

A CELEBRATION OF THE HISTORY BETWEEN

Vincent Price
AND
Truman State University



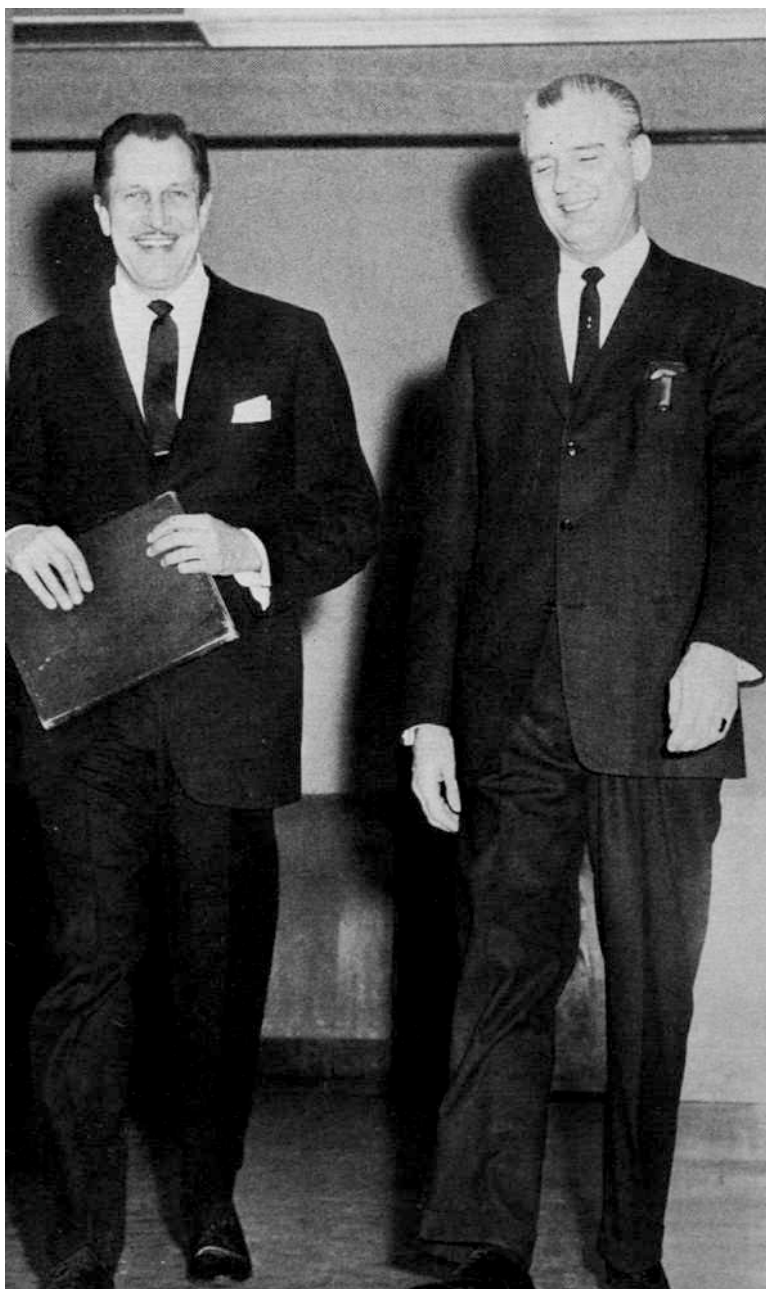
Vincent Price '85

OCTOBER 8TH 2015

***"I feel very much a part of
the University family." - Vincent Price***

The friendship between the University and film legend Vincent Price has deep roots stretching back to fundamental moments in our history. In 1960, the Kirksville unit of the nationwide Civic Music Association approached President Walter H. Ryle for assistance with their struggling program. The College took over funding, programming and operation. It was also given a new name --the "Lyceum Series". The chosen name was derived from the Greek word "Lykeion", which referred to a temple outside of Athens and a nearby expanse of open land where intellectuals of the day (such as Aristotle) held scholarly debates. President Ryle appointed a faculty committee headed by Dr. Gilbert C. Kohlenberg to administer the project. The first season of the newly named series featured a line-up that included Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt*, the Cleveland Playhouse, and Vincent Price.

*In 1935, first lady Mrs. Roosevelt was in the audience of the National Theatre (Washington, D.C.) for the pre-Broadway performance of *Victoria Regina*, in which Vincent made his American stage debut and starred opposite first lady of the American theatre, Helen Hayes.



