

"A Time to Gather Stones" comes to The Scenic Theatre in Pittsfield

This Friday, June 27-(7:30) Saturday, June 28- (7:30) and Sunday, June 29-(2:00) The Pittsfield Players, at The Scenic Theatre in downtown Pittsfield, will present "A Time to Gather Stones" a new play, and world premiere by playwright, George Kelly, a writer who calls Concord home.

The play is a courtroom drama that centers on the trial of Joseph Le Page, for the murder of Josie Langmaid, of Pembroke.

On October 4th, 1875, 17-year-old, Josie Langmaid was on her way to Pembroke Academy when she was attacked, raped, murdered, and dismembered. Her murder made front page headlines in newspapers up and down the East Coast. The brutality of it all was horrific and shocking. The populace in Pembroke and Suncook were afraid to walk the streets, and the pressure on law enforcement to find her killer was enormous. After some intense investigation, Joseph LePage, a French- Canadian woodcutter was accused of the murder and faced trial for his alleged crime.

According to Kelly, who is also directing the play, the inspiration began as a fascination. "Years ago," Kelly says, "I saw the monument to Miss Langmaid, on Academy Road in Pembroke, and thought it kind of a grizzly tribute. In typical Victorian style," Kelly says, "the monument has engravings on it that describe where Miss Langmaid's head and torso were found." Behind the monolith there are additional granite markers indicating where her body parts were found.

Kelly's initial curiosity continued and brought him to The Concord Public Library. "I spent the greater part of six months, reading micro fiche front page articles, in the *Monitor-Patriot* (now *The Concord Monitor*), about the trial." What Kelly found were editorial condemnations of the accused Le Page. The editors of the paper slanted their coverage of the trial and stoked the dislike of the French-Canadians who had immigrated to work as loggers and wood cutters, into genuine hate. Foreigners were suspect in the greater Concord community, and the newspaper reflected the prevailing mood. A mob formed and was ready to hang Le Page, but was stopped by the local sheriff, who, as the *Monitor-Patriot* reported, "was compelled to draw his revolver."

Though "A Time to Gather Stones," is set in the 1800's, there are a host of parallels in the world we live in today: xenophobia, prejudice, a distrust of immigrants, hypocrisy in our system of justice, and downright bigotry, come through as witnesses are called to testify. Behind them all, in the background scenery, is *Blind Justice*, created by local artist Emily Marsh. The play also focusses on the pressures each of the principal characters faces. "Nearly every character must deal with the societal pressure on them, to convict the accused killer LePage. There is no escape. Josie Langmaid's ghost hovers over a fractured community, and someone is going to hang, for the killing.

Kelly is a founding member of Granite Playwrights. Recently, Kelly's play, "The College Game," took Best Play honors at The Palace Theatre in Manchester. "I have been writing one-act plays for years, most of which have been shown in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Connecticut."

"A Time to Gather Stones," is his second full length play, and one that he is excited to finally see. "This play was workshopped, deposited in a drawer as hopeless, and then resurrected about a year ago. When I began reading an old draft of the play, it really began writing itself. When I rewrote it, I knew I had written an historical courtroom drama." Kelly shopped the play and, Carole Neveux, Board Member of The Pittsfield Players granted him a reading, after which the Players Board unanimously voted to "give it light" at The Scenic Theatre.

The Players have a long history in Pittsfield and, according to Kelly, "The Board helped me assemble a cast that is remarkable" They are all experienced actors who have appeared in plays at various venues in the area, the state, and in the country. "The multi-talented cast just gelled from the beginning; they are such a pleasure to work with—not a diva in the bunch," Kelly says.

Carole Neveux is play's Producer. A veteran Player herself, she has a long history with The Pittsfield Players. "I am new to the Scenic Theatre, and Carole is just magnificent to work with. She plucks people out of the woodwork to help. She and everyone else have been so welcoming and supportive, to a new Director, and a new play." Kelly is quick to acknowledge that taking a chance on an unknown play, when theatre budgets are tight, takes courage, and commitment. "My admiration for The Pittsfield Players, and their beautiful, air-conditioned art deco theatre, grows greater every day. Just being with them, is a heady experience."

"A Time to Gather Stones, went into production the last week in May. The Players scrambled to fill a cast of fifteen. The short window to production has not been easy, but progress was immediate. Actors have risen to the challenge and literally inhabited their characters. "The most rewarding part of working on this play are the actors, and production crew involved with it. Each rehearsal is still another chance to see the set creation, the lighting, and hear what I've written-- spoken. This journey is immediately rewarding, because of the creative people involved."

Finally, this historical account of the trial of Joseph LePage though based in fiction, will allow the audience some insight into a dark place in history, as well as illuminate some of the contemporary dilemmas that are present in our modern day.

"I am in awe", Kelly said, "that even after all these years, someone places fresh roses at Josie's grave, as others tend the monument to her."

Tickets to "A Time to Gather Stones," may be purchased in advance, at www.pittsfieldplayers.org. Parents of young children may find some of the descriptive language unsuitable. Discretion is advised.

