

## **East Falls Past-- Old Academy Players Local Playhouse has Diverse History**

*The Fallser*, May 2009, by Ellen Sheehan

Recently, I interviewed Bob Freed, Historian for the Old Academy Playhouse on Indian Queen Lane. Bob has been a member of the Players since 1957. He is the Vice President in charge of Production, in addition to directing shows and acting, most recently as the Abbott in this year's "The Incorruptible."

***Bob, tell me about the early history of Old Academy (OA)***

OA was originally the "Moment Musical Club" which was founded in 1923 at the Falls Methodist Church. They came to the Indian Queen Lane building in 1932, purchasing it for \$1.00. They had a lot of work to do on the building and have been a real part of the community ever since.



***How did OA fare during the Depression?***

They had it tough in the beginning. Here is an entry from the Minutes 4/3/34: "\$1.25 in the treasury." On 4/17 it had zoomed up to \$20.91, but by 9/34 they were back to \$1.44. This was the depth of the Depression. For several years they would do three one-act plays instead of full-length plays and only charge fifty cents. To give people more for their money they offered free refreshments at intermissions, a practice we continue to this day.

***How did WWII affect the Playhouse?***

During the war, OA was very active. They took shows to Camp Dix and the Naval Hospital and sent candy and material to make blankets. Benefits were given for the Air Raid groups that were around here at that time. Here is a Minutes entry for 10/1/40: "a motion was passed to give \$2.40 a week for milk to needy children at Mifflin School. Members are contributing .15/ week for children who are refugees from the European war." An interesting suggestion from 1/13/42 reads: "motion made to cast women in male parts because of men going to war - defeated."

We had one member, Bill Bender, who was killed in the war.

***You own the building next door to OA?***

Next door to us for years was the Young Men's Association. It was a private boys club. All the boys in the area played sports there but it petered out in the 1970s. They offered the building to us for \$1.00. It gave us another building to store things and an area which, eventually, we converted into a parking lot. One thing the Falls lacks is parking. It was built in the 1850's and,

like the OA building, built in 1819; it requires constant upkeep. We rent the back part for wedding receptions, showers, parties, etc. We did have help in refurbishing from Mark Sherman of Sherman Properties, a real estate developer in this area. He put in new windows and refurbished the floors in the Carfax building.

***Why is this building referred to as Carfax?***

We were doing the show "Dracula" and Dracula's residence in England was called Carfax. Because of the condition of the building, we thought the name Carfax was appropriate.

***Have there been any additions to the original building?***

In 1941, there was an addition put on the back of the building which gave us dressing rooms, a staircase and more stage space. It cost \$2400.00. John B. Kelly contributed \$1,000.00 and John Hohenadel, who owned the local brewery up the street, contributed \$1000.00

Next month we will continue the interview with Bob's memories of famous actors at OA.  
OA.