

Transcript -- Sarah Elizabeth Minchin

Narrator: Sarah Elizabeth Minchin

Interviewer:

Interview Date:

Interview Time:

Location: Hallworth House, Providence, Rhode Island

Length: 2 audio files; 54:24

Track 1

Q: You were mentioning that Henry Barker --

Sarah Elizabeth Minchin: Henry Ames Barker... What would you want --

Q: Who were some of the people that did originally start? You mentioned that there was a professor at Brown, and --

SEM: Thomas Crosby Junior. He always used that junior. He was a fine actor. He went to the -- I'm not sure of the spelling of the name -- it was Wheatley, I think, School in New York. He graduated from there. He started out thinking we would get on the stage, but somehow it didn't work out. And he came back to Brown, and he became a professor in English there. And then he became a professor [01:00] -- I guess he extended his studies -- he became a professor in the English Department of Brown University, that and the Theater, and an excellent actor. And he really was, the stage did lose something by losing him, I think. But, well a lot of things have been (inaudible), you know how that goes. So then there a number of young men that were great friends that wanted to act, but there wasn't any chance, really. So this old Talma Theatre was just anybody that happened to get going or wanted to do something. And so (inaudible) these boys at Brown pulled up and made the Talma Theatre [02:00], and took up that building -- have you seen that? It's a boys club now I think.

Q: No, I haven't been down there, but I want to get down and visit.

SEM: But it was a pretty good theatre, and it held 400 people, and it also worked as a pretty good stage, and dressing rooms, and so on. Then I came into the picture there when The Players was born in 1909. My teacher was a Ms. [Muljer?] from high school, and she wanted me to join. My mother was not so keen on that. I'm sure you understand that.

Q: Yes, life upon the wicked stage, as they say.

SEM: Finally, I joined The Players. I was a charter [03:00] member of The Players in 1909. But we didn't get really going until 1910, and I was in the play then.

Q: So basically, they formed the club as an outlet for their own performing and to be able to put on plays. Is that --

SEM: All of these youngsters wanted to perform, and they didn't get much chance at the university. And so they formed their own little group. That was in 1886. I wasn't even around then. I guess they did some very good work, from what I hear. But of course I think people dress those things up to themselves when they're talking about them.

Q: So it was in a sense [04:00] a group associated with this professor and so forth at Brown, and they move it out of the university into a public theater as opposed to staying with the university.

SEM: That is right. In 1910 I think was the first performance. I'm not sure, I know I was there but I couldn't tell you positively the date.

Q: Was there a lot of performance theater in Providence at the time that this was going on?

SEM: Oh, no, not at all. But somebody said to me that The Players had a lot of little theaters around. There weren't any little theaters. There was a group of people in Elmwood where -- at that time it was a very lovely section of Providence -- and they did set up a little [05:00] theater

group. It was very intermittent, they did it when they thought they could. Most of them were business people. But really Players -- and I'm not being very exact about it -- but I really do think that Players is the grandparent of all the little theaters that you find in Rhode Island, and there are lots of them. Very many. And some of the people were friends since the man that played the -- oh, what's his name -- [06:00] policeman in the show is one of the boys that came from --

Q: Barrington.

SEM: -- I don't know --

Q: I think it was Barrington.

SEM: Does he live in Barrington? I'm not sure which little theater he came from. But they all kind of looked to Players as a parent, or they have in the past. I don't know whether they are now, things change. He's one of the outgrowth of Players, really.

Q: Was there much professional theater in Providence at all? Touring companies, things of that nature?

SEM: Tremendous amount in the old days, yes, a great deal. Providence Opera House was a very successful theater for many many years. I went as long as I can remember there, through that period of my adolescence. I went time after [07:00] time, saw some of the great stars at the Providence Opera House, which was only torn down a comparatively short, as years go, a short time ago.

Q: Was it a school teacher that suggested that you perform with players? Who was it that talked you into climbing on the stage.

