

**McLean County Museum of History**

**American Passion Play Collection**

Processed by George F. Perkins

Reprocessed by Alix Jones Summer 2008

Maintaining updates George F. Perkins Spring 2018

**Collection Information**

Volume of Collection:	One Box.
Collection Dates:	1928—2017
Restrictions:	
Reproduction Rights:	Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained in writing from the McLean County Museum of History.
Location:	Archives
Notes:	For additional information, see: Photographic Collection Subject - American Passion Play, Bloomington; Photographic Collection - People: Darrah

**Historical Sketch**

The American Passion Play, presented by the Scottish Rite Valley of Bloomington, Illinois, has been a tradition since its original production in 1923. In the fall of 1923, during the Scottish Rite's fall reunion at the Consistory (as the temple building built in 1922 was also known), Delmar D. Darrah staged the trial, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ as an epilogue to an 18<sup>th</sup> degree presentation, the Knight of the Rose Croix. This production is now considered the first of the play's 94 seasons. In December of 1923, Darrah's "The Star in the East," a retelling of Christ's birth, was staged at the Consistory and meant for a wider audience than Scottish Rite membership. The success of this Christmastime pageant told Darrah that the local

community was ready for a similarly grand staging of Passion of Jesus. The first full Passion Play season, carrying the title “The Life of Our Savior Jesus Christ,” was held Easter weekend, April 18-20, 1924, with one performance on Friday and two each on Saturday and Sunday. The 8,000 or so tickets available for these five shows in April 1924 were mostly distributed to members of the Scottish Rite and their families.

The Play was originally shown with twenty-five scenes, on five consecutive Sunday afternoons. The Play was enthusiastically received and garnered the highest praise from the most exacting critics. It continued to grow, and in 1929, twenty-one performances were sold out.

Its conception originated from Delmar D. Darrah, Thirty-Third Degree, who based his version of the play on earlier European productions. Darrah’s plan to portray Jesus in a stage production was met with strong objections from local associations. His pilot production, however, proved that the Play would not offend even the most pious members of the community. To house the production of the American Passion Play as well as to provide a home for the Valley of Bloomington, a building was built featuring a 1,300 seat auditorium and a well-equipped stage in 1922.

The Play is largely considered a ritual and attendance of the play often fulfills a religious pilgrimage. Roles in the Play are passed down from one cast member to another. Many participants began in the Play as children in crowd scenes, later became members of the mob or temple guards, and progressed to either the role of a Roman guard or a disciple. Roles are passed along in an oral tradition, as there are no formal auditions. An experienced cast member with a large speaking part will train a younger member to replace him. Keeping with that view, the actors are told not to “act” the part, but rather to live it. The performers are given quite a lot of liberty with how they wish to portray and express themselves in the performance.

Costumes have also played an important role in the production of the Play. The producers have often prided themselves on the historical accuracy of the costumes, scenery and props. Characters, however, are often dressed based on whether they are a “believer” or “non-believer” to better set them apart for the benefit of the audience.

One of the most important aspects of the American Passion Play is its continued revision. It has never been considered a finished product, and has gone through numerous changes since 1923. One such example is the portrayal of Jesus. Since the 1920s Jesus was unemotional and made no physical contact with other characters. In the 1990s however, Jesus was shown as a more gentle, human, and emotional man. Such alterations were not intentional, but rather happened naturally and gradually based on the actors portraying Jesus. In addition, new scenes have been added or removed, as well as effects and properties.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The American Passion Play collection contains a historical booklet accompanying exhibits, programs, brochures, souvenir programs, anniversary souvenir programs, articles, oral histories, and miscellaneous items such as advertising cards and rehearsal schedules. The collection consists of one box, which is divided into thirteen folders.

## **Box and Folder Inventory**

## **Box 1: American Passion Play Collection (13 Folders)**

### **Folder 1: Rituals and Passages Booklet**

- 1.1.1 “Rituals and Passages: 75 Years of The American Passion Play” ; An exhibit at the McLean County Historical Society, March 21, 1998 – May 8, 1999 ; Allison Weiss, Guest Curator (McLean County History Society, 1998) ; 31 p. booklet.
- 1.1.2 “Rituals and Passages: 75 Years of The American Passion Play” ; An exhibit at the McLean County Historical Society, March 21, 1998 – May 8, 1999 ; Allison Weiss, Guest Curator (McLean County History Society, 1998) ; 31 p. booklet.

