The Globe Players in Balboa Park

By

Darlene Gould Davies

I acted in the first play at the Old Globe as a permanent theater in 1937 (after the closing of the Exposition of 1935-36). I was an actor in 1937-38, but I was also a stage manager, helped with sets and props—I lived at the theatre! Then when the Globe’s director was called up by the Navy, I was chosen to be producing director—a job which I did, basically, for the next 65 years...(though my title changed).

Craig Noel in 2005

Seventy-five years have passed since the 1935 California Pacific International Exposition in Balboa Park and the first appearance of the Globe Players in the newly built Old Globe Theatre. The Globe Players moved to San Diego from Chicago where they had performed edited versions of Shakespeare’s plays in an Elizabethan-themed “Merrie England” exhibit at the 1933-34 “Century of Progress Exposition” in Chicago. Word of their popularity reached San Diegans who were busily planning an exposition to open the next year. According to theatre critic Welton Jones, “the operators of the 1935 California Pacific International Exposition in San Diego lured them to Balboa Park hoping to duplicate their success.”

Abbreviated Shakespeare productions fit nicely with a great array of attractions in Balboa Park. The purpose of the exposition was purely commercial—to market San Diego to the world as a tourist attraction and a place to do business. Performances of edited Shakespearean plays appealed to

Darlene Gould Davies has previously published articles on San Diego’s theatre history in The Journal of San Diego History. She is indebted to editors Dr. Molly McClain and Dr. Iris Engstrand, without whom this article would not have been written.
large numbers of people—a practical notion that introduced many people to theatre and Shakespeare for the first time in their lives. For the most part, it took little time to see plays, leaving plenty of leftover hours for viewing rocks and minerals; attending the Hollywood Motion Picture Hall of Fame, Gold Gulch Calaboose, and the Amusement Zone; enjoying symphony concerts; peeking at the Zoro Garden nudist colony; and sampling all kinds of food. People could opt to see multiple plays in one day. It was envisioned that upon entering the fairgrounds within the park, families would spend entire days and evenings at the Exposition. That is exactly what happened.

The founder of the Globe Players was Thomas Wood (“T.W.”) Stevens (1895-1984), an artist, teacher, author, and theatre director. He founded the Department of Drama at the Carnegie Institute of Technology (Carnegie Mellon University), remaining there from 1913-25, and co-founded the Goodman Memorial Theatre in Chicago. Director Theodore Viehman described him as “a quiet and efficient organizer” and an all-round artist: “He was a complete régisseur, for he was eminently equipped as painter, etcher, colorist, and he had a far-reaching knowledge of historic periods in costume, furniture, decoration, and architecture.” He was not, however, an actor’s director. Those who worked with him described their frustration “at not having a firm guiding hand from T.W.” According to one student, he had a sink-or-swim attitude: “He had unwavering faith in the actors whom he had chosen. He assumed they were trained for their jobs...He was convinced that each individual had something to say and to contribute and, given the right conditions and material, he would eventually say it.”

In 1919, Stevens recruited Ben Iden Payne (1881-1976), an English actor, director, and teacher in the drama program. Payne made his stage debut in England at age seventeen and went on to pioneer the repertory theatre movement in Britain and, later, the United States. In 1913, he established the Fine Arts Theatre in Chicago, where he met Stevens for the first time. Payne explained that he accepted a position at the Carnegie Institute because “for some time I had felt that the changing conditions in the theatre had created the need for definite training of actors rather than the old haphazard way of drifting or forcing one’s way onto the stage without preparation.”
At the Carnegie Institute, Payne “developed what he considered his chief contribution to theatre: the method of producing Shakespeare’s plays on an approximation of an Elizabethan stage.” He attributed it to his “brief association with that eccentric genius William Poel, founder of the Elizabethan Stage Society” and later wrote about his experiences in *A Life in the Wooden O: Memoirs of the Theatre* (1977). In 1934, Payne took a leave from the university to direct and act at the Goodman Theatre with his former colleague Stevens.

Together, Stevens and Payne planned a Shakespeare project for Chicago’s Century of Progress Exposition, where a theatre was built for Stevens in the fair’s “English Village,” also known as “Merrie England.” There, the Globe Players performed shortened versions of Shakespeare’s plays. Stevens and Payne “edited the cutting of the plays, streamlining each play into a forty minute playing unit, without intermission.”