SEM: My teacher at high school, in elocution I guess they call it, declamation. She was very anxious for me to get into Players, but Players wasn't formed even then. But when it was formed, my husband came to my graduation exercises and [08:00] saw my performance, and then --

(inaudible) except that's where I met him. It was a year or so after that, I think. And then he was very active. He did beautiful drawings and painting, and building of scenery. He practically all the great productions that we did. While he lived, he was very very active, and very successful.

Q: In the early formative days, when Players was putting itself together in the Talma, did they do a lot of, for lack of a better word, recruiting? [09:00] Such as they would see someone at a high school like yourself doing something? Or did people just come to them because they were doing so well?

SEM: I don't think they did much recruiting. People were anxious to get into The Players, and it was a successful organization. My teachers, I say, got me in. I didn't belong in the society group really of that era. I knew of some of them, and we became friends and all. But there was nowhere some special line drawn between people. But they didn't take in everybody. They took in those that thought they could contribute to the theater. And so, they did. And it was because it was -- I think I'm right in saying -- that we put on the first [10:00] show that The Players did. And that was --and I think I'm right in this, I can check this -- but I think it was The Liar. Is that right?

Q: Yes it was.

SEM: And that was 1909?

Q: 1909, December. It was Professor Thomas Crosby. And you're husband did the scenery for that show.

SEM: I'll bet he did, and a great many more afterwards.

Q: Yeah, his name appears in the cast and crew list for show after show after show. What were some of the problems in working in an old theater like The Talma? You mentioned it was a society, so there's obviously a social side to what's going on in the theaters. What were some of the things back when they were getting started in working in The Talma that spring to mind?

SEM: I don't quite get what you want. The social side of it, or the --

Q: [11:00] Either side, anything that you can sort of think of that... Just how it was.

SEM: There was a very nice crew there. We had a lot of very attractive people, and they were very supportive. I mean they wanted to have a theater here. But then we grew, you know, and we couldn't in, The Players, for a while. And then it had its down period, as most things do. In the meantime, they produced -- well, from 1909 till 1916, I think I'm right -- they used The Talma Theatre. We would have liked to have bought it, it wasn't ideal in any way for theater. But it was better [12:00] than any other place. In the meantime, a group of -- most of The Players, too -- were offering more money than The Players could afford for the Boy's Club. And they bought The Talma Theatre for the Boy's Club. And that has remained in their hands for very many years, really. Now I'm not sure whether they still have it or not.

Q: I'm going to look into that, because I'd like to see what happened to the building, just as a point of interest.

SEM: So then we were out of a home, and there again Harry Barker was very able in fixing the Infantry Hall building. Now that you don't know, you're not old enough. The First Light Infantry [13:00] was a military order, but it was a very much of a society group, too. The hall was simply tremendous. I couldn't tell you how big it was. I ought to know, but I don't. Because as a little girl in dancing school, I led the march with the professor of the dancing school, whatever they called the exhibition there. So I ought to know more about Infantry Hall than I do. But Harry devised some kind of scenery making a wall through the [14:00] middle of that hall. And that gave us two places, do you see? And the stage there was not very ideal, but it was fairly big and we were able to use it as a stage for quite a number of years. Then they sold the building. We didn't want to buy that one, and I don't know that we could've. But we didn't want it. It was too much building. But that had a very happy period because we did some outstandingly good productions. And the social side of it took over and had an orchestra play in that extra piece of the hall. People danced between [15:00] the acts and they liked that very much.

Q: Oh, that's neat. Thinking back on The Talma again, just for a little bit, what are some of the outstanding shows that you remember, that you were perhaps either involved in because you were in, or because Mr. Barker was in, when you were in the early stages?

SEM: My first big chance, I was in one or two one-act tryout plays, and I can't even remember the name.

Q: They had tryout plays, along with their main stage productions?

SEM: It was an extra thing, and let people who wanted to act tryout.

Q: Ah, I see.

SEM: I can't remember the first thing I was in, I remember it in a way, but I don't remember --

Q: Let me look back in the old [16:00] list of plays, I think it was December of 1910 if I did my homework correctly.

SEM: I think you're right.

