

The people behind the Red Barn



JOHN SIBBALD, chairman of the Lake Simcoe Arts Foundation.

BY DANA COOK
JACKSON'S POINT — An accountant. A farmer. The proprietor of a country club and inn. A real estate sales lady. A recreation director. A hotel owner. A provincial judge's wife. A school teacher. A Gulf dealer. A newspaper publisher. Two businessmen.

Twelve people of many different occupations and many varied interests. You won't see them taking a bow on the stage of the Red Barn Theatre this summer but if it wasn't for their behind-the-scenes efforts as founding members of the Lake Simcoe Arts Foundation there wouldn't be any theatre at the Red Barn this summer.

Likely, there wouldn't be any Red Barn either.

In order of mention the saviours are Roy Jackson, Andrew Hall, John Sibbald, Merceille (Puss) Burrows, Steve Rocher, Don Havens, Margaret Morrison, Norman LeMarie, Marvin Hall, Harry Stemp, Roger Goodlad and Harry Kloepfer.

The non-profit foundation is now in the process of acquiring the barn and 7 1/2 acres of property and presently has a lease.

And while the Red Barn theatre is specializing in comedy and farce this summer, the story of how the old barn was rescued from the brink of destruction reads more like a suspense-filled drama - with a

happy ending, of course.

In 1969 owner Max Gold sold the barn to a developer, the first point when future of theatre at the barn became uncertain.

In the summer of 1970, Bill Glasco, who went on to found the Tarragon Theatre in Toronto, ran the theatre. The summer of 1971 saw a sparse schedule of only four plays.

The stage of the barn was bare during the summer of 1972.

"We were then thinking about how to make it go," recalls John Sibbald, chairman and prime mover of the foundation. "We started making a preliminary assessment but didn't come up with anything definite."

Starting in January of this year, Georgian township, under pressure from developer-owner Vitaly Schwed, began warning that it would demolish the barn. The first meeting of the Save the Red Barn Theatre Committee was held March 2.

This citizens' group met regularly in the Sutton Municipal Office over the next few months and out of it was born the Lake Simcoe Arts Foundation.

On May 27 the foundation made the final decision to go ahead with the summer theatre season.

This left less than a month to get the old barn whipped into shape for the June 30

opener of "Barefoot in the Park."

"It was an enormous amount of work," Mr. Sibbald explained. "I'd estimate between 120-150 man-days of work."

Leader of the volunteer clean-up force was Harry Kloepfer. Their work included painting, picking of trash, interior renovations and straightening out of broken props.

One of the biggest tasks the clean-up workers faced was the vandalism which had done to the barn over the past year. In one part of the barn alone, there were 56 windows broken.

But everything was in shape for the June 30 opener and "Barefoot in the Park" played before a capacity audience. Attendance for the rest of the showing was from good to moderate.

What's in the future for the Lake Simcoe Arts Foundation, besides the seven remaining plays?

