

The Gates of AURONA

ADVENTURE GUIDE:
GHOST HUNTING THROUGH
STAGE AND SCREEN

Storykeepers and Storytellers Gather Round!

People have gathered together to tell stories since humans first tamed fire. Shamans and teachers passed on warnings of dangers, bindings of social ritual, and instructions on how best to keep the tribe fed. Then it was wandering minstrels and bards...and then came The Stage.



This was a new home for story. Its keepers and its tellers built upon it grand visions with fabrics and paints and huge voices. Deeper and deeper into Life Itself, these keepers and tellers burrowed. Audiences grew from that simple tribe to hundreds; all packed round the stage, so they too could be part of the story.

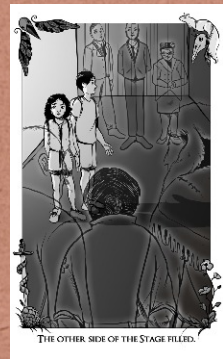


And while The Stage continued to grow, there came, too, The Screen. First just pictures, but then those pictures began to move and then they began to speak and then they grew long enough to take up an entire afternoon. They showed us the best and the worst we can be as humans and asked us to think carefully on which we would be.

But whatever way those actors took to our stages, whether by stairs or by projector, they left behind memories of the greatest of all the emotions we experience as people. They bring us back to that campfire and remind us what it means to be human. Is it any wonder that ghosts (or even just great ghost stories) might be attracted to these hallowed halls?

The magic of stage and screen isn't just clever slight of hand and computer graphics. The true magic of our theaters comes to life once we know the stories of these special places and of the people who created them.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CREATE A GHOST HUNTING GUIDE FOR YOUR OWN AREA, you may have to do a little extra research. While many towns still have theaters, you'd be surprised how many additional live stages and cinemas houses live on with new purposes! IMAGES OF AMERICA books can be a useful source of information, so can your local historical society, but even better: just get out and start talking to people. Eventually you will find someone willing to share their favorite memories! And who knows? You might even get a couple fun ghost stories out of it, too!



ADVENTURERS CAN WIN GATES GEAR

Send me a picture of yourself with your favorite theater (with an explanation of why it is your favorite) and you will be entered to win GATES GEAR as part of the launch party for each new book in the series!

- OR -

Send me a digital copy of your Silent Movie from the end of this guide! Make as many copies of the Narrative Slide and of the Action Slide as you need to tell your story. Send pictures/movie slides to tonya@tonyamacalino.com. (All materials received will be posted to www.tonyamacalino.com.)

For these adventures, I have given more story than driving directions as the sites—with a couple exceptions—are all within a few blocks of each other in downtown Hillsboro.

The Original Theater Man: ORANGE PHELPS



Orange Phelps was twenty years old when he arrived in Oregon in 1906 after a career in college baseball. He tried his hand at mining and then threw in with the future Department of Fish and Wildlife. And right around here is that fateful moment when somebody dropped the right words in his ear:

“Why don’t you start a moving picture house?”

Those words would change his life—and Hillsboro—forever. After scouting the Portland area, Orange chose Hillsboro for his grand experiment. He set up his first projector in an old storage room in 1908, arranged it with 108 seats, and called it The Arcade Theater.



ARCADE THEATER (1908)
MAJESTIC THEATER (1916 - 1917)
250 E Main St
Hillsboro, OR 97123

In addition to filling his theater, Orange took his projector and his electric generator on the road with a big black tent showing films at Shute Park and even as far away as Rockaway Beach where he was credited as bringing them their first electricity. Never one to keep life simple, while Orange was running around with his newfangled moving picture projector, he was also booking acts for The Crescent Theater, which featured both music and entertainment. (All while playing catcher for the semi-pro baseball team, the Hillsboro Cardinals!)



THE CRESCENT THEATER (1906)
Se corner of First & Main
(site of Starbucks)

The Crescent Theater was sometimes called the Opera House as it replaced the original Hillsboro Opera House, housed in the space above the McKinney Livery.

