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Dramatics allegedly began at the University of Kentucky in 1909 when Prof. A.S. Mackenzie, head of the English Department, interested his students in this branch of literature and had them act out playlets in class. They took to the idea, and under the guidance of Professor Mackenzie they got together a production of Baron Lytton's historical play *Richelieu*. It was presented at the Lexington Opera House on Friday and Saturday evenings, with a matinee on Saturday, during the first weekend of February 1910. The title role was taken by James B. Cunningham, a U.K. graduate of professional acting experience, who also assisted in directing and staging the production. The participants formed a close association, and the following week about twenty students met to organize a theatre society. Temporary chairman and secretary were elected, and Kate Pence was appointed to draw up a charter. The members met in the fall and elected officers, including a president, vice president, recording and corresponding secretaries, treasurer, and librarian. They served five months. At the end of February 1911 the group settled on a name that was to survive for more than a quarter of a century. They called themselves The Strollers. Paul L. Cocke, who had played a small part in *Richelieu*, was voted president for the second time; Annie Louise Dean, the former librarian, became secretary; and Thomas Hedden was made treasurer. Also elected were business, advertising and stage managers, properties and costumes masters, and a musical director.

The principal criticism of *Richelieu* was that its subject of a seventeenth-century conspiracy was too alien for an inexperienced amateur group to present, or for a university student body and inland-college-town audience to appreciate. Coeval with the announcement of *Richelieu* there had been mention of the possibility of the second production being "a play dealing with
college life," though the campus newsletter assumed it to be laid at
the University of Kentucky. The official announcement made over
a year later specified it to be Brown of Harvard. The play had
been read and recommended by Prof. E.F. Farquhar of the English
Department, and a meeting was held on the third floor of the
Education Building on 23 February 1911 to vote on its acceptance.6
It was also at this meeting that The Strollers had been founded
and named. A week later tryouts were held, and rehearsals began
shortly thereafter.7 The expertise that James Cunningham furnished
for Richelieu was bestowed by Henry Woodruff on Brown of
Harvard. Henry Woodruff did not perform in it; he had made a
name for himself in musical comedies in the Eastern states, and he
had played Tom Brown, the title role, in earlier productions over
a span of four years. Woodruff coached rehearsals, and with him
lending assistance was the playwright himself and a Kentuckian,
Foxhall Daingerfield. The play had four sets. The cast of twenty-
seven featured "a bunch of keen girls and classy fellows, . . . also
a villain, a drunkard, a pretty girl and a mountaineer, with a
pistol." There were "college jokes, songs, dances and love, gentle
love."
Ernest L. Becker, who was stage manager and portrayed
Tom Brown, sang two solos, When Love Is Young and Isle of
Delight. Included were a stein song and choral singing "of a
college nature." The sets were made by the dramatic club.
Admission was 25¢, 50¢, 75¢, and $1.00. Brown of Harvard was
presented at the Lexington Opera House on two Thursday
evenings, 20 and 27 April.8 On the following Monday all of the
participants attended a banquet at the Phoenix Hotel. Guests of
honor were University President H.S. Barker, Miss Julia Connelly
of Hamilton College (a dramatics teacher and staunch supporter of
The Strollers), playwright Foxhall Daingerfield, Professor
Farquhar, and Miss Kate Pence. All but the last made speeches
following the "sumptuous dinner." J.C. Mills gave an
impersonation, and a number of solos were sung. Miss Connelly
and Mr. Daingerfield were named honorary members of The
Strollers.9

During the Christmas holidays of 1911 The Strollers were
rehearsing a play called When We Were Twenty-one, but it seems
to have fallen by the wayside.10 The next theatrical on campus was
one written and directed by Prof. E.F. Farquhar. It was entitled
The Square Deal and dealt with the problem of capital and labor.
The play was given in the university chapel on the evening of 21
A scene from Brown of Harvard, Lexington Opera House, 1912 (University of Kentucky Archives)
February 1912, and with it were eight musical numbers furnished by the university band, orchestra, and glee club.\footnote{11}

In March The Strollers began rehearsals for their third production. Its single presentation was at the Opera House on 2 May, and it was a dramatization of Owen Wister’s Western novel *The Virginian*. Twenty-eight were in the cast, and two of the four settings were made by the dramatic club. *The Virginian* was pronounced equal to or better than *Brown of Harvard*, for which much credit was attributed to the stage manager, Edwin S. Pirtle. He made a short speech in response to the applause after the final curtain.\footnote{12} Gross receipts from *The Virginian* amounted to $511.50 with another $10.00 from program advertising. The greatest expense had been $161.40 for scenery, followed by $110.00 for “parts, copyright, deposit on manuscript, etc.” The use of the Opera House came to $59.50, and printing amounted to $51.35. Interest on borrowed money was $30.00, advertising cost $27.55, and $24.25 was spent on costumes, $15.00 on music. Other expenses were incidental. *Brown of Harvard* had cleared $75.58, and the balance for *The Virginian* was not much more—$78.38.\footnote{13} But considering that it had come from a single performance and not two, financial returns were on the ascendancy.

Campus life in those days was enhanced by an assortment of musical entertainments, some of which if not legitimate dramas at least were stage shows. The *Patt Hall Minstrels* on Saturday evening, 11 May 1912, was accompanied by an orchestra and tendered such ragtime songs as *Take Me Back To Your Garden of Love*, and the *Dramatic Rag*, the *Madhouse Rag*, and the *Skeleton Rag*. There were a cake walk and two skits called *Laura Clay* and *Just 'Cause We're Girls*. The purpose of the show was to raise money to send a delegation to the Asheville Y.W.C.A. conference, and in this it was successful.\footnote{14}

The next production of The Strollers was Ludwig Fulda’s *The Lost Paradise*, which was at the Lexington Opera House on the evening of 14 March 1913. It had a modern setting and was directed by the group’s first president, Paul L. Cocke. The play was also taken to Louisville. In 1914 the selection was *The College Widow*, and with its proceeds The Strollers acquired a room in the Administration Building for a studio. At this time they adopted an identifying pin, and one was given to each participant in their endeavors. It was a theatre mask with a jester’s wand and sword crossed behind, symbols of comedy and tragedy. A pearl was set
Prof. Carol Mayer Sax, from the special Romany Edition of The Kentucky Kernel, 11 March 1927 (University of Kentucky Archives)
in the crown for each season's association, and the all-important stage manager was honored by a diamond placed in the mask's mouth.

In 1915 The Strollers performed the popular comedy *Charley's Aunt* in Georgetown and Mount Sterling as well as in Lexington. Plays over the next few years were *Father and the Boys*, 1916; *The Lion and the Mouse*, 1917; *Mice and Men*, 1918; and *Under Cover*, 1919. The 1919 production was given in a room on the second floor of the "old dorm," White Hall, which held a capacity audience of 125. New heights were reached in *The Climbers*, 1920, due to having imported a professional director from the Maryland Institute in Baltimore. He was Carol Sax, who brought some of his students' work with him. The contact inspired greater finesse in *The Admirable Crichton* in 1921. *The Thirteenth Chair* was staged on 13 May 1922 in Woodland Auditorium, and in November at the Ada Meade Theatre on the north side of Main Street east of Broadway. The stage scenery had been designed by the new Art Department of the university. Carol Sax was chairman, and members of The Strollers executed it under his direction.

The early Strollers' play that was to assume a permanent place in drama repertory was Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan*, which was at Woodland Auditorium in April of 1923. The cast included two actresses who were to appear frequently in university theatricals, becoming principals in the Romany and Guignol. They were Mary Lyons, a graduate of the New York Academy of Dramatic Arts and a professional nurse, who played Lady Plymdale, and Jeanette Lampert, a student and daughter of the head of the Music Department, in a minor role. The name of Mary's brother, Thomas Lyons, had appeared on the program of *The Thirteenth Chair* as assistant electrician, and later Tom was to be electrician and technical director. Credit was given to Carol Sax for "his excellent advice in judging, coaching the cast, designing, and in execution" of the sets. *Lady Windermere's Fan* played at Lexington, Maysville, Middlesboro, Pineville, and Harlan.

