

# **A Tale of Two Theatres**

**T**he first of ten exhibits to be presented during OLT's 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season. This exhibit will remain on display in the Besserer Street lobby during the entire run of *Hay Fever*.

## **Exhibit Preamble**

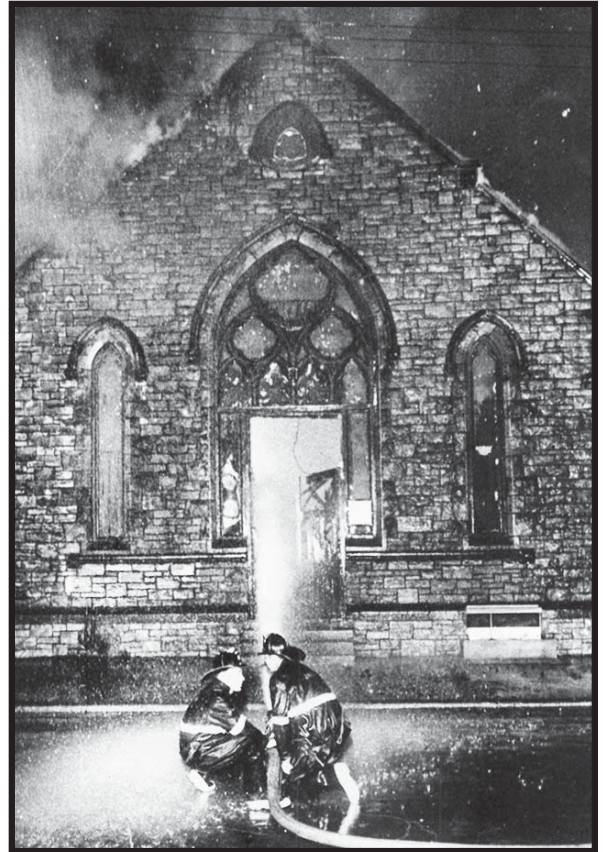
*Twice in its storied history,  
Ottawa Little Theatre,  
known as the  
Ottawa Drama League  
until the name was  
officially changed in 1951,  
undertook to establish an  
independent home  
from which  
to operate.*

*What follows is  
a brief re-capping of  
why, when and how  
these two theatres  
were acquired...*

# Fire



*Fire destroys  
Canada's Parliament Buildings  
1916*



*Fire destroys  
Ottawa Little Theatre  
1970*

**T**he fire at Canada's Parliament Buildings in 1916 and the OLT fire of 1970 each precipitated efforts by Ottawa Little Theatre to secure a permanent home. In 1916, the Ottawa Little Theatre, known at that time as the Ottawa Drama League, had been staging performances in the Victoria Memorial Museum. After the Parliament fire, the League was required to move out of the Museum to provide temporary accommodations for the House of Commons. This disruption is acknowledged to have triggered the League's decision to procure a permanent home. That home, a renovated church at the corner of King Edward Avenue and Besserer Street, was destroyed by the fire of 1970. Supporters of the Ottawa Little Theatre quickly rallied to the cause of building a new theatre, OLT's second home, at the same location.

## Fund Raising: The people and the goals

Once installed as President of the Ottawa, Drama League Dr. Duncan Campbell Scott was determined to give the group a permanent home. His vice-presidents, Col. Henry Osborne and Dorothy White, and fund-raising chairman Elizabeth Cruickshank mounted a multi-pronged effort to achieve this purpose.

### Raising \$60,000

The established goal was to raise \$60,000 to buy an old church property: the Eastern Methodist Church, on the corner of King Edward Avenue and Besserer Street.

### How they did it:

A campaign headquarters was established. Leaflets were distributed calling for donations. Non-interest mortgage bonds were sold. Fund-raising meetings were held. Elizabeth Cruickshank made, what she described as "horrible little stuffed dogs" for sale at the fund-raising meetings.

Dr. Campbell Scott wrote a letter requesting donations.

1926

*The Present Proposal*

The League now proposes to construct, from the design of a local architect, a permanent Little Theatre, centrally located, with a seating capacity of about 475, at an approximate cost, including land, buildings and equipment, of \$60,000. This sum it proposes to raise by the issue of bonds secured by the property, and to be issued in denominations of \$25 and upwards. The Executive Committee feels reasonably sure that the revenue will be such as to permit the application of substantial annual amounts for the redemption of the bonds, together with interest payments thereon.

The League invites the co-operation of all who are interested in the drama. It is not proposed to incur any expenditure until the full amount necessary to buy the land and erect and completely equip the building has been subscribed and the success of the undertaking assured.

*Excerpt from fund-raising pamphlet*

1970



**Our Rebuilding Goal is:**  
**\$445,000**

TOTAL COST  
of rebuilding your  
Ottawa Little Theatre is  
**\$771,000**

This cost is made up of:	\$527,000
Construction costs	\$527,000
Architects, Consultant Services and Administration, Interim Financing, Contingency	\$171,000
Equipment and Furnishings	\$73,000
	\$771,000

LESS:  
Insurance and interest on short  
term investment

\$326,000

**Leaving a balance of**  
**\$445,000**  
which can only come from  
public subscription.

*Excerpt from fund-raising pamphlet*

While others may have concluded that the fire in 1970 rang a death knell for OLT, President Jane Murray and Board member Len Holt lead the efforts to re-build and Kenneth C. Binks offered his expertise as fund-raising chairman.