A livery was where you could rent an horse and/or a horse and wagon. You could also board your horse there if you were staying in town. They were usually associated with hotels. The McKinney Livery was across the street from the Commercial Hotel.



HILLSBORO OPERA HOUSE (1890)
NE corner of 2nd and Washington
(parking lot across from HART Theater)

Nickelodeon theaters like The Arcade (those which charged a nickel or two for a silent movie accompanied by live piano/organ) gained enormous popularity in these years, but Orange's fellow businessmen didn't see the future in it. When he would take the train into Portland to pick up his reels, they would tell him about the jobs they could get him when he finally gave up on that crazy old machine.



THE FILM EXCHANGE

(Paramount, Warner, Fox, RKO, and Columbia)
909 NW 19th Ave
Portland, OR 97209

(Before shipping became easier, film production companies maintained film exchange offices where theater operators could pick up batches of films. Sometimes they could also preview the films there. Films came on multiple reels and you didn't get to choose all of the films in your batch. Your choice was whether or not to show them all. An operator had to know their audience! This building is out by the NW 23rd district of Portland and is worth the peek, if you have the chance!)

Fortunately, pioneer banker John Shute recognized the opportunity—and probably knew better than Orange's fellow commuters how much money the theater was making! Just 3 years after Orange launched his enterprise, John arranged for Orange to buy his former bank building across the street from The Arcade.



GRAND THEATER (1913)

LIBERTY THEATER (1916)

THE VENETIAN (1925)

THE TOWN THEATER (1957 - 1996)

THE VENETIAN (2008 - 2016)

253 E Main St
Hillsboro, OR 97123

The Grand Theater had several reincarnations. Orange watched his theater burn twice, which must have been just heartbreaking. However, each time he rebuilt it and each time better than the last. The crown jewel of downtown Hillsboro and Orange Phelps himself saw the film industry evolve from black and white silent films that Orange had to narrate himself while hand-cranking the movie, through the tricky coordination of phonograph and projector, on to the fully integrated films of today.

And of these many, many stories he shared with his community, which was his favorite?

Gone with The Wind, of course!

Heavily involved in the city, Orange had a hand in creating the Carnegie Library, the Shute Park Pavillion, the Hillsboro Airport, and the Hillsboro Happy Days celebration. He served on the city council for many years and as mayor from 1929 - 1935.

Shortly after his term of service as mayor, Orange partnered with Harry Hill to create an additional theater around the corner from The Venetian . The Hill Theater showed “double bills” while The Venetian showed first run movies.



HILL THEATER (1937)
127 NE 3rd Ave
Hillsboro, OR 97124

In his seventies, Orange was not yet done expanding his entertainment empire! Orange partnered with the Forest Grove entertainment magnates, the Watrous family, to create a drive-in theater.



CARVUE DRIVE IN (1952)
(now Fred Meyer)
2200 E Baseline St
Cornelius, OR 97113

Around this time, television began to make filling theaters difficult. Ever the smart entrepreneur, Orange went back to his roots using entertainment of all sorts to make up the difference—live theater, cooking shows, even hosting graduations.

The amazing passion for theater and community that was Orange Phelps left this world in 1985 at the age of 99. He had sold his theaters to Tom Moyer’s entertainment company when he finally retired a little less than a decade before in 1978. (Tom was the one to drive him to Disneyland to be honored as the oldest living theater man in the United States.)

Orange’s final theater, The Town, continued to operate until 1996 when it was left to crumble—losing both roof and floor to the elements.

But the tale doesn’t end there...

Tualatin Valley Tried to Beat Hollywood: PREMIUM PICTURE PRODUCTIONS

A fun historical side note: In addition to riding the train into town to pick up his reels, Orange Phelps would certainly have had an association with Beaverton's Premium Picture Productions, which tried to give Hollywood a run for its money from 1921 to 1925. The 32-acre studio lot was located on Erickson Street, kitty corner to present-day Beaverton High School. It produced 15 films, several of which were shot in Hillsboro!

