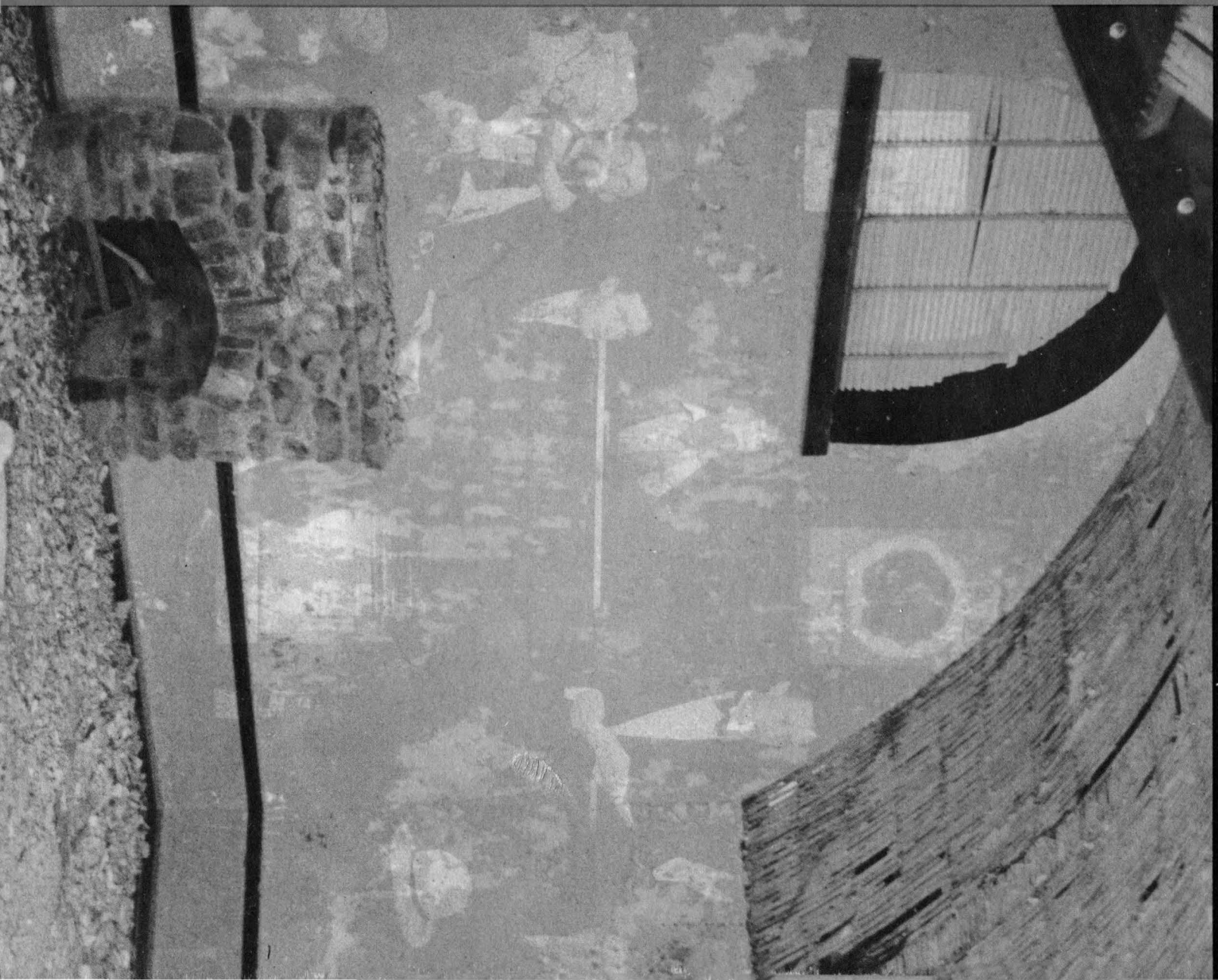
Mount Saint Mary's BRIEFING & MOUNT ALUMNUS

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the GHOSTS of PURCELL HALL

Inside: HOMECOMING '78



MOUNT SAINT MARY'S BRIEFING & MOUNT ALUMNUS

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"Mount Saint Mary's does not discriminate in any way on the basis of race, creed, color, sex, national origin or handicap in granting admission."