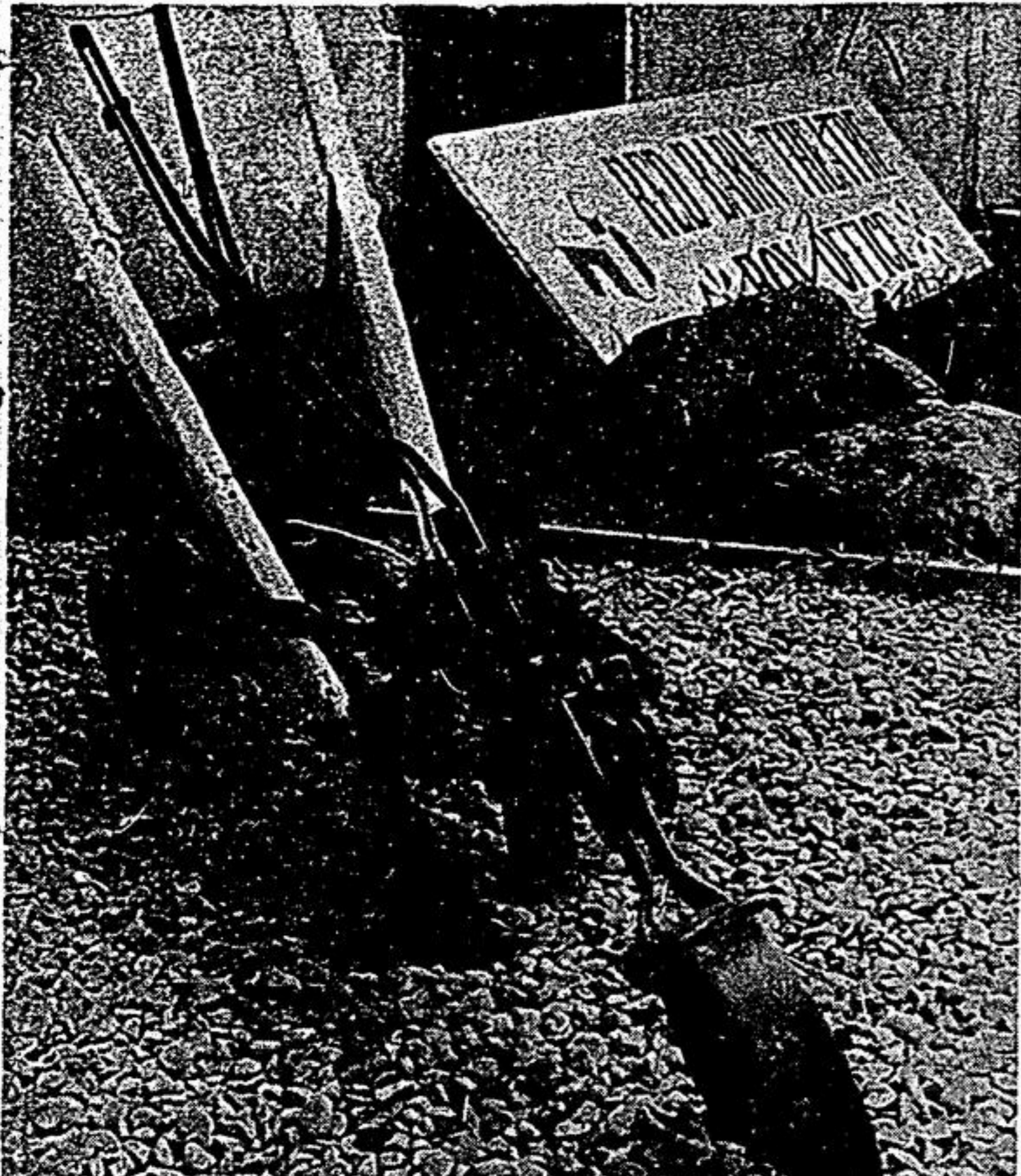
"We'd like to get into the visual as well as the performing arts," said Mr. Sibbald. "Painting, Sculpture, Music, Drama."

He adds: It has to go in the direction people in the community want it to go. It's going to have to make its own way."

For the time being, Mr. Sibbald is content with giving people a few laughs for the summer.



JOHN DEE, artistic director and general manager at the Red Barn this summer.



Pioneer plough sits out in front of the Red Barn Theatre. Several have also been painted and are being used as interior decorations.

Volunteer help is still needed

JACKSON'S POINT — Richard Allen is learning the ropes in the theatre business at The Red Barn theatre the hard way.

