

ALL the WORLD'S a STAGE...

Bringing you the World since 1901

The curtain is about to go up on the 110th Season of Lakewood Theater, the oldest summer theater in America.



Originally an Indian camp ground, the homestead of Joseph Hayden, and a meeting place for spiritualists, the Lakewood Theater area was a swampy amusement park at the turn of the twentieth century when Herbert L. Swett took over as manager in 1899. The first legitimate stage play was "The Private Secretary" opening on June 15, 1901. This is considered the birthday of Lakewood Theater as we know it today. The theater and summer colony that would flourish on the western shore of Lake Wesserunsett was the vision of this Bangor

native and graduate of Bowdoin College. In its "Hey Day," between 1925 -1941, this jewel of America's resident stock companies was the major summer tryout for productions hoping for success on Broadway. One of the longest running play on Broadway, *Life with Father*, premiered at Lakewood in 1939. The stock company was the training ground for promising young talent--talented they were and famous many of them would become. A "Who's Who" of silent screen, Broadway, movies, and television have passed through the back stage door.

Lakewood Theater held onto its resident company format until 1961 when it joined with other theaters on the east coast in presenting package productions.

Patrons wanted to see their favorite television stars. The Swett Family sold the Theater in 1970 and for the next 15 years owners came and went. And for a time, no one came and no one went.

Then, in the summer of 1985, the dust billowed across the parking lot as a rattletrap clunker driven by a woman with wild frizzy hair and a perpetual smile led a procession of pickups trucks to the rear of the Theater. Marti Stevens and The Cornville Players had arrived at Lakewood Theater. The community theater group had agreed to perform three plays over a six week period. A non-profit partnership of Stevens, Bruce Hertz, and Jeffrey Quinn was formed to and incorporated as CUE (Curtain Up Enterprises). Six weeks became another summer, became a decade, became two decades, became a quarter century of performing--restoring, repairing, renovating--and loving this grand old Theater.

Comedies, dramas, musicals, and children's shows are again presented on the stage of the magnificent Theater. Lakewood Theater was designated the State Theater of Maine by the Maine Legislature in 1967. Exceptional performances are on stage from late-May to mid-September. Each fall the Lakewood Jesters, an audience friendly group of adults, offers the unforgettable experience of live theater to more than 2800 students from K-Grade 4. CUE also operates the Lakewood Young Performers Camp. Talented, creative young people between the ages of 6 and 18 can attend one of three two-week sessions, concluding with a Saturday morning production with costumes, make-up, sets, and music before a live audience. Advanced teens participate in a three-week session during which they produce their own show...they then take the show on the road to nursing homes, assisted living centers and VA facilities. In 2009, the Lakewood Inn Restaurant offered a two week culinary school for young people.



Jeffrey Quinn, now General Manager of the Theater, recently observed "we take our stewardship of Lakewood Theater and its rich history very seriously.

We strive to maintain her gleaming white facade as we fix leaks, jack up sills, modernize bathrooms, paint, carpet, and landscape. The maintenance of the large building and its grounds is a constant process--consuming time and money."

During its tenure at Lakewood Theater, Cue has: converted the side balconies into Cabaret seating and opened a long forgotten orchestra pit under the stage. Every other row of seats was removed for more leg room and the seats are currently being sanded, re-finished and re-upholstered. A new red curtain was hung and the light board has been replaced. Five gas heaters were installed, extending the season into the spring and fall. The backstage, painting, and prop areas have been cleaned and/or relocated. An actor's outdoor shower was installed. The Green Room and six dressing rooms have been refurbished.

The dressing room walls have been sealed to preserve the fading signatures. The most famous signature is undoubtedly the scrawl of John Travolta. At the height of his fame as Vinnie Barbarino on television's "Welcome back, Kotter" Travolta appeared in Bus Stop. The back stage bathrooms were recently renovated. When the sheetrock was removed the signature of Myrna Loy and Mama Cass Elliot was discovered.

A front office space has been converted into a refreshment area. Wine and beer, cookies, coffee, and soda are available.

A few days before his birthday in December 2007, Jeffrey Quinn signed on the dotted line and The Shanty returned as part of the Lakewood property.