Q: Let me see if I can... Homework time... Here we go. Yes, Sybil Amberly in My Lord and Livery, by S. Theyre Smith, was the first role I found in here that you had done. They did three short plays that particular --

SEM: Those would have been tryouts, you see. They used them for a show.

Q: Ah, that's neat. This was a way of having more people in to perform, while preparing for the... That's a really good idea. So they were really trying to develop [17:00] performers as well as just performing for themselves.

SEM: And, as I say, Harry Barker was very -- it's awfully hard to not seem very personal about this -- but he really was an artist. That wasn't his business, but he was an artist. He painted scenery, he built scenery. And he did some beautiful things.

Q: Can you think of any, well I guess people would call them perhaps anecdotes, just events or situations that occurred at The Talma that maybe stuck in your mind, problems with shows, difficulties, anything --

SEM: There always were problems with shows, haven't you learned that?

Q: Yes, some problems you remember more than others.

SEM: You don't know how you get through some [18:00] of it, but you do. You'd like to know one that we had that was very --

Q: Good, bad, indifferent. Just things that stick in your mind. It's all relevant.

SEM: Well, you can cut it out if you don't want it. Do you know Pomander Walk?

Q: No, I'm not familiar with that, no.

SEM: It's an English theater, and that was a great success. I think it was well done, too. I was in it, so I think it was well done. No, but it really was one of the big successes. The stage has the fronts of five little houses on a riverside, and [19:00] he did a beautiful job with that. They were really charming little places, with little gardens in front. It was really beautiful, I've got some pictures of that. Not handy.

Q: I'd sure like to see some of those at some point.

SEM: I'm moving out, you see, if you'd come to me a year or two ago I could have done much better for you. But he did that, and oh it was a great success. And it was at the time of the start of -- was it the Second World War? Or, no, I guess it was the First World War

Q: First World War, sure. I can look it up here in a little book I believe. The realistic type of scenery and so forth, did that really help sell some of the early shows?

SEM: Oh, [20:00] everything was realistic for Harry. I've often thought when I've seen some of the more modern theater that he wouldn't have liked it really, I don't think.

Q: He was much more inclined towards the realistic types of --

SEM: Very definitely. And he was awfully good at it. And because he did that show there --

Q: Pomander Walk, it was by Parker. It was done in March of 1917.

SEM: By whom does it say --

Q: Directed by Henry Barker, who also did the stage, and it was written by Louis N. Parker.

SEM: That's right, Louis Parker. Cambridge Social Dramatic Club was going to do, and that [21:00] director was tied up with some kind of military thing, he couldn't do it. And they asked Harry to transport our Pomander Walk up there. He too was tied up with many things and he said he couldn't take the time to go up and direct it, but he could send somebody that could. And that somebody was I. (inaudible)

Q: Was that your first directing job?

SEM: Oh, no, I'd done smaller things, but this was a big production. Really big. All these houses, and little gazebos that people mess in, oh it was really a bit production. I hope I've got a picture I can show you but I'm sure The Players have.



Q: We'll be digging through that sometime. [22:00]

SEM: The players have a lot of pictures of all of the productions, I think. I traipsed back and forth to Cambridge two and three times a week to direct [ringing phone] that show.

Q: I'll get your phone for you, just a minute we'll we put this on pause.

[pause]

Q: That's all it takes, once phone calls are over you just stop and start. This comes to mind because of the 1980s and the ERA and things like that, were there a lot of women directing plays, were you involved in that, or were you a rather unusual person for that?

SEM: Well, I became so, I wasn't then. That director just folded, he had too much else to do, and he couldn't direct, he said. He positively couldn't. [23:00] So then they asked Harry to send his assistant. Well, everybody was getting all tied up in one thing, and so he thought I could do it. See, I was just a -- well, what I would call now a girl growing up, but in those days you were an adolescent, really. I was about 19 or so. Well, I did. I traipsed back and forth to Boston on a train, and then took a car over to Cambridge. And I stayed overnight quite a number of nights with Ms. Houghton of the Houghton Mifflin people. I had dinner with her, and then went to the theater, and that was my routine [24:00] for about three months, pretty near.