*San Diego Union* arts writer Dave McIntyre wrote, “In spite of horrified outcries from the more hidebound academicians, the resulting productions enjoyed enthusiastic popular success.”

Shakespeare’s plays came to life under Stevens and Payne with performances that were “expertly directed, briskly paced, intelligently read, well phrased,” according to a contemporary. By the end of the Century of Progress Exposition, the company had put on 1,001 performances of Shakespeare’s most popular plays before audiences totaling 400,000.

San Diego planners wanted to replicate that success in Balboa Park. McIntyre wrote, “Encouraged by the offer of enough space to erect a reasonably accurate replica of Shakespeare’s own theater... Stevens agreed to repeat the project here. And that’s how the Old Globe was born.” Payne edited and arranged many of the plays and was involved in direction. He later returned to the Globe to direct.
the first production of the National Shakespeare Festival, *Twelfth Night*, in 1949. According to McIntyre, “His judgment was certainly a key factor in their success. And anyone who remembers the long lines that gathered for every performance during the fair can testify to their appeal. In truth, it is no exaggeration to mark those offerings as the root of much of the vital interest in Shakespeare that continues to this day.”

Groundbreaking for San Diego’s Globe Theatre replica took place on April 28, 1935. Although the new theatre was not finished when the Old Globe Players arrived, it was soon done, opening on May 29. The replica, as promised, was faithfully based on Shakespeare’s fabled Globe Theatre in England. That meant that, in the beginning, it had no roof and audiences endured uncomfortably hot weather conditions. Nevertheless, the plays, the talent, and the setting provided a mix that was irresistible to the public.

Joe A. Callaway, a member of the 1935 Globe acting company, later wrote about that first year. He maintained fond memories and eagerly shared them. Callaway’s recollections provide direct links to that historically significant time. He recalled the history of the founding of The Old Globe Company of Equity Players in 1934 and its development into the financial and artistic hit of the Century of Progress Exposition. Callaway cited glowing critical reviews at the time, including one that described the company as, “Blazingly successful in both quality and box office.” Another reported, “1,000 successful performances of Shakespeare in one playhouse for a half million people is the most important dramatic item ever written.” Thanks to Callaway’s recollections, it is known that, at the close of the Century of Progress Exposition engagement, a winter season followed at Chicago’s Studebaker Theatre featuring a full length version of *King Lear*, that critic Lloyd Lewis described as “the greatest in living memory.”
Actress Irene Tedrow described her time with the Old Globe Players to writer and actress Roberta Ridgely. “It was a wonderful learning experience,” the former recalled, “Nine of us were from Carnegie Tech, where Stevens headed the drama department, the first in the country to give a degree in drama. We all had worked with Payne there. It was he who put our company together.” Payne had many contacts, as he had taught at other institutions besides the Carnegie Institute, and he was able to recruit additional players, for instance, Bertram Tanswell. According to Tedrow, “Payne, not Stevens, was the real director of the Globe Players. And he was such an authority. He could tell you how to read the lines and how to interpret them, and how to speak in verse. A great teacher as well as a great director. After the 1934 Century of Progress, we toured the Midwest. Then we returned to Chicago and played in a downtown theatre.”

The company arrived in San Diego in May 1935. According to Callaway, “Most of the plays were given in abbreviated versions, with unessential parts eliminated without weakening the structure. They held the audience’s interest closely by presenting the essence of the plays in less than an hour. Intermissions, scene changes, and curtain waits were eliminated so that the condensed versions were paced with cinema-like speed. There were marathon performances each day.” Walter Kerr, the influential New York Times critic, wrote: “Correct any impression that Stevens was in any way ‘amateur.’ It was one of the most vigorous and accomplished young acting companies I ever saw.”

According to the Old Globe’s production history, the following eight plays were presented in the first year: Julius Caesar, The Taming of the Shrew, Hamlet, Much Ado About Nothing, The Comedy of Errors (full length), The Winter’s Tale, As You Like it, Macbeth, A Midsummer’s Night Dream, All’s Well That Ends Well, Twelfth Night, Dr. Faustus, and The Merry Wives of Windsor. Nevertheless, additional productions were in the final repertoire.

There seems to have been very little theatre activity in Los Angeles at the time,
so the movie colony adopted the Globe. Callaway remembered that movie stars like Jimmy Cagney, Mae West, and Boris Karloff came to shows, with Karloff boasting he had seen thirty-six performances.  

