

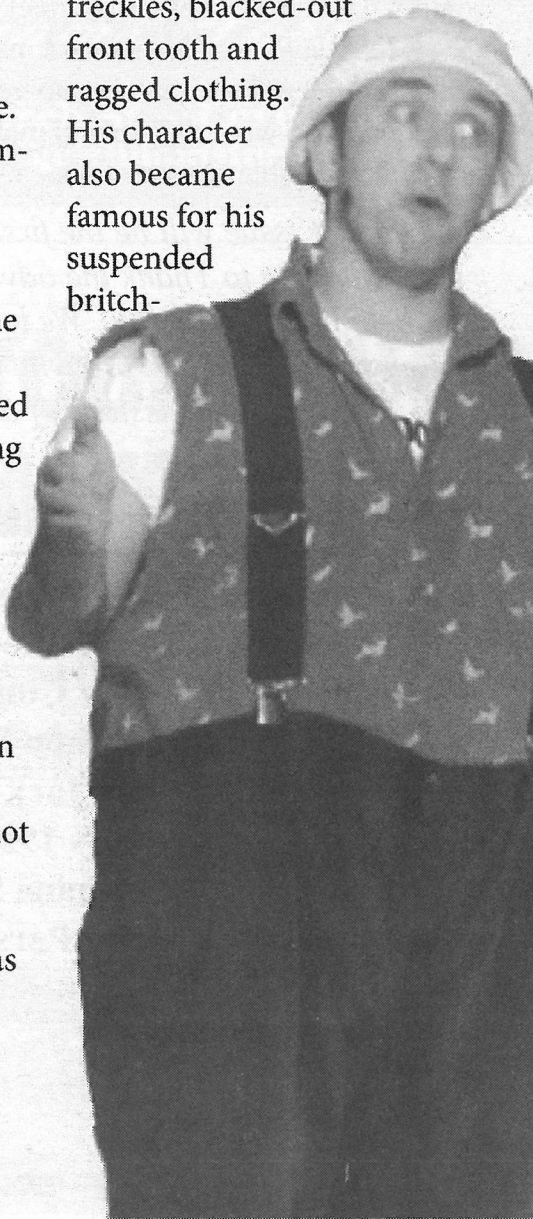
Rivertime Players

“THE TOBY SHOW”

By Lorrie Kirk

It's that time of year!! Here comes the “Toby Show.” Decatur County residents and residents of neighboring counties have come to look forward to the big canvas tent located on the Municipal Building lawn in September of every year. Shane Bridges, and President of the Rivertime Players, Mark Tubbs are ready to entertain. Tent shows are known as the genuine, American folk theatre. There were many great performers that began their successful careers in tent theatres, Clark Gable, Jennifer Jones, Buddy Ebsen and who could forget the famous Red Skelton. The earliest tent shows consisted of comedy or drama plays along with music. The first shows began back in the 1880s. They traveled from town to town using horse and wagons. Then the railroad came along and shows were moved by train. In the 1920s, the tent shows began to travel by truck which gave them greater access to towns not served by railroads. Toby was created by Fred Wilson. He created the character as a naïve, silly-kid, mischievous, rude character and a genuine folk hero of the American theatre. Wilson detailed Toby in many different humorous

characters depending on the areas of the performance. In the mountains of Tennessee and Kentucky, Toby was more of a hillbilly, and in the West and Southwest, you would find Toby in chaps and carrying side arms. However, the country bumpkin became instantly recognizable by his red hair, freckles, blacked-out front tooth and ragged clothing. His character also became famous for his suspended britch-