COVER STORY

Have we at long last confirmed the existence of ghosts on the campus of Mount Saint Mary's? Well, not really. What we have done is begin to unravel the mysteries behind the history of theatre, particularly with relation to Purcell Lyceum, the Mount's Broadway Playhouse for nearly a century. Our little scenario begins on page 4. Our Characters: The Detective, The Informant, The Workman and you. Enjoy!



by Prof. Wayne Hamilton

Editor's Note: When plans were announced for the renovation of dilapidated Purcell Music Hall (Lyceum) into a 24-hour study area, many people were caught off-guard. Where was Purcell Hall? Those who did know of the building remembered it as a storage facility and at times a convention hall for rodents. But as with almost every part of Mount Saint Mary's, the winds of history soon began blowing. Wayne Hamilton, director of the college drama club, Sock 'n Buskin, had been undertaking preliminary research on the history of theatre at the Mount when he was tipped off by former MSM president Msgr. Robert Kline about the wealth of material concerning past casts and crews hidden behind Purcell's plastered walls. In his words Hamilton tells of the tremendous historical success of the subsequent investigation. But the mystery is far from being completely unraveled.

The Purcell Building has served Mount St. Mary's long and well as everything from a repository for unused items to a music hall. The recent work being carried on to convert it to a student lounge has necessarily led to the destruction of reminders that Purcell was also the place where a long and proud tradition of college dramatics prospered for many years.

During the 40-odd years in this century that the building was known as the Purcell Lyceum, dramatic presentations were usually performed only once, but sometimes two or three times. After the performance was over and the student audience had returned to their rooms, and after the set was dismantled and destroyed, the students, seminarians and priests who were involved with a production wrote their names and the name of the play on the curved ceiling over the stage. The original ceiling and the earliest names were eventually plastered-over, but the wear of the years caused the plaster to chip away, once more revealing the testimonials to dramatic projects at the Mount.

Recently, as the work on Purcell's new roof caused more and more of the names to fall to the floor, moves were taken to preserve, in some way, these pieces of theatre history. More of the old plaster was scraped away, and what information could be uncovered and read was written down and then photographed.

What we have managed to uncover from the building and from research in the college archives indicates a theatrical tradition and history at the Mount which we are only beginning to discover and appreciate. For instance, the oldest show found on the ceiling of Purcell was dated April 3rd, 1903. This original show, called simply the "First Musical Comedy", was so popular with the Mount community that another similar effort called the "Second Musical Comedy" was offered a few weeks later on May 21st, 1903. At least six students appeared in both shows: Messrs. J. McCarthy, John J. Crane, James Burke, John Romadka, John Harris and Theodore Cullen. An article appeared in the May, 1903 issue of the **Mountaineer** which stated that the second of these two musical shows was performed at "the Garrick" because of the great demand for tickets. The article implied that "the Garrick" was a popular name for a larger performance space somewhere on campus, but we have no idea as to its exact location.

Another play chronicled on the ceiling of Purcell was **The Lion and the Mouse** by Charles Klein, performed on

March 17, 1912. The cast included individuals with a long-standing commitment to the college: Thomas F. Mulhearn, Edward Hogan, John Cogan, Charles Ruddy, and Daniel Tierney. Four years later, James Montgomery's **Ready Money** was presented at an evening performance on March 28, 1916. It was popular enough to justify an afternoon performance on the following day. Included among the names taken from the ceiling are Richard J. McCullough, Paul Cogan, Wm. F. Culhane, Francis J. McCormick and Edward A. Gleason.

One mystery of the Purcell ceiling is what looks to be the name of a show called **The Private Secretary**. However, there are no dates, names or any other information except the name of the producing organization. That organization, Purcell Lyceum, was open only to freshman and sophomores at the college and took its name from the building which housed its productions. The junior-senior organization, the Philomathean Society, had an off-and-on history with neither the sustained interest nor the strength in numbers of the underclass group.

