HOFFMAN: JOURNEY THROUGH TIME

a play with history

by

Mark Jensen

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For my Dad

Who sold his grain, got his machinery fixed,

and drank his coffee in Hoffman.

He loved the town.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

HOFFMAN: JOURNEY THROUGH TIME was performed as part of the Hoffman Harvest Festival. The play was staged in the John Kleinsasser Memorial Auditorium on August 11 and 13, 2016. The following company performed the play:

The Acting Ensemble:

- Bev Anderson
- Claremont Anderson
- Cheryl Barsness
- Becky Behm
- Brina Beyer
- Mindy Beyer
- Phil Corrigan
- Hannah Goerdt
- PK Hedstrom
- Scottie Hedstrom
- Carter Jensen
- Bonnie Lerass
- Brooklyn Lesnau
- Edgar Persons
- Tim Ray
- Alveda Rhude
- Shirley Sampson
- Arlou Swenson
- Jennes Swenson

The Choir:

- Messiah Lutheran Church Choir

The Violinist:

- Per Ostigaard

The Barbershop Quartet:

- Julia Gulbrandson
- Sue Cedarleaf
- Leon Johnson
- Tim Ray

The Cheerleaders:

- Micaela Howley
- Isabelle Woodle
- Zoey Furhman
- Bella Hale
- Wylie McNally
- Allison Leitch

The Production Team:

- Playwright/Director – Mark Jensen

- Assistant Director – Becky Behm

- Music Directors – Julia Gulbrandson, Faye Giese, Shirley Sampson, Jerry Gunderson

- Choreographers – Deborah Briske, Bev Anderson

- Costume Designer – Becky Behm

- Sounds Effects Designer – Tim Ray

- Light, Sound, and Media Designer – Ryan Saurer

- Slide Show Design – Cheryl Barsness, Mark Jensen

- Light and Sound Crew – Ryan Saurer, Liam Saurer, Mark Reuter

- Light and Sound Effects Operators – Stacie Saurer, Ryan Saurer

- Set Building Crew – Duane Samuelson, Carter Jensen, Chris Ray, Gary Johnson, Stan Stark, Claremont Anderson, Jennes Swenson, Tim Ray, Jim Lembcke

- Producers – Muriel Krusemark, Dianne Johnson

"We Are Hoffman" composed by Gary Rue, lyrics by Mark Jensen and Gary Rue

PERFORMANCE STYLE

Most of this play is performed as Readers' Theatre. The actors will sit on stools or chairs and perform the storytelling narration or the character roles. To add variety, some scenes are fully staged while others are a mix of reader's theatre and staged scenes. All STORYTELLER lines are performed from the script. Depending on the scene, character roles may either be read or staged.

SET DESIGN

A thrust stage sits on the Hoffman auditorium floor. A series of platforms connects the thrust stage with the original gym stage. Forming the scenic backdrop on the original stage is a LARGE SCREEN that displays slides from Hoffman history.

Two benches are on the thrust stage. The performers will configure them as needed throughout the performance. Some of these configurations can be similar, as the Main Street, school, horse wagon/car, and building entrance locations repeat throughout the play.

COSTUME DESIGN

During Act One, the performers wear late 19th/early 20th century costumes. During Act Two, the performers wear late 20th century costumes.

PROP DESIGN

To keep the play moving, all (or nearly all) props should be mimed. Some costume props, such as glasses, hats, and wigs, may be required to help the actors indicate they are playing different people.

SOUND

Sound effects are needed to set the scenes and time period. These sounds are indicated.

<div align="center">ACT ONE</div>

BLOCK 1: OPENING

> (AT RISE: SCREEN: Current Hoffman Main Street)

<div align="center">STORYTELLER (ALVEDA)</div>

You are about to watch the history of Hoffman.

<div align="center">STORYTELLER (EDGAR)</div>

From Hoffman's beginnings, to Hoffman's here and now.

