Cast Rehearsal, Oregon Shakespeare Festival

By Oregon Journal Collection

This July 2, 1939 photograph shows actors Leroy Lindner, left, Dorothy Pruitt, and Gwen Jones rehearsing for the Oregon Shakespearean Festival in Ashland, located in Southern Oregon. The play company changed its name to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in 1988.

Southern Oregon Normal School teacher Angus L. Bowmer founded the festival in 1935 after raising money for its first season from the city and the state. Bowmer worked with students from the normal school, a teacher-training college, and community members to make an Elizabethan-style theater out of the remnants of a building once used for Chautauqua — summer educational events popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that featured music, drama, and lectures.

In 1935, the company performed two plays written by 16th-century playwright William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice*. Since then, the festival has grown to include the works of a variety of playwrights shown in several different venues in Ashland. The festival incorporated in 1937 and was temporarily closed during World War II. Over the years, the outdoor Elizabethan stage and seating have been remodeled several times, and during the 1970s the company added several indoor theaters. Bowmer retired in 1970, and died in 1979.

Today, people travel to Ashland from around the nation, and world, to attend performances by the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.


Oregon History Project

http://www.oregonhistoryproject.org/articles/historical-records/cast-rehearsal-oregon-shakespeare-festival/