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PASADENA, THE PRICKETTS, AND THEIR PLAYHOUSE

OLIVER PRICKETT

Interviewed by Bernard Galm

Completed under the auspices
of the
Oral History Program
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INTRODUCTION

Ask anyone associated with the world-famous Pasadena Playhouse, and they will say, "Don't ask me, ask Ollie Prickett about it. Ask Mr. Playhouse himself." No one has had such a long, active, intimate association with the theater and theater school as he. It started when he was a child.

The Pricketts arrived in Pasadena in 1905, when Ollie was six months old. They bought a large property, complete with orchard and barn, and Ollie's older brother, Charles, at age twelve, created an amusement park there: a roller-coaster off the barn, a streetcar that ran on its own tracks around the park, and, best of all, a theater. Here the boys began what would become for both a lifetime in the theater when Charles directed Ollie and his friends in various productions, charging the audience "pins or pennies" for admission.

Their little theater had a proscenium arch, which, in the manner of the day, was circled with lights. Of course, the children could not afford real lights, so Charles dispatched Ollie to nearby theaters to scrounge for discarded bulbs from trash bins. At the old Savoy Theater, managing director Gilmore Brown

caught Ollie red-handed; so began an association with Brown, which lasted until Charles's death in 1954 and which resulted in Charles and Brown founding, building, and operating the Pasadena Playhouse and its incredible College of Theater.

The original house, the Savoy, was anything but glamorous. According to Ollie, "The dressing rooms were second-rate pigsties, and the ventilating system had all the modernity of a broom closet. There was never any money: no subsidy or delayed salaries, only bill collectors and the undernourished grease-paint squirrel in a rickety cage."

The theater leaked badly, and it had a barrow stage; frequently the sets had to be built back against the rear wall, making it necessary for actors crossing offstage from stage-right to stage-left to run down the alley behind the theater. On rainy days, Ollie and other children carried umbrellas for the scurrying cast.

In this rich atmosphere, Ollie and his pals--Victor Jory, Lurene Tuttle, Maurice Wells, and others--ran errands, took tickets, distributed handbills, acted, watched, and learned invaluable lessons in theatercraft.

Eventually Ollie attended the University of California, Berkeley, spent time in New York, and worked for the United Fruit Company in Cuba (where he played baseball with a young Fidel Castro). After several years there, he returned to California and opened a movie house in Carpinteria. At times he booked live acts between the feature films: one of these was the young Judy Garland and her sisters. Hard times brought him back to Pasadena, however, to Charles and his playhouse.

These were the glory years: the theater's reputation traveled around the world, attracting major playwrights and actors, developing new talent of its own. Ollie worked with them all: Zoe Akins, Laird Cregar, Victor Mature, Lloyd Nolan, William Saroyan, Randolph Scott, Robert Young, among hundreds of others. He spent more than twenty years there, creating opportunities for the college's graduate students to perform before live audiences throughout Southern California, promoting the playhouse itself, and doing a great deal of acting on its mainstage.

Ollie stayed on until his brother's death, then signed with Desilu to appear in a television series, "The Brothers." Subsequently he played an Indian in

"Ma and Pa Kettle." During these years he worked frequently for film director Vincente Minnelli, acting and baby-sitting an infant Liza.

In time James Doolittle hired Ollie to manage the Greek Theater, involving him with such exciting productions as the Comedie Francaise, the Grand Kabuki of Japan, the Greek Tragedy Theater of Athens, the Royal Danish Ballet, and, again, with Judy Garland (in a disastrous series of comeback performances).

In 1959, Ollie took on what he characterizes as the worst project of his life, his "one-year spasm." When Charles died, Gilmore Brown was too frail to operate both the theater and school; the playhouse began a decline (which ended in bankruptcy in 1969). When Brown retired in 1959, total desperation set in. The board of trustees hired Ollie as general manager, hoping, because he was so steeped in playhouse lore, that he could pull a miracle out of his back pocket and bring the house back to solvency. The board, however, gave him no support, assumed no responsibility for fund raising, and left Ollie with a property that was heavily mortgaged, a theater that was too small to be self-supporting financially, five stages to fill, and sixty to seventy staff members to feed. The burden was

overwhelming, the debt mushroomed, and Ollie was only too relieved when his year ended and he could return to the Doolittle organization.

Ultimately Ollie moved to the Los Angeles Music Center, where he set up a school program for the languishing Hollywood Bowl, was on the managerial staff of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, and participated in the project that gives him his greatest sense of pride: helping to negotiate a welfare and pension fund for the stagehands (International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Local 33), their first such fund.

Oliver Prickett's life perfectly illustrates a lyric from the musical Follies:

Good times and bum times,
I've seen 'em all,
And, my dear,
I'm still here.

--Diane Alexander, 1982

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER: Bernard Galm, acting director, Oral History Program, UCLA. B.A., English, St. John's University, Minnesota. Fulbright scholar, 1957-58, Free University, Berlin. Graduate study, School of Drama, Yale University, and Department of Theater Arts, UCLA.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Prickett's home, Pasadena, California. The video session was taped in room 134A, Powell Library, UCLA.

Dates: March 6, 13, 27, April 3, 17 (video session), 24, 1973.

Time of day, length of sessions, and total number of hours recorded: The interviews, averaging two hours in length, took place in the afternoons. A total of eight and a quarter hours of conversation was recorded.

Persons present during interview: Prickett and Galm. Joel Gardner was present during the video session, operating the equipment.

CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW:

This interview was the first in a series on the Pasadena Playhouse and College of Theatre Arts. Prickett, brother of Charles Prickett, cofounder and longtime general manager of the Playhouse, had served the theater in various capacities: actor, publicist, and general manager. These associations gave him special insight into the theater's history.

The interviewer found Gail Shoup's "The Pasadena Playhouse: Its Origins and History from 1917 to 1942" (M.A. thesis, UCLA, 1968) a valuable research source. Prickett himself arranged access to the Pasadena Playhouse collection in the Pasadena Public Library; the collection includes scrapbooks, clippings, photographs, and chronological lists of Playhouse productions.

The interviewer chose a chronological approach to document Prickett's long involvement with various theatrical establishments in Southern California and his work in film and television. Special emphasis was placed, however, on Playhouse history and on Charles Prickett's managerial role. The interview concluded with an assessment of the various attempts to restore the Playhouse to its former stature.

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. The final manuscript remains in the same order as the original taped material. Words and phrases inserted by the editor have been bracketed.

Prickett reviewed the edited transcript and answered editor's queries.

Freelance journalist Diane Alexander, engaged in research for a book about the Pasadena Playhouse, wrote the introduction. Oral History Program staff prepared the front matter and index.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

MARCH 6, 1973

GALM: Mr. Prickett, I would like to begin the interview session by first asking you when you were born and where you were born.

PRICKETT: Nineteen hundred five, April the fourth, in Centralia, Illinois. This was a short-lived residence, because my father had had a number of drug stores in Illinois--in Carbondale, Centralia, Cairo, and others--and had come out to retire. We went first to Redlands and then came right to Pasadena. I was approximately six months old when I arrived here in Pasadena, so it would date from six months after birth to the present time.

GALM: How old was your father at the time of your birth, then?

PRICKETT: My father was quite a bit older. He had had a previous wife, but my brother Charles and I were both from the combination of Charles Fillmore Prickett and Ruth Bettie, who was from St. Louis. I would say he was approximately forty, forty-five years old, and she was probably quite a bit less--I mean, possibly by six or seven years less--than that. But there's actually nothing in the background for either my brother or myself to make any indication of a theatrical bent. He had been

reasonably prominent in Carbondale and Centralia, where they had lived for a considerable time; but there's nothing there that would indicate that we would both end up in the theatre, in the field of entertainment.

GALM: What is the difference in age between you and your brother Charles?

PRICKETT: Five years. He was five years older than I am.

GALM: So what did the family do once it came to Pasadena?

PRICKETT: Well, it was actually a matter of retirement. He did nothing except pursue affiliations like Shriners, etc. He was in poor health, actually. In fact, during his latter years he was in the wheelchair a great deal of the time. I didn't know my father very well because he died in 1916, on January the first, and I was eleven years old. I think brother Charles took the brunt of most of the obligations per se in helping my mother. With us at the time also was my aunt, who lived with us and who was of great help in helping my mother because he was bedridden a great deal--and as I say, [there was] a wheelchair and a ramp down the front.

We lived on a street off of North Los Robles in Pasadena called Ashtabula. I went to Madison Grammar School and then from there to John Muir Junior High School, which of course nobody can remember now unless

they're of the same age bracket. It was at the corner of Walnut and Los Robles and was one of the first what they call now--and which are so prevalent now--junior high schools. It was an attempt to establish an interval between elementary school and high school and worked out very well, actually. It was a good innovation. It also gave a kid a chance to grow a little from the point of sixth grade to popping right into high school. And I think this was some help, shall we say, dramatically, because we had a most active schedule of plays, etc., at John Muir.

GALM: Was there anyone, either in your family or in your early schoolteachers, that might have led you into the theater?

PRICKETT: No, except that I recall a good deal of encouragement from teachers like Harriet Sterling, who later was on the Playhouse board and a great friend. They didn't do anything to discourage you. They were appreciative of somebody. As I recall, it was always possibly a utilization for an assembly or for a meeting or something of that sort, and I was always a willing worker in the field, I mean a play.

Of course by that time I'd had the advantage of some kid stuff at the Playhouse, or got pretty close to that point. I was trying desperately to recall how I got the

job of distributing the handbills for what was then the major theater in Pasadena (major legit theater, although, of course, there was only legit and a few burgeoning movie theaters at the time). I used to deliver all the handbills for the Clune's Theatre, which was quite an impressive theater on West Colorado Street, right now where the Salvation Army Stores are. They played all the big ones. They played them after or before the Los Angeles run.

I would take my bike, and they would dump these heralds, which to me were reasonably sacred. Once in a while, if I didn't care too much for the bill, I would slough a few into a convenient drain--ditch drain--down off of Fair Oaks. My God, there were things that I would never forget that were so deeply etched in my memory, like Otis Skinner in The Honor of the Family, [Alla] Nazimova in The Brat, big musicals like Chu Chin Chow. There was just a constant fare of them; they were just rolling along. So I would just go to the Clune's office, and they would load these things down. This becomes my first affiliation, actually, with the Playhouse (although it wasn't the Playhouse yet; it was Gilmore Brown's stock company, the Savoy Players). They had scattered all over Pasadena, and at that time an area now known as Lamanda Park, and also down by the Cawston Ostrich Farm, which were the furthest ones I had

to ride [to] on my bicycle. I remember those indelibly.

They had glass frames, on which I think you would call them, the closest I can think of... Of course, everything theatrically, as you know, measures in terms of "one sheets" (that's twenty-eight by forty-two). Now these were half-sheets, which were strip things. There was never any art on them. There was just a printed legend of what the bill was for the Savoy Players. It would probably be Servant in the House, or House of a Thousand Candles, or The Passing of the Third Floor Back, or whatever was in Gilmor and the Savoy Players' repertory. And for this I got to see all those shows, too. So the needle kind of went in from Clune's and from the Savoy Players.

Now this was kind of a big chore, believe me--a little kid pumping his head off, distributing these handbills. They mainly went to drug stores and grocery stores and newsstands and everyone, and I can remember how sacred this duty was to me. In other words, I would almost take a ruler and measure how many this one got and how many the next one got. And the hotels. There was the Maryland, and the Green, and of course they welcomed them at the desk. They were always glad to see this little long-nosed, curly-headed squirt come in with the things, because the guests were looking for things to do.

GALM: So it was a lightweight circular rather than a cardboard window card.

PRICKETT: Oh, yes. No, the ones from the Savoy fit right into the glass. In other words, you did a quick thing of taking out the old one, putting the other one up there, holding it there, and then slamming the glass door. They were about eighteen inches wide by three feet high, and they were changed with every bill. Of course, you had to make it in a hurry--because they changed bills, for instance, Saturday, and then they'd open again on Monday. Why, you had to do it real quick. The same with the Clune things. They had to get out in a hurry, so it meant a lot of speeding around.

GALM: How long were they playing the runs at that time? Of course, it would depend on the play.

