

1960 Catawba drama snowballed into major effort, yet broke even

For four nights in late September 1960, there appeared on the stage of Byrnes Auditorium at Winthrop University a most unusual drama.

The title was "Kah-Woh, Catawba," which translates as "Thank you, People of the River."

The history of the Catawba Indians, with a few liberties taken, covered the time from the white man's first contacts with the Catawbas up through the lifetime of Chief Samuel Blue, who had died the previous year.

The sponsor was the York County Historical Commission. The hope was that it would raise enough money to assist the Catawbas to build a permanent museum that would display their heritage.

Harper Gault, president of the Historical Commission, had earlier approached Dr. Charles Davis, then-president of Winthrop, about the possibility of the play. Davis had readily agreed to Winthrop furnishing the auditorium free and offered his support in obtaining talent among the Winthrop faculty.

William Long took up the task of writing the drama. Besides teaching theater courses at Winthrop, Long was director of "The Lost Colony" at Manteo, N.C., during the summer. Long's wife, Mary, who played Queen Elizabeth in the Manteo drama, agreed to be the costumer and head of makeup.

Long's source for Catawba history was Douglas Summers Brown, who had written a book, then yet to be published, titled "People of the River" (when published the book was titled, "The Catawba Indians, The People of the River"). She generously allowed Long to use her research.

Brown was then living in Georgia with her husband, a Presbyterian minister, but close at hand was Nan Weller Carson of the Rock Hill Public Library, who for years had amassed materials on Catawba Indian history.

From April through July, while

teaching drama at Winthrop in the spring and while directing "The Lost Colony" in the summer, Long worked to put together an extravaganza.

Christopher Reynolds of the Winthrop drama department received the four-hour play in two acts in late July and set to work on tryouts for 106 parts. He also cut the four-hour play to two hours. Townspeople and Winthrop faculty pitched in to provide their various skills.

The Longs were able to secure \$6,000 worth of costumes from three outdoor dramas, "The Common Glory" and "The Founders," both in Williamsburg, Va., and "The Lost Colony." All of the costumes were loaned at no charge.

A 32-page illustrated souvenir program was produced. More than a thousand posters went up over the area. Props and stage equipment (17 different sets) were assembled.

The first night's performance (Sept. 21, 1960) found some distinguished guests in the auditorium. The wife of then-Gov. Ernest "Fritz" Hollings was there (the governor was in South America), along with the lieutenant-governor, Burnet Maybank and his wife. All of the York County legislative delegation were present.

Members of the Joint Legislative Committee of Indian Affairs and a representative from the Bureau of Indian Affairs came down from Washington.

The whole Catawba Indian nation was invited as special guests, and many were present.

The play and the performance had some flaws — but on the whole, the audience was generous in its praise. A newspaper reviewer said that each night's performance was an improvement on the previous night.

The play took in about \$4,000. The cost was \$3,332. It was not enough to start a museum — but all agreed that it had been quite an experience.

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NEARBY HISTORY

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