

« [Paving Underway](#) | [Main](#) | [Modular Classroom Project Finishes On Time and Under Budget](#) »

[True to Tradition, Mayor Kirk Makes Cameo Appearance in the Annisquam Village Players Production of the Sound of Music](#)

By admin | August 3, 2008



Annisquam Village Players

by Gail McCarthy

Staff Writer

(Reproduced from the Gloucester Daily Times)

Annisquam and Austria, though an ocean apart, came together for the creation of a play, which became one of the world's most famous musicals.

“The Sound of Music” is far more than a Broadway production for Gloucester’s Anna Crouse Murch. The show is a piece of her personal history.

The Annisquam matriarch was married to Russel Crouse, who co-wrote the book (or the dialogue of the play), with his writing partner Howard Lindsay in the late 1950s.

Murch probably knows more about the origins of the beloved musical than anyone else.

At the age of 93, she remembers well when her husband and his partner began to write the story for stage a half a century ago.

Murch, whose maiden name was Anna Erskine, worked in the world of Broadway theater even before she married Crouse. She was a budding actress, who later began work with Broadway writers and producers. After she married, she became even more privy to the inner sanctum of some of the greatest Broadway producers of all times.

According to Murch, a great deal of “The Sound of Music” was written in the granite-strewn village of Annisquam. The writers would sit at the Crouse’s kitchen table creating lines for the show as the typist pounded out the script on an old-fashioned typewriter. Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, the pair that composed the music for the play, also traveled to Gloucester to work on the production.

Murch — who married again after her husband died in 1966 — met some of the greatest names of the New York theater world, from Mary Martin and Ethel Merman to Jimmy Stewart and Jim Durante.

She and Crouse first came to Cape Ann in the 1930s at the invitation of their dear friends, actress Jean Dixon and Ted Ely, a native Bostonian, who had a home off Washington Street in Annisquam. The Crouses

fell in love with the area's beauty and tranquility. The young couple bought a nearby house, in which they lived for 30 summers in a three-story Victorian home.

Crouse's first work with Lindsay came in 1934, when the two men revised P. G. Wodehouse and Guy Bolton's book for the Cole Porter musical that would eventually be titled "Anything Goes," starring Merman. Lindsay wanted a collaborator to work on this script. Crouse, a newspaperman, press agent and stage writer, was recommended to him.

"Unbeknownst to him, Russel was working nearby at the Theater Guild. They looked for him all day and found him just across the street. They began working that night," recalled Murch. The two writers worked right up until the show's debut, even writing lines on the train en route to Boston for its premiere, which was a success by the audience reaction just minutes into the show when Merman sang, "I Get a Kick out of You."

Lindsay and Crouse produced 15 shows together in 30 years, said Murch, who ran their office for four years, before she had children.

When asked to describe Lindsay and Crouse, Murch referred to a Saturday Evening Post article, which described Lindsay as a "man of the theater" and Crouse as "someone invented by James Barrie," the author who wrote "Peter Pan" a century ago.

"(Russel) was a pixie. He was adorable, charming and very funny," said Murch of her first husband.

Sound of Music 101

The origins of the beloved international hit, "The Sound of Music," began when a colleague of Lindsay and Crouse saw a 1956 German black-and-white film about the singing Von Trapp family. The movie was based on the 1949 book by Maria Von Trapp, who was a young Austrian novice nun, who was sent to serve as the governess for the seven children of a widower, in the days before World War II.

"Russel and Howard loved the story," recalled Murch.

Vincent Donahue, a Broadway stage director, thought such a production would be perfect for his friend, Mary Martin. Indeed, the veteran Broadway actress would play Maria in the Broadway debut in 1959. The musical later became an Oscar-winning film, starring Julie Andrews.

The story of the Austrian family's escape from the Nazi regime, remains popular more than 50 years later.

Murch noted that while her husband and his writing partner did not visit with the von Trapp family, who settled in Vermont around 1942, Martin, the lead actress, did spend quite a bit of time with the family to prepare her for the role.

Murch said that one of the play's elements that the Von Trapp family objected to was that the character of captain, who was portrayed as a strict, demanding father, but his family described him as a "pussycat."

"But the reason the writers made the captain a martinet in the beginning was so that he could make a dramatic switch when music comes back into his life," explained Murch.

The other piece was that the Von Trapp family had an in-house priest who coached them in their singing.

"The family couldn't understand why they didn't have Father Wasner teach the children to sing in the stage version. But Howard and Russel's comment was then what would Mary Martin do?" she said.

Murch added that the family said they preferred the stage version to the film version.

Crouse has seen "The Sound of Music" produced everywhere she had an opportunity.

Maria Von Trapp, too, attended the opening nights of the musical in several locations when it debuted, first in New Haven, Conn, then in Boston for its second opening before its premiere on Broadway in New York City.

“Every time Mary Martin went to take a bow, Maria, who was seated in the audience, would also stand up and take a bow,” said Murch. “At first it took Mary Martin by surprise, although it became a common occurrence after.”

“It took us all by surprise,” Murch added.

Starting tomorrow, the Annisquam Village Players will be staging “The Sound of Music.”

Terry Sands, a co-director of the local production, said when they put on the show 18 years ago, it was the first time the show had been staged in the place where it was written.

Murch’s comment to Sands at the time was: “This was the largest cast that ever performed it on the smallest stage ever.”

Murch said she is thrilled the local community theater group is producing it again, because they put on the show exactly as it was written.

Her favorite scene of the show is when the father, Captain Von Trapp, becomes angry with the children for being dressed in curtains and he fires Maria. He then hears singing and asks who was singing. Maria replies: “It’s your children.”

“Sometimes there are great moments in theater and that’s one of them,” said Murch.

“The Sound of Music” continues to be produced and is now playing in London and will soon open in Toronto.

Although this Tony Award winning show is probably their best-known collaboration of Lindsay and Crouse, their 1946 play “State of the Union” won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

The Crouse family proclivity for talent was passed down to their children. Their son, author Timothy Crouse, wrote “The Boys on the Bus,” about the media coverage of the 1972 presidential campaign and co-wrote a revival of “Anything Goes” with John Weidman, which won them a Tony Award for best revival in 1987. It will open again on Broadway next April.

Their daughter, Lindsay Crouse, an Academy Award nominee, still lives part-time in Gloucester, continuing to act on stage and in film.

Gail McCarthy can be reached at gmccarthy@gloucestertimes.com.

Topics: [Articles](#)

You are in the  © 2005-2011

Carolyn Kirk for Mayor is paid for by the Committee to Re-Elect Carolyn Kirk.

Proudly powered by [WordPress](#) - Original design by [RFDN](#)
[Entries \(RSS\)](#) and [Comments \(RSS\)](#)