<div align="center">STORYTELLER (HANNAH)</div>

Sometimes we'll act out this history. Race you to the barn and back Inga!

<div align="center">STORYTELLER (BROOKELYN)</div>

Hey wait, no fair! Oo…. Other times we'll talk right at you.

<div align="center">STORYTELLER (PHIL)</div>

And sometimes we'll do a little bit of both. We could sure use your help tomorrow, Olaf.

<div align="center">STORYTELLER (TIM)</div>

I'll be here first t'ing! And that's how I got my job at the railroad.

<div align="center">STORYTELLER (SHIRLEY)</div>

You'll see how things were, and what they became. So welcome! We hope you all enjoy…

<div align="center">ALL STORYTELLERS
(Whispering, mysterious.)</div>

Hoffman: Journey Through Time….

BLOCK 2: PIONEERS ARRIVE

> (SCREEN: Empty prairie. SOUND: Wind
> The PIONEER FAMILY looks over the prairie.)

<div align="center">PIONEER BOY (BRINA)</div>

We're living here? Really? Here? It's just… grass!

<div align="center">PIONEER GIRL ONE (HANNAH)</div>

This place is awful. There's no trees anywhere!

PIONEER GIRL TWO (BROOKELYN)

Quit being so crabby. We saw trees by that lake we passed.

PIONEER GIRL ONE (HANNAH)

Not many. It looks like a green, wavy sea.

PIONEER BOY (BRINA)

The sea made me sick.

PIONEER MAN (TIM)

The prairie looks empty now, but just think what it can become, eh?

PIONEER BOY (BRINA)

And what exactly can it… become?

PIONEER WOMAN (MINDY)

Well… the first thing that hill can become is our dugout. We need a place to sleep.

PIONEER GIRL ONE (HANNAH)

We're gonna die.

BLOCK 3: AREA SETTLED

STORYTELLER (PK)

We heard about free land in America. One hundred and sixty acres could be all ours, all free.

STORYTELLER (BONNIE)

We only had to live on it for five years and improve it. Sounded simple. Our farms in Sweden–

STORYTELLER (BEV)

Norway–

STORYTELLER (BECKY)

And Germany–

STORYTELLER (SCOTTIE)

--were small. So we homesteaded a section of empty prairie twenty miles west of Alexandria.

PIONEER MAN (TIM)

I bought a plow and started busting up the ground. The plants had this interesting smell. How I loved that prairie soil I flipped over, so dark, thick, and rich. Perfect loam for my first crop of wheat.

PIONEER GIRL ONE (HANNAH)

We bought chickens for eggs and a cow for milk. And I took care of the animals!

PIONEER GIRL TWO (BROOKELYN)

We all took care of the animals!

PIONEER WOMAN (MINDY)

I helped my husband plant our wheat. And cooked and cleaned too. Not that I could keep much clean in a dirty dugout.

PIONEER BOY (BRINA)

We helped Pa dig out square chunks of sod. We used them like bricks and built a house out of them. Pa bought a glass window in Herman, and we put that in the wall so we could get some light inside.

PIONEER GIRL TWO (BROOKELYN)

That sod house wasn't a bad place to live. Cool in the summer and warm in the winter.

PIONEER GIRL ONE (HANNAH)

Liar, it was terrible! Snakes crawled into my bed! Yuck!

PIONEER BOY (BRINA)

We lived in that sod house for nearly five years until we could finally build a wood house.

PIONEER WOMAN (MINDY)

We had to give this new place a name. We decided to name it Land township, after a village in Norway.

PIONEER GIRL TWO (BROOKELYN)

It was tough at first, but the wheat grew and my parents sold it in Herman for a good price. We wrote letters back to friends and family in Scandinavia and Germany, encouraging them to settle here.

STORYTELLER (ARLOU)

Soon more people homesteaded their own one hundred and sixty acres.

