage and the grandeur of Mount Hood at the audience’s back. Surrounding the audience on all sides were pine trees, stunted and windswept by years of being on the mountain. The location was, and is today, at the timberline of Mount Hood, with a forest stretching down the mountain in view of the audience, and the rough treeless slopes behind. At the edge of the timberline of the mountain, between a treeless and forested land, the Oregon Unit planned their production of *Paul Bunyan*, the story of a man who, according to legend, was the inventor of the lumber industry.⁴⁸ The amphitheatre was in a natural setting that fit the elements within the story of Paul Bunyan and his lumberjacks, with a location framed and constructed to offer sweeping sublime images. While theatrical landscapes are often seen on stage, in the Timberline amphitheatre the world of the play also surrounds the audience, who would have sat on half round cedar logs surrounded by solid granite walls and a large granite stage, linking Mount Hood to the wonder of the play.

Conkle completed a draft of the play by March 1939 and planning was moved to the Timberline Lodge. In a letter to Mabie, Whitcomb writes,

Hallie, Guy Williams and I are all much pleased with Conkle’s “Bunyan” and we believe we can do exciting things with it on the side of the mountain. The three of us stayed up at the Lodge two days and two nights going over the script inch by inch and making definite plans for a big event. We could look out of our windows

to the theatre under fifteen feet of snow.⁴⁹

Guy Williams was hired as the Oregon Unit Assistant Executive Director, and his experience relieved much of Whitcomb's stress, helping to shore up the Oregon Unit and plan for the troupe's future.⁵⁰ Williams, who worked with Glenn Hughes to form the Seattle Unit of the Federal Theatre, had experience sending shows into the woods as an organizer of the CCC Federal Theatre Review, with actors "barnstorming" around the CCC camps in Washington State.⁵¹ Williams took over as director of the Seattle Unit following Glenn Hughes' departure and was promoted in July 1937 to supervise touring FTP productions.⁵² In one of his last acts as director, he oversaw the combination of the disparate variety and Negro units in Seattle under one roof.

Meanwhile, FTP Director Hallie Flanagan arrived in Oregon at the end of February 1939, watched *Spirochete*, the Living Newspaper production about the taboo subject of syphilis at the Elks Temple Theatre, and stayed at Timberline Lodge through the first week of March with Whitcomb and Williams to plan the Paul Bunyan Festival.^{†††} The plan for the Bunyan Festival grew as conversations between Flanagan, Whitcomb and Williams combined with ideas from representatives of the Western Region of the FTP. The Festival grew to embrace patriotic features of the Oregon Unit and the FTP, including a remounting of Conkle's play about Abraham Lincoln, *Prologue to Glory*, and a dance performance of *American Exodus* by the Myra Kinch Dancers.⁵³ The modern dance piece, *American Exodus*, was a part of the FTP Dance Project's "Festival of American Dance" which performed in Los Angeles in 1937, and depicted

^{†††} Flanagan saw the opening performances of Living Newspaper production, *Spirochete*. In *Arena* (302) she mentions the effect of the play on the doctors and nurses in attendance, with the opening Sunday performance, February 26, 1939, endorsed by the Oregon State Medical association. (*News Telegram*, 2/27/1939, 15)

American pioneers settling the country, building homes and celebrating the harvest.⁵⁴

Kinch was the Los Angeles director and choreographer of the West Coast Dance Project of the FTP and choreographer for the opera department of the Federal Music Project.⁵⁵

With the inclusion of a patriotic pioneering play featuring Abraham Lincoln and an *American Exodus*, the Oregon Trail and the lumberjack would play side by side over four weeks. The plans for the Paul Bunyan Festival, when fully implemented, would create one of the largest FTP productions, incorporating more talent and Western FTP Units than any such festival or project in FTP history, creating what Whitcomb called “an American Festival.”

While the subject of timber seemed to resonate with the surroundings of Timberline Lodge, *Bunyan* did not feature the views of the majority of union members in the forests and mills of Oregon. Conkle’s play is anti-union; Bunyan speaks of the need for his men to focus on “work and discipline... to release them from the troublesome responsibilities of independence.”⁵⁶ For Bunyan, thinking and independence are poisonous to the lumberjack; instead, he advocates to keep them worry-free and hard-working. Pat Patterson, the king of Europe, owns the rights to the final bit of wilderness left in America, “the Great Augur River.” Patterson gave his claim to Bunyan’s nemesis, Shot Gunderson, but visits Bunyan’s camp to transfer the rights of the Augur to Bunyan. In his quest to be the King of America, Patterson must destroy heroes like Bunyan who lie in the way of his conquest. By giving Bunyan the rights to the Great Augur and planting his men in Bunyan’s camp, Patterson seeks to provoke a fight between Bunyan and Gunderson, kill Babe the Blue Ox, and plant seeds of unrest in Bunyan’s men. One of Pat Patterson’s infiltrators begins to unionize the men, saying “A 10-hour day and a

“Laboring Man’s Union! These jacks ain’t got no *Rights* an’ they don’t know it!”⁵⁷ The labor demands made by Bunyan’s men; the right to a standard workweek, an increase in wage and recognition of the men by Bunyan as a labor union, were precisely the demands of a huge strike surrounding the timber industry in Oregon in 1935. Nearly forty thousand workers affiliated with the AFL’s Sawmill Workers Union walked off the job, in forests and lumber mills across the state. In planning for the Paul Bunyan Festival, Whitcomb and her team of administrators were placing Bunyan in the position of the Oregon business owner, who came down against unionized workers. Residents of Portland’s East Side consistently voted for pro-union candidates and gave overwhelming public support to the Sawmill Workers Union during the 1935 strike.^{†††} The AFL demanded, and ultimately received, an increase in wages, recognition as a union, and a forty-hour workweek.⁵⁸ Despite Whitcomb’s hope, Conkle’s play did not resonate with the demands of lumberjacks and millwrights in the forests of Oregon in 1939.

In *Paul Bunyan*, Conkle created an American hero that disagrees with organized labor because it is against the workers’ better nature. Those who advocate for unionization within the play are depicted as deceitful, while the unknowing jack is honest and true. Standing against the lures of modernity were the values of the “heroic logger,” personified in Bunyan. In the play Bunyan declares, “...history, industry, invention and oratory are the four mighty delights of a hero. And next to them came the joys of comradeship with men of muscle.”⁵⁹ In order for the men to strive to be more like Bunyan, the true and honest hero, the lumberjacks must be free from want, and as long as

^{†††} From 1910-1917 Will Daly, president of the Oregon State Federation of Labor and Portland Labor Council, won many elections in Portland, and in 1917 came very close to defeating George Baker to become mayor. Daly’s victories came by overwhelmingly carrying Portland’s East Side neighborhoods. (Johnston, Robert D. 2003. *The radical middle class: populist democracy and the question of capitalism in progressive era Portland, Oregon*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 99-114)

they maintain this life, Bunyan will keep them happy. To be a real American hero, what Bunyan calls his “honest-to-the-stars-and-stripes he-men,” they must remain faithful to work, to laboring and camaraderie. There is a strong sentiment in the play that wicked union organizers manipulated honest hard working American laborers during the 1930s.

Bunyan comes to realize his men have been manipulated, and like King Lear or Zeus, he yells out to heaven,

Who has been trying to make common human beings out of my men—giving them notions, headaches and dull mutterings? Who? *Who?* [*His voice knocks the men down. They get up grumbling audibly, mad.*] Fetch me the hurricane, the water spout, the fog, the cantankerous, blasted river, and I can fight! I can move mountains, and carry ships in the palm of my hand, and fill up seas and oceans!... I can meet brawn with brawn! [*He lowers his head.*] But this is a mist and mystery in my brain. Johnny [Inkslinger] says I lack to understand subtleties. I say—where have these putrid, pettifogging chimeras and vicious thoughts come from?⁶⁰

In the past, Bunyan’s acts of bravery galvanized the men to his side, so he decides to get them back with one last act of bravery. Bunyan leaves to fight his nemesis, Shot Gunderson, who holds the lumber rights to the Great Auger territory. In the showdown scene, we discover that Gunderson is an unstoppable ironman, a steam-powered lumberjack. Gunderson represents modern industry: clear cutting forestland faster than all of Bunyan’s men can manage. The competition between man and machine becomes a fight to the death, with Bunyan outwitting Gunderson, who falls into a river extinguishing his fire. Bunyan victoriously returns to camp to tell tall tales of the hero’s journey, only to find the camp deserted. Patterson’s men convince the lumberjacks to leave camp and become farmers in the Corn Pone Country. Bunyan’s loss did not come at the hands of industry, but from the infiltration of ideas of a modern world. He could vanquish Gunderson, but not the power of an idea.

In the final scene of the play, Bunyan observes his men living their lives with wives, children, friends, and jobs in the Corn Pone Country. They are farmers and inventors of machinery that harvests timber. With the closing of the frontier, and the civilization of the entire nation, Bunyan realizes there is no place for the hero lumberjack, and decides to move to the North Country.

Despite the planning at the state and national level, the timing of the Paul Bunyan Festival, to begin in July of 1939, meant that the production never took place. Congress cut off funding for the FTP on June 30, 1939, and all FTP performances were subsequently canceled. The hope had been that the Paul Bunyan Festival upon the amphitheatre at Timberline Lodge would help patriotically repaint the FTP nationally and the Oregon Unit locally. The planning of Cockle's play turned the Oregon Unit to the political right, a direction they may have continued had the FTP extended into 1940. The Bunyan Festival was part of a long line of patriotic FTP displays and performances in 1939, including the World's Fair in New York and Treasure Island in San Francisco, that were used by Flanagan to convince Congress to support the FTP in the 1940 budget debate. Perhaps if Flanagan could have convinced Congress that regional Units like Oregon's were a better representative example of the FTP nationally, then the entirety of the FTP may have been saved.

When a Tree Falls in the Forest

Following the Dies Committee Report stating that communists resided in the ranks of the FTP, Flanagan met with Eleanor Roosevelt in late January 1939, shortly after her stay in Oregon. She later wrote, "we are trying in every way to develop a program

which will meet wide community needs and sponsorship. This is the only way we have of combating the false statements circulated by newspapers which choose to play up the garbled testimony of incompetent witnesses before the Dies Committee.”⁶¹ The Paul Bunyan Festival was a part of her plan to gain wider public support for the Oregon Unit, and ultimately for the FTP by developing a program that moved away from leftist thought. In a speech made to New York Unit supervisors, Flanagan stressed the need for the all FTP units to gain support by embracing Whitcomb’s proposal to increase the number of loan actors to smaller FTP Units. Flanagan’s last trip to Oregon as FTP director came in March 1939 after Congress had withdrawn \$1.5 million from the relief budget. She assisted in planning the Paul Bunyan Festival on Mount Hood, and continued on to San Francisco’s Golden Gate Expo where the FTP featured a continuous performance in a state of the art theatre.

In May, Congressman Clifton Woodrum of Virginia launched the final attack against the FTP, with allegations that the FTP was creating “lewd theatre” that “ran over budget.”⁶² Congressmen called witnesses attacking the New York musical *Sing for Your Supper*, and again sensational headlines called the FTP activities subversive.⁶³ Later in May, Mabie wrote Whitcomb asking if the Paul Bunyan Festival was “going forward or has it been wrecked by the reorganization procedures?”⁶⁴ The “reorganization” was a bill placed on the floor of the House eliminating funds for the FTP. Whitcomb responded to Mabie’s letter writing that planning for the Festival was difficult with so many administrators on the committee. The project budget, including a production of *Bunyan, Prologue to Glory* and the Myra Kinch Dancers, had risen to \$7,300, and Whitcomb wrote, “...we found the nut too big to be taken care of by subscription.” Adjusting to

2013 buying power, the cost of the project had ballooned to \$22,000.⁶⁵ Due to the situation in Washington, D.C., the Bunyan Festival was scaled down and had to work with a “\$1,300 other-than-labor cost budget,” while receiving subscription help from the *Oregonian* newspaper promotion department. To make up the difference Guy Williams traveled to Seattle to request help from the Western Lumberman’s Association headquarters. The Congressional committee hearings and attacks on the FTP nationally were having a direct effect on the Oregon Unit.

The Oregon Unit finished their production of *The Milky Way* on May 27, 1939, and with its budget cut, did not mount a production in June. Whitcomb wrote, “the present painful period of waiting to see whether or how far the ax will fall on Federal Theatre gives an opportunity for letters.” Despite the pain, Whitcomb wrote of her plan for her Grass Roots Theatre and gave a hopeful and optimistic tone, with personal plans outlined should the FTP fold or continue. “Of course,” she said, “plans for Paul Bunyan at Timberline are at a standstill until we know more of our fate from Congress.”⁶⁶

The House of Representatives sent a relief bill to the Senate removing the Federal Theatre Project from Federal One. The debate and attack on the Federal Theatre spread to the floor of the Senate with Robert Reynolds of North Carolina not only reiterating charges of Communist sympathies within the FTP’s ranks, but ridiculing the FTP’s inclusion of African Americans, saying, “...free love and racial equality—is being spread at the expense of the God-fearing, home-loving American taxpayer who must pay the bills for all this dangerous business.”⁶⁷ Flanagan herself began to believe the reason for the attack against the FTP by the conservative delegation may have come from the position the FTP maintained giving opportunity to African American actors, like Lee

Grigsby in the Oregon Unit. The fact that FTP Units across the country presented multi-racial casts in productions was used as a weapon against them on the floor of the Senate. The larger implication around Reynolds' stance was that the entire attack against the FTP was because of racial fear. Reynolds and his supporters were in the minority in the Senate, as Senators came to the FTP's defense with the Wagner-Downey-Pepper amendment restoring the FTP, which passed by a vote of 54 to 9.

News of the support of the FTP in the Senate spread quickly. On June 30, Mabie wrote Whitcomb, "Late news indicates that we may not lose the whole of the Federal Theatre after all. It may be that some of the unsatisfactory things will be sluffed off and we will be able to go ahead with the good things without carrying useless burdens."⁶⁸ Mabie had helped Flanagan with the first organizing documents of the FTP. The attack on the FTP had made an impression on the administrator, and Whitcomb's work with the Oregon Unit was part of the "good things" about the entire organization. The Senate victory was short lived, however, as the House and Senate Appropriations Committees came together to hammer out the competing differences between the two sides. The bill had to be signed by June 30 in order to keep the WPA and other relief organizations running. At the eleventh hour the last concession made in order to secure an agreement was the elimination of the FTP. In the final bill, the FTP was singled out and eliminated, while other WPA arts projects within Federal One had to secure more local money and sponsorships.

The Paul Bunyan Festival, planned in a theatre designed for FTP performances, never took place. FTP was not a national theatre, with a large theatre in a capital city, but as congressional judgment fell the only theatre in the spotlight was that of New York.

The Oregon Unit and the entire FTP network was judged on the work and political actions of a single unit, while the senators and congressional representatives came from districts in states that also housed FTP units. Why more elected officials did not defend their state FTP units against the Dies and Woodrum Committees illustrate a fear of supporting “Reds” amongst the voting public. Early in the Dies Committee hearings Flanagan spoke out and was given a gag order by WPA administrators. Had she been able to defend the FTP from hearsay testimony, perhaps the argument would have died in committee rather than being brought to the floor of both houses. Either way, the actions of other FTP units outside New York had little to do with the downfall of the whole organization, and the entirety of the FTP suffered because of the testimony of a few.

Whitcomb’s play selection from the political left to the right negotiated between the needs of conservative politics in Oregon and the changing decisions of FTP administration desperately trying to throw off the communist veil placed by the Dies Committee. Whitcomb’s play selection from the productions of *Power* and *The Yellow Harvest* to the planned production of *Paul Bunyan* and the final two performances of apolitical plays, demonstrates Whitcomb’s effectiveness as an administrator. She was able to adapt the troupe to the will of local politicians while also conforming, to the changing will of FTP administration once the communist veil of the Dies Committee descended. Her final negotiation, moving away from more liberal New Deal views, was part of a long river of often turbulent waters navigated successfully. Whitcomb was willing to adapt to the will of FTP administration in the retraining of vaudevillians and in her negotiations with the Portland Civic to create an Art Center for the city of Portland, despite her rough political history with the organization. She made the Oregon Unit a

testing ground for the retaining of vaudeville talent through Children's Theatre, and performed politically risky plays like *Power* to show administrators the value of her troupe. If her play selection in 1936 is an indication of her political leanings, Whitcomb was willing to disconnect from her own political views and move her play selection to the right in order to help the FTP in difficult times. Her drive to create high quality entertainment for the people of Portland brought Whitcomb praise from Flanagan and Griffith, and was the reason Oregon became a Model Unit.

