

Cinema Slides and 1930s Prologues in Halifax

A cinema slide from the 1930s demonstrates early modes of advertising performances. The plate features Halifax dancer Marial Mosher and promotes an upcoming performance at the Capitol Theatre where Mosher performed regularly as a member of the Hylda Davies Dancers. “Madame Hylda” held a contract with the Capitol Theatre, and its predecessor The Majestic, to perform short concerts known as prologues. Prologues were a common live act presented before the feature film in theatres in the 1920s and 1930s during the transition in popular entertainment from vaudeville to movies. These live performances became much less frequent by the mid-1930s as the Great Depression forced theatre managers to cut costs.

This cinema slide consists of two glass plates, one clear and one containing the emulsion of the image. They are placed together to protect the emulsion so that the delicate image doesn't get scratched or damaged. A paper frame between the two pieces of glass creates a border for the image and then the two pieces are joined by a gummed paper tape. In red ink or paint, someone has added the details to promote an upcoming performance by Marial Mosher. Just as today's movie theatres promote actors and upcoming features in their preshow, the Capitol obviously advertised the performers that it featured in its live prologues by projecting these glass cinema slides on the screen in a similar preshow.

No stranger to adventure, Marial Mosher's performing days are just one part of her rather remarkable life. Born in Vancouver in 1917, Mosher and her family moved to Halifax when she was still an infant. At age ten, she saw Hylda Davies's dancers perform and began classes with Madame Hylda soon after. Davies was a British émigré who had arrived in Halifax in 1922 and opened the Madame Hylda School of Dance. She taught ballet and her sister Kate taught tap. In 1926, Davies began staging prologues at the Majestic Theatre on Barrington Street and continued these performances once the Majestic was demolished and replaced by the Capitol Theatre. Davies staged these prologues for fifteen years and in 1932, Mosher began performing in them. Mosher became one of Davies's principal dancers and, after furthering her training in New York while also performing there with the Albertina Rasch Girls, Mosher returned to Halifax to teach for Davies. The theatre in which she performed most, the Capitol, was an atmospheric theatre designed to look like a medieval castle from the vestibule right through to the proscenium stage. Archival images of the theatre reveal a medieval portcullis that appears as if it might drop down with the curtain.

When World War II was declared in 1939, Mosher saw a poster that read, “Drop dance and join the army!” ... so she did just that. She joined a para-military group called the Nova Scotia Women's Army Corps. When the Canadian government officially created a Canadian Women's Army Corps in 1941, Mosher was among the first to enlist. Starting her training as a private she was soon commissioned to be an officer and rose through the ranks to Major by the time the CWAC program disbanded in 1946. She was a part of the first contingent of CWACs to be sent to England where she was selected to be part of a group to attend Princess Elizabeth's birthday party at Buckingham Palace. After the war, she used her Department of Veterans' Affairs training credits to get a degree in psychology from Acadia University followed by a master's degree in sociology. When the CWAC program was reorganized as a militia unit in 1951, Mosher took up her role as Major once more becoming the Eastern Command CWAC Officer, where she remained until 1961.

After retiring from the military for good, Mosher took up further graduate studies at the University of Toronto. In her teaching career, she made an indelible mark on Mount Saint Vincent University where she helped to create the Canadian Studies program in 1974. She strongly believed that, as Canadians, we needed to know ourselves better. She received the Order of Nova Scotia in 2004 and published her memoir, *Remembering: One Woman's World War II Story*, in 2008, the year she died. In her memoir she wrote, "The joy of dancing, the thrill of performance, the discipline of ballet and the demands of practice have remained with me in all my other endeavours."

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