



The Music Man

2023
SEASON

MUSICAL

PRODUCTION NUMBER 249

Oct. 06 — THROUGH — Nov. 18

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◇ INTERESTING FACTS ◇

How did a Provo woman end up running a library in River City, Iowa?

Meredith Wilson was born in Mason City, Iowa, in 1902 and had a career that spanned far beyond Broadway, including playing with John Philip Sousa's band and Arturo Toscanini's New York Philharmonic, multiple Academy Award nominations for Best Score (including *The Great Dictator* and *The Little Foxes*), appearing on the George Burns and Gracie Allen radio show, and penning the classic "It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas."

With a life like that, it's no wonder he wrote three memoirs, the first of which was called *And There I Stood with My Piccolo* and became the basis of *The Music Man*. He called the musical "an Iowan's attempt to pay tribute to his home state" and based the famous River City on his hometown of Mason City. That tribute took 8 years, 40 drafts, and over 40 songs to come to the stage, opening on Broadway on December 19, 1957, and taking home the Tony Award for Best Musical (beating out *West Side Story*) on its way to a run that lasted over three years and 1,375 performances.

Though based on his life growing up in Iowa, Wilson found inspiration for one of the musical's main characters far from Mason City. During

World War II, Wilson served in the Armed Forces Radio Service alongside Burns and Allen and many other stars. One of the men he served alongside was Frank Seeley, whose wife was a medical librarian in Washington, D.C.

Her name? Marian.

"I would go in to visit, and Meredith would point his finger at me, laugh, and say, 'There is Marian the Librarian,'" she said. "He was a very refined man with a lot of talent."

"I never knew why, but he just called me Marian the librarian and kept it up every time we would see each other. He thought that working as a medical librarian was such a funny job and just never let me live it down."

Marian Morby and Frank Seeley had met in California and were married in the Los Angeles California Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She had no idea her chance encounters with her husband's coworker would make her legendary until the musical premiered.

While she inspired the name of one of the most famous fictional librarians, the character of Marian was very much Wilson's creation. He built a detailed backstory and character sketch as he was writing *The Music Man*:

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Marian might have easily succumbed to a life of quiet desperation had she not had Melvin Maddy's legacy of books. [...] These books were Marian's life and the substance of her dreams. [...] Marian was the logical successor to Miss Brundage, not only because of her natural love for books, but also because she had already begun to take on the spinsterish appearance customarily associated with a Librarian of those days. 'Miss Marian,' as she quickly became known, had just turned twenty-two. During the next 6 years she was both happier and lonelier than she had ever been before.

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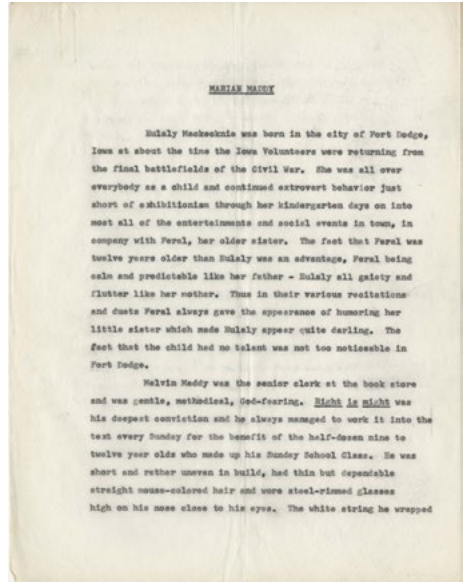
Unlike her fictional counterpart, Marian Seeley was married and after World War II moved to San Diego and started an advertising agency with her husband in 1956. After they closed the agency in the 1980s, the Seeleys moved to Provo.

She attended many local productions of *The Music Man*, including a BYU production in 2005 and a September 22, 2006 performance at Center Street Musical Theatre to celebrate Provo's official "Marian Seeley Day" as declared by Mayor Lewis K. Billings. Marian's reaction to a day in her honor? "That'll impress my children."

Marian passed away in 2013 at the age of 93, survived by three children, 15 grandchildren, and 24 great-grandchildren.

In an interview with the *Deseret News* in 2008, she reflected on fifty years as "Marian the Librarian": "Seeley sometimes 'gets tired of being Marian the Librarian,' but overall 'feels great' to have unknowingly contributed to the world of musical theater. 'How else could I feel? I'm a librarian, and my name is Marian,' she said."

—HCTO Guest Dramaturg, Mark Fossen, MFA



Page one of Meredith Wilson's seven page character sketch of Marian Paroo (still named Marian Maddy at this point.)



*Marian Seely, 84, attends a 2005 performance of *The Music Man* at BYU and is pictured here with student Summer Naomi Wood who played Marian the Librarian in the musical.*



Marian Jane Morby Seeley was born on March 14th, 1920 and passed away on April 19th, 2013 at the age of 93.