Whitcomb negotiated the Oregon political arena, anticipating national trends that made the Oregon Unit more resilient and ready to move forward with or without her guidance. Whitcomb wrote Mabie days before the FTP came to a close,

Temperamentally, I get bored when things are rolling along on a level and this seems to be the case with our theatre in Portland now. We would be glad if a great advance could be made in our local company, but I realize that about as high a grade of performance as they will ever reach has been achieved. It has seemed to me that someone else could keep our monthly shows rolling here, and I want to get out on a new venture.⁶⁹

Unlike her previous desire to quit the Oregon Unit, Whitcomb was pleased with where she was able to take the unit and ready to go on to another job if the FTP closed. High-quality theatre was needed across the state through the Federal Art Projects. Whitcomb was beginning a new chapter as a theatre pioneer heading into Oregon to teach theatre art. She was anticipating and adapting to the topography of her situation, just as she did through the course of the Oregon Unit. The only woman FTP state director would land on her feet as the Director of Theatre for the Oregon Federal Art Project.

Notes

¹ Frederick Schlick, *The Yellow Harvest*, National Archives and Records Administration, E917, Box 355, page 8, quoted in Osborne, *Staging the People*, 236.

² “Flax Festival Schedule”, *Mount Angel News*, August 13, 1936.

³ “Flax Festival Here Proved to be a Success,” *Mount Angel News*, September 10, 1939, 10.

⁴ Frederick Schlick, *Bloodstream: A Play in Three Acts* (Boston: Walter H. Baker Company, 1934).

⁵ “Proved to be a Success,” September 10, 1939, 10.

⁶ Osborne, *Staging the People*, 209-210.

⁷ Susan McKenzie, “Monk Helped Boost Mount Angel Flax Industry,” *Catholic Sentinel*, 6/8/2001 <<http://www.catholicsentinel.org/main.asp?SectionID=2&SubSectionID=35&ArticleID=1778>> (1/30/2013).

⁸ Oregon Experiment Station, *Cost in Fiber Flax Production in the Willamette Valley Oregon* (Oregon State System of Higher Education, 1938), 10.

⁹ Frederick Schlick, *The Yellow Harvest*, National Archives and Records Administration, E917, Box 355, page 8, quoted in Osborne, *Staging the People*, 212.

¹⁰ Oregon Experiment Station, “Flax Production,” 7.

¹¹ Schlick, *The Yellow Harvest*, 8.

¹² Osborne, *Staging the People*, 213.

¹³ Schlick, *The Yellow Harvest*, 21-22.

¹⁴ Osborne, *Staging the People*, 214.

¹⁵ Federal Writers' Project (OR), *Oregon, End of the Trail* (Portland: Binfords & Mort, 1940).

¹⁶ Whitcomb to Mabie, 14 August 1937, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

¹⁷ Federal Theatre Project, *First Production Conference*, 36. (see chap. 1, note 41)

¹⁸ “WPA Play to Feature Saturday: Tapestry in Linen,” *Mount Angel News*, August 12, 1937, 1.

¹⁹ Whitcomb to Mabie, 14 August 1937, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

²⁰ Flanagan, *Arena*, 298.

²¹ “Tapestry in Linen,” August 12, 1937, 1.

²² “Living Newspaper Idea Has Tremendous Possibilities, Facts are Presented Forcefully,” *Oregon Sunday Journal*, August 29, 1937, section 4, 1.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ MacColl, *Growth of a City*, 443-444.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 444.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 447.

²⁸ Witham, *Federal Theatre*, 87.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

³⁰ *Harvard Law Review*, “the Judiciary Act of 1937”. (1937) Vol. 51, No. 1, Nov., 148-149 (<http://www.jstor.org/>).

³¹ MacColl, *Growth of a City*, 449.

³² *Ibid.*, 451-2.

³³ Federal Theatre Project (U.S.), Arthur Arent, Arnold Sundgaard, and Pierre de Rohan, “Triple-A Plowed Under,” in *Federal Theatre Plays I* (New York: Random House, 1938), 62-63.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

³⁶ Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1998), xiv.

³⁷ MacColl, *Growth of a City*, 447.

³⁸ “New Deal Stage: Production Notebook from Portland production of *Power*,” *Library of Congress American Memory*, Box 1057, <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=ftp&fileName=fprpt/1057/10570011/ftp10570011page.db&recNum=0>.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Bentley, *Hallie Flanagan*, 321. (see Introduction, note 2)

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 326.

⁴³ W. B. Laughead, *Paul Bunyan and His Big Blue Ox: Their Marvelous Exploits* (Westwood, CA: Red River Lumber Company, 1944), 4 and 7.

⁴⁴ Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 145.

⁴⁵ “Rebuilding Paul Bunyan’s Empire,” *Popular Mechanics Magazine* 73.5 (May 1940), 674, quoted in Neil M. Maher, *Nature’s New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 157.

⁴⁶ Telegram from E.J. Griffith to Mabie, 18 January 1939, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

⁴⁷ Whitcomb to Mabie, 18 January 1939, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

⁴⁸ James Stevens and Allen Lewis, *Paul Bunyan* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1925), 11.

⁴⁹ Whitcomb to Mabie, 9 March 1939, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

⁵⁰ Witham, *Federal Theatre*, 87-89.

- ⁵¹ Ibid, 37.
- ⁵² Ibid, 58.
- ⁵³ Whitcomb to Mabie, 9 March 1939, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.
- ⁵⁴ Julia L. Foulkes, *Modern Bodies: Dance and American Modernism from Martha Graham to Alvin Ailey* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 146.
- ⁵⁵ “Obituaries: Hershy Kay; Myra Kinch, Lotte Lenya, *Dance Magazine* (1982), 112-114.
- ⁵⁶ Stevens, *Bunyan*, 18.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid, 20.
- ⁵⁸ Tom Fuller and Art Ayre, *Oregon at Work: 1859-2009* (Portland: Ooligan Press, 2009), 90-91.
- ⁵⁹ Stevens, *Bunyan* 10-11.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid, 51
- ⁶¹ Bentley, *Hallie Flanagan*, 330.
- ⁶² Flanagan, *Arena*, 348-51.
- ⁶³ Bentley, *Hallie Flanagan*, 336-7.
- ⁶⁴ Whitcomb to Mabie, 16 May 1939, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.
- ⁶⁵ “CPI Inflation Calculator,” *Division of Consumer Prices and Price Indexes*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl?cost1=7%2C300&year1=1939&year2=2013>.
- ⁶⁶ Whitcomb to Mabie, 24 June 1939, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

⁶⁷ Bentley, *Hallie Flanagan*, 344.

⁶⁸ Mabie to Whitcomb, 30 June 1939, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

⁶⁹ Whitcomb to Mabie, 24 June 1939, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

“The close association of the theatre with the evocation of the past, the histories and legends of the culture uncannily restored to a mysterious half-life, has made the theatre in the minds of many the art most closely related to memory and the theatre building itself a kind of memory machine.”¹

- Marvin Carlson

In *The Haunted Stage*, Marvin Carlson argues that theatre is a memory machine, a place of ghosts, repeated and passed down, adapted to the needs of the people it serves; then it is passed down again. The space, the actors, the play text, and the productions themselves are “recycled” over time, and as this process continues, the theatre memory machine is performing its memory function. But when an abrupt halt occurs, such as the final curtain for the Oregon Unit and the Federal Theatre project, the memory machine powers down, and can no longer perform its function. This concluding chapter will reveal ghosts of the Oregon Unit in three areas: vaudeville, the Little Theatre Movement, and local and national government agencies. The Oregon Unit had a lasting impact that, while non-material, changed the theater community, influenced community and governmental partnerships, and furthered the careers of actors and administrators.

One of the Oregon Unit ghosts is Jack Biles, a popular Portland vaudeville dancer, and dance instructor who became a member of the Oregon Unit in 1937, dancing in many of their vaudeville performances. When the Oregon Unit dance choreographer Florence Nelson left Portland to work in Hollywood, Biles took over choreography for the Unit. Descending from the Garden Home area of Southwest Portland, Oregon, the 32 year-old Biles was well-known for his “cheery grin and the friendly handclasp” and

helped organize the Actors Club of Portland in 1938, an exclusive “entertainers only” club where all members had to be involved in professional entertainment, in nightclubs, bars or theatre, or report on entertainment in Portland. The Actors Club met sporadically, hosting “jam” sessions on Sunday evenings, featuring a “who’s who” of Portland talent as well as touring celebrities. When the Club hosted official parties, called “Frolics,” Biles was the master of ceremonies along with featured member performances. Whitcomb and members of the Oregon Unit were regulars at the jam session and the Frolics, and in December 1938 the Oregon Unit performed ten acts of vaudeville for the jam session the Sunday before Christmas.

The Actor’s Club opened its doors to the public for a “New Years Eve Frolic” in December 1938. The party was well financed, with sizable advertising starting weeks prior the event in all the major Portland newspapers. As the newly elected president of the Actors Club, Biles was featured in advertisements as the master of ceremonies along with “Ten Big Vaudeville Acts,” the same performance the Oregon Unit presented before Christmas. Popularly priced tickets for the New Years Frolic were \$1.50, with noisemakers included. The night of floorshow dancing to Ed Lund’s Swing Band would make the end of 1938 a night to remember.

At 6:30 pm on New Year’s Eve, before the festivities began, while walking in an East Side neighborhood on 31st Avenue, Jack Biles was struck by a hit and run driver. *The Daily Journal* reported that 18-year-old Charlotte Boerger, who also lived in the neighborhood, was walking with him and was unhurt. Biles died of a skull fracture at St. Vincent’s Hospital at 1:47 am, becoming the first Portland traffic fatality of 1939.² *Journal* theatre critic Harold Hunt published Biles’ epitaph, fittingly enough, under the

feature “More Show Gossip:”

Years of association with one of the kindest spirits of Portland’s amusement world had taught us to appreciate his worth, both as a friend and as an antidote when life became too serious. Jack Biles helped many a man and many a woman to many a laugh, and his passing, early New Years day, victim of a motor maniac, too cowardly to stay his mad rush and offer what atonement he could for his recklessness, brought many a tear and many a heartache.[...] There will be no "jam" session at the Actors' club, of which he was the newly elected president tonight. With Jack gone , who could make merry?³

The sudden loss of Biles had a tremendous impact on the Oregon Unit and the Portland entertainment community. Hunt reported that Finley's chapel was overflowing, with more mourners seated outside than inside the chapel. A large number of Portland residents who attended Biles dance classes for the WPA recreation project in Portland and his personal studio may have swelled the attendance for his funeral. The Oregon Unit performed *Alice in Wonderland* (which Biles choreographed) the Saturday after his death, but delayed the opening of *Prologue to Glory* for three weeks to the end of January 1939. Biles played a part in the choreography for all of the Oregon Unit productions, and with his passing, *Alice in Wonderland* became the last children’s show produced by the Oregon Unit. His death changed the course of the Oregon Unit and The Actors Club, which did not meet again until March.

Biles ran a dance studio for years in the Studio Building in downtown Portland, just below the Taylor Street Theatre, which held many Oregon Unit performances, and today houses a reported ghost. I visited the theatre, which is now the office of a film distribution company occupying the entire top floor. While the theatre has been converted into office cubicles – the steel gates to the theatre are still in operation and lock up the facility each night. To my surprise, the gates feature Greek comedy and tragedy masks bent into the ornamental designs, similar to WPA ironwork and ornamental gate

work found at Timberline Lodge. The receptionist shared a story of a ghost who haunts the floor, opening up filing drawers and scattering files and papers around the office after the gates are locked for the night. The file drawer problem was so acute the office staff had to begin locking every filing cabinet at the end of the workday.⁴

Carlson argues that the theatre is a location for ghosts, for haunting, because in the theatre the past is constantly dug up and presented to the audience. Because theatre is ephemeral, existing only in the mind of the audience or the actor performing, performances are quickly lost along with the names and faces of the performer. The work of famous local stage actors and choreographers such as Biles, are lost to directors looking to reproduce and re-imagine the performance. Biles' artistic work, while in the minds of hundreds of mourners, and embodied in the dance moves of many Portlanders in 1939, was lost because the memory machine powered down. This study has attempted to remember lost Oregonian performers, pulling them out of the shadows to center stage.

New Deal legacies inhabit the landscape all around us in the state of Oregon. Constructed by the workers of the New Deal, material legacies like the Bonneville Dam, the Timberline Lodge, Wolf Creek Highway, the Portland International Airport and the State Capitol Building, have lasted almost a hundred years. While these legacies stand the test of time, there are other non-material legacies, like the contributions made to Oregon by the Oregon Unit, which deserve attention. The non-material legacies of the WPA in Oregon, the ghosts haunting the stage of the Oregon Unit, are as significant and lasting as the material legacies constructed of concrete, wood and iron. The Oregon Unit spurred a network of new thoughts and ideas through the theatre arts community regionally that changed what theatre could look like in Portland and around the region. The State

Theatre idea was brought forward in the negotiations between Whitcomb and the Portland Civic, pulling theatre into the educational mission of the University of Oregon. Connections were made within the State Theatre Conference, which inspired a young Horace Robinson to connect with Portland theatre administrators as well as regional high school theatre teachers.

The relationships that were already present between Whitcomb and the Portland Civic grew into a community partnership between local, state and federal agencies. This relationship changed the ties between the organizations and outlasted the FTP. Finally, the careers of vaudevillians and administrators did not end in 1939, but continued on stage in Portland, on the studio lots in Hollywood, and in the halls of academia. For individuals in the Oregon Unit, the job was more than a relief position, it was a vehicle that allowed talented vaudevillians to continue their craft, and administrators to gain experience that built their careers. The non-material legacies, found in the new ideas, constructed WPA partnerships and the future careers in the Oregon Unit that are intangible remnants left by the WPA in Oregon.

The Oregon Unit Influence Ideas About Theatre in Portland

One of the “ghosts” of the Oregon Unit was a renewed public and entrepreneurial interest in vaudeville in the city of Portland. During the late 1930s, several vaudeville houses opened in Portland as the local economy rebounded. The Oregon Unit kept vaudeville alive for the general public, increasing its exposure by offering free performances throughout the city from 1936 through their final vaudeville performance in 1938. The free performances kept vaudeville as a craft present for many Portlanders

who had a limited, if non-existent entertainment budget. The Oregon Unit was the only local professional vaudeville troupe (outside of the Capitol Theatre East Coast circuit) performing in Portland and its popularity gave rise to local vaudeville entrepreneurs who saw a niche in the market. The new theatres presented “stage productions and top circuit vaudeville... together with first-run motion pictures,” increasing the number of vaudeville entertainers on stage in Portland. The Rivoli reopened its doors in downtown Portland in May 1937 after a \$40,000 renovation. An investment group out of Salem, Oregon, and the Sterling Theatre chain out of Seattle purchased the largest downtown theatres, with the Orpheum Theatre (at Broadway and Yamhill in downtown Portland) acquired by Sterling Theatres the day after Congress defunded the FTP on July 1, 1939.⁵ Many vaudeville houses in Portland at the beginning of the Great Depression collapsed, leaving only The Capitol Theatre, but the Oregon Unit kept the idea of vaudeville and the popularity of the performances alive.

The largest numbers in attendance for Oregon Unit vaudeville performances happened in the Portland area parks such as Laurelhurst from 1936-37. Without a theatre in the first years of existence, Whitcomb’s creativity with limited resources created the “ghost” of regular summer outdoor theatre in Portland parks. Outdoor spaces in Portland parks and at the Reed College outdoor amphitheatre were free and available to the FTP, and without a budget to rent a theatre space, Whitcomb had to be resourceful. As the FTP began, with 90 percent of the budget spent on labor, and renting a building did not fit into the budget and was out of the question. Gate receipts would make up some of the cost of rental, giving the Oregon Unit a chance to perform in theatres such as Portland’s Auditorium and Benson Polytechnic auditorium. Whitcomb relied on the talents of her

vaudevillians who had readymade material to present to the public, and on the kindness of the city of Portland and the Portland Parks Department. Whitcomb's experience working with Portland city officials in the early 1930s on Portland Civic productions of *Alice in Wonderland* during the Rose Festival made the idea of performing outdoors in Oregon not so farfetched. In 1938, she worked with the City of Portland and Portland Parks on a parks tour of *Taming of the Shrew*, featuring a portable stage on a converted flatbed trailer supplied by the city. Tens of thousands of patrons came to parks around Portland to see the events. The tradition of performing outdoors in Portland parks continued with the Portland Civic and today Portland area residents can choose from several outdoor theatre troupes, including Portland Actors Ensemble, now in its 43rd year.⁶ The parks space is no longer free, but the idea of performing outdoors today was born from the need Whitcomb had in the 1930s: having a very low budget and a need to perform. By performing outdoors in the inclimate weather of the Pacific Northwest, the Oregon Unit changed the vision of what open park spaces around Portland could become.