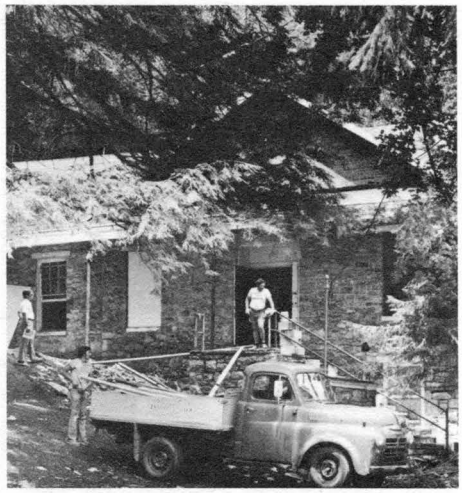
This exclusion of one-half of the student body from theatrical endeavors of the other half apparently began to dilute the popularity of both groups in the 1920's and early 30's.

Sometime in the early 1930's, the Philomathean Society breathed its last, but the Purcell Lyceum's constitution still forbade participation by upperclassmen. The group recognized the problem and wanted to make use of the skills of these seasoned thespians, so during the week of October 15, 1938, Purcell Lyceum was disbanded. At that time, it was the oldest organization on campus. The new organization was called the Purcell Dramatic Society and was accepted by the Student Government on November 2, 1938. Their first production was a double-bill of old-fashioned melodramas, **Curse You, Jack Dalton** and **The Name is Johnston,** presented on December 11th of that year.

These shows were the last to be entered on the ceiling of Purcell. The cast included Joe Gallagher, Ben Swint, Joe Hanlon, Ken Hollenstein, Sal Zangarri and Harold F.X. Schwartz, who was remembered by the critics for the way he "stomped around the stage" as the sheriff. The new group allowed participation by the entire student body, but although it was the only organization dedicated specifically to the presentation of plays, other organizations also provided entertainments for the Mount community. For many years, virtually every group on campus presented some kind of stage show. In addition, there were the Mount Jamborees and minstrel shows.

By 1947 the Purcell Dramatic Society had become the Mount Saint Mary's Dramatic Society, which presented plays in conjunction with St. Joseph's College. In the early 1950's, this organization fizzled out. However, in academic year 1954-55, under the mentorship of Father John McGovern, another dramatic organization was born. The Sock and Buskin Dramatic Society was named by the late Dr. John Dillon in that year. Father McGovern did not attempt to revive the association with St. Joseph's, but turned instead to shows with all-male casts: **The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial** being the first play produced by the new group. By the way the Mount production of **Caine Mutiny** was the first presentation of that Broadway hit on <u>any</u> college campus.

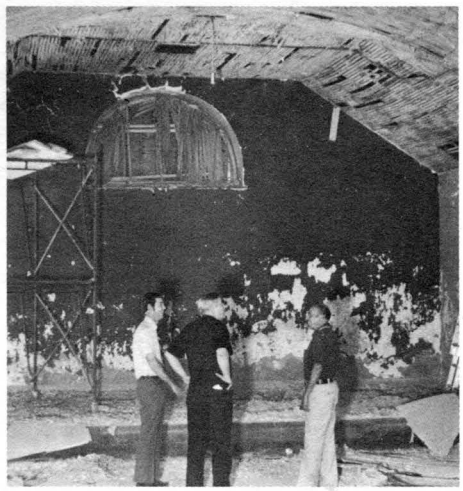
Sometime between 1957 and 1962, Sock and Buskin went the way of its predecessor, but was brought to life again in 1966 by an enthusiastic group of students led by then-sophomore Bill Wills. The group has flourished since then, and is now one of the largest and strongest organizations serving the Mount community. Sock and Buskin was further assisted by the addition to the faculty of a theatre specialist; Phil Wychodski and later, Paul O'Connell taught theatre courses and gave professional guidance to productions as director and club moderator. One mystery, however, continues to elude us about this most recent dramatic organization: at some point in time, the constitution of the club was changed to re-name it from the original "Sock



For the many alumni who have a hard time remembering Purcell Hall, this is an exterior shot of the south face. The building is shrouded in pine and sits behind Brute Hall. The old theatre is slated to be a 24-hour serious study area.

