

We Get Letters.....

Readers Discuss Community Theatre, Crash Photo, Car Fees

On Theatre

Last week's Courier carried— not check by jowl, but still close enough to evoke comparison—an editorial about the state of culture in the "Cultural Center of the North Country," and an account of the Village Board's final rejection of Potsdam Community Theatre's long-standing appeal for a leasing or waiver of the Civic Center's fees on use of the Auditorium. The undersigned, a member of Community Theatre, couldn't help making this comparison and drawing some logical conclusions.

The editorial pointed out how difficult it was, despite the many and varied programs at State and Clarkson, for the general public to attend the best of these. The situation is no one's fault; there are just too many college personnel who must get in first. The item reported the outcome of a series of negotiations between the Village Board and the one group in Potsdam which conscientiously tries to purvey culture to the public. Now, for the record, I would like to set forth the history of these negotiations and to show what their failure implies for the future of culture in Potsdam.

In October Potsdam Community Theatre re-formed after two years of suspended animation. Though its personnel includes many old members, it defines itself as an essentially new organization. The statement of purpose contained in the re-drafted constitution best describes the group's aims:

Patron's Drive
Assuming that a waiver of Auditorium fees granted the former Community Theatre group in 1961 by the Village Board and never taken advantage of was still in effect, the new group undertook a patron's drive to finance its year's program, and began rehearsals for "Gigi" under Lloyd Howe's direction.

On Nov. 5 the group submitted an open letter petition to the Village Board for some adjustment of janitorial fees and permission to extend rehearsals on the stage. The request was referred to Village Clerk Mary Moriarty and Village Administrator Stanley Howlett. When members of the theater group's Executive Board met with this committee, however, we found they had no power, and the Village Board apparently no longer intended to honor the 1961 waiver agreement. Nonetheless, Potsdam Community Theatre verbally re-petitioned the Village Board, through Mrs. Moriarty and Mr. Howlett, to grant us the waiver.

On Nov. 7 Mayor Anderson wrote Community Theatre President Harold Holden, granting rehearsal permission to rehearse freely, but brushing aside the request for janitorial fees adjustment as un-negotiable and flatly rejecting the appeal for a waiver of the Auditorium fee. In the theater group's answering letter, a counter-offer was made: a fee of \$125 per production (two plays), to cover janitorial services and serve as a token auditorium fee payment.

We made this offer to keep negotiations open and to give the Village Board an opportunity to "save face." Mr. Anderson's reply again was a flat rejection. In the meantime, the Clerk's office refused the cast of "Gigi" access to the auditorium on the grounds that the case was not "closed." "Gigi" was rehearsed for two weeks on two other stages, in a vacant store-front apartment, and in east members' living rooms. I need scarcely add that moral was an all-time low.

On Nov. 17 Potsdam Community Theatre's Executive Board held a council of war, and drafted a new letter for presentation to the Village Board. In it we requested complete waiver of fees, rehearsal carte blanche, free use of storage space for Community Theatre equipment—in short, for the Civic Center as a "home" for Potsdam Community Theatre. We based this request on two things—our claim to be an essentially non-profit cultural enterprise deserving of civic support, and a "shoot-the-sky" attitude born of frustration with this run-around and anxiety for our own future.

On Nov. 19 we presented this bill of particulars in the Village Board's regular meeting. Mayor Anderson was absent; Felix Shelly presided. The Village Board quickly gave a

"yes" vote to all the items. The Courier hailed the Board's action, and "Gigi" went into high gear, confident at last that the coast was clear.

But!!!—On Nov. 26 Mayor Anderson called an emergency Village Board meeting to rescind the motion and vote of Nov. 19. He and Village Attorney Cudley contended this action to have been illegally in defiance of the Village Board's 1960 ruling on Auditorium fees and groups exempt from them.

The Conversation
"All right," said Community Theatre representatives present, "rewrite the 1960 ruling so that Community Theatre can be classified as a fee-exempt group."

"Haven't the power," said Mayor Anderson.
"Of course you do," we said; "this very Board did it in 1961."
"That was illegal too," said the Mayor.

"Then make it legal," we said.
"That takes time," he said.
"We can't wait," we said; "we're in production. We've promised to fulfill to our patronage. Both the Village Board and Community Theatre are going to cut a sorry figure in the public eye if you force us to cancel Gigi."