As national attention focused on the Oregon Unit the play selection became more of what FTP administration wanted, following the HUAC charges and less of the fun loving vaudeville-inspired troupe the Oregon Unit had become. Whitcomb's negotiation, changing the productions of the Oregon Unit to the will of FTP administration, was drastic and meant little after HUAC fixed the "Red" label on the New York Unit. In the wake of Jack Biles' death and the Unit's move to the political center; plays presented by the Oregon Unit became character driven, dark and introspective. Plays like *Night Must Fall*, about the work of a serial killer, were far from standard Oregon Unit programming. With the change came free childcare featuring marionette shows for the children while

the grisly production entertained parents, and audience questionnaires asked patrons how they felt about the changes taking place. Whitcomb's move towards legitimate theatre was dark and ominous, and very different from the frivolity of previous years.

Whitcomb's move to a central political position also brought many FTP and WPA administrators into the conversation, supporting the play *Paul Bunyan* and the work of the Oregon Unit. As more administrators entered the conversation, the troupe had increased national oversight, and with increased oversight, fewer vaudeville performers on the payroll were receiving parts with direction of the troupe increasingly handled by actors on loan, such as Leon Forbes from San Francisco. Newspaper headlines featuring communist accusations about the New York Unit dwarfed any changes made in the Oregon Unit.

Community Partnerships

Political maneuverings behind the scenes by Whitcomb and Griffith opened new possibilities for theatre in Portland. While the actual Oregon Unit theatre performances were ephemeral, the political maneuverings with the Portland Civic, the city of Portland and the University of Oregon changed how they viewed theatre as an art. Griffith's dream of an Art Center during negotiation with the Portland Civic changed the Portland Civic Board of Director's vision and mission for their organization, ultimately creating a State Theatre. Griffith's administrative prowess and Whitcomb's unique position bridged artistic, administrative, and political communities, and expanded the possibilities of theatre in Portland.

The State Theatre was a "ghost" of the Oregon Unit that began with Griffith's

dream of the Art Center, transformed into a conference and ultimately changed the mission of the Portland Civic as they moved into a permanent theatre space in the 1940s. Griffith's idea of an Art Center Theatre as the central State Theatre of Oregon was fashioned after other FTP State Theatres such as the Pasadena Playhouse. Before Whitcomb approached the Portland Civic to build the WPA Art Center Theatre, both theatre troupes were performing in various theatres, halls, clubs and parks in Portland. The Portland Civic and the Oregon Unit struggled loading-in scenery in facilities poorly equipped for their production, so vast in size, such as the Portland Auditorium that the actor's voices could not be heard. Before negotiations with Whitcomb, the Portland Civic was looking to repurpose a building in Downtown Portland for a theatre, and to house the Portland Civic Theatre School. As negotiations with Whitcomb moved forward with the Portland Civic Board of Directors, the idea of a State Theatre became a part of negotiations, the Portland Civic began to engage the Oregon theatre teachers in State Theatre Conferences, original play competitions, and finally into a physical Portland Civic theatre in the 1940s which included a dedicated State Theatre library. The State Theatre Conference and the library allowed theatre educators in high schools and universities to create a community that had never existed before.

The University of Oregon entered the conversation around the State Theater through Dean Powers of the University of Oregon Extension in Portland. The University of Oregon Extension and the Portland Civic entered into an agreement to give college credit for Portland Civic Theatre School classes. Under the WPA Art Center agreement the University of Oregon agreed to pay for a portion of the "other-than-labor" costs, becoming a facility sponsor with the Portland Civic of the facility. With the negotiations,

the ties between the Portland Civic and the University of Oregon became closer, with Dean Powers engaging in many board meetings, and former University of Oregon Vice President Burt Brown Barker, joining the Portland Civic Board. As the idea of a State Theater moved forward with representatives of the University of Oregon Extension on the Portland Civic Board in the conversation, the first State Theatre Conference was held in 1937, bringing college professors and high school teachers together to talk about the struggles of producing educational theatre in Oregon. University of Oregon theatre professor, Horace Robinson, was a featured participant traveling from the main campus in Eugene for the first State Theatre Conference, and subsequent conferences in Portland. Robinson delivered several lectures, such as “The Production Problems of High School and Community Theatres,” that identify the conference experience.⁷ The Art Center idea, as a central hub of theatre in the state, had a direct connection to the idea of the State Theatre, which became a resource for theatre teachers from high school to college.

Forward-Moving Careers

The closing of the FTP in cities across the country placed thousands of theatre workers on the streets looking for work. Where did the 55 Oregon Unit employees go? Many of the performers and workers in the Oregon Unit were above the age of 50, and after the Congressional decision, their Portland job prospects were minimal. As the debate over the value of the FTP came down to the wire in the Senate, Dr. G. Gallup, director of the American Institute of Public Opinion, published findings of a poll asking a segment of the 20 million Americans on relief (one family in six) about their job and job prospects. Gallup’s study not only helps answer the question of where the older Oregon

Unit vaudevillians went, but echoes trouble found in our current economic downturn in 2013. Testimony in 2012 before the special committee on aging in the Senate echoes Gallup's statistic of 1939, finding that unemployed workers over the age of 55 were looking for work, on average, for 51 weeks, compared to 37.4 weeks for the population as a whole.⁸ In 1939, Gallup found that 70% of the relief workers over 50 had given up hope for a regular job in private industry. Gallup's survey found the average relief worker has looked for work for 3 years or more, with 38% saying they have not had steady work outside of the WPA for four years or more.⁹ The closing of the FTP meant the prospects for Oregon Unit actors and technicians were grim.

During the FTP years in cities like New York, the FTP gave technicians and actors the opportunity to practice their art and remain in the industry. Flanagan convinced theatre labor unions not to strike against the FTP, which had lower wages than the unions, by convincing them the FTP would not compete for union jobs but would instead create a pool of talent ready for union labor once the theatre industry picked up. Once the FTP closed, a large pool of FTP labor suddenly entered the job market. While jobs were hard to come by in 1939, FTP laborers began competing for union and non-union positions on the professional stage.

The Oregon Unit had offered a place for performers to continue their craft in the middle of the Great Depression. Without such opportunity, many actors who would go on to a career on the stage and in the film industry may have been sidetracked from their success. While the stage career of actors working for the Oregon Unit is difficult to uncover, actors who worked in the movie industry were seen as local heroes and mentioned in Portland newspapers. Florence Nelson and Don Porter, who left the Oregon

Unit before 1939, had careers in Hollywood. Nelson, choreographer for the Oregon Unit before Jack Biles, moved to Hollywood in November 1937, dancing in the film *Rosalie* based on the Cole Porter musical and worked with Bing Crosby.¹⁰ Porter, who was trained as an actor by Whitcomb and played Petruchio in the Oregon Unit's *Taming of the Shrew*, had a film and television career that spanned six decades, working in Westerns and World War II films in the late 1940s and early '50s and moving on to television where he starred in the 1960s as Sally Field's father in *Gidget*. Porter played supporting roles in the 1970s, working with Lucille Ball in *Mame* and Robert Redford in *The Candidate*, with his final role coming in 1988.¹¹ Exactly when Crooner Lee Grigsby moved to Hollywood is a mystery because he performed in the vaudeville act *Here You Are* through May 1938, but was not in their production of *Power* in March of that year. The Oregon Unit featured Grigsby in early productions, but as an African American, race may have limited his exposure in the Portland press. By May 1939, Grigsby moved to Los Angeles and was featured in the play *The Lucky Accident* by John Kinloch by the "12th Street YWCA branch Business and Professional Women's Club" at the Hamilton Methodist Church.¹² The lives and careers of other Oregon Unit actors is an area for future research, but the Oregon Unit helped Nelson, Porter and Grigsby gather experience when few opportunities existed for professional actors in Oregon and helped launch their careers.

Bess Whitcomb: Portland's Theatrical Pioneer

Whitcomb was negotiating the possibilities of how theatre could work in Oregon, presenting the Grass Roots Theatre idea with Williams to the Oregon Federal Art Project

just before Congress eliminated the FTP. The Art Project approved the idea at the state level and Griffith told Whitcomb she would have a job with the WPA as long as he was state director. She began working for the Federal Art Project in July 1939, pulling together her Grass Roots Theatre idea at the Art Center in Salem, and then working several months on the Oregon Coast at a small Curry County Art Center in Gold Beach. She had experience working on the coast having toured with the Oregon Unit in March 1938 performing a show titled *Here You Are* at the Art Center in Marshfield (Coos Bay) and in WPA camps. Whitcomb enjoyed the Oregon Coast, writing to Mabie, “I’m still having a whale of a time in Gold Beach. The impact does not lessen of ocean, hills, sky, stars, clean fragrant air, dancing, [and] basketball games.”¹³

At the Curry County Art Center, she worked with the leading attorney, the postmaster, the town’s hardware merchant, the dentist and the “town’s most brilliant loafer,” teaching them to act in classes and directing them in productions.¹⁴ Following her work in Gold Beach, she moved on to open a theatre program at the Art Center in LaGrande, Oregon. While her work with the Art Centers around the state kept her employed with the WPA, it was also rewarding. In her work, she saw the possibilities of what theatre could do for the community. She wrote Mabie,

I believe the real justification for the expenditure of government money is the change that comes to individual lives. I hear not one woman but many say, ‘I’m never bored anymore. Life in Gold Beach is more exciting than I’ve dreamed it could be.’ Discussion of plays, general Art Center subjects, even amateur philosophy and politics is gradually displacing gossip.¹⁵

Whitcomb was proud of her work in Gold Beach, sending several letters to Mabie from her residence at The Sunset Inn. Whitcomb sent Photos of the Curry County Art Center in one letter featuring the room where performances took place and children and adults

participating in a theatrical makeup class in the facility. Her work in Gold Beach was touching lives, and expanding what art could be in Curry County for children and adults alike.

Working with the Art Center offered Whitcomb a living wage in a job that she enjoyed, but it was very different from working with skilled actors, even vaudevillians. As a former employee of the FTP working on the Art Project, Whitcomb was under the constant threat of dismissal in 1940, with conservative congressional representatives seeking to remove all former FTP employees who moved to other Federal One projects after closing the FTP. Whitcomb wrote,

It seems that Woodrum of Virginia is making the statement that no theatrical activity of any kind is to continue under the auspices of WPA and that he will see that investigators are sent out to assure that elimination. This was spoken with reference to actors being taken onto the Education and Recreation Projects, but if true will probably apply equally to art centers.¹⁶

Throughout the months leading up to the demise of the FTP and with the threat of dismissal from the Federal Art Project, Whitcomb kept in constant communication with Mabie about returning to college to get a Masters degree at the University of Iowa. Whitcomb was accepted into the University of Iowa as a graduate assistant in February 1940, where she taught, “elementary courses in acting and the supervision of ...the costume department.”¹⁷ Whitcomb’s success and experience working with the Oregon Unit, as well as her personal relationship with Mabie, led to her acceptance into graduate school. She graduated in 1941, writing her thesis on the topic of a University of Iowa production of Robert Sherwood’s *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*.¹⁸ Shortly after her graduation, she returned to Portland.

In her last correspondence in the Mabie archive, written in September 1941,

Whitcomb was looking for work, with the possibility of going into the “heart of the state” for a job. Upon her return to Portland, in her attempt to find a job, she continued talking to the new Dean of the Extension Division of Higher Education in Oregon, Dr. V.V. Caldwell, who was “intensely interested” in the “therapeutic value to the individual” in her Grass Roots Theatre idea. Using her experience and relationships gained with the Oregon Unit, Whitcomb worked between the University of Oregon with the Art Project to finance her idea, saying, “in the meantime, I find the WPA is very open minded about a tie-up with the University on such a project.” Exactly how successful Whitcomb was in the “tie-up,” considering the U.S. entered World War II only a few months after the correspondence, is a topic for further research, but she was ready and eager to continue the Grass Roots Theatre idea born from her experience with the Oregon Unit. “But it is just a beginning and I know it,” she said, “There is so much more I want. Money, money, money! Why does that and a hoped for career have to interfere with so worthy a project as more learning?”¹⁹ By 1945, Whitcomb moved to Los Angeles to join some of the actors who had been with the Oregon Unit and began teaching acting at the Gellar Theatre Workshop training World War II veterans on the G.I. Bill.²⁰ Whitcomb’s experiences working with the Oregon Unit transferred directly to the classroom working for the Gellar Theatre Workshop and later in life, for Diablo Valley College in Pleasant Hill, CA.

Future Areas of Study

I spent much of this study focusing on the volume of performances that occurred in just under four years, coming to know and understand the performance style and type

of productions the troupe created. Connecting the political and administrative tensions in Portland, as well as Whitcomb's negotiations with the Portland Civic and the University of Oregon created a complex layer within the study that will be understood at a deeper level with future research exploring the politics of Portland. Narrowing the disparate historic elements into a cohesive narrative has forced me to exclude important areas of research.

One of the largest omissions from this study is a feminist reading of Whitcomb's place as the only woman State Director in the FTP. That Whitcomb was a female administrator in the 1930s was a tremendous achievement, even though I have not analyzed it here. Reading into reports such as that from the FTP Summer Conference, which mentions Whitcomb only once in the entire document (under the cast of characters in the play *One-Third of a Nation*), gives a sense of her place among the male administrators. In the State of Oregon Whitcomb served with many female state administrators, such as Margery Hoffman Smith, the Assistant State Director of the Federal Art Project and Gladys Everett, Oregon's State Director of the Women's and Professional Division. I have not endeavored to explore Whitcomb's administrative position *as a woman* in the negotiations with the Portland Civic or in her work with E.J. Griffith at the state level, or how the position of the other women around her in Oregon's Federal One or nationally, helped or hindered her progress with the Oregon Unit. Whitcomb's letters from the Mabie archives are primary source material that should be scrutinized through a feminist lens. Mabie was Whitcomb's confidant and the two were friends, but Mabie also held out a possible future for Whitcomb. Looking at Whitcomb's position as a woman in the male dominated FTP and WPA, and at her relationship with

Edward Charles (E.C.) Mabie, would give a deeper understanding of the central figure of the Oregon Unit.

Like many FTP Units across the country, the Oregon Unit was led by a Little Theatre director and administrator, and tension was created when the vaudeville performers did not live up to legitimate theatre expectations. Analyzing the work of Little Theatre leaders in the FTP who had to work with vaudevillians, looking at personal accounts of attitudes and adjustment in expectations will help develop how common the problems faced by Whitcomb were, and how her decisions were unique and innovative among administrators. All of the FTP directors from the Little Theatre Movement were men, yet many leaders within the movement across the country were women, like the leaders of the Portland Civic. Whitcomb seemed to adapt and create new works of theatre at a regular pace with her vaudeville talent, creating works influenced by vaudeville like *Sloping West*, *Night Beat*, and *Timberline Tintypes*. Could the reason for the vaudeville problem be tied up in masculine images of what legitimate theatre should look like? If there were more women in state administrator positions, would they learn to adapt, as Whitcomb did in Portland?

Whitcomb came up with the idea of smaller units borrowing actors from larger units, which became official FTP policy following the FTP Summer Conference in 1937. The necessity for this policy came from a perception that the “old-line” vaudevillians were not good enough to perform in legitimate plays. The FTP had to be more than entertainment, and since Flanagan wanted quality legitimate art, rehashing “old forms” made the FTP look dated. The tension created with the FTP’s dismissal of vaudeville created tension locally with the Oregon Unit, and Whitcomb chose to embrace the

national vision and move the Unit towards Flanagan's vision. Borrowing professional legitimate stage actors from larger units bolstered the Oregon Unit, but was this the case in other Units? Was the "vaudeville problem" as much of a problem as the administrators suggested, or did vaudevillians in the FTP help create new ways of looking at theatre in the United States? Exploring the outcome of other, smaller FTP Units that relied on a similar number of vaudevillians with a budget the size of the Oregon Unit, such as New Hampshire and Maine, would help define the vaudeville "problem" in smaller units and what effect borrowing had on the performances.²¹

With a load of available talent, the Oregon Unit did not need to borrow dancers or choreographers from larger units. Florence Nelson and Jack Biles choreographed modern dance movements embodying machines building the Bonneville Dam or a flax scutching machine, and children's theatre performances. The fact that the vaudevillians committed to their choreography was a testament to their ability. While a section on dance was not offered, both Nelson and Biles were influenced by modern and classic dance of the 1930s. Several vaudeville dancers made up the Unit, including Jane LeSalle and Dan Feely, with Nelson influenced by the modern dance of Martha Graham, while Biles choreographed classic ballroom dances, like those found in the films of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. The two different styles could not be further apart, but Whitcomb had the ability to incorporate both into the plays, creating a product that the public enjoyed. Retracing their steps, to look at the movement that inspired their work would give a deeper sense of the performance style within the narrative description of the plays.

