

The Cookie Jar Theatre in Chatsworth

- The inspiration for this program was a 31-minute documentary on character actor Milton Parsons made in 2014.
- From 1948 to 1963, Milton and Collette Parsons created the Cookie Jar Theatre. The performers were Chatsworth children between the ages of 5 and 12.
- Performances were held at the American Legion Hall on Devonshire, at the Chatsworth Park Elementary Auditorium, and in private homes.
- Rehearsals were held at the Parsons' residence at 10801 Farralone Ave.
- The photographs that follow were donated by the performers and their families.

1948 “Princess Nina’s Birthday”

- Performers from the 1948 playlet, “Princess Nina’s Birthday”.
- This was the beginning of the Cookie Jar Theatre.

Chatsworth Cookie Jar Theater Stages Playlet Twice

Many Chatsworth residents are still talking about the playlet, “Princess Nina’s Birthday”, which was presented twice recently in the patio of the Milton Parsons home.

The production was acted by stars of “The Cookie Jar Theater” and was under the direction of Mr. Parsons, assisted by Mrs. Parsons who was also responsible for the props.

The playlet was given for the first time on the birthday anniversary of Sally Ann Parsons as entertainment for guests at her party. A repeat performance was then staged before selected guests including parents of the players.

Sally Ann enacted the title role of Princess Nina while Henry Ditto played the page boy. Mary Jo Meyser was the Lady in Waiting, Jeanette Butler was Jolly the Jester, and Susan Meyser was Susie the Scullery Maid.



From Left, Sally Ann Parsons (8), Mary Jo Meyser, Henry Ditto (4), Susan Meyser, Jeanette Butler

1951 "Little Women"

The Van Nuys News and Valley Green Sheet, Jul 30, 1951:

Chatsworth Awaits August Revival of Cookie Jar Theater Production

By SALLIE STANLEY

Revival of the Cookie Jar Theater's thespian endeavors in Chatsworth has been announced with the dates of Aug. 20 to 24 set for presentation of the enlarged adaptation of Louisa Alcott's "Little Women."

Again the play will be presented on the grounds of the J. B. Meyser home at 10450 Santa Susanna Blvd., where the rumpus room and cement pavilion have been converted into a miniature stage replete with stage settings of the Victorian period.

Colette Parsons, known on the

stage as Colette Humphrey, wrote the original adaptation presented last summer with such outstanding success. This year the play has been elaborated on with the addition of a wedding scene. Several scenes will comprise the three acts.

Directing the play is Milton Parsons, well known character actor, who spent last year on tour with the play "As You Like It" starring Katherine Hepburn. More recently he has been taking a role in the play, "Ring Around the Moon" at LaJolla. Both he and his wife are Chatsworth residents. Eleanor Pettebone of Chatsworth is general manager and residents of the community are assisting.

Rehearsals are being held from 2 to 5 p.m. daily with Chatsworth children between the ages of 5 and 12 years enacting the various roles. Members of the cast were chosen for their aptitude and talent for play acting.

Heroines in the play are four sisters—Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy, and taking these roles again this season are Claudia McCulloch as Jo; Sally

Anne Parsons as Beth; Susan Pettebone, Amy and Susan Meyser, Meg. Others are Louise Schepler, Diane Felbinger, Carolyn Howard, Brian McGinnis, and Robert Randall. Added this year to the original cast are Phyllis and Henry Fladwed, Henry Dilto, Joel Boyce and Allen Pettebone.

Organizations in the community are sponsoring one night runs of the production with proceeds to benefit their own coffers. They are: Monday, Aug. 20, Our Lady of the Valley Catholic Church; Tuesday, Aug. 21, Chatsworth Park P.T.A. and Chatsworth Community Church; Wednesday, Aug. 22, Chatsworth Woman's Club; Thursday, Aug. 23, Chatsworth Post, American Legion and Auxiliary; Friday, Aug. 24, St. Martin-in-the-Fields, Winnetka.

Curtain will be at 8:15 each evening and seating capacity for each production is 200 persons. Admission is by donation and further information may be obtained by calling Mrs. Pettebone at SUperior 8-5344.



