CHARACTER PARTS AND COMMUNITY CHALLENGES

Maudie Prickett Cooper

Interviewed by Bernard Galm

Completed under the auspices
of the
Oral History Program
University of California
Los Angeles

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction. vi

Interview History. ix

TAPE NUMBER: I, Side One (June 13, 1973). 1

Family background and childhood education--Early stage experience--Decision to study theater--University of Denver--University of Wyoming--Teaching job--The Depression--Picking the Pasadena Playhouse--First impressions of the Playhouse--Student jobs--Admissions requirements for the Playhouse School of Theatre--Dr. Fairfax P. Walkup.

TAPE NUMBER: I, Side Two (June 13, 1973). 30

Studies at the School of Theatre--Student productions--Casting at the Playhouse--Gilmor Brown and the academic approach to theater--Student contact with Gilmor Brown--Charles Prickett's involvement with the school--Setting up the School of Theatre--Working with Playhouse directors--Gilmor Brown's directing style--Early reputation of the Playhouse--Benefits of the Playhouse school.

TAPE NUMBER: II, Side One (June 19, 1973). 55

Early Mainstage roles--Acting experience at the University of Wyoming--Introduction to Charles Prickett--Courtship--Stock company in Santa Monica--Charles Prickett--His sensitivity--His introduction to the theater--His ingenuity--H. O. Stechan--Charles's relationship to the Playhouse--Accreditation of the School of Theatre --The Playhouse joins Equity--Marriage and acting career--Early Los Angeles theaters.

TAPE NUMBER: II, Side Two (June 19, 1973). 82

Advantages of playing the Playhouse--Community readings--Third year at the Playhouse school--Gilmor Brown's Playbox--Gilmor's protégés--Famous third-year students--Size of third-year class.

TAPE NUMBER: III, Side One [video session] (July 5, 1973). 97

Visitors to the Playhouse School of Theatre--Edgar Bergen and Playhouse radio broadcasts--Directors as professors--Breaking into Hollywood --The Durango Kid--KTTV project at the Playhouse --Actors' Company at La Jolla--Touring with Suds in Your Eye--TV appearance on "Tea with Harriet Hester"--Role as wife of Playhouse executive vice-president--Playhouse board's involvement with Playhouse promotion--Prickett-Brown "feud."

TAPE NUMBER: III, Side Two (July 18, 1973). 126

Third-year touring company--Ford Foundation community theater project--Touring company itinerary--Playhouse alumni around the community --Charles Prickett's irreplaceability--Denouement of the Playhouse--Trying to rescue the Playhouse --Charles's plans for the future of the Playhouse --Playhouse alumni groups--Lack of alumni support --Gilmor's Playbox as financial burden--Eighteen Actors, Inc.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side One (July 18, 1973). 152

Graduation activities at the Playhouse school--School of Theatre mode of operation--Becoming a "hot commodity" in Hollywood--Changes in the motion picture industry--On being a character actress--Television roles--"Hazel" series--Jack Benny's show--Episode with a mountain lion --Professionalism--Intermittent theater performances--Generation gap in the industry--Jonathan Winters and "Maude Frickert"--Young directors and untrained actors--Importance of academic training in theater.

Index. 178

INTRODUCTION

When Maudie Prickett walked into a room, it came alive. She dominated it. Vivacious and full of life, interested in everybody, she never forgot a name. Maudie's greeting, a firm grip on hand or arm, her warm, brown eyes directed straight at you, left a happy glow of camaraderie.

Maudie was always bigger than life: tall, with red hair that was her crowning glory, so long she could sit on it, worn in two rolls at the back of her head. This and the abundance of eye-catching jewelry she always wore helped create her distinctive appearance.

She had a lusty love of life and was a great raconteur; her risque stories and limericks were famous. She was in great demand as a mistress of ceremonies; her poise, strong voice, warmth, and good humor immediately set a tone of relaxed fun.

"My mother," Maudie recalled, "merely exposed me to all the niceties that a young lady should have for poise and dignity, and somehow or other it all took." Performing became a part of her life.

Maudie studied acting at the Pasadena Playhouse from 1937 to 1941, the year she married playhouse cofounder and manager Charles Prickett. One year

she played the housewife role, until her husband suggested that she do a play at the theater. Resuming her career, she eventually branched into film and television, working steadily as a character actress the rest of her life.

Despite her dedication to the theater, Maudie always felt motherhood was her most important role, and throughout her career, her children--Charles III and Charie--remained her first interest. The three shared an unusually close relationship.

In 1954 Charles died. Maudie remarried but was again soon widowed. Her third husband, Bernard Cooper, then mayor of Pasadena, shared her deep interest in the cultural life of the city.

In 1960 Maudie was cast simultaneously in two popular television series: "Hazel" (with Shirley Booth) and "The Jack Benny Show." For five years, she juggled the demands of two shows, then returned to active participation at the playhouse, this time as a trustee. But the Pasadena Playhouse was already in its final days. In 1966 it was padlocked by the Internal Revenue Service. Funds were found to reopen the theater and school, but by the summer of 1969, it was closed again, apparently forever.

Maudie worked until her death in 1976 for the revitalization of the playhouse. Unfortunately, she did not live to see the fruition of her efforts: in 1975 the city of Pasadena bought the theater and arranged for a private company to restore and reopen it in 1983.

--Diane Alexander and Peggy Ebright, 1981

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER: Bernard Galm, acting director, Oral History Program, UCLA. B.A. English, St. Johns University; Fulbright scholar, 1957-58, Free University, Berlin; graduate study, School of Drama, Yale University, and Department of Theatre Arts, UCLA.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Cooper's Pasadena home. The video session was recorded in room 134A, Powell Library, UCLA.

Dates: June 13, 19, July 5 (video session), 18, 1973.

Time of day, length of session, and total number of recording hours: Interview sessions took place in the afternoons and lasted from two to three hours with one and one-half hours of conversation recorded at each session. A total of five hours was recorded.

Persons present during interview: Cooper and Galm. Joel Gardner operated the equipment during the videotaping.

CONDUCT OF THE INTERVIEW:

James. V. Mink, head of the Department of Special Collections of the UCLA Library, suggested Maudie Prickett Cooper as a candidate for an oral history interview. They had been fellow passengers aboard the Kungshold on its 1972 North Cape cruise, and Mink had been impressed by Cooper's intimate knowledge of the Pasadena Playhouse. As Maudie Doyle, she had been a student at its School of the Theatre and eventually married Playhouse general manager, Charles F. Prickett.

The interviewer met with Cooper, who suggested her brother-in-law, Oliver Prickett, Lenore Shanewise, and Peggy Ebright as individuals whose combined recollections would contribute to a fuller history of the Playhouse. These individuals were interviewed first, and their recollections did indeed provide a rich resource of information and anecdotes to draw upon in the sessions with Cooper.

The interviewer chose a chronological approach to review Cooper's extensive work in theatre, television, and films. But the primary focus of the interview remained the Pasadena Playhouse, Cooper's role as student and actress on the Mainstage, and the major contribution that her late husband had made to the success of the Playhouse organization.

EDITING:

Editing was done by Susan Tamayo, assistant editor, Oral History Program. The verbatim transcript of the interview was checked against the original tape recordings and edited for punctuation, paragraphing, correct spelling, and verification of proper nouns. Words and phrases inserted by the editor have been bracketed. The final manuscript remains in the same order as the original taped material.

Cooper reviewed and approved the edited transcript. She made only minor changes, with few additions or deletions.

Freelance journalist Diane Alexander and Playhouse board member Peggy Ebright wrote the introduction to the volume. Other front matter and the volume's index were prepared by Oral History Program staff.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

JUNE 13, 1973

GALM: We might begin this series of interviews by my asking you where you were born and when you were born.

PRICKETT: I was born in Portland, Oregon, October 25, 1914.

GALM. What was your family background in Portland?

PRICKETT: My father [Thomas James Doyle] was there because he was head of all construction for the Great Western Sugar Company. At that time they were building a factory in Portland, so he and my mother were there when I was born. We lived there only six months, because after the factory had been completed, then we moved back to our family home in Denver. The headquarters of the Great Western Sugar Company was in Denver.

GALM: So you spent most of your childhood and your youth in Denver?

PRICKETT: Oh, yes. I went through the Denver schools and graduated from South Denver High School. I said we went back to our family home [because] my mother [Maude Carroll Doyle] and father both were raised in Denver and graduated from South Denver High School, and both were graduates of the University of Colorado. But I broke the tradition and went two years to the University of Denver,

because of the drama department there; and then I went up to the University of Wyoming, because of the excellent drama department there, and graduated from the University of Wyoming.

GALM: At what point in your childhood did your interest in the theater begin? And how did it begin?

PRICKETT: Well, it began rather interestingly. I'll have to tell you what my mother always said when she was interviewed about me. When she was asked, "Mrs. Doyle, did you intend that Maudie should go on the stage?" She said, "Oh, good heavens, no! I merely exposed her to all of the niceties that a young lady should have for poise and for dignity, and somehow or another it all took." [laughter] So my mother certainly never intended that I should go on the stage. My mother was a very brilliant, intellectual woman--a typical Phi Beta Kappa--and with many of the Victorian qualities, and certainly never thought that a young lady would go on the stage. Except I must say, she and my father both had a great interest in the theater, because they were a marvelous audience and always followed everything that ever came to any town or city in which they were. So that they were interested from that standpoint.

Mother started me, when I was about six years old, taking what was then elocution. I took elocution lessons,

and also dancing lessons, and then I studied piano. Well, piano didn't take quite as well as all the rest of it--for which I'm very sorry now--but the dancing and the drama part of it did. So I studied outside of school always. She took me to my lessons. Every week I had to learn a new "piece" to speak at school, and she saw that I learned the piece. The readings kept getting longer and longer and longer, until when I was in the fifth grade and we were all sewing in our sewing class making pink sateen bloomers. It took me forever to get those darn bloomers done, because the teacher would have me give the reading I had learned that week. And that's what I did every single week on Thursdays at fifth period--I can remember it still. And that was also good training for me.

When I was seven, Mr. William Lane came to Denver from New York, and was interested in children's theater. So at the Broadway Theatre in Denver--which was the old stock company house where Vic [Victor] Jory and Jean Inness used to play in the early twenties and 1915, '16, '17, '18--he produced this play. It was [Maurice] Maeterlinck's The Blue Bird, and I played the part of Water. So that was my stage debut, when I was seven, at the Broadway Theatre in Denver.

GALM: Were any of your classmates involved in elocution lessons, or were you sort of a unique child?

PRICKETT: I was unique to that extent, yes. No, they weren't. It was just something that I did differently than anybody else, and it remained so all through my high school years. I did a lot of ballet dancing during my early years. I used to study with John Murray Anderson and with the Petrofs, both Boris and Victor, who had dancing schools in Denver--and very outstanding ones.

Every summer at Elitch's [Gardens] I studied dancing with a "visiting" school, whoever came from New York or from the East to teach there. Directors used to use us--now I'm talking about the time when I was between seven and twelve--whenever they needed children in the plays of the stock company at Elitch's--Elitch Gardens in Denver, which is, incidentally, the oldest existing stock theater in the United States. So I had marvelous experience. I worked with Florence Eldridge and Fredric March when they were there--I was just very small--and they were there many, many summers in a row. You wouldn't remember it, but they were there in the twenties. So I had wonderful training in acting with them, and also of watching them.

I think the thing that intrigued me most was that I used to love putting on makeup. We'd put on makeup for a matinee performance; and then, of course, being very professional, we'd have to take it off, because nobody ever

went out on the street with his makeup on. So we'd take it off, and then it was such fun to get it on again for the evening performance.

My mother was always with me all of these times. Of course, my father was always a very good audience when I was performing, but Mother was always backstage with me in all these things. It was really she that was my guiding light, and [it was] with the opportunities and experience that she afforded me that I really continued in the acting field.

GALM: And yet she wasn't promoting you.

PRICKETT: Not promoting me in the least. It was just something that I loved doing, and I suppose she could see progress in my "poise" lessons that I was taking for that reason. And then she used to work with me with memory techniques. I tried to do the same thing with my children, too--although she was living with me at the time, and she, too, worked with them--which is a marvelous thing. I've often thought if more people did this, we'd all remember things better. When she was driving me to any of my lessons, she'd have me look at the license plate of the car in front of us and then look away quickly and repeat the license number. We'd do this with all of the cars we saw. She didn't drive very fast, so there were many cars passing us [and] I had many licenses to look at.

Then she'd have me say the license numbers backwards--look at it quickly and then repeat the numbers backwards. To this day I can remember telephone numbers or anything that has to do with numbers better than I can remember almost anything else. This trained my memory to be a retentive memory, without my really knowing it. So that when I came to giving my readings during sewing class, she had me going from one page in the beginning, to two typewritten pages, to three typewritten pages, to four typewritten pages, to five typewritten pages that I learned each week. And I always learned it each week. You know that a child just doesn't do that on his own; it takes a mother, an adult to inspire them to do it. And this she did. My mother spent time with me; she came to all of my lessons with me so that she knew exactly what I had to do and how I should say it, according to the elocution teacher.

GALM: Do you still retain the lines from roles that you've done in the past?

PRICKETT: Well, I'd like to say yes, but I don't know whether it's age--I keep blaming television. And I really do think that it's television, because ones that are young say the same thing to me. Television is a medium that is here quickly and gone quickly, and so for that reason, you have to learn the lines in a hurry. Then

when you're ready to go on to another television show the next week, you have to forget or dismiss the lines that you've learned for last week and go right on to the next. That has simply played havoc with my retentive memory. It's just amazing what it's done to it. But others say the same thing. When television first came in and I was working in a different performance every single week, I could learn quickly and still retain lines. It is not as easy today!

GALM: You mentioned that your mother had intellectual interests of her own. Was she active outside of the home?

PRICKETT: Yes, she was active. She was active in the women's clubs and that sort of thing, but most of her concentration was on her children. [telephone rings; tape recorder turned off]

GALM: You mentioned that there was a lot of theater going on in Denver: Were there plays that were memorable to you that you'd seen?

PRICKETT: Do you mean during the time of my childhood and that time?

GALM: Right.

PRICKETT: Oh, yes. I used to see a lot of Shakespeare, which my mother took me to see. I can't think of the name of the theater we used to go. Oh, yes--the Denham. And the Broadway continued, not as a stock house but as

a theater for touring companies.

The thing that's most memorable to me, when I think of my childhood and of this particular time in the twenties, was that we always danced each weekend--Saturdays and Sundays, I guess it was--in the vaudeville acts. Every movie theater had a short subject, and then it would have a feature picture, and then some sort of a vaudeville act or a live act. Every week for a period of maybe five or six years, I would be dancing, in some act or another, at these picture houses. This was the very tail end of the vaudeville era. Also, my mother used to take my brother and me (my brother who was three and a half years younger) to the Pantages Theatre every single Saturday afternoon--this was before I started dancing with these various schools that put on performances--to see the different acts there at the Pantages Theatre. This was something we always did.

So, I do remember all of that vaudeville era. I really remember that at that time, and the Shakespearean performances that we attended, better than anything else. This was the era for that sort of thing. But there again, I had the wonderful opportunity of working with these professionals. My mother was always by my side, then there were three of us little girls--I guess we were ten, eleven, and twelve. I would do the solo, and the two

sisters would do the sister act. We used to do Javanese dances and Russian dances and the Black Bottom and the Charleston jazz routines. We did all of them--right along with the professionals!

GALM: Did you ever do acrobatic dancing? Or wasn't that of the era?

PRICKETT: Yes, it's of the era, but it wasn't my forte, I'll tell you. [laughter] I can barely do a backbend. Acrobatics was not mine. But I used to do the specialty numbers; I did lots of soft shoe. And then I specialized in tap dancing. Really, tap dancing was my love. I studied with Bill Robinson when he came through Denver. I must say, it was the hardest thing to learn from him. It was marvelous what he did himself, but he couldn't teach you how to do any particular step; so you just had to watch him and pick up steps. That was something that was my forte: I could do the tap dancing. So I did tap dancing from the time that I was twelve years old until I was eighteen, till I left Denver when I went up to the University of Wyoming.

GALM: Were you involved in theatrics in the high school?

PRICKETT: Oh, yes! Oh, my goodness, yes. Every year when we had a play, I used to play various roles in those plays.

GALM: Character parts or leading ladies?

PRICKETT: Oh, always character parts. I tell you, I've gotten to the place now where I'm really just playing straight all the parts I've been acting for years. [laughter] But they were always character parts, always, when I played.

GALM: Was there a decision to be made whether you were going to the University of Denver? Did you consider any other schools?

PRICKETT: Oh, yes. What I had thought about, when I graduated from high school, was that I probably would go to the University of Colorado, where my father had been the outstanding football player for four years while he was in college in the early 1900s. He'd taken me, from the time I was four years old, up to every homecoming that there ever was, and I was just University-of-Colorado-oriented. But I was just sixteen when I graduated from high school, and my mother thought that the University of Colorado was a bit sophisticated for me, at that time. Plus the fact that they didn't have a good drama school, because the English department was such a strong one. You know when the English department is very strong, drama usually doesn't thrive. You could not major in drama at all. You could take some of the courses under the English department.

Then to sort of cinch matters, I got a scholarship

to the University of Denver when I graduated from high school. Plus the fact that it was 1931, Depression times. My mother was working with Fate! My father, who was not University-of-Denver-oriented, said, "Oh, well, as long as your mother thinks that you should stay home for a year, why don't you go one year to the University of Denver? And then I'll get you a new car, and you can go up to the University of Colorado the next year." Well, this sounded interesting enough to me, so I started in at the University of Denver.

At that time, the University of Denver had one of the best drama departments you could ever hope to ask for. Walter Sinclair, who was one of Gilmor Brown's era, had been brought in to head the Civic Theatre of Denver. The Civic Theatre was on the University of Denver campus. (Helen Bonfils was one of its big patrons, really the big promoter of the Civic Theatre in Denver.) During the first year, you didn't have a chance at all to try out for any of the plays that they did in the Civic Theatre. But the second year you did. The first year, students were so busy taking all of the requireds, with maybe one or two classes of theater, that there was no time. I had a perfectly wonderful time at the University of Denver.

When it came to the sophomore year, I decided I wanted to stay at the University of Denver for another year,

which I did. That year, not very many had an opportunity to play in the Civic Theatre, which cast plays with open readings. One of the plays that I always adored was [Richard Brinsley] Sheridan's The Rivals, and I was bound and determined that I was going to play Mrs. Malaprop. So, my mother had me specially coached, and when it came to the final reading, I got the part of Mrs. Malaprop. I was all of seventeen now, playing Mrs. Malaprop in the Civic Theatre of Denver; and you know, Denver society is pretty sophisticated as an audience when it comes to this theater. I fortunately had a successful time playing this part of Mrs. Malaprop, and to this day it's been one of my favorite roles.

You know [that] when you have acclaim, that makes you like the place even more, so I decided that I would finish that year at the University of Denver, and then go on to the University of Colorado. My father and mother thought this sounded like it made sense, but we all said, "The University of Colorado doesn't have a drama department. Now, is this really what I want?" Well, I decided that I would think about it during the summer.

Each summer I always studied at the Lamont School of Music. I studied music and theater. At the Lamont School of Music was Frederick Hile, who was one of the most handsome Shakespearean actors that had ever come to

Denver. Why he never was one of the greatest actors on Broadway, I'll never know. But after making many attempts at Broadway, he decided that he would teach at the Lamont School of Music. Later, he came out to California and went into the ministry and ended up in Santa Barbara.

At any rate, I studied with him every summer at the Lamont School of Music. While I was there this one summer, a sorority sister of mine was also studying there, and she said to me, "Where are you going to school next year?" I said, "Well, I've been thinking, and I think maybe I'll go up to the University of Colorado." She said, "Why are you going there? They don't have any drama school." I said, "I know it." She said, "Well, why don't you come up to the University of Wyoming? My heavens! We have a theater of our own. We do three performances a year. We do a Vee da Voo pageant. We do theater-in-the-round. We have library readings. We have a touring company of the whole state. My heavens! Why don't you come up there?" I said, "My heavens! Where is it?" She said, "Well, it's 133 miles, and it's up at Laramie."

She and my mother and I drove up one day, at my father's suggestion, and I fell <u>madly</u> in love with the campus just looking at it. So I decided that I would go there to school. I have <u>never</u>, <u>ever</u> been sorry. I've never

learned as much, from a professional aspect, as I did at the University of Wyoming. The head of the department, whom I used to see many, many times afterwards in New York (he had become head of the oral speech department in Brooklyn [College]), used to say to me, "Tell me, did you have to unlearn anything?" And my answer was, "Never. Never."

GALM: What was his name?

PRICKETT: His name was Dr. Louis [A.] Mallory. He was a schoolmate of Don Ameche's. They both graduated from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Don elected to go the movie route, and Louie decided that he would teach. Well, he just put on a one-man show every day for us. His technique was every bit the one you would learn when you'd go to a professional school, like I did at the [Pasadena] Playhouse. It was just marvelous. Now, you usually don't get that in a university drama school. I think it's happening more now, as I observe, but you never did then. You took these courses with the idea that you were going to teach somebody else, not that you were going to use them yourself. You just "played" with them if you were in the various productions that a school might have given. But it was always from the academic standpoint, and not from the professional standpoint that you yourself were going to go out into the field. Now, I

know UCLA has corrected that a great deal, because of the professional people that they have from the motion picture industry and from television, and the producers and directors that they have as guest speakers. USC has done the same things. These are the universities that I've happened to observe out here.

GALM: I still don't quite understand why you would not have stayed at the University of Denver.

PRICKETT: Oh, I should tell you that. First of all, my father thought the University of Denver was just a cowtown college. It's certainly anything but that now. However, I never went to school there without wearing a hat and gloves every single day, nor did I go to the University of Wyoming one day without wearing hat and gloves. He felt that I should, first of all, have the experience of being away from home because that's part of college life, and I agree with him wholeheartedly. So that was decided: that I would go away.

Also, at the University of Denver, the process had begun of moving the Civic Theatre off the university campus, which was taking a great deal of allure and opportunity away from the drama department at the University of Denver then. Now it is separated, of course, and I understand the drama department is still very good at the University of Denver. But I felt that I needed still a

broader experience in theater. So for those two reasons, I left to go to another college. It wasn't very popular, either, in that era, to split your college. When you started someplace, you continued at that college.

GALM: Or you explained why. [laughter]

PRICKETT: Yes, or you said, "Why am I changing?" That's right. Well, I must say that Wyoming was very nice to me. It welcomed me with open arms, and I played the lead in practically every play that we gave for two years. They were nice enough to give me the Outstanding Thespian award when I graduated.

GALM: What were some of the plays?

PRICKETT: Some of the plays were The Torchbearers and The Queen's Husband. Oh, dear, that's going back quite a little ways, isn't it? Well those two come to my mind right away. I did six of them, so you'd think I could remember. Importance of Being Earnest, School for Scandal.

GALM: Were there any classmates who went on into theater?

PRICKETT: Yes. The boy that I went with at the University of Wyoming came out here and went to the Pasadena Playhouse, later went to New York, and later came back to California and was one of the assistants in the voice and speech department at the Pasadena Playhouse. Then later, Helen Inkster came out, and she did a great deal in pictures and still has done a great number of commercials. Oh, we had

many from the University of Wyoming that came out here to the Playhouse. Isabel Jewell, of course, is one of the ones that came from Wyoming and was in pictures. And then they have a sports announcer now. I've forgotten what his name is, but one of the big sports announcers now was from the University of Wyoming. Oh, Curt Gowdy. Incidentally, the University of Wyoming now has a very outstanding drama department. They have just asked me for my memorabilia. I have given a great deal to them. And President [Devon M.] Carlson and Gene Gressley were just out here and met with me. So, their drama department and fine arts department are really coming along well again. After Dr. Mallory left, I understand--which is typical--the department was not quite as popular nor quite as good as it had been when he was there.

GALM: But it was a school where the actor could learn to act.

PRICKETT: That's right. And that's the only way an actor does learn. And a director could learn to direct. We had no business management courses, but, you see, business was separated from theater at that time. Now they know it goes together.

GALM: What about the technical theater?

PRICKETT: Well, the technical aspect of it, yes. We all helped out on that, so we all had an opportunity to

learn some of that. I was never too much interested in the technical aspect, though, but I always like to know that it's there. [laughter]

GALM: If you'd been on stage you couldn't have.