Finally, while this study looked at the change brought about using vaudevillians in Oregon Unit children's theatre, it did not look at the implications in the Portland

theatre community of the vaudevillian's performances in *Pinocchio*, *Hansel and Gretel* and *Alice in Wonderland*. The three plays are important because of the shift in attention by the Oregon Unit and the FTP towards young audiences brought about by Yasha Frank. The day Congress decided the fate of the FTP, Yasha Frank's *Pinocchio* was one of the last productions presented. In the final performance, in front of a crowded theatre packed with children, the puppet never came back to life, never became a real boy, and the New York troupe paraded a miniature coffin through the streets in effigy. The Oregon Unit was the second company to workshop Frank's *Pinocchio*, and innovative advertising asked children to build the wooden doll themselves to be displayed in the window of a downtown Portland department store. Similar advertising innovations encouraged attendance with lollypops distributed at *Hansel and Gretel* after the show. A local *Oregon Daily Journal* newspaper reporter, who was heavily influenced by Whitcomb's *Alice in Wonderland* in the early 1930s Rose Festival celebrations, adapted the play for the Oregon Unit. Reviews were plentiful and encouraged parents as well as children to attend the event. Children's theatre was part of what endeared the Oregon Unit to the people of Portland.

This study began with the title "Oregon in the American Mind," but as I worked through the chapters and worked with my committee, I realized the subject was not about how Americans perceived Oregon through the Oregon Unit, but rather how the Oregon Unit helped Oregonians view themselves during tough economic times. Plays rooted in the state of Oregon, about topics that concerned Oregonians were constantly present in the production calendar. Plays like *Sloping West* placed in Southern Oregon presented

backwoods and hillbilly comedy before a Portland audience, while *Tapestry in Linen* and *The Yellow Harvest* performed the story of farming in the Willamette Valley for a Mount Angel audience and political dignitaries. During the production of *Taming of the Shrew* Florence Nelson used the image of manual labor and machines from the Bonneville Dam site to choreograph a dance titled *Bonneville Dam*. The troupe continued the pantomime and dance before President Roosevelt's delegation at Timberline Lodge in *Dance of the Flax-Scutching Machines*, and *Dance of the WPA Worker*. The vaudevillians performed at the Lodge creating the melodrama *Timberline Tintypes* about the Oregon dance hall days, and planned production *Paul Bunyan* would have created a festival in honor of the mythic hero, centered on Oregon's chief industry – logging and timber. The topic of Oregon was a matter of pride not only for Whitcomb, but for the vaudevillians who stayed with the company through its existence.

The productions presented by the Oregon Unit captured the New Deal agenda, and helped define what it meant to be an Oregonian during the Great Depression. The plays were recreating Oregon, from the farmland, to the river, to the forests on Mount Hood. New Deal labor interacted with the environment, embodied by New Deal vaudevillians. Many of the dances explored the movements of men at work, and recreated the performance of machines, which helped build New Deal monuments that stand today.

Whitcomb's unique experience working in the theatre in Portland, Oregon, led her to the State Director position with the Oregon Unit. This experience allowed her the opportunity to grapple with personal and professional challenges, from the vaudevillian that had trouble with legitimate drama to the troubling negotiations with former Portland Civic directors. Her negotiation around and through the conflicts presented by these

challenges gave her the ability to create opportunities for herself and for the 55 actors and technicians in the Oregon Unit. Today, Whitcomb needs to be re-centered in the theatrical history of Portland, not merely as the leader of the Bess Whitcomb Players and a director of early productions at the Portland Civic, but for the theatrical magnet and political negotiator that this document suggests. Whitcomb had the ability to work with and adapt the world around her into art. She changed FTP regulations, gave opportunity and a theatrical home for unemployed vaudevillians, represented the WPA in negotiations for an Arts Center in Portland that started a State Theatre conference, and was able to do it all while negotiating the troubled waters of communist allegations against the FTP. The shame is that in her lifetime, historians of the Portland Civic discounted her contribution, while the history of her work with the Oregon Unit was forgotten. Although she lived to be 89 years of age, Whitcomb's valuable contribution to the arts in Portland was never remembered or acknowledged. My hope is that this study helps bring back her presence, her ghost, among the great theatrical entrepreneurs of Portland who transformed the city's landscape and its theatrical history.

Notes

¹ Marvin A. Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 142.

² "Dancer killed by Hit-Run Car. Jack Biles, Garden Home, Dies of Injuries," *Oregon Daily Journal*, January 2, 1939, 2, 13.

³ "More Show Gossip," *Oregon Sunday Journal*, January 8, 1939, 4, 3.

⁴ Personal interview, Hollywood Distribution, Studio Building. Name withheld to protect the employee. 9/27/2011

⁵ "Theatre Deal Bringing New Firm to City," *Oregon Daily Journal*, July 2, 1939, 2, 1.

⁶ “Portland Actors Ensemble,” *Portland Actors Ensemble*, <http://www.portlandactors.com>.

⁷ “Conference Will Concern Theatre”, *Oregon Sunday Journal*, March 5, 1939, 4, 1.

⁸ Charles A. Jeszeck. U.S. Government Accountability Office. “Testimony Before the Special Committee on Aging, U.S. Senate. Unemployed Older Workers, Many Face Long-Term Joblessness and Reduced Retirement Security” 4/15/2012. < <http://www.gao.gov/assets/600/590882.pdf>> viewed 4/18/2013.

⁹ George Galup, “Relievers’ Views on Causes of Unemployment,” *Oregon Sunday Journal*, June 25, 1939, 10

¹⁰ “With Stage Folk,” *Oregon Daily Journal*, November 21, 1937, 4, 1-2, and “Rosalie,” *Internet Movie Database*, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0029499/fullcredits?ref_=tt_cl_sm#cast..

¹¹ “Don Porter,” *Internet Movie Database*, http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0692093/?ref_=fn_al_nm_1.

¹² “Reviews,” *California Eagle*, May 18, 1939, 2B.

¹³ Whitcomb to Mabie, 21 February 1940, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

¹⁴ Whitcomb to Mabie, 21 February 1940, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

¹⁵ Whitcomb to Mabie, 21 February 1940, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

¹⁶ Whitcomb to Mabie, 16 August 1939, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

¹⁷ Mabie to Whitcomb, 27 February 1940, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, “Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941”, RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

¹⁸ Bess Whitcomb, "An Analysis of the Background and Directing Methods in the Production of Robert Sherwood's *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*" (master's thesis, University of Iowa, 1941).

¹⁹ Whitcomb to Mabie, 21 September 1941, Papers of Edward C. Mabie, Box 2, "Federal Theatre Project, Bess Whitcomb, 1936-1941", RG 99.0188, the University of Iowa Libraries.

²⁰ "Gellar Gossip," *Los Angeles Times*, April 22, 1945, C5, and December 16, 1945, B5.

²¹ Flanagan, *Arena*, 236-239.

APPENDIX A

OREGON UNIT OF THE FEDERAL THEATRE PROJECT: PERFORMANCE CHRONOLOGY, 1936-39

Date	Day	Time	Production	Sponsor	Location	Source
May 1936						
4			“Theater Project in State”		Applications received at 821 S. W. Fourth Ave.	<i>Telegram 5/4/36, 6</i>
July 1936						
21	Tues		10-acts of Vaudeville		Shrine Hospital	<i>ODJ 7/22/36, 28</i>
August 1936						
3	Mon		Vaudeville		Peninsula Park	<i>ODJ 8/3/36, 22</i>
5	Wed		Vaudeville		Janzen Beach Park	<i>ODJ 8/5/36, 1</i>
5	Wed	8 pm	Vaudeville		Mt. Tabor Park	<i>ODJ 8/5/36, 11</i>
6	Thur		Vaudeville		National Guard Armory	<i>Telegram 8/5/39 2: 9</i>
7	Fri		Vaudeville		Woodmen Hall	<i>Telegram 8/5/39 2: 9</i>
12	Wed	8 pm	Vaudeville		Columbia Park	<i>ODJ 8/12/36, 11</i>
14	Fri		Vaudeville		Mt. Scott Park	<i>ODJ 8/13/36, 13</i>
17	Mon		Vaudeville		Powell Park	<i>ODJ 8/13/36, 13</i>
19	Wed	8 pm	Vaudeville		Belmont Park	<i>ODJ 8/13/36, 13</i>
24	Mon		10 Acts of Vaudeville		Duniway Park	<i>ODJ 8/13/36, 13</i>
26	Wed	8 pm	8 Acts of Vaudeville		Duniway Park	<i>ODJ 8/26/36, 17</i>
26	Wed		Vaudeville		Doernbecher Hospital	<i>ODJ 8/13/36, 13</i>
28	Fri	7:30 p	9 Acts of Vaudeville		U.S. Grant Bowl	<i>ODJ 8/26/36, 17</i> <i>ODJ 8/13/36, 13</i>

September 1936						
5	Sat		The Yellow Harvest		Mt. Angel, OR	<i>ODJ 8/30/36, 10</i> <i>Mt. Angel News 7/30/36,1</i> <i>Mt. Angel News 8/6/36,1</i> <i>Mt. Angel News 8/13/36,1</i> <i>Mt. Angel News 8/16/36,5</i> <i>Mt. Angel News 9/10/36,10</i>
24	Thur	8:30 p	New Vaudeville program		Vancouver Barracks	<i>ODJ 9/24/36, 20</i>
25	Fri	11 am	Hawaiian educational performance		Edison 6-year high school	<i>ODJ 9/24/36, 20</i>
25	Fri	8:30 p	Vaudeville		Benson Polytechnic	<i>ODJ 9/24/36, 20</i>
October 1936						
9	Thur	8 pm	Vaudeville	AFof L no. 320	Al Azar Temple	<i>Telegram 10/8/36, 10</i>
14	Wed	7:15 p	Vaudeville	Multnomah County Home	Troutdale, OR	<i>ODJ 10/14/36, 13</i> <i>Telegram 10/14/36, 13</i>
15	Thur	9 pm	Vaudeville "one of 16 booked for the remainder of Oct."	The Elks	Old Concordia Club	<i>ODJ 10/15/36, 31</i>
19	Mon	8:30 p	Vaudeville		Shrine Auditorium	<i>ODJ 10/19/36, 16</i>
20	Tues	2 pm	Vaudeville		Roosevelt High School	<i>ODJ 10/19/36, 16</i>
20	Tues	8 pm	Vaudeville		Roosevelt High School	<i>ODJ 10/19/36, 16</i>
21	Wed	8:30 p	Vaudeville		Moose Lodge	<i>Telegram 10/21/36, 12</i>
22	Thur	8 pm	Vaudeville		Park Rose Lions Club	<i>Telegram 10/21/36, 12</i>
23	Fri	8 pm	Vaudeville		Hill Military academy	<i>Telegram 10/22/36, 12</i> <i>Telegram 10/23/36, 9</i>
24	Sat	8pm	Vaudeville	VFW post 1442	Russellville grammar school auditorium	<i>Telegram 10/24/36, 5</i>
26	Mon	8 pm	9 acts of vaudeville with 1-act <i>On the Lot</i>	Neighborhood House	South Parkway Club	<i>ODJ 10/26/36, 10</i> <i>Telegram 10/26/36, 11</i>

27	Tues	8 pm	Vaudeville		Milwaukie high school auditorium	<i>ODJ 10/26/36, 10 Telegram 10/27/36, 11</i>
28	Wed	8:30 p	Vaudeville – featuring Palmor & LeSalle	I.O.O.F.	I.O.O.F.	<i>Telegram 10/27/36, 11 ODJ 10/28/36, 14</i>
29	Thurs	8:30p	Vaudeville	I.O.O.F.	I.O.O.F.	<i>ODJ 10/28/36, 14</i>
29	Thur	7:30 p	Vaudeville – featuring comedian Hal Kiter		Veterans Hospital	<i>ODJ 10/28/36, 14 Telegram 10/28/36, 15</i>
30	Fri	7:30 p	Vaudeville		Helen Kelly Manly Center	<i>ODJ 10/25/36, 6 Telegram 10/29/36, 11</i>
31	Sat	7:30 p	Vaudeville –featuring WPA puppetry		The Men’s Resort	<i>Telegram 10/30/36, 12</i>
November 1936						
2	Mon	7:30 p	Vaudeville		W.O.W. Hall	<i>ODJ 11/2/36,13</i>
3	Tues	8 pm	Vaudeville – featuring Hope Garner		W.O.W Hall	<i>Telegram 11/3/36, 13 ODJ 11/3/36, 12</i>
4	Wed	8 pm	Vaudeville – featuring Lee Grigsby		City Hall, Oregon City	<i>Telegram 11/4/36, 13 ODJ 11/3/36, 12</i>
5	Thur	9 pm	Vaudeville		Elks Hall, Oregon City	<i>ODJ 11/5/36, 20</i>
6	Fri	8 pm	Vaudeville		Multnomah grammar school	<i>ODJ 11/5/36, 20</i>
7	Sat		Vaudeville		Men Resort	<i>ODJ 11/5/36, 20</i>
10	Tues	9:30 p	“Vaudeville and Legitimate acts”		Al-Azar Temple	<i>Telegram 11/10/36, 13</i>
13	Fri	2 pm	Vaudeville		Holladay school	<i>ODJ 11/5/36, 20</i>
13	Fri	8 pm	Vaudeville –“new show in rehearsal”		Elliot school	<i>Telegram 11/13/36, 15 ODJ 11/5/36, 20</i>
14	Sat	8 pm	Vaudeville		Al-Azar Temple	<i>ODJ 11/14/36, 5</i>
17	Tues	9 pm	Vaudeville – Matt Howard appointed musical director	Anchor Council, 746, Security Benefit Assoc.	W.O.W. Temple	<i>Telegram 11/17/36, 11 ODJ 11/17/36, 18</i>

18	Wed	7:30 p	Vaudeville-featuring Hawaiian Dance	Veterans of Foreign Wars	Norse Hall	<i>Telegram</i> 11/18/36, 10
19	Thur	8 pm	Vaudeville- “61 st performance since June”	I.O.O.F. Cityview lodge 294 (or 201)	Odd Fellows Hall	<i>ODJ</i> 11/19/36, 18
20	Fri	8 pm	Vaudeville – “staged as a carnival”		YMCA auditorium	<i>Telegram</i> 11/20/36, 8 <i>ODJ</i> 11/19/36, 18
23	Mon	9 pm	Vaudeville	Gul Reazee Grotto	Masonic Temple	<i>ODJ</i> 11/23/36, 10
24	Tues	8 pm	Hawaiian Act	Park Rose Lions	Park Rose High	<i>Telegram</i> 11/18/36, 10 <i>Telegram</i> 11/24/36, 2:1
24	Tues	9 pm	Thanksgiving Sing for Arkansas CCC boys	Portland 20/ 30 Club	Imperial Hotel	<i>Telegram</i> 11/24/36, 2:1
25	Wed	Noon	Vaudeville		East Side Commercial Club	<i>ODJ</i> 11/25/36, 5
27	Fri	8:15 p	Vaudeville	Portland League	YMCA Social Hall	<i>Telegram</i> 11/27/36, 10
28	Sat	8 pm	Vaudeville		Masonic Home, Forest Grove, OR	<i>Telegram</i> 11/27/36, 10
December 1936						
1	Tues		WPA Theatre exhibit featuring photos		Central Library	<i>ODJ</i> 12/2/36,13
2	Wed	8:30 p	<i>Night Beat</i> – Mayor Carson and Milwaukie Mayor Sanders speak	S.E. 39 th Ave. Improvement association	Duniway school	<i>Telegram</i> 12/2/36, 8 <i>ODJ</i> 12/2/36,13
3	Thur	8:45 p	Vaudeville – “Carnival show” 73 rd performance	Grads of LaSalle University Club, Chicago	Studio Building – 9 th floor	<i>ODJ</i> 12/2/36,13
4	Fri		Vaudeville	WPA	WPA Camp Chapman, Scappoose, OR	<i>ODJ</i> 12/2/36,13
8	Tues	8:15 p	4-acts of Vaudeville and <i>Night Beat</i>		B’nai B’rith Center	<i>Telegram</i> 12/8/36, 13 <i>ODJ</i> 12/7/36,15 <i>ODJ</i> 12/8/36,16

