



Terry C. Lorden

Co-Founder, Playhouse 101 and the American Stage Festival

Terry Lorden dreamed of theatre, professional theatre. And he longed to bring it to his home town of Milford, New Hampshire. It would draw players and playgoers from near and far, to a vibrant and live experience of cultural significance. It would bring joy. After graduating from Plymouth State College, Mr. Lorden taught English in New London. But he was sent to Vietnam. It was in Vietnam that he formulated his plan and created the outline that was to be the genesis of Playhouse 101.

After professional theatre positions in San Francisco and Los Angeles, Terry again returned to Milford in 1970 and the Souhegan Theatre Council was formed. Teaming with Dr. Roi White, of Plymouth College, the two searched for a site to host a theatre. They chose the First Congregational Church Parish House along the banks of Railroad Pond. Mr. Lorden was the producer and Dr. White directed. Playhouse 101 opened on June 30, 1971 when Terry Lorden was 27 years old. The Playhouse enjoyed a 98.6% sold out record the first glorious season. And it continued to thrive. It wasn't just a summer theatre, however. There were weekly Kids Specials, S(enior)-Rated matinees, music events, an art gallery, and outdoor programs as well. The town and theatre campus were teaming with activity and excitement.

Playhouse 101 outgrew the site by the end of season, 1973, and its creators had to make a decision. A larger venue must be found or they must build. After an interim year where some activities did continue at various locations, they built the Souhegan Valley Theatre on the banks of the Souhegan River. This new enterprise was called the American Stage Festival. And it was a true professional resident and repertory company, opening in 1975 with a massive production of Show Boat. As in both theatres, it involved not just the professionals, arriving from all over the country, but multitudes of area folks willing to add their time and talent to the adventure. Milford will never again see the likes of these theatrical happenings in the 1970s, the dream and reality of Terry Lorden. He resigned in early 1978. Others led variations of what was later called ASF, at the same site and in Nashua, until 2002. Today, in Milford, other theatre activity continues and the Riverbend Youth Company performs at the Boy's and Girl's Club/Amato Center stage, the same site. Terry Lorden's youthful dream vitalized the community, forever.

The First Congregational Church Historical Room houses the largest and most complete collection of archives from both Playhouse 101 and the American Stage Festival. These can be viewed any time the church is open, or by appointment.

Bonnie Gondola, Church Historian

The charcoal drawing of Terry Lorden, above, is from an original by Phoebe Flory, a Mont Vernon artist who was a key supporter and artist in residence of both Playhouse 101 and the American Stage Festival, Circa 1971.