PRICKETT: Well, I can't recall. The Clune's run would probably be one or two nights only, because after all, there was no way for them to gauge the value of a run. In other words, Pasadena was a small town of 25-30,000 people at the time, and one night (I don't know how many, I've forgotten how many seats there were in Clune's Theatre), would generally be a sellout thing. And it would be an occasion. Then Clune's would alternate that. When the big stuff wasn't available, then they always had vaudeville going. An unforgettable character--the envy of all of us--by the name of Jimmy Gilbert played the drums, and you were diverted constantly by him. He was a kind of a

Phil Harris of his day. In other words, he was very dramatic playing the drums. I just recall that.

Gilmor Brown ran the Savoy Players. Then the theater became known as the Savoy Theatre; before that it had been Tally's. Tally's Theatre in Los Angeles was one of the major theaters, along with Morosco and Majestic and Mason Opera House and some others over there--the Hippodrome and the Orpheum, etc. But Tally's was a major house in Los Angeles, and Tally had built this house in Pasadena. It's just a kind of a place to book things, as we call it, "breaking the hop." In other words, he would come over and play Pasadena, and it was rented by this group and the other group. They had this gig about the burlesque house (it was no gig; it was burlesque, as they knew it in those days--nothing to compare with even the nudie-cutie type thing of now, but, I mean, it was burlesque); and there would be other companies in there. And the Gilmor Brown Players, the Savoy Players, would come in for a run like, oh, seems to me it was for a month or two, and go through their repertoire. They of course played other places--Claremont, San Diego, and other places around.

Booking wasn't quite the same. It was a little more casual than it is now. In other words, you don't set things on the Theatre Guild subscription list for a year ahead like the [Los Angeles County] Music Center has to,

or go into it with the dating of years in advance. And if the house was empty, why, they came in and played it for... I haven't any idea. I never did know, and I can't imagine what the rental terms were; but they must have been low because the price--gee, I can't even remember what the price was. If only I had saved one or two of those handbills, but I've never been a saver. Gee, think of what a giddy array that would make, because they really were just tremendous shows, in both Clune's.... And then Gilmore's efforts were, well, they were second-string. Everything that played in Tally's or in the Savoy was second-string, that's all.

GALM: Was Tally's the only theater in Pasadena that was playing burlesque at that time?

PRICKETT: Yes. I can't recall exactly when the big surge of stock companies began, but it was shortly around 1917 or 18. I really am so bad at dates. There was the Ralston Players, [and] there were the Jarecki Players, who sometimes were in tents. I recall for some research I did for myself [that] at one time there were eight stock companies playing in the San Gabriel Valley--in other words, Alhambra, South Pasadena. The reason I remember that [is that] we kids used to try and grab all the parts we could.

I played with the Jarecki Players many, many times. They had a theater in Alhambra, and they had one in South Pasadena. It was the old Rialto Theatre in South Pasadena,

which was up this side of Mission Street on Fair Oaks. It had a regular rigged stage, and [it] was available, and a chap by the name of Raymond Jarecki ran both stock companies. I'd get on the Short Line car at Colorado and Fair Oaks with a makeup kit which my brother had made for me (which was a thing of beauty--totally unessential; I mean, I could have rubbed my hand on the wall for the parts that I had, but I had everything in there). He had made this beautiful makeup kit, just the way he could make anything--and did make anything. In fact, the first files at the Playhouse were orange boxes which he rigged when he went to the Playhouse. But I think all that early beginning made a tendency on the part of a group of us around--oh, Vic [Victor] Jory and Lurene Tuttle, Maurice Wells, all the rest of us, Mervin Williams, Barrie O'Daniels, Chuck Daniels. All of us were minded that way. I mean, we just were aware of what was going on everywhere.

GALM: Now, these are all Pasadena youngsters?

PRICKETT: Yes, all local kids. Yes, we all went through high school together. We've all just kind of grown up together. Then, of course, one of the biggest stock companies--one of the biggest, I say, because at that time a group in San Diego was the most prominent stock company. By a stock company I mean something we don't have now

except for a few repertory companies. But this was a real stock company in the sense of, well, in the same way [as] Gilmor with the Savoy Players--I would say eight to twelve people under whatever contract existed at the time, and they weren't regulated by [Actors'] Equity [Association] or anything else. I think they were regulated by the prevailing wind of whatever economics was involved; I mean, I **think** they just split the pot.

As I say, one of the biggest came to Pasadena, and I think it must have been around 1919, somewhere along in there--the Smith-King Players. That was a tremendous company, tremendous in draw. Roscoe Karns was their comic, but they were playing all the first-run, at that time, high-royalty type stuff like Smilin' Through, and this and that--just big shows and beautifully done. This was a real, real company. It was supposed to mark the end of not only the Playhouse, but the end of any other stocks in the San Gabriel Valley. And it was a most impressive thing. They were in the Raymond Theatre. The Smith-King Players. None of us kids could crack them, because they just didn't have the time or the inclination to even look at us little punks for anything. I think maybe one of us might have gotten a walk-on as a newspaperboy or something like that, but that was the end of it. They were really a caliber group.

And then, of course, the evolution of the stock company went into a company like a Henry Duffy Company in Hollywood, or the Duffwin in Oakland, or the Alcazar in San Francisco, or others where they would play a bill with a name, the play called Burlesque. They would play it for two or three months here, and then they would ship it up. The only connection that has is that it marked the end of the stock company--in other words, a resident company. All these people in, say, for instance, a company like Smith-King Players became local favorites to the point of being highly in demand for parties, for speeches, for everything else. They became a part of the community. Those days, as I say, ended with that transition to the packaged show which came into other theaters.

GALM: Was there something about the makeup of the Smith-King Players that didn't allow for an evolution such as the Community Players did make?

PRICKETT: I would just be guessing, but when you think in terms of the Community Players, the Pasadena Community Players came as a kind of an economic evolution to a disaster. Gilmor had been out with the Ben Greet Players. He'd been here and there across the country as far as playing. He had seen promotionally the idea and, being a thinker, had had this Community Player idea--whereas I'm

sure that the Smith-King group, in contrast philosophically, were nothing but old-line pros. In other words, they were just show people and "Bam-bam-get-that-curtain-up, get-it-down." They had no thought other than the play of the moment and, "What'll we do next week?"--that sort of thing.

What happened with the Community Players was that Gilmor, in his loyalty to a number of his players who were with him--Orrin Knox, Andy [Andrew J.] Campbell, others in the company--kept [them] on for a while. When the Community Players began, they were kept on and given lunch money for playing with the Community Players. The whole change was radical, but it just didn't go from totally professional to totally amateur. As I recall, Orrin Knox and, of course, Andy Campbell ended up as a makeup instructor for the Playhouse. [coughs] Pardon me.

These people kept on playing in Community Players productions for quite a while, and then they finally drifted away completely--especially drifted because the material changed so radically from the kind of corny things that they had been doing before, which were purely for draw and because they were all, shall we say, "up" in them. I'll bet that they probably had (I wish I could remember all of them) a half a dozen plays that they could play; and if they had to have a replacement, well,

they'd bring in somebody who was "up" in the same six plays. This is the way the stock thing worked in those days. It wasn't just [as if] all of a sudden they shut down the other operation and the Community Players began (although technically that's what happened).

At the beginning of the Community Players there was a kind of a stigma attached to the Savoy--not a bad stigma, but it was just thought that there would be a better place for this Gilmor Brown idea, which he had sold to people of stature in the community. So that's why the Playhouse actually began at the Shakespeare Club House because the Shakespeare Club House had an aura of more distinction about it. The North Fair Oaks digs were pretty miserable, and besides, this kind of smell that went with it.... So that actually is why the first two productions were in the Shakespeare Club. But it became absolutely impossible for the Shakespeare Club to carry on its dignified, ladylike conduct with this bunch of harum-scarum nuts running around, and it became the Playhouse Club House instead of the Shakespeare Club House. The first production was November 20, 1917 (I think it was the twentieth).

GALM: You're right. The Song of Lady Lotus Eyes.

PRICKETT: Well, The Song of Lady Lotus Eyes is a very distinguished beginning when you consider it, because the

first person ever to step on the stage was a little itty-bitty kid from Santa Barbara by the name of Martha Graham. She did a little--I'll never forget it--Chinese number. She was just brought in for that single thing; there was no acting phase of it. It was just an introduction to the play. And then the others were The Neighbors, Pierre Patelin; then there's one other--I can't think of it right now [The Critics]. There were four one-acts: Pierre Patelin, The Neighbors, Song of Lady Lotus Eyes, [The Critics].

The very first show was directed by a gal who to me was one of the charmers personally and from a point of real talent--Cloyd Duval Dalzell. Now, nobody's really heard of Cloyd Duval Dalzell in terms of any prominence, but she directed that first show, and she was also one of a dozen or so rocks of Gibraltar that the Playhouse hung its hat on for a number of years. She had the most fascinating lisp I've ever heard, one that almost was dramatically affected. She couldn't say "love," she had to say "lllove." But if you knew her and saw her work, or were with her, it would have been wrong for her to have said "love"; because it was more attractive the way she said "lllove." I played in a number of shows with her as a kid, and I never forget the fascination all of us had. She ended up as the head of the choral speech department at USC, and I think wrote a couple of very authoritative books on choral speech. Just one of those people from the old days who stand out so vividly in your memory,

because she meant so much to everybody.

GALM: How long did she remain with the company?

PRICKETT: Pardon?

GALM: How long did she remain with the company?

PRICKETT: Well, she was in and out as an actress and as a director. I think at that time she was teaching. "With the company" at that time meant that you were used whenever you were needed. In other words, if there was some casting that she was wanted for, or some play to be directed (she directed a lot of shows in the old days).... "But your requirement was that you make a living outside and that you function as an actor or director or whatever on the other side of the clock. As I think I mentioned [when] we talked before, this actually gave birth to a great cross section of people, in Pasadena and the area, called Community Players. People who carried a makeup kit instead of a golf bag or a bridge deck or whatever, who just loved being a part of the theater, [people who] did it with total devotion. And believe me, in many cases these Community Players were better than any professional that you've ever seen. But philosophically they just didn't want to go along with the theater, which was quite different in those days. I think a lot of them probably would have gone the route of films, television, or whatever now, but at that time there was quite a little thing

about actors. In addition to being noncitizens to a lot of people, they were still something on the freak side. But, oh, we had so many that were just so good!

The mother of the Playhouse fits into that category. Adele Adams, who was Ma Palmer, to my way of thinking was the salvation of the Playhouse because of a tendency to keep everybody pulled together and also to get out on that stage and give performances that were just top-drawer in every.... She had been a pro. She came to Pasadena and married a local dentist, Dr. Arthur [H.] Palmer, who was of great help to the Playhouse in his own quiet sort of way. But Ma Palmer was just a--well, she played Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch, and I happen to have played Billy Wiggs in that. And she was Mrs. Wiggs of the cabbage patch. I mean, she just nurtured everybody back to either mental or physical health, and she was a great woman, just wonderful.

A man prominent in that time was Sam Hinds, Samuel S. Hinds, and his wife Dorothy--very wealthy people who lived on La Loma Road. Every once in a while we used to be invited up to their house to watch a phenomenon being done, and that was a movie being made on their grounds, for which they were given \$100 rental. Imagine that, \$100. We all had to stand over to one side, and we were especially invited guests; but it was a real phenomenon.

Sam was a familiar figure around Pasadena--driving his Marmon and smoking his Between the Acts cigars (he was never without one). His father had been one of the heads of the U.S. Playing Card Company--Bicycle Cards, whatever you call them. He promised his father that he wouldn't go on the stage professionally, and he didn't go on the stage professionally, although he played everything at the Playhouse. And here is a man who was just gifted, who had offers after offers to go professional. When his father died, Sam then had a divorce thing; and during the Depression, Sam was left actually almost penniless. There was a great many times when he was given a few bucks for eating. Then he went to Paramount [Studios], and of course he became a feature player. He was under contract at Universal [Studios] for seventeen or eighteen years, and regained all his financial stature, and still remained Sam Hinds. He played both at the old Playhouse and at the new Playhouse many, many, many times. I can't imagine how many productions he worked in.

GALM: Was he a matinee-idol type?