9	Wed	10 am	<i>Night Beat</i>		St. Helens Hall	<i>Telegram</i> 12/8/36, 13 <i>ODJ</i> 12/8/36,16
9	Wed	2:45 p	Vaudeville		Couch school	<i>ODJ</i> 12/8/36,16
11	Fri	2 pm	3 acts of Vaudeville and <i>Night Beat</i>		Portland Women's Club	<i>Telegram</i> 12/10/36, 15 <i>ODJ</i> 12/10/36,8
11	Fri	8 pm	3 acts of Vaudeville and <i>Night Beat</i> "presented daily"		Brooklyn Community Club	<i>Telegram</i> 12/10/36, 15 <i>ODJ</i> 12/10/36,8
12	Sat	7:30 p	<i>Night Beat</i> – "Two a day until Christmas"		The Men's Resort	<i>ODJ</i> 12/10/36,8 <i>Telegram</i> 12/11/36, 11
14- 18	Mon- Fri		<i>Night Beat</i>		Portland schools	<i>ODJ</i> 12/10/36,8 <i>Telegram</i> 12/10/36, 15
18	Fri	11 am	<i>Night Beat</i>		Franklin high school	<i>ODJ</i> 12/17/36, 23
18	Fri	1:30 p	<i>Night Beat</i>		Washington high school	<i>ODJ</i> 12/17/36, 23
18	Fri	8:30 p	<i>Night Beat</i> - Federal One Community Sing		Portland Municipal Auditorium	<i>Telegram</i> 12/11/36, 11 <i>ODJ</i> 12/15/36, 34 <i>ODJ</i> 12/17/36, 23
18	Fri		<i>Night Beat</i>		The Men's Resort	<i>Telegram</i> 12/11/36, 11
22	Tues	8:30 p	<i>Night Beat</i> "Played to 8,000 persons" on the 18th	Modern Woodmen of America	Pythian Building	<i>ODJ</i> 12/22/36, 12
23	Wed	8 pm	<i>Night Beat</i>		Kiwanis Club, Oregon City, OR	<i>ODJ</i> 12/22/36, 12
24	Thur	7 pm	<i>Night Beat</i>		Masonic and Eastern Star Home, Forest Grove, OR	<i>ODJ</i> 12/22/36, 12
January 1937						
8	Fri	8 pm	Vaudeville	Pulp & Sulphite Workers, local 1171	Vancouver junior high school	<i>ODJ</i> 1/8/37, 23

9	Sat	8 pm	Vaudeville	Brotherhood of Railway & Steamship Clerks	W.O.W. Hall	<i>ODJ 1/8/37, 23</i>
12	Tues		Vaudeville	The Breakfast Club “morning meeting”	Hotel Portland	<i>ODJ 1/11/37, 9</i>
14	Thurs	8:30 p	Vaudeville – “Portland Civic Actors added”	The Thurs. Evening club	YWCA Main Social Hall	<i>ODJ 1/14/37, 14</i>
15	Fri	8 pm	4 acts of Vaudeville and <i>On the Lot</i>	Sabin PTA	Sabin schools	<i>ODJ 1/8/37, 23 ODJ 1/14/37, 14</i>
16	Sat	9:30 p	4 acts of Vaudeville and <i>On the Lot</i>	Oregon White Shrine, no. 1	Masonic Temple Commandery Room	<i>ODJ 1/14/37, 14</i>
30	Sat	1:30 p	<i>Sloping West</i> “Hour and a half vaudeville show”		Portland Public Market South Auditorium	<i>Telegram 1/30/37, 2 ODJ 1/28/37, 13</i>
February 1937						
1-7			Heavy snow cancels <i>Sloping West</i>		Portland Public Market South Auditorium	<i>ODJ 2/2/37, 3</i>
8	Mon	1:30 p	<i>Sloping West</i> – “plays daily”		Portland Public Market South Auditorium	<i>Telegram 2/6/37, 10</i>
9	Tues	1:30 p	<i>Sloping West</i>		Portland Public Market South Auditorium	<i>Telegram 2/9/37, 13 ODJ 2/9/37, 10</i>
10	Wed	1:30 p	<i>Sloping West</i>		Portland Public Market	<i>ODJ 2/9/37, 10</i>
11	Thur	1:30 p	<i>Sloping West</i>		Portland Public Market	<i>ODJ 2/9/37, 10</i>
12	Fri	1:30 p	<i>Sloping West</i>		Portland Public Market	<i>ODJ 2/12/37, 20</i>
15	Mon	1:30 p	<i>Sloping West</i>		Portland Public Market	<i>Telegram 2/15/37, 2</i>
16	Tues	1:30 p	<i>Sloping West</i> – “more than 1,500 in attendance last week”		Portland Public Market South Auditorium	<i>Telegram 2/15/37, 2</i>

17	Wed	1:30 p	<i>Sloping West</i> –“feature a one-act play by Arthur Hopkins”		Portland Public Market South Auditorium	<i>ODJ 2/17/37, 11</i>
18	Thur	1:30 p	“ <i>Sloping West</i> ”		Portland Public Market South Auditorium	<i>ODJ 2/17/37, 11</i>
18	Thur	8 pm	<i>Sloping West</i> ”	Moose Lodge Portland,no.291	Woodmen Temple	<i>ODJ 2/18/37, 13</i>
19	Fri	1:30 p	<i>Sloping West</i>		Portland Public Market South Auditorium	<i>ODJ 2/18/37, 11</i>
20	Sat	1:30 p	<i>Sloping West</i>		Portland Public Market South Auditorium	<i>ODJ 2/18/37, 11</i>
20	Sat	4 pm	<i>Sloping West</i>		Portland Public Market South Auditorium	<i>ODJ 2/17/37, 11</i>
22	Mon	2 pm	5 acts of vaudeville		Portland Public Market South Auditorium	<i>ODJ 2/26/37, 22</i> <i>Telegram 2/24/37, 11</i>
23	Tues	2 pm	5 acts of vaudeville		Portland Public Market South Auditorium	<i>ODJ 2/17/37, 11</i> <i>Telegram 2/24/37, 11</i>
23	Tues		Rehearsal for <i>The Boor</i>		Viewed by regional director J. Howard Miller	<i>ODJ 2/28/37, 4:1,3</i>
24	Wed	2 pm	5 acts of vaudeville		Portland Public Market South Auditorium	<i>Telegram 2/24/37, 11</i>
24	Wed	8:30 p	<i>Sloping West</i>	Modern Woodmen of America, camp 5466	Pythian Building – 5 th floor auditorium	<i>Telegram 2/24/37, 11</i>
25	Thurs	2 pm	5 acts of vaudeville		Portland Public Market South Auditorium	<i>ODJ 2/26/37, 22</i>
25	Thurs	8 pm	<i>Sloping West</i> – Will R. Lewis, master of ceremonies	Multnomah Hunters and Anglers club	Woodman Hall	<i>Telegram 2/24/37, 11</i>
26	Fri	2 pm	5 acts of vaudeville		Portland Public Market South Auditorium	<i>ODJ 2/26/37, 22</i>

26	Fri	8 pm	<i>Sloping West</i>	Hillsboro Moose, no. 247	Old George Hall, Hillsboro, OR	<i>ODJ 2/26/37, 22</i> <i>Telegram 2/23/37, 5</i>
March 1937						
5			<i>The Last Mile</i> by Wexley, <i>Minie Field</i> by Conkle, and <i>The</i> <i>Boor</i> by Chekov		In Rehearsal	<i>Telegram 3/5/37, 11</i> <i>Telegram 3/11/37, 14</i> <i>Telegram 3/16/37, 11</i>
12	Fri	8 pm	5 acts of vaudeville- includes <i>On the Lot</i> “45 th performance”	Battin PTA	Battin school	<i>ODJ 3/12/37, 18</i> <i>Telegram 3/11/37, 14</i>
17	Wed	9 pm	<i>Sloping West</i> – “25 th performance”	The Order of the Eastern Star, Waluga Masonic Lodge	Lake Theatre in Oswego	<i>ODJ 3/17/37, 8</i> <i>Telegram 3/16/37, 11</i>
18	Thurs	3:30 p	<i>Sloping West</i>		Grout School	<i>ODJ 3/17/37, 8</i>
19	Fri	8:30 p	<i>Sloping West</i>	Webfoot Camp, Woodmen of the World	Woodmen Temple, Hall no. 3	<i>ODJ 3/19/37, 16</i> <i>Telegram 3/16/37, 11</i>
25	Fri	8 pm	<i>Sloping West</i>	Vancouver Lodge, Loyal Order of the Moose	Memorial Building Auditorium, Vancouver, WA	<i>Telegram 3/25/37, 9</i>
April 1937						
2	Fri	8:15 p	<i>Sloping West</i>		Sellwood Masonic Temple	ODJ
8	Thur	9:15 p	<i>The Boor</i>	The Order of the Eastern Star, Waluga Masonic Lodge	Lake Theatre in Oswego	ODJ
9	Fri	8:30 p	<i>Sloping West</i>	Pleasant Valley PTA	Pleasant Valley Grange	<i>Telegram 4/8/37, 6</i>

9	Fri		<i>On to Oregon and All the Weary People</i>		In Rehearsal	Telegram
10	Sat	8:30 p	<i>Sloping West</i>		Lents Masonic Lodge	<i>Telegram 4/8/37, 6 Telegram 4/9/37, 15</i>
15	Thur	8 pm	<i>Sloping West</i>		St. Agatha Hall	ODJ
16	Fri		<i>The Boor</i>	Oregon Speech Teachers Convention	Multnomah Hotel	ODJ
23	Fri	8 pm	<i>Sloping West</i>		Powell Hurst school	ODJ
27	Tues	8 pm	<i>Sloping West</i>	Veterans of Foreign Wars	Norse Hall	ODJ
May 1937						
7	Fri	2 pm	<i>The Boor</i> - features Russian Folk Dances		Girls Polytechnic school	<i>ODJ 5/6/37, 16</i>
18	Tues	8 pm	<i>The Boor</i> – features Russian Dance and The Royal Hawaiian 5 piece orchestra		Lents Masonic Lodge	<i>ODJ 5/18/37, 12</i>
21	Fri	8 pm	<i>Sloping West</i> -featuring The Royal Hawaiians	Multnomah Casting Club	Harmony Hall	<i>ODJ 5/21/37, 14</i>
25	Tues	8 pm	<i>Sloping West</i>		Sandy High school	<i>ODJ 5/25/37, 16</i>
26	Wed		<i>Sloping West</i> – 50 th performance		Ardenwald school	<i>ODJ 5/25/37, 16</i>
30	Sun		<i>Taming of the Shrew</i> – in rehearsal, actor borrowing authorized			<i>ODJ 5/30/37, 2</i>
June 1937						
2	Wed	8 pm	<i>The Boor</i> - features Russian Dances by Florence Nelson, The Royal Hawaiians		Blind Trade School of Oregon	<i>ODJ 6/2/37, 8</i>

17	Thur	8:15 p	<i>The Boor</i> - features Russian Dances, Royal Hawaiians and 2 acts of Vaudeville	Capitol Hill Community Club	Capitol Hill Community Club	<i>ODJ 6/17/37, 17</i>
21	Mon	2 pm	Journal Junior Puppet Class, with instructor Arthur Wasser		Each Monday through Summer.	<i>ODJ 6/20/37, 3:1</i>
23	Wed	8:15 p	<i>The Boor</i> - featuring Wynne and Magwood.		The Central YMCA auditorium	<i>ODJ 6/23/37, 18</i>
July 1937						
6	Tues	8 pm	<i>Taming of the Shrew</i>		Laurelhurst Park	<i>ODJ 6/13/37, 4:2</i>
7	Wed	8:30 p	<i>Taming of the Shrew</i> -featuring “the Raymond Brothers” aerial act		Laurelhurst Park	<i>ODJ 7/4/37, 4:2</i> <i>ODJ 7/6/37, 16</i> <i>ODJ 7/7/37, 16</i> <i>Telegram 7/7/37, 12*</i>
8	Thurs	8:30 p	<i>Taming of the Shrew</i>		Laurelhurst Park	<i>ODJ 7/4/37, 4:2</i>
9	Fri	8:30 p	<i>Taming of the Shrew</i> -features portable stage and amplified sound		Laurelhurst Park	<i>ODJ 7/11/37, 4:2*</i>
12	Mon	8:30 p	<i>Taming of the Shrew</i>		Laurelhurst Park	<i>ODJ 7/4/37, 4:2</i>
13	Tues	8 pm	<i>Taming of the Shrew</i> -featuring a fencing exhibition	Portland Park bureau	Laurelhurst Park	<i>ODJ 7/7/37, 16</i> <i>Telegram 7/13/37, 3</i>
14	Wed	8:30 p	<i>Taming of the Shrew</i>		Laurelhurst Park	<i>ODJ 7/4/37, 4:2</i>
15	Thur	8:30 p	<i>Taming of the Shrew</i>		Laurelhurst Park	<i>ODJ 7/4/37, 4:2</i>
August 1937						
4	Wed	8:30p	New variety show, featuring “Manhattan Serenade” ballroom dance and “mechanical number” Bonneville Dam		Grant Park	<i>ODJ 8/1/37, 4:3</i>

5	Thur		<i>Taming of the Shrew</i>		Laurelhurst Park	<i>ODJ 8/1/37, 4:3</i>
6	Fri		<i>Taming of the Shrew</i>		Laurelhurst Park	<i>ODJ 8/1/37, 4:3</i>
14	Sat	8:15p	<i>Tapestry in Linen</i>	Flax Festival	Ebner Ballpark, Mt. Angel, OR	<i>ODJ 8/29/37, 4:2</i> <i>Mt. Angel News 8/12/37,1</i>
September 1937						
28	Tues		Timberline Lodge Dedication ceremony. Dances include <i>All the Weary People</i> , <i>Bonneville Dam</i> , <i>Dance of the Flax Scutching Machines</i> , <i>Indian Celebration</i> , <i>The Dance of the Sophisticates</i> , “Dance commemorating the Negro in the WPA, “Dace of the WPA workers” concluded		Timberline Lodge on Mt. Hood, “in an amphitheatre in the rear of Timberline Lodge, with Mt. Jefferson as a backdrop for the stage and Mt. Hood at the audiences back” Costume changing “in rudely constructed rooms under the stage”	<i>ODJ 9/19/37, 9</i> <i>ODJ 9/26/37, 1</i> <i>ODJ 9/28/37, 4*</i> <i>ODJ 9/29/37, 14</i> <i>Telegram 9/24/37, 4</i> <i>Telegram 9/28/37, 14</i> <i>Telegram 9/29/37, 5</i>
October 1937						
15	Fri	8:15p	<i>Taming of the Shrew</i> “last summer 10,000 in attendance”	Joseph Lane PTA	Joseph Lane school	<i>ODJ 10/14/37, 20</i>
19	Tues	8:30 p	<i>The Boor-</i> and vaudeville program	Portland Women’s Club	Portland Women’s Club auditorium	<i>ODJ 10/19/37, 15</i>
24	Sun		<i>The Pursuit of Happiness</i> – five borrowed actors from LA Unit		Opens in late November preceding a state tour.	<i>ODJ 10/24/37 4:3</i>

November 1937						
6	Sat		<i>The Boor</i> - “a general talent review	Hallie Flanagan visits the Oregon	Girls Edison High school	<i>ODJ</i> 11/6/37, 5 <i>Telegram</i> 11/8/37, 14
13	Sat		Pinocchio announced to open 12/5. Yasha Frank assumes direction			<i>ODJ</i> 11/13/37, 5 <i>ODJ</i> 11/21/37. 4:1
21	Sun	8 pm	Vaudeville – also featured “pictures of the war in Spain”	Webfoot Camp no. 65	Westside W.O.W. Hall	<i>Telegram</i> 11/25, 10
December 1937						
12	Sun		<i>Welded</i> by O’Neill announced to open 1/4/38 “Performed in a Blue Room manner”			<i>ODJ</i> 12/12/37, 4:2
21	Tues	8 pm	<i>Taming of the Shrew</i>		Oregon City High school	<i>ODJ</i> 11/21/37, 8
January 1938						
7	Fri	8:15 p	<i>Welded</i> by O’Neill	Reed College	Reed College Chapel	<i>ODJ</i> 11/21/37, 8 <i>ODJ</i> 1/2/38, 4:3 <i>ODJ</i> 1/3/38,11 <i>Telegram</i> 1/7/38, 7
8	Sat	8:15 p	<i>Welded</i> by O’Neill, extra show due to “wide interest”	Reed College	Reed College Chapel	<i>ODJ</i> 1/4/38, 13 <i>ODJ</i> 1/5/38, 17 <i>ODJ</i> 1/8/38, 5* <i>Telegram</i> 1/7/38, 7
18	Tues	8:30 p	<i>Welded</i> by O’Neill		Multnomah Hotel Junior Ballroom	<i>Telegram</i> 1/13/38, 6 <i>ODJ</i> 1/12/38, 11 <i>ODJ</i> 1/16/38, 4: 1
19	Wed	8:30 p	<i>Welded</i> by O’Neill – “block tickets sold”		Multnomah Hotel Junior Ballroom	<i>Telegram</i> 1/13/38, 6 <i>ODJ</i> 1/13/38, 13

