



just all in storage. It had been purchased by a Harry Thrakill and they used to use it for a produce center but other than that, it was pretty much in disrepair. The committee finally got itself together during the year of late '53 and early '54 and formed an organization called "Helena Unlimited." They sold memberships in Helena Unlimited for \$1 per member and there were finally, after the complete drive was made, 13,625 members, or \$13,625. With that \$13,625 Helena Unlimited purchased the old Capitol Malt & Brewery theater building for \$5,000. They had a tour train built with another \$4,500 and the remainder ran the operation for the first year. The work at the theater began with the help of all the kids from Last Chance Gulch, many of them still living in Helena today. There was no water and no lights of any kind. We worked there feverishly for several months. Over 100 truck loads of junk, old potatoes and the like were taken out of the Old Brewery Theater. Logan and Underseth Contractors chopped their way through and built basically the first theater to be in Helena for many, many years. We opened in 1954 with several of the Montana people and a few people from out-of-state. That was the beginning of the Old Brewery Theater which later became, from '54 until '72—19 consecutive years—the "No. 3" summer theater in the United States. The first play presented at the Old Brewery Theater was "Down to Earth." It was a play which Doris had directed and produced in high school that year. In 1954 we did several plays at the Old Brewery Theater and also continued at Frontier Town, but in 1955 we discontinued Frontier Town and concentrated solely on the Old Brewery Theater. The Last Chance Tour Train was built and made four trips a day, at 8:30, 10:30, 1:30 and 3:30, with tours of Helena, and, of course, a stop at the theater.

My work with theater had been only in the last four years at Frontier Town with some prior experience on the French Riviera. But as the Executive Producer of the Old Brewery Theater I then started auditions for our summer theater company, both in Washington, D.C., which I conducted every March, and in San Francisco, California, conducted by my Associate Executive Producer, Donald Peoples, from Helena, who worked with us in the summer and taught school at Sangar, California in the fall. We had as many as 150-200 people at the auditions and held the auditions for three days in Washington, D.C. at the Sheraton Park Hotel. From that

audition and the San Francisco audition we came up with a company of about 35 people and we proceeded from there.

I want to make one thing absolutely clear, as President Nixon would say, at this point. There were no funds for this theater. Even though the Internal Revenue Service didn't believe this, it cost us over \$85,000 during the 19 years of our work, and we paid for all of it. We borrowed the money from the First National Bank & Trust Company, cashed our insurance policies and took loans on insurance policies to keep the theater going. No one said we had to do it, but we did it. I remember our problems with IRS. I can't think of a worse mistake made by an agency of federal government. We proved to them, beyond a shadow of a doubt, our financial losses, but this is where sometimes federal government just gets out of line and stays out of line. It cost us several thousand dollars. The property was finally sold for \$53,000. I went into the bank with the \$53,000 check, paid off all the bank notes and paid off everything we ever owed against the Brewery Theater. None of our time for 20 years nor thousands of dollars worth of notes would the IRS allow. After about a five year battle with the IRS, it cost us over \$10,000. I feel very strongly about this—I know we were right. I know the IRS was wrong, but, once again, this is where government steps in, sometimes not knowing the full story—not wanting to know the full story.

Over the period of 18 to 19 years we had over 1,000 actors and actresses from all over the United States who came to the Old Brewery Theater and performed. As Executive Producer I produced over 175 major Broadway productions as well as close to 65 major children's productions, plus variety shows. The Old Brewery Theater, also a part of Helena Unlimited from '54 through 1962, was a combined operation, with the train making money every year and, of course, the theater losing money every year. The train, or Helena Unlimited, would help a little bit, but the Marshalls paid most of the bills. Doris was, the first few years, not only doing all the executive directing of all the shows, but cooked for almost all of the students and resident company people who lived at the theater. The theater building had 27 rooms. We had a boys' dormitory and a girls' dormitory, an apartment for the directors, plus individual rooms, a costume room, shops and lobbies, the "dungeon" and things of that nature.

We were very, very fortunate over the years to have very fine

young directors: Bill Gratton from Portland University; Dr. Paul Ouelette, who headed up the Department of Drama at the University of Portland for many, many years; Kenneth Marsolais, Doris's nephew who started with us and was with us for eight years. He went to Broadway and became a very fine producer. He produced "The Shadow Box," which won the Tony Award and also had several other shows on Broadway. Many other actors and actresses have gone on to television and Broadway and traveled with theater companies. Timmy Stetzer from Helena has been traveling for many years since leaving the Old Brewery Theater and has had many major and minor successes in the field of theater. All the work which had been done we would start remembering every Memorial Day when we would again start to clean up the Old Brewery Theater. Some of our Board of Directors, Bob and Grace Painter and others, spent many Memorial Days at the Old Brewery Theater cleaning and getting ready for the entourage to arrive on June 15th. We were one big happy family. We're very proud to say that during all the 19 years we were at the Old Brewery Theater no young man or young lady was ever arrested, no one was ever in jail—we only had to send two home during that entire time. We lived as one family, and we did it my way. That was as peaceably as possible, forceably if necessary, but we had to do it our way in order to keep those show troupes going. They would do one show nightly with Sundays off while we rehearsed two more. Picnics were always a part of the deal on the day off and we found that we'd get ready for a big picnic with all those kids and all they'd want to do on their day off was sleep. Almost all of the young people who came from the East or even from the West hadn't had too much to eat during the years because they were in the field of drama or radio or television; and one of the interesting things we observed was that they always put on from 10-15 pounds while they were at the Old Brewery Theater.