PRICKETT: Yes, but he had that quality a makeup man can't achieve. He had that beautiful, wonderful class look, plus a great voice to go with it. But he could play the dregs the same way--he could play a copperhead as well as he could to play the banker-next-door type thing. This,

of course, was his great utility in film, because with a close-up or with anything else, this is a requirement: that you not only look it, but that you be it. And Sam was it; I mean, he had that look. I guess probably the most prominent film he made was Destry Rides Again, the first Destry, in which he was a beat-up, old, no-good type fellow.

Then there were the Clarkes--Churchill and Peggy Clarke--who again were rocks of Gibraltar (she played, he went out and raised money, and they were a great combination) as well as a former UCLA department head, Dr. Paul Perigord, who may have been the first president of the Playhouse Association.

I just was thinking dramatically of Ma Palmer. Of course, [the] medical profession wouldn't permit it now, but anybody who remembers the flu epidemic, which rode death and destruction on every block, [remembers] there was crepe hanging on houses on every block in Pasadena and other places. We played three performances of Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch with flu masks. This is a form of idiocy that nobody in their right mind could conceive as a preventative measure now. It was a piece of gauze which fitted over your nose and your mouth, and thing-a-bobs went over your ears, and you either wore a flu mask or you went to jail. If you can think of any greater

absurdity than that as a cure-all for something as deep-seated as influenza, but the idea was that "Thou shalt not breathe on anybody else." And after all, it was a horrendous time. People were dying all over the place. This is not a medical journal, but we played three performances until the cast was just decimated, as you can imagine. But this was an economic desperation thing. There wasn't anybody in the house to speak of, and then there got to be less. I think that is the only time for a great many years when the Playhouse closed involuntarily. There was no money; there was nothing left but the idea, really.

There was a woman--oh, I think that she had been maligned considerably--by the name of Aline Barnsdall. Barnsdall Park in Los Angeles is named for her because this was her gift. It's at Sunset and Vermont--an enormous park. She was a very wealthy woman, and she was also associated with some causes which cause lifted eyebrows. She firmly believed in Charlie Chaplin, for instance. She firmly believed in a lot of things that you weren't supposed to believe in, especially if you were Establishment at the time. She gave [to] the Playhouse quite anonymously; as I recall, it was \$2,000. She didn't want anything from it, and if there weren't people like myself to tell this story.... There was nothing in the way of

publicity or anything that she wanted out of it; she just believed in the Playhouse. She gave Gilmor \$2,000 to set the thing on its feet again, and that's the only reason it opened. I don't know in the chronological list how long a gap there was when it was closed, but it had to be closed for health and money reasons. It was just impossible to carry on. But again, the stalwart in the whole deal was Ma Palmer. There she was, just [a] rugged, 250-pound lump of sweetness that was up there, and not a phony bone in her body. She just did it; that's all.

When the Playhouse began again, there was a rally held. I don't remember even what went on, except that this man came to the stage door and I was supposed to let him in (we kids were always doormen or whatever). And he was Will Rogers. He came in, and he made a plea for the Playhouse, for its continuance. Now, how much effect this had, I can't measure in terms of dollars and cents. But I'll never forget opening the door for this man who was at that time mainly a Ziegfeld [performer], you know. I mean, he wasn't the Will Rogers of the time when he died. But he evidently made a good speech.

Speaking of that door, I told you the other day [that] a phenomenon to all of us kids was our first patio umbrella; most of us had never seen one before. These

came from the wealthier homes on South Orange Grove and had been given [to] us so that we could take the actors from one side of the [stage]. The stage was so shallow that the back wall was generally painted, and was painted to some degree of permanency as an exterior. So on rainy nights we would take the actors from "alley right" to "alley left," so that they wouldn't get drowned on the way to their hotel.

GALM: People like Rogers and Miss Barnsdall--did they come forward of their own volition, or were they approached?

PRICKETT: I don't know where the solicitation came from in either case. Neither of them were, shall we say, ever heard of again--to my knowledge, at least--in Playhouse history. I don't recall that Barnsdall ever stepped forward again. As I recall it, it was purely a voluntary thing on her part. Now with Will Rogers, I haven't any idea what the arrangements were, and he never played. I'm not name-dropping or attempting to in that case.

It was the dramatics of the time which were horrendous; they were just impossible. And the struggle for the existence of the Playhouse in those early days is really amazing when you come right down to it. The only thing would be that the expense thing was just so low that it could be weathered. Getting a house in there was something. There was, what, 400 seats? It was a badly ramped floor;

[there were] folding chairs which were horrible. Good actors--like Sam Hinds, for instance--could play the folding chairs. Now this is hard to do. In other words, he could have a speech; he'd see four people about to flap these folding chairs down, and he'd vamp till they got set down. And then he'd finish the sentence, either that or start it out. Sometimes you'd lose the whole plot if four people go, "flap! flap! flap! flap!" at the same time. He could play the folding chairs; he was a genius at it.

But it was kind of a miserable thing. There were two gas stoves down in the front which were lit, and sometimes they would go out because there was an exit by one side (not on the other side). If the person knew the situation well enough, they'd just relight the gas; or they'd run back and the brother or Gilmor or whoever would run down and relight the gas stove. And they were just open burners, oh, three feet wide--just gas stoves going, that's all. There was no balcony. There was a ramp along where there was a projection room, and at the end was a ladder--not a tilted ladder, just [gestures] hung on the wall. That's were all of us kids used to go.

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GALM: You were speaking about the Playhouse on Fair Oaks and the projection booth.

PRICKETT: At that time, the reason there was a projection room there was mainly for films--such as they were in the day--because there were no instruments up there. Stage lighting of those days was quite a contrast to the current trend in aerial lighting, etc. There was nothing up there, and on stage the actual electrical equipment was just of the worst backyard sort--in other words, just open switches with no dimmers. Once in a while they'd try and rig something which would provide a diminishing light, but we didn't have dimmers as we know them now. This open switchboard thing was just like on your back porch, only ten times bigger. It was a question of being neat when you pulled a plug or when you pulled a switch, otherwise you were gonna end up with 100 volts or so right through you. It did happen a couple of times. I remember Huxley, [Frederick] Carl Huxley, who was one of the great ones in Playhouse history because of his technical skill and his ability to make do, he was just knocked flat. And being a reasonably raunchy guy, he cut loose with quite a few expressions that weren't in the script, I mean which were... [laughter]

GALM: ...unrehearsed? [laughter]

PRICKETT: Oh, I should say they were! One time that the rain leaked, Gilmor and the brother and Huxley and everybody else would put pots and pans around sometimes because the roof leaked and it would come through.

In the center of the auditorium was a tremendous Chinese umbrella which hid the vent. A funny part about that vent is that it was a round thing that wasn't worked electrically, as we have them now, or anything of the sort. It just spun around and gave a kind of semblance of venting the place but really didn't. I think I told you that some of us kids would have to go up there on Saturday matinees, when they took a picture between matinee and evening, and spin those vents on cue, because the photographs taken in those days, of course, were used with an explosion like a minor atom bomb. They'd go "BOOM!" with this powder in this trough, and a chain pulled, and then everything would break loose. That was our cue to start to spin those things, because otherwise the audience for the evening performance would've had a real smell to contend with.

GALM: So it was a ventilation system that wasn't operated during the performance at all?

PRICKETT: Well, only as nature provided. In other words, if there was a wind up there...

GALM: I see.

PRICKETT: It was kind of a loose arrangement. It allowed things to go up and out, shall we say, but there was no propelling device that helped it.

GALM: Let's go back a little bit to what the situation was in your family. You've talked about various theatrical activities that you were part of as a child. Did your family go to the theater a great deal?

PRICKETT: Yes, but only because Charles and I were involved. I'm speaking only of my aunt and mother, of course, after my father's death. Mother would go just because she thought it was one of her duties. She was no theatrical buff. She had no education in theater. If I happened to be funny in a play, she would not laugh, because that was wrong for her to do--wrong in the sense [that] this was her son. It was a kind of funny complex for her. She, of course, lived the Playhouse twenty-four hours a day, because before my brother was married, he lived at home. So she lived every excruciating moment of sadness and gladness as far as the Playhouse during the whole time. She was a real heroine from that state.

Brother's connection with the theater wasn't so much as an actor as it was the whole mechanism of the theater fascinated him. I remember doing high school plays, and even junior high school plays, he would rig things that were totally ingenious to help get the show

on. For instance, you can't imagine separating an audience from a play on a tennis court. There was a tennis court at the Raymond Hotel, and I had the chore of doing a play down there. Now, there was no way that you could provide a curtaining device to separate the audience from the play. He came up with the damndest thing--an extension of bamboo poles with curtains attached to them which went down on the surface, that were let down like this [gestures] to the ground. There was a control device on either end, with a wire across the top, so that when the curtain was pulled up, it became a curtain. He was just full of things like that. In fact, we had a theater in our backyard which he rigged, which was almost a miniature of Clune's or the Savoy.

One of the funny things that we always used to laugh about was the fact that in those days--this is almost unbelievable to think--a proscenium, in other words the area which extends around the face of the stage opening, had lights in it which actually burned. This is theatricality in its lowest form, to think that if you don't like the play, you can sit there and go, "Goo-goo," and watch the lights around the thing. Oftentimes those lights were colored; they could be red, green, this and that and the other. Well, I'll never forget that he took a one-by-three and bored--with a brace and bit--holes, and

made it go all the way over this little theater stage we had in our backyard.

Let me tell you other things that we had there. He made a little railroad; he made a slide-for-death--I mean a roller-coaster type thing--this and that. But the theater was one of his prime creations.

So he bored these holes in there, and then he told me to go down to Clune's and to go to the Savoy, and get out of their ash can all the burned-out bulbs I could find. So I went, and there were none in the Clune's. I knew the Clune's people--at least I wasn't some little punk--and they didn't have any. I went to the Savoy, and Gilmor caught me in the ash can. I had to get into the ash can to get these bulbs out. But I got them, and then he understood. I hate to make up anything, but I think that's the way I got the job of putting up posters for him, because he was very kindly about the whole project--you know, what could you get in an ash can that you were trying to save? Anyway I got enough. So then I bring them back, and now we've got a fully-covered, colored-light proscenium. They don't go on, but who cares?

When I think of the ingenuity of it, and his ingenuity in so many other things--like when he went with the Playhouse, his creation of file cabinets out of apple boxes. He could whip out--I've got a couple of lamps in the

bedroom that he made, [and] Maudie [Prickett Cooper] has things that were just the height of ingenuity and creativity. I think the whole phase of theater, and his introduction into it, was this kind of freedom to sort of create something.

That was a horrible job he had at the bank. He got out of USC--got out, he was ill. He had gone to USC at the time when the SATC, the Student Army Training Corps, was a part of the deal. He had been on duty for too long during the flu epidemic, and he was in the hospital on North Figueroa. I know because I used to pedal my bike from Pasadena to North Figueroa to see him in the hospital, which was filled with guys who had had a similar experience. In other words, they'd had a touch of this flu, or more than a touch, and had fallen over in the ranks; and they put them up in the hospital. But then when he got out, he got a job with the First National Bank, at the corner of Colorado and Fair Oaks. There were no particular rules or regulations except that you had to balance every night, and sometimes he got home late at night.

I can't recall whatever conversation--because little kids don't remember a lot of things they should--[of] how he got the job with the Playhouse. I think there was a requirement for a janitor, or bookkeeper or this, that, and the other thing that they felt he could do. He went

with the Playhouse, [and] he played in a number of shows. He played in Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch. He must've gone with the Playhouse in about 1919.

GALM: Did he play prior to actually being part of the staff?

PRICKETT: Oh yes, yes. He played in Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch. He played in The Rejuvenation of Aunt Mary [and] You Never Can Tell. In fumbling through all that material that we were going through down at the library, I came across some pictures that--I'd forgotten how many things he did. I know he played in [The] Yellow Jacket. Let's see, his first title was business manager, and then it evolved into general manager later on. He wanted more than just a business management as part of his area of operation, and it always was. It was a great many things.

Prior to that, as I think I told you before, Ma [Emma Louise] Brown, Gilmor's mother, had run the box office as she had run the whole Brown family. Pa [Orville A.] Brown had done part of the functions of cleaning up and fixing up and this and that and the other. I can't recall the precise time of her death, but I would think that, [while] they were into the area of the Playhouse, they became less and less prominent. They were prominent [only] for a year or two because Ma Brown was a very, very domineering factor in everything that went on. There was Frank Brown, Gilmor's brother--or, as I prior indicated,

George's brother, because it's George Gilmor Brown.