20	Thur	8:30 p	<i>Welded</i> by O'Neill		Multnomah Hotel Junior Ballroom	<i>ODJ</i> 1/14/38, 6 <i>ODJ</i> 1/15/38, 5
21	Fri	8:30 p	<i>Welded</i> by O'Neill		Multnomah Hotel Junior Ballroom	<i>Telegram</i> 1/13/38, 6
February 1938						
4	Fri	Dinner	Gala Performance, "tone poem song and dance" and the Royal Hawaiians	WPA	Timberline Lodge, Mount Hood	<i>ODJ</i> 2/6/38, 3
11	Fri	8 pm	<i>Here You Are</i> – vaudeville	Collins View PTA	Collins View school	<i>ODJ</i> 2/11/38, 14
16	Tues	8:30 p	<i>The Pursuit of Happiness</i> – preview		Benson Polytechnic Auditorium	<i>ODJ</i> 2/16/38, 12*
17	Thur	8:30 p	<i>The Pursuit of Happiness</i>		Benson Polytechnic Auditorium	<i>ODJ</i> 1/30/38, 4: 1 <i>Telegram</i> 2/11/38, 5 <i>Telegram</i> 2/14/38, 5
18	Fri	8:30 p	<i>The Pursuit of Happiness</i>		Benson Polytechnic Auditorium	<i>Telegram</i> 2/18/38, 11 <i>ODJ</i> 2/12/38, 5 <i>ODJ</i> 2/18/38, 11
19	Sat	2:30 p	<i>The Pursuit of Happiness</i>		Benson Polytechnic Auditorium	<i>Telegram</i> 2/16/38, 6 <i>ODJ</i> 2/6/38, 4:1
19	Sat	8:30 p	<i>The Pursuit of Happiness</i>		Benson Polytechnic Auditorium	<i>ODJ</i> 2/13/38, 4:1 <i>ODJ</i> 2/15/38, 8 <i>ODJ</i> 2/19/38, 5
23	Wed		<i>Here You Are</i> – vaudeville, benefit for fire equiptment	Gladstone Fire Department	Gladstone school gymnasium	<i>ODJ</i> 2/22/38, 12
24	Thur	eve	<i>Here You Are</i> – vaudeville, "a company of 25" benefit for Durham school hot lunches	Tigard and Durham school PTA	Tigard Union High school	<i>ODJ</i> 2/23/38, 13 <i>Telegram</i> 2/22/38, 12

March 1938						
5	Sat	Mat	<i>Here You Are</i> – vaudeville –	Marshfield Lions Club	The Armory in Marshfield	<i>ODJ</i> 3/3/38, 15
5	Sat	Eve	<i>Here You Are</i> – vaudeville bus tour of Oregon, 35 members in leave in a “sleek bannered bus”	Marshfield Lions Club	The Armory in Marshfield	<i>ODJ</i> 3/3/38, 15 <i>The (Marshfield) Sun</i> 3/10/38, 3 <i>Southwestern OR News</i> 3/4/38, 4 3/11/38, 2
26	Sat	8:30 p	<i>Power</i>		Benson Polytechnic Auditorium	<i>ODJ</i> 3/6/38, 4:1-2 <i>ODJ</i> 3/20/38, 4:1 <i>ODJ</i> 3/25/38, 5* <i>Telegram</i> 3/12/38, 11 <i>Telegram</i> 3/21/38, 6 <i>Telegram</i> 3/23/38, 12 <i>Telegram</i> 3/26/38, 11 <i>Oregonian</i> 3/22/38, 4 <i>Oregonian</i> 3/24/38, 4
27	Sun	8:30 p	<i>Power</i> = “25 piece orchestra and a cast of 55 actors”		Benson Polytechnic Auditorium	<i>ODJ</i> 3/13/38, 4:1 <i>ODJ</i> 3/21/38, 15 <i>ODJ</i> 3/24/38, 10 <i>Telegram</i> 3/21/38, 6 <i>Telegram</i> 3/25/38, 11 <i>Oregonian</i> 3/23/38, 4 <i>Oregonian</i> 3/26/38, 4*
April 1938						
1	Fri	8 pm	<i>Here You Are</i> – vaudeville, “carnival spirit of April Fools”	Tualatin High school student body	Tualatin Grade school auditorium	<i>ODJ</i> 4/1/38, 8
5	Tues		<i>Here You Are</i> – vaudeville	Vestal PTA	Vestal School Auditorium	<i>ODJ</i> 4/5/38, 6

22	Fri		<i>The Pursuit of Happiness</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 4/10/ 38, 4:2</i>
29	Fri		<i>Here You Are – “the vaudeville unit”</i>	St. Helens American Legion	St. Helens	<i>ODJ 4/17/38, 4:3 St. Helens Sentinel Mist 4/29/38, 1 5/6/38, 1</i>
May 1938						
3	Tues	8:30 p	<i>The Pursuit of Happiness</i>	Reed College Players	Reed College Commons	<i>ODJ 4/24/38, 4: 2 ODJ 4/28/38, 10 Telegram 4/30/38, 11</i>
4	Wed	8:30 p	<i>The Pursuit of Happiness</i>	Reed College Players	Reed College Commons	<i>ODJ 4/17/38, 4:3 ODJ 4/24/38, 4: 2 Oregonian 4/17/38, 2</i>
5	Thur	8:30 p	<i>The Pursuit of Happiness</i>	Reed College Players	Reed College Commons	<i>ODJ 4/17/38, 4:3 Oregonian 4/17/38, 2</i>
12	Thur	8:30 p	<i>The Pursuit of Happiness</i>	Canadian Legion Post no. 17	Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 4/10/38, 2 ODJ 5/8/38, 4: 2</i>
12	Thur		<i>Here You Are – vaudeville, benefit for St. Helens Junior baseball team</i>	Columbia Post no. 42, American Legion	St. Helens Junior High School	<i>St Helens Sentinel Mist 4/29/38,1 5/6/38, 1</i>
13	Fri	8:30 p	<i>The Pursuit of Happiness-</i> performance by Canadian Legion Pipe Band before show.	Canadian Legion Post no. 17	Elks Temple Theatre Grand Opening	<i>Telegram 5/11/38, 10 Telegram 5/13/38, 11 ODJ 4/17/38, 4:3 Oregonian 4/17/38, 2</i>
14	Sat	8:30 p	<i>“The Pursuit of Happiness</i>	Canadian Legion Post no. 17	Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 5/14/38, 5</i>
15	Sun	2 pm	<i>The Pursuit of Happiness</i>	Canadian Legion Post no. 17	Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 5/15/38, 4:1</i>

15	Sun	8:30 p	<i>The Pursuit of Happiness</i>	Canadian Legion Post no. 17	Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 5/15/38, 4:1</i>
20	Fri	8 pm	<i>Here You Are –</i> 10 act vaudeville		Scappoose Union High	<i>Telegram 5/19/38, 13</i> <i>St Helens Mist 5/13/38, 5</i> <i>St Helens Mist 5/27/38, 5</i> <i>ODJ 5/18?38, 13</i>
21	Sat	2pm - 11:30p	10 acts of continuous vaudeville w/ the film <i>Ali Baba Goes to Town</i> starring Cantor		Highway Theatre	<i>Telegram 5/19/38, 13</i> <i>Telegram 5/21/38, 11</i> <i>ODJ 5/19/38, 13</i>
21	Sat	10 am	Marionette Show – <i>The Adventures of Snicklepuss</i> “given to advertise the Pinocchio contest”		Auditorium of the Central Library	<i>ODJ 4/17/38, 4:3</i> <i>Telegram 5/20/38, 5</i>
22	Sun	1 pm- 11:30p	10 acts of continuous vaudeville w/ the film <i>Ali Baba Goes to Town</i> starring Cantor		Highway Theatre	<i>Telegram 5/23/38, 6 (Ad)</i> <i>ODJ 5/22/38, 4:2 (Ad)</i>
23	Mon	1 pm- 11:30p	10 acts of continuous vaudeville w/ the film <i>Ali Baba Goes to Town</i> starring Cantor		Highway Theatre	<i>Telegram 5/20/38, 5</i>
24	Tues	1 pm- 11:30p	10 acts of continuous vaudeville w/ the film <i>Ali Baba Goes to Town</i> starring Cantor		Highway Theatre	<i>Telegram 5/20/38, 5</i>
26	Thurs	8:30 p	<i>Counselor at Law</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 5/26/38, 6</i> <i>ODJ 5/22/38, 4:3</i> <i>ODJ 5/23/38, 9</i>
27	Fri	8:30 p	<i>Counselor at Law</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 5/27/38,5 (Ad)</i> <i>ODJ 5/27/38, 6</i> <i>ODJ 2/25/38, 15</i>

28	Sat	8:30 p	<i>Counselor at Law</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 5/28/38, 5</i>
29	Sun	2 pm	<i>Counselor at Law</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 5/29/38, 4:2</i>
June 1938						
4	Sat	10:30a	<i>The Adventures of Snicklepuss – Marionette show</i>		Laurelhurst Park	Telegram
12	Sun	2 pm	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 6/7/38, 10 ODJ 6/6/38, 13 ODJ 6/7/38, 14 ODJ 6/8/38, 6 ODJ 6/9/38, 14 ODJ 6/10/38, 8 ODJ 6/11/38, 5</i>
12	Sun	8 pm	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 6/11/38, 13 ODJ 6/12/38, 4:1</i>
13	Mon	8 pm	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 6/13/38, 10 ODJ 6/13/38, 15</i>
14	Tues	8 pm	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 6/9/38, 6 ODJ 6/14/38, 15</i>
15	Wed	2 pm	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 6/15/38, 13</i>
15	Wed	8 pm	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 6/15/38, 13</i>
16	Thur	8 pm	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 6/16/38, 20</i>
17	Fri	8 pm	<i>Pinocchio</i> - winner of Pinocchio carving contest announced		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 6/17/38, 5 ODJ 6/17/38, 6</i>
18	Sat	2pm	<i>Pinocchio</i> –“seeks to become a boy by overcoming greed”		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 6/18/38, 11 ODJ 6/18/38, 5</i>
18	Sat	8 pm	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 6/18/38, 5</i>
19	Sun	2 pm	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 6/18/38, 5</i>

23	Thurs	6:30 p	Puppets in the Park <i>The Adventures of Snicklepuss</i>		Woodstock Park	<i>Telegram 6/21/38, 5</i>
24	Fri	2 pm	Puppets in the Park <i>The Adventures of Snicklepuss</i>		Irving Park	<i>Telegram 6/21/38, 5</i>
25	Sat	10 am	<i>Pinocchio</i> - “Presented every Sat. except when regular run shows have mat.”		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 6/23/38, 16</i> <i>ODJ 6/24/38, 13</i> <i>Telegram 6/23/38, 6</i> <i>Telegram 6/24/38, 11</i> <i>Telegram 6/24/38, 13*</i> <i>Telegram 6/25/38, 13*</i> <i>Telegram 6/26/38, 13*</i>
29	Wed	2 pm	Puppets in the Park <i>The Adventures of Snicklepuss</i>		Wallace Park	<i>Telegram 6/233/38, 5</i>
29	Wed	8:30 p	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Reed College amphitheatre	<i>ODJ 6/26/38, 4:2-3</i> <i>ODJ 6/28/38, 14</i> <i>ODJ 6/29/38, 13</i> <i>Telegram 6/21/38, 10</i> <i>Telegram 6/25/38, 11</i>
30	Thur	8:30 p	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Reed College amphitheatre	<i>ODJ 6/30/38, 20</i> <i>Telegram 6/27/38, 5</i> <i>Telegram 6/28/38, 5</i> <i>Telegram 6/30/38, 11</i>
July 1938						
1	Fri	8:30 p	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Reed College amphitheatre	<i>Telegram 6/29/38, 10</i>
2	Sat	10 am	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 6/23/38, 10</i>
6	Wed	2 pm	Puppets in the Park – <i>The Adventures of Snicklepuss</i>		Belmont Park	<i>Telegram 6/21/38, 5</i>

8	Fri	2 pm	Puppets in the Park <i>The Adventures of Snicklepuss</i>		Columbia Park	<i>Telegram 6/21/38, 5</i>
9	Sat	10 am	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 7/7/38, 7</i>
11	Mon	8 pm	<i>Hansel and Gretel</i> - featuring song “the Sandman duet”		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 7/8/38, 4</i> <i>ODJ 7/9/38, 5</i> <i>Telegram 7/7/38, 7</i> <i>Telegram 7/8/38, 5</i> <i>Telegram 7/9/38, 11</i> <i>Telegram 7/11/38, 11</i>
12	Tues	8 pm	<i>Hansel and Gretel</i> – “Scenic effects are...attractive”		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 7/12/ 38, 5</i> <i>ODJ 7/12/38, 6*</i>
13	Wed	2 pm	<i>Hansel and Gretel</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 7/13/38, 6</i> <i>ODJ 7/13/38, 13</i>
13	Wed	8 pm	<i>Hansel and Gretel</i> - lollypops give away from the stage.		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 7/14/38, 6</i>
14	Thurs	8 pm	<i>Hansel and Gretel</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 7/14/38, 19</i>
15	Fri	2 pm	<i>Hansel and Gretel</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 7/15/38, 5</i>
15	Fri	8 pm	<i>Hansel and Gretel</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 7/15/38, 12</i>
16	Sat	2 pm	<i>Hansel and Gretel</i> = “auditorium is air conditioned”		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 7/16/38, 5</i>
16	Sat	8 pm	<i>Hansel and Gretel</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 7/16/38, 5</i>
17	Sun	2 pm	<i>Hansel and Gretel</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 7/16/38, 5</i>
18	Mon	2 pm	Puppets in the Park <i>The Adventures of Snicklepuss</i>		Powell Park	<i>Telegram 6/21/38, 5</i>
20	Wed	2 pm	Puppets in the Park <i>The Adventures of Snicklepuss</i>		Mt. Scott Park	<i>Telegram 6/21/38, 5</i>

23	Sat	10 am	<i>Hansel and Gretel</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 7/22/38, 8</i>
25	Mon	2 pm	Puppets in the Park <i>The Adventures of Snicklepuss</i>		Rose City Park	<i>Telegram 6/21/38, 5</i>
27	Wed	2 pm	Puppets in the Park <i>The Adventures of Snicklepuss</i>		Couch School	<i>Telegram 6/21/38, 5</i>
30	Sat	10 am	<i>Hansel and Gretel</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 7/29/38, 5</i> <i>ODJ 7/28/38, 10</i>
31	Sun	10 pm	Actors Club “jam session”			<i>ODJ 7/31/38, 4:2</i>
August 1938						
6	Sat	10 am	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 7/29/38, 5</i>
12	Fri	8:30 p	<i>Timberline Tintypes</i>	Triangle Milling Company	Timberline Lodge	<i>ODJ 8/7/38, 4:3</i> <i>ODJ 8/9/38, 4</i> <i>Telegram 8/3/38, 5</i> <i>Telegram 8/10/38,6</i>
13	Sat	10am	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 8/11/38, 14</i> <i>Telegram 7/29/38, 5</i> <i>Telegram 8/11/38, 6</i>
13	Sat	8 pm	<i>Flaxville vaudeville –</i> 14 acts of vaudeville	Mt. Angel Flax Festival		<i>ODJ 8/12/38, 2:17</i> <i>Telegram 8/3/38, 3</i> <i>Telegram 8/11/38, 5</i>
19	Fri	8:30 p	<i>Timberline Tintypes</i>		Timberline Lodge	<i>Telegram 8/10/38,6</i>
20	Sat	10 am	<i>Hansel and Gretel</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 8/18/38, 4</i> <i>Telegram 8/18/38, 6</i> <i>Telegram 8/19/38, 5</i>
24	Wed	8:30 p	<i>Timberline Tintypes-</i> “played to capacity audiences at Timberline Lodge”		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 8/21/38, 4:3</i> <i>ODJ 8/22/38, 10</i> <i>Telegram 8/20/38, 11</i> <i>Telegram 8/22/38, 6</i> <i>Telegram 8/24/38, 10</i>