### **Folder 2: Programs, Part 1: 1923-1950**

- 1.2.1 April 18, 1924-April 20, 1924 (Second Season)
- 1.2.2 March 29, 1931—May 3, 1931 (Eighth Season)
- 1.2.3 April 8, 1945 – May 20, 1945 (Twenty-third Season)
- 1.2.3 April 13, 1947—June 1, 1947 (Twenty-Fifth Season)

### **Folder 3: Programs, Part 2: 1951-1980**

- 1.3.1 March 28, 1954—May 23, 1954 (Nineteen Fifty-Four Season)
- 1.3.2 March 30, 1958—May 25, 1958 (Thirty-Fifth Year)
- 1.3.3 March 27, 1960—May 22, 1960 (Thirty-Seventh Year)
- 1.3.4 March 27, 1966—May 22, 1966 (Forty-Third Year)
- 1.3.5 March 30, 1969—May 25, 1969 (Forty-Sixth Year)
- 1.3.6 March 24, 1973—May 19, 1973 (Fifty-First Year)
- 1.3.7 March 24, 1974—May 19, 1974 (Fifty-First Year)

### **Folder 4: Programs, Part 3: 1981-2000**

- 1.4.1 March 20, 1983—May 8, 1983 (Sixtieth Year)
- 1.4.2 March 25, 1984—May 12, 1984 (Sixty-First Year)
- 1.4.3 March 24, 1985—May 11, 1985 (Sixty-Second Year)
- 1.4.4 March 21, 1987—May 9, 1987 (Sixty-Fourth Year)
- 1.4.5 March 20, 1988—May 7, 1988 (Sixty-Fifth Year)
- 1.4.6 March 12, 1989—May 7, 1989 (Sixty-Sixth Year)
- 1.4.7 March 18, 1990—May 6, 1990 (Sixty-Seventh Year)
- 1.4.8 March 22, 1992—May 9, 1992 (Sixth-Ninth Year)
- 1.4.9 March 20, 1993—May 8, 1993 (Seventieth Year)
- 1.4.10 March 20, 1994—May 7, 1994 (Seventy-First Year)
- 1.4.11 March 19, 1995—May 6, 1995 (Seventy-Second Year)
- 1.4.13 March 19, 1995—May 6, 1995 (Seventy-Second Year)

1.4.14	March 17, 1996—May 11, 1996	(Seventy-Third Year)
1.4.15	March 16, 1997-May 10, 1997	(Seventy-Forth Year)
1.4.16	March 21, 1998—May 9, 1998	(Seventy-Fifth Year)
1.4.17	March 21, 1998—May 9, 1998	(Seventy-Fifth Year)
1.4.18	March 20, 1999—May 8, 1999	(Seventy-Sixth Year)

## **Folder 5: Programs, Part 4: 2001-**

1.5.1	March 17, 2001—April 28, 2001	(Seventy-Eighth Year)
1.5.2	March 15, 2003—April 26, 2003	(Eightieth Year)
1.5.3	March 20, 2004—May 1, 2004	(Eighty-First Year)
1.5.4	Year 2006 Season	(Eighty-Third Year)
1.5.5	Year 2006 Season	(Eighty-Third Year)
1.5.6	Year 2006 Season	(Eighty-Third Year)
1.5.7	Year 2006 Season	(Eighty-Third Year)
1.5.8	Year 2006 Season	(Eighty-Third Year)
1.5.9	Year 2007 Season	(Eighty-Four Year)
1.5.10	Year 2007 Season	(Eighty-Four Year)
1.5.11	March 8, 2008—April 12, 2008	(Eighty-Fifth Year)
1.5.12	March 8, 2008—April 12, 2008	(Eighty-Fifth Year)
1.5.13	March 14, 2009-April 4, 2009	(Eighty-Sixth Year)
1.5.14	March 14, 2009-April 4, 2009	(Eighty-Sixth Year)
1.5.15	March 6, 2010-March 27, 2010	(Eighty-Seventh Year)
1.5.16	March 26, 2011-April 16, 2011	(Eighty-Eighth Year)
1.5.17	March 10, 2012-March 31, 2012	(Eighty-Ninth Year)
1.5.18	March 9, 2013-April 6, 2013	(Ninetieth-Year)
1.5.19	March 29, 2014-April 26, 2014	(Ninety-First Year)
1.5.20	March 29, 2014-April 26, 2014	(Ninety-First Year)
1.5.20	March 21, 2015-April 11, 2015	(Ninety-Second Year)
1.5.21	March 5, 2016-April 2, 2016	(Ninety-Third Year)
1.5.22	March 25, 2017-April 22, 2017	(Ninety-Fourth Year)
1.5.23	March 17, 2018 – April 7, 2018	(Ninety-Five Year)(2)