PRICKETT: Oh, I couldn't have, I couldn't. Although I had to do it all, believe me, when I came out to the Playhouse.

GALM: So then what did you do after graduation?

PRICKETT: I decided my senior year that I would really like to do something that would show my father and my mother that I could really earn some money immediately. I decided a nice thing for a "lady" to do would be to teach, so I took all of my education courses my senior year. And if you've ever taken any education courses, which you have, you know how dull they are. I couldn't stay awake at night trying to read them, so I used to force myself to get up early in the morning, at five o'clock--which I'm not very good at doing--and try to absorb this dry material. I adored the head of the education department; he was such a lamb. So I did know that I had to learn something in that class, and I did. I took all these courses my senior year, so I graduated with a major in theater and English and minors in French, psychology, journalism, and education. I decided, well, I should be able to do something after that!

Just before I graduated, the superintendent of schools from Superior, Wyoming, came down to the campus to interview teachers. He wanted a woman, because she had to live in the teacherage with twelve other teachers, [laughter] and he wanted one that could teach English and dramatics and journalism. He and I got along just beautifully, and I just happened to fit his bill, so off to Superior I went to teach for two years. But, before I did that, I had applied to the Pasadena Playhouse because they were giving out scholarships. This boy (this young man that I mentioned) and I thought it would be nice if we would come out to the Pasadena Playhouse and go on to school some more--of course hoping that Hollywood would "find" us immediately. So he decided that he would do this, but I decided that since this teaching position just landed in my lap, I would do this for a year.

That summer I started some work on a master's degree at the University of Wyoming; I stayed on campus and edited the school paper, the Branding Iron. I took some courses from Dr. [Grace R.] Hebard, who was the outstanding historian that the University of Wyoming had, and then I audited some classes that Sam [S.H.] Knight taught. He's the outstanding geologist that you read about all the time. So, I did some of these things and then went up to Superior to live in the teacherage with twelve other teachers, [laughter] and to teach in high school. And, I just loved it. I had

a marvelous time up there at Superior. It had 8,000 people, it was the largest coal mining camp in all of Wyoming, and [it] also paid the teachers the highest salary. I got all of $150 a month, and of that, I saved $100. So you can see how cheap it was to live in the teacherage. [laughter]

GALM: How was it to live in the teacherage, though?

PRICKETT: It was very interesting. I'm glad I was only twenty when I was doing it, I'll tell you that. I would not wish to do it now, but it was [interesting]. It was a good experience for me. I had lived in the sorority house, of course, all the time I was at the University of Wyoming, but this was just very, very good for me. All of us [were] completely different, because the grade school teachers and the high school teachers--we all lived together, you know.

GALM: I have a couple of questions. What was the young man's name who did go on to the Playhouse that summer?

PRICKETT: Jack Woodford. He went that fall. Jack Sheridan Woodford. His parents lived in Laramie. [They] had the beautiful Hart, Schaffner & Marx clothing store there.

GALM: You mentioned that this was the time of the Depression. Did the Depression have any major effect on your family situation?

PRICKETT: Oh, yes! Of course it had a major effect on the family. You know, when you're sixteen to twenty, [you're] mostly oblivious of all of it (at least I was). But I know, looking back, it really did. I never wanted for anything that I didn't have, nor did my brother, but I know my father and mother went through great stress and strains, with my father in his own business. In the construction business, everything was greatly slowed down. But those problems never ever affected my brother and me, because we didn't have to stand the strain of it. It's not like today . . . the way I work now with my children, because I tell them everything that's going on, and they know the economic situation. They know how much they can have a month, or how much they're going to get for the year. Well, I was never on a budget. My father would put so much money in the bank, and he'd say, "Let me know when this runs out." He would give me enough so that I would have it for the whole year. He couldn't imagine how I ever got along on this. But there weren't that many demands, especially when he and my mother were buying all of my clothes and taking care of all my other expenses, outside of what I had to pay for board and room at the sorority house, and what little spending money that I used. We just weren't as socially extravagant in those days as we are now. It wasn't the day of affluence.

GALM: So you taught then for two years.

PRICKETT: Yes. I taught for two years. I decided that I would stay on a second year, because I thought if I ever needed to teach again, I should have at least two years, so that it wouldn't look like I was no good after the first year and they had to get rid of me. Then I asked if my scholarship could be extended, and Charles [F.] Prickett was very nice in writing back and said, "Yes, it would be extended." So I taught for my second year--so I taught '35-36, '36-37--in August of '37, I came out to the Pasadena Playhouse.

GALM: When did you first hear about the Pasadena Playhouse?

PRICKETT: I used to hear about the Pasadena Playhouse when I was a freshman at the University of Denver. Our professors would talk about this glowing establishment out here--saying if you ever wanted to get into motion pictures, the Pasadena Playhouse was the place to come. At that time, I was more stage-oriented, because all of my training had been on the stage. So I was torn about whether I would go to the glowing establishment on the East Coast--which was the American Academy [of Dramatic Arts]--or whether I would come out to the glowing establishment on the West Coast--the Padadena Playhouse.

As time went on, it seemed to me that motion pictures

were becoming more important all the time. As a matter of fact, they were the things that seemed to be the important thing with my peers at the time. Broadway had always been there, and I thought it always would be; but the motion picture industry seemed to be the fascinating thing that brought acting and all this new technique all together. So, I was really then leaning more toward coming to the West Coast. That's really why I did apply to the Pasadena Playhouse, and because Jack Woodford had thought that he wanted to come out, too. It just seemed like this would be fun. I'd know somebody, and we'd come out and go to the Pasadena Playhouse. Then when we both were successful in getting scholarships, well, that just seemed wonderful.

GALM: Had you been back East at all?

PRICKETT: Oh, yes. I had been back to New York. I'd traveled back there with my father and with my mother.

GALM: So it wasn't an unknown territory.

PRICKETT: Oh, no, it wasn't unknown territory at all. But I had never been out here, which also was rather another allure to bring me here.

GALM: So then you came in August of 19--?

PRICKETT: Thirty-seven.

GALM: Thirty-seven. What did you find?

PRICKETT: Well, I came on the train. . . .

GALM: Alone?

PRICKETT: Alone. Oh, yes, I came alone on the train. We got off at the station down here in Alhambra, because I came Union Pacific. Then I came by bus to the station here in Pasadena. And when I got off, I looked up the street and I could see all these palm trees, which I thought were the most fascinating things. When I could see similar trees from the train, I thought they were coconut trees. We were all so excited! The group I'd met on the train thought it was very funny that I didn't know that those were just palm trees.

I found here in Pasadena a very, very warm, congenial group. I went up to report to Charles Prickett, because he was the one with whom I'd corresponded, [and found] he was out. So his secretary took care of me, and she said the dormitory that was open during the summer was the boys' dormitory. I thought, "Well, that sounds very interesting." They had girls and boys--I suppose it was the first of the coeducational dormitories--staying in the boys' dormitory, which was on North Oakland at the time. I moved in there and later on went down to meet Mr. Prickett. There were a number of students around that were there for the summer session, so he introduced me to some of them. They happened to be living at the same dormitory where I was, so we all ate dinner together that night, and it was just a warm, happy

family from then on.

The scholarships that they offered were working scholarships, and I decided that I would do this. I had taken all of one summer of typing and shorthand. That seemed to be all that was necessary. I guess I had the sufficient speed or whatever it was to meet the scholarship requirements. I didn't mind working--typing or doing something of the sort--for a year, because I was going to be around theater and I'd have a chance to go over to Hollywood and do a lot of things. My assignment was secretary to the dean of the school, and I just loved it.

You worked a year for your tuition--plus a nominal sum; I've forgotten what it was now. I think it was enough for board and room. There were about four girl scholarships and five boy, or maybe five and five or four and six. The boys did the maintenance work--mostly night work (they did day work, too)--but the girls all did typing in the general office. They typed scripts and the sides for the various parts. But I had the glowing position, because I was the secretary to the dean of the school, who was then Dr. Fairfax [Proudfit] Walkup. She was just a fabulous person. She <u>is</u> a fabulous person. She's still alive at eighty-five. So this was fun. I could see the whole workings of the school. It was a different kind

of thing than I had ever done. I was only twenty-one or twenty-two--I would have been twenty-two in October--so I [was] still young. I was a secretary for a year, and I simply loved it.

GALM: How were the scholarships awarded?

PRICKETT: You had to send a transcript of your record; three letters of recommendation; a recommendation from the head of the theater department, in addition to three character references; then you had to write a letter telling why you wished to come to the Pasadena Playhouse, and what you thought your qualifications were.

GALM: Did you ever find out later what received more emphasis than another in the final selection?

PRICKETT: No, I think the transcripts and letters were given equal emphasis in the selection. It seemed to me, from the letters and transcripts I saw as a secretary, it was fairly easy to sift out the ten or twelve scholarship students they would be choosing that year.

GALM: Were there ever auditions?

PRICKETT: The Playhouse tried to have auditions. But, you know, it was rather costly to have people come out to Pasadena to audition, and then, if they weren't chosen, to send them back home again. They did do some auditioning. Some students were chosen by auditions. If you wished to come, fine; but otherwise, the admissions committee

would judge as best it could. You can tell pretty much from the written material.

GALM: Okay. Now, your first working association was with the dean of the school. How would you describe her as a person?

PRICKETT: Oh, she's such a volatile, dynamic, brilliant woman in all phases of theater! She is a woman from a very aristocratic family in the South--was raised on a plantation--[she] is just brilliant to this day in so many facets other than theater that she is a most stimulating soul to be around. I learned so much from her. Her specialty was costume and costume design. Maybe you've seen her book, Dressing the Part?

GALM: I know she always taught social usage.

PRICKETT: She later taught social usage, but costume was her forte. I helped her with some of the typing when she was publishing the book. Her daughter-in-law did the drawings in it. So it has been something that has been very close to my heart, because I had a part in it. Her course in social usage and customs of each era that we studied was made so interesting and so living for all of us that we just loved it. Oh, she is just one of the [most] dynamic women that was ever born!

GALM: What was she like physically?

PRICKETT: Physically she has loads of pep and lots of

energy, and she moves quickly. She has gray hair that's very, very curly and always just stands up on end, [which] exemplifies her fiery, electric nature. Everybody loves Fairfax. She's down at [California State University] Fullerton now, teaching.

GALM: Oh! Even now?

PRICKETT: Even now. She left the Playhouse in the early forties, when she was, I guess, in her late fifties, and went to the University of Utah, got her doctorate and helped the university with the pageant that they give each year. So for two years she was there working on her doctorate, and then she went to the University of Arizona and taught there for five or six years. She came back to the Playhouse and taught again, and then left to teach at Fullerton, and then came back to the Playhouse, and now is back at Fullerton.

GALM: So she's not in retirement.

PRICKETT: Not at all. And she's eighty-five, I think, [or] something like that.

GALM: How long had she been dean when you arrived?

PRICKETT: When I came? Let's see. She followed Eugenia Ong, who had been dean before, and I think that maybe in '33, '34, something like that, Fairfax became dean of the school.

GALM: Was this unusual: to have a woman dean of a drama

school?

PRICKETT: Well, it might be, at that time, to have had a woman, but a dynamic woman like this. . . . Well, she was exceptional. So maybe you should say that it was exceptional to have a woman, but they had an <u>exceptional</u> woman.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE TWO

JUNE 13, 1973

GALM: We were talking about the school. Could you briefly describe what your studies would have been the first year at the Playhouse?

PRICKETT: The first year, we had classes for half a day, and then the other half a day was always a rehearsal period. The classes were makeup, costume design, fencing, eurythmics, manners and customs, the history of literature, and voice and speech directing. We had voice and speech more often, per week, than we had any of these other courses. [We had] a course in business management taught by Mr. Prickett, and a course in technical design taught by [Frederic] Carl Huxley, who was the head of the Playhouse technical department. Those courses alternated every other week. But voice and speech classes we had three times a week. Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays we had classes, and Tuesdays and Thursdays we had conferences at which we had to practice our own particular problem. We didn't have the recording machines at the time when I was in school, but later on they did, so that you could speak into the microphone, record on the tape, and then play it back, and hear what you had said incorrectly.

Every afternoon was rehearsal time. We started out

the year in a Greek play. Later the faculty found out that that was not the best approach because by the time you rehearsed in a play that was so foreign to you, and by the time you had the critique, you didn't have one ounce of self-confidence left in you! The directors finally decided it was better to let you lose your self-confidence gradually as you relearned, so they started out with a modern one-act. But we started in with the Greek plays. Some of us were in the Greek chorus, and some of us were playing more of the leading roles; but all parts were assigned according to the number of lines, so that at the end of the year, each one had learned approximately the same number of lines. This was really quite a chore for directors and quite a thing to do. In other words, if you played the lead in the Greek play, then you were only going to have a couple of lines, if any, in the Roman play which followed.

This worked out well, I think, because you had a chance to be in all kinds of plays, and no favoritism was ever shown because somebody could play this part or that part better than others. And of course, by doing it by lines, lots of times you were given the thing that you were least suited for, but it was a great challenge for you to try to play that part. After all, you were in the process of learning and trying to find out what is

the thing you can play best, so I think the theory is a very good one.

GALM: So in other words, if a part were available and there was the right individual to play that part, but if that person had already had too many lines previously, it might go to someone who perhaps wasn't perfect for the part.

PRICKETT: Absolutely. That's the way it all worked. I'll never forget in my second year, the whole number of lines for the year was in a leading role in a Chinese play. A Chinese part I had to play! It was a great challenge, you know. The makeup alone, to do it, and to talk like the Chinese woman and to make it convincing and the whole thing. . . . But that was where all my lines went, in that, and I thought that was just awful at the time.

GALM: This is afield, but for the record I should say that your living room has a very Chinese motif. Any [connection]?

PRICKETT: It carries over, it carries over. No, I don't know. I've always loved the Oriental. But really! To have all your lines spent in playing a Chinese role when, really, I'm a comedienne and not a serious Chinese woman. [laughter] But I look back on it, and I really appreciated it all.

GALM: Now, these productions were presented where?

PRICKETT: The first-year productions were presented on Mainstage to an invited audience. They were hour cuttings of plays: the hour cutting of a Greek play, the hour cutting of a Roman play, of a Shakespearean play, of an eighteenth-century play, nineteenth-century play. The whole idea of the curriculum at the Playhouse was that as we started out with the Greek plays, that whole month we were working on it, we would be studying the makeup of the Greeks, the manners and customs of the Greeks, the techniques that were used in staging a Greek play, voice production for a Greek play. All the courses were coordinated so that we were getting a background, history and literature and everything, of the Greek era.

Then the next month--we progressed on up to the modern times--was the Roman play, and all of the courses were geared in just that way. Then we came on up to the medieval--the mystery plays and the miracle plays--and then up to the fifteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth century. By that time, our nine-month schooling was just about at an end, so then our last assignment was the modern play. Later on, that was reversed. They started out with a modern one-act, or a number of one-acts. And then of course we were divided into groups. In my class there were 150, I think, so we

were divided into many, many groups, so that each group was working on a different play, but in the same era.

GALM: Was there a basis for division into groups?

PRICKETT: Well, in my class there were more college graduates than they usually had had, which was rather interesting. So most of us were in the same group, yes. Others that had had a couple of years of college were put into other groups.

GALM: Otherwise, who were the students? Were they straight out of high school?

PRICKETT: Yes. They had to be at least eighteen years of age and a graduate of high school to enter. But as I said, there were many that were college graduates in my class.

GALM: Now, could you come to the Playhouse with the idea that "I want to specialize in acting," or "I want to specialize in design"?

PRICKETT: Not your first year, no. We all had to take exactly the same thing the first year. And that, too, is good. I had to stage manage plays--you see, that was all part of it, too. I wouldn't have any lines in that play because I was the stage manager. We had to do that also the second year. You learned all the facets of theater. In order to appreciate what each does, you do have to know what his job is or what the challenge is for that

assignment. But the second year, if you were interested in acting, then acting was what you did in the half-day period after classes. You also had night rehearsals, too, which you did not have the first year. We had a senior stage [where] we presented plays every other week. At the time I was in school, the balcony theatre was a flat floor: on one end was the Senior Theatre, and at the other end was the Laboratory Theatre. Every other week, an original play would be put on in this experimental theatre--the Laboratory Theatre. Then the alternate week, the seniors would put on a play. Every week it changed. The plays ran from Mondays through Saturdays (we didn't play on Sundays); so, you see, some senior group was constantly performing every other week.

GALM: Senior group being the second . . .

PRICKETT: . . . second-year students, yes. We had the juniors (first year) and the seniors (second year) at that time. Anybody that was interested in directing his senior year would be taking advanced courses in directing. He would be the assistant to the director on the staff who was assigned to our particular group. Those in the technical course would work on the technical crew under Carl Huxley, who was the head of the technical department. Carl Huxley, Charles Prickett, and Gilmor Brown were the three, the trio, that headed the Playhouse. And if you were interested in playwriting--oh, yes, and we also had to take a playwriting course our

second year--then playwriting would be your emphasis. Hopefully, you would have a chance to put a play on in the Laboratory Theatre, if your play measured up to the rest of the manuscripts which were submitted. There were many, many manuscripts submitted, you know, to the playreading department.

GALM: Was there an invited audience for senior plays?

PRICKET: A paid audience. I think they paid something like fifty cents. Charles Prickett's philosophy always was that people appreciated things more if they had to pay for it. If you let people come for free, they were most critical and did not have sufficient appreciation. And I believe that, too. People on passes are always your worst critics, you know. But it was interesting, when I was a senior--and this had been going on for a number of years--that we had a great following. Pasadena then was still a part of the old Pasadena of the millionaires who had come out here in the beginning, who had made Pasadena this cultural center. They used to follow all of us second-year students, and some of them kept files on us--you couldn't believe it! They would have card files that would have our names at the top, a record of every play in which we'd played, and the part that we had played. Some of these followers had been invited to our first-year performances, which were given during the day on the apron of the Mainstage. It was so interesting to have them come backstage and talk to you and say, "My, we enjoyed you so

much in this play. This was really a much better part than you had in the last one." And, my goodness, it would be about four plays back! But they kept records on us. It just shows you what a following the Playhouse had, and what individual interest there was.

GALM: Do you recall anyone in particular who did this? Who kept files?

PRICKETT: No, I don't remember any of them particularly.

GALM: But it was somebody that you had heard of?

PRICKETT: Oh--I don't remember the names now--they were people of the community, you know. I thought that was so great! I'll tell you somebody who always remembered everything you were in, and that's Earl [S.] Messer. He's still around town now. But I'm afraid these other people have been long gone, and I don't recall their names.

GALM: In other words, you had senior plays and you had lab productions. When could you read for Mainstage productions?

PRICKETT: When I came along, it was at a time that things were changing. For years before, Gilmor would never have anybody from the school read for Mainstage plays; first- and second-year students, the lifeblood of the Playhouse, could not even read for the Mainstage performances. It was always those from the community, or mainly those from Hollywood, or the group of his particular "apprentice student" that did not work for their tuition--they always had an opportunity to play

on Mainstage.

Charles Prickett insisted that the second-year students be given a chance to read for parts on the Mainstage. And if the student were as good as somebody from the outside who was reading for the part, [he insisted] that the student be given the part. After all, students were paying tuition to come to school, and they were being trained by the Playhouse people. So if your own people aren't training you well enough and giving you sufficient technique for performing on the Mainstage, then after all, what's it all about? So when I became a senior, we had opportunities to read for Mainstage productions. And many, many of us played week after week in Mainstage productions. This did happen.

I think the ones who got the parts got them honestly, because they did read better, in open readings. All the plays were cast in open readings. Open readings were held every Sunday evening at the Playhouse. Anybody who wished to read for any part appeared there, and each one was given an opportunity to read for the part for which he wished to read. You have to remember that plays were changing every two weeks. When you look back on it now, when plays run for months and months, to think that we changed every two weeks is almost unbelievable. The number of productions we had in rehearsal each week seems impossible today!

GALM: In the area of readings: you had a Sunday night reading.

Was there a call back on that?

PRICKETT: Yes. There'd be a call back, say, on the following Tuesday, then another call back on Thursday; then by the following weekend, the play would be cast. We rehearsed for a month, so the casting had to be done in a week's time, before the month's start of rehearsal.

GALM: So it wasn't based just on one reading.

PRICKETT: Oh, no. They had many call back readings. And many times, there were two that were still reading for the part after two weeks, because they couldn't decide which was the better.

GALM: Of course, I'm asking you what Gilmor Brown's thinking was, but why did he want to retain this approach to the readings?

PRICKETT: About the students, you mean? I think I know why he did. Gilmor Brown never went beyond the eighth grade in Denver. He was from Denver, and he never had any more formal education after that. I think that Gilmor did not believe in the academic approach to theater because he had never ever had it. He was of an era when touring companies and stock companies--stock companies touring--were the training grounds for actors and those connected with theater, and I think that he just felt that people that learned in other ways than going to school to learn the techniques of theater were better equipped than the ones who came to school. He never was in favor of the School of Theatre at the Playhouse, not at all.

The reason the School of Theatre was started in 1928 was that Charles Prickett needed monies in order to keep this new building that had been built in 1925, called the Pasadena Community Playhouse, going; and so he started the School of Theatre in 1928. It was Charles that went on to get it accredited. He was the one that got the state of California to allow the Playhouse to grant bachelor of arts degrees and master of arts degrees, because he believed that you had to train people.

I think the thing that really made Gilmor realize that those of us who did have academic training could act every bit as well--if not better, maybe--was that in 1935 or thereabouts, practically every studio in Hollywood had a talent school. They were training their talent, so that they'd either take the people that they wanted to develop into stars and train them, or they would send them over to the Pasadena Playhouse to be trained. So he then--at least my evaluation of him is that he then realized that this was an era when schools for training actors were really a necessity, because there were many of them all over Hollywood at the time that I came to the Playhouse. Some of them were good, some of them were fly-by-night. But the studios also had them. Plus the fact that Charles told him, "We just have to do this." Otherwise, there's nothing more disillusioning than to not be able to play on the Mainstage, which was everybody's goal when you were

going to the School of the Theatre at the Padadena Playhouse.

GALM: Was this something that had been building over a matter of years, an attitude from both the school and from students who had been at the school?

PRICKETT: Oh, yes. The students just rebelled, before I came. They just couldn't believe that they couldn't act on the Mainstage, or at least have an opportunity to read and see if they could fit into the part. So from the time that I was a first-year student on, second-year students always had an opportunity; when I was a senior, I had an opportunity to read.

GALM: You mentioned that prior to arriving at the Playhouse, your correspondence had been with Charles Prickett. At what point did you meet Gilmor Brown?

PRICKETT: I think I probably met Gilmor Brown the first day that I came to help out as secretary for Fairfax Walkup.

GALM: How much contact, as a student, would you have had with Gilmor Brown?

PRICKETT: You mean when I became a student? Well, we had him for one class a month, I think. Gilmor was not a very good teacher, but he did teach current theater. His whole approach in teaching us was to belittle us--to show us how little we knew about the theater world by asking us who certain people were--which used to frighten a lot of the younger ones in the class. It didn't happen to frighten me because that sort of thing--somebody trying to belittle me, in his position--just

makes me turn against him and lose respect for him, which is exactly what happened to many of us in the class. We used to see him around the hall. He was just getting over what the ones who had been around before I came referred to as his "Great God Brown" era--where he just rose above everything, didn't speak to any of the students in the school, and just felt that he was the last word in everything. I guess that he was in the denouement of that period when I arrived, because he was always very friendly to me when he saw me in the hall. He had an awful time remembering who anybody was. We saw him as students once a month, when he came to give us our belittling course.

GALM: Then there was a definite sense that his involvement was not with the school, but with the Playhouse.

PRICKETT: No. His interest was never with the school.

GALM: You mentioned that the school came about because of Charles Prickett seeing it as a financial . . .

PRICKETT: . . . source of income, yes.

GALM: But who really was guiding the school?

PRICKETT: Charles, and Charles Prickett alone.

GALM: How would he work, for instance, with the dean?