25	Thurs	8:30 p	<i>Timberline Tintypes</i> – “two stages with simultaneous action”		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ</i> 8/25/38, 10 <i>Telegram</i> 8/25/38, 6*
26	Fri	8:30 p	<i>Timberline Tintypes</i> – “pancake eating contest”		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 8/26/38, 11
27	Sat	10 am	<i>Hansel and Gretel</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ</i> 8/25/38, 16 <i>Telegram</i> 8/27/38, 11
27	Sat	8:30 p	<i>Timberline Tintypes</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ</i> 8/27/38, 5 <i>Telegram</i> 8/20/38, 11
31	Wed		Marionette Show accompanied by the Royal Hawaiians	Young Democrats	Democratic Headquarters	<i>ODJ</i>
September 1938						
1	Thurs	8:30 p	<i>Timberline Tintypes</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ</i> 9/1/38, 18
2	Fri	8:30 p	<i>Timberline Tintypes</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 9/2/38, 10
3	Sat	10 am	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ</i> 9/1/38, 18 <i>Telegram</i> 9/2/38, 10
3	Sat	8:30 p	<i>Timberline Tintypes</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ</i> 9/3/38, 5 <i>Telegram</i> 9/3/38, 11
9	Fri		Timberline Lodge Amphitheatre dedication		Timberline Lodge	<i>ODJ</i> 9/9/38, 4
10	Sat	10 am	<i>Hansel and Gretel</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 9/8/38, 6 <i>Telegram</i> 9/9/38, 11 <i>ODJ</i> 9/8/38, 16 <i>ODJ</i> 9/10/38, 9
12	Mon	8 pm	<i>Hansel and Gretel</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 9/8/38, 6 <i>ODJ</i> 9/11/38, 4:1-2 <i>ODJ</i> 9/12/38, 13
13	Tues	8 pm	<i>Hansel and Gretel</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 9/13/38, 5
14	Wed	8 pm	<i>Hansel and Gretel</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ</i> 9/14/38, 12

15	Thurs	8 pm	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 9/8/38, 6</i>
16	Fri	8 pm	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 9/9/38, 11</i>
17	Sat	10 am	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 9/8/38, 6</i> <i>ODJ 9/16/38, 16</i>
17	Sat	8 pm	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	Telegram
18	Sun	2:30 p	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 9/8/38, 6</i>
October 1938						
15	Sat	10 am	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 10/ 14/ 38, 10</i>
17	Mon	8:30 p	<i>One-Third of a Nation</i>	Young Democrats of Multnomah County	Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 9/25/38, 4:2</i> <i>ODJ 10/ 2/ 38, 4: 1-2</i> <i>ODJ 10/ 9/ 38, 4: 1-2</i> <i>ODJ 10/ 14/ 38, 10</i> <i>ODJ 10/ 15/ 38, 5</i> <i>ODJ 10/ 16/ 38, 4:3</i> <i>ODJ 10/ 17 38, 6</i> <i>Telegram 9/26/38, 5</i> <i>Telegram 10/13/38, 11</i> <i>Telegram 10/ 15/ 38, 11</i>
18	Tues	8:30 p	<i>One-Third of a Nation</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 10/ 18/ 38, 6*</i> <i>Telegram 10/18/38, 10*</i>
19	Wed	8:30 p	<i>One-Third of a Nation</i> “twelve Portland organizations have booked sponsorships”		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 10/19/38, 6</i>
20	Thur	8:30 p	<i>One-Third of a Nation</i> “Youth Night”	Portland Youth Council, Jewish Youth council, Negro Youth Council, YWCA, Reed College American Students Union	Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 10/ 20/ 38, 19</i> <i>Telegram 10/20/38, 6</i>

21	Fri	8:30 p	<i>One-Third of a Nation</i> "Youth Night"	Portland Youth Council, Jewish Youth council, Negro Youth Council, YWCA, Reed College American Students Union	Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 10/ 21/ 38, 18</i> <i>Telegram 10/21/38, 11</i>
22	Sat	10 am	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 10/21/38, 11</i>
22	Sat	8:30 p	<i>One-Third of a Nation</i>	Office Employees Union	Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 10/ 23/ 38, 4:3</i> <i>Telegram 10/22/38, 11</i>
24	Mon	8:30 p	<i>One-Third of a Nation</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 10/22/38, 11</i>
25	Tues	8:30 p	<i>One-Third of a Nation</i>	Business and Professional Women of the First Congregational Church	Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 10/ 25/ 38, 15</i> <i>Telegram 10/25/38, 9</i>
26	Wed	8:30 p	<i>One-Third of a Nation</i>	Business and Professional Women of the First Congregational Church	Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 10/ 26/ 38, 13</i> <i>Telegram 10/26/38, 10</i>
27	Thurs	8:30 p	<i>One-Third of a Nation</i>	Cultural and Professional Workers Union	Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 10/27/38, 14</i>
28	Fri	8:30 p	<i>One-Third of a Nation</i>	Iron, Steel and Tin Workers Union	Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 10/ 28/ 38, 6</i> <i>Telegram 10/28/38, 5</i>
29	Sat	10 am	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 10/ 28/ 38, 6</i>

29	Sat	8:30 p	<i>One-Third of a Nation</i> features "Negro Housing Scene"	NAACP	Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 10/ 29/ 38, 5</i> <i>Telegram 10/29/38, 5</i>
31	Mon	8:30 p	<i>One-Third of a Nation</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 10/ 30/ 38, 4:1</i> <i>ODJ 10/31/38, 6</i> <i>Telegram 10/231/38, 7</i>
November 1938						
1	Tues	8:30 p	<i>One-Third of a Nation</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 11/1/38, 12</i>
2	Wed	8:30 p	<i>One-Third of a Nation</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 11/2/38, 17</i> <i>Telegram 11/2/38, 6</i>
3	Thurs	8:30 p	<i>One-Third of a Nation</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 11/3/38, 17</i> <i>Telegram 11/3/38, 13</i>
4	Fri	8:30 p	<i>One-Third of a Nation</i>	International Woodworkers of America	Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 11/4/38, 18</i> <i>Telegram 11/4/38,8</i>
5	Sat	10 am	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 11/4/38, 18</i> <i>Telegram 11/4/38,8</i>
5	Sat	8:30 p	<i>One-Third of a Nation</i>	ILWU	Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 11/5/38, 5</i>
6	Sun	1:30 p	<i>One-Third of a Nation</i>	Northwest Conference of the YMCA	Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 11/6/38, 4:1-2</i>
12	Sat	10 am	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 11/12/38, 12</i> <i>Telegram 11/11/38, 11</i>
26	Sat	10 am	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 11/12/38, 12</i> <i>Telegram 11/25/38, 4</i>
December 1938						
1	Thurs		Oregon Unit employees help Theatre Guild with a production of <i>Rain</i>		Theatre Guild, Turn Verein auditorium	ODJ

3	Sat	10 am	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 12/2/38, 17</i> <i>Telegram 12/2/38, 11</i>
10	Sat	10 am	<i>Pinocchio</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 11/9/38, 8</i> <i>Telegram 12/9/38, 5</i>
17	Sat	10 am	<i>Pinocchio</i> - “food and toys accepted as admission for Toys and Joy Makers”		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 11/16/38, 12</i> <i>Telegram 12/16/38, 7</i>
18	Sun		Oregon Unit featured at Actor’s Club “frolic”		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 11/25/38, 4:3</i>
22	Thurs				Elks Temple building code violations	Telegram
26	Mon	8 pm	<i>Alice in Wonderland</i> by Dean Collins, original music by Matt Howard and dance numbers by Jack Biles		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 12/12/38, 11</i> <i>Telegram 12/23/38, 5</i> <i>Telegram 12/24/38, 5</i> <i>Telegram 12/26/38, 7</i> <i>ODJ 12/11/38, 4:2</i> <i>ODJ 12/18/38, 4:1-3</i> <i>ODJ 12/23/38, 8</i> <i>ODJ 12/24/38, 6</i> <i>ODJ 12/25/38, 4:3</i> <i>ODJ 12/26/38, 6</i>
27	Tues	8 pm	<i>Alice in Wonderland</i> - “cast of 40 actors”		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 12/27/38, 5*</i> <i>ODJ 12/23/38, 8</i>
28	Wed	2:30 p	<i>Alice in Wonderland</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 12/27/38, 6</i>
28	Wed	8 pm	<i>Alice in Wonderland</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 12/28/38, 11</i>
29	Thurs	2:30 p	<i>Alice in Wonderland</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 12/29/38, 6</i>
29	Thurs	8 pm	<i>Alice in Wonderland</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 12/29/38, 6</i>
30	Fri	2:30 p	<i>Alice in Wonderland</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 12/30/38, 4</i>
30	Fri	8 pm	<i>Alice in Wonderland</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 12/30/38, 4</i>

31	Sat	2:30 p	<i>Alice in Wonderland</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 12/30/38, 4</i>
31	Sat		Actors Club New Years Eve Frolic featuring Oregon Unit 10 acts of vaudeville, Jack Biles, M.C.		The Actor's Club	<i>ODJ 12/30/38, 4</i>
31	Sat	6:30p	Jack Biles hit and run Dies 1:47 am			<i>ODJ 1/2/39, 2:13</i>
January 1939						
4	Wed		Tribute to Jack Biles		The Chapel	<i>ODJ 1/3/39, 20 ODJ 1/8/1939, 4:3</i>
7	Sat	2:30 p	<i>Alice in Wonderland</i> – “to accommodate those who missed the show due to sell-out”		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 1/5/39, 13 Telegram 1/6/39, 2:1 ODJ 1/6/39, 12</i>
14	Sat	2:30 p	<i>Alice in Wonderland</i> and concert by Royal Hawaiian Orchestra		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 1/12/39, 12 Telegram 1/13/39, 5 ODJ 1/13/39,6</i>
18	Wed		WPA approval for \$620,000 Art Center.			<i>Telegram 1/18/39, 11 ODJ 1/17/39, 1</i>
29	Sun	8:30 p	<i>Prologue to Glory</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 12/12/38, 11 Telegram 1/26/39, 2:1 Telegram 1/27/39, 7 Telegram 1/28/39, 5 ODJ 1/1/39, 4:1 ODJ 1/8/39, 4:1 ODJ 1/15/39,4:1 ODJ 1/22/39, 4:3 ODJ 1/28/39,6 ODJ 1/29/39,4:1</i>
30	Mon	8:30 p	<i>Prologue to Glory</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 1/30/39, 9* ODJ 1/30/39, 5*</i>

31	Tues	8:30 p	<i>Prologue to Glory</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 1/31/39, 7 <i>ODJ</i> 1/31/39, 11
February 1939						
1	Wed	8:30 p	<i>Prologue to Glory</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ</i> 2/1/39, 6 <i>Telegram</i> 2/1/39, 3 (Ad)
2	Thurs	8:30 p	<i>Prologue to Glory</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	Telegram ODJ
3	Fri	8:30 p	<i>Prologue to Glory</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ</i> 2/3/39, 4 <i>Telegram</i> 2/3/39, 5
4	Sat	8:30 p	<i>Prologue to Glory</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 2/4/39, 11
5	Sun	8:30 p	<i>Prologue to Glory</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ</i> 2/5/39, 4:2
11	Sat	8:30 p	<i>Prologue to Glory</i> celebration of Lincoln's Birthday	The Cultural and Professional Workers Union	Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ</i> 2/11/39, 6 <i>Telegram</i> 2/10/39, 7
12	Sun	8:30 p	<i>Prologue to Glor</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ</i> 2/12/39, 4:1
26	Sun	8 pm	<i>Spirochete</i> - "play is set on two levels and action flashes from one scene to another in rapid order"	The Oregon State Medical Association	Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 12/12/38, 11 <i>Telegram</i> 2/23/39, 13 <i>Telegram</i> 2/24/39, 13 <i>Telegram</i> 2/25/39, 5 <i>ODJ</i> 2/19/39, 4:1 <i>ODJ</i> 2/23/39, 8 <i>ODJ</i> 2/25/39, 6 <i>ODJ</i> 2/26/39, 4:1
27	Mon	8 pm	<i>Spirochete</i>	Oregon Social Hygiene association, Visiting Nurse Association	Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ</i> 2/27/39, 6 <i>Telegram</i> 2/27/39, 11*
28	Tues	8 pm	<i>Spirochete</i> – "over 40 professional actors.	Dr. Adolph Weinziri, Portland health officer	Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ</i> 2/28/39, 12 <i>Telegram</i> 2/28/39, 5

March 1939						
1	Wed	8:30 p	<i>Spirochete</i> – “endorsed by the Oregon State Medical association”		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 3/1/39, 11 <i>ODJ</i> 3/1/39, 6
2	Thur	8:30 p	<i>Spirochete</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 3/2/39, 13 <i>ODJ</i> 3/2/39, 10
3	Fri	8:30 p	<i>Spirochete</i> – “members of the cast given blood tests... practice what they “preach”		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 3/3/39, 2:1 <i>ODJ</i> 3/3/39, 16 <i>ODJ</i> 3/3/39, 36
4	Sat	8:30 p	<i>Spirochete</i> – “held over”		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 3/4/39, 5 <i>ODJ</i> 3/4/39, 6
5	Sun	8:30 p	<i>Spirochete</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ</i> 3/5/39, 4:1
6	Mon	8:30 p	<i>Spirochete</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 3/6/39, 11 <i>ODJ</i> 3/6/39, 11
7	Tues	8:30 p	<i>Spirochete</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 3/7/39, 11 <i>ODJ</i> 3/7/39, 13
8	Wed	8:30 p	<i>Spirochete</i>	Young Democrats of Multnomah County	Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 3/8/39, 9 <i>ODJ</i> 3/8/39, 13
9	Thur	8:30 p	<i>Spirochete</i> = “not recommended for children under 16”		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 3/9/39, 13 <i>ODJ</i> 3/9/39, 17
10	Fri	8:30 p	<i>Spirochete</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 3/10/39, 9
11	Sat	8:30 p	<i>Spirochete</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 3/10/39, 9
12	Sun		The Actor’s Club jam session		Private Party – Location not disclosed	<i>ODJ</i> 3/19/39, 4:2

April 1939						
5	Wed		<i>Night Must Fall</i> – “hope that the critics form the nucleus of an informal advisory board.”	Critics preview – invitation only	Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 4/4/39, 3 <i>ODJ</i> 4/4/39, 6 <i>ODJ</i> 4/5/39, 14
6	Thur	8:30 p	<i>Night Must Fall</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 4/3/39, 13 <i>Telegram</i> 4/6/39, 13 <i>ODJ</i> 3/26/39, 4: 1 <i>ODJ</i> 4/2/39, 4: 1 <i>ODJ</i> 4/3/39, 12 <i>ODJ</i> 4/6/39, 14*
7	Fri	8:30 p	<i>Night Must Fall</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 4/6/39, 5 (Ad) <i>ODJ</i> 4/7/39, 14
8	Sat	8:30 p	<i>Night Must Fall</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 4/8/39, 11 <i>ODJ</i> 4/8/39, 6
13	Thur	8:30 p	<i>Night Must Fall</i> – “children in arms will not be admitted”		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 4/12/39, 11 <i>Telegram</i> 4/13/39, 11 <i>ODJ</i> 4/9/39, 4:1 <i>ODJ</i> 4/12/39, 17 <i>ODJ</i> 4/13/39, 21
14	Fri	8:30 p	<i>Night Must Fall</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 4/14/39, 11 (Ad) <i>ODJ</i> 4/14/39, 16
15	Sat	8:30 p	<i>Night Must Fall</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 4/15/39, 11 <i>ODJ</i> 4/15/39, 6
20	Thurs	8:30 p	<i>Night Must Fall</i> with marionette vaudeville for children		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 4/20/39, 13 <i>ODJ</i> 4/16/39, 4:3 <i>ODJ</i> 4/19/39, 6
21	Fri	8:30 p	<i>Night Must Fall</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 4/21/39, 11 (Ad)
22	Sat	8:30 p	<i>Night Must Fall</i> with marionette vaudeville for children		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram</i> 4/22/39, 11 <i>ODJ</i> 4/22/39, 6

27	Thurs	8:30 p	<i>Night Must Fall</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 4/27/39, 13</i> <i>ODJ 4/23/39, 4:1</i> <i>ODJ 4/26/39, 18</i> <i>ODJ 4/27/39, 14</i>
28	Fri	8:30 p	<i>Night Must Fall</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 4/28/39, 17</i>
29	Sat	8:30 p	<i>Night Must Fall</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 4/28/39, 17</i>
May 1939						
3	Wed		<i>The Milky Way</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 4/22/39, 11</i> <i>Telegram 5/1/39, 11</i> <i>ODJ 5/1/39, 9</i> <i>ODJ 5/3/39, 15</i>
4	Thur		<i>The Milky Way –</i> “round of curtain calls greeted... final scene”		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 5/4/39, 13</i> <i>ODJ 5/4/39, 15*</i>
5	Fri		<i>The Milky Way</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 5/4/39, 13</i>
6	Sat		<i>The Milky Way</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 5/6/39, 6</i>
11	Thurs		<i>The Milky Way</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 5/7/39, 4:1</i> <i>ODJ 5/10/39, 13</i>
12	Fri		<i>The Milky Way</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 5/7/39, 4:1</i>
13	Sat		<i>The Milky Way</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 5/13/39, 11</i> <i>ODJ 5/13/39, 6</i>
18	Thurs		<i>The Milky Way</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 5/17/39, 13</i> <i>Telegram 5/18/39, 13</i> <i>ODJ 5/14/39, 4:1</i> <i>ODJ 5/17/39, 15</i> <i>ODJ 5/18/39, 16</i>
19	Fri		<i>The Milky Way</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 5/19/39, 14</i>