BLOCK 4: SCHOOLS AND CHURCHES

STORYTELLER (BEV)

And since the area now had more people, we needed a place to worship. One afternoon in 1871, in the barn on the Aaron Wahlin farm, a bunch of us Swedish settlers formed the first church around here. Wennersborg Lutheran Church.

PIONEER WOMAN (MINDY)

But with all the children in the area, we also needed a school.

PIONEER BOY (BRINA)

No we don't.

PIONEER WOMAN (MINDY)

Yes, we do.

PIONEER BOY (BRINA)

We don't have time for school, Ma. We're too busy farming.

PIONEER WOMAN (MINDY)

We need a school. And you will go to it.

PIONEER BOY (BRINA)

Shucks.

STORYTELLER (BEV)

So also in 1871, the first school in Grant County was built. District #1, the Elk Lake Schoolhouse.

PIONEER GIRL ONE (HANNAH)

Town is spelled T-O-W-N. I wish we had a town close by.

STORYTELLER (BEV)

Not long after, in 1873, the first Norwegian church started up too. Lincoln Lutheran Church.

PIONEER MAN (TIM)
(Norwegian accent.)

Uff-da, I don't vant to ride all de vay up dere ta dat Lincoln Church. It's too far in the vinter!

STORYTELLER (BEV)

So in 1878, a meeting was held at the Elk Lake Schoolhouse to form yet another Norwegian church. We named our congregation the Elk Lake Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church. Whew! Mouthful.

PIONEER BOY (BRINA)

And this new church meets in our schoolhouse too. So now I even have to be at school on Sundays!

STORYTELLER (BEV)

Most of us would gather at these new churches, where we would worship, visit, and eat lefsa together. Now every Sunday morning, the sounds of hymns were heard mixing with the winds of the prairie.

(SONG: A CHURCH CHOIR ensembles on the steps.
The CHOIR sings a Norwegian or Swedish hymn.)

BLOCK 5: TRIP TO TOWN

PIONEER MAN (TIM)

Hitch up the horses, girls. Need to head to Alexandria and buy a harness for the ox team.

PIONEER WOMAN (MINDY)

I need sugar and flour too. Oh, and a rolling pin.

PIONEER GIRL ONE (HANNAH)

Pa, it's so cold! Alex is such a long trip!

PIONEER MAN (TIM)

Nothing to be done, need the supplies. Let's go. Yah!

(SOUND: Horses.)

PIONEER WOMAN (MINDY)

Don't forget my rolling pin!

STORYTELLER (ARLOU)

The closest towns were Herman, Morris, Holmes City, and Alexandria, all nearly twenty miles away.
That's a long way to travel by horse and wagon, especially in the winter.

STORYTELLER (JENNES)

In the summer too. We were spending too much time on the road and not enough time in the field!

PIONEER GIRL ONE (HANNAH)

What we needed was a town. Our very own town, close by. So we wouldn't have to ride all the way to
Alexandria to buy a stupid rolling pin!

STORYTELLER (CLAREMONT)

Finally, in 1886, nearly fifteen years after the first settlers came, it happened.

PIONEER BOY (BRINA)

Ma! My teacher said the railroad is coming! They're building a railroad right through Land township!

BLOCK 6: TRAIN COMES

(RAIL WORKERS build a rail line. The rest read.
SOUND: Rocks breaking.)

STORYTELLER (CHERYL)

The federal government gave land to any railroad who would lay tracks over remote sections of the west.

STORYTELLER (CHERYL) (CONT.)

So the Minneapolis and Pacific Railroad Company, called the M and P for short, decided to build a new line from Minneapolis to Lidgerwood, North Dakota, right through this wheat rich, but isolated, section of West Central Minnesota. Construction began in April 1886.

STORYTELLER 21 (SHIRLEY)

The M and P wanted to buy wheat from settlers along their new route, so they founded towns every seven to ten miles along the track. See, the railroad planners figured a farmer could travel about seven miles with an oxcart each day, bringing their wheat into town and then taking back home supplies.