Frank Brown had been the stage manager, and also did a lot of the technical work, and did a lot of construction of sets, etc. But Ma was the dominant factor in the Brown family. I wish I could recall when she died, or her exit from the whole Playhouse function. I know it wasn't in the first year or two. It seems to me I can see that buxom figure in that box office for two or three years at least.

Of course, Frank Brown's wife had been Gilmor's Savoy Players' leading lady--and she was around too, at the time. Around! She played show after show after show, and she played at the new Playhouse, too, for many, many years. Frank ran a furniture store in South Pasadena where we used to get an awful lot of furniture to fix up sets with. Pa Brown ran the cigar store which was right next to the entrance to the old Playhouse. And on the other side was a kindly little Jewish man who--gosh, if I could only think of his name--was always helping, always sewing somebody's costume up or always doing something. He had a little clothing store in the one shop on the north side of the Playhouse, and next to the cigar store was what the Playhouse used for an office--which was the back room. Gilmor had his office there, [and] the brother had his office.

A man who, I think I said the other day, should always be considered as one of the big four of the beginning of the Playhouse, and that's H.O. Stechan, who did all the promotion and publicity and got the Playhouse attention, even in New York and in foreign press. You would hardly think that a little scuttling dump on North Fair Oaks in Pasadena warranted it, but somehow he got it--he and Huxley. We always think of Gilmor as sort of the title head of the Playhouse. I think the combination of he and the brother--the one with the handful of brass tacks and the other with the crystal ball--and the other two fulfilling their functions, to me they were the real essence of how the Playhouse got through those years to a point where it warranted a plant such as it got on South El Molino. They were a great combination.

GALM: We haven't mentioned what your first contact with Gilmor Brown was.

PRICKETT: I took elocution lessons from him. After this putting up posters. Now, when I put up the posters, I was much smaller. There wasn't the Community Players then; this was for the Savoy Stock Company.

GALM: You would've been what?

PRICKETT: I would've been, oh, twelve? When does a kid go to junior high school, about seventh grade--sixth,

seventh grade, something like that? Now Gilmor was only there in some degree of prominence as the Savoy Stock Company [in] 1915, '16, and '17, because the transition to the Playhouse came in late 1917, and he was still going at the Playhouse. In fact, the second production at the Playhouse, The Man from Home, was practically taken from the repertory of the Savoy Stock Company. In other words, the people playing it were the same. And it, too, was done at the Shakespeare Club House. It wasn't till after The Man from Home that the Playhouse moved back up to North Fair Oaks--slightly refurbished. At least the beginning at the Shakespeare gave it something a little more of a salable tint than it had before.

There was a man at that time who should also be recalled by a great many here, by the name of George Mortimer, who led community singing, which was, believe it or not, a part of practically every performance. At intermission time, people didn't go out and chew the fat, or tear the place apart, or smoke, or drink, or anything like that. They sat right in their seats while George Mortimer led them in community singing. And, boy, they were rousers! He just encouraged people to sing their lungs out. It was kind of a fun thing, and naive. But for its day, it was a very soul-satisfying thing for people to be able to sit there and sing all the old "Battle Hymn

of the Republic" and Stephen Foster and all the rest of it. It was quite...

GALM: How did they do it? Did they have song books or were they lantern slides?

PRICKETT: They had sheets. No, they usually had song sheets. Community singing was kind of prevalent in that day. Everybody knew the words, you know, and they didn't go far beyond. They didn't get into any Bach or Beethoven. [laughter] To think back on it, that's about as corny as you can get; but it was a wholesome corniness that was very much accepted. In fact, I'll bet a lot of people came there for the community singing as much as they did for the show. And they'd have one. In the four one-act plays, hell, they'd have a community sing between each act!

GALM: How long did it take to change a set at the old Playhouse?

PRICKETT: The Shakespeare Club stage was even more ridiculous than the Playhouse. It had a fairly good apron on it, but it also had no depth at all and no flies. So everything had to be set pieces and were just dragged in like so many screens. In fact, I think most of the things there were just the set pieces, like for Song of Lady Lotus Eyes. The Playhouse had at least the benefit of a gridiron, of a grid. But they were pretty awful, too,

by today's terms--the painted trees, and the this and that and the other. Not that they aren't painted nowadays, but their approach is a little bit different. The curtain was an ad[vertising] curtain, which was part of the revenue thing, and it rolled up and down on a great big cylinder, and "RRRRRRBOOM!" Then that changed later on, when they finally got together enough for a curtain. I think the curtain came out of Gilmor's old drapes and was glued together for a curtain.

GALM: I know there was a pit area.

PRICKETT: Yes, very fragile, very narrow--I mean, six pieces would be very crowded in it. But later on this pit area, by Gilmor's imagination in staging, became utilized; I mean, it became a series of steps. I'll never forget. We did a production of Shakespeare--I've forgotten what it was--in which it was actually built out over the pit.

Back of the pit, of course, was the dressing room area, which no cattle would ever have been happy in. It was just a series of boards separating nothing, with one toilet at the end--you just took your chances, that's all--and had a long one kind of chorus dressing room. But the crudest--I mean, just absolutely. But nobody thought of it as being crude then. And everybody, of course, [wore] an excess of makeup in those days. Maurice Wells

and I, in looking at those pictures, were thinking how people used to come for hours ahead and go into the fine art of makeup. This is the day of Steins and all the rest, and they would make a whole career out of makeup.

They'd get up there, [and] what did they have? They had footlights, which are the most destructive thing that can happen to a person's face, generally: bright footlights, and no stand-type of the type of inkies that we use now. You had foots and you had borders. The intensity of the light was how many borders you used, which were nothing but a tin trough. Maybe, through Huxley's ingenuity, they would have three circuits, which were probably red, white, and blue, but this was, well...

GALM: There was no dimming system, so they would've been the same intensity once they were set up.

PRICKETT: That's right. The intensity of the light would've been the number of bulbs that were burning, that's all.

GALM: I noticed that, too--the makeup--and I was trying to determine whether it was the fact that these were stage pictures or what?

PRICKETT: Part of that is the fact that there was no attempt to be cute as far as the photographer was concerned. He put X number of globules of that blow-up powder in there, and just, "WOOOOOM!"--it went. There was no finesse as far as trying to shade anything. He just took a picture

and it came out all white, as you probably noticed in the pictures at the library.

GALM: I was wondering whether it might have been a thing in which the makeup really wasn't controlled. In other words, whatever you wanted to do with your makeup, you were allowed to do, more or less.

PRICKETT: You see, this is a failing that legit has had for a long time. Whereas you go to work in films or TV and somebody makes you up because they have the makeup pattern of the entire thing under control, legit has always depended on the actor making himself up. Now, this has gone on for a long time, up until a reasonable number of years--I'd say ten or twelve years ago--when the stage manager became the all-important person on any company. Then he, along with the lighting man and everyone else, made a determination on what number an actor should use; and they still let the actors make themselves up. In other words, they didn't want to get into the area of hiring a makeup man for every single night--no legit company would do this--but they established the control.

And then the niceties in makeup now, with pancake and all the rest of the shadings, etc.: one of the reasons for all this was that the only thing used was grease. In other words, it was a stick of grease which was then

powdered down. By the end of a strenuous act, this actor could look pretty grimy, and things would run, and this and that and the other.

I don't know [about] this change with realism being more a premium in the way it should be. In other words, just because you're twenty-five feet from somebody, you don't have to put on eyebrows that you could read three miles away. But it was pretty hard. Some of these people had some strange effects, and I realize it now more than ever when I look at those funny old pictures. Some of the grotesquerie of that makeup is just--it's a wonder they didn't start laughing when the person came out. You take a play like Shakespeare, take The Tempest or something, and you'd get everybody look like the fourth cousin to Caliban; they were just "wooh!" all over the place. But that's the way it was in those days.

Even the stock company people were overmade. They were made up like crazy, because I think people expected a certain theatricality about it all. Same as the stupid thing about those proscenium lights. "A tree is a tree is a tree" was a canvas cut-out tree in the background which obviously was a canvas cut-out tree, but it was accepted because of its theater value. Now, if you put one of those things on the stage, somebody would laugh you right out of the place. And rightfully so; I mean, you shouldn't.

Even now there's a tendency towards velours; it's just great because the attempt to paint on and paint shadows on was so prevalent in those days.

GALM: So your association with the early Playhouse days began with your handbills, and then the...

PRICKETT: That's right.

GALM: Small minor parts.

PRICKETT: There was an in-between gap between the Savoy Players and meeting of Gilmore [and] the distribution of the handbills, (not the handbills for them, because they didn't make up the handbills; they had these half-sheets). Then it was elocution. Gilmore gave lessons, elocution lessons, in which you stand upon the stage and he sat in the audience. I wish I could remember; it seems to me they were one dollar. Now they could've been less; they could've been fifty cents. I don't think my mother would've given me a dollar. I don't know. But I'll tell you what I can remember, and that is what I learned: that it was pure elocution. There was no "method" involved. [laughter] Projection was either "I can't hear you," or "You're speaking too loud." There was no sense of projection per se, or any method. It's a funny thing--and you probably got this in your life, too--something that has just stuck with me like it couldn't get unglued, and that is the book that I had. I went up there on that

stage every day (not every day; I think it was once a week, something like that): "Actually, adequately, and admirably acting and adjusting for antediluvian ancients. Balefully bouncing the bounding and bewitching barracuda with boisterous, belligerent boastings. Cunning, crafty, craven catamounts casting and catching the cool, calcareous cucumber with cackling, calamitous cachinations." This, right down through the alphabet.

GALM: On and on and on and on. Do you remember the whole alphabet?

PRICKETT: I remember the first three very well, and maybe some of the others; but it's funny how something like that sticks with you forever. And I can just see myself up there with, at that time, long black stockings (it was just at the point where long pants were coming into being), standing up there and Gilmor in the audience. And he probably didn't hear a word of anything; he'd [just] get his fifty cents or dollar. But anyway, it was a theatrical beginning, and I've never forgotten it as long as I live.

GALM: Why were you taking elocution? Was it with the idea of going into the theater?

PRICKETT: Well, you didn't think of it. You were just going into the theater. You wanted to be in a play, that's all. I don't think [I considered it] the theater in the sense of its broader aspects. You were just a little

ham; and I tell you, you can't [pinpoint] where the twig gets bent or how it goes in that direction. All I know [is that] all these recitations in front of school groups and groups, etc., was all a part of this hamminess or this part of--I don't know what you call it. I just know that there were a batch of us kids afflicted with it. It was like Jory, and Lurene Tuttle, Chuck Daniels, Mervin Williams, and the rest of us who belonged to all the drama societies and the Mask and Mirror. We had a remeeting of an old-time collection, and there were two or three of us who had ever done anything about it afterwards for good reasons. The others probably had more gray matter upstairs. Then the transition to getting little bitty parts at the Playhouse, of playing in just one [play] after another. That's why I'm fascinated by this material down there. I have recall on stuff I'd forgotten had happened. The Playhouse was such an active thing in those days. We had things going in Cruickshank Gardens or Brookside Park. You were always a part of the action if you were one of these kids that was around. God knows where the kids can get that these days. I don't know. I suppose they do, in a more refined way, probably.

GALM: This is still during your high school days?

PRICKETT: Oh, yes, and then playing, of course, all the high school shows--Clarence and all the high school plays--

and then getting through high school. I played in a one-act play with Cloyd Duval Dalzell called Addio, which was by Stark Young. Now, I don't know whether Stark Young means anything to you as a playwright, but he meant a great deal literary-wise with So Red the Rose, etc. Anyway, I played Addio a million times. I made a few thousand, or a few hundred thousand, because it was a short one-act in which there were three people. We played it here and there for gatherings; we played it at the Playhouse; I played it in high school. It kept coming up all the time. I always loved the play--loved it as much as a kid (you like it because you're in it; I guess that's the main reason).