In the end a compromise was reached which basically awarded nothing to either group: Community Theatre could put "Gigi" on fee-exempt (janitor's fees, however, to be paid) if it pledged its gate receipts to a public charity (we chose the Boy and Girl Scouts). In this way it could define its production as a "benefit," and qualify, albeit spuriously, under the 1960 ruling. Mr. Anderson made it quite clear, however, that future productions of dramatic negotiations would have to be made.

With plans laid for a late February or early March readers-theater production of Arthur Miller's "The Crucible," Potsdam Community Theatre again appeared before the Village Board on Jan. 5. Both sides agree to table the group's request for a rewriting of the 1960 ruling in the face of more pressing business. The Clerk's office agreed, in the meantime, to permit "The Crucible's" cast access to the Auditorium for rehearsals.

Final Episode
The final episode of these negotiations was fully and accurately reported in the Courier's article last week. Though the Board's "action" was anticlimactically simple—there was no discussion, no motion, no vote—it throws Community Theatre and "The Crucible" into an acute crisis. In fact, at the present writing, we cannot assure anyone but ourselves (and that by way of whistling in the dark) that "The Crucible" or any future productions will come out of this year's original high hopes.

Our problem is contained in a single dirty word: Money. We need a stage, and we can't afford the only one available to us. If we have to pay ALL the janitorial and rental fees the Civic Center would exact (bear in mind that putting on a play takes weeks of preparation and rehearsal), we must add between \$150 and \$200 to the cost of EACH PRODUCTION. We have never opposed IN PRINCIPLE payment of rental fees, and all our budget provides for this item. But not \$500-\$600 a year! The local theater could scarcely charge more.

Through the negotiations with the Village Board it was patently clear that various members of the Village Board have no sympathy with our claim to be a purveyor of culture, and that they believe citizens of Potsdam have no such sympathy either. They have opposed our appeal for fee adjustments on three major premises which deserve some discussion here.

Argument One: If Community Theatre doesn't pay, the public will have to—in taxes. This is patently untrue. The Civic Center is maintained as a public service, on a full-time basis, whether money is taken in or not—whether, in fact, it is used or not. It is true that Auditorium fee payments help raise the levy on the Civic Center property. But what does this mean for the individual taxpayer? Does it mean that fee-exempt use of the Auditorium increases his taxes? I doubt it. In any case, the Village Board has never been able to clarify this to our satisfaction.

Argument Two: If the Board makes an exception in favor of one group, what is to stop other groups from asking the same waiver? To which we answer: What indeed? And why shouldn't they? Need the Village Board be afraid or embarrassed by such requests, each of which they certainly have the power to decide on its own

merits? And may not many of these groups already face the same problem we do—the problem of being priced right out of what should be, if not a free facility, at least an affordable one? Members of the Village Board themselves admit that the Civic Center policy needs evaluation. If they can volunteer this confession, isn't it obvious there must be grounds for widespread public dissatisfaction with their inflexible and exclusionary policy?

Argument Three: It is actually the crux of our own issue. Repeatedly during these meetings we heard the contention—more or less baldly put—"If they don't pay their own way, they don't deserve to use public facilities." But what other organized or un-organized community groups in Potsdam DO "pay their own way"? The people who use the public parks? The kids and adults who play organized baseball, or who use the skating rink? The people who swim at Postwood? The students and public who participate in the Winter Carnival?

These projects don't "pay their way," and no one questions their right to exist. Is a group which depends on some sort of income to finance community projects supposed to be too proud to ask for help when such income isn't enough? Must it fold its tents and steal away in shame? Assuming that it fills some need in the lives of its members at least, isn't its demise a loss to the public?

Does Not Pay
But this is quibbling. The fact is, culture does not "pay its way." From time immemorial it has been underwritten, subsidized, bought for a public. To require Potsdam Community Theatre to demonstrate its financial viability is to put it on the level of a business enterprise—and, much as we would like to consider ourselves "successful," we reject such a classification. Our patrons and our audiences are supporters, not investors; they know it, we know it; what intellectual blindness keeps the Village Board from knowing it?