Vincent Price and Dr. Huenemann – 1961

On January 31st 1961, Vincent Price presented *Three Voices of America* (Walt Whitman, James Whistler, and Tennessee Williams) to a capacity crowd in the Baldwin auditorium. *The Kirksville Daily Express* reported that, “Price’s characterization was acclaimed with prolonged applause by a highly appreciative audience. In the opinion of many, “An Evening with Vincent Price” had proved to be an evening with some of America’s proudest and most moving voices—an evening long to remember.” In addition to his Lyceum performance, residents had the opportunity to get an autographed copy of *I Like What I Know: A Visual Autobiography* from Edna Campbells book store.



Following his initial visit, Vincent Price frequently returned to campus as a part of the Lyceum Series. In 1972, Kirksville was included on a tour of 23 cities in 25 days. The 1972-73 *Echo* yearbook mentions that, "Price spent the afternoon completing two chapters of his forthcoming book about art". The book in question was published in 1972 as *The Vincent Price Treasury of American Art*.



**Vincent returns to the
Lyceum in 1972.**

**Vincent performs in the 1977
Lyceum series.**



Vincent returned to the Baldwin Auditorium and another capacity crowd on February 22, 1977, with his extremely popular lecture, *The Villains Still Pursue Me*. The lecture concluded with a question and answer period and a reading of “The Conqueror Worm,” by Edgar Allan Poe.

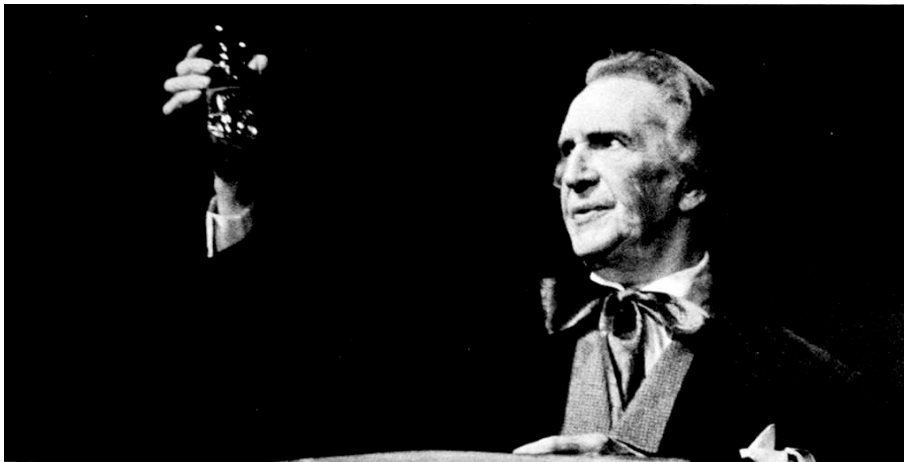
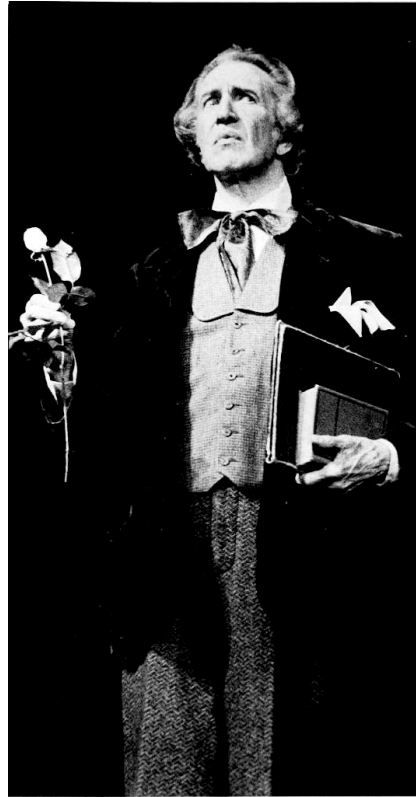
In July of that same year, he opened in San Francisco in *Diversions and Delights*, John Gay's one-man play about playwright Oscar Wilde. Many believe that the role was his greatest achievement on the stage. Over the next three years, Vincent performed the play in more than two hundred and fifty cities, one of which was Kirksville. He brought the play to the Lyceum series on September 23, 1980, following a tour of Australia and New Zealand. He told the 1980-81 *Echo*, "Retirement is the kiss of death." Vincent also remarked in a 1980 interview with the *Index*, "I read an interesting, marvelous thing the other day. Life is a series of beginnings. And it's true. Curiosity is what it's all about."



Vincent's curiosity had taken him into the world of the gourmet years prior with an acclaimed cookbook, *A Treasury of Great Recipes*, which he co-wrote with his wife Mary Grant Price and published in 1965. Vincent held a signing of the gourmet book at Edna Campbells bookstore during the evening of one of his visits. He also frequently dined at Minn's Cuisine restaurant with his Kirksville friends and members of the University.