es, winks and facial contortions, as well as his theatrical gymnastics, which delighted the audiences. This year will be the ninth annual performance for The Rivertime Players. The 2015 show, “The Good, The Bad and The Toby,” is a hilarious, western comedy. In this particular comical performance, The Good, the Bad and the Toby finds our Toby (Shane Bridges) working as a farmhand in Arizona under the direction of ranch foreman, Buck Growsome (Adam Stanford). Buck is said to have rage issues, who has a thing for Molly Medford (Elicia Spain). Molly is a simple gal, who is also the apple of Jack Norton’s (Mark Tubbs) eye. Jack’s car broke down while traveling from Atlanta with Slate McGyver (David Taylor). Slate is also smitten with Miss Molly. But one knows that her life is being threatened by Pale Kildee (MaKayla Blackstock), a half-breed Navajo gal. In the meantime, Pale just happens to have a Navajo wedding ceremony with Buck Growsome (Adam Stanford). And Buck has a lackey named Rowdy Stench (Ivan Hobbs), who is profoundly confused. Can Toby make sense of this whole situation? Can you? Wild West

wackiness is warranted. (<http://www.rivertimeplayers.org/shows/2015tentshow.asp>) What makes these shows so special? The show’s roots can be traced back 1897. Founder, Richard Henderson, a resident of Portland, MI, joined the W. H. Hartigan Dramatic Company. One year later he established his drama company called Henderson Stock Company with the intentions to employ himself as well as fellow unemployed actors. Later, the Henderson Company merged with the Hunt Stock Company in 1931. The team would travel and perform in small towns in canvas tents and opera houses until Henderson’s retirement in 1935. At that time, Harold Rosier was a featured actor in the show, went on to manage the company until 1937 at which time, he purchased the company from Henderson’s widow and changed the name to Rosier Players.



Original Trucks with the “Toby Show” in the 1940s

Toby Show

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In the spring of 1966, The Rosier Players added another team of performers and equipment called the Jack Collier Players. The team toured their company throughout the Midwest until a heart attack forced Henderson to leave the company. After the 1976 season, the Rosiers donated the show to Jackson Community College in Jackson, MI. The college continued the show until the end of 1991 season and packed away the show and placed everything in storage. In 1997, the widow of Harold Rosier donated the complete tent show to Dr. Dawn Larsen and the Hard Corn Players of Gallatin, TN. The Hard Corn Players were 10 to 15 young actors hired to

take the tent show on the road and perform throughout the Southeast in the summers. Shane Bridges was among those young actors. The actors would travel just as the circus. The actors functioned as a troupe. Each member played their part, driving trucks, cooking meals, selling tickets as well acting on stage. Each member would sleep in smaller tents around the big tent to help protect it from the inclement weather. 2006, Dr. Larsen accepted a position in another state. Larsen made the decision to give the tent production to the Parsons Arts Council as a gift. The mayor and city leaders of Parsons were happy to accept. This gift would give Parsons the proud privilege of being caretaker of the world’s last known traveling tent performance company.

In 2007, under the direction of Shane Bridges, the first “Toby Show” was performed on the Municipal Building lawn and was titled “How Now White Cow.” The show is equipped with many of the original props from the early days. An old piano and many of the 300 wooden blue chairs are all over 100 years old. The old canvas tent had to be replaced due to dry rot. The new vinyl tent is huge (45’x90’) and is designed to look just like the original. The trucks that are used for the set up are the original ones used in the 1940s. They’ve been updated over time, but still look the part of a 117 year old show. Rivertime Players are a group of volunteers in Parsons who strive to provide a community-based performing arts organization for the purpose of presenting dramatic and musi-

cal theatre, offer quality family entertainment and create opportunities for children and adults to develop talents. The show is funded by volunteers, grants, The Jackson’s Art Council and The Tennessee Arts Commission. The show is scheduled for six performances; September 25/26, October 2/3 and 9/10, 2015. Tent opens at six thirty and the performance will begin at seven thirty at 535 Tennessee Avenue in Parsons, TN. Admission is \$7.00 for adults and \$2.00 for children. Come out and enjoy the family fun and excitement of live theatre. You will be glad you did. For more information about “The Good, The Bad and The Toby” or The Rivertime Players, find us on Facebook or online at www.rivertimeplayers.org.



Toby Show Tent on Munciple Building Lawn