Callaway’s name appears repeatedly in a printed program for Globe Theatre productions dated 1935. The program lists eight productions with their casts, but the repertoire was larger than eight. A few of the popular players were Irene Tedrow, Bertram Tanswell, Carl Benton Reid, Jack Woolley (later known as Jackson Woolley), Elsie Dvorak, Joe A. Callaway, Jackson Perkins, Martha Ellen Scott, and Rhys Williams. While not all actors appeared in every production, a majority performed in most of them.

The fact that the group was already a functioning unit made it easier to adjust to the rapidly changing and uneven circumstances of the early days of the Exposition. It was a true repertory company in ensemble mode, young and nimble, ready to rapidly change from one humorous character in a comedy to a lead in a tragedy, then to an entirely different part in a third production, lickety-split, all within a few hours’ time. Accounts differ as to the length of the plays, with various sources citing performance times from 36 to 50 minutes, as well as full length. San Diego historian Richard Amero refers to one-hour versions of Shakespeare and suggests that there were five, maybe six, plays presented each day. Even in abbreviated format, actors and staff must have worked furiously to provide so much entertainment.

Callaway fondly recalled artistic director and producer Craig Noel who became the guiding inspiration at the Globe for more than seven decades. During breaks, actors would walk across Cabrillo bridge for tea and a visit with Noel, a stage-struck young man working at the soda fountain at Bakker’s Drug Store at Fifth and Laurel Streets. Callaway wrote, “Even if they had read the tea leaves at the bottom of the
cups, none would have predicted that this brilliant fellow would later be largely responsible for the preservation and expansion of the durable Old Globe.”27

Noel graduated from high school in 1934 with a great love of the words of Shakespeare. His high school drama teacher—Margery Davis, a former professional actor—had encouraged him in his acting endeavors and he had memorized Shakespearean soliloquies and performed them in contests while still in high school. He had auditioned for Stevens to be a part of the Globe Theatre performances, but was not selected. He recalled that his choice of Antony’s oration from Julius Caesar was an “unwise choice for a scrawny little kid.” Nevertheless, Noel stayed near the Globe, taking various jobs in Balboa Park during the Exposition. One job involved working the check stand: checking coats, cameras, packages, and the like. Between shifts, he rushed over to the Globe to see a Shakespeare production. He loved the shows and thought the actors were wonderful, mentioning, in particular, Jackson Perkins, Irene Tedrow, Carl Benton Reid, and Martha Scott.28

Noel wrote of the Globe Theatre: “I found the acting very rapid and intense, but what impressed me was the thrust stage. I had never seen anything like it.”29 He was referring to Payne’s use of “a modified Elizabethan staging for Shakespeare plays rather than the Victorian proscenium staging common at the time.”30

While the new theatre in Balboa Park conformed well to the original Old Globe, the positioning was faulty. Noel explained, “Because of San Diego’s wonderful climate, exposition officials decided they could follow the original Old Globe plan of an open-air building with no roof...Unfortunately, the stage had been placed so that the late afternoon sun shone right in the eyes of the audiences.”31 As the afternoon sun was blinding and hot, a trial canvas was put on top of the “Wooden O.” Finally, a permanent roof was attached that not only took care of the sun glare during shows, but also cut down on the...
Charlotte Erwine Albrecht, a long-time San Diegan, described the Exposition as “kind of thrown together in the beginning. Buildings and amenities were only partially completed.” She clearly remembered seeing the Globe Shakespeare productions when she was thirteen years old. Her large family frequently attended the fair and showed great enthusiasm for both the Globe performances and symphony concerts in the Ford Bowl, often referred to as the Starlight Bowl. They spent an entire day and evening every time they visited. She said, “There was so much to do. The first thing we did after we entered the fair was hurry to the food and beverage building, where free sticks of gum were given to visitors. We all watched one of the Shakespeare productions, which probably cost no more than 25 cents at the time. Then, we rushed from the Globe to other attractions.” Albrecht remembered the Globe stage productions as being very well done: “So immediate. My parents were very impressed. The stage was fabulous.”

San Diego’s Globe Players were mentioned in a Time Magazine article entitled, “California: Miracle of 1935.” The article described the California Pacific Exposition: “Under the soft glow of colored lights playing on bower of palm and eucalyptus trees, a comfortable but by no means spectacular crowd of 25,000 began to see the fair sights in earnest.” They included, “the ‘Gold Gulch Mining Camp,’ complete with an old-time saloon, ogling dance hall gals and some bearded characters in hickory shirts splashing in a muddy wallow with pans. Tabloid versions of Shakespearean drama were playing at ‘Shakespeare’s Old Globe Theatre,’ an old-time Chicago attraction.” Perhaps the word “tabloid” referred to the fact that most of the Shakespeare plays were heavily edited and abbreviated.