The Theater Man for Today: SCOTT PALMER



While Orange Phelps embodied the pioneer spirit, riding the wild edge of tomorrow with enthusiastic abandon, Scott Palmer is that nagging awareness of where our new understanding of the past intersects with the equally new possibility of tomorrow—that point at which we are who we are today.

Scott's journey as a storyteller began in earnest his sophomore year at Hillsboro High School. The class was on a field trip in Ashland for the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and finding a three-hour performance of *King Lear* a little more than they could sit through. Scott, on the other hand, was entranced. The plot too closely paralleled the circumstances of his own life: a grandfather in the throes of Alzheimer's and 3 sisters (one, his own mother) who were struggling to deal with the patriarch's failing mental health. During intermission, the teacher said the class could leave the performance, but only if no one wanted to finish it. Scott carefully raised his hand. He had to know how that story would end!

From there forward, Scott was addicted. As a theater kid in conservative community that wasn't supportive of the arts, he didn't need more reasons to be ridiculed, so he

hid his fascination with the Bard. He began stealing tomes of Shakespeare from the Shute Park Library. (He still has that copy of *Hamlet*—though he has since paid for it!)

A Bachelors and a Masters in Theater and Political Science let him explore the fascinating role that art plays in social movements, but after all of that inspiring and rigorous study was complete, he found himself at loose ends. Then he learned that his best friend, Rachel Buck, was moving with her family back to Scotland—he went with them.

Scott spent six years in Scotland testing the possibilities of all that he had learned. He worked toward a PhD in Contemporary Theater Practice, but he also organized and became the artistic director for Glasgow Repertory Company, Scotland's national Shakespeare company, experimenting with found theater spaces such as gardens, barns, and tunnels. His journey continued for two years in New Zealand.

After these eight years abroad, Scott began to miss his family and realized it was time to come home. The Hillsboro he returned to was a different town altogether than the one he left. After nearly a decade, it had become

much more socially and economically diverse. Scott decided maybe there was a place for him here after all.

In 2005, together with a handful of fellow actors, Scott was back in the theater business, founding Bag & Baggage. He directed their first show, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)*, in Corvallis and it went over so well that the group ended up taking it on the road. They performed in suburban and rural spaces where professional theater was not as common and found great old vaudeville performance spaces just ready to be brought back to life.

A turning point for Scott and Hillsboro came in October 2007. Bag & Baggage was performing *Macbeth* in McMenamin's Octagonal Barn at Cornelius Pass Roadhouse. There could not have been a more atmospheric setting for the haunting play. The barn came pre-staged with bats and an owl and the air was so crisp that the company had to hand out blankets to the audience. It was perfect.



MCMENAMIN'S OCTAGONAL BARN

4045 NW Cornelius Pass Rd
Hillsboro, OR 97124

(The Octagonal Barn is at McMenamin's Cornelius Pass Roadhouse location. This is a great place to stop for lunch in your tour, if you have the chance!)

But the turning point wasn't just in the delicious setting, the turning point lay in who had come to endure the chill to partake in the story: Hillsboro Mayor Tom Hughes. After the performance, Tom approached Scott, telling him, "I've got someone you need to meet."

Remember when I said the story of Orange Phelps's final theater wasn't over? At the time of their meeting, Denzil Scheller was half way through renovating The Town Theater, which he had renamed The Venetian in honor of the space which held some of his best childhood memories. The city of Hillsboro was also involved in bringing the crown jewel of downtown back to her former glory and Mayor Tom Hughes suggested that Denzil give Scott's group a shot. Denzil agreed to one performance.



THE VENETIAN THEATER

253 E Main St
Hillsboro, OR 97123

The refurbished Venetian hadn't been intended for live theater. The stage was only 18 feet deep and the fly system for backdrops and such had been removed. But Scott and his team were used to making a space work for them.

Bag & Baggage performed *Steel Magnolias* for the assembled crowd on September of 2008. Denzil asked Scott that night how many more productions they could

do. Bag & Baggage became the resident company of the new Venetian for 8 years!

