

# THE BROWN GRAND THEATRE



**Gazette**

310 West 6th Street, PO Box 347 • Concordia • Kansas • 66901-0347 • [www.browngand.org](http://www.browngand.org) August 2009

## *Mission Statement*

*"The Brown Grand Theatre is a community-based historical Theatre dedicated to enhancing cultural life in North Central Kansas."*

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The Brown Grand Gazette is a publication of The Brown Grand Theatre, Concordia, Kansas, for distribution to a private mailing list.

Editor:  
Wonda Phillips  
[wphillips@nckn.com](mailto:wphillips@nckn.com)



*Editor reserves the right to edit information for content and fit.*

## **Ron and Opal Show will showcase at Brown Grand's 102 Birthday Bash**

The official ambassadors of the Roy Rogers Happy Trails Theater and Museum in Branson, Missouri, Ron and Opal entertain with show stopping humor, classic country and southern gospel singing. Ron plays a variety of instruments including steel guitar, acoustic guitar, bass, banjo and accordion.

Ron and Opal were the recipients of the Vocal Duo of the Year award from the Country Hayride Opry. They recently received the 2007 and 2008 Country Gospel Music Association International Duo of the Year Award.

Ron is an accomplished steel guitarist who has appeared on several country music shows throughout the mid-west. He was a regular member of the K.C. Opry in Kansas City, for 12 years as a featured singer and steel guitarist for the house band. As a member of that band, he played steel guitar for the great Web Pierce, The Kendals, and several other Grand ol' Opry stars. He also appeared on the Country Hayride Opry in Excelsior Springs, Missouri, and Cousin Pud's Country Jamboree as a regular band member for several years.

Ron and Opal are proud to represent the Roy Rogers Happy Trails Theater and Museum. A 30 minute video of Roy Rogers & Dale Evans will be shown from 6:15 to 6:45 prior to the concert. This video will contain movie clips, interviews, & family home movies. They share many of the same values in life that Roy and Dale stood for: God, Family, and Country.

Opal grew up in south Georgia singing classic country and southern style gospel music in church. She has been a featured singer on all of the shows Ron has worked, and has one of the most outstanding female voices ever heard in country and gospel music.

Relocating to Branson in 1991, they have made guest appearances at a variety of Branson Theaters. In 2000, they took their own show on the road performing for RV resorts, chuck-wagon cookouts, cowboy poet gatherings, RV rallies, Cowboy Church, churches, and other events all across America. In addition Ron & Opal are bringing in an exciting third singer. Greg Jones from Tahlequah, OK will be joining them for this one special night on this three month tour. When performing gospel music they are a trio known as "Restored."

They will help the Brown Grand celebrate its 102nd birthday on Friday, September 18, at 7 p.m.. Tickets are available at the door, online at [www.browngand.org](http://www.browngand.org), or by calling the theatre at 785-243-2553. Patrons will also enjoy birthday cake on the Brown Grand stage after the performance!



We've lost our cool--literally!!

After 80 summers of keeping the patrons of the Brown Grand Theatre cool and comfortable, our antiquated air conditioning system has given up the ghost.

Two events scheduled for August were cancelled or relocated. Hopefully, September will cool down enough to host our birthday celebration. Because the Brown Grand is owned by the City of Concordia, the City Commission will fund one-half of the \$50,000++ replacement cost. This means the Brown Grand Board is now fundraising for the rest of this important project!

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YES! I want to be a Brown Grand Fan!

Here's my donation toward replacing the Air Conditioner!

Return this form with your payment selection to:

Brown Grand Theatre
310 West Sixth Street, PO Box 347
Concordia, Kansas 66901-0347

My check is enclosed.

This is a memorial for:

Name

Mailing Address

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS!

(receive updates by email--browngrand@nckcn.com--request event email list)

- Sept 18 \*7:00 p.m. Ron & Opal Show
Happy 102nd Birthday to the Brown Grand!
Brithday Cake served on stage afterwards!
Sept 19 7:00 p.m. Teens for Christ
Shane Sanderson, Southside Youth Outreach in St. Joseph, MO
Oct 4 2:00 p.m. Randy Halfhide Piano Concert
Unveiling of newly refurbished Mason-Hamlin Grand Piano and donor tribute
Oct 6 \*7:00 p.m. Ronald Radford-Flamenco Guitar
Produced in cooperation with MidAmerica Arts Alliance, National Endowment for the Arts, and The Arts Foundation of Tulsa OK
Oct 9 7:00 p.m. CARES Service Dog Graduation
Oct 17 7:00 p.m. Teens for Christ--Jack Hager
Oct 18 2:00 p.m. Manhattan Project Quartet
Community Concert Members only
Oct 19 7:30 p.m. "Notables" Air Force Jazz Band from Offutt AFB, Omaha, NE
Oct 23 \*7:00 p.m. Stranger Creek
Traditional country western music
Oct 29, \*7:00 p.m. Fall Production
30 & 31 by CCCC Drama Department
Nov 3 7:00 p.m. Cook Lecture Series
Marty Essen: Around the World in 90 minutes
Nov 15 2:00 p.m. Tony Kenny-Irish Cabaret Singer
Community Concert Members only
Nov 21 7:00 p.m. Teens for Christ
Cash Hollistah, hip hop and rapper
Nov 22 \*2:00 p.m. CCCC Great Society Singers
Nov 23 9:15 a.m. & 1:15 p.m. Wichita Children's Theatre
"Little Red Hen"--Tomlinson Grand Day for Kids