Q: That's quite a period of time. Did The Players often send people out, in other words did other groups ask for assistance from The Players at that time in the --

SEM: No, this is very unusual. But it was understandable because everybody was working for the war then. That would be the First World War

Q: Yeah, sure. 1916, 1917, that would be about then.

SEM: That would it. So I did that. But they weren't sending people out to direct or act even in those days. Though I wonder what else we could link up with that that you would be interested in.

Q: One thing that might be of interest would be [25:00] just to maybe talk about some of the technical problems or positive sides of The Talma Theatre itself. What worked, what didn't? All theaters have things that work and things that don't.

SEM: Like trial and error. Well, I don't know where --

Q: Well how many people did it seat, roughly? Three, four hundred? Two hundred?

SEM: You mean...

Q: The Talma, how large was the audience size of the...

SEM: Well the audience was four hundred.

Q: Four hundred. And you did roughly how many shows?

SEM: We were always stuck with five with scenes.

Q: And how many nights would each play --

SEM: This was with the theater, you see. I think when we did it at The Talma it was three, possibly four [26:00] nights. I can't really remember. At Infantry Hall I think that held in step with those figures. Got some new members, of course, that were interested by that time, young people's (inaudible). Then, after that we had a bad time because people who'd owned that building -- it was a religious group -- sold it. I can't remember exactly what the name of that was, but it was a well-known charitable group. And then, there again Harry stepped up to the donation and fixed Elks Auditorium so that we could use that. [27:00] I think we only played three nights

there, because they had a big auditorium, there's nothing we could do about that, and we didn't want empty seats. So I think that we played three nights there.

Q: If you played three nights and it was a pretty good show you could count on a reasonably full house --

SEM: Oh yes. We had full houses.

Q: -- rather than extending it. That's good.

SEM: And then Harry had to build a stage out for us to even put a show on there.

Q: This is at the Elks?

SEM: At the Elks. They had just one of these little narrow stages that were really more for speakers and maybe a singers or something. He built out the stage so that we had a sizeable [28:00] room. And we had a very rough time there, not because they weren't cooperative but because we weren't fitting into the right things there. We had to change some of our choices of plays because we couldn't stage them on that stage. So we had real trouble there, for getting the kind of thing we could do and could cast, and remember that in war time people were (inaudible).

Q: That might be an interesting thing, also, that we can talk about a little bit. Back when the theater was formed what determined play selection? Who decided --

SEM: I think in those days they called it, the dramatic committee. Afterwards -- and I think now it still holds [29:00] -- it's still the production committee.

Q: Do they have any particular philosophy of plays?

SEM: No, we didn't then anyway. We did what we thought was good theater.

Q: Just whatever was available that would be...

SEM: But of course, there again, you had to watch the kind of casting you could do, when you could get the right people. Of course nowadays you take anything, but we were not that kind of people. I remember I played in [Cantera's Weldons White?]. I was criticized, not only I but the players. A man who was connected with the Butler hospital [30:00] and his wife who were society people (inaudible).

Q: What were they upset about? I'm not familiar with the plays.

SEM: Well, it was really -- how will I put it? I know that one scene was a dinner party and the woman of the group had defended a boy that was trying to write. And of course the old tongues got wagging, you can imagine. And the result was that one person -- I don't know if it was the husband of the leading woman, yes I think it was, I think he was killed [31:00] -- it was really a treatise against gossip. It really was. Fine, fine play.

Track 2

Q: A painting of you in the character of Lady Teazle. What was the name of the painter again, that did that for you?

SEM: Stacy Tolman, who was a member of the art club, or course, as he would be. And I think a pen and pencil club, too. He studied abroad, and painted abroad. I only learned, maybe a month or so ago, that he had a painting in the Louvre.

Q: That's wild. I take it that, from some of the things that you've mentioned, that The Players in effect had connections with people that were in other societies, painting societies, writing societies, [overlapping dialogue] that would work in with the [01:00] group.