## **Folder 6: Brochures, Part 1: 1923-1990**

1.6.1	April 9, 1933—May 7, 1933	(Tenth Season)
1.6.2	April 14, 1935—May 19, 1935	(Twelfth Season)
1.6.3	April 13, 1941—May 25, 1941	(Eighteenth Season)
1.6.4	April 8, 1945—May 20, 1945	(Twenty-Third Season)
1.6.5	April 7, 1946—May 26, 1946	(Twenty-Fourth Season)
1.6.6	April 13, 1947—June 1, 1947	(Twenty-Fifth Season)
1.6.7	April 4, 1948—May 30, 1948	(Twenty-Sixth Year)
1.6.8	March 30, 1969—May 25, 1969	(Forty-Sixth Year)

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|--------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| 1.6.9  | March 26, 1972—May 21, 1972 | (Forty-Ninth Year) |
| 1.6.10 | March 26, 1972—May 21, 1972 | (Forty-Ninth Year) |
| 1.6.11 | March 12, 1989—May 7, 1989  | (Sixty-Sixth Year) |

## **Folder 7: Brochures, Part 2: 1991-**

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|--------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1.7.1  | March 17, 1991—May 5, 1991    | (Sixty-Eighth Season)   |
| 1.7.2  | March 22, 1992—May 9, 1992    | (Sixty-Ninth Season)    |
| 1.7.3  | March 20, 1993—May 8, 1993    | (Seventieth Season)     |
| 1.7.4  | March 21, 1998—May 9, 1998    | (Seventy-Fifth Season)  |
| 1.7.5  | March 20, 1999—May 8, 1999    | (Seventy-Sixth Season)  |
| 1.7.6  | March 17, 2001—April 28, 2001 | (Seventy-Eighth Season) |
| 1.7.7  | March 15, 2003—April 26, 2003 | (Eightieth Season)      |
| 1.7.8  | Feb 26, 2005-April 2, 2005    | (Eighty-Second Season)  |
| 1.7.9  | March 3, 2007—April 1, 2007   | (Eighty-Fourth Season)  |
| 1.7.10 | March 8, 2008—April 12, 2008  | (Eighty-Fifth Season)   |
| 1.7.11 | March 14, 2009—April 4, 2009  | (Eighty-Sixth Season)   |
| 1.7.12 | March 14, 2009—April 4, 2009  | (Eighty-Sixth Season)   |
| 1.7.13 | March 6, 2010—March 27, 2010  | (Eighty-Seventh Season) |
| 1.7.14 | March 26, 2011—April 16, 2011 | (Eighty-Eighth Season)  |
| 1.7.15 | March 10, 2012—March 31, 2012 | (Eighty-Ninth Season)   |
| 1.7.16 |                               |                         |
| 1.7.17 | Spring 2014                   | (Ninety-First Season)   |
| 1.7.18 | Spring 2015                   | (Ninety-second Season)  |
| 1.7.19 | Spring 2016                   | (Ninety-third Season)   |
| 1.7.20 | Spring 2017                   | (Ninety-Fourth Season)  |

## **Folder 8: Souvenir Programs, Part I**

- |       |                            |
|-------|----------------------------|
| 1.8.1 | c. 1928                    |
| 1.8.2 | 1929 (hand-dated on front) |
| 1.8.3 | c. 1933                    |
| 1.8.4 | c. 1933 (2 copies)         |
| 1.8.5 | ca. 1928 date unknown      |

## **Folder 9: Souvenir Programs, Part II**

- |       |         |
|-------|---------|
| 1.9.1 | c. 1938 |
| 1.9.2 | c. 1938 |
| 1.9.3 | c. 1938 |
| 1.9.4 | c. 1938 |

## **Folder 10: Souvenir Programs, Part III**

- 1.10.1 Blue border, n.d.
- 1.10.2 Blue border, n.d.
- 1.10.3 Blue border, n.d. (March 27, 1960—May 22, 1960, Thirty-Seventh Year, program stapled inside cover).

