

# LET'S PUT ON A PLAY

The challenge of finding a good hall has never stopped Ann Arborites from putting on theatrical performances. Early productions were held in the courthouse or hotel ballrooms such as Goodrich House at Fourth and Ann or Cook's, a block to the south. By 1860 Hangsterfer's Hall at Main and Washington could accommodate larger audiences.

The city's first real theater was George D. Hill's Opera House, which opened on the corner of Main and Ann in August 1871 with *The Spy of Shiloh*, a local production recalling the Civil War. Two years later University Hall opened on campus, providing the largest venue in the city for concerts and lectures.



▲ *Michigan Union Opera's second production, "Culture," was performed in December 1908 at the Whitney Theater.*

UM's Union Opera productions began as a way to raise funds for the Michigan Union, which was first housed in the old Cooley home on State Street. To make way for a large new building, the Pond house next door was moved to the rear of the lot, where the "cube" stands today. Construction on the Union was delayed during World War I, so the Pond house was expanded and converted into a temporary dining and dance hall. Once the Union was finished, the hall was eventually converted into the Mimes Theater. The Union Opera moved there from the Whitney Theater in 1922.



**Mary Bartron Henderson**



▲ *Advertisement for Hill's Opera House at Main and Ann.*

In 1908, entrepreneur B. C. Whitney purchased Hill's Opera House, remodeled the theater, and added two stories to the building. In February *Michigenda*, Michigan Union Opera's first production, opened there to a packed house. Written and performed by students, using all-male casts including popular campus athletes, these annual extravaganzas were a great hit and soon took to the road, delighting alumni as far away as New York and Chicago.



▲ *Although state-of-the-art on the inside, the Mimes Theater was nothing much to look at on the outside.*



◀ *Women at Michigan used Sarah Caswell Angell Hall Theater in Barbour Gymnasium, completed in 1896. The annual Junior Girls' Play, shown here in 1914, was one of many productions and lectures held here.*

As the culmination of her successful fund-raising campaign for the new Women's League building in 1929, **MARY BARTRON HENDERSON** persuaded financier Gordon Mendelssohn to contribute \$50,000 for a theater. He asked that the theater be named after his mother, Lydia. Ever since, this jewel of a theater has been the most cherished theatrical performance space on campus.