In a photo essay of the Lakewood Colony entitled "Bringing Broadway to Maine" and published in 1938, it was noted: "The Shanty is the center of life at Lakewood. It is the post office where members of the colony come to get the papers and mail and to while away a few minutes with the latest theater gossip; it is the meeting place of the actors after rehearsal for a light lunch and a cooling drink, and it is the rendezvous of everyone after the Theater. Actors, directors, playwrights and audience all hasten to The Shanty to talk over the night's performance while enjoying a soda and sandwich."



CUE had rented the space for years. With each passing season the building continued to fall down around us. It was certainly facing its last winter without serious attention. And attention was paid. The hexagonal front space of The Shanty has been retained and is used as a classroom/rehearsal space for the Young Performers Camp and as a rehearsal hall, now complete with heat and air conditioning. The middle part of the long structure contains a sewing space and large storage area for costumes and accessories. The rear is used for furniture storage and upholstery shop.

As we prepare for another season of Lakewood Theater, we remember her past, plan her future, and revel in her present.



It's another opening, another show, another season...

Come celebrate the spirit of Theater in America!



SNIPETS

Lakewood Theater is located six miles north of Skowhegan on the shores of LAKE WESSRUNSETT, a peaceful lake fringed by birch and pine groves. Wesserunsett, an historic Indian name, has been spelled at least ten different ways. A deed dated in 1648 spelled it

Wesserunskiek. Other spellings have been: Usserunscut, Wesserunscut, Arressewinsuck, and Wesseronsaeg. Lake Wesserunsett was designated as Madison Pond on maps in the last half of the 1800's and it was Hayden Pond during the early 1900's. The present spelling was adopted in 1912 when the State Legislature officially designated the body of water as Lake Wesserunsett.

Lakewood's tradition is long in years, deep in sentiment, and steadfast in endurance. In the early 1600's the Kennebec Indian Tribe frequented the lake they called Wesserunskiek. In 1800 Jedediah Hayden emigrated by ox-cart from Gray, Maine, to settle on the former Indian camping ground. He left a log cabin to his son William who continued the family line. In 1882 The Madison Spiritualist Association constructed the first major building a few hundred feet from the lakeshore. Over a century to come the building was transformed from a skating rink, vaudeville theater, movie house, and "barn" theater into a major theatrical colony. During the period from 1925 to 1941 Lakewood was the major tryout theater for potential Broadway productions and earned the title "Broadway in Maine."

THE STATE THEATER of MAINE

In 1967 the Legislature of the State of Maine resolved that Lakewood be designated the title State of Maine Theater due to the "feeling of warmth and hospitality that made thousands of friends for our State and created an image of professionalism known and respected all over the United States."



LAKEWOOD in its glory....

Lakewood's background is a story of one man's vision and desire to build a community in Maine that would give people the advantage of the finer things of life--beauty, simplicity, wholesome recreation and all that goes to make up complete living. Starting as an Amusement Park in 1896, Lakewood, since 1901, has presented a season of dramas every summer (except 1943, 44, 45, 84) and is now the oldest company in America in number of consecutive years. Herbert L. Swett managed Lakewood since 1899 (until his death in 1945) and his constant belief that people will seek out and appreciate the best has been realized in this beautiful community.



It is the practical fulfillment of an ideal of what a summer community should be--winding rows of colonial type bungalows; an intriguing golf course; fast tennis courts; diversified water sports; good fishing; an Inn combining the charm of colonial formality with faultless service and moderate prices; a modernized version of the old country store; saddle horses and numerous features--all set in one of Maine's beauty spots of lake and streams, mountains and hill country, pine and white birch.

The idea of a resort colony which would draw vacationers to the Lakewood grove originated in 1919. By 1924, theater programs advertised camps with baths for overnight guests and theater patrons. In 1925 Lakewood's increasing sophistication appeared when the management referred to the overnight facilities as "bungalows with baths," not "camps with baths." After this, visitors to the Lakewood Colony committed a cardinal sin if they referred to these facilities as cottages or camps. (Herbert) Swett preferred that a patron stay only one night in order to make room for another guest who had not yet seen the current production.

Certain bungalows were retained for the use of the company members. During the course of the 1934 season, Mary Phillips, then wife of Humphrey Bogart, had spent the early portion of the season at Lakewood while Bogart finished his run in *The Petrified Forest*. When Bogart arrived he went to Herbert Swett to request a private cottage for himself and his wife, but Swett, in all seriousness, suggested that Miss Phillips stay in the cottage she had been sharing with Katherine Kidder, another member of the players, and that Bogart could move in with Sanford Cummings and Keenan Wynn: a suggestion which led Bogart to seek another landlord the next day.