The Strollers' greatest obstacle was not having their own show place. They later made use of the Guignol Theatre, as for their first musical comedy, given on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings in mid-December of 1929. It was called *Local Color*, with book by Frank C. Davidson, and lyrics and music by Katherine Davis and Earl King Senff. Davidson and Davis were juniors and Senff a sophomore at the university. The club's first musical revue
was called *The Stroller Revue of 1931*. It was staged at Woodland Auditorium on Monday, 11 May. The lack of permanent home indicated an independence, which was striving to function outside of the university's jurisdiction, that fostered more lethal consequences. The matter reached a climax in December of 1937, when they were served an ultimatum by Dean of Women Sarah Blanding either to select a faculty adviser and submit prescribed reports to the administration or disband. The group talked of reorganizing, but dissolved after twenty-seven years of existence.

In the fall of 1920 another drama group had appeared at the University of Kentucky. Under the leadership of English professor E.F. Farquhar, The Campus Playhouse came into being with the blessing of, and a reasonable amount of credit at the business office extended by, President Frank LeRond McVey. (The season was financed on less than $200.) Despite its name, The Campus Playhouse was a community as well as a college endeavor. Performers were recruited not only from among the students, but from "clerks, business women, faculty members and neighborhood groups of Lexington," a policy that was to be perpetuated by its successors. Performances consisted of one-act plays, "aesthetic" dancing, and operettas, and they included community singing. A set was constructed that was reversible, one side representing "an elegant interior" and the other "a more or less shabby one. Doors, windows, and panels could be shifted to any place." Farquhar was succeeded as director in 1921 by Prof. W.H. Mikesell. His first bill was the dramatization of short stories by students in the play-writing class of Dean Frances Jewell (two years later to become Mrs. F.L. McVey). Notable were those based on Mrs. Noyes Hart's *The American* and Rose Sidney's *Butterflies*. Two evenings of four plays from O. Henry short stories were given on 23 February and 1 March, directed by those who had adapted them for the stage. Late in March a program of three plays on two evenings consisted of John Galsworthy's *The First and the Last*, Anatole France's *The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife*, and one having a medieval theme by Carol Sax. The next presentation was based on Charles Craddock's Kentucky mountain story *The Prophet of Big Smoky*. Professor Mikesell and Jeanette Lampert were among the performers.

Prof. E.E. Fleischman was the third director of The Campus Playhouse. The highlight of the first half of the 1922-23 season was a Christmas "warming." It featured four one-act plays, one
pair given in the afternoon and the other pair in the evening. Two of the plays had been written by Professor Fleischman, who, with Mary Lyons, headed a cast of seven. "Ten Y.W.C.A. girls dressed in white and carrying lighted tapers sang Christmas carols between the plays. An informal reception at which the guests were served from a steaming 'wassail' bowl followed the evening bill." In the spring of 1923 Professor Fleischman directed *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, Molière's *The Imaginary Invalid*, O'Neill's *Beyond the Horizon*, and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. They were given in the university chapel.

The luminary who made University of Kentucky theatre a viable institution was Carol Sax, whose name has been mentioned several times for his contributions to early endeavors. Carol Mayer Sax (1885-1961), of a well-to-do German Jewish family, was born in Ottumwa, Iowa, where he attended school. His education was completed at St. John's School at Manlius, New York, and at Columbia University. He established his home in New York City in 1909. Here he saw Sarah Bernhardt in one of her famous "farewell tours," whose impressive performance was made all the more remarkable—he told me—when he later learned that she had lost a leg. Sax's early involvement in the theatre consisted of designing posters (including the first for John Barrymore), properties and costumes for producer Morris Gest, and rendering a series of portraits of stage celebrities. In 1913 Carol Sax was called to Baltimore to head the design department at the Maryland Institute. His extra-curricular activities included the decorating of residences in the vicinity, the founding of the Vagabond Theatre in Baltimore, a commission designing costumes and scenery for Ruth St. Dennis and Ted Shawn, and a major setting for orchestra concerts and recitals for the Metropolitan Opera House. Sax served in the camouflage corps during World War I, briefly designed for the Provincetown Players, and conceived the scenery and costumes for Edna St. Vincent Millay's first play produced in New York City, *The Princess Marries the Page*.

In the fall of 1919 Carol Sax had just returned to the Maryland Institute when he received a letter from Grover Creech, stage manager of The Strollers, inviting him to Kentucky to direct *The Climbers*. Sax accepted, and his rapport with Lexingtonians was so agreeable on both sides that when the University of Kentucky offered him the chairmanship of a proposed art department he accepted that also. Thus he became an assistant professor and
acting head of the Art Department in September of 1920; he was promoted to associate professor and head a year later, and made full professor in 1922. The new department occupied two rooms on an upper floor of White Hall, significantly close to the Strollers' hall. Due to his love for and involvement in campus histrionics, Professor Sax was fully cognizant of and sympathetic toward the university's having a theatre exclusively its own, and he became the prime mover in fulfilling this objective.

In June of 1923 a prospectus was circulated proposing the construction of the Romany Theatre. The building was to be "admireably equipped with excellent stage and lighting facilities, a picturesque and comfortable auditorium, with box and orchestra seats, seating about two hundred. Each seat will command an excellent view of the stage. . . . No thought or effort will be spared to achieve scenery, costumes and lighting of rare beauty and appropriateness. . . . [Plays were to] be selected not only for their literary and artistic merit, but also for their ability to interest the audience keenly." The building was estimated to cost $5,000. Subscriptions were solicited at $5.00 each, or one could become a charter guarantor for $25.00. Samuel B. Walton was treasurer. In July it was announced that "A Little Theatre is being built on Winslow Street on University property to replace a building formerly used as a negro church. The theatre is being . . . financed by townspeople interested in dramatic advancement. . . . Construction of this building is being done by five university students: Dan Morse, Henry Harper, Sam Shouse, Cornelius Anderson and Frank McVey, Jr."26 "Winslow Street" was the former name of the stretch of Euclid Avenue from Rose to Upper Street. The Consolidated Baptist Church served Adams Town, the Negro community centered on Adams Street, which in those days ran as far west as College Street, the alley that went up to the back of the old women's dormitory, Patterson Hall. A row of small Negro houses faced Winslow Street eastward of the church, which stood about forty yards west of the alley. Its steeply pitched gable end facing the street was crowned by a small square tower; three windows were in each flank, and a polygonal apse constituted the north end. The meeting house had become famous locally by the pastorate of the Rev. Peter Vinegar for fifty years. The property was acquired by the University of Kentucky in 1922, and Boyd Hall was built between the church and Patterson Hall as a second women's dormitory. Despite the proposal of the
A scene from Candida in the first Romany Theatre, 1925 (Photograph by Prof. Louis E. Nollau; University of Kentucky Archives)
prospectus to construct a new building, the five college students strengthened and remodeled the dilapidated frame church for the theatre auditorium. This very likely was due to the fact that the target sum of $5,000 only reached $1,800. It was derived from the sale of seventy-five guarantor subscriptions, five hundred season tickets to townspeople, and two hundred to students. Among the foremost supporters were President and Mrs. Frank L. McVey, son Frank, Jr., Prof. and Mrs. E.F. Farquhar, Miss (later Professor) Anne Worthington Callihan, and Miss (later Professor at Wheaton College) Lucille Bush.27