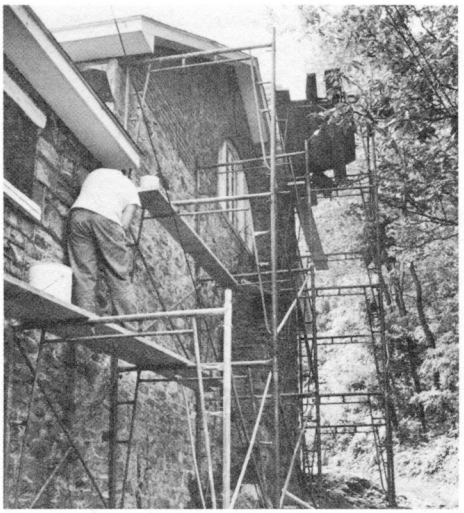


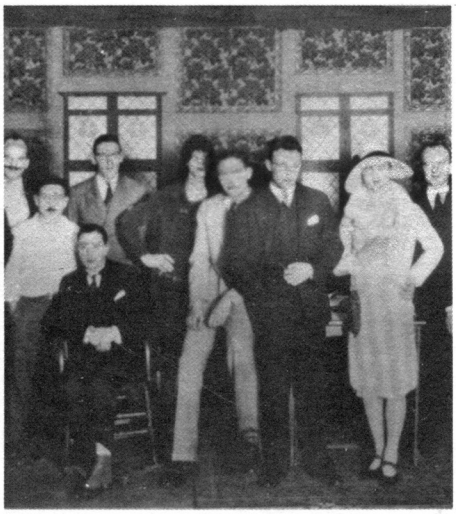
Dr. Wickenheiser shows Father Forker, college vice president, and Harold Schwartz, executive administrator, one of the walls on which casts of the past were recorded prior to plastering and subsequent peeling. Schwartz's name was discovered among those involved in a late 1930's production.





Unknown, Dick Daugherty, Jim Gribbin, Unknown, Leo Barry, Joe Callaghan, Russ Murray.





and Buskin." The new name was "Sock '**n** Buskin". Neither the original officers from the fifties nor the club's revivers from the sixties can shed any light on how or when this occurred.

Briefly then, we have outlined the history of drama at Mount Saint Mary's in the 20th century. But the Mount's dramatic history goes even further back in time. The earliest recorded performance took place in 1827. The play was entitled **Montezuma, or the Conquest of Mexico** and was written by Fr. Charles Constantine Pise. Fr. Pise was a professor of rhetoric at the Mount, and later became the first Roman Catholic priest to serve as chaplain of the United States Senate. Throughout the nineteenth century, and particularly in the 1890's, "theatricals" were an important and popular part of campus life.