PRICKETT: Well, Charles was like the president of a university. The dean of students was just like any dean of students under him. He had the publicity department for the school under him, which Ollie [Oliver B.] Prickett did. (Ollie also did the

publicity for the Playhouse at large, meaning what was going on on all the stages.) He had the running of the Playhouse, the head of the general office, under him. The head of the general office supervised all of the scripts and all of the things that were necessary for the setup of the readings. This office did all of the detailed work for that. Charles had the head of admissions under him, too; and the head of the admissions interviewed all prospective students that came, and took care of all applications that came in. Then there was an admissions committee that met together--Charles and the head of admissions and the ones that were selected to be on this particular committee. The bookkeeper took care of the books and all under Charles's supervision. The running and the maintenance of the whole building, the programs for the theater--Charles supervised everything of that sort. What Gilmor did was the choosing of the plays for the Mainstage--oh, and Charles did all of the hiring for everybody at the Playhouse. Gilmor had selection of people that he would like to have as the directors under him, but they had to come down and meet with Charles before they ever were hired. Gilmor supervised the manuscript department and his Playbox--his hobby. Otherwise, the whole running of the Playhouse was under Charles Prickett, and had been since 1925 when the Playhouse moved into the new building.

Because of the fact that they had to have more monies, it

was Charles that had to devise all of the ideas [and] all of the plans. Every method that was developed was developed by Charles Prickett to see how they could maintain this huge castle into which they had just moved. The whole operations of the Playhouse, as Gilmor Brown had first started with the Community [Playhouse] Theatre in 1916-1917, of using purely the amateur talent, no longer worked in the new building. The building outshone the productions. So something had to be done to change all that, and it was Charles who had to see what could be done. Now you see, in order to get better actors to appear on the stage, they had to be trained, which was another reason why he had the idea of starting the school. You had to have better talent; that's all there was to it. And also, the building was something that had to be maintained, and there were no funds to maintain this big building. The people of Pasadena got it built, but there were no funds to maintain it. So the whole big problem just fell in Charles's lap because he was the business manager for the Pasadena Playhouse.

It was he who, during the Depression and also during the flu epidemic when people were not coming to the theater, had to devise some way, with the monies that they had on hand, to keep the staff and to keep the place running. He proposed, and the staff accepted the proposal, that during the Depression times, they would take a certain percentage of their salary, with the understanding that when the Playhouse had sufficient

monies, the remaining percentage of their salary would be made up to them. And this loyal, loyal staff said yes, they would do this, and they did it. When times got better, they were all paid the amount of money that they had given up at that time. It was all paid back to them. But it was Charles Prickett that had to decide upon and come up with all these ideas and to conceive ways to keep the place going.

GALM: What about ideas within the school itself? In other words, you had mentioned the whole concept of an integrated curriculum. Whose idea was that?

PRICKETT: This was Charles's idea, too. He was interested in making this a university of theater that would eventually present a master of arts degree and a bachelor of arts degree. This was his goal when he started the school. He decided he'd better start out with a two-year course. Then he tried to see how he could work two years in a format to meet the academic requirements of the state, and [in the meantime] give a sufficient amount of knowledge and training to people that wished to go into theater.

Fairfax Wālkup was around then in the early days--the late twenties and the early thirties--[as were] Lenore Shanewise and Carl Huxley. Gilmor was never very interested in sitting down and talking about the school or its program. Charles gathered these people around, discussing and weighing what they could put down in the way of a curriculum, as they

studied the catalogs from all the other accredited schools. And as they formulated what kind of a curriculum they thought would be best--and Fairfax had a lot to do with this--they started out, in a very small way, in 1928 with a school curriculum for the students. When I came along, it had been very well worked out. It had been worked out a number of years even before that, so that we had the type of curriculum that I was telling you about.

It was Charles Prickett that always was the one that was supervising and adding to and planning for this kind of training. He didn't think he knew it all; he gathered around him people that did know. He made trips over to USC and to UCLA and conferred with people there. Ralph Freud was also in the picture in this early period, too--from 1928 to '34. So that he had much advice and much information, but it was actually Charles who formulated the curriculum and who hired people to teach these courses.

During my time--and it must have started about in 1934, '35--there was the greatest group of associate directors on that staff that ever was before or since. Frank Ferguson, whom you've seen many times in pictures, was there; Ralph Urmy, who had come from Stuart Walker's company and had taught school and had acted on Broadway, was on the staff; Maxwell Sholes; George Phelps, who had been an actor all of his life--all these people were associate directors, and each one of

them had a different technique and a different approach to acting and directing.

We had an opportunity to work with every single one of them, because they directed our first-year plays. They rotated with our groups even though they were directing Mainstage plays, which changed every two weeks. That's when they came under Gilmor's supervision. And then when they were teaching us in the school, they would be under Charles Prickett's direction. This was just marvelous--to work with these outstanding people who had all been actors themselves, so they knew exactly what they were doing. Oh, you learned so much from all of them! Some of them were better at doing eighteenth-century plays, some of them better at doing plays of the Middle Ages, some with Greek plays. But we had a chance to work with all of them and learn to adjust to the techniques of their direction. It was simply marvelous, the background we were given.

GALM: I've asked Oliver Prickett whether there was such a thing as a Playhouse directorial approach, and I'll ask you the same question.

PRICKETT: What do you mean?

GALM: In other words, whether there was a common element among all of the directors at the Playhouse, as far as their approach to directing, and whether this came out of the Playhouse.

PRICKETT: You mean their techniques in directing?

GALM: Yes. In other words, is there such a thing as a

Pasadena Playhouse director?

PRICKETT: Oh. I see what you mean. Yes, that kind of thing. Well, not of those men that I'm talking about, because they'd all had their training elsewhere, and nobody ever made any attempt to change them into any particular Playhouse directorial soul. You're saying, for instance, did Gilmor train somebody who has now become a director? Do you mean that?

GALM: Or perhaps even the students who would have specialized in directing.

PRICKETT: Now, you see, the students never came in contact with Gilmor. They would have learned under these associate directors whom I'm talking about. Unless they happened to be--well, no, I won't say that, because I can't think of anybody, to my knowledge, that Gilmor was interested in as a director. Gilmor was interested in these men as actors. I can't think of anybody that Gilmor was interested in as a director.

GALM: What was Gilmor's directing style?

PRICKETT: Well, I'm sure that Gilmor was a genius in his field, and I think that I did not have the opportunity of seeing him at the height of his career. When I came to the Playhouse, all the things that I used to hear about that Gilmor did, he was not doing. Gilmor did the supervising directing; somebody else always did the directing.

He came in on dress rehearsal, and if he saw something that he thought that he could better, then he would blow his whistle and come walking down. The stories before I got there were that Gilmor used to sit back there in the auditorium and blow that whistle and come stomping down the aisle so often, to change something or to do something on dress rehearsal night--dress rehearsal night!--that it was most dramatic, and a bit fearful.

And [I heard] that his genius really showed. He could just put his finger on the thing that was wrong. I'm sure he did, and I'm sure he could; but when I came along, he was not doing that. Yes, I have been in plays where he has blown the whistle, and he has walked down the aisle very calmly and has said something very calmly to an actor, which was no major change in anything; but I really never saw that stroke of genius at work. I'm sure it was there, because many, many people have spoken about it. But from the time of 1937 and all the associations I had with the Playhouse, I never saw that. He only came to rehearsals on dress rehearsal nights, and he used to do less and less.

I must say, he had a group of excellent associate directors, about whom I was speaking, [so] that I think there wasn't the need to make changes. I think that they so well directed the plays, that he didn't have to do the

things that he'd probably had to do before. So that, really, the load was taken off him. Then also, these same directors used to direct at the Playbox (Gilmor's small theater). So actually, when you worked at the Playbox, Gilmor came in just the same on the dress rehearsal night. And if he had some suggestions to make, he made them. So I think that he just didn't have to do as much as he had to do in the beginning, when he didn't have as good directors.

GALM: When you heard about the Pasadena Playhouse, at that time were the Pasadena Playhouse and Gilmor Brown sort of . . .

PRICKETT: . . . synonymous?

GALM: Yes.

PRICKETT: I never paid any attention to Gilmor Brown.

GALM: So in other words, Gilmor Brown was not a drawing card.

PRICKETT: Not for me. No, he wasn't the one that we talked about. Now, interestingly enough, when you talked about the Civic Theatre in Denver, you talked about Walter Sinclair. But I think that the Pasadena Playhouse had grown up and beyond that point. Now, in the beginning, I'm sure that they talked about the Pasadena Community Theatre and Gilmor Brown, yes. I wasn't that much aware of it, of course, in the early twenties, because I was too young. Those of us that are out in front--the directors,

the actors--we're always the ones that are in the limelight, you know. And particularly when a community theater is built around one man, as it was in the beginning with Gilmor Brown, yes, then I'm sure you did hear such reference. But if you read the early recollections of the Playhouse that were written by one of the board of trustee members, which I read, they don't mention anybody's name. They simply talk about the project that they had at hand, and that was to start a community playhouse.

It's true that Gilmor came here with his stock company in 1915, and it's true that stock was dying in 1915 and they couldn't move anyplace else. He was certainly here in a ripe territory where culture was rampant. It was the idea of many people that he talked with to start a community theater here, because they wanted to keep theater alive. These were people from the East that were used to theater. And it is true that Gilmor was a charming young man. He must have been, from what I've seen of his younger pictures and from what I've heard people [say in] the Tuesday Morning Drama Class that I belonged to ([which] we'll talk about at a later time). [These] were the [factors] that were instrumental in helping the project get started, because the two I think complemented one another. Here they had a charming young director who had been touring in stock, and they had a community and a group of people

that wished to see theater go and had the money to do it. So the combination was a beautiful opportunity for Pasadena and for Gilmor.

GALM: So no one came to the School of Theatre with the idea [of studying] with Gilmor Brown.

PRICKETT: I imagine some did. It just happens that I didn't, because we didn't talk about Gilmor Brown in that way. It was The Pasadena Playhouse.

GALM: Was anyone on the faculty of stature, nationally, that people would have come to study with? A particular person?

PRICKETT: Well, yes. I think so. Take Frayne Williams, for example, [who] had been a great Shakespearean actor. [He] was on the staff of the Playhouse. He taught history of the theater. He never ever was publicized alone as such, because the whole publicity was Pasadena Playhouse School of Theatre; these were the members on the faculty. No particular one of them, at that time, did I come to study with, no. I came to learn at the Pasadena Playhouse. And of course, its proximity to Hollywood, none of us could deny. [laughter] The thing, I think, that was also alluring at the time was that it did say in the publicity, which was absolutely true, that every single play was covered by movie scouts from every studio. And this they were. Every single play.

GALM: What could you learn here that you hadn't learned before?

PRICKETT: That's a good question. When I looked at the course of study I thought, "Now, what more would I learn, as far as learning's concerned"--although I know we all can learn something always--"that I haven't already had in courses at the university?" First of all, I could see that I'd have an opportunity to do much more acting than I'd ever had a chance to do before, because I was going to be rehearsing every single day. Secondly, I had never taken fencing; I'd never taken eurythmics; I had never been taught makeup separately by a makeup man who'd spent all of his life on the stage; I had never been taught Shakespeare by somebody (outside of Frederick Hile) who had spent a lifetime acting Shakespeare as Frayne Williams did. I could see further knowledge being obtained from a professional standpoint rather than an academic standpoint, and I wasn't here but two weeks when I realized that this was absolutely what I was going to get, too. And it's absolutely what I did get. The approach from what I'd had at the university was different, but not that different because of Louis Mallory. But it was different. It was still academic-oriented [compared] to what I had here. Every single thing I was learning was something I was going to use for me as an actor. I was going to learn it

because I was the one that was going to do it. Whether it was manners and customs I was learning, I was going to know how to do this and that whenever I was doing a particular play of a certain era. This had not ever been coordinated for me before, and also handed to me in such a neat package.

GALM: Had you made sort of a personal commitment, by this time, that the theater or some aspect of it was definitely going to be your life?

PRICKETT: Oh, yes. I'd decided teaching was not for me. You can put on a one-woman show there everyday, that's for sure, but I'm a doer rather than teaching somebody else to do it, although I loved my teaching, and I think it's very gratifying. I have coached many, many plays since. I taught at Anoakia [and] I taught at St. Andrew's after I came out here (while I was still going to school at the Playhouse, because they needed somebody to coach drama). So I have used it, and I've enjoyed doing it, too. It's been my directorial approach to things.

GALM: I think we'll close for today. We're just at the end of a tape.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE

JUNE 19, 1973

GALM: Last time, Mrs. Cooper, we were talking about the fact that one of the things that came about was that open readings were allowed to the members of the Playhouse student body. What roles did you play as a student at the Playhouse?

PRICKETT: Oh, my goodness, you mean on Mainstage?

GALM: On Mainstage.

PRICKETT: Oh, goodness, I'd have to look back and think what I did in there.

GALM: Were they significant roles?

PRICKETT: Oh, very much so! Very much so. They were always character parts, as we talked about before. My goodness, this is going back to when I was a student, from '38 to '41, and I'd have to think about some of those parts that I've played. One of them that I remember was during a summer festival that summer. I was around here during a summer festival [when] I played in Quality Street, when we did the [James M.] Barrie festival that summer. I was around here during the summertime, too, of that particular year. I played in Morning's at Seven. . . .

GALM: Our Town.

PRICKETT: Oh, yes, and I played in Our Town, too.

Let me see. Oh, I'd just have to look at the list of plays. Do you want to wait until I can get those, or do you have one?

GALM: I have one here. [tape recorder turned off] You've had a chance to review the chronology of the plays that were presented during that period of years that you were a student. What are the ones that sort of stick out?

PRICKETT: Well, I also played in A Comedy of Errors. I mentioned Morning's at Seven [and] Quality Street during that summer festival. I also did What Every Woman Knows. Let me see. The following year was Morning's at Seven. Let me see now. Not that one, but. . . . You have to realize that every two weeks, these plays were changing. We did a different play every two weeks, so we were constantly in rehearsal with something or another. Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines, Clyde Fitch's play, is the next one I did, and I guess that takes me through all the time that I was a student at the Playhouse.

GALM: What did this type of acting give you that you hadn't had before?

PRICKETT: I don't know that it gave me anything that I hadn't had before, except additional experience and the opportunity to work with some of these marvelous directors that I've mentioned before that were at the Playhouse at this particular time. Practically every play that I have

mentioned had a different director, and I do think that the opportunity of working with different directors and with their different techniques can't help but develop you as an individual in acting.

GALM: One play that had been mentioned in a biographical sketch that I checked was The Importance of Being Earnest, that you'd appeared in in 1935. Now, in what connection was that?

PRICKETT: That was when I was at the University of Wyoming, when I played in The Importance of Being Earnest in 1935.

GALM: That was one of their productions?

PRICKETT: Yes. We did, I think I mentioned, when I was at the university, such wonderful plays. And also, they were presented in such a beautiful, productive manner that they were completely professional, because of Dr. Louis Mallory. That was when I played Lady Bracknell in The Importance of Being Earnest. I did have an opportunity then to play all of these character parts. Of course, at that time--you have to realize [that] I was only twenty years old when I graduated, so I'm really playing very old characters at that particular time.

GALM: So you played Mrs. Malaprop and Lady Bracknell.

PRICKETT: And Lady Bracknell. And Mrs. Candour in School for Scandal. I also played Mrs. [J. Duro] Pampinelli in The Torchbearers, too, during that same time while I was

at the University of Wyoming. Also, I was the queen in Queen's Husband. These were marvelous character roles--just marvelous ones.

GALM: So in 1941, you graduated from the Pasadena Playhouse of the Theatre.

PRICKETT: With a master of theater arts degree.

GALM: And when were you married?

PRICKETT: Well, I was married in 1941, but I was married in August of 1941 after graduating in June of 1941.

GALM: How did that come about?

PRICKETT: It came about after about four years of assiduously working on one Charles F. Prickett--with the help, I must say, of everybody connected with the administration of the Pasadena Playhouse. As a matter of fact, I think they promoted it. Oh, I must say it sounds rather kittenish to go back to when I was--well, I was all of twenty-six, so it shouldn't really have been that kittenish; but it all seems like it at the time, when I think about it. Charles was not one to ever "date" any young girls. He and Eugenia Ong--who was this beautiful, lovely lady who had been associated with the Playhouse for many, many years [and] who had had many positions in the Playhouse, from being head of membership to being dean of the school to being the girl that Charles Prickett took out every place he ever went--[were] around together when I came to

the Playhouse, and it was always said that Charles and Eugenia Ong were the two that were always seen every place together.

Well, when I was secretary to Mrs. Walkup, I came in contact with Charles Prickett very often because many times when his secretary had other things to do, he used to call me in to take dictation. Well, I'm telling you, this was complete disaster. He would dictate very quickly to me, and of course I'd get about every fourth word in my very slow shorthand, and then he would ask me to read it back to him. Well, what came back to him, with part Charles Prickett and part Maudie Doyle, was something that he'd never encountered before. [laughter] So this rather intrigued him, I think, in a way. It was kind of an excuse for my inefficiency, too. But we'd go over it again more slowly so I would get it, and then I would type up the letters and take it in to him, and somehow or another he'd put his signature on them and they passed. Because I was one of the ones that had graduated from the university before I came there, and because this was a time when he was very definitely upgrading the School of Theatre, those of us who had gone to college and had graduated worked in a student-council capacity with him to see how more like a university he could make these two years at the Playhouse, so that everyone wouldn't be completely theater-oriented and

nothing else. Bob [Robert] Rockwell and Russell Arms and Louise Albritton had had almost four years of college, and some of the rest of us--Betsy Jones and some of the other students who had graduated from college--all worked with him.

I had three roommates. We had rented one of the Maryland Hotel cottages that were still standing at that particular time. These were the ones that were left from the old Maryland Hotel that used to be on the corner of Los Robles and Colorado. The hotel was long gone--the Broadway department store had been constructed--but on the corner of Euclid and Union these cottages from the old Maryland were still standing, and four of us had rented one of these. My one roommate was from Colorado, had graduated in 1935 from the Playhouse, and was teaching. She was the assistant in the voice and speech department, so she was quite a bit ahead of me. The other two were--one was a year behind me, and the other one was in my class.

Charles was always one to take many, many girls on excursions together--as many as his car would hold, or as many girls as he could take at one time. Usually he had a caravan of maybe a couple of other cars. He would take all of us out to Padua Hills for an evening for dinner and the production out there. You've probably heard all about

the productions at Padua Hills. Then he would take all of us out to Knott's Berry Farm and all of the highlights that he could think of around that area, but never anyone alone. We always used to kid him about his harem of twelve.

Since the four of us roommates knew him--we thought--rather well, we decided that one night we would invite him over for dinner, which we did and which he refused. We weren't very easily put down, so we decided we would invite him a month or so later--which we did, and he came! So the four of us entertained him for dinner; he was all alone with the four of us. Then he said--I suppose he felt rather obligated--"Now, look, I'd like to take you girls roller-skating. Would you like to go roller-skating?" And we all said, "Oh, yes! We'd love to go roller-skating!" (out at the Moonlight Rollerway Skating Rink, which was one of the things to do here in Pasadena). The time came, and one of my roommates had to rehearse that night and could not go, and the other two were ill. So when he called to check to see if we were all ready to go, I answered the phone and told him Patsy had to rehearse and the other two of my roommates were sick. So he said, "Well, then we'll postpone it to another time." And I said, "Not at all! I'm feeling perfectly well, I want to go roller-skating, and I expect to be taken." "Well," he

said, "All right, we'll go then." That was the first time I'd ever had him alone. So we went roller-skating. We had a marvelous time. We went to dinner first. I just thought he was terribly enchanting and completely different than when I shared him with eleven others. That was the only time I'd ever had him alone.

Well, things went on from there. The Playhouse had, at that particular time, a stock company playing in Santa Monica. Maybe Ollie's told you about the stock company we had in Santa Monica.

GALM: No, I don't think so.

PRICKETT: He didn't? Charles always felt that two years were not enough to have for the training in theater. So for the third-year students that he had at that time--the postgraduate course which I also took--he had a stock company for the third-year students in Santa Monica. He had rented the little theater there on--I've forgotten the name of the street. It was a little theater that had been operating in Santa Monica, and the Playhouse took it over. He set up the third-year students as a regular stock company, with one being the business manager, the other one the technical director, and the other one the director. The plays that he sent down had all been directed here at the Pasadena Playhouse and were there to run for a period of two weeks. Then the other part of the third-year students

would be rehearsing another play which would go down the following two weeks, but still the director and the technical man and the business manager would remain the same.

So he would go down every Saturday night to check to see how things were going, and Charles would invite a member of the board of trustees and his wife to see and to check on the players. Well, it finally got so that he would invite me to go down--I was a second-year student at the time--and I had a chance to see how things were going down in Santa Monica. He would take me every other Saturday when he would go. (I did check to find out that he wasn't taking any other girl, though, on the alternate Saturdays.) So I'd go down with him and a board member and his wife, and all of us that would go together got to be very well acquainted.

GALM: How were you explained?

PRICKETT: How was I explained? Oh, well, I was just a student. I was a second-year student at the Playhouse, and I had met most of these people, anyway, at the various activities of the Playhouse. I don't know that he felt that he had to explain me in any way, actually. The staff was always very much intrigued by what was going on, because Charles had never paid very much attention to any girls before. He supported his mother and his aunt, and he

had 275 students to look after at the Pasadena Playhouse, so I think he felt that, financially, [during] those years, he couldn't afford a wife. It wasn't until 1940, I think, that he even really thought very much about it.

He'd had a girl, he said, when he was in the fifth grade, and he brought her a rose one day to school. He handed her the rose, and she took it from him, and she threw it on the floor and stepped on it. And I think that this, with his sensitive nature, really turned him off. I can see why, knowing him as well as I did, that this would. When he used to lecture to us in the business management class, he always used to say, "Other things in life matter besides just money, but if you have a nickel, spend it for a rose"--which was not his phrase, but one that he had taken from an earlier poet. I think that this was very much his philosophy. I think that to have this happen to him when he was so young and feeling that this was the way he showed his affection to somebody, and to have it stepped on, I think that it really did set him back quite a bit in his affairs of love. I was always so impressed with knowing this about him and listening to him lecture in class when I was one of his students, that I started falling in love.

Before we were married, every Christmas, he always used to send one long-stemmed rose to his very dear

friends in Pasadena with a card wishing them "Merry Christmas." I think that's a very, very sweet thought, and it was so typical of one Charles Prickett. This was a side of him that the people who thought of him only as a hard, cold man that handled money did not know. This man was anything but hard and cold. He was sensitive. He was warm. He was primarily an artist. He was a creative individual. He would have loved to have been a doctor, but never had the monies to become a doctor. He had to earn a living because his father died when he was fourteen. He had the opportunity of going to SC a very short time, for economical reasons, and then came out with training in business to go into the business world.

GALM: From my research and also from talking with Oliver Prickett, I know that he went into the banking business to begin with. From there, he went from a bookkeeping position into what at that time was the beginnings of the Pasadena Playhouse. The question that came to my mind is, why he would go from banking to theater? And [also], why did he stay with the theater?

PRICKETT: Why did he stay with the theater?

GALM: Well, let's answer the first one.

PRICKETT: Why didn't he stay with the banking?

GALM: Yes. And why did he go into the theater?

PRICKETT: He was at the First Trust & Savings Bank for exactly six months. He decided that this was one of the dullest places that he had ever encountered, because money alone was not his thing. Maybe Ollie told you that in the very beginning, when they first started out as kids together--and especially when Charles was in his early teens--they used to have a playhouse at their big place [on] Ashtabula in the back forty that their mother gave them to play in. Charles immediately set up a stage--built it, designed the whole thing--because they didn't have much money to do anything with except a creative nature. He had to use his ingenuity with what things they could scrounge. He built a big stage for them and he devised a curtain that would come up, with two pieces of wood that would come together in stage center and then flop down to open up, because they didn't have enough money to get a railing or a . . .

GALM: . . . fly area?

PRICKETT: No, not a fly area, but just a groove thing that would make the curtains slide back and forth. They didn't have that, so he had to devise everything from just what they had around. Now, he was only eleven, twelve, and thirteen, and he's creating all of these things, because he was primarily a creative artist. He did all the designing and construction and then he would direct. [He

would] get all of the kids in the neighborhood, primarily of Ollie's age (because Ollie was five years younger) and get them to act. He would direct them and they would put on productions the way we all used to do--charge so many pins or pennies or whatever it was for admission. Charles was the one that created all that.

He also built and created an amusement park. He created a roller coaster off the barn which was built at the back of their lot there. They had this huge area in the back of the lemon groves to play in. So they had the roller coaster structure which he built, and then he built the roller coaster car itself that would come down the tracks. Then he built a--what do we call the carts that the Chinese pull?