The name Romany ("gypsy") Theatre was in line with Carol Sax's former Vagabond Theatre in Baltimore, as well as with the even older title of The Strollers at the university. The decorating of the auditorium was carried out by Miss Callihan, Mrs. William Adams, Jack Powers, and Clifton Wesselman. It was described as colorful. The curtain was made by Mrs. W.H. Renick. Miss Callihan "designed and executed appliquéd panels representing Romany maidens which were placed in the windows." Carol Sax must have admired Anne Worthington Callihan's ability, as at the beginning of the spring semester, or in January 1924, she was appointed an instructor in the Art Department. She specialized in the decorative arts, both studio and history courses, and taught at U.K. for twenty-six years. The five-student theatre construction team concentrated on replacing the former apse with a stage pavilion, which measured twenty by forty feet, and was thirty feet high. It inherited the equipment that The Strollers had been accumulating for more than a dozen years; and $1,200 was spent on new apparatus, making the Romany "the most completely equipped theatre in Lexington."28 The cost of the building as a whole came to $2,800. Originally the outside walls were to have been painted green and the roof red, but there were not sufficient funds left over from expenses for internal requirements to make these exterior improvements. It is reported that treasurer Sam Walton gave director Carol Sax the figure of "exactly $1.17."29 The idea was conceived—variously attributed to Sax and to Mrs. Jack Powers—of rounding up volunteers and having them bring brushes and cans of leftover paint, no matter what color, to apply a protective coat to whatever portion of the building their taste dictated.

The Romany Theatre opened on 7 January 1924 for a week's run of matinee and evening performances of Hungarian playwright
Ferenc Molnar’s *Liliom*. The play had been on Broadway in 1921, and it was to be converted into the Rogers and Hart musical *Carousel* in 1945. The Lexington performance must have been quite professional. The title role was played by William Berrenger, who had been a member of the Lasky Famous Players Corporation for nine years. Others in the cast were W. Bentley Ball, recently with the Obron Opera Company; Oskar Hambleton, the year before with the Provincetown Players; Margaret Buford Harris, who had been with the Jewett Players of Boston; Violet Young, who was to tour with Redpath Chautauqua; Regina Stanfiel, who had been with Stuart Walker in Cincinnati, and later resumed her acting career with him there; and Marjorie Warden, the feminine lead, who was to turn down a contract with Stuart Walker to complete her studies at the university and play in six more Romany productions. Miss Warden went to New York in 1925, became a member of the Theatre Guild, and undertook two small parts and the understudy to Helen Hayes in Shaw’s *Caesar and Cleopatra*. Her career was cut short by a fatal stroke of pneumonia in the spring of 1926. A student loan fund in her memory was founded a year later.\(^{30}\)

Other offerings in Romany’s first season were A.A. Milne’s *Mr. Pim Passes By*, Booth Tarkington’s *The Intimate Strangers*, and *The Merry Game*, adapted from Arthur Schnitzler’s *Liebelei*. Mary Lyons was co-director with Sax for the last play. Also announced for the season was Wiers-Jennsen’s *The Witch Wife*, but evidence could not be found for its becoming a reality. During the week of 20 May 1924 “The University of Kentucky Playhouse” gave Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*. It was directed by Prof. W.R. Sutherland. Names connected with the Romany participated. Nora was played by Regina Stanfiel. Oskar Hambleton designed the costumes, and he and Anne Callihan assisted the director.

The 1924-25 season opened with Mark Connelly and George Kaufman’s *To the Ladies*. The next bill, in mid-November, was U.K. senior (with Hollywood experience) Troy L. Perkins’s *What’s Wrong with This Picture?* It was followed by Hubert Henry Davies’s *The Mollusc*, then by Augustus Thomas’s *Just Suppose*. The next play, *White Chips*, was written by Spring Byington and Marie de Montalva, friends of Mr. Sax’s. Then there were Arthur Wing Pinero’s *The Enchanted Cottage*, and another Milne work, *The Dover Road*.

The first play of the second full season (1925-26) was George
The Consolidated Baptist Church building on Winslow Street (now Euclid Avenue) during construction for the Romany Theatre, 1923 (Photograph by Henry Harper; Kinney Harper Collection, University of Kentucky Libraries)
Bernard Shaw's *Candida*, with Florence Whipple Powers playing the title role. It was succeeded by Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*. Noel Coward's *Hay Fever* was scheduled for presentation in early February, but it was postponed for several years. Given in the spring of 1926 were John Galsworthy's *The Pigeon*, starring Jeanette Lampert, and Henry Hubert Davies's *Mrs. Gorringe's Necklace*, with Mary Lyons directing and playing the title role. Great care had been lavished on costumes, furnishings, and setting in all of the early Romany shows, with Anne Callihan and Oskar Hambleton creating the costumes, a number of local antique dealers lending period pieces, and the sets presumably designed by Mr. Sax. Furnishings and decorations for *Mrs. Gorringe's Necklace* were especially noteworthy, having been put into the expert hands of Mr. W. Edward Russell, a Louisville interior decorator. He brought a truck load of valuable antiques, and the audience was invited to the stage to inspect them following each performance. The program announced another treat from the Falls City: the Louisville Players Club was to present St. John Ervine's *John Ferguson* at the Romany Theatre on the evening of 19 June 1926.

Thus concluded the career of the Romany Theatre in the converted Consolidated Baptist Church. Its last two years of existence were to be spent in new quarters. The original or middle part of the first University of Kentucky Art Center was built on Winslow Street (Euclid Avenue) between College Street and Harrison Avenue for the Art Department, and it was occupied in the autumn of 1925. The east wing was added for the Music Department a year later. The Romany Theatre, constituting the west wing, was built simultaneously, but it was not completed until 1927. The theatre proper was approximately the same size and shape as its predecessor, and its plans were drawn by one of Lexington's foremost architects, Robert McMeekin. The design of the interior of the auditorium must be credited to Carol Sax. Its ceiling was flat at the center and pitched to either side, following the contours of the proscenium arch. Silver masks of tragedy and comedy flanked the stage opening. A beam having bracketed ends spanned the ceiling a few feet back from the proscenium arch to hide spotlights from the audience. Blind arches overspread the side walls, consisting of slender, fluted, half-round shafts having small capitals supporting pointed arches. Flat surfaces were beaverboard, and they were painted earth brown and foliage green, with a moderate blue overhead, the accents in silver. On my visit to
Carol Sax in New York during the 1940s he confided that the scheme was to represent a forest. His initial thought regarding the curtain, he said, had been to have a large peacock whose tail would open and close like a Japanese fan, the body disappearing into the footlight trough. It was abandoned because of mechanical problems. Instead, retractable curtains of multicolored rectangles of velvet, the needlework of the demented patients at Eastern State Hospital, were used, with Anne Callihan supervising. House lights were sconces of mailing-tube "candles" with tambourine shades on their incandescent-bulb "flames." The floor was slightly pitched, and a single block of seats, entered from the side aisles, accommodated some two hundred persons. Though the theatre was of limited size, it was attractive. At a reception given in her honor, the celebrated dancer and Sax’s former client, Ruth St. Dennis, was overheard to have told the director: "Carol, if Maxfield Parrish had done your decorations, he would have asked you ten thousand dollars for the job." There was no need for a Maxfield Parrish—there was a Carol Sax.

The structure on the north end was indispensable for theatricals. It housed the elevated stage with paneled bowed front—at least after the narrow orchestra pit was provided in the summer of 1930. There were steps to either side, those ascending requiring a diagonal leap from the top to the stage. The prompter’s box was centered in the footlight trough. The front curtains and scenery or anything else that was flown were managed with ropes and pulleys worked by hand. These and the light switches were concentrated on the east side of the proscenium arch. Ladders could be mounted to the ample loft and grid for rigging the equipment. In a centered pent at the back were great double doors for the passage of flats, furniture, and other sizable paraphernalia. The stage door was at the north end of a shallow lean-to on the east flank, also containing stairs to the basement dressing rooms, paint room, and storage spaces. The nether region evidently was a new convenience in the second Romany. It fulfilled all production needs, but, like the house itself, it was of restricted size.