The Venetian wasn't without her quirks. The stage had no wings or backstage area. The stage was extended 18 feet in 2 phases over the orchestra pit which led to some very odd moments. The entire theater was engineered to amplify the orchestra, so when dressing rooms and a bathroom were installed in the former music space...well, then those activities were broadcast throughout the entire auditorium. The new rule became that the cast lined up for the bathroom at 6:15 and the commode was off limits from 7:00 onward!

The sealed off orchestra pit also caused moments on the stage itself. Certain areas of the stage had to be marked off with "Don't stand here" tape. If an actor or actress accidentally stood in one of these areas, their voice would boom throughout the theater—talk about stealing the scene!

But being a long-term guest in someone else's house has never been an easy thing, and after a few years, Scott began eyeing a building just down the street, a building that had intrigued him even as a teen, the First National Bank Building. By this time, the building had stood empty for around 25 years. Scott, never anymore idle than Orange, began raising money to buy the building and convert it into a theater.

In 2016, Denzil decided to retire and sell the Venetian. Scott and his theater troupe found themselves in the predicament they most feared. They didn't yet have enough money for their new home and they wouldn't have a venue in which to perform the last two plays of their season, in order to help raise that money.

But just as Orange had after watching his theater burn twice, Scott rallied, finding a performance space at the library for one of the two shows and conjuring up enough donors to complete The Vault in 2017.



THE VAULT THEATER & EVENT SPACE
350 E Main St
Hillsboro, OR 97123

Unlike the more traditional stage at the Venetian, The Vault harkens back to Scott's earlier experiences in theater, offering himself and other directors a simple empty box in which to set their imaginations absolutely free. A more intimate space for a more intimate examination of the human condition.

As his degree in theater and political science might cause one to guess, Scott is just as civically minded as his predecessor Orange Phelps. Scott has served on the Hillsboro Arts and Culture Council, on the board for Tualatin Valley Creates (formerly Westside Cultural Alliance), and on the steering committee for the City of Hillsboro's Arts and Culture Plan. He has also reviewed grants for the Oregon Arts Commission and the Oregon Cultural Trust, in addition to receiving the City of Beaverton's Arts Leadership Award.

And if the story ended there, it would still be a grand one—a true intersection of the realm of past and the realm of possibility. But there is one last little monologue before we close the curtains. It may seem from the telling that coincidence has led the way to Scott's success in bringing theater back to life in Hillsboro. This couldn't be further from the truth. Insight, intelligence, and taking an active part in the community have played a much larger role.

In 2017, all of this hard work and talent were recognized by the National Theater Conference when they invited Scott to become a member. An elite group of only 150 professionals, this organization is made up of the most brilliant minds in theater today—all working to preserve the artform in America.

National award-winning theater. In Hillsboro, Oregon.

As Hannah said, maybe the world really is still big enough for heroes!

Community Theater Lives On!



HART THEATRE
185 SE Washington St
Hillsboro, OR 97123



THEATER IN THE GROVE
2028 Pacific Ave
Forest Grove, OR 97116

Standing on the site of the old Commercial Hotel and directly across from the site of its ancestor, the Hillsboro Opera House, the HART Theatre is the home of Hillsboro's community theater troupe, founded in 1994 by John and Kim Sandstrom. The volunteer actors put on around 10 shows a season and host a youth acting program called YAST every summer. HART Theatre is also home to STAGES Performing Arts Youth Academy which puts on 3 plays per season.

After Hannah and Cameron's debut of CAM AND THE LAKE DRAGON on the stage of The Venetian, HART Theatre would be a great place for them to sharpen those thespian skills!

Speaking of community theaters, Orange Phelps's granddaughter, Mary Stafford told a story about Forest Grove's community theater, Theater in the Grove:

Orange Phelps's partners in the CarVue Drive-In were getting past their theater operating years. Fred Watrous had passed on and his son Don Watrous was ready to retire. Orange's son Vince was interested in purchasing their two theaters, Theater in the Grove and the Forest Theater. Don decided to forgive the loan the local community theater troupe had on Theater in the Grove.

Don did sell his other theater, Forest Theater, to Vince.