SEM: That's right. Take, for instance, Professor Crosby. I had the best little painting he ever did. He really wasn't a great artist at all, but he did belong to the art club, and he did send things in when they were having an artist's show and things like that. But Stacy Tolman was really, really a great artist.

Q: Did this kind of artistic connection also reflect in the audiences that you got? Were the audiences pretty much from the same social group of people --

SEM: I think so.

Q: -- as opposed to just everybody in town--

SEM: No, not altogether. But some, yes, I think very definitely. I don't know how much you know in Providence, but there are two or three people that were really outstanding [02:00] artists that belonged to Players. When we did shows that needed something special, and even now even though we don't know the people at the School of Design so well, if we need something we holler loud enough we get it from the school.

Q: (laughter) So the thrust of interest, then, for a performing group like this would have been among that group of people that were also interested in other aspects of the arts as well, as opposed to just general public.

SEM: Yes.

Q: OK, that's interesting. In reading the brief capsule of history that was in the 65th Anniversary, listing the whole of the plays and so forth, they mention that at the old Talma Theatre when you were [03:00] changing scenery you had to store the stuff outside the stage door.

SEM: That was true sometimes, yes. If we had big things they did have to.

Q: Just a lack of general storage space?

SEM: Yes.

Q: And it's mentioned using people's drawing rooms for rehearsals. Did that ever cause a lot of problems in moving around?

SEM: Well, we did do a good deal of trotting around to different rehearsals, that's true.

Q: Did you have access to The Talma whenever you wanted it? Or did you just have access to it certain days of the week?

SEM: That's a hard question for me to answer, because I personally was pretty young when things were starting there. I wouldn't have gone in at any time, but I think quite a lot of the people connected with the staging went in most any time.

Q: So there was a general access to the building. [04:00]

SEM: I think that is true. I always remember one of the things that Harry went in to see a rehearsal of a -- I think they were Portuguese people, there were a lot of Portuguese here in Rhode Island -- they were putting on something. He decided he'd swap down to see what it was like. They had this character -- I don't know what the play was -- but anyway, they had a trap door in the stage. They used that trap door, and he said the women they just dropped her down, which shocked his sensibilities.

Q: (laughter) While The Players were doing their theatrical presentations, there was other, for lack of a better word, community theater going [05:00] on in Providence --

SEM: Portuguese, definitely, because there were a large number here. I don't think there was what you would call community theater in most places. They sometimes invited us to go somewhere and play. And gradually they'd get interested. I know in East Greenwich they have now a very active play house. They didn't have that. And then they were good enough to honor

me by making me a first honorary -- I don't know what it was, president, or what it was. Anyway, they gave that to me. And they're quite active, East Greenwich. And there was a big one started up in Barrington, and that, I think, is going pretty strong. [06:00] I can't get around nowadays, but I used to go see them. And they did good work, some of them did excellent work. I'm trying to think, I know Pawtucket has one. And I know that there's a restaurant called New Farm Restaurant where they produce one night a week only. You go for dinner..

Q: But back when The Players were starting, most of these other communities then really had nothing as far as community --

SEM: They didn't have much. I think the only one, that I told you of was The Elmwood Group, and that wasn't a regular scheduled thing.

Q: And then the Portuguese Community occasionally would [07:00] do shows.

SEM: And they decided they wanted a little theater group, and they'd start up. Some of them successfully, and others you wouldn't know if it would be.

Q: Were shows at The Players often taken to other communities in the beginning?

SEM: Yes, some -- well, I say often. I won't say often -- but it really was a big job to move the scenery and properties and everything. For instance here, Hallworth House, has a very big recreation room and a big dining room I'd guess you call it, I don't know. I don't go down because I don't like those things. The Players brought here a scene from the I Do I Do, you know [08:00]. They did it, and of course the whole people here went. They loved it.

Q: But this kind of thing has been going on, in other words, almost since The Players began.

SEM: Oh, yes.

Q: I guess that would be some like yourself being asked to go up and direct the show up in Cambridge, and things of this nature were pretty common. Was there a lot of, for lack of a better word, interlinking among the drama societies, the art society? Did people from one society know the people from societies?