Dunster Duncan Foster played Hedwig in *The Wild Duck* late in 1925. She had studied acting during high school and afterwards in Washington, D.C., and her family had just moved back to Lexington to occupy the old castellated homestead called Ingelside on the Harrodsburg Pike. In the fall of 1926 Dunster was offered the position of business manager for the Romany Theatre and
Dunster Duncan Foster Pettit (left) played the lead in Sister Beatrice, performed in the second Romany Theatre in 1927 (Courtesy of Mrs. Dunster Duncan Foster Pettit)
accepted it. She shared an office with Jean Lowry in the newly completed Music Department wing of the Art Center. Miss Lowry taught art history in the main pavilion. Miss Foster's domain was still in the construction stage, and she, too, began building for the future. She sold a thousand season tickets to townspeople, and program advertisements to Main Street merchants. Paul Porter, a law student at U.K. and part-time employee at the *Lexington Herald*, was publicity manager. The first play in the new Romany Theatre, given in March of 1927, was George Edward Kelly's satire on the Little Theatre movement, *The Torch Bearers*. The second was Maurice Maeterlinck's *Sister Beatrice*, which ran the week of 9 May and three days of the following week. Maeterlinck was a Belgian mystic, and one of the best-known playwrights of his day, though now his dramas are all but forgotten. *Sister Beatrice* was a very personal endeavor, as he lived in the atmospheric discomfort of a former monastery. Carol Sax cast Dunster Duncan Foster as Sister Beatrice and the Madonna in those passages where her image comes alive. Director assistants were Jeanette Lampert and Sallie Bullock Cave. Care for production details carried over from the older Romany. Dunster recalls that the blue velvet material for her madonna costume cost $50.00. Stained glass windows for the Gothic setting were executed on silk by Prof. Edward Fiske, who taught painting and the graphic arts in the Art Department. Mediterranean iron gates, 300 years old, were borrowed from a Cincinnati concern.  

The 1927-28 season consisted of two plays in the fall and two in the spring. It opened on 7 November with a second play by Troy Perkins called *Visiting Lady*. Dunster Duncan Foster and Jeanette Lampert acted in it. Sutton Vane's *Outward Bound* was given the week of 12 December. Miss Lampert assisted Carol Sax in the directing. John Galsworthy's *Justice* was the offering for the week of 19 March 1928. The season closed with Girdler Fitch's *The Whip of Fire* early in May. Jeanette Lampert played in both; she had the only female role in *Justice*, all of the other parts being taken by engineering students.  

Carol Sax told me an episode that seems to have a bearing on this matter. He said that the engineering students had to take his art appreciation class, which was against their wishes and what they considered their better judgment. Sax seldom arrived on time, and if his tardiness exceeded the quarter-hour grace allowed department heads, the students would bolt. The clock was over the
hall door, through which he usually made his entrance. On one occasion Sax was exceedingly late, and from his office he came in through a rear door. All eyes were fixed on the clock, and the engineers had assumed sprinters’ poses. Sax cleared his throat, and when all eyes, with slight malice, had turned toward him, he announced: “Gentlemen, a professor who is more than fifteen minutes late is in a class by himself!” The pleasantry converted the engineers to Carol Sax, perhaps to the fine arts, and some—at least—to Sax’s specialty of the performing arts.

Prof. Carol Sax had been on leave during the second semester of the 1924-25 academic year, returning to assume command of the Art Department when it was settled in the new Art Center. He took a sabbatical for a year beginning in the fall of 1928, and in the following summer he resigned. That autumn Sax went to Paris, France, and presented a season of American plays. Next year he directed the Manchester Repertory Theatre in England. In 1931 Carol Sax made his Broadway debut by producing Arthur Wilmurt’s *The Guest Room*. Later he presented the same playwright’s *Lottie Gathers No Moss*, Frederick Schlick’s *Como Murphy*, and Patrick Kearney’s *Veiled Eyes.*

My meeting with him in the 1940s was engineered by Dr. Lucille Bush, then chairman of the Wheaton College Art Department. She took me to his apartment at 471 Park Avenue. My impression was of a gentleman of not prepossessing size but of excessive neatness, courtesy, and polish. I remember him as fitting the description of Agatha Christie’s Hercule Poirot—minus the moustache. He took us to lunch and told us that he never dined alone but always welcomed any friends who cared to share his company and his hospitality. In character with this generosity were his contributions to the University of Kentucky, to the Student Loan Fund, to the Frances Jewell Scholarship Fund, and the bestowing of the J.B. Sax Lecture Fund as a tribute to his father. Undoubtedly the Romany Theatre benefitted greatly from his largess.

Carol Sax was succeeded in University of Kentucky theatre by Frank Fowler, a native of Bournemouth, England. Fowler’s lack of British accent suggests that he migrated to the United States early in life. He earned two college degrees at Brown University, a bachelor of arts in 1926 and a master of arts in 1928. The following summer he coached dramatics at Culver Military Academy. In the fall of 1928 Frank Fowler came to the University of Kentucky as an instructor in the English Department. Carol Sax
Prof. Frank C. Fowler, ca. 1929 (Starman Studio, Lexington; University of Kentucky Archives)
being absent on sabbatical, Frank served as director of the Romany Theatre. Frank C. Fowler (1904-72) was ten years younger than Carol Sax had been when he moved to Lexington. Frank had a better academic background but not as much professional experience. A bachelor, like Sax, who had lived at the Lafayette Hotel, Fowler occupied an apartment (at least in the 1940s) at the Wellington Arms. His mother also lived in Lexington, but they did not reside together. They were on excellent terms, but Mrs. Fowler did not intrude upon Frank’s professional career. Unlike Sax, Fowler was tall, and, although early described by his closest theatre associate as “The shy young man with a moustache though . . . [with] personality and great promise,” my impression of him was of a man with persuasive authority. His talents encompassed every aspect of theatre, and his competence was contagious. He told me that he had dabbled in commercial art, and his ability at directing, performing, teaching acting, lecturing and writing on the various facets of histrionics, and composing plays were patent. He spent summer interims and sabbaticals performing and coaching elsewhere. In the fall of 1936 he directed his own play Paths of Glory for a fortnight run at the Pasadena Playhouse. His Galloping Down was sold to the Shuberts. Frank Fowler also worked on an advanced degree at Columbia University and received a doctorate in dramatics in 1944. The subject of his dissertation was “Modern American Dramatization.”

After Sax resigned in the summer of 1929 Fowler was made assistant professor and put in charge of dramatics. He changed the title from the Romany to the Guignol Theatre. “Guignol” originally was the name of a late-eighteenth-century marionette proper to Lyons, France. In the nineteenth century Parisian cabarets were called guignols. Then the Théâtre du Grand Guignol came into existence, specializing in plays of violence and horror, suggestive of Punch and Judy puppet shows. The name “Guignol” had acquired a milder meaning when introduced to England at the beginning of this century, and Frank Fowler may have adopted it from his native land. The word has a nice sound, and “Guignol” has persisted in Lexington—despite the destruction of its first home—for well over a half century.