STORYTELLER (ALVEDA)

Plus steam engines needed water and coal engines needed coal. Each train stop would have a supply of both. So the railroad founded towns seven to ten miles apart along their new route, Glenwood, Lowry, Farwell, Kensington… but when they got here, they had a problem.

BLOCK 7: THE HOFFMAN DEAL

OSBORNE HOFFMAN (SCOTTIE)
(Enters, knocks on door. He's very cold.)

Excuse me sir, are you Andres Lindberg?

ANDRES LINDBERG (CLAREMONT)

Dat I am, ya, dat I am.

OSBORNE HOFFMAN (SCOTTIE)

Oh good, I hoped I'd catch you at home. Nice to meet you!

ANDRES LINDBERG (CLAREMONT)

Ya. Vell, come in, ya can't stand on de porch, still vinter out. Vife's got coffee on da stove.

OSBORNE HOFFMAN (SCOTTIE)

Thank you! Could sure use hot coffee, as long as it's black.

MISSUS LINDBERG (BECKY)

Black as dirt. Here's your cup.
(They mime sipping coffee.)

OSBORNE HOFFMAN (SCOTTIE)

Mm, sure needed this, Missus Lindberg. Tastes wonderful.

MISSUS LINDBERG (BECKY)

It's the egg I put in it.

                         (HOFFMAN stops, mid-sip. He then decides it will be
                         better for business if he gulps the rest of the sip down.)

OSBORNE HOFFMAN (SCOTTIE)

So then… I'm with the M and P railroad. My name is Osborne Hoffman.

ANDRES LINDBERG (CLAREMONT)

Osborne Hoffman, eh?

OSBORNE HOFFMAN (SCOTTIE)

I'm the engineer in charge of surveying the land around here for the new rail that's coming through. We'd like to ah, build a village, Mr. Lindberg, on this here spot. On your wheat field.

ANDRES LINDBERG (CLAREMONT)

Oh do ya now?

OSBORNE HOFFMAN (SCOTTIE)

The M and P is prepared to pay you, of course.

ANDRES LINDBERG (CLAREMONT)

Dey better, Mr. Hoffman. Dis is nice, flat land. Yust how much dey villing ta pass along dere den?

OSBORNE HOFFMAN (SCOTTIE)

Here's our offer.

ANDRES LINDBERG (CLAREMONT)
                         (Stares and scowls at the imaginary paper, then--)

Sold!

BLOCK 8: HOFFMAN DESIGNED

STORYTELLER (EDGAR)

So Osborne Hoffman and his railroad team platted out the new village in 1886. They decided where Main Street would go, and how many store lots would be for sale on both sides of that street.

OSBORNE HOFFMAN (SCOTTIE)

Hm… which direction should I place Main Street, need room for the grain elevators…

STORYTELLER (EDGAR)

Now the layout of a new railroad town was a very important decision. When railroads first started building towns, the rail went straight through the middle of them, with stores on either side of the tracks. That worked okay, except the same types of businesses tended to be on the same side of the tracks. So all the general stores and clothing stores and blacksmiths would end up on one side of the rail.

CLOTHING STORE OWNER (ARLOU)

Look at the beautiful calico, ma'am. Just off the train!

STORYTELLER (EDGAR)

While businesses like hotels, pool halls, and saloons ended up on the other side.

SHADY LADY (BEV)

Hello there boys, feeling lonely?

STORYTELLER (EDGAR)

Which is where the phrase, "The wrong side of the tracks" comes from.

OSBORNE HOFFMAN (SCOTTIE)

Yeah, no. Think I'll go with a T-town layout.

STORYTELLER (EDGAR)

By the late 1880's, railroads favored the T-town design. Main Street would jut straight out from the railroad tracks, forming a T. That way all the stores would be on the same street and on same side of the tracks. Plus the town would be set back from the railroad line, leaving plenty of room for grain elevators. So farm families only needed to cross the tracks once to get to Main Street.