### **Folder 11: Souvenir Programs, Part IV**

- 1.11.1 Gold border, n.d.
- 1.11.2 Gold border, n.d.
- 1.11.3 c. 1991 (2 copies)
- 1.11.4 n.d.

### **Folder 12: Anniversary Souvenir Programs**

- 1.12.1 Fiftieth Anniversary 1923—1973, March 25—May 20 season
- 1.12.2 Fiftieth Anniversary 1923—1973, March 25—May 20 season
- 1.12.3 Seventy-Fifth Anniversary 1923—1998, 1998 season

### **Folder 13: Postcards**

- 1.13.1 “Souvenir Color Photo Post Cards: 50 Years of Performances 1923—1973” (Color Photos by Ken-Way Studios, Bloomington). Envelope and nine postcards, undated (2 sets).
- 1.13.2 “Souvenir Color Post Cards: Annual Performances Since 1923” (Color Photos by Ken-Way Studios, Bloomington) Envelope and twelve postcards, undated.

### **Folder 14: Northern Light Articles (note: the Northern Light is the quarterly magazine of the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite)**

- 1.14.1 “Valley of Bloomington Presents Original American Passion Play” (April 1970): 16—17.
- 1.14.2 “American Passion Play: 75<sup>th</sup> Year of Production for Valley of Bloomington” (May 1988): 8—11.

### **Folder 15: Oral Histories (note: Allison Weiss conducted three interviews for the “Rituals and Passages: 75 Years of *The American Passion Play*” McLean County Museum of History exhibit)**

- 1.15.1 Interview with George Broughton, August 26, 1997.
- 1.15.2 Interview with Barry Weer, September 8, 1997.
- 1.15.3 Interview with Harry Riddle, Jr., September 17, 1997.

## **Folder 16: Rehearsal Schedules**

- 1.16.1 1965 Rehearsal Schedule, January 19-March 25
- 1.16.2 1967 Rehearsal Schedule, January 23-March 21
- 1.16.3 1968 Rehearsal Schedule, January 23-March 29
- 1.16.4 1969 Rehearsal Schedule, January 17-March 28
- 1.16.5 1970 Rehearsal Schedule, January 23-March 20
- 1.16.6 1971 Rehearsal Schedule, January 22-March 21
- 1.16.7 1972 Rehearsal Schedule, January 21-March 23

## **Folder 17: Stage Door Passes**

- 1.17.1 Stage Door Pass of Betty Turpin, 1977
- 1.17.2 Stage Door Pass of William Turpin, 1977
- 1.17.3 Stage Door Pass of William Miller, 1986

## **Folder 18: Miscellaneous**

- 1.18.1 Door Staff and Hostesses Group Photograph, 1990, Sixty-Seventh Season
- 1.18.2 1960 Season flier
- 1.18.3 Undated letter and envelope
- 1.18.4 Wallet-size appreciation cards to D. Hodge Fuller, 1966 and 1972, and William Turpin, 1969
- 1.18.5 Groups attending March 22, 1992 performance, map of Illinois (2 copies)
- 1.18.6 1998 Closing Dinner and 75th Anniversary Reunion Dinner program
- 1.18.7 Advertising Card, 2007 (2 copies)
- 1.18.8 Advertising Card, 2008
- 1.18.9 Oberammergau Passion Play 1960, booklet published for members of the U.S. Armed Forces by the Garmisch Recreation Area
- 1.18.10 "the original American Passion Play" letterhead
- 1.18.11 "the original American Passion Play - Celebrating 50 years of Performances 1923-1973" letterhead
- 1.18.12 "the original American Passion Play" envelope
- 1.18.13 "the original American Passion Play – 1923. 50. 1973 Annual Season April and May – Since 1923" envelope
- 1.18.14 Ticket stub May 2, 1992
- 1.18.15 Bound script of D. Hodge Fuller, Judas lines underlined
- 1.18.16 Handwritten Judas monologue on notebook paper by D. Hodge Fuller
- 1.18.17 1998 Our 75<sup>th</sup> Year American Passion Play (photos of all cast members)