

Society hears talk on Mark Reed

The CHELMSFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY opened its fall season with a dinner meeting at the Congregational Church in North Chelmsford on Saturday, Oct. 21.

Following the meal, Chelmsford historian and lecturer George Adams Parkhurst spoke on the life and work of Mark Reed, a local man who achieved international fame as a playwright.

Parkhurst reported that Reed received his early education in the local schools and graduated as valedictorian of Chelmsford High School, Class of 1908. He then

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attended Dartmouth College, graduating magna cum laude and went on to earn a degree in architecture from M.I.T. Soon after, he found himself in the front lines of France in World War I. Following the Armistice, he moved to New York and did free lance writing while waiting for his big break.

His career as a dramatist culminated in two Broadway hits, "Petticoat Fever" (1935) and "Yes, My Darling Daughter," (1937) both of

which became major box office attractions in the movies as well as on the stage. Theater critics rated Mark among the top playwrights of the period. Such popular actors and actresses as, Robert Montgomery, Leo G. Carroll, Humphrey Bogart, Myrna Loy, and Jessica Tandy appeared in his productions.

Unfortunately, the fame of this local boy who reached the heights of the theatrical world is known to only a few present day Chelmsford residents, according to Parkhurst...

er was privileged to go back stage at the Plymouth Theatre in Boston with Mr. Reed to meet the cast and study the many stage effects.

"Petticoat Fever" was a favorite for community theatre groups and the "straw hat" circuit for many years, and is still produced from time to time. (Mark's widow told this writer recently that she received a royalty check last year.)

Two years after Mark had broken the Broadway barrier, in 1937, he gave theater-goers another treat in "Yes, My Darling Daughter," based on the author's musing as to the kind of children women prominent in the suffrage and liberal movement would have, and what situations would arise in their lives when the children grew up.

"Yes, My Darling Daughter" ran for 400 performances on Broadway and, like "Petticoat

Fever," played all over the world. Mr. Reed received \$100,000 - a princely sum in those days - for the movie rights to "Yes, My Darling Daughter."

Outside of his writing, probably Mark's major interest was tennis, a game in which he excelled. During his college days, and later when visiting his parents, he played tennis regularly on the course of the Chelmsford Lawn Tennis Association.

Mark married Virginia Belding of New York City in 1940 and retired to Boothbay Harbor, Maine. He died several years ago.

Although he had produced only two Broadway and Hollywood hits, this Chelmsford native fulfilled his ambition of placing the name Mark Reed among the successful playwrights of the period, and had become financially rewarded for the frustrating years spent in gaining recognition.