GALM: You mean a rickshaw?

PRICKETT: Rickshaw. He built a rickshaw, and of course Ollie was always the one that had to pull the rickshaw. [laughter] Charles built all these things. He had a streetcar that he built that went around their amusement park tracks, and he built the tracks that the car went on. He would get roller skates, old broken-down roller skates, which he would use for wheels on both the roller coaster and the car. So he was constantly creating.

Charles was primarily an artist, and it started way back then. So being housed in a teller's cage at a bank

was not for him for very long. And for that reason, he left the bank and went into theater, where he had started when he was eighteen years old when they sent for him to come to play Mr. Icorn in Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch, when he was a senior at Pasadena High School. He had [had] a taste of the Pasadena Playhouse at that time, and that's what made him decide this was the thing he wanted to do.

In 1922, when he went with the Pasadena Playhouse, was the time when Mr. [H.O.] Stechan, who had been the business manager and for whom Charles had worked as a young boy, was leaving. So Charles came in then to take over his job as business manager to take charge of all the business--to sell the tickets at the box office, to carry the umbrellas for the actors around the backstage when they had to go from stage right to stage left to keep them out of the rain, to put the buckets under the leaky places in the roof, and all other details. He really took over Mr. Stechan's job of handling the finances and also of running the whole front of the auditorium, but he did it all, because he had such a love for the backstage end of things.

GALM: Why did Mr. Stechan leave?

PRICKETT: Well, I think Mr. Stechan decided that he was going to go up north to a different kind of job. I really

don't know why Mr. Stechan left. It was under very pleasant circumstances; I do know that.

GALM: Do you feel that your husband's ultimate relationship [with] the Playhouse was a totally satisfying one?

PRICKETT: Yes. For him?

GALM: Yes.

PRICKETT: Yes, I do, very much so. Charles always used to say, "Isn't it wonderful that I have an opportunity to do the type of thing that I really want to do." And it was satisfying to him, because he was constantly creating. He was building a monument--he really was--and that's what I keep saying. I don't wish to belittle Gilmor in any way, but Charles Prickett must be given his due, because it was Charles who built what you see, and what you saw up until 1954, as the Pasadena Playhouse. He was creating this monument that, first of all, was economically sound businesswise. Second, it was also one of the most outstanding--if not the outstanding place that was producing the best plays in all the United states, if not in the world! And also, it was producing potential actors for the future to meet all the different media that were coming along. This he was abreast of. This was one of the things he wished to continue developing. When the Los Angeles Times was working to get Channel 11, they approached him to

come over to the Times penthouse for a meeting to see what could be done in building a building on Playhouse property that would be the place where television--the beginnings of television and the future of television--could be developed. It was this kind of thing--constantly staying abreast of the changing times in theater--that was the great challenge to Charles. And he was the one that carried the Playhouse along in this particular way.

GALM: Do you feel that, with a strong aptitude for the technical aspects of theater, he would have gone into this area if he had had a chance or more training?

PRICKETT: You mean into the design end?

GALM: In technical and scenic design.

PRICKETT: I don't know whether he would have or not. I think that Charles was bigger than just one aspect of theater. I think he was so successful because he had a knowledge and an aptitude for all phases of theater. He knew business management, which is the very backbone of theater; he knew the creative part of theater, because he'd had an experience in doing this and was constantly creating; he could do things, technically and scenic-design-wise, himself, because woodwork was his hobby--he knew how to do all these things. And he had just an allover picture of the whole world of theater. So although many people have said that the world missed a great scenic design artist when

they missed getting Charles Prickett, I think Charles was even bigger than a scenic design artist.

GALM: But he didn't see it himself as having missed an opportunity.

PRICKETT: He thought he had the most wonderful opportunity in the world. [telephone rings; tape recorder turned off] You know, when you have a dream--which Charles had--of making this institution the greatest institution in the whole world, then he didn't think he'd missed a thing, because he had the opportunity of working in every facet of the theater--which he did.

GALM: When you say the greatest institution--did he indicate to you what he might have based his concept upon? In other words, other institutions?

PRICKETT: Of making it the greatest? I think his concept of making it the greatest was that this institution was giving students the opportunity to meet all of the current challenges of theater and the challenges that might be ahead. And the only way to give them an opportunity to go forward is to teach them to meet these challenges. At that time, he had the very best instructors [and] the very best directors. We had the best facility that could be offered at that particular time. We had the best following [and lots] of opportunities for those in the various fields to be seen and to be recognized. And certainly it was, at

that time that I'm talking about, the outstanding institution. It was recognized all over the world. We attracted students from practically every country in the world.

GALM: Were there any problems in getting the Playhouse school accredited?

PRICKETT: Oh, yes. Charles worked for a long time on that. It became accredited in 1941 and was [then] given the right to grant a bachelor of arts degree and a master of arts degree. But Charles had spent many, many years working on this, and it was Charles who was the one who did it all. Now, Gilmor was not interested at all in accrediting the school. As I said before, Gilmor cared not at all about the academic education.

GALM: What are the problems of accrediting a two-year program?

PRICKETT: Well, you have to meet certain state qualifications. First of all, your instructors have to have had certain training and certain credentials. This Charles spent time on, and the instructors that he had hired and those who were on the staff met these qualifications. Then you have to offer, in your curriculum, certain courses. So he worked the curriculum around (because he had charge of this, too) of offering the courses that were required to meet the accreditation standard. These are the problems that he had to meet, and these are the ones that

were met. And so from 1941 on until--I don't know. After his death in 1954, I wasn't too closely associated with the Playhouse.

GALM: In 1942, the Playhouse went [Actors'] Equity [Association].

PRICKETT: Yes.

GALM: That, I would assume, is a very important date as far as a certain shift in philosophy.

PRICKETT: Completely, and one that Charles abhorred. He said, "This is going to be the denouement of the Playhouse."

GALM: What was the lead-up to that decision?

PRICKETT: The lead-up to that decision, I think, came from the Eighteen Actors Group [which] had been at the Playhouse, all of them having gotten a great bounce into Hollywood from the Playhouse. They had withdrawn from the Playhouse and had started their own group, eighteen of them. They played here in town at the Elks Club and had a great following. Didn't seem to detract at all from the attendance at the Playhouse, but they did have a following of their own. Then it was they who wished to come back to act at the Playhouse and to be paid for acting at the Playhouse.

The Playhouse always operated on a very, very narrow margin. Nobody that worked at the Pasadena Playhouse ever made very much money. It was sheer dedication to the arts that ever kept them there. Vic [Victor] Jory led the

way for Equity, and it's always astounded me that Vic, who professed to be such a great friend of the Playhouse, would be the one that took it upon himself to lead the way for Equity to come into the Playhouse--knowing on what a narrow margin the Playhouse worked. But he did, and of course unions are very, very powerful, and so the ruling was made that the Playhouse would then have to be a union house. I'm sure Ollie has told you that the Playhouse was always a union house backstage. Carl Huxley and the men who worked backstage always received union wages while Charles and Gilmor and others had to either take nothing or a very small percentage of their salaries because the union people--the backstage people--had to be paid first. There were years and years when Charles and Gilmor had just partial salary (and some months, no salary at all), because there wasn't that much money to go around after the staff had been paid. So it was really rather astounding to think that people [who] supposedly had been so devoted to the Playhouse, and had understood all of this, and were such good friends of Gilmor's, would push this kind of thing.

Well, it was the whole change in the setup of the Pasadena Playhouse. It became even more of a struggle from 1942 on, when Equity minimum salaries had to be paid. The whole Equity move was such a complete change in everything. No longer could the community people play on the same

basis that they had been playing. Every time that a student played with an Equity member, five dollars had to be paid by that student to Equity, which the Playhouse always paid for the student to play in that production. The payment had to be made per week. Any member from the community that was going to play in the production had to pay five dollars to Equity--to Equity; not to the Playhouse, but to Equity--for the privilege of playing with this professional. So you see, the whole concept of the Playhouse changed in 1942.

Now, I'm a member of Equity, I'm a member of [the] Screen Actors' Guild, and I'm a member of AFTRA [American Federation of Television and Radio Artists]; but I do think that there are times when places like the Pasadena Playhouse should have been allowed to have continued without the pressure of union wages being paid. We're suffering from this very thing right now--that professional people cannot go out and play, except under very limited circumstances according to Equity's rules.

GALM: You mentioned that Victor Jory sort of pushed the fight for Equity.

PRICKETT: He led it, yes.

GALM: Who else would have been in that gang?

PRICKETT: Well, Morey [Morris] Ankrum was one of them that also was with him, and I think that Charlie [Charles] Lane was another one.

GALM: In other words, these were more or less members of Eighteen Actors, Incorporated.

PRICKETT: Yes, Eighteen Actors, Incorporated. And they had previously been very loyal people to the Pasadena Playhouse.

GALM: What do you think that their philosophy was?

PRICKETT: Well, I think that at that time they were thinking, "If you're going to be a professional, you should be paid for being a professional, even if it's sixty dollars a week. Well, to me, sixty dollars a week wouldn't have made that much difference; and it certainly didn't to them, who were acting in pictures all the time. But to take it out of the class that it was in, where it was doing very well, and then to put it into a completely professional house, which if they had listened, [they would know] might be, in the long run, the ruination of it--it seems to me that one would take a different approach. At least, it wasn't my kind of thinking, and it certainly wasn't Charles's. He said at the time, "This will lead to the ruination of the Playhouse." And he was so right. That <u>is</u> what led to the ruination of the Playhouse, because they brought in, after Charles was gone, people to whom they paid $1,000 a week, $750 a week. Those people had never ever made that kind of a salary on Broadway! So it <u>was</u> one of the things that led to the ruination of the Playhouse.

GALM: Did your husband mount a fight against this? Or wasn't it a thing that could be fought?

PRICKETT: Yes, he did definitely disagree. But Equity was very strong at that time, and you had to balance your thinking as to whether you'd go along with it, or whether Equity would put a ban on the house forevermore and you could not use these professional people. Ironically, the ones that were in Equity at the time used to change their names and come over and act at the Playhouse under another name.

GALM: Was that that easy to get away with?

PRICKETT: They did it.

GALM: So it evidently was. [laughter]

PRICKETT: It evidently was. They were there the whole time that I was there, from 1937 to I guess it was the end of '41, when this fight--this whole change (I don't know how much of a fight it was)--took place.

GALM: How did Gilmor stand in this?

PRICKETT: I don't know how Gilmor stood in this. He never put up any fight. But Gilmor never ever did. It was always Charles that was the man for anything unpleasant.

GALM: So whether he thought good or bad about it, you don't know? It's just that he sort of acquiesced to it?

PRICKETT: I don't know.

GALM: Well, now, you were married in 1941. How did

that affect both your career and your life?

PRICKETT: When Charles asked me to marry him, he said to me, "Do you mean you'd give up this star to marry me?" And I said, yes, I would. And rather typical of the way Gilmor treated everybody that married anybody at the Playhouse, they never acted on the Mainstage for a year. This doesn't mean that the directors with whom you had worked didn't want you. It just meant that Gilmor, in his capacity, had the right to not have you be in the play if he didn't so desire to have you. So for an entire year I never did any acting at the Playhouse. It really didn't bother me too much, because I was madly in love and I wished to be a housewife, anyway. We had a lovely new home, and this was very nice. It was a new experience for me. So I was happy doing this kind of thing. Of course, Charles was running everything at the Playhouse, so I was down there doing everything with him. I went down with him every time that he went to his office in the evenings, and with the Coleman concerts on Sundays that used to be there. . . . So I was very much a part of everything, except that I wasn't participating myself. I had another cohort in Bea Hassel, because after she graduated and she and Carl Huxley "were one," she never acted again.

After a year's time, Charles said to me, "Don't you

think maybe you ought to go down and do a play at the Playhouse?" And I said, "Well, I think this would be very nice. Why don't you tell Gilmor that I would like to do a play at the Playhouse?" Whether he mentioned this, or somebody else mentioned it, or I mentioned it (I'm not quite the shrinking violet type), at any rate, Gilmor got the message; and very shortly after that, I did do a play. Now let me see, what was the one that I did? Was it Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines? I'll have to look here a minute and see. Oh! The Women. That's what I did, The Women. This was a fun, fun production, because it not only had one of my roommates in it, but it had a whole lot of people from Hollywood. You see, now it's 1942, so things were really rolling along with some of the ones who were from Hollywood, because Equity moved in, and we really had a lot of people from Hollywood coming over. We always had a lot of people from Hollywood coming over, but there just was a different aura about the whole thing after it became an Equity house.

GALM: Was it a different type of Hollywood person that came over?

PRICKETT: No, no difference whatsoever.

GALM: Or was it just that there was more Hollywood?

PRICKETT: Yes. There was more Hollywood because they knew that they were going to be paid something. Otherwise,

it was a case of just coming over here and hoping that Equity--those that belonged to Equity--would not discover that they were coming over to do a play.

You know, when you have theater in your blood, you have to continually keep doing something in a creative way. It's just like I was saying to you a while ago: I've gone along long enough now without doing something before an audience, even though I give many, many talks around town. It isn't the same as creating another character within yourself, or you within another character. If it's in your blood, you simply have to do it. And this is what actors have to do. The actors who were in pictures and were working only in pictures were looking for a stage outlet, because you have to get back to the stage, after you've been in pictures or television for so long, to find out if you really still have the rapport with an audience.

GALM: At that time in Los Angeles, what would you say were the stages that they could be seen on?

PRICKETT: Well, we had the ones down on Olympic there on--was it Hill? I think so. We had the Mayan Theatre and the theater right next to it that were both producing. We had the Biltmore Theatre, of course, and we had the Philharmonic [Auditorium] going. We had the. . . .

GALM: Was the El Capitan functioning?

PRICKETT: The El Capitan was going. I don't think [the]

Huntington Hartford, at that stage of the game, had come into being. I don't think so. I think that was much later.

GALM: How would the Pasadena rank with those theaters?

PRICKETT: How would it rank? Well, you see, the Pasadena Playhouse drew. . . .

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE TWO

JUNE 19, 1973

GALM: We were talking about the theaters in Los Angeles and rating them with the Pasadena Playhouse and you were mentioning that the other theaters were perhaps of a different nature, or what?

PRICKETT: No, I don't think they were of a different nature at all. I think that people liked to come over to the Pasadena Playhouse because they knew, at that time, that every single studio was covering all of the productions at the Playhouse with a scout or two. So when actors were playing at the Playhouse, they knew that they were being watched and scouted. This is the sort of thing [where], of course, they were hoping that they would get parts in Hollywood and in pictures and be discovered or rediscovered. Of course, if they were acting on the stage in the professional theaters of Los Angeles, they were being paid full-scale Equity wages, which they were not if they played over here. So they had to balance the two. Also, there might have been a part over here that they would rather have had, or could have had, more than some of the plays that were being played in Hollywood. And I think at that time, actors were just looking, as they are now, for the part of their lives that they love to play and do.

That's ever the actor's story.

GALM: Now, the people that would be playing leads in Pasadena, were they still under the category of "hopefuls" at that time?

PRICKETT: Well, "hopefuls" as we're all hopeful in the field.

GALM: As compared to the other theaters.

PRICKETT: Oh, no. I don't think so at all. The people that were playing leads here were exactly the same people that could have been playing leads over in Los Angeles. There were very few women that were ever playing leads on the Mainstage at the Playhouse that weren't the people from Hollywood. Now, the men were a different situation during my era. The young men who were playing leads on the Playhouse stage were young men like Bob [Robert] Preston, like Dana Andrews, like Gig Young. But as far as the women were concerned, no. We had the Celeste Holms over here, we had the Mabel Albertsons--those are the people that were over here playing the leads, the same ones that would have been playing leads in Los Angeles, Chicago, New York.

GALM: So it was still of the same caliber. . . .

PRICKETT: Oh, absolutely of the same caliber. As a matter of fact, I always used to think, in trying to have a perspective, that actually the allover production was better done at the Pasadena Playhouse than it was in

Los Angeles productions--which were touring companies out of New York. And many times, the same play that I've seen in New York was a better allover production at the Playhouse, because in the professional theaters, everything was geared to the stars rather than emphasis on a good supporting cast for them.

GALM: Now, some of these theaters that we're talking about in Los Angeles acted more or less as booking companies for the New York productions.

PRICKETT: That's right. They came in as touring companies.

GALM: But the Pasadena Playhouse never acted in that capacity.

PRICKETT: No. The Playhouse produced its own plays.

GALM: Was there any temptation to go [in] this direction?

PRICKETT: To book in the plays? No, not to my knowledge at all. It wasn't set up to do that kind of thing. It was actually there to give a professional production, but also it was a community-oriented playhouse for Pasadena. But gradually, the people from the community were not always the very best actors for the plays. They came to read in competition, every Sunday evening with professionals. So whether it was a professional who got the part, or whether it was somebody from the community that was not a member of Equity, the decision was made by the director. Everything was open to the public in open readings. But it got to be

less and less [that way], the more the Playhouse became professional--which I think, in time, was its ruination.

GALM: Nineteen forty-two is sort of the date as far as Equity coming into the Playhouse. Did the community participation or involvement drop from that point on?

PRICKETT: Yes. Yes, I would say it did drop from that point on.

GALM: And in what way?

PRICKETT: In that fewer and fewer community people were used, because the person who was not Equity had to pay Equity to play with an Equity member in the cast. You see, nobody ever had to pay to play at the Pasadena Playhouse. One of its great drawing cards and one of its great attributes was that nobody paid to get a part on the stage of the Pasadena Playhouse--at all. Now, that wasn't true of some of the places in Hollywood. You did have to pay to play a part. But this was never true for Pasadena. Now you were having to pay a sum of five dollars to Equity to play with a professional--not to the Pasadena Playhouse, but to Equity--and I think this did make a change in the type of people that came to readings. I do think it did.

GALM: It was the Playhouse who paid the amount that had to go to Equity?

PRICKETT: Only for the students of the Playhouse, not for the community players. The community players had to deal

directly with Equity.

GALM: So if a community member took on a part, they were the ones who paid Equity.

PRICKETT: They had to pay Equity their five dollars. They had to pay. The Playhouse paid only for its students who had gotten parts on the Mainstage play.

GALM: You were a student then for two years, and then you elected to take a third. Was there a reason for your decision?

PRICKETT: Yes. Charles had said that within that next year, from 1940 to 1941, the state would be granting the Pasadena Playhouse the privilege of granting a bachelor of arts degree in theater and a master of arts degree in theater. And since I already had a bachelor of arts degree, I thought I might as well continue for the third year and get my master of theater arts, which I did. And so for that reason, I stayed on for the extra year.

GALM: What did that involve?

PRICKETT: That involved, [laughter] a very interesting kind of thing. The third-year students at this time were plunked over--and I do mean plunked--into the Playbox, which was Gilmor's hobby. This Playbox belonged to Gilmor. It had absolutely no financial connection with the Playhouse whatsoever, although Gilmor used all of the directors that were paid by the Playhouse to direct the productions there

for his group of apprentices--the boys whom he had chosen, which, incidentally, were the same number as the scholarship students that were under the sponsorship of Charles Prickett. The apprentices played in the Playbox and cleaned up the Playbox and did the stage managing. They were getting training there, and most of them were playing the leads on the Mainstage, as well. We third-year students were plunked over there to do some of the acting. They kept us there for so long, doing play after play after play, that finally a group of us--practically the whole third-year class--revolted, because no scouts were allowed to come to the Playbox whatsoever. (Mademoiselle [Jeanne] Richert ran the Playbox for Gilmor--a perfectly darling lady who taught French and German. Charles hired her to teach in the school so that she would have milk and bread to eat.) We were over there with nobody seeing us. We had been playing on the Mainstage during our second year in the school, and now, all of a sudden, we can't do that. We were week after week after week in the Playbox, that Black Hole of Calcutta, as we called it!

The Playbox--I must say before I leave that-- was [an] intimate theater that seated about sixty people, and you played, as the living-room technique, right in the center of the room. The Playbox had a very set following of the Pasadena people who had followed the Playhouse from its very beginning, and some of the newcomers that had

heard about the Playhouse and had bought single tickets--all of which benefitted Gilmor and the Playbox [but] had nothing whatsoever to do with the Playhouse. We third-year students were furnishing the entertainment for that. Well--it was good experience. The Playbox was the beginning of theater-in-the-round in this country; Gilmor started it in 1928. That kind of technique was good, expecially for the motion picture industry, because there's no projection; it's just person-to-person talking. It's absolutely the motion picture technique, but we'd already had these courses in the course of study [of] our second year at the Playhouse.

So there we were, but after so long, this kind of no attention just didn't go with mature people. So we were taken out of the Playbox and once again given an opportunity to play on the Mainstage and do various productions at the Playhouse. We didn't have the third-year theater then. We played mostly on Mainstage from then on.

GALM: So at the beginning of your third year, you were restricted to playing the Playbox.

PRICKETT: Playbox, yes. All of us.

GALM: What was the general caliber of plays that were done in the Playbox? Experimental, or not necessarily?

PRICKETT: Yes, mostly on the experimental side, and ones that were not the general public ones. We did Everyman,

for example. I remember that particular play, the general public would [not] dash to see. We did all the unusual, the miracle plays and the eighteenth-century. They were plays that were not the things that we were doing on the Playhouse stage at all.

GALM: What about contemporary?

PRICKETT: Yes, there were some very contemporary ones [which] some of the ones were in. I didn't happen to be in any of those, but there were some contemporary of that era, which was '40, '41. It was mostly the experimental, the new playwrights whom Gilmor would choose--the plays that were new which he would do and try out there.

GALM: Was it avant-garde?

PRICKETT: No, I wouldn't consider it avant-garde. It was just more "of the era" type of thing. I haven't looked at the list of plays that were done in 1940-41 when I was at school, but I'm sure if you saw them you would think--well, maybe you wouldn't know them, because I don't think they've gone anyplace. Maybe one or two have, but they were more just of the era. [There was] absolutely nothing offensive in the least, because that wasn't the kind of a following that the Playbox had. The Playbox really had the following of the nice, elegant, elite ladies of Pasadena, and it was to them that the plays were geared. They would appreciate Everyman, because this is something that they

remembered back a ways that was in . . .

GALM: . . . from world lit.

PRICKETT: Yes, yes.

GALM: What was your husband's attitude towards the Playbox as an institution?

PRICKETT: As an institution. Well, I thought he was most gracious, from my standpoint. He allowed the directors from the Playhouse to direct there. He allowed the talent from the Playhouse to be used there. He hired Mlle. Richert and paid her on the staff of the Playhouse. The Playbox cost the Playhouse nothing but money. I think that he was most gracious and kind in his whole relationship to the Playbox.

As I told you before, he was Gilmor's greatest friend. When he was making the plans for the development of the Playhouse--after the Playhouse had purchased the area back of the Playhouse to Madison Avenue, and also out from the Playhouse to Green Street--he bought the property from the Playhouse to Green Street for the purpose of the construction of Gilmor Brown's Playbox. [He made accommodations] so that it would be there, because he did feel that it was a great opportunity for students to have the experience of playing in this "living room"--the intimate theater of the time.

Gilmor turned this down, I must tell you. Gilmor did

not want this. He did not want the Playbox connected in any way with the Playhouse, and he constantly kept it away, and it was the denouement of the Playbox. The Playbox folded long before the Playhouse did. It was Gilmor's source of income and revenue up and beyond the salary he got from the Playhouse. It was his plaything. Charles always said that Gilmor had to have some kind of a plaything--which, I think, is very true--but Charles wanted to see Gilmor have a more elegant plaything that had a much more sound business basis than the way Gilmor was handling it. I don't know who was Gilmor's business manager. I would guess he had none, but I don't know.

Charles was trying to tie the whole thing in so that this would ever be his plaything--that he could have and do his thing there--and [so] that the other property on Madison would be turned into the television station ([which] I think we talked about before)--the Times, which owned Channel 11, wished to build a TV building on that property for the Playhouse. This all was taking place at the same time. But Gilmor had turned down the proposal of the plans that Charles had had made and had had drawn up by architects. The KTTV building also became impossible.

GALM: Was there something that the Playbox was giving to Gilmor that couldn't be provided in the context of the lab theatre?

PRICKETT: Well, only in the fact that the Playbox was Gilmor's very own, and the lab theater belonged to the Playhouse.

GALM: The Playbox predated the school?

PRICKETT: No, I think they were about the same time. I think Gilmor started the Playbox in 1928, it's my recollection, after he had come back from seeing a similar thing in France. And the school was started in 1928, too. I think they were pretty much the same.