When it was decided to extend the Exposition into 1936, the Globe Players performed for only a short time in San Diego before leaving early in 1936 to play at an exposition in Texas. The Fortune Players replaced them and continued to perform Shakespeare’s work. Ridgely noted, “It was always the éclat of the Globe Players that San Diegans liked to recall in connection with the Expo years.”

In 1997, Dr. Homer and Mrs. Betty Peabody gathered written memories of the Exposition in a softbound, unpublished book entitled “Tapestry of Time.”
The Globe Players gathered around the character of Queen Elizabeth I, played by Martha Scott, 1935-36. From left to right, standing: Jack Woolley, Bertram Tanswell, Robert Galbraith, Austin Coghlan, and Kendall Power. From left to right, seated: Martha Scott, Elizabeth Sowersby, and Elsie Dvorak. Old Globe Theatre Photograph Collection, Special Collections & University Archives, San Diego State University.

The Globe Players recreated a banquet scene from Queen Elizabeth I’s court outside the playhouse. Old Globe Theatre Photograph Collection, Special Collections & University Archives, San Diego State University.
The Globe Players in Balboa Park

Lewis W. Fry recalled, “It was a wonderful world inside those gates. One place that made a difference in my life was the Old Globe Theatre where actors performed short Shakespearean excerpts both inside the replica of the famous Globe on the Thames and outside in a bench-rimmed circle on the grass. I watched them over and over. Though I never took a Shakespeare literature class in school, those little plays gave me a real appreciation of the drama and I enjoyed Globe Shakespeare Festival productions starting with the first one in 1949 and was a Globe member for years.”

Dr. Sue Earnest wrote, “I remember the agile dancers on the green by the Globe Theatre presided over by Queen Elizabeth. They danced with youthful abandon. The trumpet was sounded, Queen Elizabeth waved her fan and a page barked sharply ‘Curtain time!’ The sharply cut versions of Shakespeare were beautifully done and lasted about an hour.”

Ellen Revelle Eckis said, “We loved the performances of stream-lined Shakespeare, and Queen Elizabeth appearing to watch the lively English dances outdoors.”

World fairs like the ones in Chicago, San Diego and Dallas offered valuable training for ambitious actors in early periods of their careers. MacDonald Carey, a member of the Globe Players in Texas, later achieved fame as a film and television performer. Noted actor and director Sam Wanamaker, meanwhile, performed Shakespeare at the 1936-37 summertime Great Lakes World Fair in Cleveland, Ohio. This experience may have provided the seeds of his enormous efforts to reconstruct the original Globe Theatre in London later in his life.

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The Globe Theatre’s famed artistic director and producer Craig Noel saw many Shakespeare productions during the 1935 Exposition and befriended a number of actors.

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lecture platform
performances include
more than eight thou-
sand appearances
in the United States,
Europe, and Asia.
He acted in sixteen
Shakespearean plays,
four of which were
directed by Margaret
Webster, co-founder
of the American
Repertory Theater. In 1989, he established
the Joe A. Callaway
Award for acting,
administered through
Actors Equity Asso-
ciation. Among the
many recipients
of this award are
Campbell Scott (1991),
Brian Bedford (1995),
Laura Linney (1994),
and Frank Langella
(1996). In 2001, the
world-renowned
stage director and for-
er Artistic Director

of the Old Globe, Jack O’Brien, was the recipient of the Joe A. Callaway Directors Award, administered by the Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation. Callaway also endowed the Joe A. Callaway Company Fellow Award at the Old Globe to commemorate the 1935 company. For many years, an oil painting of Cal-

appeared in many movies, includ-

Carl Benton Reid was another one of the actors who graduated from Carnegie
Tech drama department, and was recruited by Stevens to act with the Globe Players in Chicago and then in San Diego. That was the beginning of Reid’s long and multi-faceted career on stage, in film, and on television. He was acclaimed in the role of Oscar Hubbard in the 1939 broadway production of The Little Foxes, a role he repeated in the movie starring Bette Davis. He acted in Shakespeare productions on Broadway and performed in the original production of Eugene O’Neil’s The Iceman Cometh. Reid’s filmography lists thirty movies, including The Great Caruso, The Ugly American, Pork Chop Hill, and Wichita. He is best remembered for his presence as “the man” in the 1965 TV series “Amos Burke—Secret Agent,” which was only one of many TV appearances.