In our present plight we go to the public. Do you agree with the Village Board's arguments, and the philosophy towards culture underlying them? Do you support its views of Potsdam Community Theatre—which, through many ups and downs, has filled a function undertaken by no other groups in Potsdam—as essentially a "business" to be judged in terms of success or failure? We would really like to know.

We can continue to exist, after a fashion, even if the answer is "yes." We can put on sketchy productions in makeshift locations, open to the public for two or three times our present price of admission, and read plays to ourselves over cake and coffee in members' homes—on the long chance that this will enrich Potsdam's shrinking cultural life. Or we can give it up as not worth the effort. Let the colleges and the lucky few who can attend their programs, purvey culture! Potsdam isn't interested. But I hope it doesn't come to that.

Olive Moffett

More On Theatre

To the Editor:
As a member of the Potsdam Community Theatre group, I would like to see a settlement between the Village Board and the group. The problem is the rental fee of \$60 a night. While the group is not a profit making one, we do have to raise enough money to clear our expenses for each production. To be taken into consideration are the costs already involved, royalties, scripts, costumes, technical work, and enough capitol to float the next production. If we have to add the fee of \$60 for each night we present a play to the public, the situation becomes financially impossible.

We try, as a group, to add to the cultural programme of the village, and provide entertainment at a low cost to the public. Cannot the Village Board cooperate by adjusting the fee charged for the auditorium? I would like to know why a fee is charged? I suppose the answer is that lights, heating, and janitor services must be paid for, but do these actually cost \$60 a night? The theatre group does not misuse the auditorium causing damage, etc. We do not add to the janitor's work by leaving a mess behind us. After the last production, the dressing rooms, stairways, an stage were cleared of any litter, and the floors swept floors!

We have an interesting programme planned for the coming months. Is our planning and

work to come to nothing for lack of an auditorium which we can use at a reasonable fee?

Sincerely,
Mrs. Fred Baker

Oppose Fee Hike

To the Editor:
The St. Lawrence County Automobile Club, Inc. with nearly 3,000 members in this county, has joined the New York State Automobile Association in the protest against Gov. Rockefeller's planned increase in Automobile fees. The protest, initiated by the Auto Club of Syracuse, has snowballed across the state and the twenty-one clubs in New York State have taken up the cause.

The St. Lawrence County Auto Club has joined the Auto Club of Syracuse in waving a banner of protest. The flag we wave is older than our country. It's the 1776 "Don't Tread on Me" flag, carried by colonists to protest English taxes.

The flag is designed to be placed on the car window. They are free and will be given to any motorist, club member or not.

We ask that you join with us and the 21 Auto Clubs in New York State in preventing this onerous tax (or fee) from being "passed" through the Legislature.

Very truly yours,
A. Sage Cordwell
Secretary
THE ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY AUTOMOBILE CLUB, INC.
201 State Street
Ogdensburg, New York

Motorists in New York State are among the nation's leaders in the amount they pay for their registration fees. The amount proposed by Gov. Rockefeller will make them top leaders. New Yorkers pay from \$8 to more than \$30 for registration. In adjoining states, the fees are as follows: Pennsylvania \$10; New Jersey from \$10 to \$25; Massachusetts \$6; Connecticut \$10; Vermont \$32; Ohio \$10; Illinois from \$6.50 to \$22.

The St. Lawrence County Auto Club, Inc. has written to Senator Robert McEwen and Assemblyman Verner Ingram protesting this increase in re-

gistration, stating that it is unfair and discriminatory. Motorists should not be asked to pay more than their fair share of state taxes, and will oppose any attempt to single them out to shoulder new burdens in addition to those they are already carrying. Constant vigilance by efficient officers, who protect the interest of all car owners, fighting unjust automobile legislation is one of the requisites of this Auto Club.

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201 State Street
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Used Poor Taste

To the Editor:

I was very surprised and disturbed when I looked at the front page of today's (Feb. 7) paper. The picture of Mr. Jones lying dead in the wrecked car was very sharp in detail, too much so for a paper of the Courier's caliber.

The picture was quite disturbing—and I didn't know Mr. Jones. But what about those that did know him; his friends and his children? The two older children will obviously see the story. Is this any kind of a picture that you would like them to remember their father by?

