

# Playwright finds fame and notoriety on Broadway

**T**he road to success via Broadway and Hollywood, has not been the route taken by most natives of Chelmsford. That makes Mark Reed unique.

Born in Chelmsford in 1890, Mark attended the local school (at that time both the elementary and high school were in the yellow schoolhouse on North Road where the fire station now stands) and graduated as valedictorian with the C.H.S. Class of 1908.

He graduated from M.I.T. in 1914 with a degree in architecture. His first job involved designing 10 floors of hospital bathrooms. Visioning a future devoted to plumbing, Mark left architecture and enrolled in a theater arts course at Harvard.

The theater proved to be an irresistible attraction. He forsook Chelmsford for the bright lights of Manhattan, hoping to crash the big time — not

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as a singer, a dancer, or an actor, but as a playwright.

He joined the colony of aspiring artists that had gathered in Greenwich Village and completed two scripts. However, before either of his plays saw the footlights a greater production was approaching its climax in Europe — World War I.

Mark joined the war effort and was assigned a job as a truck driver in the camouflage division. When the war ended, he returned home to find his first play, "She Would and She Did," on the verge of production. The play was not a success, though some nice things were said about the author.

He left Broadway for 10 years, and returned to write "Skyrocket," which opened with Humphrey Bogart in the cast. That too proved disappointing and again Reed left the theater to occupy himself (and meet the grocery bills) with fiction writing,



Photo courtesy of George Parkhurst

Playwright Mark Reed had two Broadway hits that were turned into hit movies. He also enjoyed the dubious distinction of having the movie version of "Yes, My Darling Daughter" banned in New York State.

school teaching, and factory work.

In 1935, Reed finally struck pay dirt with "Petticoat Fever." After establishing itself as a box office attraction on the stage, a movie version with Myrna Loy and Robert Montgomery was filmed which proved to be even more successful. "Petticoat Fever" was a favorite with community theater groups as well; in 1946 the Chelmsford Players selected the comedy for its spring vehicle.

Two years later in 1937, Mark Reed gave theatergoers another treat in "Yes, My Darling

Daughter," based on the author's musing as to what kind of children women prominent in the suffrage and liberal movement would have and what situations would arise in their lives when the children grew up.

Briefly, the plot revolves around a respectable middle-aged wife of a banker. She is shocked (remember this was 1937) by her daughter's announcement that she will be spending a weekend with a young man without benefit of matrimony.

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The mother's protests are met by the daughter's documented evidence of her maternal past which included an affair with a promising poet. The maternal protests suddenly cease.

Like its predecessor, "Yes My Darling Daughter" became a hit in the movies as well as behind the footlights.

Because of the references to the unchaperoned weekend, the movie version was banned from showing in New York State — but

not Boston — under the strict censorship laws of the time.

The front page of the *New York Times* of February 8, 1939 carried a story with the headline "Censors Ban 'Yes My Darling Daughter'; Action Most Drastic Under State Film Code."

It was the ultimate in free advertising for the out-of-New York movie houses.

Although he produced only two Broadway and Hollywood success, this Chelmsford native fulfilled his ambition of placing the name Mark Reed among the successful playwrights of the period.

George Parkhurst  
Chelmsford Independent



Mark Reed