Poticha; Fall 484-584 Fall 2008 Studio  (unless I change my mind)

A new theater and associated functional spaces for the Very Little Theater. The theater currently is located on a site @ 2350 Hilyard St. Eugene, OR.

This theater is the longest continually running community theater in the US.

They are currently considering building a new and Improved facility.

Poticha in 2005 developed schemes to renovate and expand the current site and building. The board now wants to explore a totally new facility on the present site or on an alternate site or sites. They are determined to continue production at the present facility through the new construction which will impact the existing site placement.

The Very Little Theatre History:
The Very Little Theatre got its name on March 3, 1929, when eight Eugene theatre enthusiasts got together to form a group. One person said to the others, “There are hundreds of little theatre groups up and down the country, but this is certainly going to be a very little one!”

Born in the Great Depression, The Very Little Theatre survived difficult economic conditions, World War II, changing consumer tastes, and increased competition to become one of the oldest, continuously-operating community theatres in the United States.
The Very Little Theatre (The VLT) presented its first production of "You and I" by Philip Barry on Thursday, May 16, 1929 in the Heilig theatre, an early vaudeville house in Eugene, Oregon. The theatre made a net profit from this production of $4.51 and gained community-wide recognition and support. The following excerpt from The History of The Very Little Theatre in Eugene, Oregon 1929–1954, gives an idea of the grassroots beginnings of this small theatre group during that first production of "You and I."

Since they could only afford to rent the building for two evenings, the group was unable to do any of the production work at the Heilig. They were forced to rehearse the play, construct the set, and assemble props and furniture outside the theatre. The sets were constructed at Friendly Hall on the University campus and assembled the night of dress rehearsal. Painting of the sets took place on the afternoon of opening night, which almost resulted in a catastrophe during the performance.

After two seasons at the Heilig theatre, the VLT found it necessary to find a new location due to economic demands and facility restrictions.

The PillBox Era

In 1931, the Very Little Theatre moved into the "PillBox," a drugstore at 538 East 13th Street, which it rented for $10 a month. During the renovation of this facility, the theatre put on two one-act plays at Johnson Hall at the University of Oregon. The "PillBox" provided seating for 95 to 100 patrons on wooden packing cases and folding chairs.

By December, 1932, these were replaced with tiered wooden seats. During these depression years, audiences paid ten, twenty-five and fifty cents to watch live theatre on a wooden platform stage donned with flour sack curtains. An old wood-burning stove provided minimal heat to the space.

The Very Little Theatre produced 24 plays at the "PillBox." Edgar Buchanan, Jr., an early member of the theatre, who later went to Hollywood to become television's Uncle Joe of "Petticoat Junction", encouraged the VLT to do melodrama and commercial theatre to yield large profits that would allow its members to produce literary
drama. This set the tone for providing a melodrama or "corn show" at least every other season for many decades to come at The Very Little Theatre.

It was during the "PillBox" years that the theatre established an organizational structure and fiscal management that would successfully carry the theatre into its 72nd season and beyond. The Very Little Theatre became incorporated on October 9, 1934.

The Barn Era

In 1935, due to a rent increase, The VLT was forced to again move its operation to a new location. The Lane County Fairgrounds provided a framed exhibition hall which became known as the "Barn." Rent was set at sixty dollars a year.

From August to December of 1935 nearly all 45 VLT members volunteered to renovate the "Barn" under the direction of BlaireAlderman, a building contractor and member of The VLT. The expanded space would allow for a larger stage to accommodate full-scale productions, as compared to the primarily one-act plays produced in the "PillBox." Pews from an abandoned church provided seating for 200. If folding chairs were placed in the aisles, 75 additional patrons could be served. Heating was provided by a wood-burning furnace.

The Very Little Theatre, Inc.: A Building of Our Own

Throughout this period the members of the theatre desired to obtain their own performance space. They began to produce more commercial drama, including Broadway comedies and melodramas, in order to raise money for a building fund. Banding together, members supported this fund out of their own pockets and by performing for community organizations.

In the 1947–48 season, Horace Robinson convinced The VLT to sell season tickets. A five-play schedule sold for five dollars, raising $2,500. The following season the theatre sold $4,000 in season tickets.

In the 1950s, with 82 active members on board, The Very Little Theatre constructed a 220-seat
auditorium. A workshop, dressing rooms, green room and small service kitchen were added several years later.

The Present and Beyond

The VLT, now 125 members strong, offers a five-show season with ten to fourteen performances per show. Approximately 2,000 – 2,600 patrons are served per show, 1,600 of which are season ticket holders. The theatre is managed by an eleven-member volunteer board of directors (elected annually from the VLT membership) with fifteen active volunteer committees under its direction.

Sound fiscal management has enabled The VLT to make regular improvements over the years. These include a large rehearsal space (Stage Left); expanded restrooms and kitchen area; new auditorium seats; a new light board and catwalk to support lighting instruments; lobby carpeting; a rehearsal piano; air conditioning; an improved sound system; and a fire sprinkler system to ensure patron and member safety as well as protect The VLT building and its contents.