But anyway, I became fascinated by Stark Young, and Stark Young at that time was the head of the drama department of Amherst [College] in the East. And so I started a communication, a letter-writing thing, with Stark Young, who utterly fascinated me. So I was entered at Amherst. Gilmore had written me nice letters, [and] they had waived the requirement. In those days for either Williams [College] or Wesleyan [University] [or] Amherst or most any eastern school, [the requirement] was Greek, or its equivalent; and I had a bad record in Latin. Anyway, I was entered at Amherst and had my freshman hat and everything all set, and then the family got a very horrible

economic jolt which affected all of us tremendously.

We had, from my father's estate, a trust fund-- "trust," ha ha! with all varying degrees of bitterness. It had been done by the First Trust and Savings Bank of Pasadena, and we would get this giddy blue statement every six months (or year or whatever it was), saying how much we were worth. From that estate there had been an allowance--money to my mother to allow us to eat, etc. We'd get this statement, and that constituted my college requirements, financially. We went down to make arrangements for payment of tuition and everything and the trust was worth about one cent on the dollar.

Now this happened in Pasadena as one of Pasadena's major scandals of all time--the trust department--which brought about, actually, a great many changes in the establishment of trust and the requirement for certified.... What had happened there was probably in the whole spirit of goodwill. The First Trust and Savings Bank had tried to save a building here, or something else, or the Altadena Country Club, or [the] Flintridge Country Club. They had provided some financial backing for these groups, and they had failed. But according to the book legend of it, they kept sending these things out. We weren't bright, or we didn't have as many inquiring reporters or financial editors or whatever at the time; so [if] you got a letter

that said, "You have in your trust fund \$12,812," you believed it! But when you go down there and find there isn't any, that they're sorry, why, it's kind of a shocker.

It set Charles back in his own planning. It set me to a desperation decision, which turned out to be a kind of theatrical blessing for me. It sent me to [University of California] Berkeley in California, and the reason it did was that Gilmor said, "I'll give you an introduction to Sam [Samuel J.] Hume." Now Sam Hume at that time was one of the powers of all theater in the [San Francisco] Bay Area--a great, inventive, genius nut. I can't forget my entrance to his alleged office, which was a shambles, at Cal. He had his feet up on the desk, and he always wore white socks. And he looked at this frosh squirt and said, "What the hell do you want?" And I said, "G-G-G-Gilmor sent me." He said, "Oh, yeah. Well, okay. You can work with us. [If] Gilmor says you're all right, well, I'll use you."

Now, understand [that] at that time there was no drama department, or it was a fragility at Berkeley. It was nothing but advanced elocution. They did a few things. Under Sam Hume's direction there was the Greek Theatre Players, we were called. I think we played once or twice in the Greek Theatre, but we played [mainly] in Wheeler Hall. We played on the stage that was a lecture platform

in Wheeler Auditorium. This was one of the greatest theatrical associations I have ever had. Irving Pichel and tons of others--Morey [Morris] Ankrum, the rest of it--were all part of this vital thing, which had no univeristy control but which had the control of a guy by the name of Sam Hume. And boy, was he something! He was one of the characters of my whole life.

My academic record at the University of California, you could put on the head of a pin. [laughter] I must've been at Berkeley for about two or two and a half years, but I don't think I was in school for more than two semesters. Sam got us more work. He got us down at KGO in Oakland, and we did a batch of things down there that were just stolen. We'd do a big-time show like It Pays to Advertise, with the books which Sam would throw to us: "You play this"; "You play that." We'd get up and we'd do the show on the radio with one mike, or maybe two if there were. KGO was pretty prominent, but it was like the old KFI in Los Angeles. Anyway, then we'd take these shows, like To the Ladies or Hobson's Choice. [and] we'd play in Lodi, we'd play in Sacramento, Stockton. Sam would get the money, and he would throw it on a table, and "Two bucks to you," [laughter] "Two to you...."

Really, I think that Sam's influence at that time was just the greatest on me, because it led me into a kind of a theatrical philosophy which wasn't easy to come by.

But we were just a bunch of hicks, really. One time I was going to write for my academic record at Berkeley, and I thought, [laughter] I'd better not, 'cause I'm going to get back a blank page. At that time, in contrast to today, they were eager to keep you in; they did everything they could. The first semester you were edgy, they gave you a warning. The next time, what was it? Probation.

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MARCH 13, 1973

GALM: The last time that we were speaking, we ended the session by talking about your days at the University of California, Berkeley.

PRICKETT: Oh, yes.

GALM: And you were talking of a man at Berkeley whose name was Professor Hume.

PRICKETT: Yes, Sam Hume. I don't know whether he even rated the...

GALM: ...title "professor"?

PRICKETT: ...the title "professor". He was so at odds at all times with the academic side. He was a free soul in the fullest sense of the word. I know he left the university. He came because he was interested in Oriental, everything Oriental. In fact, I believe [he] married a Chinese woman. Now, that's not a gossip note or anything like that, but as I recall it. Anyway, he went into the importing business and became very proficient at it; he had a place over in the city. But, of course, the university, in the evolution of things, tried to do away with this Greek Theatre Players-type group and with Sam's affiliation and all. Of course, there was some enlightenment beginning then as far as the establishment of a theater [by] the university was concerned, which didn't get really

any fulfillment until the Hearsts gave some money, and [then] a theater was established on the campus. Otherwise, everything was just done on Wheeler Hall stage, which was nothing but a lecture platform but which, with a great deal of imagination--both staging-wise and with units--was brought to life. And there was great attraction, because we had some terrific people--Nester Paiva, Morey Ankrum, Irving Pichel, just one after another--that were really theater people; they were of the theater structure.

That went on for a while, and [it] had no parallel in my academic life. This is just kind of a "This is My Life" approachment to it, but all of a sudden I got fed [up] with everything, as is a youthful want, I guess you could say. I came back to Pasadena and decided I was going to get around a little. So I, through a friend by the name of Wickersham and a man in Pasadena by the name of Dunkerly, got a job as fireman in a sailor's mess on a tanker going around through the [Panama] Canal up to New Jersey, with the ultimate aim of going with the United Fruit Company--which, to me, seemed like a college dropout's idea of a romantic approach to tomorrow.

GALM: Was anyone else doing this at that time?

PRICKETT: Once in a while somebody was, but the way I was lucky is that there was at that time no strict union-type thing as far as the shipping out was concerned. So I rustled the grub three times a day for the crew, and I

had what you might call a very dearly beloved aunt who lived in New York, and so I could sort of headquarter there. Then I went up to Boston and made my proper approachments to United Fruit Company, which headquartered in Boston, and then went back to New York. Then [I] started looking for a job, because it was evident that my appointment notice was going to be a few months away. I got a job at Macy's selling ice skates; I'd never seen an ice skate before. [laughter] There was a kind of a fringe benefit there, in that Madison Square Garden was very anxious for us in the ice skate department to plug ice skating and ice hockey at Madison Square Garden. So I caught on very quick by being able to go to a lot of ice hockey games and get the idea of what you did when you had a skate on, because being a California kid, I'd never seen an ice skate before. There were no rinks around like there are now. But they had one great tangent benefit for me.

There used to be a place--I don't know whether it still exists; I'm sure it does not exist--called Leblang's in New York which was down underneath a drugstore [and] which was a great kind of a hall arrangement. I'd get through work at five-thirty, six o'clock, and I would hurry over to Leblang's. Now Leblang's is a cut-rate ticket office. Now, of course, for many years now, if a run

showed no promise at all, they'd whack it right now; they'd pull this turkey off just as quick as they can. But in those days, they used to kind of sustain them. So I would go down to Leblang's, and if you got a rainy night at this time of day, you could get--and I got--tickets to things like Ziegfeld Follies, to see Leslie Howard, to see George M. Cohan. Every night, practically, I would go to Leblang's to see.

The reason for Leblang's is that on a given time--like six o'clock or whenever. I've forgotten exactly the time--the box office of every attraction. Now, I'm talking about a time when there was probably thirty-five theaters, "Bam!" [snaps fingers] just going on Broadway all the time, and with major-type things. Once in a while The Ladder or something like that--that was a dog, anyway--was being sustained. So you just went around like a stock brokerage room. Say, it was a Shubert attraction, or say it was somebody else--maybe it was a Theatre Guild attraction or whatever--you would go and they would have on the board, "balcony seats--fifty cents, seventy-five cents." At that point, they were willing to dump on Leblang's all the tickets they thought they had available that they weren't going to peddle that night.

I must've seen--well, let's see, I got to New York in about October or November, something like that, and

I didn't get my [United] Fruit Company appointment until after Christmas--February or something like that. I just about saw every show on Broadway, and this was a great sustaining factor for me, because the top price would probably be a dollar. But it was a great panorama of everything, and I have definite recollections.

I went to see The Poor Nut, which is an old-time hit with the Nugents--J.C. and Elliott Nugent--in it, and I noticed that there were quite a few kids there. It's the story of a track meet, and the boy wins the race; but it was a very brightly staged thing in that they simulated the guy running around through the back and then coming around. And the grandstand was there with a lot of kids in it. So I went backstage, and I got a job! They gave you a dollar a night to be an extra, and you just checked in. You sat in the grandstand, and you knew what to do--who to yell for, who to boo, everything else. But I found after about a week of it that it got in the way of my playgoing. But you could show up anytime, as long as you were certified by the stage manager. You could see if they had enough crew for tonight, which was a kind of a nice thing for a kid--you know, to be able to sit in the grandstand, get a whole buck for doing it, and watch the show at the same time.

GALM: What year are we talking about?

PRICKETT: Let's see, what year are we talking about?

We must be talking about 1925, '26, around in there.

GALM: So would that be the year immediately following your Berkeley year?

PRICKETT: What are my Berkeley years? 1923...

GALM: Nineteen twenty-seven, according to this.

PRICKETT: That was the year I was supposed to graduate.

GALM: Oh, I see.

PRICKETT: But I went there in '23, and then went '23, '24, and at least part of '25. So it must be '25, I would say--'25 lopping over into '26.

Then my Fruit Company appointment came through, so I was assigned to Nicaragua. [I] got off the ship, and they wouldn't let us stay there, because that bandit was chopping heads off right and left. The Fruit Company was in, shall we say, cahoots with the marine corps, in that the marine corps was protecting the installations of the Fruit Company. But the bandit--I can't think of his name; every once in a while it pops up. But anyway I never did get even to Managua, because Managua was inland and we went on the Caribbean side. They just put us off, and then I got word [that] they made a reassignment of me to Cuba--which meant going from there to Santiago de Cuba, which is on the far end of the island. I was there for just about a year and a half--sixteen to eighteen

months, something like that.

It was a good deal for kids from Massachusetts aggies or Purdue; they could take a piece of [sugar] cane, and they could analyze the whole thing right now. Fortunatley, my wife and I were able to go back a couple of times and see some of the people. Cuba was one of my favorite countries, except for.... And we don't get into the philosophies of it or anyting like that, because my name is probably on the CIA list, [or] some kind of list. This was a real saviour, Mr. [Fidel] Castro. This was a downtrodden group of people--of course, my main contact was with the working people in the fields--of such poverty and degradation, it was just unbelievable. So I was one of the first ones, when Castro got out of the hills and came into being, to congratulate him and everything like that. I don't know where the letter is now.

GALM: You actually had sent a letter?

PRICKETT: He played ball for me. The only thing that saved my life down there was the fact that I was able to play ball. I played ball for the United Fruit Company all over the end of the island, and this gave me an outlet, because my romanticism as far as being in a foreign atmosphere had diminished considerably by then. We played ball all over--Guantanamo, Santiago de Cuba--and we were stationed (we, I used it in that sense; I was stationed)

at a farm-plantation called "Biran." Gee, we're drifting a long way from show business now. But anyway, it's where the Castro family lived. If you read the sister's notes, who lives now in Mexico City, there's a constant reference to the fact. And they ran the store--her father ran the little store, almost a trading post-type thing--on our plantation, which was a matter of 40,000 acres. We'd bring home a few extra baseballs, and it was like we were encouraging Little League. The Castro kids were always a part of the game, and now when I see him with that bearded thing, throwing that ball over, I think of him as a little bitty kid. Anyway, then [I went] home again, with a spot of malaria, [not knowing] what to do about it.

GALM: Was that the real reason for coming back, or had you just...?