Leuise Schepler at right

OUTDOORS

Carnival Fete Is Gala Event for Midsummer

In the old-fashioned manner, a

1951 “Little Women”



Henry Ditto 4th from right, Joel Boyce 3rd from right, Allen Pettebone far right,
Sally Ann Parsons 3rd from left

1951 "Little Women" Program

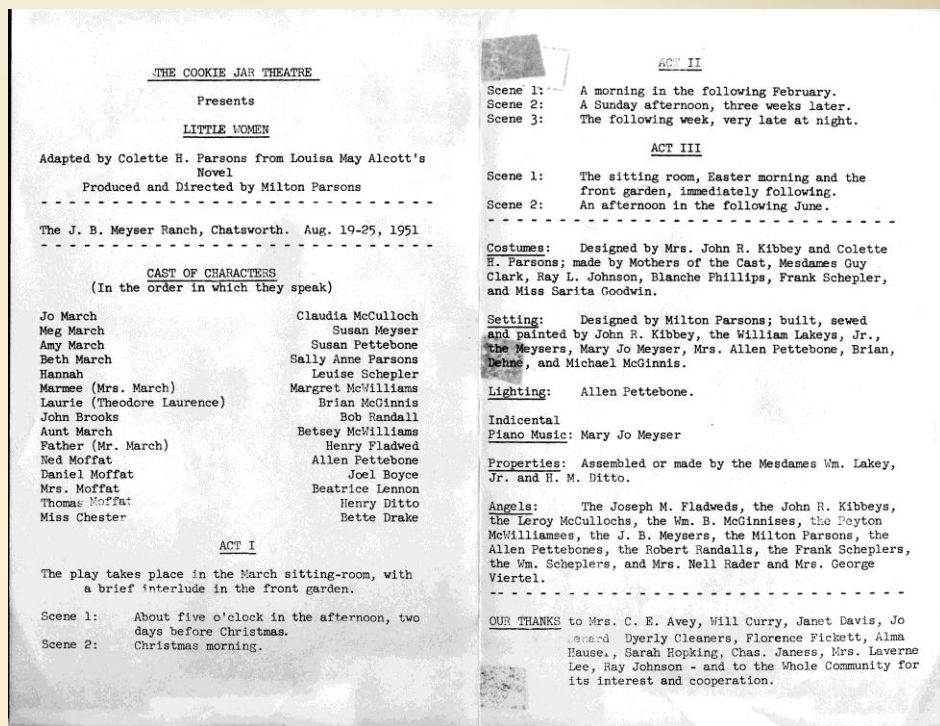
- Comments echoed by all:

These were not children's plays.
These were large, well planned
productions, that just happened to
have children for the actors.

The costuming, the sets and
production were all professionally
done.

Milton and Collette brought a high level of artistic culture to the children of Chatsworth during this era, they gave a lot of themselves to this community.

Also, this was a total community support function. If you look at the sponsors it is a Who's Who of Chatsworth during that era.



1952 “Dick Whittington”

- Performance Photograph from “Dick Whittington” at right.
- The play was held at the American Legion Hall, 21340 Devonshire Blvd.

Anstr Davidson is a mouse third or 4th from right. The Mice were named “A, E, I, O and U”.

Henry Ditto (as General Nuisance, their Commander) is at left.



1952 “Dick Whittington”

- Performance Photograph from “Dick Whittington” at right.
- The play was held at the American Legion Hall, 21340 Devonshire Blvd.

