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waiters and waitresses spoke with cockney accents.

"We had two trunks of costumes," said Paul Dueber, whose family operated stores in Cannon Beach. "Every year we would get them out, launder them up and wear them. It was pretty fantastic when it happened. Christmas was really a strong community theme."

With a theater in a town full of writers and artists, naturally someone suggested a Dickens play.

Local artist and songwriter Bill Steidel and dozens of other Cannon Beach residents collaborated on the scripts, sets and songs of the Scrooge story. Since then, performances have taken on a variety of interpretations.

There were true Christmas Carol renditions with and without music, several "Dickens plays" with a dash of the "Oliver" orphan tale added, and even a New York gangland version where Scrooge was shot by mobsters.

Drama teacher D.K. Smith wrote the first Dickens play, and Steidel played the first Scrooge. As "Father Christmas," Smith narrated the story while sitting on a wingback chair atop a narrow 4-foot by 4-foot post 12 feet high at the side of the stage. He reached the chair by climbing a ladder, which, Steidel said, often caused the audience to hold its collective breath as the husky Smith, dressed as a gnome, eased himself on the shaky chair.

### 'It was so much fun'

The early Christmas plays captured the imagination of local residents trying to get through the dark winter days when there was not much else to do.

"We had over 100 people involved at one time. They just wanted to be involved because it was so much fun," said Sally Steidel, who usually brought a pot of stew for the volunteers and worked backstage.

While the plays were far



COURTESY COASTER THEATRE  
A sketch in "A Dickens Christmas in Cannon Beach," from "A Portfolio by Bill Steidel"

### "TOY STORE WINDOW"

(Lyrics by Bill Steidel)

*We're the toys in the  
Christmas windows  
Once again we have  
come to thank you  
For your faith in dreams.*

*Other children are  
fortunate*

*Opportunity, it seems,  
has let them*

*Have their dreams while  
yours are set aside*

*See, children, once a year  
we will stop the clock  
in between a tick and a  
tock*

*Your faith in dreams will  
unlock*

*The magic in our world. ...*

from professional, those who helped out drew from their professional careers for inspiration. Kay Lee, known for her Kay Lee Puppet Theater in Portland, wrote scripts. Stan Glarum, choir director at Lewis & Clark College, composed music to accompany Bill's lyrics, and Victoria Parker Pohl, a Portland actor, also wrote and directed some plays.

Former television and voice-over actor Dallas McKennon, who appeared

regularly in the Daniel Boone television series, provided sound effects. According to a written history of the Coaster Theatre, to reproduce the clank of chains carried by Marley's ghost, McKennon traveled to the Astoria Column and recorded the sound of chains being dragged on the concrete stairs.

Local artists Ken Grant, Frank Lackaff and Steve McLeod also assisted. Metal sculptor and then-Mayor Joe Police fabricated mechanical heads that moved inside the toy store on stage. Cast members sang Bill's songs, including "Toy Store Window" and "Christmas in Our Hometown."

Theatergoers snacked on hot chestnuts from a wagon with a heater installed. Proceeds paid for the costumes.

### Community is the heart

Bill played Scrooge for four years. When Paul Dueber moved to Cannon Beach in 1983, he first played an Irishman and an English Cockney. Then he became Scrooge for several years.

"The cast didn't change that often," Dueber said.

But the plays changed during the following decade, and "Christmas Carol" — or a version of it — wasn't staged at the Coaster again until "Scrooge the Musical" in 2012.

This year's "A Christmas Carol: The Musical" is mostly that: music. The plot, however, follows closely the traditional Scrooge story, and like dozens of Coaster "Christmas Carols" before it, the community is the heart of the production.

"Ultimately, the message of the Scrooge story is that kindness and the Christmas spirit is what uplifts people," Hull said. "It's about reaching out a hand to help each other up. And when people are having a hard time, that's an important thing to do. I think that's the core of the story of Scrooge." 