SEM: I used to a show, that is I acted in a show at one of the lady's afternoons, I guess you'd call it, at the Art Club. I used to go and do a show there once a year. But that was all Players. I can't say now [09:00], I'm a member of the Art Club but I can't get around. And things are changing, personnel is changing. I don't know if they're doing it any more. But we always used to fit in, and when they had a Christmas show, everybody that was in that Christmas show, most of them were Players.

Q: One of the things you were mentioning in the move to Infantry Hall was something that I had never heard of before was having a dance band and dancing in between the acts.

SEM: Well that was because we had that extra space at the other end of Infantry Hall from the stage, you see.

Q: Was that very unique to do something like that, or was that common to theaters, or what?

SEM: I don't honestly know that at all. We did it because we wanted to use the space, and somebody wanted to [10:00] have a dance. So that was it.

Q: Was this practice for some time while you were at Infantry Hall?

SEM: Well, we were there, I don't know how long exactly we were there. We did some good shows there, though. Pomander Walk was one of them, as I say I went up to Cambridge and put the show on up there for them. I don't how I ever did it, but I did. And our scenery went up for them. They trucked it up there.



Q: Now you were mentioning when you were asked to go up there and do the show it was in 1917, 1916 or 1917, with the war and so forth. I shouldn't say did the war have an effect, I'm sure the war had an effect [11:00]. What was the effect of the war on a social and performing group like The Players?

SEM: Well, we did what we could, and I think we did plays that probably were not our very best, because everybody was working in those days on something. I took a group of Players around to high schools for bonds, to sell bonds. We did quite well. We took a group in the daytime, they wanted it at that time. Or in the evening to play something or other. You know, some little play. We did quite a lot.

Q: Did you find the manpower shortage to be a pretty [12:00] significant problem?

SEM: Very, very difficult.

Q: Because I know in World War II, for example, that the same sort of thing would happen, and a lot more. Well, like in your case, women got involved in things that normally men had been doing. That was pretty much the same thing that happened here?

SEM: We probably didn't go as far as your group that you know of, because things have changed and women are in everything now. I'm a feminist, I guess you'd call me. I don't approve of some of the things they do. (laughter) One of my friends was in to see me the other day, the man that wanted to borrow that history of The Players. Well, not players, the founders [?] of the theater. He won't speak to me, he just thought I belong back in the dark ages.

Q: I'm sure he will speak to you [13:00], I'm really looking forward to looking at that book because I think it may help --

SEM: I hope I can get it for you. I'm sure he'd loan it to you. But because he feels very pleased to have (inaudible) many copies he can get. And maybe, I think in the athenaeum, I would expect the big library to have a copy. But I don't know whether they do or not.

Q: One other small question, just to sort of wrap up today, because I think we've covered a lot of ground. Nowadays when you put on a play, one of the first things that people do is look to the critical reviews. They grab the newspaper and see what the newspaper has to say. Back at The Talma or The Infantry Hall, did you get press coverage? And if so, what kind was it and how did they react? You know, that sort of thing.

SEM: We did get press coverage. [14:00] The Journal, or whatever it was that covered it, were exceedingly kind to us, I think. I think we did pretty good work, but that's impossible for a person like me, all mixed up in it all the time, to tell. But they did get some excellent notices. They had a man that, I think he was kind of on our side of things, but he -- I can't think of his name now to save me, and that's another one of these gaps up here -- he really like us as a place. And he loved to come to the theater and we liked to have him, of course. He covered every show for a long, long period [15:00], and then he died. The Journal doesn't cover us now, they're too small compared to other things.

Q: What about styles of acting, and so forth? You did direct, back in the teens. Is there anything you might want to mention about that? Particularly in changes that you've seen in styles of direction?

SEM: Of course there is, definitely, a change in styles of acting, (inaudible) things are very different. I think techniques in that are very changed, don't you?

Q: Well, from what I've seen --

SEM: You've been gone long enough to know --

Q: -- I've seen a few. How would you describe some of the changes that you've seen from the time when you were doing some direction to what you see today? Does anything stick out?