PRICKETT: No, I just had it. There was no future in it for me. There was a future for any [person who was] agriculturally minded, and they have gone a long way. A couple of kids from Purdue became very big until the Cuban government took over everything. I chatted with one in Havana who had been--we were called timekeepers on the plantations.

So I came home, and of course there's a great incentive to anybody on the East Coast that worked with the Fruit Company, or anybody working in the central states, too,

because your transportation, as far as any conveyance of the United Fruit Company, is all free. Well, it was a chore for me to get [home]. The only thing I got was a ride from Havana to New Orleans, and that's not too much of an incentive. But I wasn't minded, anyway. If I hadn't played ball, I would've gone crazy, because these kids could stand around and chew the fat about the agricultural importance of something [about which] I hadn't, or wasn't about to acquire, that skill or that knowledge. And strangely enough, there was no real prerequisite to getting the job. Because you were on horseback, say, ten hours a day, in supervision, you had nothing to do with the progression of cane sugar from its growing state to its manufacture (which ended up, of course, with the United Fruit Company in a Revere box, because Revere was, and still is, their brand of cane sugar).

Then [I was home] with the little spot of malaria, which is nothing for a white because we have built within us a combativeness, whereas it might take a native very readily because they haven't sustained enough strength in-- I don't know, whatever--corpuscles to combat it. It's quite often reasonably fatal with them. So I was looking for a spot to kind of go and rest for a couple of weeks, or just kind of be away from Pasadena. And so I thought of a fraternity brother of mine who was in Carpinteria,

which is about twelve miles this side of Santa Barbara, and a very attractive little farming community. His name was Jim Deaderick, and he was in the contracting business. So as I got a little better and I lived with them in the house there, and then later on with the relatives. I noticed there was no movie theater in the town--I mean, everybody noticed it. And I decided to do something about it. So I got two DeVry suitcase projectors--which are 35 millimeter, which was standard size; 16 mm wasn't in vogue at that time--and I got a rent on the town hall. [I] went down to Film Row in Los Angeles, and this little long-nosed nut that they had in said, "Why, sure, we'll give you all you need. You need a feature, and then a comedy, and a newsreel? Okay. Take the whole works for \$15."

I got a hold of some rented chairs and the town hall in Carpinteria. The guy I was working for, Jim Deaderick--I poured concrete for him in the daytime, and he ran the projector for me at night. And I tell you, I wondered where I'd been. The people flocked in like crazy. Now, we're in the silent days. We're back in William S. Hart and all the rest of it. [There was] the brand-new, coming-up cowboy star by the name of Gary Cooper, but [there was mainly] a lot of Rod La Rocque and Vilma Banky and, oh, just one film after another. So that went on, and I'll

tell you, I just wondered where I'd been. That's the only way, 'cause I'd get this whole schmearcase for \$15 and my gross would be \$200, \$250. I was making \$100, \$150 a week, and my gosh, it was just like shooting fish! I just opened the door and ducked, that's all. I sold the tickets, took 'em by hand around the corner, and it was a breeze. Jim ran the projectors for me.

GALM: Were you getting a special rate on that, as compared to a Los Angeles firm?

PRICKETT: Oh, there's always a special rate. Every deal is a separate deal. Film peddlers go on the basis of their own. In those days, they went on the basis of: if there was a theater in Oxnard or Ventura, they would pay \$500 for the film; if there was one in Santa Barbara, they'd pay \$1,000 or whatever. And this was right out of left field, as far as they were concerned. I wasn't competing with any first-run thing, because the road to Santa Barbara wasn't as good then. But it was something.

I had to end my lease with the town hall because they decided during the earthquake that it had been pretty well scarred; and now that people were being in there in such droves, there might be some hazard. So I just came down to United Tent and Awning Company, and got the cutie-pie-est tent you've ever seen in your life, and put a wooden floor in it. Now, understand, we're still in the silent days.

We're still going with the piano down there with the cue sheet, which is a mood music arrangement, and I've got a little tin projection house to comply with the fire requirements, and I'm still mopping up. I mean, it was just a breeze.

I can recall a picture like Ben-Hur. Now, there's a lot of Mexican people in Carpinteria, and there's a lot of Ramon Novarro fans, etc. I would get one of those in there, and I'll tell you, the line would be two blocks long--with no impatience; They'd get there eventually. And I'd just keep on grinding the thing. As long as there were people to see it, who the hell cared what kind it was? So it just went on that way.

A couple of fairly wealthy gentlemen from Santa Barbara came down and saw this phenomenon, and they decided that this was a good inspiration for a building. They came to me and said, "We're gonna put it to you first, but we think that the town deserves a theater and we deserve a building. We'll build the theater in the middle and put all the stores on both sides of it." So, by golly, they built a building! This went along very well; this went along very well for me, too.

I moved over into the building, and it was going along--with a little more, expense-wise, but I had the old organ thing in there, a beautiful little organ; and we were

really uptown! I had some pretty good ideas, and did a lot of advertising, and did a lot of yacking it up. In fact, a few student companies from the Playhouse used to come up and play. I would book everything legit that I could find--the Frederick Harrington Players, and just almost awful stuff--and I did [some] stage shows myself. You'd just die when you hear. I had a group, and I was Ollie Oop and the Seven Little Oops. I led the orchestra. We had a singer, and we had a comedian, and we had all the black-out bits that I could find anyplace. And everybody in a small town like this just loves this kind of stuff, so we'd just pile them in.

GALM: Was this combining the idea of vaudeville with the film?

PRICKETT: Yes. It's just that I was legit-crazy. I don't know [if] there ever was a small theater of 400--a little over 400 seats--that ever had as good [facilities]. We had dressing rooms backstage, we had a.... This is the way I had originally wanted it.

GALM: Does it still exist?

PRICKETT: Yes, it's still there. I called it the Alcazar Theatre, because I was so crazy about the Alcazar Theatre in San Francisco. And [I had] all corny stuff, like across the end of it, "Oliver B. Prickett's Alcazar Theatre." I used to get more people that knew me from

school or whatever go by, and they'd flip! But it was a good way of life until Mr. [Al] Jolson started singing. And when sound came in, of course, this was the most terrific change that ever came down the pike.

I should backtrack here to say that there was an exhibitor in Lancaster by the name of Gumm, and we used to book the Gumm Sisters in--which, if you think about it, why, it's Mrs. Gumm, and Judy Gumm, who became Judy Garland, and her sister. And they had a singing act, the three of them. I think they used to come just over the mountain for a piece. In those days, getting down to Depression times now, I think--God, I tried to remember; I haven't got anything on it--I'd say it was like twenty-five dollars for two days, something like that, to sing. They had a regular act, and they played around everyplace around there. This little, all-eyes kid, who was Judy, became Judy Garland.

Anyway, sound was the beginning of the end for me; I mean, that's where it went. There was a theater called the Rose Theatre in Santa Barbara which was even doing in the big houses up there in Santa Barbara--Granada, California, Mission, and all the rest--because it had the only sound installation in Santa Barbara at that time. But of course, right away, quick, sound came in. Now, for the big kids this was all right, but for all of us

little teeny-tinies, it meant attaching a synchronization device with an arm which ran a turntable down by the projector. It meant that in my case, being so teeny-tiny, we had the horse talking quite often, [laughter] because the records would be a little warped or somebody had taken out too many frames. Understand that it's such a close thing that you've got to get right down to the frame. If you should break the film, then you've got to do a measurement which puts in black film and causes innumerable clickety-clickety-clicketies. But anyway, it's just the disadvantage of being smallish.

So it just started [to go] down and down. We tried to recover--we, although I was the head of it. An old high school friend, and still one of my very dearest friends, by the name of George Damon had come down from Oregon State [University] (Oregon Aggies, then), and had joined me because he didn't have a job. So he was the projectionist. We had the opportunity (if you could call it that), of taking over the theater in Ojai, so now we had Carpinteria and Ojai, which meant we probably lost twice as much money as if we'd only had one. But anyway, that's the way it was. This went on for a while, but it was just impossible. There was no way that we could buy the kind of equipment which would give us this caliber of projection and sound that some other theater would have.

GALM: Were the silent pictures dropped immediately when

sound came in as far as exhibition?

PRICKETT: Well, no. There was an attempt for a while--for I would say a period of not more than six months--that they did a lot of sound on it. They gave you a background--even if you didn't have the synchronized, or the attempted synchronizing, device. You used it through a broadcast system which would give you sound effects. But they were hardly any [good]; you know, here's the titles going, too, as they did in the old silent days. Just because there's a little music in the background is hardly enough when the person could go and see the lips move, the mouth talk, and all the wonders of sound pictures. So it didn't take me very long to have my shirt right out on the line; it was not too slow a process, either. The road to Santa Barbara had been fixed beautifully to almost a state highway. The theaters up there had all the latest releases--all the Maurice Chevalier things, all the this and that and the others that were the big draws. We were in about, as far as the area was concerned, in the third-run status; so we would get Chevalier down the line a ways, in The Smiling Lieutenant or whatever. The stage shows helped a little. I had a magician by the name of Maldo, who was in Santa Barbara [and] who used to come down and do a very bright stage act. This helped a lot, but finally there was no light

at the end of the tunnel at all. As I say, it all got to be sound on film, so that unless you had new projectors with a soundhead built into them, there was no way to compete with your little waxworks going around down by the side.

I tried to substantiate my income. Now this would be in the--the reason the date is so identified [is that] I married a Carpinteria girl by the name of Margaret Gaynor, and we were married in 1930. Almost immediately afterwards, this thing began to happen in a devastating sort of way. When I wasn't out chopping logs for the WPA, and then getting groceries up in Santa Barbara at the WPA.... Of course, this was no disgrace then, because so many people were in a welfare state. It was just a depression; I mean, it was just really rocky. I tried to sell my "Oop" idea to the theater in Santa Barbara, [the] California. They wouldn't take the Oop idea, but they wanted me to work up a stage show for them, and played that for weeks and weeks, and then took it around to Oxnard [and] Santa Paula as a kind of a road show thing.

Warner's had nothing to combat Fanchon and Marco, which was a big producing unit of those days, which went into the new Arlington Theatre. So they had nothing. We had a good band. A chap by the name of Greenough, Frank

Greenough, who was a name band leader in Santa Barbara. He was part of the draw, along with the idea of the stage show.

It finally came to an end. I tried to sell out the place. The sheriff finally had to put a thing in my hand and say, "This is the end," which was a blessing to a degree. And then he was decent enough to give me a key--him being a local sheriff, we were all buddy-buddies, because we played on the same ball team in Carpinteria and Santa Barbara--so I could show it to somebody who might be a buyer. This is how I began working for Lobero Theatre in Santa Barbara.

The evolution of the Lobero Theatre is a fascinating one; it was built way back in, oh, '24, '25, I guess. I don't know whether you've ever seen it, but it's one of the most attractive theaters in the world. It is really a gem and has only one deterrent, and that is lack of capacity. But anyway, when the Lobero was built, they had so much money from, strangely enough, the Carnegie [Corporation of America], which gave them--oh, it was a lot of money in those days; I think it was in the neighborhood of \$25,000. But they had to spend it. This is when they had a supervising director, an assistant to an assistant to an assistant to an assistant. They actually put gold leaf on sets because they had this money.

They would get through--this is a typical Santa Barbara gig--one show, and they would do twelve in the course of a year. They would appoint two people--man and wife or friend and relative, or whatever--to go to New York to see what was good for Santa Barbara to do next. Now, the agony and the ecstasy of this was that if they liked a show, they'd play it, whether it was available or not. And then they would pay the penalty! There was only one other theater to my knowledge that was ever getting away with that, and that's the one [belonging to] the Honolulu Community Players, who used to play them two days after Broadway opened. But who knew? Or who cared? But here was Lobero--they would actually take a play which was in its first month of a big smash on Broadway. And they'd get a book of it, and they'd get the cast. And then pretty soon somebody would find out about it, and they'd get fined. And they paid the fine!

All the Montecito money was just funneled in. I think we had, at the time that I went in, around \$44,000 to do twelve productions. Now, that doesn't seem like much now, but it was an awful lot of money [then]. Irving Pichel was the director, and he was up there [getting what was] in those days a fabulous salary like \$700 or \$800 a month just to come in and put a touch of genius into the thing.

GALM: Do you know why the Carnegie Corporation chose to give it to the Lobero?