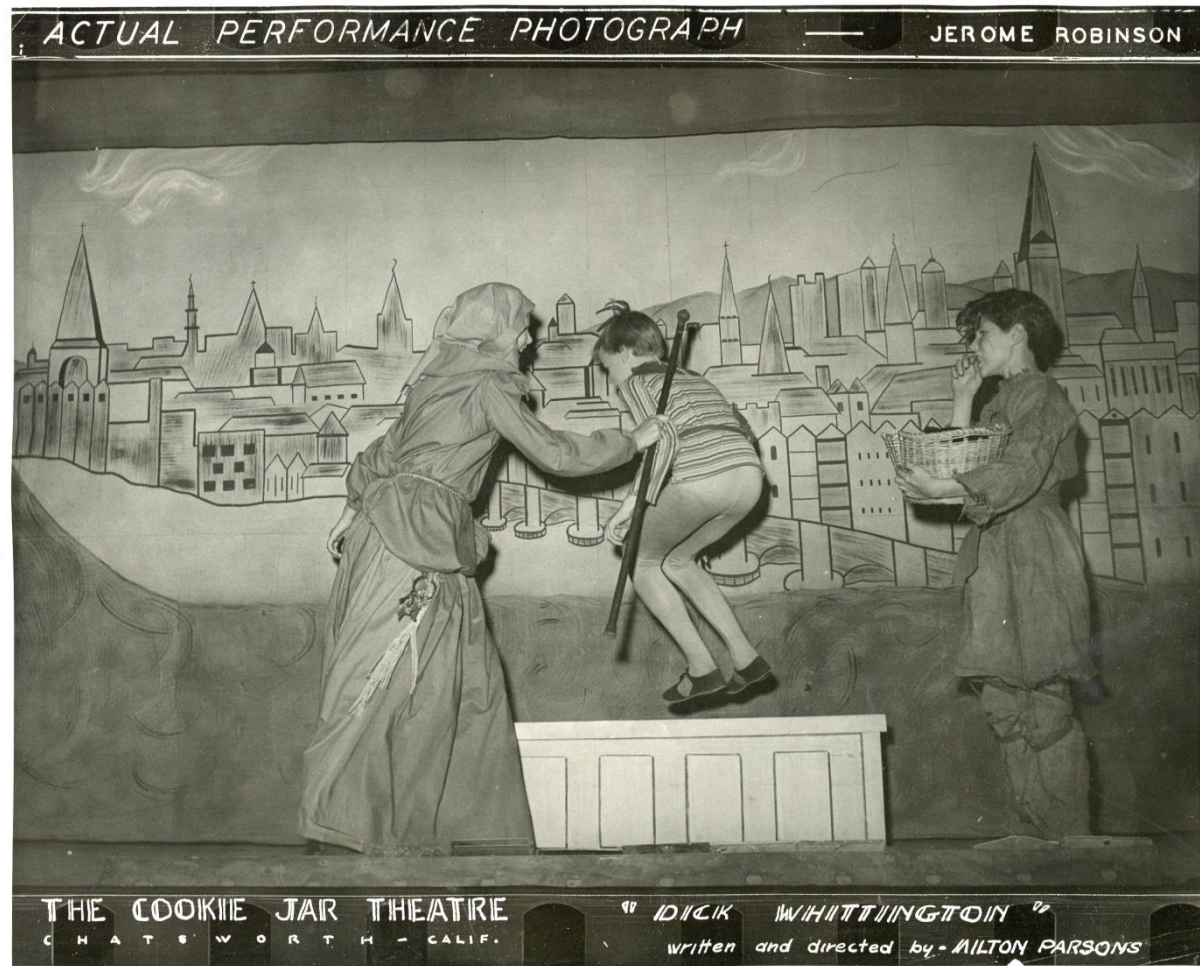
Henry Ditto (8yrs old) is front left.



1952 "Dick Whittington"

- Performance Photograph from "Dick Whittington" at right.
- The play was held at the American Legion Hall, 21340 Devonshire Blvd.

Phyllis Fladwed's
Performance Photograph.
Henry Fladwed was also in
the cast. Mrs. Joseph
Fladwed was the Musical
Director.



1952 "Dick Whittington"

1952 newspaper article at right states:

"75 boys from San Antonio School, Pacific lodge and Nazarene were guests at the performance, and given a bottle of pop through the kindness of Mrs. J.B. Meyser, Mrs. Allen Pettebone and Jack Allen"

"Saturday night, movie actress Teresa Wright attended the performance"

More Sponsors For Cookie Jar

Chatsworth's "little theater" is over for the summer with the closing performance of "Dick Whittington" on Saturday night. The play was exceptionally well done by both casts, and the way the alternate casts took over on their nights offstage, changed scenes, helped change costumes, and otherwise run the show, was little short of marvelous.

Costumes were very authentic as were the stage settings; and the directors and producers, Mr. and Mrs. Milton Parsons, left no stone unturned to make the show outstanding.

Highlights of the week were a party after the show Monday night, in honor of the birthday anniversaries of Phyllis Fladwed and Mrs. Gordon Watts, with Mrs. M. Fladwed as hostess for all the cast and the assistants.

Wednesday night, 75 boys from San Antonio school, the Pacific lodge and the Nazarene home were guests at the performance. They were all given a bottle of pop through the kindness of Mrs. J. B. Meyser, Mrs. Allen Pettebone and Jack Allen.

Saturday night, movie actress Teresa Wright attended the performance, and had her picture taken with the cast after the show.

Sunday afternoon, the cast and assistants were guests of Mr. and Mrs. A. A. Newcomb for a swimming party at Lakeside park.