SEM: I don't think that the directors that we have on the whole, goodness knows don't [16:00] say this at work, but I don't think they're as good or as meticulous in their desire to do a very perfect thing. Now this man that directed the one you just saw, Price, he's an excellent actor. I've had him in a number of plays. And he is, he's an excellent actor. But as a director, I've seen him do some things that I thought were good, but not the way we of the old gang did it. Take people aside and work with them on certain kinds of things. It turned off, and gave some beautiful performances.

Q: [17:00] I'm not really familiar with a lot of the styles of acting, or the styles of staging, that would have been predominant to me in the teens. Speaking to an ignorant person like me, how would you describe it? How would you stage a show? In other words, what kinds of things would you ask or expect of the actors, for example?

SEM: That is a hard one, isn't it?

Q: Yeah it is, it's a tough one. (laughter) Like where they would stand, how they would interact.

SEM: Oh, well we would always try to have people in our major shows that have learned at least the business of position on stage. That kind of thing we hoped they don't let the green room, as we call it. Somebody telling them how to walk and how to cross [18:00] the theater, that sort of thing. We don't try to do that as a rule on the major. If we have a green room group, and we have had several of them -- I started that and I don't know whether I did a good job or a bad job on that -- but we had some very good people come out of it, who worked in wages that sort of stayed with us.

Q: Was elocution, such as the more traditional sense of speech training and so forth, was that something you expected an actor to bring to the theater with him?

SEM: No, we didn't expect him to, but we did expect him to try to do it and learn something. Now some people won't give the time, they're too busy in many departments of life today, and they don't want to be bothered being tied up [19:00] to a night of read call or whatever it turned

out to be, to learn. So we don't get anything like as good as speech out. I'm just crazy over TV. I think the people on TV need to be taken aside by the producers and be made to learn to speak the English language.

(break in audio)

Q: In summary, in the years 1909 to 1917, Players was an outgrowth for Brown University Group formed probably around 1886. Professor Thomas Crosby was instrumental in this organization. The group located in The Talma Theatre, which had a seating capacity of approximately four hundred. They stayed there till 1917, when the building was sold out to the Boys Club. [20:00]

The Players were a drama society as opposed to a community theater. The group was dedicated to providing performing opportunities for its members. These performances they expected to be of the highest quality, performing the very best plays that were available. Membership was limited to those who could make a distinct contribution to the group. The Players appealed to a particular segment of the community, generally those people who were associated with or interested in the various fine arts societies. They did not appeal to the broad community as such.

Local amateur competition was limited. There was a theater in the Portuguese community, and occasionally a group from the Elmwood district would put on a show. Professional theater at the opera house was quite good, bringing the best of professional theater to Providence. The Players used one act plays as a means of training, and performed the best [21:00] of them. They were called tryout plays.

The scenic style for the theater was realistic. Henry Ames Barker was noted for his work in this area. The shows were well received, and there was newspaper support. One writer in the particular followed the fortunes of the group till his death. The season was five shows long, with

three performances per show. The houses generally sold out. It was felt that more performances would not yield a significantly bigger total audience.

There was some recognition of The Players outside of the local community, such as with the Cambridge Social and Dramatics Club. This beyond the community facet of Players development became more important later in its history. Another outside activity was war bond sales through benefits given at the local high schools.

Players did not produce shows which simply pandered to popular [22:00] taste. Some of their shows were criticized because of their theme or content. The Players stuck to their philosophy of producing the best plays available. Excellence in stage skills was expected of the performers. Among these skills was a high standard of elocution. The shows were considered tightly performed.

Women in the theater were still a touchy subject in some quarters, and it was considered unusual for a woman to direct. 1917 to 1932, after Players left Talma, they moved to Infantry Hall. It was a large building that had to be modified for their use. The top or auditorium floor was so large they cut it in half. They players used the non-seating half for dancing with an orchestra between the acts. Later moved to Elks Hall also called for extensive modification for performances. The stage itself was considerably extended.

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