GALM: Was there a reason why the Playbox wasn't incorporated into the school structure?

PRICKETT: Only because Gilmor would not have it be. It was his idea, and he had it at his home. You see, it started in the garage of his house. It was a very attractive place. It was a new idea. It was a great innovative thing at the time. And [this was heightened by] the fact that you would walk down the driveway [in the] back by his house and into this garage area, which had been fixed into a little theater with just regular chairs around. It was fixed so that you could stage it up on a riser that was up on one side of the room. One scene could be there, the other one would be here, [and] another one would be right over there, with the audience sitting right next to the actor. It was a new thing. He started this, and this was his plaything, and he was developing it. It was new, and it had

a great following, and it was a different kind of theater than you found on the Mainstage of the Playhouse.

GALM: You mentioned that scouts were not allowed to attend productions at the Playbox. Was that a ruling by Gilmor?

PRICKETT: I don't know whether it was Gilmor or whether it was Mlle. Richert, but Mlle. Richert certainly enforced it.

GALM: That was to keep you from being distracted?

PRICKETT: It was to keep it from being commercialized. Gilmor and Mademoiselle didn't want it to be commercialized.

GALM: Do you know what Gilmor's attitude towards scouting was?

PRICKETT: My goodness! Gilmor was terribly much in favor of it, which was the only reason that he had all of his favorites ever appearing on the Mainstage time after time after time. Gilmor took great pride in everybody that he had taken an interest in, being accepted in Hollywood. And I don't blame him. I would too. Vic [Victor] Mature was one of the ones he was particularly interested in, and certainly Vic enjoyed great fame. Robert Preston's another one, and Dana Andrews is another one. Gig Young, who was Byron Barr when he was at the Playhouse--Gilmor spent much time with him. Ray [Raymond] Burr was with Gilmor constantly. Gilmor took great pride in all the associations he had.

The promoting and the springboarding of people into the profession was one of the things that the Playhouse had to offer. But the Playbox--[and] I think [it] must have been Gilmor's idea, not to have scouts there--was a different kind of thing. That's one reason that those of us who were third-year students did not particularly relish being there month after month after month, because at that time, we were anxious to be Hollywood's "next stars." As a matter of fact, we all thought we should be.

GALM: Those of you who elected to stay a third year, were most of you still hopefuls?

PRICKETT: Oh, very much so. And many of the ones that did stay were successful. Bob [Robert] Rockwell went on from that third year--well, it took him some years--he played Mr. [Philip] Boynton in "Our Miss Brooks" and enjoyed much fame during that run. Russ [Russell] Arms went back to New York and was on the Lucky Strike program for years and years. Louise Albritton went to Universal [Studios] and was under contract there. Eleanor Parker left us earlier than that, for a contract with Warner Brothers. Barbara Rush--no, she was a year behind us--was signed by a studio. Most of them did do very well, the ones that stayed. We were not a large class. I think there were forty of us, so it wasn't that small.

GALM: Forty at the beginning, or forty ending?

PRICKETT: Well, forty ending. I don't remember anybody's dropping out. The ones who started the third year stayed, because if you've decided to do it, you pretty well are in there for earnest.

GALM: Are most of those forty people involved in all aspects of theater, or mainly acting?

PRICKETT: Well, by that time, you have concentrated on the field you were mostly interested in. So those that were interested in directing were doing the directing of the plays, those that were interested in the technical end were stage managing and doing the technical assignments, and those of us--most of us--in the acting field were acting.

GALM: Was there any quota system?

PRICKETT: For the classes?

GALM: Third class.

PRICKETT: No, there wasn't any quota system. The classes always averaged out to about 275 in the entire school. As a matter of fact, they kept it at that. And usually, the beginning class (the junior class, we called it) was around 90 to 100. Then the second year [was] about--what?--the same. Anyhow, however it worked out, it always came out to about 275 including the third year. The second year had almost as many as the first.

GALM: So there wasn't necessarily a large dropout rate?

PRICKETT: No, as a matter of fact, there was a very small

dropout [rate] from the first year to the second year. I think that maybe I'm wrong with 90 to 100. I think it was between 100 and 125, because in the first six weeks of the first year there is a great drop. You can just tell, when somebody is in there for about a six-week period, whether or not they're there for earnest, or whether they're there just to play. And if they're there just to play, then out they go immediately. The admissions committee told them that they think that this isn't the place for them, and they think they'll do better in some other field.

GALM: Was there much weeding out after the first year?

PRICKETT: Yes, after the first six weeks of the first year there was some weeding out.

GALM: By the school?

PRICKETT: By the school. It usually came before the end of the first year, but then there was even weeding out after that. The first year, as I remember, had an enrollment of 125, so that you had something like a hundred and--hmm, that doesn't come out right, does it? Well, anyway, 275 in total--my arithmetic's bad. [laughter]

GALM: Okay, next time I'll talk about how you made it to Hollywood.

PRICKETT: How I made it in Hollywood. Next time, don't ask me to add. [laughter]

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE [video session]

JULY 5, 1973

GALM: Last time we spent the session speaking of your role at the Playhouse as a student, and one of the things that you've recalled since then, that was an important aspect of the Playhouse school, was visitors to the school. Who were some of these people?

PRICKETT: The personalities that impressed me--and I had said, you remember in the beginning, that I felt I was there at the golden era of the Playhouse, and this I'm sure I was. At that time we used to have, as often as they were in the vicinity, such outstanding people as Maude Adams, for example, [who], as I said to you, was really the Helen Hayes of my era, because she was the soul that we used to look up to as the epitome of theater. She was there, and also Louis Calhern came over to the Playhouse. [William] Saroyan was there in his very early days of playwriting. Tennessee Williams--it actually was the very beginning of his writing, and the period the Playhouse had a program where we tried out many of the new plays. Margo Jones, who came from Dallas, was very much interested in Tennessee Williams, so she was promoting him; and of course Gilmor Brown was interested in Tennessee's writings, too. So Tennessee was there. He lectured to us as students,

as did Saroyan and Maude Adams.

Also, a very interesting person that we'd all heard so very much about was Dorothy Parker. She really was a very interesting character, I might add. I was interested in her because I'd always given her readings when I was younger, during the days when we all gave monologues. Dorothy Parker talked to the students, and it seemed to me that she was never as negative in the readings that I gave of hers as she seemed when she talked to the students. With me, she left the feeling that she was rather a negative person (which we all know now she did have those moments and that side to her life). But when she talked to us, I thought she was a very interesting person.

Also, Edna May Oliver used to come over to many of the opening nights. I always was interested in her, because I was a young character actress and she was an outstanding one in her later years. So it was always interesting to me to see Edna May Oliver when she was there. Also, somebody whom I'd thought about that I didn't mention to you was Edgar Bergen. I don't think we talked about him, did we?

GALM: No.

PRICKETT: Edgar Bergen came over [with] his top-flight performance of Charlie [McCarthy]--when he and Charlie were at the top. He broadcast from the Playhouse, because he preferred the audiences that he got in Pasadena more than

any other place that he'd ever broadcast. So he broadcast from the Pasadena Playhouse for years. This was always very interesting, to know Edgar Bergen and his company.

GALM: In other words, his regular program was done before a live radio audience.

PRICKETT: That's right. And he learned many things from his audience, too. He learned that in his broadcast he was delivering his lines much too rapidly. The general public in the United States could not follow as rapidly as he was delivering the lines, so he discovered that he'd have to deliver them much more slowly. And if you noticed in his technique, he did change from the rapid delivery he had to a much more studied and much more slow, methodical delivery. He made the change there at the Playhouse. He also found that the audience that he attracted from Pasadena and its environs was much more responsive to him, and [was] an audience that he preferred to any other place.

GALM: Did you ever do any radio work?

PRICKETT: Yes, I did radio work. When I first came out here to California, I did some radio work with CBS and NBC. I had started in Denver at KOA and KLZ (both stations which are still in operation) when I was at the tender age of seven, on up until I left Denver. I used to do various shows there. But then radio--well, it was still a strong

medium, but my emphasis when I was a student at the Playhouse seemed to be more on the motion picture aspect. And of course, I was busy, as I told you, doing a play a month while I was a student, so that I gradually did less and less of radio.

GALM: Did the visiting lecturers ever really participate in a teaching capacity at the Playhouse?

PRICKETT: Not the ones that I particularly mentioned. But Robert Lee was also another one that came over to the Playhouse (I know he's now at UCLA), and he did participate. He taught a course of playwriting at the Playhouse. When I was a student, as I mentioned to you, we had outstanding people of the theater, [and] outstanding actors of the time--character people such as Frank Ferguson, Max [Maxwell] Sholes--oh, dear, that's not his professional name, but . . .

GALM: We can supply that.

PRICKETT: Fine--you can supply that. And Ralph Urmy, who had been with Stuart Walker. All of these people were outstanding people in their own right, and they were on the staff of the Playhouse at that time. They were our directors, and we had courses with them constantly. We had Madame [Barbara] Vajda, who was Ernst [Erno] Vajda's wife (Ernst Vajda, the great Hungarian playwright). She was there, and she was a very colorful, delightful

individual. And Frayne Williams, a former New York Shakespearean actor, that I mentioned to you, too. Oh, everyone I think of at that time was outstanding in his own field. We constantly had the outstanding people that were in the vicinity associated with us, the students. Louis Calhern, for example, delivered the commencement speech one year, so we did come in contact with him. We always had at commencement time one of the speakers from the industry. Now Tennessee Williams spoke to us on how he went about writing a play. Saroyan also spoke to us. We'd have a student body meeting on Fridays where everybody would gather in the Mainstage auditorium and the various visiting people spoke to us. But for teaching, it was more the ones that I have mentioned.

GALM: Was there any significant shift within the school faculty during the time that you were there? Or did it remain more or less constant?

PRICKETT: It remained more or less constant during the time that I was there, and it remained more or less constant a couple of years after I graduated. But then these great directors that I'm talking about gradually put their emphasis into being actors and going into the motion picture industry.

GALM: Did the school ever diminish at a later period?

PRICKETT: Well, the school didn't diminish--you mean as

far as outstanding personalities are concerned?

GALM: Yes. Both in faculty and people that they produced.

PRICKETT: I don't think it diminished, no. I think that they brought in new people that were coming up in the field. The names that we had known, as far as I was concerned, were not there; but of course, they were getting older and doing their thing, too, which was the motion picture industry again. Some of them had left the theater business completely and had gone into other fields--I think more because they were getting older, and also because they wished to lead a more relaxing life. I do think that the school maintained its level of excellence, but they were all new names to me that were coming along--just like the motion picture industry now. They're all young people. I hardly know any of the casting people at all, because it's a whole new, young element that's coming in. And that is what had started to come in onto the faculty at the Playhouse, too.

GALM: Did this new element bring in a different approach to the school?

PRICKETT: To the theater itself?

GALM: Say, to the school curriculum.

PRICKETT: No, the school curriculum remained the same. They did come in with their new ideas and their new

approaches, which of course we did want. What's needed always is change. To me it didn't seem as golden an era as it was when I was there, but the excellence remained the same. The rating of the Playhouse was always the same until 1954 (that we've talked about), when Charles Prickett died. And then everything did change, everything.

GALM: This time we were also going to talk about your own breaking into the industry in Hollywood. How did that come about?

PRICKETT: That was very interesting. I told you that I had decided to come to Hollywood rather than going to New York to the American Academy, because I felt that the motion picture was a new medium that was developing, and I was fascinated by it. I had had the legitimate stage training, and I always felt that I could do that. Plus the fact [that] I'd heard more about actors starving to death in New York than I did out here in Hollywood, so I decided to come to the Pasadena Playhouse [for] which I've always been delighted. I got my master's degree and also my lord and master at the same time there.

In 1941, Charles and I were married, and after that, I didn't do any acting for a year. Then I went back to the Playhouse and did maybe two or three plays a year. Now, at this time, the Playhouse had gone from doing a new play every two weeks to doing a play a month, because they had

learned--along with Edgar Bergen--that you couldn't feed the public as much material and have them absorb it all as quickly as they were doing. So the Playhouse went from performances lasting two weeks to performances running for a month.

In 1944 I was playing in The Late Christopher Bean the role of Mrs. Haggett, a sixty-five-year-old woman. I had mentioned before, in our tapings, that every play was covered by a scout from all of the studios in Hollywood. Well, one day at the Playhouse a call came to my husband that they would like for me to come over to Columbia Studios, and they wanted to know who my agent was. Well, he said that I did not have an agent--which I did not, because I was being a nice housewife and just playing with theater at this time. I'd given up somewhat my great desire to be a great screen star; but you know, if it gets in your blood, it just never ever leaves. So he said, "Well, I'll tell her that you would like to have her come over and see if she'd like to do this." So he called me, and of course, oh, my goodness, I couldn't wait to get over there fast enough.

I had no agent at the time; but just coincidentally, Gus Dembling, who had been handling so many of the students from the Playhouse, had called Charles Prickett and said, "I understand that Columbia wants Maudie to come over. I

wonder if she would like to have me handle her." Charles said, "Well, I don't know. Why don't you call her?" So I got an agent just like that.

By this time I already had my appointment at Columbia, so I went over to the studio. Bob Palmer, who was in the casting department, intercepted me and took me over to the director and the producer. I was so excited I can't even remember who they were. They said, "Are you Maudie Prickett?" And I said, "Oh, yes, yes, I'm Maudie Prickett." So they said, "How old are you?" And I said, "I'm twenty-nine." And I'll never forget the expression on their faces. They kind of looked at me and thought, "Oh, the poor dear. She's hanging onto those twenties." I really was just twenty-nine. So they said, "Well, we're looking for a woman who's sixty-five."

George Godfrey, who was the scout from Columbia, was sitting there, and every time they'd say a negative thing, he'd say, "But she's a very funny woman." [imitates voice] And so they said, "But this is a sixty-five-year-old part." I said, "But that's the part I was playing--Mrs. Haggett, sixty-five." And they said, "In Hollywood we don't do that. We have to have you <u>be</u> sixty-five." And George would say, "But she's a very funny woman." I said, "But I made myself up to look sixty-five. Don't you have a makeup department that does this?" They said, "Oh, well! In Hollywood we

don't do things this way. You have to look sixty-five." And George would say, [laughter] "But she's a very funny woman!"

So finally, they had a little conference and said, "Well, you are just too young to play this part; that's all there is to it. But would you consider playing a part in a comedy that we're doing with Eddie Foy, Jr.? It starts tomorrow, and Jules White is directing it." Of course, I couldn't wait to do it! But I tried to maintain my calm, and I said, "Well, if I'm too young for this part, maybe so." So they said, "Well, Bob, take her on over and see if Jules doesn't want her to do this, and she'll play the part of the secretary for Eddie Foy." So over I went and met Jules White. He said, "Oh, fine, fine. Are you free tomorrow?" Well, goodness, I should say I was! So I started in the next day with a six o'clock call. It seemed to me I couldn't wait to get there. They made me up, and I must say, by the time they got through, I looked like I was sixty-five. I could have done the other part. But I played the secretary of Eddie Foy, Jr. They shot those comedies, it seems to me, in about three days. So that was my beginning.

Jules White came over to me the first day. I, of course, didn't know what to do--it was my first time on a set and the whole thing--so I looked to see what everybody

else did and just did what I would have done had I been on a stage. After we'd done a couple of scenes, he came over and sat down beside me again and said, "What have you been doing lately?" I said, "Do you mean in pictures?" And he said, "Yes." I said, "I've never been in a picture before. This is my first one, my first exposure." And he said, "I can't believe it! You must have been on the stage for a long time." I said, "Yes, [I was] on the stage for a long time." He said, "You can tell them every time. you can't tell the difference [between] anybody who's been on stage for a long time or whether they've been in pictures. The legitimate stage people always know what to do." Well, that was my beginning. That was at Columbia, and then Columbia just used me in one thing right after another.

They were doing the Durango Kid series, with Charlie [Charles] Starrett and Smiley Burnette, and they cast me as Smiley Burnette's girlfriend. I had a ball! Those Westerns were terrific. How I got that part was that when I went on the interview, they asked me, "Have you ever driven a buckboard?" Well, I hadn't the slightest idea what a buckboard even looked like. I knew it had something to do with Westerns and all that sort of thing. I knew it was one of those wagons. So I said, "Well, my heavens! I graduated from the University of Wyoming!" And they said,

"Give her the part, give her the part." So I got the part.

I got on the set with all these various wagons all around, and I was figuring to myself, "I wonder which one of those was the buckboard?" [laughter] So I thought I'd just wait. Finally, they drove up this thing that had a board in the front--which I thought looked very much like what should be called a buckboard--and the driver showed me how to hold the reins and what to do. (They never ever let you do anything that's too dangerous, you know.) He just said, "Now, when you want the horse to go, just go [clicks tongue and demonstrates action] with the reins." I did, and the horses went. It was just as easy as could be, and I just had a ball! So I worked in this for months and had a marvelous time.

That was the beginning, and then it just seemed to roll and roll and roll and roll; and then, of course, we rolled right into television in '49 [or] '50. But do you know, Bernard, that the Playhouse was doing television for KHJ, up on the hill there, in 1933?

GALM: I think I talked with Oliver Prickett about that. That was in association with the Los Angeles Times, was it?

PRICKETT: No, not KHJ. KTTV was with the Times, but I don't believe KHJ was.

GALM: So how did that come about?

PRICKETT: Well, KHJ approached the Playhouse, because KHJ

was doing some experimental work in TV. They decided that they wanted to try out this new medium, and that they would do the experimenting up on the hill at their new studio of KHJ. They came to the Playhouse for a source of programming, which later was the reason that brought the Los Angeles Times--for Channel 11, KTTV--to the Playhouse. I think I told you that Charles Prickett and I had met Harry Miller, from the Los Angeles Times, at a TV meeting in New York in 1948. That's what really brought the two organizations together first of all--that meeting of the two of them. We talked about the KTTV development then.

GALM: Right. What was your association with the Playhouse once you got into your film work?

PRICKETT: I think that my association was really through my husband, because I didn't have a chance then to do very many plays whatsoever. I started in television in the very beginning of the television days and worked with Red Skelton and Jack Benny and all of those people, and I was so busy doing all of the programs and productions, because every week I was in some program in television. So actually, from 1948 all through the fifties, I did really very few plays to speak of. I did, however, in the summer of 1948, play with the Actors' Company at La Jolla in For Love or Money, and that was a very interesting experience in summer stock.

GALM: How did that come about?

PRICKETT: That came about in that Gregory Peck called me one day, and he said, "Maudie, I hate to do this to you, but we need somebody to come in a day's time and learn this role and open tomorrow night." And he said, "The woman that we had cast in the play just doesn't seem to learn the role, and she doesn't seem to fit in the whole setup. Would you come?" I had a conference with my husband, and he said, "Well, why don't you go on and do it?" I always have been a fast study, so I went down. I learned the part in a day, and I rehearsed with the cast a couple of times, and I had a wardrobe and went out and bought some character shoes (that I was telling you about) for seventy-five cents that have made more hundreds of thousands of dollars for me than you can imagine any pair of shoes could ever do, and [I] opened the next night. I do remember the petrified state in which I went on, but at any rate, it was an interesting experience. I played the role of the housekeeper in this production, with Leon Ames and June Lockhart, For Love or Money, and thoroughly enjoyed it.

GALM: Was this a long-lived actors' group in La Jolla?

PRICKETT: It seems to me, as I remember, [that] they opened in 1947. In 1948, I played with them. They invited me to stay on and do the next production, which I couldn't do because I had a picture commitment up here that

following week. They played for just a week in each of these productions, so I had to come back for it. Then the next year, when Gregory Peck was attending a production at the Pasadena Playhouse, he said to me, "How about coming down now and playing the role in such and such a play?" This was in the summertime. And I said, "Well, I'd simply be delighted to"--it was an old maid's part--"but I happen to be terribly pregnant, and I'm going to have a baby in September." [laughter] And so he said, "Well, I guess you won't fit the role at all then." They were playing in 1949 and then in 1950--well, I think that was just about the extent of it. Seems to me they ran for three to five years, something of that sort.

GALM: Who was the guiding spirit?

PRICKETT: Well, it was Mel Ferrer, Gregory Peck, Jennifer Jones, and Joseph Cotten--the four of them. They spent much time going back and forth from Hollywood to La Jolla. The idea was, I think, in the beginning that they would play in the plays. [lawnmower noise; tape recorder turned off]

GALM: We're resuming our recording now after the lawnmower is making its . . .

PRICKETT: . . . last round?

GALM: Yes. I guess we were going to start in on how you got into the touring of Suds in Your Eye.

PRICKETT: Oh, yes. Nineteen forty-four being the stellar

year, because that was the year I broke into Hollywood . . . (Oh, here we go again! See, he loves us. Well, Mr. Lawnmower. . . .) That year, too, the Playhouse had a production called Suds in Your Eye, and I was playing the part of Miss Tinkham--which I dearly loved--that dear old-maid music teacher who was sixty-five years old. This was a great hit at the Playhouse. As a matter of fact, it was such a great hit that Louis McClune (the Hollywood producer of many, many years) decided that he wanted to take this production on the road, and he wanted to take the three leads that were in the production; the "road" meaning only that we would take it up to San Francisco for a period of three weeks. June Evans was playing Mrs. Feeley, and Millie Mack was playing Mrs. Rasmussen, [and] Maudie Prickett was playing Miss Tinkham--these were the three that he wanted to take. He was going to build a cast around us, because the production at the Playhouse had many students in it at this particular time, [and] he was going to take all professional people. Well, Millie Mack couldn't go because she had other commitments here, so McClune cast Irene Siedner; but June Evans and I went along.

We rehearsed at the Playhouse, and Lenore Shanewise was hired to be the director. I think Lenore did direct it in the first place, so she was going to do it again. I must say that, as I think about it, we produced this at the

Playhouse in the spring; and it was in the fall--D-Day or V-J Day or one of those days which happened during the time that we were rehearsing, so it must have been in August. Lenore was going to direct it in the manner which she had in the beginning.

We had the contracts to sign, and there were three people that Mr. McClune wanted to sign a run-of-the-play contract. I had just gotten my new agent, Gus Dembling, who had said to me, "Don't sign anything until I see it!" Well, I didn't sign it the first night, and I didn't get the contract over to Gus the next day; and that night, Ollie Prickett, who was handling everything for the Playhouse as far as Equity contracts were concerned said to me, "Well, what are you afraid of? Sign it! You're only going to be up in San Francisco for three weeks." So I talked to Charles and I said that Ollie said, "Sign it!" Well, I was naive--I've learned many, many things from that one incident--and so I put my name on this run-of-the-play contract. Six months later, I came home to father.

This play was such a success, we had the SRO sign out every night. We played to nothing but the most hysterical houses going. It was the most fun to be playing this kind of a part to all of these various audiences that everyone just loved it! The critics hated it, and the audiences loved it. [laughter] Some places, we'd get good reviews

(it was sheer slapstick), but most places, the critics just thought it was terrible. We loved it, and everybody else did, too.

We went to San Francisco and played the three weeks. It was so successful there that we came down to San Diego, played a week in San Diego, back to Long Beach, played there, and into Los Angeles for seven weeks. That was just fine, because I was close to home then, but then we took off again and went up to San Francisco for three more weeks. We played in Oakland for half a week, Sacramento for half a week, and we were off on the road--[just] because I had put my little John Henry on this run-of-the-play contract. I could get no more money; I couldn't get out of the play--I was off.

You know, as you look back, everything happens for the best. I wouldn't have elected to have toured; I was forced to do it. It was a difficult time touring. We had many difficulties, but I think probably no more than touring companies ordinarily do. We played everyplace. We followed the regular touring route of Kansas City, St. Paul, Minneapolis, St. Louis. Then we went to Detroit and then came into Chicago, and we were playing in Chicago for three weeks--packed houses every night at that old Majestic Theatre.

In fact, it was so successful that the Shuberts wanted us to move into the Blackstone in Chicago because it was a

bigger house. They wanted to come in with their--not Deep Are the Roots, but one of the first of that kind of a play--into the Majestic to try it in the Middle West there. Mr. McClune was very adamant. He didn't want to pay any more house rent. So they said, "All right. You either move to the Blackstone, or close the play." He said, "I'll close the play." I couldn't have been happier, because I'd been on the road for six months and I was happy to get home. But it was a great experience, and it's a different kind of experience--with every single night a different kind of audience in a different part of the country. We did do a few two-night stands, and that is difficult--picking up and going.