\*Admission charged. Schedule is subject to change.
Please call the theatre at (785) 243-2553 for ticket information and to confirm time and dates.
Email: browngrand@nckcn.com



# Thank you!!

## Kay and Tommy Tomlinson Grand Day Memorial Donors (additions)

Phyllis Christie  
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## Dr. H.C. "Hugh" Hattan Memorial Donors (additions)

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## Thelma Workman Memorial Donors

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**Thanks** to these generous donors, and those listed in the April *Gazette*, we have two projects that are able to move forward. The Tomlinson Memorial helps to continue the Tomlinson Grand Day for Kids, which focuses on children's programming. The Wichita Children's Theatre production of "Little Red Hen" will be the 2009 designated Grand Day on November 23. In addition to the Hugh Hattan, Jack Roney & Thelma Workman Memorials, plus funds from the Community Foundation for Cloud County, we have been able to refinish and refurbish our Mason-Hamlin grand piano inside and out. The piano, donated by Janet Baker Davis, will be debuted at an October 4 concert featuring Randy Halfhide, pianist and the piano refurbisher. These memorial donors will be recognized at the piano concert. The Roney donators will be listed in a future *Gazette*. The Winter *Gazette* will include a feature on Kay Tomlinson and the history of the Tomlinson Grand Day for the Arts and a tribute to Hugh Hattan.

### A GIFT THAT HONORS OTHERS IS A UNIQUE GIFT OR A THOUGHTFUL AND APPRECIATED WAY TO EXPRESS CONGRATULATIONS OR SYMPATHY.

Many people make gifts to a charity or non-profit organization in the names of people they care about and wish to recognize. Families often prefer that a deceased loved one be remembered in this way. The Brown Grand's MEMORIAL AND IN HONOR GIFTS PROGRAM offers an easy and meaningful way to extend condolences. It also lets you, in a special way, extend congratulations for friends and family members throughout the year, recognize graduations, retirements, job promotions, birthdays or anniversaries. These special gifts will be acknowledged with a personal letter and in our newsletter.

Contact Susan Cantine-Maxson, Executive Director, at 785-243-2553 to discuss the options.

### RECOGNIZING ADOPT-A-DAY DONORS:

Lela Hill,

May 15 birthday memorial for Donald Hill  
Margaret Balch, September 15



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*Take another look--  
we're positively grand!*

## **Bob Pearson Had Show Biz in His Blood**

Concordia native, Robert E. Pearson, died in Clay Center on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, a day Bob would have picked as the perfect day of departure. According to an internet site, Bob was involved in making over 100 movies and television programs. At age 12, Bob grew bored with Concordia and hopped a freight train to Hollywood. After several days traveling back and forth across the country in a boxcar—supposedly on his way to California—Bob’s train slowed and came to a stop. Unbelievably, he was back in Concordia.

This is but one of Bob’s fantastic tales of a daring youth and his determination to make a mark in show business. According to a *Lawrence Journal World* article, Bob made the decision to go to Hollywood after “witnessing a band concert at Concordia High School when he was ten years old.” This inspiring concert took place around 1928, so it would be interesting to go back and try to find the event listed in an old *Blade-Empire Newspaper*.

The Brown Grand Theatre showed movies during Bob’s early youth and he remembered telling his mother, Dorothy, “Someday I am going to be a movie star just like them.”

Bob finally made it to California. Even though his first try landed him back in Concordia, Bob once again climbed aboard a west-bound freight train. Using a combination of hitch-hiking and riding the rails, Bob finally arrived in Hollywood. After a string of door-to-door sales jobs, Bob joined the Army at 15, but a knee injury led to his discharge a year later.