Frank Fowler inherited a small but well-appointed establishment, accompanied by a moderately well-trained, eager, and devoted coterie. The first presentation in the theatre renamed the Guignol was Noel Coward’s Hay Fever, and five other plays followed
during the 1928-29 season. The third play was his own mystery called *The Dagger*. Its setting was a New York theatre, and the pseudonym Charles Martin appeared on the program as playwright. The fourth of five bills given the second season was Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt*, long talked about for the striking black and white of its somewhat abstract settings and costumes. It was succeeded by *Table d’Hote*, written by Frank Fowler and Marian (Mrs. Francis) Galloway, being a sophisticated society comedy laid in a fashionable summer-resort hotel in New Jersey. The cast included Virginia McVey and Virginia Boyd, daughters of the president of the university and dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. There were eighteen plays in the 1930-31 season, including Kaufman and Ferber’s *The Royal Family*, Dumas’s *Camille*, Moliere’s *La Malade Imaginaire* (it had been given at the U.K. Little Theatre in 1923 as *The Imaginary Invalid*), Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* (it had been at the U.K. Playhouse in 1924), Goldsmith’s *She Stoops To Conquer*, and Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. Including an Elizabethan play each season became a Guignol tradition. Two plays in which Dunster Duncan Foster (by this time Mrs. William Pettit) starred during the 1930-31 season were as Linda Seton in Berry’s *Holiday* and Helen Pettigrew in Balderston’s *Berkeley Square*. In the latter Frank Fowler played opposite her as Peter Standish. They gave a memorable performance together again in the 1939 production of Deval and Sherwood’s *Tovarich*. The Guignol acquired a new facility in the fall of 1931. This was the lounge, behind the director’s and box office in the southwest corner of the building. The room had served the Art Department as library for several years. After its transfer to the theatre it became the place for serving coffee between acts during performances. Its ample size and long table and chairs also accommodated group play readings and theatre classes. It was balanced on the other side of the corridor leading from the front vestibule to the auditorium by the costume department, which also provided the check room for patrons’ wraps. The projection booth was over the corridor. The number of plays presented in a single year peaked for Guignol at the Art Center in the 1937-38 season; there were twenty three. Some were of one act, several being given on the same bill.

Taking its cue from The Strollers’ pin, the Guignol adopted a brass key resembling that of Phi Beta Kappa (originally used for winding watches) with a “GP” in a black enamel field framed by
comedy and tragedy masks in relief facing outward. Eligibility for ownership depended on participation in five plays. I still have mine. It is well worn, and on the back is my name with the date 1938, the year I graduated from college. With the bumper crop of more than a score of plays that year, I or my handiwork contributed to well over the prescribed minimum number of productions for possession of the pin.

Part II
Staging the Guignol in the Old Art Center

After I entered college in the fall of 1934 the Art Center at the University of Kentucky became the nucleus of my universe for the better part of the following decade. The Art Center was a sprawling frame structure standing on a greensward rise that was the site of the present outdoor basketball courts. The women's dormitories were on the far side of College Street to the west, and on the other side of one-block-long Harrison Avenue to the east stood the Sigma Nu fraternity house, also on a promontory. The north side of Euclid Avenue beyond was still Adams Town, except for a few commercial enterprises on or near to Rose Street. Adams Street terminated at Harrison Avenue, the former west block having been replaced by a formal garden behind the Art Center, completed in the fall of 1927. The clapboarded walls of the Art Center were painted white, and its interior was sheathed in natural beaverboards. They were pockmarked by hammers that had missed nails (or pounded them through the soft beaverboards) for picture hanging, and by other less legitimate abuses. The holes revealed empty, uninsulated walls, and batteries of ardent radiators attempted to alleviate the discomfort caused by sub-zero blizzards that rattled and penetrated the studio windows during the early months of the year. There were two large studios flanking an equally large classroom, the last with French doors opening to the formal garden. Across the south side of the pavilion ran a sunny hall, which also served as a picture gallery, with six windows and a fanlighted entrance vestibule facing Euclid Avenue. Narrow wings at the extremities projected forward. That to the east contained the faculty offices, the one at the end having walls lined with bookshelves. I understood that it had been the first art library, and that it had moved in 1927 to what was to become the
The Formal Garden back of the old Art Center on Euclid Avenue. The Guignol Theatre is at the right. This photograph must date from the late 1920s, as by the early 1930s the two windows to the center studio had been reset farther apart, and a fanlighted French doorway inserted between them. The doorway was on axis with the flagstone path here shown terminating at a concrete bench.
Guignol lounge. The Music Department occupied the east wing. The etching studio was at the other end, interlaying the painting studio and Guignol costume room.

In the mid 1930s the art library was at the southeast corner on the fourth floor of the main library building, now the Margaret I. King Library. An office belonging to the Art Department was adjacent. The principal lecture room for the department was on the third floor off the gallery that overlooked the card catalog. Most of the courses using slides were given here, as those scheduled for the middle room in the Art Center entailed a good deal of traffic. There was even the matter of transporting projectors and screens. This job often fell to me, as I worked as a desk assistant in the art library from my second semester in college onward. The compensation in those days was 33¢ an hour for university student employees, which was 3¢ more than students on government-paid jobs got. But by living at home, with tuition amounting to $42.50 per semester, and only books and art supplies to buy, one managed. I lived about a mile from the nearest point on the campus and walked both ways, usually three times a day. After I became involved in the theatre I often kept the art library open until nine o’clock at night, then went to the Guignol to work until the small hours of the morning. Needless to say, I tried to avoid eight-o’clock classes.

My interest in the theatre came about through my mother’s penchant for theatre-going. She commandeered annual family vacations that culminated in two weeks at New York and two more at Atlantic City. We went to the theatre every evening in New York and attended occasional operettas on Garden Pier and such stage shows—mostly minstrels and vaudeville—as Steel Pier afforded at the seashore. Back home we had season tickets for the stock companies that came to the Lexington Opera House. From my father I inherited the instinct for making things. I still have a copy of the poster I cut out of a linoleum block and printed for the senior play, The Charm School, given at Henry Clay High School in 1932. It has lettering and decorative masks in Art Deco style rendered in green and black ink. The following year I designed and executed a medieval ruin to highlight the arboreal backdrop and wings of the school’s auditorium stage for a performance of Gilbert and Sullivan’s Pirates of Penzance. It measured about twelve by eight feet, and included a Tudor-arched doorway, the base of a round turret, and several pointed
windows. These features were sketched in poster paint on strips of brown wrapping paper pasted together and stretched out on the gymnasium floor. The paper was cut out and supported by a light wood framework, and behind rose two colonnetted piers, truncated a little above their springing, to impart a sense of depth.

My first assignment at the Guignol was producing a late-nineteenth-century locomotive to be used in the last play of the 1935-36 season, *Under the Gaslight*. It was to appear in a scene in which the villain tied the innocent damsel to the railroad tracks, and the approach of the fatal train was announced by the whistle becoming louder and the headlight playing on the landscape backdrop. The damsel was rescued by the hero in the nick of time before the locomotive plunged onto the scene. It was a profile less than life size, cut out of some kind of building board, painted in tempera colors, and slid easily along the floor. It may be that this initial job for the Guignol had something to do with my undertaking a book on the Nantucket railroad thirty-five years later. The coupons for two show tickets that I received were given to my parents, who went and enjoyed the farce.

In the fall I boarded the Chesapeake and Ohio train and went to New York to study for three months under John Sloan and Arnold Blanche at the Art Students' League. I returned to the University of Kentucky for the spring semester, and started working at the Guignol on a regular basis in September of 1937. The opening play was *First Lady*, with Mary Lyons and Kathryn Wheeler pitting their husbands against one another for President. The settings were already planned, and I merely performed the duties of an interior decorator. The main set was a formal living room or parlor, with a wide doorway centered at the back, a narrower door to the right, and a fireplace between two windows opposite. Some angel (probably Mrs. Letitia Gardner) provided a Kentucky Federal mantel and pair of girandoles for each end of the shelf. Windows were dressed in valances and floor-length side panels of flannel dyed dark green. White woodwork consisted of chairrailing and baseboard encircling the room, and door jambs crowned with friezes and cornices. I cut out two swan-neck Regency wall sconces for the back wall, and accepted such framed paintings and prints as could be borrowed. The effect was not very inspired or inspiring. A second set was of flats set up inside the large room to represent a small library. A talented freshman, Gail Kirn, helped paint paneling or shelves full of books on each
flat, and if no known wood ever matched the brown tone that predominated, the furniture was homely and the effect cozy. Our flats were the usual muslin stretched over wood frames, sized and painted with powdered pigments mixed with water and glue. The colors were sprayed on with a compression fruit spray. Adjoining flats were laced together at the back. If fixed, the flats were stripped with narrow pieces of muslin adhered with flour paste. In the theatre working alone late at night one could hear mice nibbling at the flour and the glue. Details, such as the highlights and shadows of panels and books on shelves were painted by hand.