Martha Scott, another Globe Player, was the original Emily Webb in Our Town on Broadway in 1938. She recreated the role for the 1940 film, winning an Academy Award nomination for Best Actress. Scott appeared in many movies, includ-


Other working actors included Bertram Tanswell, who acted the part of Oberon in *Summerspell* (1983) and directed plays, and the remarkable Irene Tedrow, veteran of dozens of television shows and films.\(^{48}\) The latter performed in several Broadway performances of Shakespeare plays in the late 1930s and the Broadway revival of *Our Town* (1969). She returned to theater later in life to deliver a burnished performance in the Old Globe production of *Foxfire* (1985).\(^{49}\)

Jackson Woolley, a native of Pittsburgh, continued to act and direct. He returned to the Old Globe to play Malvolio in B. Iden Payne’s 1949 production of *Twelfth Night*. Noel discussed that production, among others, in a conversation with Ted Bardacke in 1969. He said that in the summer of 1949, most of the actors were students, with the exception of Donna Woodruff and Jackson Woolley who “were able to enhance the productions.”\(^{50}\) In the 1950s, Woolley directed several shows at the Globe. He and his wife Ellamarie Woolley became regionally notable visual artists, and their enamel on copper work remains highly collectible.\(^{51}\)

Stevens continued his dynamic career. After his work with the Globe Players, he directed and taught at many different drama centers, from small theatres in St. Louis and Detroit to The Stanford Theatre in Palo Alto, California. In 1941, he accepted the position of Head of the Department of Dramatic Arts at the University of Arizona. He also did an incredible amount of writing. He penned plays for stage; wrote and directed twenty-two dramatic pageants, including *The Pageant of the Italian Renaissance* (1909); published his poetry in *Harper’s Magazine*; and composed novels. According to White, his most important literary contribution was his textbook on the history of the theatre, *The Theatre from Athens to Broadway* (1932).\(^{52}\)

Particularly interesting are his arrangements of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *As You Like It* for the Globe Theatre. According to actress Mary Doyle, “No one in his generation did more to popularize Shakespeare than Thomas Wood Stevens.”\(^{53}\)

Payne, meanwhile, continued his career in educational theatre. In 1935, he returned to England to become the director of the Stratford-on-Avon Shake-
Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. In 1942, he lectured in the United States for the British Ministry of Information and, two years later, directed several plays for the New York Theatre Guild. In 1946, he took a position at the University of Texas at Austin where he remained for the rest of his career, first as Guest Professor of Drama and, later, as department chair. He held guest summer positions at a number of schools and summer theatres, including Shakespeare festivals in San Diego and Ashland, Oregon, and won many awards. In 1976, Queen Elizabeth II made him an Honorary Officer of the British Empire and the University of Texas approved the establishment of a 500-seat theater to be named after him.54

Stevens and Payne, along with the Globe Players, laid the foundation of San Diego’s Globe Theatre. Their work was carried on by many devoted people of the theatre, none more determinedly, or for so long, than Craig Noel. The stage-struck young actor who longingly gazed at the Globe stage in 1935 provided the thread of continuity over seventy-five years. While the years of World War II were disruptive and there were stumbles along the way, he never dropped the torch handed to him by Stevens, Payne, and actors like Callaway. Let Balboa Park’s California Pacific International Exposition and San Diego’s Globe Theatre share a birthday cake this year. Seventy-five years young.
The Globe Players in Balboa Park

NOTES


12. McInryre, “Barrymore Story Kindles Memories of Drama Veteran.”


17. Ibid.


19. Ibid.


21. Ibid.


25. Author conversations with Craig Noel over past two decades.


30. Rhoades, “Payne, Ben Iden.”


32. Ridgely, “The Dream in the Park.”


35. Ridgely, “The Dream in the Park.”

36. Dr. Homer and Betty Peabody, eds., “Tapestry of Time,” unpublished manuscript, 1997, 63. This bound collection of stories is available for loan from the Friends of Balboa Park office.

37. Ibid, 63.

38. Ibid, 18.

39. Ibid, 32.


45. Diane Sinor and Lianne Bower, interviewed by author, 2010. The painting of Callaway was identified and located by Diane Sinor, Roberta Wells-Famula, and Robert Drake.