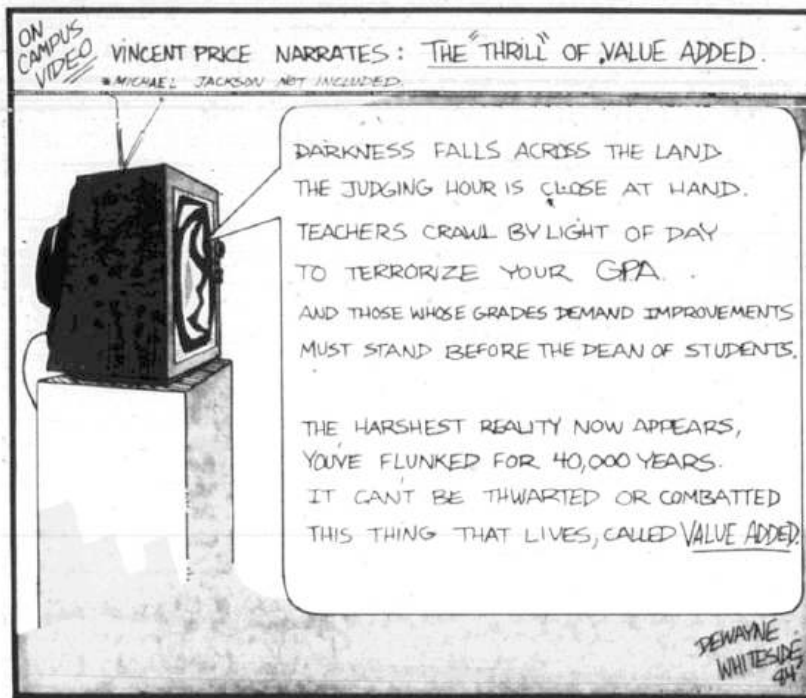


Vincent performing as playwright
Oscar Wilde in 1980.



Vincent returned the following year for a two day stop in Kirksville on September 30 and October 1 of 1981. Only season ticket holders, faculty, staff and students were allowed to attend his Lyceum presentation due to a projected full house. Even with this restriction in place, a crowd of nearly two thousand packed the Baldwin auditorium. The *Index* quoted Vincent's long-time friend and Language & Literature Division Head Ed Carpenter, "He has been the most popular individual we've ever had. He is most gracious, stops and talks to students and likes the campus." The University was one of only four lecture stops that Vincent made during the 1981-1982 school year. During his visits he often conducted other seminars with students on topics such as art history and drama. In addition, he frequently made time to speak with campus reporters, hold question & answer open forums, visit with the Lyceum committee and meet with the University President and Board of Regents. When asked by the *Index* about his lecturing career and his frequent trips to the University, Vincent simply said, "I'm here because I want to be."

Vincent hosting a seminar on drama in the Baldwin Hall Little Theater October 1, 1981.



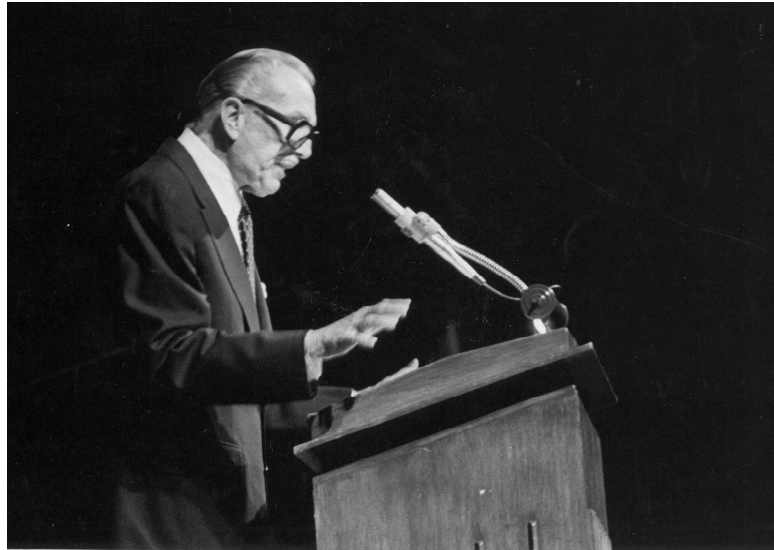
In the early 1980s, Dr. Charles McClain guided the institution toward its new mission with the adoption of a “value-added assessment” – a way of testing student progress and learning in relation to their potential. In 1984 Vincent recorded narration for a value-added documentary for which the University won the Mitau Award for Excellence and Innovation in Higher Education. Ed Carpenter was quoted in the *Index*, explaining that, “He’s kind of become the voice of NMSU.” Vincent also recorded *The “Thrill” of Value Added* for the University – a spoof of his infamous voiceover in Michael Jackson’s hit song *Thriller*. Vincent made another two day visit to the University on March 22 and 23 of 1984. The *Nemoscope* quoted Vincent’s reaction to the new value-added initiative, “I think it’s wonderful when a student knows exactly how much he’s learned. This testing program is a way of doing that. When I was in school at Yale, tests were a way of telling me how dumb I was. But this is a great opportunity for students to find out their strengths and weaknesses.” During his 1984 visit, Vincent made the first of many donations to the University and established the Vincent Price Theatrical Performance Scholarship.