STORYTELLER (MINDY)

And in each railroad town, right where Main Street intersected with the tracks to form the "T", would sit the train depot. You couldn't miss it, right next to the water tank and the coal shed. In fact, one of the first jobs you could get in Hoffman was to water the steam engines and shovel coal for the coal engines.

STORYTELLER (CARTER)

The Minneapolis and Pacific Railroad drove the last spike in the railroad tracks in December. The rail line to Lidgerwood only took nine months to build.

STORYTELLER (EDGAR)

And the new train stop was named Hoffman, in honor of Osborne Hoffman, the chief engineer who designed the village.

OSBORNE HOFFMAN (SCOTTIE)

Why, thank you!

PIONEER GIRL ONE (HANNAH)

The first train rolled into Hoffman just after Christmas in 1886. We had our town!

BLOCK 9: THE BREENS

                                        (SOUND: Train whistle and engine sounds. SCREEN:
                                        Photos of early Hoffman.)

STORYTELLER (BECKY)

Now because we had a town, people began arriving to start new businesses.

LEWIS T. BREEN (PHIL)

Excuse me, are you the town agent?

TOWN AGENT (SHIRLEY)

I am.

LEWIS T. BREEN (PHIL)

Lewis Breen, and this is my wife Mathilda.

MATHILDA BREEN (BONNIE)

Nice to meet you! We're from Herman.

TOWN AGENT (SHIRLEY)

Mm.

LEWIS T. BREEN (PHIL)

We'd like to run our own place. A general store.

MATHILDA BREEN (BONNIE)

We should have enough money. We've been saving every spare penny.

LEWIS T. BREEN (PHIL)

Mathida and I know a lot about general stores.

TOWN AGENT (SHIRLEY)

Either you do or you don't. Makes no difference to me, as long as you got the money.
                                        (LEWIS T. BREEN puts money on the desk.)
Hm! Yup. That's enough for a lot on Main Street. Wanna take a look?

MATHILDA BREEN (BONNIE)

Main Street, Lewis! Main Street!

STORYTELLER (BECKY)

Andres Lindberg's wheat field was now measured out in wooden stakes, platted into square lots. The
railroad was hauling in gravel, so we could see where Main Street was going to be.

MATHILDA BREEN (BONNIE)

We have to buy this lot, Lewis, its right on the corner. Customers can see us from both directions!

STORYTELLER (BECKY)

Lewis and Mathilda Breen bought a corner lot on Main Street, next to where Farmer's State Bank now stands. Soon carpenters were laying down the floorboards and setting up beams for their store.

BLOCK 10: MAIN STREET STARTS

(SOUND: Hammers and saws.)

STORYTELLER (PK)

The Breen General Store was one of the first businesses in town. They carried food, soap, tools. And if the Breen's didn't have it, they could special order it from Minneapolis.

STORYTELLER (BRINA)

More stores sprang up on or right next to Main Street! There were three other general stores, a real estate office, two hardware stores, a hotel, and, of course, a blacksmith shop.

STORYTELLER (PK)

But of all the businesses, the largest was the grain elevator. Area farmers hauled lumber from Cyrus to help build it. It was called the Atlantic Elevator Company.

STORYTELLER (BRINA)

Farmers really liked the Atlantic Elevator. They no longer had to haul grain twenty miles to Herman. Their wheat crop was Minneapolis bound, where mills ground it into flour. And that flour went by train and Mississippi boat to places all over the United States!

PIONEER MAN (TIM)

Our average yield in 1886 was twelve bushels an acre. And we got forty-nine cents a bushel.

STORYTELLER (CLAREMONT)

Other entrepreneurs came to Hoffman.

JOHN WILLD (EDGAR)

Name's John Willd, and this is my daughter Ella.

ELLA WILLD (BEV)

Hi there.

LEWIS T. BREEN (PHIL)

Breen. Lewis Breen. I own this place here, Breen General Store.