

History

The Oregon Shakespeare Festival traces its roots back to the Chautauqua movement, which brought culture and entertainment to rural areas of the country in the late 19th century. Ashland's first Chautauqua building—erected in 1893, mostly by townspeople—saw its first performance on July 5. In 1905, the building was enlarged to accommodate an audience of 1,500. Families traveled from all over Southern Oregon and Northern California to see such performers as John Phillip Sousa and William Jennings Bryan during the Ashland Chautauqua's 10-day seasons.

In 1917 a round, dome-covered structure was erected in the place of the original Chautauqua building. The structure fell into disuse, however, when the Chautauqua movement died out in the early 1920s. The dome was torn down in 1933, but the cement walls remain standing today; covered with ivy, they surround the Elizabethan Theatre.

Angus L. Bowmer, an enthusiastic young teacher from Southern Oregon Normal School (now Southern Oregon University), was struck by the resemblance between the Chautauqua walls and some sketches he had seen of Elizabethan theatres. He proposed producing a "festival" of two plays within the walls, in conjunction with the City of Ashland's Fourth of July celebration. The City cautiously advanced Bowmer a sum "not to exceed \$400" for the project. SERA (State Economic Recovery Act) funds provided a construction crew to build the stage and improve the grounds.

The Oregon Shakespearean Festival was officially born on July 2, 1935 with a production of *Twelfth Night*. The Festival presented *The Merchant of Venice* on the 3rd and *Twelfth Night* again on the 4th. Reserved seats cost \$1, with general admission of \$.50 for adults and \$.25 for children. Even at these prices, the Festival covered its own expenses. The Festival also absorbed the losses of the daytime boxing matches that the City—which feared that the plays would lose money—held onstage.

Here's a brief look at some of the major events that followed the Festival's inception in 1935:

1935	Oregon Shakespearean Festival opens July 2 with a production of <i>Twelfth Night</i> , and presents <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> on the 3rd and <i>Twelfth Night</i> again on the 4th.
1937	Oregon Shakespearean Festival Association is incorporated.
1939	The Festival takes a production of <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> to the Golden Gate Exposition in San Francisco. Angus L. Bowmer later credits the nationwide radio broadcast and resultant publicity for enabling the Festival to resume production after World War II.
1941-46	OSF closes during World War II.

- 1947 OSF resumes production as a new, larger Elizabethan Stage is built to replace the stage damaged by a 1940 fire. As the reputation for the productions grew, so does the Festival; more performances are scheduled, and the company becomes larger. The Institute of Renaissance Studies (the forerunner of the current education department, the OSF Institute) becomes a part of OSF.
- 1952 The Tudor Guild, the Festival's first volunteer organization, is incorporated.
- 1953 OSF hires its first, full-time, paid employee: General Manager William Patton, who later becomes Executive Director. Richard L. Hay is appointed Designer and Technical Director.
- 1958 With its production of Troilus and Cressida, OSF completes the Shakespearean canon for the first time. Following the season, the 1947 stagehouse—which had, for several years, barely met fire codes—is torn down.
- 1959 New Elizabethan Stage opens. Designed by Richard L. Hay (architect: Jack A. Edson; contractor: Frank Fairweather), the stagehouse is patterned on London's 1599 Fortune Theatre.
- 1960 OSF produces its first non-Shakespearean play, John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*.
- 1963 Attendance tops 50,000.
- 1966 OSF's Endowment Fund is established.
- 1970 The 600-seat indoor Angus Bowmer Theatre, designed by Richard L. Hay (architects: Kirk, Wallace, McKinley, AIA & Associates, Seattle WA; contractor: Robert D. Morrow, Inc., Salem, OR), opens March 21 with Tom Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead. Completion of the theatre enables OSF to expand its season into the spring and fall; helps generate much-needed income; and accommodates more playgoers.
- 1971 Angus Bowmer retires. Jerry Turner is appointed Producing Director. Attendance tops 150,000.
- 1977 A third theatre—the 140-seat Black Swan, designed by Richard L. Hay—opens February 11 with Shelagh Delaney's A Taste of Honey. This intimate theatre allows experimentation with plays which cannot be sustained in the larger theatres, but are still worthy of serious production. Angus Bowmer and OSF receive the Oregon Governor's Award for the Arts.
- 1978 With Timon of Athens, the Festival completes the Shakespearean canon for the second time.
- 1979 OSF founder Angus Bowmer dies on May 26 (1904-1979).
- 1983 Festival wins Antoinette Perry ("Tony") Award for outstanding achievement in regional theatre and National Governors' Association Award for distinguished service to the arts, the first ever awarded to a performing arts organization. Attendance tops 300,000.

1984 OSF negotiates a special contract with Actors' Equity Association, thereby increasing the number of Equity actors in the company while continuing to give new actors the opportunity to accrue experience and professional credits. 1985 OSF celebrates its 50th anniversary. 1986 Festival volunteers receive the President's Volunteer Action Award at the White House. 1987 OSF welcomes its five millionth visitor. Board of Directors accepts invitation from the City of Portland to establish a resident theatre company in the new Portland Center for the Performing Arts. 1988 OSF Portland opens November 12 with a production of George Bernard Shaw's Heartbreak House. The expansion makes OSF the largest not-for-profit theatre in the The Oregon Shakespearean Festival changes its name to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. 1989 Richard L. Hay, OSF's Principal Scenic and Theatre Designer, receives the Oregon Governor's Award for the Arts. 1990 OSF launches \$5.2 million fund-raising campaign to build Elizabethan Theatre Seating Pavilion. Board of Directors refuses \$49,500 grant from National Endowment for the Arts due to restrictive language. OSF subsequently receives 1990 American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Commendation and 1990 Open Book Award for First Amendment Courage from American Society of Journalists and Authors (ASJA). 1991 Jerry Turner—who receives the Oregon Arts Commission/Governor's Award for the Arts—retires and Henry Woronicz is appointed Artistic Director. 1992 The \$7.6 million Allen Pavilion of the Elizabethan Theatre is completed in June. The Pavilion encircles the seating area and provides improved acoustics, sight-lines and technical capabilities. Vomitoria (entryways for the actors from under the seating area to the stage) are added, increasing staging possibilities. Seating capacity does not change, but several hundred seats are raised onto a roofed balcony. The theatre remains open to the sky. 1993 William Patton receives the Oregon Governor's Award for the Arts. 1994 The Festival's operation in Portland becomes an independent theatre company— Portland Center Stage—on July 1. 1995 William Patton retires after 47 years with OSF. Patton later receives the Mark R. Sumner Award for distinguished achievement from the Institute of Outdoor Drama. Henry Woronicz announces his resignation in June: Libby Appel is named Artistic Director; and OSF General Manager Paul E. Nicholson is named Executive Director. 1996 Artistic Director Emeritus Jerry Turner is presented the St. Olavs Medal by the

Norwegian Consul General on behalf of King Harald of Norway.

Festival's third rotation through the Shakespeare canon is completed with Timon of

1997

Athens.



awarded Zelda Fichandler Award for imaginative, brave work in the theatre.