The set for Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, the second major production of the season, stemmed from an ingenious device conceived by Frank Fowler. He had the stage crew get together every sturdy object on the premises—platforms, benches, chests, tables, even chairs—and make scale models an inch to the foot. These were assembled to form a rocky island with crags, ledges, a cave, and a miniscule ravine. The construction that evolved on the stage was covered with old curtain material and sprayed with rock colors. Enhanced by artificial vines, real palm fronds, and a running stream with cascades, and backed by a curved cyclorama floodlighted with appropriate sky hues, the pile accommodated every scene. For good measure a ballet of sprites led by William Carter Stair was ad-libbed to the score. The one and only time I undertook a duty for which I was totally unsuited was designing the costumes. I bungled through by plagiarizing figures in Piero della Francesca paintings. Gail Kirn made the mask for Caliban, and perhaps produced costumes for him and Ariel—and the sprites—and later she elevated this department to an estimable altitude.

In February of 1938 Gail enacted Babe, a gangster’s moll, in *The Spider*. It was a flimsy mystery thriller providing a murder committed during a vaudeville performance. Greer Johnson, who had taken a small part in *First Lady*, here portrayed Alexander the mind reader, with Prof. Cass Robinson of the Geology Department as Chartrand, the magician, circulating about the audience fingerling objects and feeding Greer the cues. In one act the *Tempest* ballet reappeared in front of a black curtain with silver flames on it to which had been added bright red and white heart designs, the show being given a week before Valentine’s Day. By way of publicity I cut the silhouette of a hairy spider and simple
An informal snapshot of Clarence Geiger (technical director, instructor, actor, director), Sarah McLean (actress, office manager), Frank Fowler, Lolo Robinson (actress, director, business manager, chronicler of the Guignol) in the formal garden, 1938. Clarence Geiger played Ferdinand to Sarah McLean’s Miranda in The Tempest, week of 6 December 1937, and he and Lolo Robinson were the lovers in High Tor, week of 27 March 1939 (Photograph by Clay Lancaster)

inscription “GUIGNOL/FEB. 7-12” in a linoleum block, from which were printed handbills on an assortment of colored papers. These were distributed by loyal Thespians to mystify and litter up the town.

The last two major productions of the 1937-38 season were Idiot’s Delight and Stage Door. The settings were modifications of those that had appeared at the Shubert and Music Box theatres in 1936. Greer Johnson was the bartender in Idiot’s Delight, and the Stair ballerinas (without Bill) traipsed through a modern routine for the floor show. Our technical director Clarence Geiger and stage manager William Quirey worked out a convincing collapse of the building for the finale bombing. Stage Door called for a number of actress portraits to adorn the walls. Gail Kirn did most of them in pastel as she could achieve better likenesses than I could.

About this time I took a special theatre-design course from Prof. Anne Callihan. I received my bachelor’s degree in June of 1938. During the ensuing school year I worked on my master’s degree, attended classes, researched and wrote the thesis, and kept the art library afternoons and evenings. I had no time for Guignol, and Gail carried on. The M.A. was received in June of 1939. The
first play of the 1939-40 season at Guignol was You Can't Take It With You. Gail recalls taking a truck with helpers to Louisville to clean out her mother's garret for filling the set. I returned to the scene to make the footboard for the bed in Volpone, the second production. The footboard was a fantasy relief of two satyrs playing clarinets dancing with a “sly fox” (volpone). They were modeled in clay on a shaped rigid background, covered with papier-mâché, and painted, predominantly pink. Gail's costumes for the Ben Jonson play were imaginative, even spectacular. Carol Sax visited Lexington at the time, and Frank Fowler gave a party for him on stage following the first performance on the evening of 4 December. Sax must have felt at home in the atmosphere he had created, unchanged on the south side of the patchwork curtains made at the insane asylum.

The last offering of the season—week of 22 April 1940—was Robert Sherwood's Reunion in Vienna, in which Frank Fowler and Jeanette Lampert handled the leading roles with elegance. The drawing room of the home of Dr. Krug had real openings in the flats, but draperies, wall decorations, and framed pictures were all painted on; furniture was Empire. The secondary set, an anteroom of the imperial suite in Hotel Lucher, was executed in Art Deco style, its severity relieved by grained wood, finely-striped upholstery, and a sprinkling of five-pointed stars. Looking back, the last might better have been omitted. Since Reunion in Vienna was the one-hundredth Guignol presentation, the occasion was celebrated by including a bookmark announcing the fact in each program. It was of thin orange cardboard (a shade lighter than the program cover) of irregular shape, on which were a simplified perspective sketch of the secondary set and moderne lettering. Little did I realize at the time that fifteen years later I would be teaching lettering and perspective drawing in a New York commercial art school out of sheer necessity!

The two following seasons I practically lived at the Guignol, assuming all art roles (except costuming) as Gail Kirk spent all of her extra-curricular time working in the art library and as secretary to the department head the first year, and then graduated and left the university. Clare Booth's The Women was given the week of 25 October 1940. Both the cumbersome cast of thirty-seven actresses and twelve set changes, nine of them different, made life complicated. The scenery was handled as set pieces that were flown and let down in front of a black cyclorama. They were
(again) Art Deco, ranging from ruffles, muted stripes, and pastel colors of a powder room on the Casino Roof (a night view of mid-Manhattan was seen through the circular window), to a brightly patterned hairdresser’s establishment with chromium tube furniture.

The Women was succeeded by Shaw’s 1894 satire on the military, Arms and the Man. At the Guignol it was modified by a touch of the 1909 comic-opera derivative, The Chocolate Soldier. Fantasy ran riot in the Petkoff interior, with colorful walls and curvilinear furnishings, curlicues enframing irregular shapes, and a multi-hued tent ceiling. The courtyard scene was more restrained in color, but the garden wall serpentined to embrace a crescent-shaped bench and humped up to a tall post capped by a thatched birdhouse. Rusticated walls and post, decorated step risers, a hookah prominently displayed (called for in the script), and a Victorian carriage lantern by the pedimented doorway were unlikely foreground for church steeples glimpsed over the hedge. Frank Fowler, Susan Hinkle, Mary Lyons and Prof. Dantzler were in the cast.

Chodorov's Kind Lady required more art work than any other show during my sojourn at the Guignol. There was only one set, but Frank Fowler wanted perfection, and the basic structure was to remain for the two following presentations. The scene was a Victorian parlor. There was a great double window, heavily draped, on the left, and a fireplace opposite, a door up from the chimneybreast. Octagonal piers were set to either side of an opening to the hall centered on the upstage wall, and two more stood in the corners of the room. There were several steps up to the hall, and several more to a bay window beyond, from which recess the stairway rose to the right. A major skirmish arose over whether the theatre could afford a magnificent mid-nineteenth-century walnut newel post costing $25 at a salvage yard on Seventh Street. In those days whoever was in charge of art received $15 and two complimentary tickets for each production. Season tickets for five plays sold for $3. The expenditure for the newel post therefore exceeded what the art director got for the play, and equaled the sale of more than eight season subscriptions. But we got it. By way of retribution I marbleized the fireplace, door frames and high baseboard that encircled the parlor, and stenciled a simple classic design around the frieze supported by the octagonal posts. This was but a beginning: the play called for art
Cast on the set of Kind Lady, 1941, includes (left to right) Marguerite Goodykoontz as Aggie, Lucille Little as Mrs. Edwards, Clayton Thomas as Doctor, Dorothy Dyer Rodes as Mary Herries, Frank Johnson as Henry Abbott, and Don Irvine as Mrs. Edwards (Courtesy of Frank Johnson)
works—paintings by the masters—framed and hanging on the walls. For them I sized rough-textured charcoal paper with varnish thinned with turpentine, and made oil copies of Hogarth’s *Shrimp Girl*, Constable’s *Hay Wain*, and three Whistlers, including *The Little White Girl* and *Old Battersea Bridge*, modified another Whistler portrait, and improvised an El Greco crucifixion. These had to fit pre-determined frames that were available. It was a challenge.