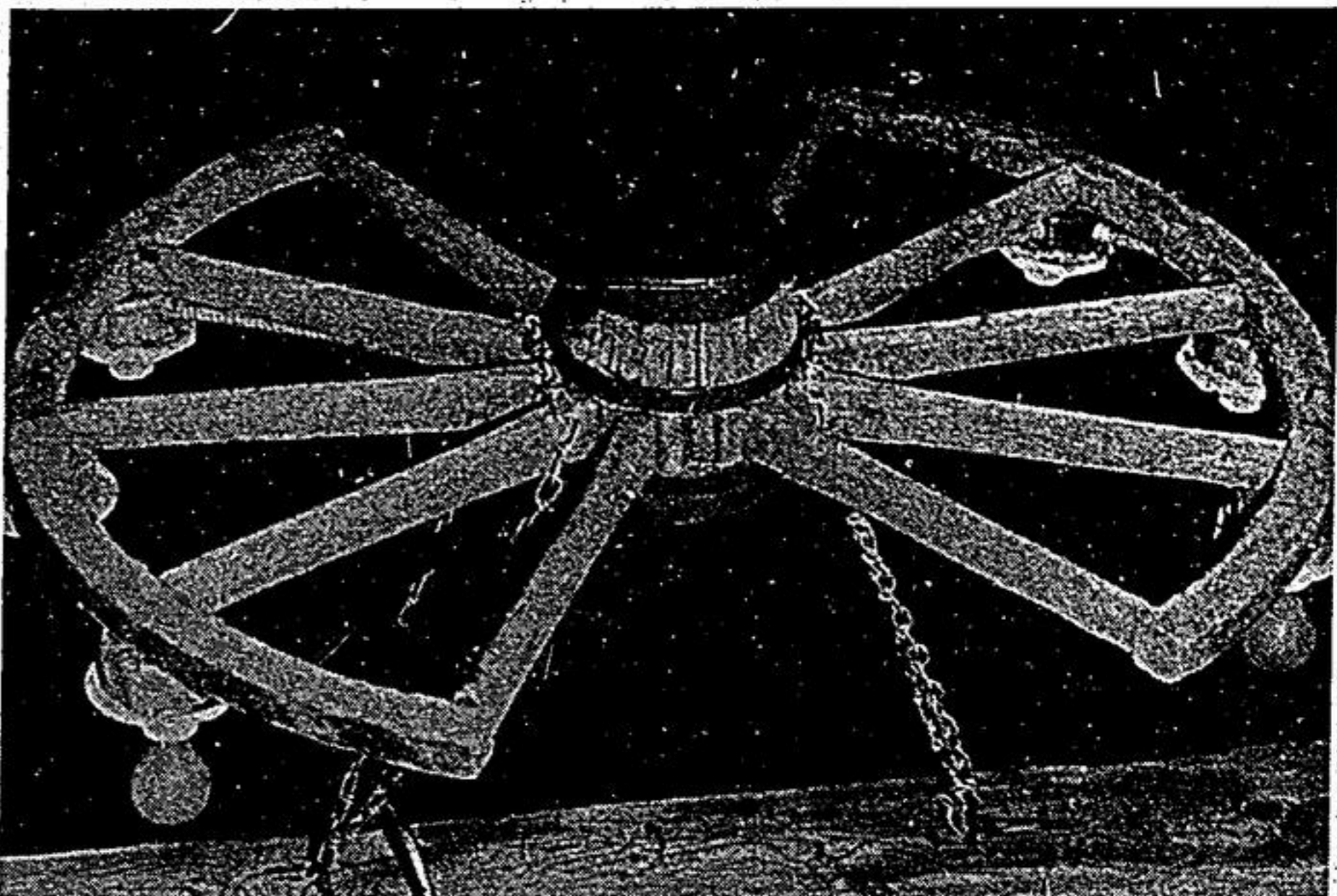
The name of the unpaid apprentice at the summer stock theatre showed up more times on the first program than the name of any other member of the company. He played the delivery man in Barefoot in the Park, the season's opening play, handled the lighting, and was a member of the three-person stage crew. On top of that, the young man works in the office, sometimes can be found taking tickets, ushering, painting, building sets, or even sweeping the floors.

But the job that gives Richard the most problems is not one for which he gets credit on the program. Richard is the theatre's official co-ordinator of volunteers - but no volunteers have offered themselves.

Other seasons, we have always had teenagers hanging around the theatre who are willing to do a bit of work, said John Sibbald chairman of the Lake Simcoe Arts Foundation. Without volunteers to co-ordinate, Richard has sometimes found himself working 20-hour days at The Barn, and that takes some of the fun out of being a volunteer himself.

"We need at least one person to take tickets each night, someone to hand out programs, we're short-staffed in the stage hand department, we need somebody handy with tools to make props and sets, and someone to help move scenery during dress rehearsals," said Richard.

Anyone wishing to help out at the theatre, contact Richard or artistic director John Dee at the theatre.



Ceiling lights at Red Barn Theatre are fashioned out of an old wagon wheel.

'Barefoot in the Park' was full of chuckles

JACKSON'S POINT — Summer is the time for laughter at the Red Barn theatre as it opened a season of comedy and farce with the hilarious comedy, "Barefoot in the Park."

The audience seemed to agree and warmly responded to top-notch performances by the cast composed of both professional and fledgling actors. It all adds up to the promise of more summer chuckles.

Ingrid Cook

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