FOREST THEATER
1911 Pacific Ave
Forest Grove, OR 97116

I Promised You Ghost Stories...

Now that you've finished your theater adventure, find a cozy spot to settle in with a cup of cocoa (Study of Sweets, perhaps!) and prepare to get your spook on!

Ghost hunters have visited both The Venetian and The Hill Theaters. Old theaters are famous for their ghosts. Perhaps it is because of the age of the buildings or the many lives they've seen. Or perhaps it is the storm of human emotion whipped up by the actors and their audiences that draws the specters in for one last sip from the well of life. Let's meet a few...

Perhaps the lack of a calming ghost light is the reason for the randomly dimming lights before performances that no electrician can find a cause for and the flood from the ceiling in the kitchen that left the ceiling tiles dry and could not be traced back to any source of plumbing!

Ghosts of The Venetian



THE GHOST LIGHT

Such an ancient art as acting has had time to gather round it a veritable rule book of superstitions, along with its resident ghosts. The tradition of the ghost light holds that if a single light on stage is left on when the theater is emptied for the night, the peskier, more mischievous ghosts will be made calm and less likely to wreak havoc on your theater and your show. Bag & Baggage kept a foot-operated ghost light on the stage of The Venetian. And several times, when they returned the next day, the light was switched off. Every member of the staff swore they hadn't touched it!



THE CARETAKER

According to legend, during the first fire which burned down the theater the caretaker of the building was killed. Several people have seen an elderly, white-haired man in dungarees and a dark brown jacket sitting the very back of the theater. His reserved seat in the one by the door, left in shadow by the overhead speaker. In one story, a theater worker approached him, not realizing his spectral nature, and asked him to leave. At which point he vanished!



THE WEEPING WOMAN

This young lady is just as famous as the caretaker. According to her legend, she and her husband and her son lived in an apartment above what is now the toy store. (The upper floors of the buildings are connected.) One night, her husband flew into a jealous rage upon discovering that their son was not his and killed her. He ran off with the child, never to return. She is usually seen either wandering the upper floor in her purple and black dress or peering from the toy store side, weeping, watching, and waiting for her husband and child to return to her.

Ghost hunters have a recording of a disembodied voice saying, "Sorry...I'm sorry...sorry." Could it be her?



THE LONE ACTOR

After the opening night of Steel Magnolias, director Scott Palmer returned alone to the dressing room to retrieve his briefcase. He heard the sound of footsteps on the stage overhead and came out to see who it was. There was no one there. Another night, Dale Buck was checking the rear exit door of the theater when a black and gray blast of cold air rushed past her and whispered for her to stop. Apparently, our lone actor didn't want to be alone!



THE PROJECTIONIST

The International Paranormal Reporting Group conducting an experiment in the projection room. With the temperature manually set to 68 degrees, the investigator asked the spirit to raise the temperature to

70, then 71, and so on up to 78 degrees. The spirit obliged. Then, upon the investigator's request, the spirit lowered the temperature back down to 68. Cold spot anyone?

A special thank you to Scott Palmer, Artistic Director of Bag & Baggage for sharing many of these stories!

Ghosts of The Hill

The Hill Theater has since transformed into Snider's Hill Theater Antique Mall. Whether the ghosts from her theater days have stayed on or whether she has come to house new one's thanks to the treasures of lives gone by that now pack her auditorium, is anyone's guess, but the staff suspect they must be from the antiques as most don't tend to make repeat visits. The ghosts of The Hill are private as well, coming out only when the staff are alone and The Hill respects this privacy, actively discouraging ghost hunting and similar activities.



THE MUSIC LOVERS

Two spectral visitors to The Hill have been lovers of music. One staff member found herself serenaded by surprise by several music boxes at once. Another staff member was at the checkout desk when she heard carnival music coming from upstairs. Following the sound, she ended her search in the projector room where the music was loudest...but nothing was playing the song!