In 1962 at the annual meeting of Helena Unlimited it was decided that the Old Brewery Theater would become a separate, non-profit corporation and Helena Unlimited would continue with the tour train, which it did. I was elected President of Helena Unlimited in 1962 and from 1962 until the present day I am still the President and we have a Board of Directors which runs Helena Unlimited.

All these years we went on, from '54 until the ill-fated Urban

Renewal project came into effect. Because a bunch of promoters wanted the area, we found ourselves in the middle of our project and having that project destroyed. On July 4, 1972 the Old Brewery Theater was torn down, much to the dismay of many, many people throughout the entire United States because we were the No. 3 summer theater in the United States. We had petitions signed by over 7,000 people to save the theater. The late Mayor Bill Scribner and some City Commissioners did all they could, but in the end we were unable to convince the bureaucrats that they had confused change with progress and the building was destroyed. I was at the City Commission meeting every week for over a year because they were going to close us down on the excuse that it was a dangerous building. As the head of the Old Brewery Theater I was forced to get a million dollar liability policy in order to open up in the years of '71 and '72. We got the policies. During all this time, we found ourselves getting deeper into debt, but the theater was something we loved, something we wanted and something we continued to have.

I finally took my good friend, Joe Campeau, to Washington, D.C. for the last plea for preservation funds and this was, I think, one of the most fabulous events which ever happened to me in my life. We had many heads of government agencies at this presentation on that afternoon and I presented our case with slides, with pictures, audio, video, newspaper clippings—you name it, we had it. The many heads of agencies who were there were from the Department of Interior, the Department of Agriculture, Fish & Wildlife Service, the White House, Department of Labor—I think there were 19 different agencies represented that afternoon as we made our presentation to get the \$250,000 preservation grant to repair the Brewery Theater so it could continue. A vote of all those agencies was taken that afternoon after we completed our presentation. They asked for a recess so they could call to arrange approval for the \$250,000 and, believe it or not, this was the day on which President Nixon froze all the preservation funds! If we'd have been there the day before, the Old Brewery Theater would still be standing today. We had lost our case. I remember walking all the way from the Capitol downtown to Lafayette Park with Joe Campeau. It was close to Valentine's Day; we stopped in and got some valentines for Joe Campeau's daughter. We went back to the hotel. I bought a bottle of



Canadian Club and we sat in the hotel that night and took care of the whiskey—didn't go out to dinner. We came back to Helena very much disgusted with the entire bureaucratic operation of the United States Government at that time. Even though President Nixon had been a friend, this was the day he destroyed the arts and theater as far as the State of Montana and as far as we were concerned. It didn't have to happen. The Urban Renewal project in Helena did not have to take the Old Brewery Theater, but it was taken; and today I think you'll see that the houses and the operations there do not fit into the motif of famous old Last Chance Gulch, but they are there and there is nothing anybody can do about it. We did our last year of shows having the biggest year ever. I think one of our most outstanding productions was "Fiddler on the Roof," directed by Ken Marsolais with a full 19-piece orchestra, with all of the Helena talent. Our "Tevya" from Salt Lake City, Glen Sacos, was outstanding, along with all of our other people. I hope we will be able to see theater thrive in Montana. They are trying very hard with the current Grand Street Theater, they are doing very well, and I certainly wish them the best of luck.

Audrey Creecy of KFBB television in Great Falls and CBS produced a film about the Old Brewery Theater, "From Hops to Props." It was a very fine film and it tells all the history from the day the Old Brewery Theater opened until the day the Old Brewery Theater closed.

One of my very closest friends, Ken Myers, who also had worked at the theater, has now gone on to greater things in the ad business. He owns an agency in New Orleans and is perhaps one of the most gifted young writers I have ever met in my life. I sort of took him "under my wing" at a very young age and he has done very well. Ken wrote more articles for nation-wide publicity than the Old Brewery Theater had ever received. He was also on our Board of Directors, but the nation-wide publicity which we received was something we'll never forget and neither will Helena. I certainly know that Ken has a personal feeling in his heart for the Old Brewery Theater because part of his family life was up there as well.

We are left with many fond memories of our guests at the Old Brewery Theater. Over the years we had such stars visit us as Gary Cooper, Myrna Loy, Ian McDonald, Steve Brody, Broderick Crawford, Dinah Shore, George Montgomery and Hoot Gibson. We built a national reputation for theater in

Montana. Whether it be the *New York Times*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Reader's Digest*, the *Denver Post*, the *Washington Post*, *Life*, *Look* magazine—you name them—the Brewery Theater had the publicity and it was a very fine portion of Helena's theatrical life.



Enjoying a cool beer, prop room, Old Brewery Theater, 1968.



Curtain call, "Ten Little Indians," Old Brewery Theater, 1954. Walter Marshall (2nd from right) and cast.