PRICKETT: No, I think it must've made a local drag, because of some influences of some sort, that this beautiful theater had to be.... And they did beautiful things. They looked down their nose at Pasadena and everyplace else. Believe me, they did beautiful things; they really did.

But finally the [snaps fingers] Carnegie thing went off. There was no more guts to this thing. I'll tell you how much intestinal fortitude there was in this gig. All of a sudden, after I don't know [how many] board meetings which were unattended, etc., some of the board members--in fact, just about all the board members--discovered that the Community Arts Association, which was kind of the holding company for [the] Lobero Theatre, had borrowed money against the Lobero Theatre. I will never forget the day when they all grabbed a piece of paper and resigned. The whole board just walked right out of the room! Even the ones who were inclined to be reasonably loyal and hadn't used this for purely a social thing, a plaything--even they walked out. And there were the three of us: Paul, I was doing the publicity then, and there was a gal who was handling the office. And there we were, sitting there with a theater, which was an

unbelievable thing.

We tried to whip up.... This is a very funny story; I've just got to tape it. I know you'd appreciate it. We tried to do a benefit. We were going to do a benefit for the employees. We were accountable, actually, to hardly anybody except the bank of--I think it was the Bank of Italy at the time, which became the Bank of America, or maybe it had changed to the Bank of America then. In the long run, something was going to happen, but in the meantime, we just had a theater. And that was the way it was. So we decided to do [an] employees' benefit thing, because now we had no pay. We were just sittin' there. So we picked a show which all of us were nuts about, called Behold This Dreamer. Now, Behold This Dreamer had played on Broadway and been a big flop. [Charles] Fulton Oursler and a chap by the name of Kennedy wrote it. Fulton Oursler was the editor of a magazine which went out; it was as big as Time. Golly, that's stupid. I can't remember.

GALM: Not Liberty?

PRICKETT: It might have been Liberty; I'm not sure.

So we went ahead with the rehearsals, and we just knocked ourselves out. We thought that this was the funniest show that ever came down the pike. And we weren't selling any tickets. Oh, boy, we weren't selling any tickets, because: "Behold This Dreamer, what is that?"

We couldn't personally circulate enough to make it, so we decided we had to do something about this damn situation. [There] wasn't any sense in putting it on. So we went over--most of the cast--to El Paseo, and we got crocked to the eyeballs on what to do. We really took on a collective load. "We got to do something about it. There's no alternative. All right? Let's get another title."

So we went down through the playbook, and the chief motif in the thing is a chap who wanted to get away from the mundane world of Rotary Clubs, etc. He was an oddball, and so his family decided to put him in a home. He always wanted to paint, and they thought he was a little odd; so they put him in this home. While he's in the home, he does a painting which is called Nude with Pineapple. This becomes a big winner and makes him the acclaim of everybody. So now his family wants to get him out, but he doesn't want to get out. He wants to stay in. It's a cute idea. It's one of the cutest shows.

After we had decided that there was a title we could live with, we went over--Paul and I--and by that time the secretary had drawn up a thing for the poster man. I don't know if you remember the Lobero, but there's a great [thing], like a French kiosk, in the very corner where the posters are put. We went over there, and we

got a ladder from backstage; and with our bare hands we tore down that sign that said Behold This Dreamer and just left it blank. The secretary, having her head screwed on right, went up to the sign painter and left this thing under the door: "As fast as you can make it." And here's what she put on it-- Nude with Pineapple.

When we got back there by a little after noon, here was our new sign, and business started booming. We had one of the biggest hits; we played it twice. I used to get a letter every year from Fulton Oursler saying, "Season's Greetings"--never a check inside, but "Season's Greetings." It's now listed in the [Samuel] French's catalogue as Nude with Pineapple. I brought it back down to the Playhouse, [and] we did it at the Playhouse. One of the first places that broke the ring of this thing was UCLA. They played it because they thought this was cute. And it was; it really was. It was just a terrific show.

The eventuality of the Lobero was that it came under the county of Santa Barbara and became a rental unit. In other words, they maintained a person there to take care of it; but as far as a producing organization or anything else, it was impossible just to reorganize the old way of life. But now it's under the county of Santa Barbara, and a certain amount of it [is] an attempt to pay off the bank or whatever.

GALM: So at the time you were associated with it, it was a

community theater?

PRICKETT: It was a community theater, just on the same basic framework as the Playhouse. Operating as a holding company was the Community Arts Association, but the Lobero Theatre Association was the producer of the plays and the conduct of the entire operation. Now, of course, it has served well up there. It's still an attractive thing, and it has served well. The Music [Academy] of the West installation down by the Biltmore uses it for all their concerts and does opera briefs in it. And it's rented to people. Later on, when I got with the Greek Theatre Association, we'd break in shows there. I've broken in a number of shows there that I've worked in myself, because strangely enough, it had a better backstage, a better grid, better equipment all the way than a theater like the Biltmore in Los Angeles. It had great depth. It had everything there. It was just a real gem of a theater. It's funny. You get up on that stage and you look both ways, and you can't tell whether there's more distance to the back wall of the theater than there is to the back wall of the [stage].

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GALM: We were speaking about the Lobero Theatre and your time there. What is the period of time that you were publicist?

PRICKETT: It wasn't too long. It was partially during the time that I was going out of my mind trying to keep Carpinteria open, and then it went on over to what amounted to practically a full-time thing, although the Lobero never was a full-time theater. In other words, the director, Paul Whitney (who was in my thinking a brilliant person), also was a correspondent for the L.A. Times. It was a "We'll do a play on schedule" type thing, but it wasn't a twenty-four-hour job of any sort.

GALM: What was the guiding artistic principle of the theater at that time? Did it have one?

PRICKETT: No, it had glories of big production, of a lot of things when the Carnegie money and when the Montecito money in subscriptions was there; but it had gotten down to a.... Well, I'm trying to think. As you might expect, during fiesta days we did Rose of the Rancho. We did things like this Nude with a Pineapple or Her Master's Voice, just actually with an attempt to get by, because this was in the years after the Carnegie thing had fallen off.

I kind of hate to see it that way currently, but I realize that there's a splat of summer stock in there every now and then, and there are things in there that are worthy, but there also is no criteria of value now. If your sister Suzie wants to do a flute concert, she just has to rent the hall, that's all. So there's not institutional value continuing as far as Lobero is concerned. This Music Academy of the West, of course, they have tremendous standards, and their things help sustain the caliber of audiences. Audiences of Santa Barbara are very discerning; they are a sophisticated group. But it still is an availability, and I've seen things going in there that I know wouldn't have been tolerated before.

GALM: You had mentioned that the Greek Theatre had tried out some things there. Do you know of any attempts by someone to establish a base of operation like [James A.] Doolittle has at the Greek Theatre?

PRICKETT: Well, he wouldn't be able to sustain it from a point of economics up there. The only thing that I could think of that might happen would be for somebody to set up a season and get the shows from outside. I think there has been summer stock season there for the last few years, but this doesn't take care of the winter. And I can imagine it's just a sheer matter of economics as far as everything is concerned, because you just can't do it with a 600-plus

house. We broke in, for instance, the Carol Channing show up there. Well, what are we going to do? We're going to play it Friday for a break-in, Saturday matinee, and Saturday evening. Figure a five-dollar top in those days was pretty fair. You got \$3,000, you got \$6,000, you got maybe a diminishment down to \$2,000 on the matinee; so what you're doing is coming out of there with \$8,000, which is buttons when you think that a show like that has to gross at least from \$30- to \$40,000 a week to get by. So, although George Washington Smith's design was perfect for its time, if there had only been some architectural provision for a balcony or something, because right now, every seat of those 600 is a choice orchestra seat. If you're sitting in the last row, you're as well off as you are at the Music Center in the tenth row. Better off, in fact--you've got less distance to cope with.

GALM: Is it sort of like a Huntington Hartford [Theatre] without a balcony?

PRICKETT: Yes. Well, of course, the Huntington Hartford is 1,050 [seats], so you've at least got a margin. With the Hartford, of course, all the aim for over there was to extend the run. And this was the problem we had, that you're in there for two weeks. Well, you just get your nut out of it, hopefully, in the two weeks. In other words, the promotion and everything that went in--the take-in of the

scenery, the setting-up of the whole thing--on the current union scale is a pretty prohibitive thing. This is why we always kept fighting to get a longer run, so that we could advertise it more effectively.

Up there, of course, you could probably play, as we played, to capacity with the Carol Channing show for three days. Those three days were automatically red ink, so to think of it in terms of longer than that.... After all, you're just using the house for break-in, that's all. Just getting things pulled together.

GALM: So how did you get back to Pasadena?

PRICKETT: My brother was the general manager of the Playhouse. I was a broke and lost little soul. I tried vaudeville with two gals from Santa Barbara. We would run down and play things like the Dome in Ocean Park. We played the Million Dollar in five shows a day behind a guy by the name of Clemente who threw knives at a Mexican friend who was up there on the board; he could hardly see the board by the time he.... Anyway, I tried all that there--Pico Theatre on Pico Boulevard--but there was nowhere to go. Finally the opportunity came at the Playhouse for the extension of a third year.

The Playhouse had a college of theatre arts development, which reached an accreditation stage; but in those times we had a lot of kids who were begging for continuation rather

than just trying out for Mainstage or the upstairs Workshop Theatre (as it was called then; later it became the Laboratory). This wasn't enough for them. They wanted to continue on with a minimum of academics but some playing time. So the brother brought me down and said, "What can we do about this?"

They developed a third-year course which included the minimum of academics but all the rules and regulations and the discipline that would be required of a person being enrolled. And then we started going out and getting places for them to play. We at first began with the things like the Veterans' Hospital up at Olive View up here. We'd take a production into them, and we'd take the same one to a hospital benefit in Palm Springs. We'd just hippety-hop with a couple of shows. We had two or three shows: we had a Molière; we had The Romancers [by] Rostand. After all, we were the Playhouse, and we weren't trying to do Mickey Mouse-type material. We were trying to be representative and yet give them a good run for their money. But there weren't enough dates in that, and they were too splattered here and there and everything.

Through a good friend, Janet Scott, who was a professional actress who lived in Riverside, we got to a man by the name of [George] Hunt in Riverside, who owned the Golden State Theatre. We set up a regular schedule with him and played

plays in conjunction with a movie. We played an afternoon and an evening performance of--now we get back to the common denominator of moviegoers--oh, Dulcy and plays like that, just stock. They're very good, and the third-year kids were intense about this. They really were.

This was no plaything. We had a bus; we had a trailer for scenery; we had everything. It was a good little operation. We played out there for quite a while. We'd break it sometimes by playing in the Orange Theatre. The specifications on the thing had to be that it had a backstage. [In] most movie theaters, the screen goes right up to the back wall. We had to have a backstage. We played the Riverside operation for quite a while. In the meantime we'd pick up a few days here and there. As I recall, at Riverside we'd play three nights a week; we'd play a matinee and evening. It depended upon their film booking, on whether the film was a percentage thing. There were a lot of contingencies there, as you can imagine. If they had a straight percentage film in [and] couldn't cut it, then we could put it off and do another date on the thing.

Then into the Playhouse to see the brother came Herman and Bess [A.] Garner, who had the Padua Hills Theatre. The Padua Hills Theatre had been built because of her especially; she was a great showman, one of the best. It had been built to do Mexican Players and as a dining room, but it was one

of the most attractive little theaters in the world. It's just a beauty. Again, it is in the 400-seat category. I've forgotten what the year was; I've got it all here in a book somewhere. Anyway, the whole idea was that the third-year [players] take on the operation of playing Padua Hills from Monday or Tuesday through Friday--every week with a different production. We ran them for a week, and we did an amazing number of things over a period of two years out there. I was--I guess you gotta call it general manager or production manager or whatever. We did, really, some stunning material. Oh, is this the Padua Hills write-up?

GALM: Nineteen thirty-three to 1935.