Because I was playing in the starring role, I was up every morning (after being up late at night) on radio or doing some promotion for the play or having pictures taken for the newspaper to promote the play. And when we got to Chicago, they asked me if I wouldn't go on their television program, which was "Tea with Harriet Hester." [That was where] they interviewed the stars of all the productions that came into Chicago, and they wondered if I wouldn't be on television. So I thought, "Well, this would be very nice. Yes, I [will] do this," because I hadn't done anything over at KHJ ever. So I thought, "Well, my goodness, what would you wear?"--having been on radio and done a couple of things in pictures at Columbia. I thought my black and a string of

pearls would probably be very nice, which I wore. It was in the era of hats, and I love hats. I had this smashing black hat that had a black ostrich plume that came around it, and it matched the smashing black dress. So I thought, "This ought to be nice for tea with Harriet Hester."

I got all dressed up with my string of pearls, my gloves, and the whole thing, and I went for tea with Harriet Hester. We sat at a table very much like this. She'd pour the tea, and ask me questions the way you are doing. So as we were talking along, I'd see men in front of me with silver reflectors. They'd put it there, so I'd try not to pay any attention. And then I'd see them walk over there with another reflector, and they'd kind of put it down, and then they'd walk back and around the camera. And then I'd see someone come along and stick one there, and I thought, "Mercy! The technicians are busier than the actors on television." And here we're trying to have a very calm tea session.

Finally, the fifteen-minute or half-hour program came to an end, and my friend that I had known from Playhouse days was on the staff. So afterwards I said to him, "Well, how did it go? Give me some suggestions." He laughed and he said, "Well, I tell you, Maudie. What with that black that you've got on giving off all the reflections, and [with] that feather with your moving your head, everything was so

much in motion and there was such a glare that I don't think anybody knows how it went." [laughter] Those were the days when you were not supposed to wear black, and you couldn't wear white, and you had to wear that deep, deep red lipstick. When I came in, the only thing that they said to me was, "You know, your lipstick isn't dark enough. Here, use this." Of course, everything is the antithesis of all that now. But that was my first appearance on television. I'll tell you, those technicians were pretty busy. I didn't see one of them after the show was over. [laughter]

GALM: So then you did eventually end up back in Pasadena.

PRICKETT: Yes.

GALM: Had you missed out on anything by taking the tour?

PRICKETT: Well, yes, I did. You see, I was just starting to roll in Hollywood, so I missed the time that I left, from the end of August until I got back in February, six months later. (Whether it was February or March, whatever it was . . .) So that I did [miss out], actually. But then when I got back, because I had been on the road--then I was much in demand, because I'd just come back from a tour--my agent got busy immediately. That's when I started in with the Durango Kid with Smiley Burnette--on that series.

GALM: Was that also made for Columbia?

PRICKETT: That was Columbia, yes. We used to shoot a lot of it down at the Columbia ranch.

GALM: Your husband, of course, was fully involved with the Playhouse then.

PRICKETT: Yes.

GALM: What was your role as a wife then?

PRICKETT: Well, I had a very exciting time. You see, here we are, two people with the same interests, and he was always very willing that I do my acting bit. He was always very proud of everything I did--which some husbands are not, but he always was. And it always fit in very well--my being gone during the day--with everything that we had to do at night.

At that time, Charles spent a lot of time at the Playhouse. I don't think I told you, but he was first of all married to the Playhouse, and secondly to me. The Playhouse was his baby, and it was something that needed attention constantly. So he was down there at night, checking on things that needed to be watched over always. For every opening, I always went with him. The Coleman Concerts were at the Playhouse once a month on Sundays, and I always went to that with him. I always acted as the hostess for all of the openings.

GALM: Where was the opening night reception held?

PRICKETT: Well, there was no reception, actually. It was

just that we greeted people when they came in the door, and then for those that came down to the Green Room afterwards. We always served coffee at intermission, but we didn't have [receptions]. Well, sometimes we did; sometimes we had receptions afterwards in the Green Room. For the one-act play tournaments, I always helped him and acted as the hostess, because he was the one that was the guiding light of that. Ollie probably discussed the one-act play tournaments with you.

GALM: The high schools . . .

PRICKETT: Yes, of the high schools of the state of California. When I was a student, my goodness, I'd never think of the one-act play contest, but I think of the time when I was a student when Charles Prickett called me up and said, "Come down and lead the singing at the break at the one-act play contest tonight." And I said, "Lead the singing! I can't carry a tune in a bucket!" He said, "Well, just come on down and be funny." [laughter] You know it's so easy to be funny.

GALM: Yes. [laughter]

PRICKETT: "And just keep things going while there's this break." Well, my heavens! I've forgotten who was supposed to do it. They had somebody coming over from Hollywood that wasn't able to come--he was late in shooting or something of the sort--and so I appeared to lead community singing.

Well, it's amazing what gifts are given to you. Of course, I sing in A-flat, and that went over real well. I did it--I conducted all this stuff. Goodness only knows what I did. But when I think of the one-act play contest, that always comes to mind--the time he called me to lead the singing!! The high schools that participated took it all very seriously, and they put on beautiful productions--they really did. But they also had a great time coming to the Playhouse.

So I helped him with all of that kind of thing. And then every graduation, we always had a reception for the graduating students, and we always entertained the board of trustees after the ceremony at a dinner at our home. During the year, we used to entertain the members of the board of trustees at various times. So I was constantly doing that. Everything that he had to do, and everyplace he had to go, I went with him.

GALM: Did the board [members] involve themselves actively in promoting the Playhouse?

PRICKETT: Well, some of them did, Bernard, some of them did. However, I always felt that the board of trustees was more of a consulting board for Charles. It is true they set policy, as far as the policy of the Playhouse was concerned, and also [decided] what the salaries should be as far as Charles and Gilmor were concerned. They approved of the

salaries that Charles felt that he could pay the other members of the staff, too. As far as involving themselves, they used to come to the opening nights and do that kind of thing; but not until the early fifties, I would say, would any of them ever do any entertaining for the students or do anything in a social way for the Playhouse. Now, in the beginning, I think things were different. It was before I came; but in the early twenties, when they had set up the Theatre Guild [and] when Churchill Clark was so interested in the Playhouse and was taking such an active part, they were much more active in raising monies and promoting the activities of the Playhouse. But when Charles Prickett took hold, they didn't do as much, because they always felt that he was the one that was guiding it alone. He did seem like a very self-sufficient soul that did this, and he was. Consequently, all the responsibility went to him, and they took less and less and less responsibility. That isn't at all good, as you can see.

GALM: Of course, there has been talk about--and I don't really know who has called it a feud first--the Prickett-Gilmor Brown feud.

PRICKETT: I know, and I don't think that that is true.

GALM: Was it ever referred to as a feud?

PRICKETT: Well, not between them. [It was] simply because they had opposite views on many things. Gilmor refused to

look at finances ever. He just thought there were no limitations. That's the only way anything runs, through business management, and so Charles was always the one that was saying, "No, you cannot do that because there aren't sufficient funds."

The Playhouse has been a struggle since the very beginning. I'm sure Ollie told you of all the difficult times that they had in the beginning. There was always something--the flu epidemic or the Depression or something--that was always setting the Playhouse back when it was just starting to roll. I think, suprisingly enough, [that] it was rolling as well as it was when I was there (in '37, '38, '39 and '40), because we were coming out of the Depression, and we had all of the people maybe that weren't getting jobs other places. [They] were there at the Playhouse because this was sure salary for them at this time. It wasn't before that, but at this time it was--in '36, '37 and on. So that Charles was the one, going back to this, that had to map the whole plan, that decided how far they could go with every project that they had [and] how much of a budget they could have for every play. And as I mentioned to you before, many times Gilmor would have to change plays that he had chosen to do because there wasn't that amount of money to produce that play. So he'd have to come back and produce another kind of play.

Gilmor was not one to readily say "yes" to this kind of

thing. He was always the one that said, "Yes, you may have this part in the play," or "Yes, I would like to have you direct this play." When so-and-so would come down to talk to Charles, Charles would say, "No, we cannot pay you your Hollywood director's salary for this." So that it made Charles always look like the "No" man. But as far as an out-and-out feud ever, this is just something that was talked about simply because it's ever been the story of theater that the business manager will never let the producer do what he wants to do. You know: "We would have liked to have made this a grand old production, but the man who's holding the strings for money says 'No, you can't do it.'" It was that kind of a conflict, if you want to call it such. I told you that Charles was Gilmor's very best friend. You could not say anything derogatory about Gilmor at all to him. (Now, I say a lot of derogatory things about Gilmor, but Charles never would.) So it was more of a fictional thing, I think, that people developed--like they say, "There's a big fight between the second floor and the third floor."

GALM: Did you ever feel any recriminations as being the wife of Charles Prickett, from Playhouse people?

PRICKETT: Recriminations? No. I never ever did. Maybe it's because I love everybody and I expect everybody to love me. No, no, I never did.

I think that because Gilmor was not a marrying man,

he, in his way, showed his authority to all the ones on the staff that did marry by not letting any of us act on the stage for a year's time--you know, not letting us be in any of the plays. But with me, it lasted the regular year's time, and then after that, things went along very well. Gilmor certainly never pushed me in any way to be an outstanding actress, not at all. I always thought I made it in spite of Gilmor, because the other directors on the staff were the ones that always asked for me and were the ones with whom I had great rapport.

As I told you before, the thing was [that] I lacked respect for Gilmor. I'm sure that he was a great genius in his earlier days. It's just that when I came to the Playhouse, I just didn't see evidence of it. Now, Charles Prickett would be the first one to say, "Yes, he is a genius." Charles always gave him such great credit. But when I would sit in an audience and hear Gilmor represent the Playhouse in speaking, and tell about its development and what it was doing, and not mention Charles Prickett's name once!--this didn't set too well with me. Now, Charles never said one word about this. I was the one that fumed all the way home about it. I don't think [it's] fair, when here is a man, Charles Prickett, who has built what you saw at the Playhouse, which was his dream, and here is the big force behind it--to not even mention the name, to say, "Charles and I have done this together. . . ." These were

the things that built up my feelings toward Gilmor. I do think credit should be given where credit is due. And certainly it was very evident that in 1954, when Charles died, it was the beginning of the denouement of the Playhouse.

GALM: Were there any signs of it prior to [1954]? Say, in the late forties or early fifties?

PRICKETT: What was evident was. . . .

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE TWO

JULY 18, 1973

GALM: Today we were going to start by discussing a couple of the other activities that the school of the Playhouse was involved in, and one of them was a touring company?

PRICKETT: Yes, that's right. The object of the third year, Charles always felt, was to train people in the specific field in which they wished to go in theater. In order to set up any kind of a company, for example, one of the fields would be the director's field, the other one would be the technical field, and the other one would be the acting field. So the School of Theatre was organized along those lines, too. Of course, the writers do come into this, too, but this was a separate sort of thing. Scripts can always be sent in to an organization with the director and the technical man and the business manager that handles the actor. In order to train these people, I think it was in the mid-forties, the third year had the opportunity to be in a touring company. A director at the Playhouse directed them, with an assistant director who would leave and tour with them, then a technical man always went along to supervise the setting up of the scenery and to take care of the backstage activities, and then [there would be] the business manager for the whole company.

The company would go out for a period of six to eight weeks and tour up and down the coast, from here up to this side of San Francisco. They'd play in places like Salinas, Coalinga, Fresno, Santa Barbara, Bakersfield--all the places up and down the coast. I think they played in Monterey, too, one night. And they'd have either one-night or two-night stands while they were gone. The company was an entity of itself, sponsored by the Playhouse, and it was just marvelous experience for these third-year students to have the experience of playing in a real touring company. So they did that, and it was somewhat the same setup, that I mentioned to you, that we had in 1940 at Santa Monica when the company was a company just like that--only it was a stock company. The same actors were playing in various parts in various plays during that year. This was a different kind of adventure, but still training them in the directorial, the technical, and the stage-managing aspect. Of course, the actors were trained already in the first two years.

The Ford Foundation was out here at the time, and they were very much interested in this kind of a setup and this kind of an organization. So the heads of the foundation contacted Charles Prickett and said that they would like to have the Playhouse train people to go out to set up community theaters throughout the country. They

would like to have a three-man unit trained: a director, a technical man, and a business manager. Well, of course, the Playhouse was already set up to do that sort of thing, so it was just a natural. The Ford Foundation at that time wanted to have grass-root theater all over the United States, and they wanted to start community theaters in communities clear across the country, and it was going to be funded by the Ford Foundation.

Charles had done a lot of work in planning for this, and in 1953, he was asked to go back East to meet in New York with the man on the East Coast that was going to head this kind of program. Helen Hayes was on the committee--oh, a number of people that were prominent in theater at that time and that were prominent in theater organizations. Scott Fletcher was the one that was head of this division for the Ford Foundation. During the time we were in New York--which was a five-day period--the man that was to be the head of the East Coast group died. We left and came back to Pasadena. We already knew Charles was ill. He didn't know how seriously ill he was; I did. And in nine months' time, Charles was gone. Scott Fletcher decided this was a pretty bad omen, so the whole program was scratched; and to my knowledge, they've not done anything of this nature since. They did, however, fund the Shakespearean theater [American Shakespeare Festival

Theatre] in Stratford, Connecticut, which was asking for funds, too. I think they did that instead of this marvelous program which they had planned. It's just too bad now that they don't do something, because there's such a need for this kind of theater throughout the country.

GALM: Was your husband quite excited about the prospect?

PRICKETT: Oh, he was so excited at the prospects of this whole thing. He just thought that this was a marvelous opportunity; it was exactly his dream when he set up the school. The school was already fulfilling a great need here in being able to train such people. And of course, when the GIs came back after the war, there were many, many of them that went out as directors in various communities from whence they had come. The whole program was one that was just right for his dream fulfillment--and then this sort of thing happened.

Well, I don't believe the Ford Foundation granted any monies at all to the Playhouse after that. As I said, they were going to fund the whole program, and it was to be for the whole West Coast here--all the training would be at the Playhouse. Then they were going to send the team of three out across the country. The same program of training was going to take place on the East Coast. They hadn't decided where that was going to headquarter at the time; it was all so nebulous. But it never came to fulfillment.

GALM: Did the touring company take only one production out on the road?

PRICKETT: Yes, yes. It would take one production at a time. During the course of the year, they went, it seems to me, three different times. Yes, I think they had three different tours.

GALM: What type of production would they often be?

PRICKETT: Oh, let's see. It's been so long ago, I can't remember exactly what plays they took. They were not the classic plays, but they were more the current plays of the era that would appeal to these kinds of communities. It was not too sophisticated a play, but something like the Maxwell Anderson type of play of the forties. Oh, what did they take? Well, I do have my records. I could probably check and find out.

GALM: Did the school ever get itself involved in presenting productions at universities and colleges?

PRICKETT: Well, now, let me see. At universities and colleges?

GALM: In other words, would the touring company that you're speaking of appear mainly in municipal theaters?

PRICKETT: No, mainly in high school auditoriums. They would play at the high school auditoriums because they were nonunion, and of course they had to be careful of the union aspect. When they got close to San Francisco,

then the union would step in. And several times, we had to pay for a union man just to come in and sit while the student backstage hands did everything that they'd always been doing in the company, but the Playhouse had to pay for the union man to come in. So consequently, they played mostly in the high school auditoriums. I'm trying to think. We did things with UCLA at one time, and also with SC. It seems to me they were one-acts or short skits or this sort of thing--not during my era, however, but at an earlier time in the school's history. Also, they used to take productions out to Citrus College, too, later on in the forties. The third-year students went out to Citrus College several times and gave performances.

The Mainstage plays were not taken anyplace, except the cast that I told you about that I was in with Suds in your Eye, and again with Jenny Kissed Me with Rudy Vallee. To pick up the whole cast and go--the ones from Mainstage--no, they didn't do that; but as far as the third-year students were concerned, they did do this. It seems to me there were other--oh, at Redlands, too. I guess when I start thinking of them, I can think of the various times that we did have productions. And then we used to take--which was an interesting program, I thought--the third-year student plays to Chino, to the penal institution out there. It was not only interesting playing for the ones in the cast,

but it was also interesting to be in the audience and to watch the reaction, too, of that kind of audience.

GALM: Who would have promoted that idea?

PRICKETT: That idea? Well, it came about through a friend of Charles Prickett's (Mr. Ralph Merriam) who was very closely associated with a very good friend of the man, Mr. [Kenyon J.] Scudder, who was then head of [the] Chino institute [California Institution for Men]. They wanted to try this kind of entertainment for the inmates. Mrs. Scudder was one who believed in having no bars, [and] the prisoners all lived in dormitories. It was actually Mr. Scudder who really started this kind of thinking out there at Chino. Many, many times, we used to take plays out to Chino. Actually, the third-year students had a marvelous opportunity of acting to different kinds of audiences. It was really marvelous.

GALM: Of course, many people that were associated with the Pasadena Playhouse then went on to UCLA theater arts faculty. Did they also go on to SC?

PRICKETT: Yes, I think some went on to SC--a much less number than ever went on to UCLA, because UCLA seemed to be the focal point; and also, the department was in the process of developing. That's where Ralph Freud, who'd been at the Playhouse went, and that was when Kenneth Macgowan was there. The department then was just blossoming much

more so than it was at SC. Let's see, that was the end of the forties, wasn't it? When did UCLA's department start?

GALM: Theater arts? Probably in the fifties.

PRICKETT: Well, then, in the fifties. It was the early part of the fifties, then--the late forties or the fifties.

And of course, that was the time that television was just blossoming, too. I can think of a couple of our students who went over to the television department at SC, but most of them were headed toward KTTV, because they were cameramen who had been trained at the Playhouse along with the technical staff for KTTV. Most of them started professionally as floor managers or assistant cameramen. So actually, the focus of training at the Playhouse, UCLA, USC was to get into the professional aspect of it as quickly as possible.

GALM: I know that this is one of the things that Oliver Prickett said in his interview: that to go around town even today, the number of technical people that were trained at the Playhouse is quite fantastic.

PRICKETT: It is fantastic.

GALM: Last time we ended the session by your saying that you felt that the death of your husband sort of marked, in some ways, the denouement of the Playhouse. And I think we have discussed that one of the sad things was, of course, that your husband had not trained anyone to replace himself.

What were some of the other factors that you feel contributed to the denouement?

PRICKETT: To the denouement? One was that he hadn't trained anybody. The other fact was, too, that he was the dreamer. He was the one that was creating everything that had happened at the Playhouse. Gilmor long since had stopped looking that far ahead and planning anything new, I think, because Gilmor was playing with his Playbox and the plays that he had over there. He was only supervising the plays at the Playhouse. But it was Charles who was dreaming and planning and making way for everything that the Playhouse was to be in the future, and he was doing this as a one-man job. He was making all the plans, as I mentioned, with the Ford Foundation; he was looking ahead to see where the Playhouse would be going in the future, and how it would be expanding, and how he would be building on the back of the Playhouse and adding to it; [he was planning] to have a television studio of our own back there (we always broadcast radiowise from the Playhouse); and he was constantly making these big plans of what he wanted to see the Playhouse be--and, of course, had made it what it was in most of the time that I know anything about. So consequently, he had not imparted all of this information to anyone. He had plans in his desk of future drawings that he had dreamt of for the Playhouse; he had written

down a few things that he was going to do and what he thought should be done. But he never ever had anybody that he took along with him to tell these plans to, let alone train them to come along. So that when he died, the dreaming stopped, the planning stopped, and it was just a case of survival.

The only one that could come in at all to take over, as far as the business was concerned, was the bookkeeper. The bookkeeper had never ever been trained in anything of a theater nature; however, he had kept books for Charles and for the Playhouse for a period of, I guess, maybe five [or] six years. I don't think he'd been there much longer than that. And when somebody's at the head making the decisions, it may look like it's an easy thing to do, but the bookkeeper found out very shortly that it wasn't. He knew how much monies were in the bank that Charles actually was able to save. The Playhouse has always been a struggle. I'm sure Ollie pointed that out to you. Anybody that's been connected with [the Playhouse] knows that it has always worked on such a fine line from the black to the red that to get extra monies, when the Mainstage never ever paid for itself, was really quite a task.

So that actually, the monies came primarily from the school, and the school thrived when the GIs came back from the war, when we had so many in the school at that time.

We were just bursting at the seams; there were twice as many there as the school was designed to handle. It was at that time that Charles was able to buy the dormitories for the Playhouse--the three dormitories up on North El Molino--and to get some monies put aside in the bank to do something with later. Otherwise, they had very, very little ever to work with. The Playhouse was never endowed, so we never ever had those reserves. So actually, the bookkeeper who took over had to try to stay afloat.

Not knowing about being an impresario, and not knowing about handling theater people, he got in Arthur Eddy, who was a person--I suppose you could call him a kind of impresario-agent--who went about getting talent from Hollywood for the plays. The only way that Mr. [Harold] Dyer, who was the bookkeeper, could see to bring attendance to the Playhouse was to have big names. He brought in names that were familiar to all of us, but he also paid them salaries that they never ever even heard of getting on Broadway, they were so huge. They were huge! As a matter of fact, they were all out of line for the Playhouse. He would pay some of them, a week, a sum that probably should have been the budget for the whole production for the week.

Well, of course, they did this time after time, and the productions kept getting more and more elaborate. The productions were not balancing themselves out. They were

running in the red, and in no time at all, they had gone through everything that had been saved in the bank accounts. Gradually, the Playhouse started down, down, down; and when you get into that little whirlpool you get taken down very quickly. Then the Playhouse board brought in everybody that they could think of. This Mr. Dyer left, after he and Mr. Eddy had had the sad experience with the Playhouse. They brought in David Crandell, and David tried for a year to do something, and that was a headache to David and to everybody. Then they brought in Ollie Prickett, and he probably told you how he attempted to run it for a year. He gained more respect for his brother in that short year than he could ever have gotten in all the other years, because he found out what a horrendous task it was to operate the Pasadena Playhouse. That's what everyone who's come in has found out. Then Albert McCleery came in. And Albert, who emulated Gilmor in every way, took the Playhouse down so fast--with its elaborate, elaborate productions that Albert always knew how to do. They were lovely productions, and they cost nothing but money--until it went down, down, down more. Until the first thing you know, the board of trustees was borrowing $500,000 from the Bank of America, and there it was. It's still in the hands of the Bank of America today.

GALM: You seem to speak [about the fact] that these

decisions of bringing in people and so forth were made by the bookkeeper. What was Gilmor's role at this point?

PRICKETT: I do not know. These were the people who brought them in, Mr. Arthur Eddy and Mr. Harold Dyer. As a matter of fact, it was Harold Dyer who asked me if I would come to play in one of the plays to help the Playhouse out, because it needed help. Of course, he wasn't paying me any fancy salary. He was paying me Equity minimum--which, as you know, is something like sixty-two dollars a week or something of that sort--and I was starring in the production. But I was doing it to help the Playhouse out. It was Harold Dyer who asked me to come. And Gilmor was there. He saw us, but he didn't have very much to do [with it] at all. We did have one of the assistant directors directing.

GALM: Did the board become active at this point?

PRICKETT: The board became very active, especially Mr. Wesley [I.] Dumm, the president at the time, who had made arrangements for the loan. Also, Mr. Dumm had contributed much of his own money to keep the place afloat, and he brought in his own bookkeeper and ran things pretty much himself for two years. Then they brought in Tom [Thomas] Browne Henry for a year's time, and Tom found out what a horrendous job that was to run the place. It was just this constant grasping for the last straw in every way. But Gilmor, as I say, was less and less and less active all

the time.

GALM: Were they losing their audience? Was that the reason that they brought in the Hollywood talent to the degree that they did?

PRICKETT: It must have been. You must realize that immediately after Charles's death, I was in such a state of shock, I was not paying that much attention to the Playhouse. Also, my career was keeping me so busy that I was in Hollywood every single week, so I really didn't have too much time to think about the Playhouse. And somehow or another, since I was working very hard in my own career after being so close to the Playhouse, I was suddenly very far away from it. It was partly because the board kept me far away from it, too. They didn't ask for my help. Had they asked me immediately for my help, I would have been able to tell them some of the plans that Charles had for the Playhouse that he thought were necessary to do, and what he had hoped to do. But no. When one man's out, they all know so well what to do to carry on! And many members of the board of trustees just <u>knew</u> they <u>knew</u> what to do, and it proved complete disaster.

