

Overview

"An actors' club combining the convenience and advantages that you speak of has been a dream of mine for many years,

and I had the house in question in my mind's eye for the purpose of some far-off future day." — Edwin Booth

"We do not mingle enough with minds that influence the world," Booth said of his fellow actors, "We should measure ourselves through personal contact with outsiders ... I want my club to be a place where actors are away from the glamour of the theatre."

Two years after the great actor Edwin Booth wrote these words to his friend, theatre manager Albert Palmer, his dream was realized. In May, 1888, he paid \$75,000 to purchase a townhouse at 16 Gramercy Park in New York City that had been built in 1847 for banker Elihu Townsend. Booth's vision now had a home.

The club's name, The Players, was suggested by author Thomas Bailey Aldrich, after one of the lines from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. Booth, along with 15 other friends, were the incorporates of the club. Another close friend, the architect Stanford White, was hired to handle the conversion.

On opening night, December 31, 1888, before a gathering of men from the theatre, fine arts and letters, journalism, and commerce, Edwin Booth deeded the structure and its contents, including all the works of art and theatrical memorabilia he had amassed, along with his extensive personal library, to The Players.

For much of its history, The Players was strictly a men's club. However, on Shakespeare's birthday, April 23, 1989, women were finally permitted to become Players, the first of them being Helen Hayes.

One of The Players' longest traditions has been its Pipe Nights, named for the smoking of churchwarden pipes during the evening. This series of events began in 1905, and by 1936 had evolved into testimonials honoring artists for their contributions to the American stage.

In 1911, French tragedienne Sarah Bernhardt was lionized, after a petition was taken up by several dozen Players who thought it important to celebrate her legendary career.

In 1963, The Players was designated a National Historic Landmark, but ever since 1888, the interior has undergone several renovations, some of them quite extensive. For example, the Dining Room did not always have a stage at one end; the room led onto a garden dining area with a fountain.

In the 1920s, The Players put their rich theatrical resources to work for the direct benefit of the club by producing Broadway plays. Starting in 1922 with Sheridan's *The Rivals*, the club produced a series of successful commercial revivals starring well-known Players. These productions continued, until 1940.

Incorporators of The Players

Edwin Booth (1st Pres.)

Mark Twain

John Drew (3rd Pres.)

Joseph Jefferson (2nd Pres.)

William Tecumseh Sherman

Lawrence Barrett

Laurence Hutton (Sec.)

Augustin Daly (1st VP)

Albert M. Palmer (VP, Treas.)

Joseph F. Daly (VP)

William Bispham (VP-Treas.)

Brander Matthews (Sec.)

James Lewis

Stephen H. Olin

Henry Edwards

John A. Lane

Today, as always, the Players is an exciting and memorable place to mingle and meet fellow club members, friends and colleagues, in an ambiance of conviviality, culture, history and comfort.