LOST SOULS WANDERING THE BALCONY

Overlooking the theater's auditorium is a lovely upstairs balcony. On this balcony, one staff member ran into a gentleman in 70s clothes only to have him abruptly vanish. Two folks have told me stories about a young lady wandering that same balcony. Perhaps the ghosts, too, enjoy the view.



LAST MINUTE SHOPPER

As they were closing shop for the night, one person looked down the aisle just in time to see a gentleman hurry across from one booth to another. Was he still struggling in the afterlife to find the perfect gift? Poor fellow.

Thank you to the staff of Snider's Antique Mall for sharing these stories over the years!

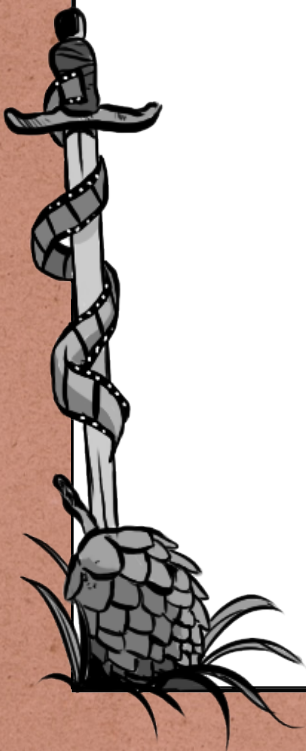
Ghosts of The Vault

Apparently both the bank and the post office which came before it were not lively enough places to collect wandering spirits. We may have to wait a few years before the theater is old enough to gather some of its own!

Silent Movie Slides

NARRATIVE SLIDE

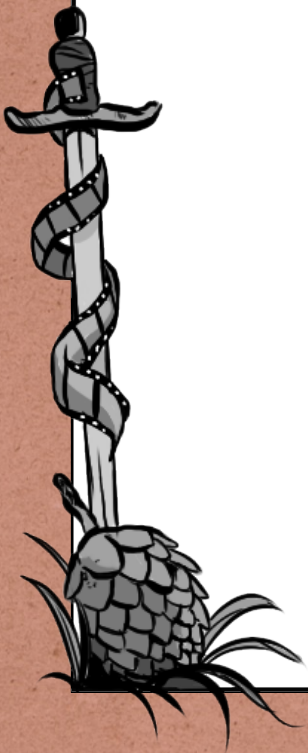
If you've never watched a silent movie, many are preserved on YouTube! A great reference is the 1903 version of Alice in Wonderland, if you want to see how narrative slides and action alternate. (<https://youtu.be/zeIXfdogJbA>) Print as many narrative slides as you need to tell your story. (These are the slides the projector operator will read aloud to your audience.)



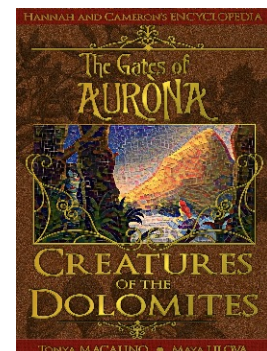
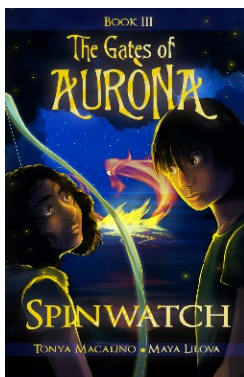
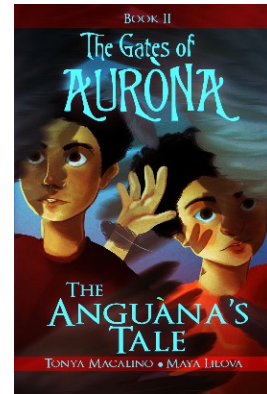
Silent Movie Slides

ACTION SLIDE

If you've never watched a silent movie, many are preserved on YouTube! A great reference is the 1903 version of Alice in Wonderland, if you want to see how narrative slides and action alternate. (<https://youtu.be/zeIXfdogJbA>) Print as many of these action slides as you need to tell your story. These are the slides that show the actors in your movie.



Collect all 10 Books!



Check www.TonyaMacalino.com for release dates.

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STAGE AND SCREEN

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