### Raising \$775,000

The established goal was to raise \$445,000 which (with \$330,000 from the fire insurance) would fund rebuilding on the same lot - property already owned by Ottawa Little Theatre.

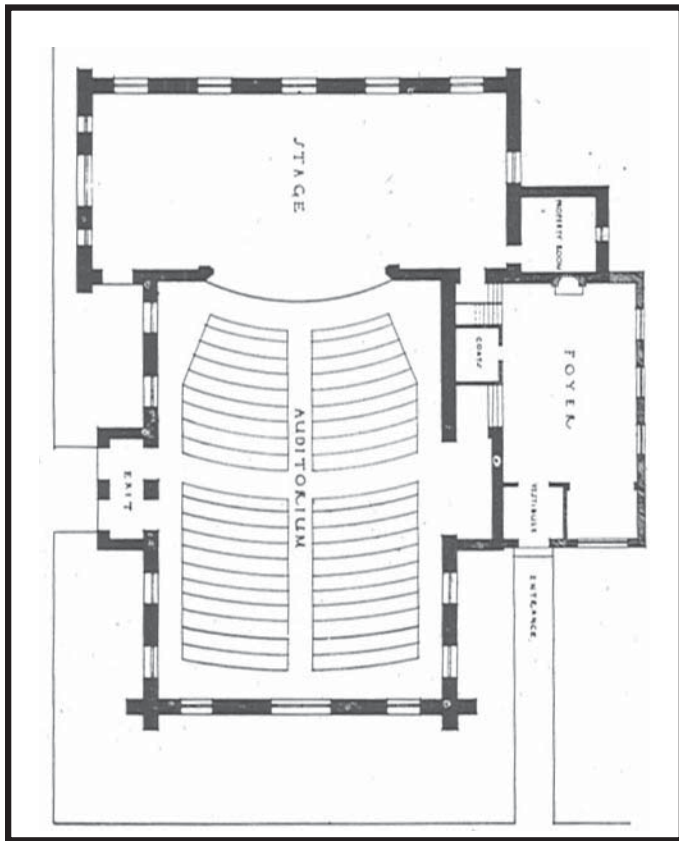
### How they did it:

Supporters organized a television tribute produced and aired by CBC. A telethon was held on CJOH TV. OLT staged a benefit performance of *Hay Fever* in the theatre of the NAC. Pamphlets were distributed calling for donations. Seated Life memberships were sold at \$1,000.

# The Plans and Building Stages

1926

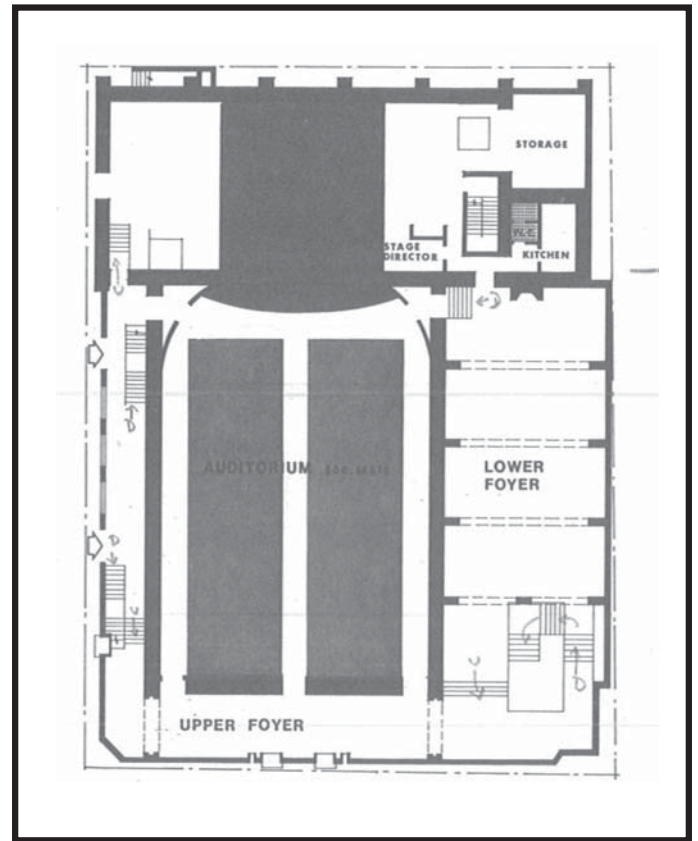
Within two years enough money was raised to buy the old church building and additional money was raised to convert the building into a theatre. Cecil Burgess was the architect contracted to undertake the renovations.



*Plan view of auditorium and stage in 1928*

1970

Less than six months after the fire, Jane Murray announced that the re-building project would begin on February 8, 1971. A long time member of OLT, Ted Fancott, senior partner of W.E Fancott and Bett Architects was to design the new theatre, accepting only a nominal fee for his service.