It was then that Bob started getting bit parts in movies and stage shows. TV was gaining in popularity about that time, so Bob made a number of appearances on popular shows like “Bob Hope Chrysler Theatre,” “Perry Mason,” “Day in Court,” and numerous others. Bob claimed in later life that he had given producers the idea for “Ironside,” about a wheelchair-bound detective. Raymond Burr was trying to make a come-back but was no longer the slim actor audiences remembered from “Perry Mason.” Bob told producers to put Burr in a wheelchair and his added weight wouldn’t be noticed. Thanks or not to Bob Pearson, “Ironside” became a big hit for its star, Raymond Burr.

Hollywood was a small company town back in the 1950’s, and Bob Pearson claimed knowing all the big stars of the day. He helped Ronald Reagan with landscaping at his new Bel-Aire home. One day at the famous Schwab’s Drug Store, Frank Sinatra drove into Bob’s new car parked in front and gave him a handful of cash to pay for the damage. While his car was being repaired, Marilyn Monroe gave Bob a ride to the studio. And on and on. He had a thousand stories.

Later on, Bob started writing his own scripts, directing and appearing in his own films. One was, “The Devil and Leroy Bassett,” the last film shown at the Brown Grand Theatre before it was closed for restoration. Bob finally made it onto the screen that had inspired him to make movies.

Susan Sutton, friend

## Susan Sutton pays tribute to Jack Roney

As I've gone back these past several days to when — exactly — I met Jack: I just can't remember. It seems like I've always known him — like you'd know a neighbor or manager of a local store. Someone you'd see from time to time, always in context like that.

My family moved to Concordia around the same time the Roneys came to town. For me, it was the summer of 1964. We were still unloading household items when a car drove in and a mom and teenage girl got out. We would soon know this two-person Welcome Wagon to be Sarah Coker and her daughter, Sharon. The mom had learned a new family had a daughter (me) similar in age to her daughter. On cue, Sharon stepped forward and asked if I'd like to go to the show that evening. After an urging nod from my mom, I said yes.

Sharon's house at 7<sup>th</sup> and Cedar was less than a block from the Brown Grand Theatre. The theatre was showing *The Pink Panther*, which, at age 16, I thought was the best movie I'd ever seen; certainly the funniest. But it was the Brown Grand that left the most lasting impression. It was like no other movie theater I'd seen. The building had atmosphere. It had a history which I came to know as a richness woven from the experiences of thousands upon thousands of entertainment seekers. People who were transported while gazing at that "fourth wall," whether it unfolded on stage or in flashes on the big silver screen.

I've said it many times, but I got engaged to the Brown Grand that first night in Concordia, and I've been married to it ever since.

The year I moved to town, the Brown Grand was owned and operated by Concordia Amusement Company. An elderly man by the name of Punch Rogers was the manager, I believe. Soon, however, Jack Roney, who had purchased the drive-in theater and the Apollo — where the new Majestic is now located — bought the Brown Grand. Jack, his wife and daughters, were in possession of Concordia's only show business monopoly. It was a working class dynasty that required each family member to do his or her part.

I remember going to the drive-in during high school. One of the draw-backs of being located close to the river was the mosquitoes. It was too hot to keep the windows rolled up, and burning a "mosquito coil" in the car ashtray created too much confined toxicity. In an effort to keep his customers happy, Jack's voice came over the car speaker one night, "Come up to the concession stand and we'll spray you with Off." Suddenly, dome lights blinked, car doors slammed,

and people streamed up to get sprayed for a mosquito-free evening.

And who can forget a tension-filled scenic moment broken by Jack's voice over the car speaker, "Richard, your pizza's ready."

At the end of the show, as cars aggressively maneuvered to be the first out the gate, inevitably someone would drive away with the speaker still attached and the broken cord flapping alongside the car. One of the couples's daughters, Marlesa, told me these torn-away speakers often found their way to the family's front yard later that same night.



At the onset of drive-in movie season came the day-in, day-out spring winds — the result being — the tin surrounding the drive-in would come loose and end up bent and twisted in the ditch. Once I asked Jack when — or if — he was going to put the tin back up. He said he was waiting for the windy part of spring to pass. When he felt the time was right, he

hammered and stomped the tin back as straight as he could get it and nailed it back up. It usually stayed until the next spring when it blew down again.

When I started attending the Community College here in town, I became interested in drama. Several of my classmates, Don Lambert being one, and I wished we had more opportunities to do theatre — in addition to school-affiliated plays. It was then that I approached Jack with the idea of starting a summer theatre at the Brown Grand. For some reason, Jack liked my pitch. The Brown Grand was mainly dark during the week because the drive-in was in full swing. For weekend rehearsals, our drama group had to practice after the show was over — usually around 10p.m. Imagine me as a 19-year-old being entrusted with the Brown Grand. I even had a key!