(Bringing Broadway to Maine by John Oblak, pp 93-94, 66-67)

An article in the Boston Evening American in 1928 proclaimed:

"Now let it be known, they do things well at Lakewood. No shoddy stock productions clutter the stage in the costly birch grove; no half-hearted, uninspired attempts to do something quickly and cheaply. The Lakewood Players have pride in their work."

In the program for the opening week of 1941, Herbert L. Swett declared: "This is a summer for Laughter." He expounded on that theme several weeks later in the program for June 30, 1941. "Swett again addressed his patrons on the subject of play selection and the need for comedy in the season's schedule. He felt that the theater, designed primarily for entertainment, should provide "an hour or two of escape from the crushing reality of the present upset world" and that if this could be done, the management would feel that they had done something to make life somewhat more bearable.

We can't recreate the past, but we can remember and celebrate that past as we enjoy the present and plan the future. We can't bring back the glamour and novelty of the summer colony, and the current "residents" are not giving up their day jobs. But on a starry night you can hear the loons on the lake; you can hear the laughter, and the music, and the applause; you can hear the whisperings in the pines; you can feel the soft caress on the cheek as the ghosts of over a thousand productions pass by. You can feel the magic of Lakewood Theater.



LAKEWOOD--A DIFFERENT TIME

This year Lakewood Theater celebrates its 110th year.

For mountain building, Redwood tree growing, or glacier melting, 110 years is a dandelion in the wind. But to us, who measure out our lives no longer in coffee spoons but in cell phone minutes, a century plus is a long, long time.

Think about time. "Are we there yet?" "I'm late! I'm late! For a very important date!"
"Where's the fire?" "Flight delayed."

We are fortunate to have a collection of old playbills, especially from the "Hey Day" of Lakewood between 1925-1941. In addition to wonderful advertisements they contain the musings of Lakewood founder and visionary, Herbert L. Swett. Mr. Swett writes of jaunts, strolls, rambles, day trips, and excursions. People pick wild flowers and compete in endless games of badminton. They chat. Of course, the players did not have day jobs. While there are many mentions of dogs, there are no mentions of young children. Still--they took their time in that different time.

Foot race. Space race. Rat race. Car pool.
Microwave. Cuisinart. Drive thru Fast Food.

We few lucky ones who spend countless hours at Lakewood have found "Lakewood time." There is only one important time each day at Lakewood: curtain time. The exact hour and minute during the rest of the day do not really matter. There are few wall clocks at Lakewood. There is a clock high on one wall of the Box Office, I think. There is a clock on the wall back stage but the only time that matters is kept by the Stage Manager. "Ten minutes." "Thank-you, ten."

"Three minutes." "Thank-you,three." "Places." Even "curtain time" is more a sense of surroundings rather than the location of hands on a clock face: twilight, a stirring in the trees, a loon call on the lake, smell of campfires, the swish of canoe paddles, a "sweater around the shoulders" coolness, the clatter of dishes in the Inn kitchen. Herbert said his favorite time of day was sunset. He writes of sitting in his office watching cars drive into the parking lot. One can almost imagine him coming down the stairs and strolling over to the Inn... to chat...

Slow down. You move too fast.

Welcome to the 110th Season of Lakewood Theater

Have a good time.

Have some Lakewood time.



1901 - LAKEWOOD - 1947

by Grant Mills

Consider yourself for a moment a Lakewood theatergoer on a Saturday night 30 years ago (1917). You are seated in an old barn on folding chairs, which, following the theatrical performance will be stacked on the stage to make way for the dancing to follow. Outside is a popcorn stand, and across the way, the tiny Acadia Tea Room. There is no golf course, tennis court, nor Country Club, and in place of the cottages, a ramshackle hotel stands near the lakefront. You probably arrived at the Theater either on the trolley cars which run from Skowhegan, or, if you live at the lake, the 35-foot steamer Margaret B. picked you up at your dock and will return you there after the play. The caged monkeys and bears are gone and the bowling alley has been converted into the present day carpenter shop, but there are still band concerts on Sundays and fireworks each Tuesday. A playground--where the Inn kitchen now stands--provides amusement for children; a six-sided open-air refreshment stand is serving where the Shanty Lunch now prospers.