*Plan view of original concept for auditorium and stage in 1971*

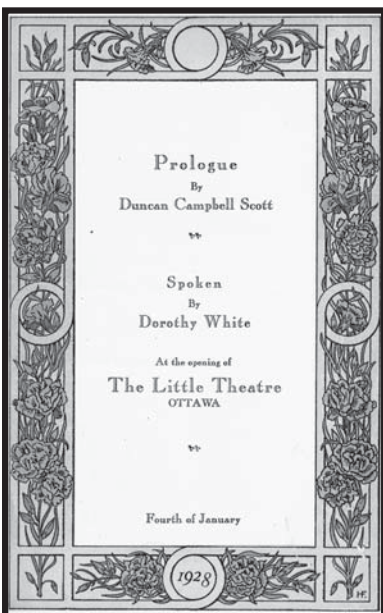


# The Finished Product

1928



On January 3rd, 1928 the OLT auditorium was officially opened by the Governor General, Freeman-Thomas, Marquess of Willingdon. The first production was *Anthony and Anna* by St. John Ervine on January 4th.



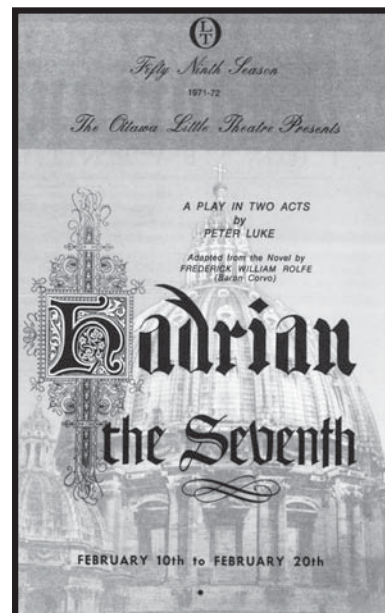
Cover of Prologue written by Dr. Campbell Scott to commemorate the opening of the Ottawa Little Theatre.

Renovated Church property (above)

1972



On February 10, 1972 the curtain of the newly constructed theatre opened on the production *Hadrian VII* by Peter Luke, directed by Len Holt.



Cover of program from *Hadrian VII* the first production staged in the new theatre.

Ottawa Little Theatre building, 1972 (above)

## Press Coverage of the Official Opening

Patrons of amateur drama in Ottawa will find the interior of the Little Theatre a work of art in itself.

The foyer, which is literally one of the finest in Canada, has...an early Venetian motif with curved stone pillars, great open fireplace and gorgeous stained glass windows...

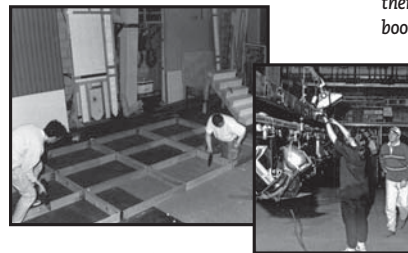
The auditorium itself is also beautiful to behold. Overhead is the attractive, blue vaulted ceiling with handsomely carved beams, while on the floor are the 498 opera chairs, appropriately spaced for comfort and richly furnished in deep leather upholstery. Wide aisles give easy access to all parts of the house and every seat will be found acceptable in the matter of stage view and acoustics.

The stage is 75 feet wide and 30 feet deep, ample room for all presentations. All contrivances of modern stagecraft have been installed, these include an up-to-date electrical switchboard and complete equipment for all desired lighting effects. There is an extensive array of scenery, curtains, back drops and stage properties, insuring the proper setting for (all) types of performances. Back stage are found ample dressing rooms, a green room and excellent storage facilities.



Note: the citations (at left) are from: Ottawa Journal, January 3rd, 1928, page 14

1928



Note: the citations (at right) are from: Ottawa Citizen, January 29, 1972 p. 25

1972

...there is much to admire in this new, up-dated version of the Little Theatre.

To the left of the lobby is a staircase which follows the curve of a brick wall to the upper foyer – a large, pleasant space with long windows all along one side...

...the similarity in atmosphere between this auditorium and the old one is startling...the dominant color, – indeed the only colour – is red...: warm red carpet, red walls, and red upholstery on the 510 seats. The floor is steeply raked (7 feet from back to front), and the seats are staggered, giving extremely good sightlines from practically any part of the house.

The stage itself is 80 feet in width, which means wing space undreamed of in the old building. The grid is 45 feet above the stage...this means three or four sets could be "flown" if necessary. Lighting is set up from a booth at stage left, and there is a control console in the lighting and sound booth which runs across the back of the auditorium and is reached by means of a spiral staircase leading to a catwalk all along the side of the theatre...Beneath the stage are all the working facilities- a prop room, a "green room"...with a small kitchen...and a rehearsal room... Dressing rooms are positively elegant, complete with vanities and tiled showers, and a large costume room has space to accommodate...racks of clothes, ...shoes, hat boxes and other accessories.