

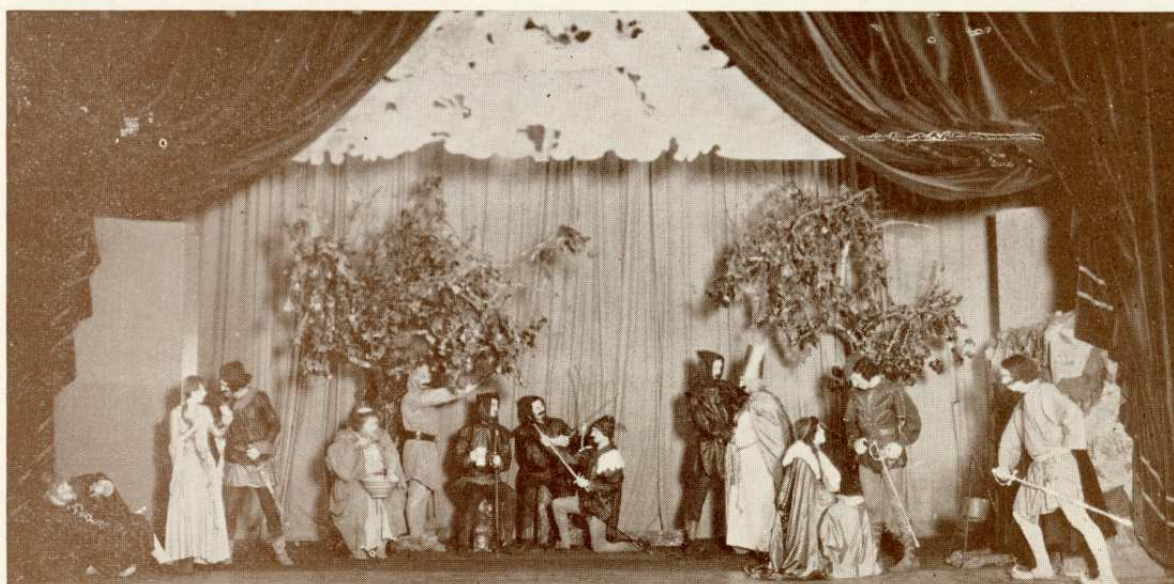
Although a formal drama department was not organized at Western Oregon University (WOU) until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, theatre has been a part of WOU from its earliest years. School yearbooks, from when WOU was known as Oregon State Normal School (OSNS) and Oregon Normal School, document some of these earliest dramatic presentations.



“The Flower Shop” performed in 1917

Dramatic presentations most frequently occurred at class receptions or during the meetings of the literary societies: the Vespertines, the Delphians, and the Normals. The first documentation of a dramatic production was a pantomime and set of vignettes presented by the senior class of February 1906. These dramas were performed during the senior class reception. The reception was organized by the seniors who treated student colleagues and faculty to a dramatic and musical performance and refreshments. A similar class reception presented in February 1909 featured a Greek play presented by seven of the graduating senior girls. These dramatic presentations quickly grew into complete plays.

In 1910 OSNS closed and when it reopened in 1911, the school’s name had changed to Oregon Normal School (ONS). It is at this point that the literary societies became more active in dramatic presentations. In the spring of 1912 the Delphian society presented a “living picture” consisting of people dressed in costumes and arranged to represent famous paintings or sketches. In December of the same year, both the Delphians and the Vespertines engaged in serious dramatic



A scene from “Robin Hood” performed by the junior class of 1929

presentations. The Vespertines performed a pantomime of “Hiawatha” and the Delphians presented “Thank Heaven the Table’s Set” and “The Courtship of Miles Standish.”

Annual events such as the Senior Class Play and Christmas play were standard dramatic functions throughout ONS’s early years. In June 1914 the Senior Class presented Shakespeare’s “As You Like It” in the grove. The previous year, the Winter graduating class performed “Shadows Before Dawn.” Christmas pageants were often organized and performed by the literary societies. The 1917 *Norm* discusses the success of one Christmas Play. The article reads,

Good judgment was exercised in the assignment of parts and there was not one poor impersonation. The stage effects and lighting were especially pleasing. All those who attended were treated to an exceedingly good exhibition of amateur theatricals.

The Normal Society was responsible for the stage setting and the Delphians for the costuming. But to the Vespertines the task of directing the play, and it was to

Miss Kennon’s efficient management that its splendid success was wholly due.

May Day festivities were observed for many years. They included theatrical

presentations. Different class years were responsible for presenting dramatizations. On one occasion the history department even organized a pantomime and set of historical vignettes.

Scenes from a 1917 Plays



Scene from a 1946 Play