20	Sat		<i>The Milky Way</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>Telegram 5/20/39, 11 ODJ 5/20/39, 8</i>
25	Thurs		<i>The Milky Way</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 5/21/39, 4:1 ODJ 5/4/39, 8 ODJ 5/25/39, 17</i>
26	Fri		<i>The Milky Way</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 5/4/39, 8</i>
27	Sat		<i>The Milky Way</i>		Elks Temple Theatre	<i>ODJ 5/27/39, 8</i>
June 1939						
4		8:30 p	<i>Both Your Houses</i> by Maxwell Anderson announced to open June 22. Direction by Whitcomb and Frederic Murray.		Elks Temple Theatre Scheduled for six weekend run. Show never opens.	<i>ODJ 6/4/39, 4:1</i>
14	Wed		Telegram sent to Oregon congressmen asking them to not end WPA arts projects	Sponsored by 40 prominent citizens from politics to the business community	.	<i>ODJ 6/18/39, 6 Telegram 6/19/39, 2:1</i>
26	Mon		<i>ODJ</i> Editor, P.L. Jackson, writes a letter of support for the FTP.			<i>ODJ 6/26/39, 9</i>
July 1939						
1	Sat		Federal Theatre abolished			<i>ODJ 7/1/39, 1,3 Telegram 7/1/39, 1-2 Telegram 7/4/39, 5</i>

6	Thurs		WPA workers strike in Lewis County, WA to protest cuts in the program. Strike spreads across U.S.. 300,000 WPA workers cut from relief rolls.			<i>Telegram 7/6/39, 1</i> <i>Telegram 7/7/39, 1</i> <i>Telegram 7/8/39, 1</i> <i>Telegram 7/10/39, 1</i> <i>Telegram 7/11/39, 1-2</i> <i>Telegram 7/12/39, 1-2</i> <i>Telegram 7/13/39, 1-3</i> <i>Telegram 7/14/39, 1-2</i> <i>Telegram 7/17/39, 1-2</i>
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APPENDIX B
OREGON UNIT PERSONNEL

<u>Name</u>	<u>Skill</u>	<u>Featured Performances</u>
Al Adams	clown, marionettes	<i>Shrew, Punch and Judy show, One-third of a Nation</i>
Margaret Barney	director, publicity, actor	<i>Timberline Tintypes, 1/3 of a Nation, Alice, Night Must Fall</i>
James Beard	costume design (& chef) Radio personality, Director for Portland Neighborhood House, 1936	<i>Taming of the Shrew</i>
Louise Beck	actor	<i>One-third of a Nation, Alice, Prologue to Glory, Spirochete</i>
Jack Biles	choreographer, dancer, actor	<i>One-third of a Nation, Alice in Wonderland</i>
Julia Boroski	actor	<i>Prologue to Glory</i>
Edward C. Bowen	booking agent	
Maxene Bowles	actor	<i>Timberline Tintypes, One-third of a Nation, Hansel & Gretel</i>
Alma Bunnell	loan actor (L.A., 11/38)	<i>Prologue to Glory, Night Must Fall</i>
Don Burbank	actor	<i>The Milky Way</i>
Stanley Burroughs	actor	<i>One-third of a Nation</i>

Bud Crabtree	actor	<i>One-third of a Nation</i>
Earnest Carrier	strongman	<i>Here You Are</i>
Dean Collins	Playwright (Portland- ODJ)	<i>Alice in Wonderland</i>
Rowen Crawford	Business Manager	
Bernice Davison	actor	<i>One-third of a Nation</i>
John Dawson	loan actor (L.A., 11/38)	<i>Spirochete, Night Must Fall, The Milky Way</i>
Eleanor Debellis	actor	<i>One-third of a Nation</i>
Dan Feely	dancer, lariat	<i>Sloping West, Shrew, Power, Pinocchio, One-third of a Nation</i>
Yasha Frank	writer, director	<i>Pinocchio, Hansel and Gretel</i>
Leon Forbes	loan actor, director(San Fran 1/39))	<i>Prologue to Glory, Spirochete, Night Must Fall, Milky Way</i>
Hope Garner	singer under Irving Berlin	<i>Taming of the Shrew, One-third of a Nation, Night Must Fall</i>
“Lullaby” Lee Grigsby	“Negro baritone”	<i>Night Beat, Sloping West, Taming of the Shrew</i>
John Groves	actor	<i>Timberline Tintypes, The Milky Way, One-third of a Nation</i>
Janette Gump	actor	<i>One-third of a Nation</i>
Ted Harold	whistler	<i>Taming of the Shrew, Power, 1/3 of a Nation, The Milky Way</i>
Clarence M. Heath	singer – baritone	<i>The Boor, One-third of a Nation, The Milky Way</i>
Frank Heminway	assistant to Whitcomb, actor	<i>One-third of a Nation</i>

Boyd Homewood	assistant to Whitcomb (actor with Portland Civic)	<i>One-third of a Nation, Sloping West</i>
Matt Howard	conductor, composer(11/36)	<i>Alice in Wonderland</i> original score
Barbara James	Portland actor	<i>On the Lot</i>
Oscar Johnson	juggler (Larson & Johnson)	<i>One-third of a Nation</i>
Joe Kemper	actor (L.A. loan, 12/37)	<i>Power, The Pursuit of Happiness</i>
Hal Kiter	comedian	<i>Here You Are, One-third of a Nation</i>
Tom Kneeland	lighting (Portland Civic)	<i>Sloping West</i>
Lelah Landon	actor	<i>Timberline Tintypes</i>
Theo Larson	juggler (Larson& Johnson)	<i>One-third of a Nation</i>
Jane LeSalle	dancer (Palmor & LeSalle)	<i>Shrew, Pursuit, Alice, Prologue to Glory, The Milky Way</i>
Herbert Lewis	African American actor. Volunteer from NAACP for “Negro Housing Scene” in	<i>1/3 of a Nation</i>
William Logan	actor	<i>One-third of a Nation</i>
Warren Magwood (Philip Warren)	Portland Civic actor	<i>Taming of the Shrew, Sloping West</i> (leaves for Hollywood 10/37)
Peter Marroney	Stage design	<i>Taming of the Shrew</i> (portable stage)
Laura McClure	actor	<i>One-third of a Nation</i>
Roberta McCracken	actor	<i>One-third of a Nation</i>
Harold (Harry) Miles	actor (Portland Civic)	<i>Taming of the Shrew, One-third of a Nation, Alice, Pursuit</i>

Fred Miller	loan actor (L.A., 12/37)	<i>Welded, Power, The Pursuit of Happiness</i>
Mason Moltzner	actor (from Portland)	<i>Power, One-third of a Nation, Timberline Tintypes</i>
E. Carol Moran	actor	<i>One-third of a Nation</i>
Frederic Murray	loan actor (L.A., 11/38)	<i>Spirochete, Alice, Night Must Fall, The Milky Way</i>
Florence Nelson	choreographer	Russian Ballet for <i>The Boor, Dance of the Flax Scutching Machine</i>
Pat O'Hara	loan actor (L.A. 11/38)	<i>Alice in Wonderland, Spirochete</i>
Harold Ormston	Prod. Manager (L.A. loan)	<i>Power, The Pursuit of Happiness</i>
John Palmor	dancer (Palmor & LeSalle)	<i>Alice in Wonderland, One-third of a Nation, Pursuit of Happiness</i>
Virginia Parker	actor	<i>One-third of a Nation</i>
Micha Pelz	conductor (7/36 – 11/36)	returned to conduct orchestra for <i>Power</i>
Don Porter	actor (Portland Civic)	<i>Welded, Taming of the Shrew, The Pursuit of Happiness</i>
Jack Price	set designer	<i>Spirochete</i>
Louigi Ragan	accordionist	<i>One-third of a Nation</i>
“The Raymond Brothers”	Ariel act on trapeze and high wire	
Walter Reynolds	African American actor. Volunteer from NAACP for “Negro Housing Scene” in <i>1/3 of a Nation</i>	
Frank Robinson	actor	<i>One-third of a Nation</i>
Louise Rohets	actor	<i>Night Must Fall</i>

May Ross	costume design	<i>Spirochete</i>
Deon Routh		<i>One-third of a Nation</i>
Louise Christian Routh	actor (from Portland)	<i>Power</i>
“Royal Hawaiians”	Hawaiian musicians, names unknown.	
Bruce Savon	youth actor	<i>Alice in Wonderland</i>
Bruce Showler	actor	<i>One-third of a Nation</i>
Harry Summerkamp	Director of stage crew	<i>Taming of the Shrew</i>
Mae Stabell	loan actor (L.A , 12/37)	<i>Welded, Power, The Pursuit of Happiness</i>
Corbett Sutton	actor	<i>One-third of a Nation</i>
Douglas Sutton	actor	<i>One-third of a Nation</i>
Juanita Wagner	actor	<i>One-third of a Nation, Prologue to Glory</i>
Sallie Wagner	actor	<i>One-third of a Nation</i>
Jack Walker	actor	<i>One-third of a Nation</i>
Arthur Wasser	Puppeteer, actor	<i>Pinocchio, The Adventures of Snicklepuss, Power, Prologue</i>
Walter Weaver	loan actor (L.A., 12/37)	<i>Power, The Pursuit of Happiness</i>
Paul Weiss	actor	<i>One-third of a Nation, The Milky Way</i>
George Wilhelm	Assistant director	Vaudeville performances in 1936

Guy Williams	Assistant Executive Director (12/'38)	
Bess Whitcomb	State Director	
Walter Winslow	juvenile actor (L.A. 12/37)	<i>The Pursuit of Happiness</i>
Louis Wood	Loan actor (L.A., 11/38)	<i>Prologue to Glory</i>
Gale Woodworth	Actor (w/ Portland Civic) Worked in Hollywood	<i>On the Lot, Sloping West</i>
Madge Wynne	legitimate theatre	<i>Taming of the Shrew, Timberline Tintypes, Welded, Alice</i>
Paul Zarembo	loan actor (Kansas City)	<i>Pursuit of Happiness, Timberline Tintypes, Power, 1/3 of a Nation</i>

APPENDIX C

OREGON UNIT PERFORMANCE LOCATIONS

<u>Location Name</u>	<u>Address</u>
The Actor's Club	531 SW Park Avenue
Al Azar Temple	SW 3 rd and Columbia
Almeda Park Community Church	NE 31 st and Mason
Battin school	SE Johnson Creek Road and 82 nd Street
Belmont Park	20 th and Belmont
Benson Polytechnic	546 NE 12th Avenue
Blind Trades school of Oregon	8435 NE Glisan
B'nai B'rith Center	1636 SW 13 th Avenue
Brooklyn Community Club	SE 13 th and Center Street
Capitol Hill Community Club	SW Spring Garden Road
Central Library Auditorium	801 SW 10 th Avenue
City Hall, Oregon City	7 th and John Adams Street, Oregon City
Collins View school	9727 SW Terwilliger Blvd.
Columbia Park	Between N. Woolsey Ave & N Chautauqua
Couch school	NW 20 th Avenue and Glisan Street
East Side Commercial Club	615 SE Alder
Edison Six Year High school (girls)	3830 SE 14 th Avenue
Edison Six Year High school (boys)	22 NE Beech
Elks Hall – Oregon City	Waterfront Street, Oregon City
Elliot school	2711 NE Rodney Avenue

Democratic Headquarters

Doernbecher Memorial Hospital	3181 SW Marquam Road
Duniway Park	SW 5 th Avenue and SW Sheridan
Duniway school	7700 SE Reed College Place
Ebner Ballpark	Mt. Angel, OR
Elks Temple Theatre	614 SW 11 th Avenue
Girls Polytechnic school	2508 NE Everett Street
Gladstone School gymnasium	Gladstone, OR
Grant Park	NE 33 rd Avenue and Thompson
Grout school for women (WPA)	3119 SE Holgate Street
Harmony Hall	719 SE Alder Street
Helen Kelly Manly Center	2828 SW Front Avenue
Hill Military Academy	2451 NW Marshall St. (Rocky Butte Drive)
Highway Theatre	NE 52 nd Avenue and Sandy Boulevard
Holladay school	NE 9 th Avenue and Clackamas Street
Hotel Portland	721 SW 6 th Avenue
Imperial Hotel	422 SW Broadway
I.O.O.F. Odd Fellows Hall	S.E. 13 th and Tenino Street
I.O.O.F. Odd Fellows Hall	9212 SE Ramona
I.O.O.F Odd Fellows Building	3214 SE Holgate Street
Joseph Lane school	7200 SE 60 th Avenue
Kiwanis Club, Oregon City	Oregon City, OR
Lake Theatre, Oswego	Lake Oswego, OR
Lents Masonic	5811 SE 92 nd Ave and SE Ramona

Marylhurst College	3030 SW 2 nd
Masonic & Eastern Star	Forest Grove
Masonic Hall	3536 SE 26 th Ave
Memorial Building Auditorium	13 th and Broadway, Vancouver, WA
Men's Resort	400 W. Burnside
Milwaukie Union High auditorium	22 nd near the corner of Willard and Milwaukie
Moose Lodge	914 SW Yamhill Street
Mt. Scott Park	NE 72 nd Ave and SE Ellis
Mt. Tabor Park	SE Main and SE 63 rd Avenue
Multnomah County [Poor] Farm	2126 SW Halsey Street, Troutdale, OR
Multnomah Grammar school	7688 SW Capitol Highway, Multnomah, OR
Multnomah Hotel	SW Pine and SW Ash between SW 3 rd and SW 4 th
National Guard Armory	107 NW Couch
Norse Hall	111 NE 11 th Avenue
Old Concordia Club Stage	SW 16 th Avenue and Morrison Street
Old George Hall, Moose #247	Hillsboro
Oregon City High School	Oregon City
Park Rose High school	10639 NE Prescott
Park Rose Lions Club	4812 NE 102 nd Avenue
Peninsula Park	N. Portland Blvd between Kerby Ave and N. Albina
Pleasant Valley Grange	Foster Road
Portland Women's Club	1220 SW Taylor
Powell Park	SE Powell Blvd between SE 22 nd and SE 26 th Ave
Powellhurst school	2626 SE 122 nd Avenue

Portland Municipal Auditorium	SW 3 rd Avenue between SW Clay & SW Market
Portland Public Market	SW Front Av between SW Morrison & SW Salmon
Portland Women's Club	1220 SW Taylor Street
Pythian Building	918 SW Yamhill
Reed College Commons	3203 SE Woodstock Boulevard
Reed College Amphitheatre	3203 SE Woodstock Boulevard
Roosevelt High school	6941 N. Central
Russellville Grammar school	SE 102 nd Avenue
Sabin schools	4013 NE 18 th Avenue
Scappoose Union High school	Scappoose, OR
St. Agatha Hall	7985 SE 15 th Avenue
St. Helens Hall	1855 SW 13 th Street
St. Mary's Church	Mt. Angel, OR
Shrine Auditorium	010 SW Gibbs
Shrine Hospital	NE Sandy Blvd @ NE 82 nd Avenue
South Parkway Club	3030 SW 2 nd Avenue
Studio Building, 9 th floor	919 SW Taylor Street
Taylor Street Theatre	919 SW Taylor Street
Tigard Union High school	Tigard, OR
Tualatin Grade school	Tualatin, OR
Vancouver Barracks	Vancouver, WA
Vancouver Junior High	Vancouver, between W. 25 th and W. 26 th
Vestal school	NE 82 nd Avenue and Glisan Street
Veterans' Hospital	3181 S.W. Sam Jackson Park Road

Woodman Hall/ Temple	528 SW 11 th Ave
WPA Camp Chapman	Scappoose
W.O.W. Hall	SE 6 th and Alder
W.O.W. Temple	528 S.W. 11 th Avenue
YMCA Main Auditorium	831 SW 6 th Avenue and Taylor Street
YWCA Social Hall	834 SW Broadway

APPENDIX D

ARCHIVES

Archival Sources

Willamette Valley Heritage Center
Mission Hill Museum and Marion County Historical Society
Library Archives Collection Division
Salem, Oregon

Oregon Historical Society
Research Library
Portland, Oregon

Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Archives
Knight Library
University of Oregon
Eugene, Oregon

Special Collections and University Archives
The University of Iowa Libraries
Iowa City, Iowa

National Archives and Records Administration
Records of the Works Progress Administration
Records Group 69
Washington, D.C.

Library of Congress
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