Kirksville resident Vera Burk discussed his 1984 Lyceum performance on the radio saying, “There’s a definite love affair going on between the NMSU students, citizens of Kirksville and Vincent Price.” She went on to say that the 1984 Lyceum performance was a presentation of poetry that told the story of American history. Vincent began his performance with “Rereading Indian Sign Near Holiday, Missouri” written by local poet and University professor Dr. Jim Barnes, of Choctaw descent. Dr. Barnes recently said, “he looked me up before his ’84 presentation, having heard of my Choctaw blood and my early “fame” as a poet.”



In 1985 the Student Senate held a contest to choose the Homecoming theme. Junior Greg Beasley won with his submission ‘Halloween Homecoming 1985’. Vincent Price was honored as the Homecoming parade’s Grand Marshal and appeared again as a Lyceum guest. When the *Index* asked Vincent about his theatre scholarship and an additional gift to art, Price said he hoped “to back up student’s convictions that being here is the right thing to do.”

Vincent at the podium during his 1984 Lyceum program.



Vincent's 1985 Halloween Homecoming Lyceum presentation.



Twenty-five hundred alumni were reportedly expected to return for a Homecoming that featured Vincent Price. In the 1985 *Echo*, David Clithero (staff assistant in Alumni Development) stated, "I think a lot of the success of Homecoming had to do with having Vincent Price as the entertainment for Saturday night."



In September of 1986, Vincent returned yet again for another two day stop prior to travelling to Maine to work on *The Whales of August* with film legends Bette Davis and Lillian Gish. The *Index* reported that the donations Price continued to make were a way to pay the University back for all of the generosity given to him. That year Vincent was appointed as the National Fundraising Chairman of 1986. In addition to his financial support of the University, Vincent donated a number of other items, such as manuscripts, video materials, and a large personal library of author inscribed books. One rare item in the collection is a telegram of encouragement that E.Y. 'Yip' Harburg sent to the cast of the Broadway musical *Darling of the Day*, which starred Vincent Price and Patricia

Routledge (who went on to win the 1968 Tony for her role). The musical featured lyrics by E.Y. Harburg and music by Jule Styne. E.Y. Harburg was a lyricist best known for writing the lyrics to American standards such as "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?," "April in Paris," and his most enduring song, "Over the Rainbow." These items are carefully preserved in Truman's Special Collections department.



**A question and answer open forum in
the Baldwin Hall Little Theater 1986.**



Vincent's 1986 Lyceum performance was a symposium on his work in the movie industry. Vincent spoke eloquently about his affinity for the University. He also claimed that he wouldn't have survived in his business without a liberal arts education.

"Art is everything. It is an approach to life. That's why I love this place. It teaches the importance of art...if you close the door to art, you close the door to life." - Vincent Price, *Index* 1986.

Vincent was scheduled to return as a Lyceum guest in 1988, but was forced to cancel due to illness. In the later years of his life, Price suffered from Parkinson's Disease and emphysema, which interfered with his ability to tour. Vincent was eventually diagnosed with lung cancer in the early 1990s and passed away on October 25th, 1993. Dr. Kohlenberg served as Lyceum committee chairman throughout all of Vincent's visits to the University. He stepped down in 1992, but continued to serve as a committee member until his passing in 1996. In honor of Dr. Kohlenberg's more than thirty years of devoted leadership and service, the series was officially named the Kohlenberg Lyceum Series in 1997. Vincent's scholarship and Dr. Kohlenberg's series are celebrations of these great men, the arts, and Vincent's long-term friendship with Truman State University.

Vincent's legacy continues through his scholarship, which supports a Truman theatre student each year. If you would like to become a part of that legacy, make a gift in honor of our friend Vincent Price.



" If you have a good liberal arts education, you'll have something to be interested in all your life."

- *Vincent Price*

Anything we missed? Please
share your history and stories
with us at:
www.truman.edu/vincent-price



“ONE OF THE THINGS EDUCATION
MUST DO IS EDUCATE BY GIVING THEM
THE ARTS TO SEE.” - VINCENT PRICE