I am surprised in your lack of good taste and thoughtlessness in allowing this picture to be published. If Mr. Jones had been drunk, perhaps you would have been justified in using this picture as a good example to others. But since no one was to blame, as you have stated, perhaps a picture of the wreck AFTER the deceased had been removed would have done just as well.

Sincerely,
Walter J. A. Crumb
Brasher Falls, N. Y.

Marilyn Foster Leads Parishville Honor Roll

The honor roll averages for the last semester at Parishville-Hopkinton Central School have been released. The following

Sunday Concerto Includes Seniors

Eight outstanding senior music students at The State University College at Potsdam will be featured in a concerto program by the Crane Symphony Orchestra Sunday, Feb. 17 at 3 p. m. The honors program will be held in the College Theatre, under the direction of Prof. Maurice Baritaud.

Participating students, each selected as the top instrumentalist or vocalist in their field of study, will be Kim Kassling, organ; Alan Goodman, bassoon; Barbara Burris, soprano; Constance Bell, clarinet; Kathleen VerHow, piano; Marion Acker, piano; Susan Wood, soprano; Edward Kasouf, piano.

The program will include works by Handel, Vivaldi, Verdi, Debussy, Mozart, Brahms and Prokofieff. The public is invited.

are listed in descending order:

Marilyn Foster (93.6), Tommy Elek, Sharon Hampton, Bonnie Hollinger, Barbara Parker, Joan Thaler, Nancy Martin, Patty Macomber, Joseph Rosenbarker, Billie Nurney, Meribeth Barton, Verona Simonds and Bonnie Champney.

Hilton Hotaling, Rose Rosenbarker, Mike Taylor, Barbara Wells, Patty Tyler, Dale Kingsley, Donna Planty, Ruth Ann Miller, Chris Nelson, Dean Harper, Tommy Hoyt, Diane Nelson, Susan Elek and Fay Kingsley.

Ann Nurney, Louise De Carr, Bonnie Burgess, Douglas Johnson, Catherine Malbone, Donna Tupper, Alan Wilson, Marie Tyo, Gloria Randall, Donna Wells, Carol Weems, Susan Sampter, Katherine Thompson, Dale Burnett, Donald Powell and Joseph Stark.

ON JURY DUTY
Area residents who will serve on jury duty beginning Feb. 18 are Emily Fisher, Lula Clark and Arthur Unger.

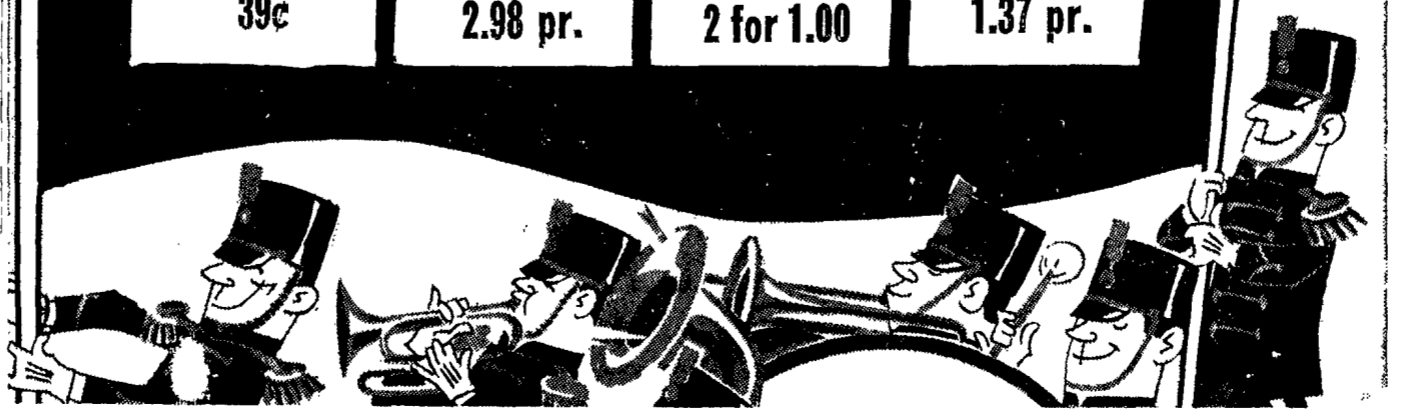
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