

MEMORIES

LOWELL SUNDAY SUN

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Mark Reed—talented Broadway playwright

(George A. Parkhurst, a resident of Hildreth Hills in Westford, has been a playwright for local community theatre for many years.)

By GEORGE A. PARKHURST

CHELMSFORD — Broadway! Hollywood! These are the embodiment of the glamorous life. What young lady or young man has not dreamed of being part of the action on the stage or the screen?

For most, it is just a dream. But one Chelmsford man, Mark White Reed, turned his dream into reality.

Born in Chelmsford in 1890, the son of Arthur and Carrie (White) Reed, Mark received his early education in the local public schools, graduating from Chelmsford High in 1908 as class valedictorian.

After attending Dartmouth College for one year, he decided to be an architect and enrolled in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology School of Architecture. Later, he returned to Dartmouth and received his B.S., magna cum laude.

His first job was with a Boston architectural firm where he was given the somewhat less than exciting assignment of designing 10 floors of bathrooms in a hospital.

Envisioning a future devoted to plumbing, Mark left architecture to and went to Harvard, where he enrolled in Professor Baker's class in theater arts.

The theater proved to be an irresistible attraction to him.



Mark White Reed

He forsook Chelmsford for the bright lights of Manhattan, hoping to crash the big time — not as a singer, a dancer, or an actor, but as a playwright — but he soon discovered that he was only one of the aspiring artists that had gathered in Greenwich Village.

He completed two scripts. While waiting for a producer to snap them up, he went to work for a national woman's suffrage magazine. However, before either of his plays saw the New York footlights,

another, greater production was approaching its climax in Europe.

Billed as World War I, it had Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany as the star player up to that time.

Drafted into war

Mark was drafted Sept. 8,



George A. Parkhurst

1917, and after 10 days at Fort Devens, he was assigned to a machine company and shipped to France. Because of his theatrical experience, the military, in all its wisdom, transferred him to a French camouflage unit.

Having gained experience under fire, he was assigned to the new camouflage section of Company A, 4th U.S. Engineers. As a camouflage sergeant, his job was with the artillery, supervising the construction of concealment over the guns.

Between Sept. 18 and Nov. 11, 1918, he saw plenty of action in the St. Mihiel Offensive and in the Meuse-Argonne. After helping to conclude the "war to end all wars," he returned home in 1919 to find his first play, "She Would and She Did," starring Grace George, on the verge of production.

The play was not the success he had hoped for, though the critics had some nice things to say about the author.

It was 10 years before Mr. Reed's work was seen on Broadway, when his "Skyrocket" (with Humphrey Bogart in the cast) opened but failed to impress the theatergoers and once more he vanished from the theatrical scene.

During this time, he occupied himself (and met the grocery bills) with fiction writing, school teaching and factory work. Some of the pulp magazines containing his stories were sent home but his mother felt they were too avant garde for display on the parlor table at 15 Crosby Lane.

Broadway success

It was in 1935 that Mark finally struck pay dirt with his "Petticoat Fever," which enjoyed considerable success on Broadway and even more when it was made into a movie, starring Myrna Loy and Robert Montgomery.

The one song in the show was "Love Tiptoeed Through My Heart," composed by Frederic Loewe who later, with Alan J. Lerner, would achieve international fame.

Following its opening in New York, the New Yorker magazine editorialized that, in spite of unenthusiastic reviews by the critics, "the naughty 'box office' has finally found what it likes." Lines formed at the ticket window daily.