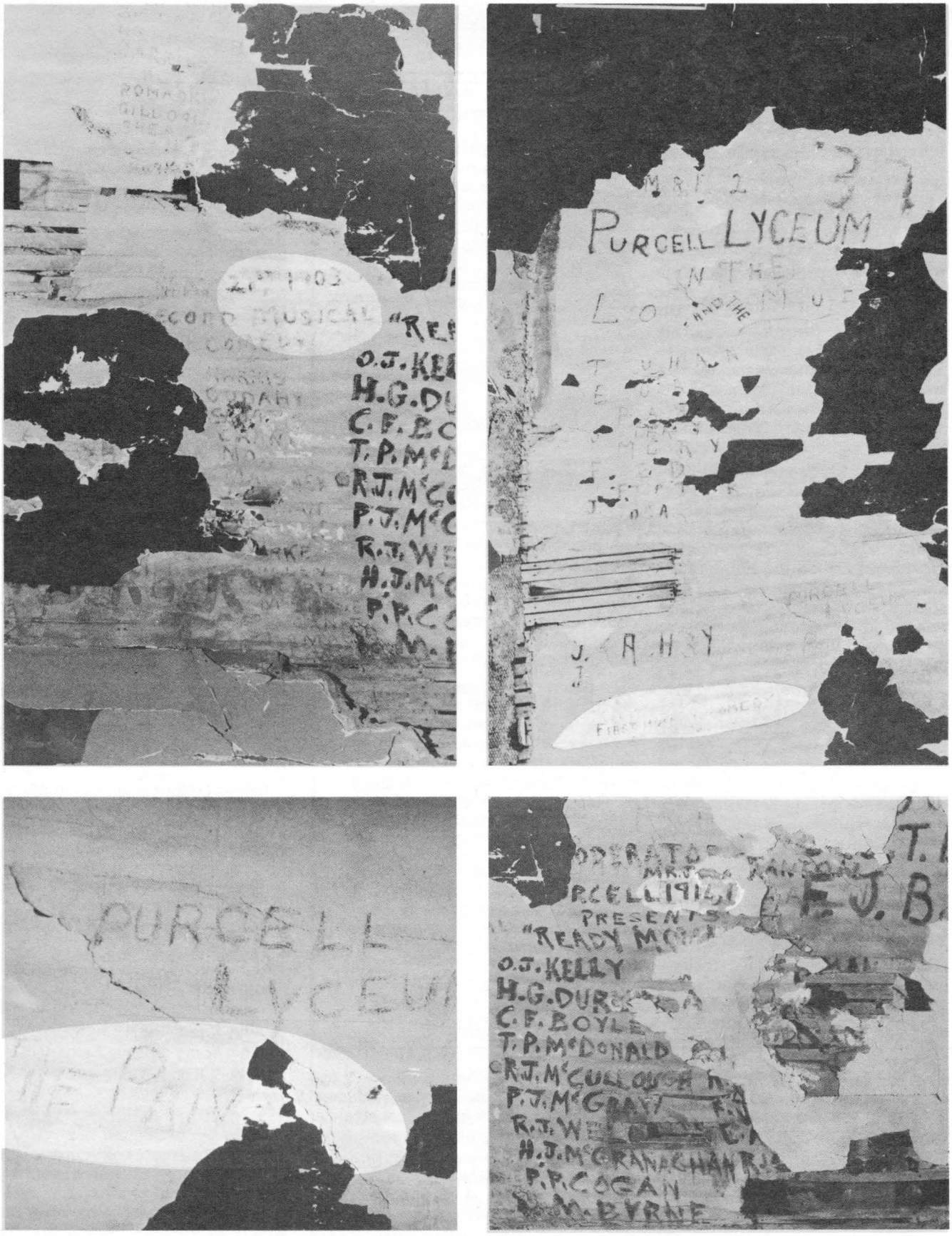
As we begin our 152nd year of drama at the Mount, the renewal of Purcell has been the cause for a renewal of interest in Mount theatre history. There are photographs in the archives which we cannot identify or even date; we have no programs from earlier productions; in fact, aside from the documentation of some of the shows by the **Mountaineer** and the **Mountain Echo**, we have very littled first-hand evidence (programs, stories, etc.) from shows presented here. Anyone who can shed any light on the questions raised in this article, or who can provide documentation on theatricals for our archives is invited to write:

Wayne Hamilton
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We look forward to the prospect of having some of these plays live again through the memories of those most closely connected with them: our alumni.



"Sherlock" Hamilton, the author, used this approach and others in his work to uncover the mystery behind the Purcell autographs.



These four photographs show the names of Purcell's "ghosts," the many casts and crews whose names were hidden by plaster for several decades. A state grant for renovation, and a tip from Msgr. Robert Kline led to this theatrical find, spearheaded by Prof. Hamilton. (Photo by Sue Abramson)

The Mystery Remains . . .