Another challenge was converting the set to a Nazi consulate for the second Clare Booth play of the year, *Margin for Error*. The structure was stripped and the basic color changed from all browns to light gray with dark green accents. The mood was Bauhaus, and there were long platform benches right and left, tube furniture, and a mural map over the electric fireplace. The bay window beyond the hall became a polygonal recess with Wagnerian figures sketched on the splayed walls. The plate-glass window over the French doors to the terrace at the back somehow failed to acquire the bold swastika planned for it. Present, however, on a column pedestal, was the life-sized bust of Hitler I had modeled. It was saluted periodically during the performance, though not from artistic appreciation.

The set reverted to a residential scene for *The Male Animal*, week of 21 April 1941. One of the eight-sided corner posts and the adjoining wall were brought forward to disrupt the formal symmetry, and the upright surfaces were covered with a patterned apple-green wallpaper (not my choice). The room was furnished with skirted overstuffed sofa and armchairs, and Grand Rapids colonial pieces. A staircase at the back rose in the opposite direction from that in *Kind Lady*, and it had a Chinese-lattice railing (definitely mine).

In July a modified version of Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* was offered for a three-performance run. It was directed by Clarence Geiger, and French Prof. Blaine W. Schick (who had played Karl Baumer in *Margin*) was the only player not a summer student. Also unique was the all-girl stage crew. The flats they handled were embellished with line drawings of clashing Greek warriors and self-possessed Athenian women suggested by the theme.

The 1941-42 season was launched with *The Philadelphia Story*. All four scenes were enacted in the courtyard of the Seth Lord house. Our four octagonal piers again appeared, this time as freestanding posts to a portico. Each outermost pair was linked by
The author with two Guignol stage properties: a replica of a Whistler painting for Chodorov’s Kind Lady and a bust of Hitler for Clare Booth’s Margin for Error, both performed in the 1941 season.

railings, being Greek Revival wrought-iron grilles with anthemion motifs in relief, which I had rescued from an old building that had been demolished on Main Street opposite Wrenn Alley in Lexington. For a vine-clad niche to the right I modeled in clay and cast in plaster a large della Robbia madonna and child, glazed white and having a Wedgwood-blue background. My collection of potted avocados was brought in, and seating was provided by traditional and modern iron garden furniture. The della Robbia
motif was converted into a deep-red linoleum-block print on a light-blue card and became the Guignol's Christmas card to its patrons a month later.

*Ladies in Retirement*, given the second week in December, portrayed the interior of an old house on the Thames estuary ten miles from Gravesend. A massive brick chimney predominated, having an arched fireplace and an oven to one side. The lower part of adjacent walls were sheathed in upright battens, and above them the plaster was smoked and cracked, and parts that had fallen off revealed laths beneath. All of this, including the brick chimney, was meticulously painted. The set was admirably dressed in Victorian furniture by Alfred Andrews, who was to become a successful interior decorator in New York and Connecticut. Costumes were supervised by Anna Freeman.

Mr. Andrews and Mrs. Freeman also lent their expertise to the two following plays. The first was *Old Acquaintance*, which was laid in New York apartments, and the second was O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness!,* which took place in a Connecticut town in 1906. The latter's principal set was the Miller family's living room. It was given an arched doorway with portieres at the back, windows right and left with green tasseled draperies having lambrequins, black wallpaper with red roses on it up to a dropped-ceiling picture mold, an early electric chandelier with a circular table under it in the center, and other less conspicuous furniture. Mr. Andrews enhanced the set with such refined period touches as a fringed velvet spread on the table, on which sat a globe lamp with cord hooked to the chandelier, a Rogers group (*Checkers Down on the Farm*) on the sideboard upstage, a hatrack with straw headgear on it in the hall, a varied assortment of framed pictures on the walls, urns containing snake plants or pampas grass, and lace antimacassars on the backs of the upholstered seats.

Two settings I particularly enjoyed doing in the 1942-43 season were those for *Claudia* and *Arsenic and Old Lace*. *Claudia* took place in a country house seventy miles from New York City, and a converted barn seemed likely, a lean-to effect appropriate. The combination was implemented by having a banistered stairs to a platform, a Dutch door, a wide bungalow window, Pennsylvania stylized animal and floral designs on utensils in view, and a framed copy of the late-eighteenth-century primitive painting *Baby in Red High Chair* from the Museum of Modern Art hanging on the wall. The fireplace was indicated at the front by andirons.
A poster designed for a 1942 Guignol production

week of November 9th
carrying logs backed up against the footlights.

That *Arsenic and Old Lace* resembled the New York production which opened a year before cannot be denied. The action called for specific elements in specified juxtaposition, of a definite character, and there was little alternative. The Brewster house in Brooklyn overlooking Greenwood Cemetery gave us the opportunity to reuse the $25 newel post purchased for *Kind Lady*. The stairway traffic was illuminated by amber glow coming through a stained-glass wheel window in the wall at its base, and doors above and below permitted stealthy and not-so-stealthy entrances and exits, including departures to the cellar ceremonial, both for those who returned and those who did not. If Lexington theatregoers during the week of 18 January 1943 thought that they had encountered the last of Victorian interiors on the Guignol stage, they learned differently when the curtains parted. As Mr. Witherspoon mused about thinking he had seen his last glass of elderberry wine at the end of the comedy—there it was. And like Mr. Witherspoon I departed from the scene, not from Brooklyn but the Guignol, and eventually to Brooklyn, and wrote three books about it. This memoir now written on theatre at the University of Kentucky tends to even up the score.

Although it has not been in the province of this essay to depart far from the production end of theatre, mention has been made of several persons who were to make names for themselves in the professional world after their apprenticeship at the Guignol. Gail Kirn, as Mrs. Robert Schneider, served as librarian at the Staten Island Museum from 1961 to 1977, and as archivist from the latter date to her retirement in 1981. During this score of years she was editor of the museum’s publications. Douglas Dick (a student in *Reunion in Vienna* and the juvenile lead in *Our Town*) went on to Hollywood, where he played the son crippled by World War II action in Lillian Hellman’s *The Searching Wind* in 1946, and the college boy amorous of his professor Loretta Young in *The Accused* in 1949. I recall having seen him in a soap opera with Alan Ladd about that time, and chanced upon him in a waterfront serial on television (one of the six times in my life I ever looked at TV). Greer Johnson, the mind reader in *The Spider*, was in other Guignol plays, but his specialty was writing. The Guignol gave his *Noblesse Oblige* during the 1937-38 season and seven more of his one-act plays during its next. In May of 1943 it presented three performances of his full-length mystery thriller *Cry Havoc*. The
The author's pencil perspective for Arsenic and Old Lace, 1943
Lexington press pronounced it a triumph. Parenthetically, one of the players was Jack Paritz, who was to write television shows in New York and California. Greer’s place in professional theatre was established by co-authoring Mrs. Patterson with Charles Sebree in 1954. It was a three-act play with six songs, most of them sung by the star Eartha Kitt. On opening night at the National Theatre I sat behind Lolo (Mrs. Cass) Robinson, who had directed and acted in many Guignol performances and managed its office; and there were other Kentucky friends in the house. Greer Johnson wrote a number of plays that were given other than on Broadway; some were television shows for NBC and CBC, and they included a rewriting of Mrs. Patterson for BBC.