MORE ANGELS

Credit is due to many local people who assisted in various ways to make the production possible. Many have already been listed and others appear below:

Messrs. and Mmes. Jack Allen, Hamilton Bingham, Robert Boggis, Tom Davidson, H. M. Ditto, King Drake, Otis Draper, Sam Downing, S. R. Ewalt, Joseph Fladwed, John Glenn, Henry Heyneman, R. Hummel, R. L. Johnson, Alexander Knox, William Lakey Jr. William Lakey Sr., Hubert Lamb, Herbert Lee, E. A. Little, R. H. Markham, Leroy McCulloch, Payton McWilliams, J. B. Meyser, A. A. Newcomb, Milton Parsons, Allen Pettebone, Earl Rush, William Schepler, John Spinks, Gordon Watts, Rev. and Mrs. James Murray, Ben Brindley, Dr. J. C. Campbell, Scott Wilbur, Joseph Waring, John Lupton, Miss Mary Young, Mrs. L. M. Gaines, Mrs. Kate Frost Sheridan, Mrs. Jean Elliot, Elsa Findley and the Chatsworth PTA.

1954 "Tom Sawyer"

- Performance Photograph from "Tom Sawyer" at right.
- The play was held at the Chatsworth Park Elementary School Auditorium, sponsored by the school's PTA.

Photo at right: Susan Pettebone seated in middle, Dick Dickenson behind her, Susan Bogert 2nd from right, Sally Ann Parsons at right.



- **“The Parsonage”**, circa 1950’s,
Home of Milton and Collette
Parsons (from 1941 to 1980)
10801 Farralone Ave.
- Built by the Flint family, about 1925.



Email from Virginia Watson, 4/20/2015

Hi Ann,

You asked for info for tomorrow at The Acre. Milton and Collette attended St. Martin-in-the-Field Episcopal Church in Winnetka when they lived in Chatsworth and I also attended the same church. I saw them often. They organized a group of members and produced religious plays for the church.

When the Chatsworth Historical Society was organized in 1963 they joined and became active members. Collette was editor of The Smoke Signal and we have copies of them. The couple loaned us their home for many meetings including board meetings. They were good friends of Jane Matthews, one of our most active presidents.

I only saw one of their plays. It was "Little Women" with Leuise Schepler in the play. My daughter Judy was friends with her and Judy still remembers going to the play. They were really nice people and the plays were really good. Sorry I can't be there, but I know the meeting will be good.

Sources/Acknowledgements

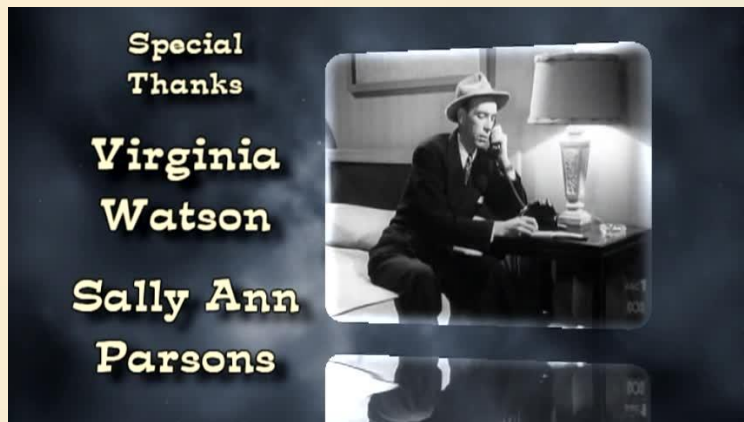
- “The Face is Familiar: Milton Parsons”, The Henson Press, 2014
- Chatsworth Historical Society Oral History Archives, Leuise Schepler Mitchell et al. Charleen Janess Roesch, Lila Schepler, Virginia Watson, Ann Vincent, Betty and Jim Summers
- Ken Ditto, Anstr Davidson, Reid Bogert, Phyllis Fladwed Owens, and Carolyn Schepler Grimm for sharing photographs and articles, and participating in research questions.
- Prepared by Ann and Ray Vincent, Chatsworth Historical Society, April 2015, revised Dec 2022

Up Next:

- A 2014 31-minute documentary on character actor Milton Parsons, “The Face is Familiar”. The video is available at:

<https://archive.org/details/FaceMiltonParsons>

- Note clip from documentary
special thanks to
Virginia Watson
Sally Ann Parsons



- A 2011 6-minute video oral interview with Leuise Schepler Mitchell, one of the founding Cookie Jar Theatre performers

Showing Next:

The Face Is Familiar: Milton Parsons (2014)*

Available on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/x7dLAHr4ZDk>

* Required to delete a 44 second 1964 Dick Van Dyke clip to post on YouTube

Up Next:

A 2011 6-minute video oral interview with Leuise Schepler Mitchell, one of the founding Cookie Jar Theatre performers.

With Lila Schepler, Charleen Janess Roesch, Virginia Watson, Ann Vincent, Betty and Jim Summers.

- Available on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/E1O4maxUnL0>