GALM: What were some of these plans? You mentioned, of course, the Ford Foundation.

PRICKETT: Charles felt that the Playhouse very definitely needed to broaden its base. And he was very wise, because

you can see business, ten years later, having to broaden its base in every single business I can think of. He thought that in order to do that the school should be made larger; we should have it a four-year course rather than a two-year course as it was, with an optional third year. He felt very definitely that this should happen. He felt that the Playhouse should be the arm of a larger institution and be the arm of theater that did all the training for whatever institution it would be--a college or something of that sort. He felt that the whole base should just be broadened, so that the whole financial burden would not be falling on the small finances that the Playhouse was able to generate. And he was very wise, because as time's gone on, we can certainly see that that's exactly what should have happened, because it wasn't able to survive, at least the way it was later handled. I think that the best thing--I've mentioned this to you before and I'm sure you're going to do it--is to talk to Peggy Ebright, who was on the board from very shortly after the time that Charles died until the Playhouse died. She would be the one that would be able to tell you what these last years were about.

While Wesley Dumm was chairman of the board of trustees, they brought in [C.] Lowell Lees, as you know, from the University of Utah. He had a heart attack the minute he stepped across the threshold, and that should have been a great omen to him. [laughter] He should have left then.

But his assistant carried on for a year, and then he took over. And I don't know what he was thinking. I always thought that he was a good friend of the Playhouse, but he destroyed all of the previous records of the Playhouse. Records which had been lost before Dr. Lees's arrival, I had replaced from the duplicate copies that Charles had kept; then they were destroyed by Lowell Lees in his era. So that actually, much valuable information is just gone and lost--it's a shame. The board relieved him of his position before he finished out his contract. As I understand it, [they] paid him [for] the full time and tried to get going again. Oh, it's sad.

GALM: When did the alumni of the Playhouse school really become aware of the problems that the Playhouse was in?

PRICKETT: I think you have to go back and look at the organization of the alumni. Now, this was one of Charles's theses. He felt that an institution is strong when its alumni are strong, so he always wanted to have an alumni organization on the East Coast and one on the West Coast. He wanted to organize this while I was in school. As a matter of fact, he was organizing it while I was in school, which was in the late thirties--well, '38, '39, '40 [and] '41. Gilmor would never let him do this because Gilmor wanted to be the only one that went East to talk to the people back there, and Gilmor wanted just his contingent

that he had back there, who were the actors who had formerly been with the Playhouse--not necessarily students of the Playhouse, but the ones who had played at the Playhouse. So that was a lost cause, to try to organize those on the East Coast, because Gilmor made quite a fuss over all this.

Then Charles went about organizing a group of alumni out here on the West Coast. This was in the forties, now, that things were really getting rolling and getting under way. The alumni were organized here; there was much discussion about whether we would have just the ones who had graduated from the school, or whether we would have the ones who had played at the Playhouse, too--anybody who had played on the Playhouse stages. Well, it came down to the fact that we would have the Alumni and the Associates, they would be called, and this organization was started. They would meet once a year; we'd have a gathering of some kind at the Huntington [where] they'd hear news of what was going on at the Playhouse. We'd usually have a speaker, one that was particularly outstanding, and it was very interesting. We'd all get together there. There were four or five hundred that would meet. [tape recorder turned off]

Then at this time, in the late forties, early fifties, the Eastern group was formed. Finally, Charles worked it out with Gilmor that they would have this kind of meeting.

[They decided] that Charles would get it all set up from here; Gilmor would go back and meet with the Alumni and the Associates (the group that he had been meeting with), and they would have a gathering, at which time Gilmor would be the honoree. He would be the star, and he would give a report on what had gone on at the Playhouse during the past year. This Eastern group was well organized. Charles had them elect a chairman with whom he would correspond, and all of the information and arrangements were done from the Playhouse through this man who was the chairman. Well, this worked fine. Every year, Gilmor would go back East and have meetings with the Eastern group.

Gradually, the Western group got more and more organized. It was in the fifties, because in 1954, Jack Woodford, I remember, was the president, and then I was the following year. And gradually, this group out here had gotten larger and larger and more closely knit and more actively involved in the Playhouse activities--naturally, because of the proximity to the Playhouse.

The alumni always wanted to do a play on the Mainstage, and it seemed only logical that they ought to be able to do a play on the Mainstage. [telephone rings; tape recorder turned off] So the alumni had appealed and appealed and appealed to Gilmor, to let them have at least one week to do a play on the Mainstage of the Playhouse. Well, they

never were successful in doing that during the time that Gilmor was alive, because Gilmor somehow or another (as I told you) was not very school-oriented, and he did not have that much consideration for the alumni. So no time was ever allotted to the alumni to do a play, but later on, they did have a chance to act on the Playhouse stage. Peggy Ebright can tell you all about that, because she's very active with the alumni.

It seems as time's gone on, so few of the people who are actively engaged in the motion picture industry come to the Playhouse breakfasts which are still held once a year here. The Eastern group does not meet, but the Western group out here has met annually since it was organized--conventionally organized, with a chairman and a secretary and a treasurer and all. It has met every single year since the group was organized, but the people that seem to have more time to spend are the ones who are actively engaged in other than theater activities. There are some, however, in the industry. The president, Ross Eastty, is one of the unit managers at ABC [American Broadcasting Company] and a very outstanding unit manager for Merv Griffin. There are many of them that are in it, but the bulk are people who are not actively engaged in the industry. But they have always stayed very much interested in what they could do for the Playhouse. They are ready to go again, to help it if it could just get started once again. They

participate in a nonprofessional capacity in other community theater organizations around the area. So they really are a dedicated group to the Pasadena Playhouse.

GALM: When was fund raising a part of their activities?

PRICKETT: Of the alumni? You mean when they were trying to save the Playhouse in one of [the] cases when the IRS [Internal Revenue Service] closed the door and put the lock on it? Well, I do remember when Victor Jory and some of the people who had been associated with the Playhouse for many, many years came over, and I think they had a night where the audience paid so much money to come in. There again, Peggy Ebright could tell you more of the details.

GALM: Why wasn't fund raising from the alumni thought of immediately, as soon as an alumni group was established?

PRICKETT: Fund raising was. Charles Prickett hired three different fund-raisers to help the Playhouse in fund raising, and they were not able to raise a thing. Each one of them was so astounded that the alumni of the Playhouse and the associates primarily--the ones who are stars in Hollywood--would not give one dime to the furtherance of the Playhouse. And this just simply stopped the money-raisers. They tried to reason as to why it was that they couldn't get any money, and finally, the conclusion was the people in theater are just so egotistically-oriented that once they've made it, they are not very willing to give

monies to the organization that really made it possible for them to get to where they are. It's a strange piece of psychology, isn't it? Because people that graduate from a university contribute--I contribute to my university; my children are contributing to the universities from whence they graduated. But the people that came out of the Playhouse, once they had made it--with very, very few exceptions--gave no large sums and have never ever felt called upon to donate to the Playhouse to help other people along the way to have the same kind of success that they've had. Whether they're afraid of the competition or what it is, I don't know.

GALM: Gilmor, of course, did command a certain respect from his following. Was he not able to use this? Or did he never attempt to use this to obtain money?

PRICKETT: Oh, he was very hesitant to ever ask anybody for it. And monies that were given, he would have given to his Playbox--not to the Playhouse, but to the Playbox. This did happen in instances that I happen to know about.

GALM: Was this sort of a sore point with your husband, the Playbox?

PRICKETT: It wasn't a sore point. It was a responsibility for him. Gilmor never ever paid the directors to work at his Playbox. It was Charles who had to pay them--they were on the Playhouse staff--and it was a problem for Charles to

work this out. Here these directors were hired to do things at the Playhouse, and yet they were being used at the Playbox. Well, then, the only way you could get around that was to have students play at the Playbox. That's when I told you we were put over there as third-year students--in that "Black Hole of Calcutta" that we used to call it--where no agents, no scouts, nobody was allowed to come to see us play there. That's where we were put as our third-year project, until we were screaming to get out of there. It was experience, yes, for the first few times that we acted there, but not for a steady diet of it.

Charles's whole staff was participating in keeping the Playbox going, so the Playbox was a financial drain on the Playhouse when all of the revenues went directly to Gilmor. But Charles was very sympathetic in saying that Gilmor always had to have a hobby, and the hobby was his Playbox. I think I mentioned to you the plans [that] were made when the Los Angeles Times wanted to build a television building in the back of the Playhouse--on the now parking area. Charles also had designed--on the property that the Playhouse owned that he was able to buy with the monies from the GI bill (the property that went out to Green Street)--an area where Gilmor could have his Playbox, and it would all be attached to the Playhouse. The Playbox would run the way Gilmor had always had it; it was going to

be his plaything. You can see how kind Charles was in this: Gilmor was going to be able to have his plaything. Charles was providing for it, and the Playhouse was it for him. But Gilmor turned that down. He did not want it connected with the Playhouse. Gilmor never turned over any books or any methods of the way the Playbox was run, ever. I don't know that books were ever kept. The Playbox definitely was a drain on the budget of the Playhouse, and the Playhouse needed money!

GALM: Did the board resent Gilmor's involvement with the Playbox? Did they ever voice it?

PRICKETT: Well, I don't know. I never attended any of the board meetings, but I think they all thought in the vein that Charles presented it to them. Charles was the one that made all the presentations to the board of trustees. Charles was the secretary of the board; he took the minutes; he was the one that brought up all of the issues that had to be taken up before the board meetings. But as I understand it, whenever the Playbox was discussed, it was Gilmor's hobby--it was Gilmor's plaything--and I think [it was] just discussed as that. However, they were very willing for the Playhouse to build this plan that Charles had for the Playbox. But Gilmor didn't want that. And as I told you, the building costs went up so much that the Los Angeles Times felt they couldn't build the big building in the back, and Charles agreed with them so that the

building was never built. Those plans were filed for the future. But the Los Angeles Times gave the two-camera chain setup to the Playhouse and built the television studio within the Playhouse itself for the Playhouse.

GALM: The group Eighteen Actors, Incorporated--I know more or less the organization of it. That was made up of people who had been associated with the Playhouse.

PRICKETT: That's right.

GALM: It wasn't an alumni group, in a sense. It was a producing group?

PRICKETT: Yes, it was a producing group. It was made up of people like Vic Jory and his wife, Jean Inness; Charlie Lane and his wife, Ruth; and Morey Ankrum and his wife, Joan--the ones that had played at the Playhouse (that had been there before I came to the Playhouse), who were playing there in the early thirties. Most of them were actively employed in the motion picture business at the time, and they decided to form this producing group, their Eighteen Actors, Incorporated. They did plays at the Elks Lodge down here and were very successful. I must say that they drew away from the attendance at the Playhouse very much, because these are the ones that people were used to going to see on the Playhouse stage. They had quite a following in town, so now, the audiences were going to see them instead of going to the Playhouse. So for a while there--especially

when they were a new group--it did take away a great deal from the Playhouse. This bothered Charles no end.

GALM: Why did this group not feel that they could do the same thing within the structure of the Playhouse?

PRICKETT: I think mainly because they weren't getting that many parts on Mainstage.

GALM: This would be more because of Gilmor's. . . .

PRICKETT: Well, this had been partly Gilmor's decision, although these are Gilmor's friends--these are the ones that Gilmor has had acting. I think it also came at a time when they wanted to be creative on their own and see what they might do in a producing line. Every actor goes through that, I think, some time in his life, that he thinks that he'd like to try producing and being in a company of his own. So that they did. And they were all excellent actors and actresses, so these were marvelous productions. They really were.

GALM: And they did compete in some ways.

PRICKETT: Oh, indeed they competed. Of course, they played to a much smaller audience. I think the audiences were--oh, what did they have? Maybe 200 that they could seat in the various places that they played. I've forgotten where they started, but I know they played mostly at the Elks Lodge here. But then when you take 200 people away from a production at the Playhouse, which seats 854, you have quite

a lot of seats gone.

GALM: Do you know whether they ever approached Gilmor to say, "We have this group. Could we have the Playhouse for the week?"

PRICKETT: This I don't know. Now, if they had had the Playhouse for a week, they would have had to make arrangements through Charles. So they would come to talk with Charles about that for any arrangement of that sort. Not to my knowledge did they do this, no.

GALM: We're coming to an end of part of the discussion of the Playhouse and the school. Is there anything else? I would still like to talk further about your own career, but I think I'll change the tape. Do you have anything more [to say] about . . .

PRICKETT: . . . about the Playhouse? Well, when you mention things, you remind me of things which I haven't really thought about for some time. It's been so sad for me to see what's happened to the Playhouse when it was really Charles's bit of immortality, and to see it go-- I really do put up kind of a block in my mind, I think. But when you ask me questions, then these various eras of the Playhouse come back to me. You asked me the other day what role I played as the wife of the general manager. Outside of being his wife and doing the things that I naturally would do as his wife as hostess, I think of the festive times that. . . .

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE ONE

JULY 18, 1973

GALM: You were mentioning that in your role as wife of the general manager, one of the festive times was graduation?

PRICKETT: Yes. It was really such a happy, gay time, and the graduation ceremonies were always so attractive. Before the graduates came down the aisles of the auditorium of the Playhouse, a group of girls in Grecian chitons and carrying a chain of flowers would come down either aisle, and on the stage perform a bacchanalian dance, which was always most attractive and very dramatic. It just got you in the mood for what was coming in this kind of ethereal graduation situation. It really did take away from the academic part of it, I must say, but it was such a nice prelude to it. Then the dancers would take their positions in a Grecian frieze during the ceremonies. Then the board of trustees would come on stage--they'd have chairs to sit in, so they didn't have to stand--and then the graduates came down the aisles and would be seated in the first few rows of the auditorium. The parents and the guests would be at the back part of the auditorium. The diplomas would be given and the degrees presented, and then after that, we would have a reception in the patio of the Playhouse--which was a very festive affair. Then Charles and I usually

had a dinner for the graduates up at our house.

GALM: A sit-down dinner? [laughter]

PRICKETT: As a matter of fact, it was! The board of trustees would come, too, and it just was a gala time each year. Before the graduation day, we would always have a street dance in front of the Playhouse. Charles would make arrangements to have El Molino shut off from Colorado to Green Street, and we'd have street dancing on that whole block--right in front of the Playhouse. We'd have an orchestra--oh, it was just as festive as it could be! It really was different from a lot of graduations. But the more the Playhouse became academic and going up in the academic world, some people thought that this was not the right way to do this kind of a ceremony. They seemed to think that it was a little pagan. Well, I must say, if it was, it was beautifully pagan. Then the dancing was stopped, and it became just a regular, ordinary graduation--in a smaller vein, though, than UCLA or USC, I'm happy to say. But it lacked that feeling of a theater graduation, which it always was when I first came to the Playhouse. I loved all of the great festivity that we had.

GALM: Did they have a graduation speaker?

PRICKETT: Yes, we had a graduation speaker each year. One that stands out particularly in my mind is Louis Calhern. We'd have people of that caliber. He said to

the graduates that year--maybe I mentioned this before--that he thought that they ought to count their blessings to think that they had had the opportunity to learn the trade that we all were in, in the theater, in such a beautiful atmosphere of such taste, whereas he had to learn it by hard knocks in the days of stock. I'll always remember that, because we did need to count our blessings. We did have an opportunity to learn the techniques of the trade in a beautifully designed atmosphere with wonderful teachers and facilities.

GALM: Whose idea was it to confer honorary degrees?

PRICKETT: Charles's. He felt that the honorary degrees, just like every university confers honorary degrees, should be given in the field of theater for those that were particularly outstanding and for those who had had connections with the Playhouse before it was granted the right to give the degrees.

GALM: How was the school governed? In other words, you say that this decision was Charles's. Did the board of trustees also govern the school?

PRICKETT: No--well, it did to the degree that it governed the whole Pasadena Playhouse operation, per se. Charles was the one that ran the Playhouse and ran the school. Now, under Charles at the school was the dean of the school. There was a dean of men, a dean of women, a dean of admissions, a person who had charge of membership (this had not

to do with the school, but I was thinking of the offices on the second floor), a dean of students. As far as the academic setup, those are the ones; and those people were all responsible to Charles Prickett. So that Charles was actually the president of the university, and these people. . . .

GALM: He was the chancellor.

PRICKETT: Yes, the chancellor.

GALM: Did he have a working title for this, as head of the school?

PRICKETT: Well, Charles was executive vice-president of the Pasadena Playhouse and, as such, was also head of the school.

GALM: But there was no special title.

PRICKETT: No, he didn't have a title. This seemed to cause friction with Gilmor, so he had no title for the school.

GALM: I see. Now, during this time [that] you were acting, you said you were in perhaps three or four productions a year at the Playhouse. That was from about 1944 on?

PRICKETT: Yes.

GALM: Then at what point did you really become more active in the industry?

PRICKETT: From doing three and four productions a year!

When I came back from touring in Suds in Your Eye, that was in 1945. Then I started with Smiley Burnette and Charley Starrett, and I worked with them practically every week. So that I was busy during the day when we were shooting those episodes. There were many months when I was rehearsing a play at night and also working during the day in a picture. So as time went on, I would say that I didn't have a chance to do that many plays a year at the Playhouse--except maybe in the summer, when we were on hiatus--because from '49 through '50, I was not very busy in plays because I had a baby in 1949, and another one in 1950. I remember I went to work two weeks after Charie [Doyle Prickett] was born, in No Sad Songs for Me, with Maureen Stapleton. (Maureen Stapleton? Yes. She played. . . . Was that her name, Maureen Stapleton? Well, No Sad Songs for Me, at any rate.) I remember it was two weeks after Charie's arrival, so I was pretty busy from then on. I was just going all the time.

You know, when your career is zooming--and you can see it with the stars today: when they're a hot product, you have to keep going, because that's the way you stay going. You see the ones today--the hot commodities are the ones going from one picture to another picture to another TV show and so forth, and that's the way I was. During the fifties and after Charles died, my career just

took off like it was going out of style, and I was busy all the time. Of course, we had the television programs that we were doing live, and they were beginning to put them on film. So I was just going from one of those to another, which was a terribly exciting time, really. And we were doing such marvelous plays for TV.

GALM: What makes for a "hot commodity"? [laughter]

PRICKETT: Well, that's a good question. As Bing Crosby always says, "It's being at the right place at the right time." [laughter]

GALM: Yes, especially as a character actress, though.

PRICKETT: Well, I think that you are identified as a certain type, and I certainly have been such. And yet, I'm recognized most now, I'm happy to say, not by the type that I have been playing always. I think that most people recognize me as Rosie in the "Hazel" series, and that is a character that is more like me than any of the other characters that I play--these prim old maids or severe old women or something of that sort. But you are typed, and the minute you start with a studio playing this type--if they like you and the casting director remembers you and knows you and got good reports about you --then the very next time that that kind of a part comes up, he thinks of you immediately. That's the way it goes, and that's the way it did with Columbia [Pictures Corporation].

I started at Columbia and I have worked, as you can see from my records, more at Columbia than any other place. I think I gave you records just up through the middle fifties or something of the sort; and of course since then, three-fourths of my credits are on this side of the date. [Walt] Disney [Studios], for example, is one that sort of has a stock company of actors. If you've once worked there and they like you, they call you back time after time after time. Of course, that's one reason I'm anxious to go back now: because I love this studio, and the whole atmosphere of working there is such a pleasant one.

You know, I'm finding that since I've come back into the business, after not really being as active as I had been after I married Barney [C. Bernard] Cooper in 1966, the industry is terrifically changed. I did not do the number of pictures and TV shows that I usually did during a year, because I was doing the city things with him, while he was mayor of Pasadena and on the city board. In the first place, now you don't have to be the type that you've been cast as always. As a matter of fact, you just have to look like what the man who's casting thinks he wants to see. You don't have to have any training to speak of; you just have to be the person that they have in mind. As my commercial agent says, "It's just a 'slice of life' era." Just a slice of life. "That's why there are

no training schools in theater," he says, "because they don't want trained people. They just want you to act natural, just be that person, just be what you look like." It's not very challenging to a character actress, you know. It's fun to rather be yourself every now and then, but the challenge is in character acting. Where I've found great satisfaction in it is to be a different person each time. Of course, I must say, now that I've passed forty, I don't like to play the old homely, ugly-looking, slovenly ones the way I did before I was forty. [laughter] It was okay then, but now that I've passed forty, I like to play the nicer parts.

GALM: Do you find it more difficult to play yourself than to play the characters?

PRICKETT: Oh, yes! My goodness, yes. You can hide behind any character, you know. And I think that's why many, many of the name actresses and actors that we have find it very difficult to stand up and speak and be themselves. I think you notice it in the Academy Awards. Some of them present themselves very poorly, really. It's because they have this great fear of standing up before an audience and being themselves. But if they're playing some kind of a character in a film, they're simply magnificent--because they're not themselves; they're somebody else.

GALM: Was your longest involvement with a particular

series the character of Rosie in "Hazel"?

PRICKETT: Yes, and also the secretary of Jack Benny.

GALM: Now, the secretary to Jack Benny preceded the "Hazel" series?

PRICKETT: No, I think the "Hazel" came first. I started both of them in 1960, and they went the same five years. In fact, I was being juggled back and forth from the "Hazel" to the "Jack Benny [Program]."

GALM: Was this just a natural outgrowth of other work that you had done for Columbia?

PRICKETT: Well, yes, I think so. It's a case of working for a director and having him remember you, too, which is a change in the business that I see now, too, which I'll come back to. I had worked with Bill Russell, the director, and with Jim Fonda, the producer, in "Father Knows Best" with Bob [Robert] Young. And after they had finished that series, Bill Russell was to direct the "Hazel" series, and Jim Fonda was to produce. So I went on an interview for the part of Rosie, and they chose me. Of course, I had worked with them before. But that's how that started.

Then Shirley [Booth] and I worked very well together, so Rosie kept coming into more and more and more [of] the episodes. Rosie was in nine out of thirteen of the episodes in the beginning, because if you remember the series, the emphasis, first of all, was on the maids. And

then gradually the maids were rather phased out, and toward the end of the run, Mr. Baxter and Shirley were the two that were constantly opposing one another--which, of course, was the basis of the "Hazel" series. But the humor of it all was the maids together and the maids working on their respective employers.

My part with Jack Benny, I went on an interview to meet the director. I don't believe Freddie de Cordova was directing in the beginning. I've forgotten who directed the first of the Jack Benny shows. But I went over because "Rochester" had had a stroke, and Eddie [Anderson] was not very well and was not able to come back and be in the episodes with Jack. They needed somebody for Jack to play against, to beat him down and downgrade him the way Rochester always did, so they decided they'd put in a secretary. That was why I was called in for the interview. When Jack met me, he said, "That's it. She's the secretary." So that's how I started in as Jack's secretary.

We had great rapport, just great rapport. I enjoy working with Jack immensely. He's such a perfectionist, you know. He learns every line verbatim, and he insists that everybody else learns every line verbatim. I had done one episode with him when he was doing the show live at CBS a number of years before, when Rochester also was in it, and I was playing a busybody of the town. And I can

remember Jack just insisting that every single one of us be there ahead of time, and every single one of us learn if, the, and, and but, and not change one word, because he had the best writers in the business, and he paid them a great salary, and we couldn't improve on their words. "So don't try to!" That's what he believed, and we all did.

That's one reason he's lasted so long, you know. He never ad-libs. As he says, he's the worst ad-libber going, and he really is. His technique is ad-libbing, but he has memorized everything he says. I notice now, however, when he guest spots, he does say a few things that I'm sure are not written in the script. But never when he was doing his own shows. Never.

GALM: So it was just a matter of fantastic timing?

PRICKETT: His timing? Oh, it's fantastic, just fantastic! It's what he's built his whole career on, you know, and he's just a master at it and a delight to work with. I just adore him.

GALM: Do you remember any specific episodes that you had in working on that series?

PRICKETT: Yes, I remember the one of the lion. Didn't I tell you about the lion?

GALM: Oh, yes. But that was over lunch.

PRICKETT: Oh, was that over lunch? Oh, yes. We always had something that we laughed ourselves silly over, but

this one of the lion. . . . You know, Jack was always renting out rooms in his house in the show, and so he always had his secretary over there helping him. In this particular episode, the secretary was helping him rent the room. This one man called to rent the room, and he said that he had a pet; did that matter? And Jack said, oh, no, he wouldn't mind if he had a pet. So the man showed up at the door with his pet, and his pet turned out to be this huge mountain lion.

