

Longboat Key Life

December 1, 2006

Art, Real Estate and Community Life

Section B



Glenn and Carole Swope
Contributing Columnists

Golden Apple Dinner Theatre is offering a real Christmas treat, something for the entire family, in its production of "Plaid Tidings," a sequel to the popular and joyful "Forever Plaid."

"Plaid..." tells the story of a young quarter of singers, trying to emulate such groups as The Four Freshman, The Four Aces, and others that brought a light and romantic touch of popular barbershop-style music to those of us young at heart in the 50s.

Unfortunately the quartet, on their way to their biggest gig yet, were broad-sided by a busload of young ladies from a Catholic girls' school. They are given one chance to do their gig, with their new, never-used plaid sport coats, before being carted off to heaven permanently. Well, semi-permanently, since they have been restored to earth for one more concert to bring people the Christmas spirit. (The heavenly powers may decide, like a "Star Trek" series, to consider Easter, Fourth of July and so on.)

The main selling point of "Plaid Tidings" is the plethora of familiar songs, joyfully done, in a loving manner. Just as the Great Depression brought out of its depths some very happy songs, such as "The Sunny Side of the Street" or "Any Man with a Million Dollars Can Be a Millionaire, But a Poor Man Can Be Poor without a Cent," "Plaid Tidings" comes into our lives at a time when we are in the midst of worldwide pain. As Mame sings, when all looks hopeless, "We Need a Little Christmas." As Playwright, Stuart Ross says, "It was a time when we all needed a little joy to lift our spirits."

"Plaid..." features Joey Panek, Berry Ayers, Larry Buzzeo and David Philip Brown as the almost-good quartet. They still have their idiosyncrasies. One gets nosebleeds at critical times and one has asthma. (And you thought heaven would free you from that!)

But the boys are believable. There's just enough difference in their intonation to let you know that "they're still working on it." Of course, on stage with them is the piano and bass player who appear with them in this incarnation, piano/conductor John Visser and bassist Ben Harshbarger. (When Visser takes a cigarette break, Berry Ayers accompanies briefly.)

David Engel is director and choreographer, assisted by Kyle Ennis Turoff. The show was nicely put together, with simple but effective choreography. There is a simple but interesting set, Plaid, Page 7B



More Than a Footnote in History

Samuel Tilden Lives on Thanks to Former Longboat Key Author

Jeff Berlinicke
Staff Writer

All Nikki Oldaker ever wanted to do was write a screenplay that would make people laugh.

Then she hit the history books and came up with a good one. It went from a comedic screenplay to her first book, and is now being shopped as a potential movie.

Oldaker, who grew up in Longboat Key and attended Anna Maria Elementary, wanted an idea for a screenplay. She had no idea what she would find after scraping dust off of book after book. She found her story.

You have to be a real historian to remember the presidency of Rutherford B. Hayes.

You have to really be a historian to remember the presidency that never was of Samuel Tilden.

Of course you remember the election of 1876. It made the recent Jennings-Buchanan election look like a vote for Kindergarten Class President. The mud-slinging was thrown with all the force of a Scott Kazmir fastball.

Tilden, the Democrat, was seeking to become the first Democrat to live in the White House since James Buchanan who happily gave way to Republican Abraham Lincoln in 1860.

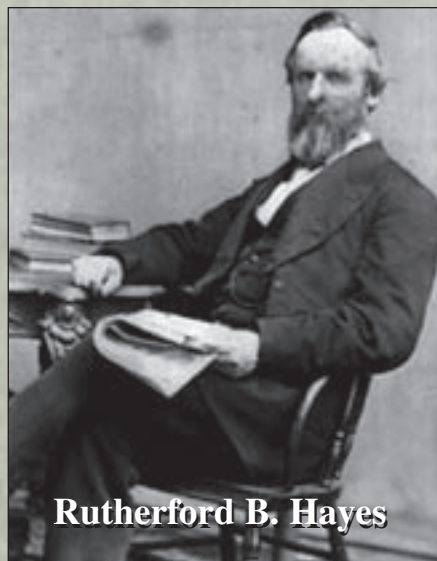
After the post-Lincoln debacles, including Andrew Johnson who was impeached and held onto his office by one vote, and Ulysses S. Grant,



Samuel Tilden



Samuel Tilden's Gramercy Park Home



Rutherford B. Hayes

who remained blissfully unaware that his own cabinet was creating one of the most corrupt presidencies of all time, America was ready for reform.

There was Tilden, a reform candidate with honest ideas and an interest in turning back the growing tide of big business and its increasing control of the federal government. Hayes was a compromise candidate from Ohio who was a man of character, but also somewhat of a political lackey, easily taken advantage of by party leaders.

The main issue at hand was Reconstruction. Since the South surrendered to the North to end the Civil War in 1865, the so-called Radical Republicans of the North were looking to extract as much penance as possible from the South. The southern territories were run by the United States military, which wasn't the least bit sympathetic with the plight of the South after the Civil War atrocities. Johnson and Grant allowed the armies to hold power in the south, at the same time, enhancing black voter's rights. Several black congressmen were seated in Washington until the election of 1876 when the tables were turned on them.

Tilden was a former governor of New York who broke up

rings of corrupt factions, which ranged all the way from the top of the state government on down. He was an honest man at a dishonest time. Future President Chester Arthur was the head of the New York Customs House, which was possibly the most lucrative government job in the nation. Tilden had his eye on Arthur, who later surprised everyone and became a decent president who championed reforms that would have destroyed him not too long before.

Hayes was an honest politician and governor of Ohio who was a war hero even though he was wounded six times during the Civil War. He was a Republican and it looked like the election of 1876 would be lost to a Democrat for the first time in 20 years.

Tilden won the popular vote by a wide

margin. He also had a significant lead in the Electoral College. The problem was, he was one vote short. With 19 votes in the balance and Tilden needing only one, the battle was joined. Hayes, who never wanted to be president in the first place, at least until the election, had his supporters protest the result in three states — Florida, Alabama and Louisiana — as well as Oregon, which had its own conflict.

That's when the backroom bargaining began. A deal, whether Hayes knew about it or not, was brokered that Hayes would get all remaining Electoral College votes in exchange for removing the military from the south.

Amidst cigar smoke and sneaky handshakes, Hayes got all of the disputed votes and the presidency. The removal of federal troops in the south set the black race back about 100 years as anti-black voting rules were designed and violent groups terrorized the southern blacks with no interference from the military.

Tilden was devastated and declined to run against James Garfield in 1880 or Grover Cleveland in 1884 even though his support was as strong as ever. Cleveland was the only Democrat to serve as President through the remainder of the 19th century. Tilden took his defeat with class and his tombstone now bears the words, "I Still Trust In The People."

With his death in 1886, Tilden became little more than a footnote for history buffs. That is, until Oldaker, a former write-in candidate for the U.S. Senate, started poking around the Yale University library.

Oldaker had always wanted to write screenplays, and also worked as a hair designer. She started a business in Connecticut where she soon became Hairdresser to the Politicians. She has managed the backstage area at every Democratic convention since 1992, and is personal friends with former vice-presidential candidate Joseph Lieberman. When she heard the story about the Election of 1876, she originally wanted it to be a comedy, but found herself immersed in a time when politicians were little more than machine lackeys.

Tilden, Page 7B



Nikki Oldaker, Author