Soon after leaving the Guignol in 1943, Clarence Geiger and his wife Anne played in a West Coast road-company revival of Abie’s Irish Rose for several months. Clarence next went into show production on Broadway, becoming assistant stage manager for Bloomer Girl and then for Day Before Spring. I considered going into professional theatre design, but when I found out what a long probation period was required I gave it up as impractical. After taking a full-time job in the libraries at Columbia University in 1943 I fell into my niche studying and then teaching Oriental art and culture. I made a number of lasting friendships with Asians, and at least for one of them—the exquisite Japanese dancer Sahomi Tachibana—I designed and built settings for many of her company’s performances. Thus, at least in this instance, after moving so far away from the Guignol experience I eventually found myself back in it.

In the fall of 1946 Frank Fowler returned from a two-year leave to complete his doctorate at Columbia University. The first semester past, preparations were being made to present I Remember Mama. Shortly before 3:00 in the afternoon of 10 February 1947, he had just dismissed an acting class in the lounge when the theatre was found to be on fire. It apparently started in the projection booth. Fifteen students were working back stage. The alarm was sounded and all ran to safety, some, in work clothes, losing their street dress in the disaster. Six fire companies were sent to the blaze. Flames leaped fifty feet and scorched the outside of Boyd Hall. The women’s dormitories were evacuated. The art studios had been moved to the Biological Sciences Building in the late 1930s, and the Music Department had expanded into their old quarters. Its staff and students hurriedly carried out its
equipment, including eighteen pianos. This proved unnecessary. But the theatre lost everything. Damage was estimated at between $40,000 and $50,000. *I Remember Mama* was given on schedule in the University High School auditorium. Claude Jackson created the settings. The show was rated one of Guignol’s best. It terminated an era, because schedule conflicts prevented further occupation of the high-school auditorium. Memorial Hall was considered, but it was found wanting because of the shallowness of its stage. No shows were given during the following season, and Frank Fowler resigned in the spring of 1948. Having made contacts in California during summers, he returned to Santa Barbara. He was associated with the junior college there and later with the University of California at Santa Barbara, and with the Alhambra Theatre. Frank Fowler also played in television shows and the movies. He retired from the entertainment world in 1971.46

Wallace Briggs, who had directed the Guignol during Fowler’s last leave of absence, was his successor. He directed *John Loves Mary*, which was given in temporary quarters the week of 26 July 1948. Scenery again was by Claude Jackson. On 13 February 1950 the Guignol made its maiden appearance in the new University of Kentucky Fine Arts Building. Euripides’ *Medea* had been freshly translated from the Greek by graduate student Melba McCloud. It was adapted for the modern stage by Lolo Robinson and O.G. Brockett, the latter as technical director. Wallace Briggs directed. The Guignol was housed in a grander and more luxurious manner than it had ever known. Veteran Guignolite Lucille Little’s interpretation of *Medea* left little doubt that the performance proper carries precedence over all other theatre considerations. Carol Sax’s still-born peacock curtain had incarnated as a winged Nike Thespian!

It is baffling how involved—even possessive—one gets working in a theatre. This is no less so in the production than in the acting end. Actually, in staging one is not so carried away by the ego factor proper to acting; one rather submerges himself in the group effort of striving toward a common goal. Teachers realize something of this in educating the young, but their situation lacks the intimacy, the immediacy, that casts a spell over those preparing for a show. They lavish time and energy expended nowhere else. At the Guignol the stage and technical people—mostly students—spent more time at the theatre than elsewhere before an opening. Food was sent in that would distress a
dietician. As for the other creature needs, there were two camps, those who took time off to wash, and those who spent it sleeping. Nobody thought twice about finding unconscious bodies curled up in the auditorium seats at any hour of the day or night. Work had to be suspended on the stage for rehearsals between eight and eleven P.M., but afterwards the production people reassembled and some of them would work until time to go to classes. As I look back over the years, although I found people having greater intellectual interests in common, I never felt a better rapport than with my associates at the Guignol. It was less a matter of personal harmony than of compelling destiny. It was also the thrill of creating. We all sensed it. The point may be illustrated by the following episode. In 1939 the Guignol student electrician Bob States was stricken, and he was taken home to Chicago the week before You Can't Take It With You was to be given. He died on the preceding Friday, but his parents fulfilled his last request by sending a telegram to the Guignol on Monday. It read: “Bob expressed the wish that his best wishes be extended for a successful opening. Mr. and Mrs. W.N. States.” It was received just minutes before late comers hurried to their seats, the house lights dimmed, the footlights came on, and the crazy-quilt curtains opened to another world.

NOTES

Part I

This first installment on U.K. Theatre was written as an afterthought to the original undertaking of my firsthand experiences in it, now Part II. It has come about because of the unexpectedly ample research material, intended for an introduction, that was provided by Mr. James D. Birchfield, Assistant Director of the Library for Collection Development and editor of The Kentucky Review, and Mr. Frank Stanger, Assistant Archivist at the University of Kentucky. The author wishes to express his appreciation to these gentlemen and to the following persons for reading the manuscript before its publication and offering corrections and suggestions: Mrs. Dunster Duncan Foster Pettit, Mrs. Lucille Little, Mrs. Gail Kirn Schneider, Mrs. Virginia Boyd Cox, and Dr. John Cutler.

1”Stroller History,” The Kentuckian 22 (1921): 242.
6 "Shall the University Have a Play This Year?," *Idea*, 23 February
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21 April 1911.
9 "Theatricals," *Idea*, 27 April 1911; "Strollers' Banquet' and "Second
11 January 1912.
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16 Program, *The Thirteenth Chair*, 13 May 1922; "Stroller Play Comes
Thursday and Friday," *Lexington Herald*, 15 November 1922.
19 Program, *Local Color*, 16-18 December 1929; program, *The Stroller
20 "Strollers Abandon Rehearsals for Play; Failure to Comply With U.
of K. Rules Charged," *Herald*, 3 December 1937; "Stage Club Dissolution
Talked at U.K.," *Herald*, 4 December 1937; "Strollers Vote to Disband,"
*Herald*, 7 December 1937.
270.
24 Combined program, University of Kentucky Archives.
26 Prospectus, University of Kentucky Archives; "University to Have a
29 Elizabeth McGoffin Garnett, "Backward, Turn Backward," Guignol
program for *Claudia*, week of 2 November 1942, p. 6.
30 "Romany Theatre Opens With Presentation of 'Liliom' on January 7,"
*Kernel*, 14 December 1923; "Miss Marjorie Warden Dies," *Kernel*, 16 April
1926; "Loan Fund Founded as Tribute to Miss Warden," *Kernel*, 11 May
1927.
31 Mary Lyons, "Looking Backward," Guignol program for *Arsenic and
Old Lace*, week of 18 January 1943, p. 12.
32 Interview with Mrs. Dunster Duncan Foster Pettit, 6 January 1986.
34 Lolo Robinson, "Lolo's Looking Glass," Guignol program for *Three's
a Family, week of 6 May 1946, p. 4.

35Interview with Mrs. Dunster Duncan Foster Pettit, 6 January 1986.
37“Sax, Former UK Art Professor, Dies,” Herald, 5 October 1961.
39“Frank Fowler to Become Doctor; Or, How Guignol Theatre Was Born,” Lexington Herald-Leader, 28 May 1944.
40“‘Table d’Hote,’ Dashing Comedy . . .,” Herald, 6 May 1930.
41“Little Theatre Flourishes under Fowler’s Tutelage,” Kernel, 13 May 1938; interview with Mrs. Dunster Duncan Foster Pettit, 6 January 1986.
42A list of plays with their playwrights presented at the Guignol up to date was given in the program for Accent on Youth, week of 17 April 1944, p. 2.

Part II

43“Garden in Rear of Art Center Now Completed,” The Kentucky Kernel, 21 October 1927.
44A list of plays with their playwrights presented at the Guignol up to date was given in the program for Accent on Youth, week of 17 April 1944, p. 2.
45Telephone interview with Mrs. Anne Geiger, 15 January 1986.