The late Herbert L. Swett, who assumed management of Lakewood in 1901 when it presented itself only as a swampy, run-down amusement park envisioned Lakewood as it now stands. Each year, he turned his profits into making improvements, always working toward his long-range plan for the Lakewood of today. Torn down in 1922, the old hotel was replaced the following year by the first of Lakewood's 33 guest cottages. The Margaret B. met its end in an explosion in 1924. Blown up for publicity purposes, the old steamer drew an audience of thousands. Our Theater, remodeled from the original barn, took shape during the winter of 1925-26, while the Country Club opened with due celebration on July 4, 1926. The trolleys to Skowhegan ceased their noisy run in 1927, and the bandstand was razed, with the Lakewood Inn being constructed during that year on the Tea Room site. The Gift Shop was added in 1932 as was the rear section of the Shanty Lunch. Since that time, fifteen years ago, countless additional improvements have been made. During the winter of 1938-39 the terrace dining room, formerly an outdoor eating place was closed in. The Theater and Inn kitchen have been remodeled on several occasions, both being now twice the size as when originally built; the Shanty Lunch has been enlarged three times since its initial construction, and the newest cottages were completed only eight years ago. In the winter of 1946, a dining room for employees was added to the Inn and the main dining room was redecorated.

Mr. Swett's plans for Lakewood have been fulfilled, and his widow and daughters continue to maintain the institution as he would want it. Always cognizant of the desires of summer patrons for the top in drama, comfort and recreation. Lakewood's founder is responsible for the multiple facilities and the prestige with which Lakewood has become justly endowed. Certainly Mr. Swett's initiative has brought not only Broadway to Maine, but country-wide theatergoers to his singular colony in our rural vacationland.

THE LAKEWOOD THEATER SPIRIT(S)



In a playbill from 1938 founder, visionary, dream-follower, and man of great spirit, Herbert L. Swett noted "We want you to feel the spirit of hospitality when you visit us, the friendly feeling that writers have called "the Lakewood spirit."

Herbert died in 1945, long before most of the current players were even born. But his spirit lingers. A picture of Mr. Swett hangs in our lobby, and we joke--reverently--that he keeps an eye on us. A light is focused on the portrait and we speak of "lighting Herbert." For many years early patrons might have the pleasure or puzzlement of seeing Jeffrey Quinn climb onto a rickety chair, reach over head, and fumble to get the plug into the socket. It was clearly understood that only Jeffrey should perform this ritual. Suggestions of a wall switch were met with shudders. Should Jeffrey neglect his duties or be unavailable, activities would proceed with a certain amount of trepidation. When strange things happen we say that Herbert is not amused. Some people thought they saw a twinkle in Herbert's eye when we posed for The Calendar shot in the lobby...it was probably just a reflection...In recent years the installation of an automatic

switch now puts Herbert in the spotlight each night at 7:00. It is magical...like live theater and Herbert seems to approve.

Of course, the Theater is haunted.

It would have to be...displaced Indians, disgruntled spiritualists, the energy of thousands of actors...

In the two decades plus that CUE has been at Lakewood the reports, stories, rumors, sightings, and sensations have been numerous and remarkably similar. Common experiences include:

A man has been observed watching rehearsal from the balcony. The greenish outline of a person moves back and forth in the balcony. Heavy footfalls start at the back of the balcony, come down the right side of the theater, and the side door to the wings is heard to open and shut. Actors in the wings have experienced the sensation of being unable to move and a cold breeze passes by. On the warmest of August days there are cold, damp, "make your skin crawl," icy pockets throughout the theater. Many actors claim to hear conversations that they can't quite understand and there is no one else in the room.

Several no-nonsense type actors have heard musical numbers being sung as they hurry to rehearsal and then finding stage is empty upon arrival. In the days of the temperamental old light board, actors could break for lunch, lock the Theater, and return to find the lights "all set."

There has always been noise and activity from Herbert's office. In the age of computers the clickety-clack of an old typewriter fills a quiet afternoon. The sound of drawers being opened, papers being shuffled, someone walking upstairs, coming down the stairs, the muffled sound of a telephone conversation...all part of the Box Office experience.

There is spirit at Lakewood.

There are spirits at Lakewood.

And we gladly and gratefully share the space and spotlight with them.

