

Melodrama tickles crowd's funny bone at 125th

Written by Kyle Arnoldy



Holyoke celebrated its 125th anniversary Wednesday, April 24 with a melodrama, “Shawnee Lou, the Prairie’s Purest Dressmaker,” at the HHS auditorium. Actor Maury Kramer, playing villain C.E. Ginapp, defiantly ignores the ramblings of Chester C. Conklin while he is with his ladies, Fluffy Furry (Dolly Smith), pictured at left, and Trixie Baxter (Penny Dockins), at right.
—Enterprise photo

Laughter filled the HHS auditorium Wednesday, April 23 as Holyoke residents gathered to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the “City of Pride and Progress” with a melodrama entitled “Shawnee Lou, the Prairie’s Purest Dressmaker,” put on by the Phillips County Players.

Mayor Orville Tonsing welcomed those in attendance and acknowledged past mayors and members of Holyoke City Council.

Once the lights dimmed, the crowd was treated to the hilarity of the melodrama, which was directed by Penny Dockins.

Set in 1888, tension between Burge Hotel owner Lavern Meusborn, played by Jerry Brandt, and the actors residing in the hotel resulted in a humorous dialogue between the conflicting characters. Although he allows them to live in the hotel, Meusborn vehemently disagrees with the flamboyant style of those chasing fame and fortune through theater.

Young Billy, played by Tristen Ferguson, was a source of humor throughout the show. He continually drew laughs as his impatience with his mother, played by Ashley Sullivan, grew. His biggest contribution to the play, however, was acting as an instigator, prompting the crowd to

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boo villains and cheer for the good guys.

Crowd participation greatly heightened the enjoyment of the evening. At several intervals throughout the night, actors would break the fourth wall and talk directly to the crowd.

Meusborn's daughter, Shawnee Lou, played by Anastasia Conklin, found herself in the middle of a love triangle early in the play. It was love at first sight when she laid her eyes on Francis Scheunemann, played by Jacob Vasa. But before they could marry, she was forced to agree to wed villain Chester C. Conklin, played by Eric Conklin. Out of fear her father would be harmed if she did not cooperate, Shawnee Lou became deeply depressed.



Shawnee Lou's (played by Anastasia Conklin) luck makes a dramatic change in the conclusion of the play as she discovers her fathers lumpy pillow is actually stuffed full of money.☐☐

—Enterprise photo

If one villain wasn't enough, C.E. Ginapp soon entered the story, scamming, stealing and lying

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at every opportunity. At first Ginapp, portrayed by Maury Kramer, promised lead roles to the actresses of the Burge Hotel, Trixie Baxter and Fluffy Furry, portrayed by Penny Dockins and Dolly Smith, to win their favor, but quickly turned his attention to thievery.

He tricked Mrs. Scheunemann, played by Karin Kramer, into lending him a sizeable amount of money as he promised to make her a star in an upcoming play if she were to help fund it. After he bled her dry of her fortunes, he was going to skip town with the loot.

The unsavory plots by Conklin and Ginapp were foiled by Francis and his mother, and the two villains soon met their endings in a manner fitting of a Shakespearean tragedy.

After the cast returned to stage for a curtain call, it was announced that the show may return in June as the celebration of the momentous occasion continues.

Other cast members include Lemoine Ferguson as Sherman Brandt. Pat Wiebers contributed to the drama of the show on the piano.

Eric Conklin served as assistant director and designed the set while Nancy Pillard and Karin Kramer worked on costumes for the event.

Sandy Ferguson was responsible for lighting and the entire cast contributed to the construction of the set.