Of course, we had to stage this thing so that if the lion went berserk or didn't act quite the way he should when the audience was there for taping, all of us would be in a fairly safe getaway place. Well, it was written and blocked so that I would hide under a card table that was in the room. The lion made his first entrance with the actor, and when he came into the room, he just made a beeline toward the davenport and card table, and headed right toward me. Of course, all the floor managers and everybody were rushing to get me out of there, because there I was, all bent over under a card table with my posterior facing the lion. I think he thought, "That's the best meal I've seen yet." [laughter] They stopped him. The trainer came in and got him, and they decided right then and there that that really wasn't the best place for me to be. So they said, "Let's run through this thing now with this lion and

and see what he's going to do." Well, he was so strong that the poor actor couldn't handle him at all.

Apparently, the lion was used to sleeping on the davenport at the trainer's house. He lived right in the room with them, ate with them, and everything. When he saw the davenport, he just climbed on it and filled the entire thing, which was hysterical. The director decided then that in the course of events, I probably would have to end up on the mantle of the fireplace, which they thought would be hysterical, anyway. Well, that mantle was never built for anybody to climb up on it, let alone me. It was just about six inches wide. They decided that it was a major job to rebuild it, so the technical men would have to get me up there and have me hang there somehow. They decided that what they would do: When the animal wasn't acting very well, they would cut the film and shoot the animal coming in, and then they would show me up on the mantle, which they did. But it was so hysterical, with my trying to balance on the mantle, that they decided when the audience was there, they would have to show the audience this. Because it took two men and a boy to get me up there on the ladder anyway, they shot the picture with the animal before the audience came into the studio. They did, however, have the animal make his entrance for the audience. That was as far as they let him go.

The night that they shot it, when the audience was there, the animal apparently was [so] excited hearing the voices around that as the actor grabbed hold of the leash to bring him in, the lion turned around and bit him from his elbow on down, tearing his coat and his shirt and everything--which held up shooting for quite a little while while they got another coat and tried to match and the whole thing to continue with the shooting of it. They then showed me up on the mantle saying, "Now, this is what happens in between. The lion comes in, and then this happens and this happens and this happens, and then you will see her up on the mantle."

It was really quite a frightening thing, and the poor actor with the lion was so frightened from then on that we could hardly continue with the shooting. Fortunately, he didn't break very much of the skin. The beast's teeth went through the clothing mostly, so we could carry on. But Jack said, "I always said that it was terrible acting with animals and children." [laughter] And this is for sure. But we always had fun times with every episode that we ever did. He had a cute one one time, when we had Kirk Douglas's wife and Groucho Marx's wife and Milton Berle's wife and--I guess there was one more because it was a bridge game. It was fun meeting these people, and also acting with them.

GALM: You mentioned that professionalism was certainly a quality that he believed in.

PRICKETT: Through and through.

GALM: Did this carry over into the "Hazel" production, too?

PRICKETT: Oh, very much so. Shirley Booth, of course, is such a perfectionist and a professional woman through and through. And Bill Russell is one of the best directors I've ever had the opportunity of working with in the business. And we had such a well-trained cast that shooting really went very, very quickly. Don DeFore is a well-trained actor--incidentally, a graduate of the Playhouse--and Whitney Blake. Of course, all of the maids were character women in the business and had been in the business for a long time. And little Bobby Buntrock, [who] played the little boy, was just excellent. He innately has a great sense of theater, plus the fact that he was a very well disciplined child--thanks to his mother, who was there and saw that he was doing what he should do all the time--and he took direction very well. So our shooting there went very, very rapidly. "Hazel" was put on film, whereas Jack Benny's was shot with three cameras before a live audience. It was fun for me to go from one to the other, because it's a different kind of technique completely.

GALM: The scheduling was such that you could handle [the] two?

PRICKETT: Yes--well, they would have to sometimes change what they were going to shoot for me to make it for both of them. Or sometimes in a week I'd work three days in the "Hazel" series and then--no, no, I'd have to do more than that, because I was always a week on the Benny show. We always had to rehearse that for a week. Occasionally I would come in the last two days of rehearsal, but Jack doesn't like that. He wants you there from the very beginning to rehearse. There were a couple of times where my schedule did overlap, and I did have to do that.

GALM: Did you then eventually leave the theater entirely and just work in television and movies?

PRICKETT: Well, during that time--let's see, 1960 to '65--I didn't do a single play. I couldn't then; I was just too busy. Did I? Wait a minute here--'65. . . . It seems to me I did one play in there someplace. Oh! I think when we were on hiatus--yes, it must have been in the spring of the year, let's see, '64--I think that's when I did A Night with the President at the Playhouse, when they were struggling so. That's the time when they asked if I wouldn't come back and help them out. No, that was before that. Was it then? No. No, that was in the fifties when I went back to do A Night with the President, when Harold Dyer asked me. And then in 1964, it seems to me I did a play then.

GALM: A Night with the President was in '58.

PRICKETT: Fifty-eight, was it? Yes. It seems to me I did some play, then, in the early 1960s. It was The Girls in 509 at the Playhouse with Madge Blake. I didn't go back to act with the Actors' Company, nor did I have a chance to do anything else on the stage because I was doing mainly television. Occasionally I'd do a picture, but I was just going from one TV program to another. And then, after the Jack Benny series and the "Hazel" series were over, I was on into something else. So that I really haven't had any time to do any plays. And then in '66, Barney and I were married, and [since] then I've really been busy, citywise. I barely found time to say "yes" to some of these things that I'd really love to do.

You must realize that I have always rather played with my career. I've been primarily a wife and a mother, and this has always taken the first place. It's taken preference over everything else, and if my career has worked in, then I have done it. I think I have been fortunate in having the best of both worlds, really, but I have really been family-oriented first. With everything that's happened to me in life, it's always been wonderful that I have had my career to go back to and that it always has blossomed whenever I've had a tragedy in my life. So it's been wonderful.

I was going to tell you, going back--and I say "going

back" when I mean going back to do more TV work, which I hope to do now--that I find that the casting directors that I used to know are no longer there, with very few exceptions. Martin Schnall is still at Disney, but the ones that I used to know at all the studios have either retired or gone; they're not there. Also, the directors that I knew have gone--have either passed away or have retired or are no longer in the business--and the producers, the same thing. So what I find is really a whole new ball game. I mentioned this to some of the actresses that I've worked with for years and years. I said, "It just seems like a new world to me, like I'm a new girl in town." And they say, "Join the club! And we've been at it all the time." It's just a complete change in the industry. Youth has come in and taken over, and the ones that were with us twenty, thirty years ago aren't there now.

GALM: So you're suffering from the generation gap?

PRICKETT: It seems to me I am. And I thought I was one that never suffered from that. [laughter]

GALM: Is it only to your disadvantage, then?

PRICKETT: It's to my disadvantage, very much so. Somebody said to me the other day, "You know, she looks like a young Rennie Riano." Well, of course Rennie and I were up for parts all the time. If they wanted a younger one, I got it; and if they wanted an older one, she got it.

That's kind of like, "He's a young W.C. Fields," or something like that. It's just the old, old ones they seem to identify with; and my era, it's just they don't seem to know me.

The thing that really appeals to the young ones is the fact that I have the name Maudie Prickett. They all kind of smile and they say, "Maudie Prickett? Is that your real name?" I said, "It certainly is, and I've had it for a long time." And they said, "Well, what about this thing with Jonathan Winters?" And I said, "Yeah, what about this thing? I've had that [name] a lot longer than Jonathan has been doing Maude Frickert." But the similarity is so close that you wonder. The funny thing is, when they introduced me to Jonathan Winters--whom I had never met--a couple or three years ago, he acted so funny when he met me. He was so sheepish and so shy and I could hardly believe it! He was hard to talk to. [laughter] I don't know whether he knew I was the original or what, but it was just very. . . . He was just so shy. He was on the set where I was working, and they called me on camera, and I didn't have a chance to say more than four or five sentences to him.

GALM: Do you think that his character's name was definitely based on your name?

PRICKETT: Well, if it wasn't, it's [such] a very close

resemblance to it that I begin to wonder. Maudie Prickett is rather a different sounding name, I must admit. When I started into pictures, they thought it was much better for me than Maudie Doyle--which was my maiden name, which I was using--because I played the more brittle type of character. So I just used my married name then, Maudie Prickett. That's how I happened to have it.

When Jonathan first started doing his Maude Frickert for the public, my agent said, "You know, Jonathan Winters is doing a Maude Frickert that sounds just like Maudie Prickett," and I said, "Yes, I know." He said, "We have two options: we can sue him, or we can ride along on the publicity." And I said, "Well, it just seems to me that rather than make a big deal of it, the publicity might be very good." Whether it has been or not, I don't know, but that is what the young ones now--and I'm talking about the young ones in the twenties that are casting and that are directing--that's what makes their eyes twinkle when they hear "Maudie Prickett."

GALM: There definitely is a young generation. Now, when you started, in the forties, were the people that you were working with also a young generation?

PRICKETT: No, they weren't. I was young then, and they were middle-aged. That's why they're gone now, you see. There were very, very few young casting directors, and very few

young directors. I worked with George [D.] Cukor then, and George must not have been as old as I thought he was then. But they were more George's age, and of course George isn't that young now. They were of that age bracket. I don't ever remember people coming into the business in as high positions as young as they are now, and all, in the forties. They worked for longer times. They did have more picture opportunities, because more pictures were being shot at that time. They came in as third assistants and second assistants, and then became first assistants, and then they became directors. This took a long period of years. Now, here are these twenty-seven and twenty-eight year olds directing and producing in Hollywood.

I was over at MGM [Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer] not so long ago, and a handsome, young, six-feet-nine man interviewed me who had graduated from Harvard med school and decided that wasn't for him. He had written a play, and he was going to direct it. He must have been twenty-nine or thirty. Well, this is young, coming into our business. I don't know what training he's had, in order to be able to direct, but [there] must be some training process. Even though you'd gone to a school of the theater, you always came into the business as a third assistant or an apprentice. You watched, and you observed. You had your assignment of getting the cast and calling them on stage and seeing that

they were at the spot where they were supposed to be. Second assistant followed that up, [who] took care of the records and all details. The first assistant was the assistant to the director. It was a long process to get there.

GALM: Do you see a tremendous difference in the eventual product?

PRICKETT: I see a great difference in the way the ones I've worked with don't know how to direct. It's unbelievable. The other day, I went over to do a commercial. My call was one-thirty. I appeared at about one-twenty, and as I walked onto the stage, some man said, "Lunchtime! Grab a box lunch, come back in an hour." I said, "I've already had lunch." And he said, "Well, get another one." All the rest of the actors who were called for the commercial were there, too, [and] they'd had the same thing said to them. "The makeup man is eating his lunch, and he's not about to start making you up for an hour." So we all sat around and chatted in the makeup room, and at two-thirty, the makeup man started to make me up. He's a makeup man that I've known for years. We laughed, and he gave me the greatest glamour makeup you've ever seen. He worked on me for about an hour and fifteen minutes, and he had two other girls and a man to make up. So finally, he got makeup on them.

At four o'clock, the director and the producer and

the light man came in from someplace--I don't know where they'd been--and the light man fixed a few lights on the set that was already set up. The director got behind the camera--he was also the cameraman. I said, "What is the script? I don't have any script. I don't know what the lines are or anything." "Oh," he said, "there are no lines. No lines. We really don't know what we're going to do here, but we're going to try this four or five different ways. So he said, "Now, why don't you start over there and come in here. And why don't you two girls just stand over there on that side and be looking at those pictures." We're supposed to be in a modern art museum and we're doing a commercial for a restaurant. So we tried that, and he said again to the actor, "All right, now you see the two girls, and then you look surprised, and then you go off." Which we did, and they shot that. He said, "Well, fine, that looks all right. Now let's try it this way." We did it three or four different ways, from four o'clock until quarter of five, and then I'm on the freeway on my way home. Every other commercial I have ever worked in, we have spent a half a day doing it. It has been so professionally done; it has been rehearsed; it has been all worked out, all of us knew exactly what we were doing and where we were going. But I guess this is the new technique and the slice of life. You just do your thing, and they

shoot it.

GALM: And you take your money and run. [laughter]

PRICKETT: Take your money and run--and just hope that they show it many, many times, so you get more money coming in the mail. But it's a different kind of technique completely. I can see almost now the general tendency of the old pendulum swinging back to more of a trained background, because in the first place, it takes too long to get these untrained actors--if you have a good director--to do the professional thing that the director is willing to settle for and say, "This is my picture." I saw it happen to a degree in a picture I worked on before I did this commercial, and the good directors just aren't going to put up with this very long.

In this one picture that I worked in a year ago, [I worked] with darling Herb Wallerstein, whom I just love. He was the first assistant on the "Hazel" series, and he's now one of the big directors in Hollywood. He was directing this one particular show--I won't mention the name of it. He had a lot of young college boys in it, and with the exception of one of them, they were just really very, very bad. I mean poor actors. I had offstage lines while they were shooting the various vignettes of them--they already had photographed my close-ups--so they were doing theirs. We went over this and over this until I thought

I was going to lose my voice, because I was yelling at them. And I finally said to Herb, "My heavens! Why are you working with people like this?" He said, "Believe it or not, these are the best in the whole bunch that were sent out." It's just that we don't have that many trained young actors anymore.

GALM: So perhaps someday there will be a place for the Playhouse school. . . .

PRICKETT: That's it, and a place for--well, UCLA will blossom even more, and all of these other schools that hopefully will be founded or will be rejuvenated and will be a training ground for people of the theater. You have to learn in theater by doing, and that's the only way you can possibly learn it. Unless you have training, you just. . . . And I don't know of any exceptions outside of people that studios have found at Schwab's drugstore. And they had to train them--you don't have good actors. They picked up Kim Novak there, or wherever she was picked up, and she went through the whole training school of the studio that first hired her. She was trained and trained; she had a chance to do the greatest parts over and over. She got leads, and she's good now. Well, you can't help but improve with the best directors in the business and the best training in the business--you turn out to be a good actress or a good actor. But without that, the results

are not too good. I believe in trained actors. I think some people are born with a great ability along this line, but I do think that training and the perfection of techniques and the knowing of what you're doing does nothing but help to make a better production and a better image of you. I thoroughly believe in it, and if I sound terribly academic, I am. [laughter]

INDEX

Actors' Company, La Jolla, 109-111
Actors' Equity Association, 73-77, 79-80, 84, 85, 138
Adams, Maude, 97, 98
Albertson, Mabel, 83
Albritton, Louise, 60, 94
Ameche, Don, 14
American Academy of Dramatic Arts, New York, 22, 103
American Broadcasting Company, 144
American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, 75
American Shakespeare Festival Theatre, Stratford, Connecticut, 128-129
Ames, Leon, 110
Anderson, Eddie "Rochester," 161
Anderson, John Murray, 4
Anderson, Maxwell, 130
Andrews, Dana, 83
Ankrum, Joan, 149
Ankrum, Morris, 75, 149
Anoakia School for Girls, Arcadia, California, 54
Arms, Russell, 60, 94

Bank of America, 137
Barr, Byron. See Young, Gig
Barrie, James M., 55
Benny, Jack, 109, 160, 161-166, 168
Bergen, Edgar, 98-99, 104
Berle, Ruth (Mrs. Milton), 165
Biltmore Theatre, Los Angeles, 80
Blackstone Theatre, Chicago, 114-115
Blake, Madge, 168
Blake, Whitney, 166
Blue Bird, The, 3
Booth, Shirley, 160, 166
Broadway Department Store, Pasadena, 60
Broadway Theatre, Denver, 3, 7
Brooklyn College, 14
Brown, Gilmor, 11, 35-52 passim, 69, 72, 74, 77, 78, 79, 86-93, 97, 120, 121-125, 134, 137-151 passim, 155
Buntrock, Bobby, 166
Burnette, Smiley, 107, 117, 156
Burr, Raymond, 93

Calhern, Louis, 97, 101, 153
California Institution for Men, Chino, 131-132
California State University, Fullerton, 28
Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines, 56, 79
Carlson, Devon, 17
Citrus College, 131
Civic Theatre of Denver, 11-12, 15, 50
Clark, Churchill, 121
Coleman Chamber Concerts, 78, 118
Columbia Broadcasting System, 99, 161
Columbia Pictures Corporation, 104-108, 115, 117-118, 157-158, 160
Comedy of Errors, A, 56

Cooper, C. Bernard, 158, 168
Cordova, Freddie de, 161
Cotten, Joseph, 111
Crandell, David, 137
Cukor, George D., 172

Deep Are the Roots, 115
DeFore, Don, 166
Dembling, Gus, 104-105, 113
Denham Theatre, Denver, 7
Douglas, Anne (Mrs. Kirk), 165
Doyle, Maude Carroll, 1-13 passim, 18, 21, 23
Doyle, Thomas James, 1, 2, 5, 10, 11, 12, 15, 18, 21, 23
Dumm, Wesley I., 138, 140
Durango Kid, 107-108, 117-118
Dyer, Harold, 135-137, 138, 167

Eastty, Ross, 144
Ebright, Peggy, 140, 144, 145
Eddy, Arthur, 136, 137, 138
Eighteen Actors, Incorporated, 73-74, 76, 149-151
El Capitan Theatre, Los Angeles, 80
Eldridge, Florence, 4
Elitch Gardens, Denver, 4
Elks Club, 73, 150
Evans, June, 112
Everyman, 88-89

"Father Knows Best," 160
Ferguson, Frank, 46, 100
Ferrer, Mel, 111
Fields, W. C., 170
First Trust and Savings Bank, 66, 68
Fitch, Clyde, 56
Fletcher, Scott, 128
Fonda, Jim, 160
Ford Foundation, 127-129, 134, 139
For Love or Money, 109-110
Foy, Eddie, Jr., 106
Freud, Ralph, 46, 132

GI Bill, 147
Girls in 509, The, 168
Godfrey, George, 105
Gowdy, Curt, 17
Great Western Sugar Company, 1
Gressley, Gene, 17
Griffin, Merv, 144

Hart, Shaffner & Marx, 20
Hassel, Bea, 78
Hayes, Helen, 97, 128
"Hazel," 157, 160-161, 166-167, 168, 175
Hebard, Grace, 19
Henry, Thomas Browne, 138
Hester, Harriet, 115-117
Hile, Frederick, 12-13, 53
Holm, Celeste, 83
Huntington Hartford Theatre, Los Angeles, 81, 142
Huxley, Frederic Carl, 30, 35, 45, 74, 76

Importance of Being Earnest, The, 16, 57
Inness, Jean, 3, 149
Inkster, Helen, 16

"Jack Benny Program,", 160, 161-167, 168
Jenny Kissed Me, 131
Jewell, Isabel, 17
Jones, Betsy, 60
Jones, Jennifer, 111
Jones, Margo, 97
Jory, Victor, 3, 73-74, 75, 145, 149

KHJ (Los Angeles television station), 108-109, 115
KLZ (Denver radio station), 99

Knight, Sam, 19
KOA (Denver radio station), 99
KTTV (Los Angeles television station), 69-70, 91, 108-109

Lamont School of Music, 12-13
Lane, Charles, 75, 149
Lane, Ruth, 149
Lane, William, 3
Late Christopher Bean, The, 104
Lee, Robert, 100
Lees, C. Lowell, 140-141
Lockhart, June, 110
Los Angeles Times, 69-70, 91, 108-109, 146, 148

McCleery, Albert, 137
McClure, Louis, 112, 115
Macgowan, Kenneth, 132
Mack, Millie, 112
Majestic Theatre, Chicago, 114-115
Mallory, Louis, 14, 17, 53, 57
March, Frederic, 4
Marx, Catharine (Mrs. Groucho), 165
Maryland Hotel, Pasadena, 60
Mature, Victor, 93
Mayan Theatre, Los Angeles, 80
Merriam, Ralph, 132
Messer, Earl S., 37
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 172
Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch, 68
Moonlight Rollerway Skating Rink, Pasadena, 61
Morning's at Seven, 55, 56

National Broadcasting Company, 99
Night with the President, A, 167
No Sad Songs for Me, 156
Novak, Kim, 176

Oliver, Edna May, 98
Ong, Eugenia, 28, 58-59
"Our Miss Brooks," 94
Our Town, 55

Palmer, Bob, 105, 106
Pantages Theatre, Los Angeles, 8
Parker, Dorothy, 98
Parker, Eleanor, 94
Pasadena Playhouse, 14, 16, 18, 19, 22, 24-103, 108,109, 111, 112, 118-156, 167-168
-Alumni Association, 141-146
-Associates, 142-146
-Board, 120-121, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 148, 152-153, 154

-Green Room, 119
-Laboratory Theatre, 35, 36, 91-92
-Mainstage, 33, 36, 37-38, 40, 43, 47, 55, 78, 83, 86, 87, 88, 93, 101, 131, 135, 143, 150

Pasadena Playhouse (continued)
-Midsummer Drama Festivals, 55, 56
-Padua Hills productions, 60-61
-Santa Monica stock company, 62-63, 127
-School of Theatre (College of Theatre Arts), 16, 18, 19, 22, 24-48, 52-58, 59-61, 70-90, 93-103, 126-132, 135, 139, 146, 151-155, 166, 176
-Senior Theatre, 35
Peck, Gregory, 110, 111
Petrof, Boris, 4
Petrof, Victor, 4
Phelps, George, 46
Phi Beta Kappa, 2
Philharmonic Auditorium, Los Angeles, 80
Playbox, 43, 50, 86-92, 94, 146-149
Preston, Robert, 83, 93
Prickett, Charie Doyle, 5, 21, 156
Prickett, Charles, 22, 24, 30, 35-47 passim, 58-79 passim, 87, 90, 91, 103, 104-105, 109, 110, 118-155 passim
Prickett, Charles F., III, 5, 21
Prickett, Oliver B., 42-43, 47, 62, 65, 66, 67, 74, 108, 113, 119, 122, 131-137
Prickett, Ruth, 64, 66

Quality Street, 55, 56
Queen's Husband, The, 16, 58

Riano, Rennie, 169-170
Richert, Jeanne, 87, 90, 93
Rivals, The, 12
Robinson, Bill, 9
Rockwell, Robert, 60, 94
Rush, Barbara, 94
Russell, Bill, 160, 166

St. Andrew's school, Pasadena, 54
Saroyan, William, 97, 98, 101
Schnall, Martin, 169
Scholes, Maxwell, 46, 100
School for Scandal, The, 16, 57
Screen Actors' Guild, 75
Scudder, Kenyon, 132
Scudder, Rebekah (Mrs. Kenyon), 132
Shakespeare, William, 7, 8, 52, 53, 101, 128-129
Shanewise, Lenore, 45, 112-113
Shubert family, 114
Siedner, Irene, 112
Sinclair, Walter, 11, 50
Skelton, Red, 109
South Denver High School, 1
Stapleton, Maureen, 156
Starrett, Charles, 107, 156
Stechan, H. O. 68-69
Suds in Your Eye, 111-115, 131, 156

"Tea with Harriet Hester," 115-117
Theatre Guild, 121
Torchbearers, The, 16, 57

U.S. Internal Revenue Service, 145
Universal Studios, 94
University of Arizona, 28

University of California, Los Angeles, 15, 46, 100, 131, 132-133, 153, 176
University of Colorado, 10-11, 12, 13
University of Denver, 1-2, 10-12, 15, 22
University of Southern California, 15, 46, 65, 131, 132-133, 153
University of Utah, 28, 140
University of Wisconsin, 14
University of Wyoming, 2, 9, 13-14, 15, 16-20, 57, 108
-Branding Iron (newspaper), 19
Urmy, Ralph, 46, 100

Vajda, Barbara, 100-101
Vajda, Ernst (Erno), 100
Vallee, Rudy, 131

Walker, Stuart, 46, 100
Walkup, Fairfax P., 25, 27-29, 41, 45-46, 59
-Dressing the Part, 27
Wallerstein, Herb, 175
Walt Disney Studios, 158, 169
Warner Brothers, 94
What Every Woman Knows, 56
White, Jules, 106-107
Williams, Frayne, 52, 53, 101
Williams, Tennessee, 97-98, 101
Winters, Jonathan ("Maude Frickert"), 170-171
Women, The, 79
Woodford, Jack Sheridan, 16, 19, 20, 23, 143

Young, Gig, 83, 93
Young, Robert, 160
"Your Hit Parade," 94