How did I know how to direct a play? And what play? I only knew the plays we read in high school English, so I went to my old teacher, Gwendolyn Fletcher, for guidance. She suggested *The Heiress*, adapted from a Henry James classic — material so challenging I wouldn't consider doing it even today. But, like I said, I knew nothing. The whole thing was a learning experience that Jack and Hanalesa went along with. Their generosity and trust are solely responsible for my career in educational theatre.

When I came back to teach at the college, I was finally able to direct plays on the Brown Grand stage that were not confined to the small space in front of the movie screen. And once the theatre lighting was upgraded during the restoration, the knife-switch shock panel was removed from backstage

for safety reasons. A number of near-electrocutions took place when a lapse in hand-eye coordination landed some part of an operator's hand in direct contact with the bare switch.

In the 1970's, a community conversation began about restoring the Brown Grand. Jack had an eye for history and supported restoration. Not much about the theatre had been changed over the years. The biggest transition had taken place in 1929 when the theatre converted to talking pictures and refrigerated air was installed at the same time.

Jack and Hanalesa agreed to sell the Brown Grand to the Restoration Committee for \$30,000. With that, Jack turned around and gave \$2,000 back as seed money to start the fundraising campaign, "Lend a Hand to the Brown Grand."

Jack and Hanalesa both served many years on the restoration committee which later became the Brown Grand Board of Directors. Many times, Jack was called upon to help with the various old systems in the building. He really knew how to baby the air conditioner and boiler. As proof, the theatre's original boiler from 1907 was finally replaced when it was 85 years old. The original air conditioning system is still in use after 80 years.

Sometime after Jack and Hanalesa had left the Board of Directors, I was in the basement looking at the hot water heater and noticed the flue was actually a series of bean cans stacked and taped together. Yes, Jack knew how to get a few more years out of an old mechanical system.

Even as a teenager, I loved Jack's sense of humor. I'd characterize his outlook as wry, filled with irony and often sardonic. Never one to go for the easy joke, Jack's humorous observations were quirky and wise. You either got it, or you didn't. He had a unique "take" on the world around him that was rooted in human insight.

The last time I really saw Jack out and about was in the pet food aisle at Rod's grocery store. "I've got a question for you," he said. "Do you know the song, 'Why-o, why-o, why-o, did I ever leave Ohio'?" He sang a bit of the tune. "Yes," I said. "It's from the musical, *Wonderful Town*," from 1953. "Well," he said, "I've had that song running through my head for days, and I'd like to see the music; I'd like to see if I could play it."

I was able to get the entire musical score, so I hope Jack was finally able to get the song out of his head after that.

The new center stage rose curtain was given in honor of Jack and Hanalesa by daughters Marlesa and Lori, to celebrate the Brown Grand's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2007.

Jack and Hanalesa Roney mean a great deal to me – and always will.

## Thelma Workman helped preserve Concordia history

With the death of Thelma Workman, the ranks of original Cloud County Community College teachers grow thinner. Thelma was my journalism instructor in those early days when we shared space with the high school. She was tough-minded, in an old-school way — intolerant of missed deadlines, misspellings, grammatical errors, and lack of imagination. Each time our newspaper, *The Thunor*, was published, Mrs. Workman praised and picked at each of us. But we were a team and she was our coach, wearing her trademark high heels, continually pushing us to do our best work.

In 1975, I became Thelma's colleague, and worked with her until her retirement. As I've been reflecting these last several days, I think Thelma was the first to master a computer, and from there taught herself PageMaker and moved journalism into a new age. Along the way, Thelma used her technical and literary skills to write and publish our College Humanities Division newsletter, "Humn/us," collections of faculty and student writings, local histories including the Brown Grand Theatre, Concordia's historic homes, and the Brown Grand Players. In her writings, Thelma helped preserve the people and history of Concordia for those who come after.



I directed Thelma in a number of community plays including, "The Vanderbilt Cup," a large-cast community effort that reopened the Brown Grand Theatre in 1980. Thelma was a "Crusty Dame," who provided comic relief throughout the musical. And I mustn't forget the opening of "Mousetrap," when a technical glitch left enough light on stage for the audience to witness Thelma running behind the furniture — only to turn up "murdered" in the next scene.

When the day of the video camera dawned, Thelma purchased one and taped numerous interviews with people connected with the Brown Grand Theatre. Thelma loved our town's most famous building and for years, she compiled huge scrapbooks filled with news stories about the theatre.

When the Orphan Train Project was getting under way, Thelma took a family photo collection of Kansas railroad depots and annotated each that had been the setting of an Orphan Train placement. Thelma's Brown Grand scrapbooks and Orphan Train depot album can be viewed at their respective locations.

Thank you, Thelma, for "wondering." You've been an inspiration.  
Susan Sutton