PRICKETT: Yes. [reads write-up] That's the one. I directed one show there [Convict's Sweetheart]. You wouldn't recognize it, but there's my phony name, Rem Bettie. Bettie happens to be my middle name, and we all used all kinds of different names then. But Rem Bettie was my name, which appears on a lot of Playhouse programs, too. Usually I played the Playhouse under Oliver Prickett, but then we got into a jam with Equity about whether a person should be under contract or not. So we all began using boxcar names and funny names and this and that and the other thing. It didn't seem to matter at the time at all. The only time it mattered was when somebody like Preston Meservey would be put under contract to Paramount [Studios] and they changed

his name to Robert Preston; or Samuel Cregar would go under Sam Cregar until [20th Century] Fox changed it to Laird Cregar. So names didn't matter.

The Padua Hills experience was a great one for the kids. Oh, boy, it was just a great one! Gilmor Brown would come out to supervise the final dress rehearsal on it. We did some amazing things. We tried to be as catholic as possible in the choice of plays. There was a [Arthur] Miller one one time, and the next time it would be something that was way out--Embers of Haworth, which was the story of the Brontës. We did some Shakespeare; we tried to do at least one a year.

GALM: Hedda Gabler?

PRICKETT: Yes. Jean Innes, Vic Jory's wife, played Hedda. We didn't have enough third-year personnel to cover everything, so this became also a great outlet for other than school kids. We had Hugh Marlowe [and] these people playing along with it--some really fine people. But in the main, the casting was third-year students, except where [there was an] age requirement or something like that. We've just never gone in for too much crepe hair or greasepaint.

It went on very effectively for two and a half or three years. We rode in every night from Padua--rode out in the setting sun and came back at midnight every night--with a trailer. We didn't use the trailer all the time; we had a bus which was very substantial to cover the company. You

couldn't cast more than the bus would hold, but it was a pretty good-size bus. Then at the end of the first year, the Garners asked me to stay on and manage the Padua Hills Theatre, too; which I did--take care of the promotion and everything else on that. So Mrs. Prickett and I lived in Claremont for one year during the last year of it.

GALM: Did this operation have a good audience following?

PRICKETT: No. It had at times. I tell you, we have played to a dozen people and we have played to 400. It was a very unpredictable thing. This is the reason that the Playhouse finally had to get out of it. Let there be a little fog, let there be a little rain.... We played one night to three people; it just was an unpredictable venture. People thought of Padua Hills in terms of the Mexican Players. If they saw something, [maybe] we could sell them on the idea of group parties, etc. If there was something like an As You Like It, there was probably some credit value in it as far as students from nearby high schools. But it's a long way up there. It's a long way even from Claremont; it's still a full piece. It's not just dropping across the street. Of course, the dining room up there and everything is part of the attractive picture of it.

Finally, at the end of the year, we were losing too much money on it. About that time, I was brought in to take care of the publicity of the Playhouse--the promotion manager or whatever you want to call it. It's just a

glorified press agent to sell the stuff. And then the development, as far as the Playhouse continuation [was] concerned, went another tack.

I had a very good chap who had been out there--and I can't for the life of me think of his name. The idea was to call it the State Theater Players and to develop the idea of the third year entirely within itself, of picking the play which fit the class--which wasn't easy to do, but they did things like Arsenic and Old Lace and this and that. [The idea was] to put this whole thing on the road with a guarantee from, say, the Salinas Rotary Club, of \$350 a night for a couple of nights (or the Ojai Lions Club or whatever) to sell it as a benefit--the State Theater Players from Pasadena Community Playhouse.

This went on as a continuation of the idea as it began. In other words, I'm just giving you the evolution. It went on for quite a while; it went on for about three or four years. And then again, rising costs, etc., were defeating it; it was just impossible. The alternative of that, institutionally, came in using more third-year people on Mainstage wherever possible, and also to give them a two-week run during the regular season--in other words, to give them a production of their own which they could do. So finally the whole road thing, the outside activity, stopped eventually.

GALM: What were the particular promotional problems involved with these operations?

PRICKETT: Well, you haven't much money to spend on advertising. You could do a lot of legwork, but it's a question of how much your legwork does for you. Selling theater in a nontheatrical atmosphere is murder. In other words, you just go out, and you have posters, and you have all the money you can spend in ads and all the publicity you can scrounge out of the situation; and then you just hope and pray, that's all. The merchandise doesn't have time enough to become attractive because you haven't got word of mouth going for you on a short run. It'll kill you, though, if you have the wrong thing, because nobody'll be interested. It's as simple as that. It's just the same old theatrical equation that exists at all times and in all years: if you've got it, you haven't got enough seats; and if you haven't got it, you can't give it away--it just doesn't work.

GALM: At the Padua Hills, was the season established? Were the plays scheduled far enough ahead so that you knew what plays were going to be done for the entire season?

PRICKETT: No, they never went that far, but they went far enough up so that we could plug the next one. Just the same way that any theatrical merchandise is merchandisable, an Animal Kingdom would go big, because, "Oh, yeah," immediate recognition. But a Deacon Brodie: "What's that?" It's the

same old theatrical equation everywhere. It wasn't the idea of the thing to have something which broached on stardom and there was none of that kind of attraction.

Now Claremont was not unknown; I mean, it was a good theater. The Claremont Community Players had been in Padua Hills before. They had a couple of seasons and then somehow-- I don't know, by either disagreement or whatever--they were out. And Pomona College, the whole thing there, it had some theatrical health, so it wasn't as bad as lighting in a place that had no theatrical knowledge or didn't know one thing from another.

GALM: Salinas.

PRICKETT: Salinas, yes. Very good example. Again, you still ride or fall on your merchandise. It's the same. There's nothing truer. Only it's more true now, because competitively, you have TV, you have greater range of sports interest, [and] you have a great deal more of do-it-yourself kind of thing. So as we so well know from every stand in Los Angeles: if you've got it, "Wow!" Don't Bother Me I Can't Cope contrasted to something which was ahead of its time, like a Brendan Behan, The Hostage--nothing but empty seats. If you'd bring it back, like we did at the Biltmore at the time....

We had him up in San Francisco too. He was even funnier up there than he was down here. He'd just loved the play so

much that he'd go around and sit in the cafe scene. He'd just sit around, and he'd bring a bottle, and he'd pour drinks for people while the play was going on. He was a panic. We had to save him out of the San Francisco Bay once. He went in, sat on the sand right by the surf, and went in without any clothes on. You'd think this'd be the greatest publicity stunt in the world, but it isn't. It wasn't at the time, because he wasn't, you know--"Brendan Behan, who's that? Some wild-eyed Irish playwright."

GALM: Took him a couple of years before his death....

PRICKETT: That's right. He was one of the sweetest, loveliest, drunkenest guys that ever came down the pike. But he'd just go in, [and] you can't keep him out; after all, it's his play. Here'd be a scene going on up there, and Behan would wander in, and he'd just sit over at the table and watch it.

GALM: In love with his own work.

PRICKETT: Well, that's right. And just full of the joy of living, he really was--and a few spirits, too.

GALM: We were speaking earlier of your act. What did your act really consist of, like at the time that you were putting together something for Lobero?

PRICKETT: Oh, nothing, just a hambo kid. I just directed the band funny, and worked in all the sketches--the missing husband or this and that and the other. I led my band just

[keeping] beat with the drummer. It was just a front or an intro for the girl singer or an intro for the next number.

I picked up a guy down at the railroad tracks who was a comedian and also a singer. He was one of the best I've ever seen, but you never knew whether he was going to show up that night or not. He lived down in the jungle, down below Carpinteria, and he came up once and sang for me. And I damn near went out of my mind. He sang [sings] "Look down, look down that lonesome road," and holy Moses! From the first night he sang that at the Alcazar, he could never get off until.... People would just scream for it. He'd go into it at the drop of a hat. But he just disappeared one day, and I've never seen him since. [I] hated it, too, because [he had] a real, great, natural talent. But [he was] a big oaf with no sense of direction or discipline at all, and he was always after more money, in a nice sort of a way, but I couldn't give it to him anymore.

GALM: What was his name?

PRICKETT: Vic something, and I cannot think of his last name. I go to Carpinteria quite often, and people say, "Hey, whatever happened to old Vic?" He would just disappear into that jungle, and go down there and come up--eight o'clock, and he'd be ready. He did some things in blackface, and he'd make up a funny little wig out of a mop. But I never have heard [from him]. I've always figured that maybe somewhere

along the line I would catch him where he had hit it big, but I just know that [with] the life he led, he probably got a knife in him or just went down the drain some way.

GALM: Getting back to the Padua Hills endeavor, was it ever thought that the third-year idea might have been a bad idea for the Playhouse?

PRICKETT: No. I'll tell you, it was a great idea. It was a really great idea, because it gave these kids responsibility. They had to help load the truck--I mean, not that that's valuable to an actor, but the whole esprit de corps and the whole thing was tremendous at all times. It was just great. It's a funny thing that they will stand no horsing around among themselves. In other words, they didn't care whether there were ten people out in that audience: they gave out, they really did. And they had an attractive place to do it in--a good proscenium theater with fine dressing rooms, with all the niceties.

Of course, we never gave up the idea of selling the thought that maybe it would really catch on. But it never did [catch on] big. It would catch on some nights, right out of left field that you could never explain. Maybe [you] could explain a portion of it by some party that you had promoted at a very minimum cost--some teacher, drama director or somebody who wanted to make an assignment of study of [a play]. We did a lot of Molière, [and] we did a lot of

nonroyalty stuff, as you can imagine, because we had to and because that was us. It was just the idea of the thing. So sometimes you'd all of a sudden catch [snaps fingers] one of those, where a number of drama directors or instructors or whatever would use it to their advantage as a laboratory sort of thing.

GALM: What was Convict's Sweetheart? That was the play that you directed.

PRICKETT: It's a melodrama, one of those things like Rose of Tennessee--the mustached villain, the rubber dagger, the whole thing, [It was] kind of cute, kind of funny, but you don't play it for funny. You played it for real, and it came off. You don't see many [melodramas]. They're all patterned after The Drunkard-type thing. If people got the idea that it was a party thing, quite often we'd have dinners, and then they'd "Ha-ha-ha!" and go into the theater. This was not the kind of trade that would come to a Molière, because even the name Molière would frighten them. You had to be an impelled goer; you couldn't propel.

GALM: I want to backtrack a bit. How much contact did you have with the family and with the Playhouse during those years that you were off to Cuba?

PRICKETT: Just correspondence is all and not too much of that; they were always a "Please write"-type thing. I [was] just a loose-jointed guy, just running around here and there.

In fact, although I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world, they probably could've been productive years. But I would say they were just wasted in living, that's all, enjoying another kind of environment. I've often thought I should've hung in there a lot tougher--theatrically, I'm speaking. But I didn't, so it doesn't matter.

GALM: So then, your real contact with the Pasadena Playhouse was with the Savoy Theatre, up until the time....

PRICKETT: When I returned for this third-year venture I was in charge of that, and this was a grind. We were always trying to scout out new dates, and if we had a piece of merchandise.... We did get a series of kid plays at the Wilshire Ebell Theatre in Los Angeles, which we also did at the Playhouse on Saturday mornings. This was mainly the PG--we called them PGs--the postgraduates, the third-year group. We did them. Now, this was a backbreaker. We were doing all the standard Alice in Wonderland-type thing, and they were big productions. We'd played them at Padua; we played them for paid dates here and there, wherever people wanted an attraction. Then we played the Wilshire Ebell, but that was a bomb; it really was.

I don't know when this whole pattern changed, but theater for children came back into vogue to beat the band. It's a real big thing now and has been the last few years. I know my daughter takes my own grandsons to Foothill College

up at Los Altos because they do good things, because they're well attended. They are in this area, too. UCLA has a very tremendous thing, and there's a gal who was from UCLA who heads a group called--well, I can't think of the title. But anyway, she acts as a kind of a central booking agency for taking a production and spotting it in ten or twelve places for children's theater.

GALM: I suppose the Saturday film matinees really cut into children's theater, too, more so than it does now, because there's so few films that children can attend.

PRICKETT: That's right, and somewhere along the line the idea of value, culturally or for whatever reason, all of a sudden caught hold. It wasn't that way before. There was an isolated one once in a while, or something like that. But now theater for children, differentiated from theater by children, is a big, big venture, and it draws. When I came back to the Playhouse, the only thing that really helped sustain us was those children's theater things. You can gross up real big on those; you can do very well with them.

This was part of the PG effort at the time. We played all the ends to the middle, just everything, with the idea [of] the third-year kids getting outside experience--motivated, of course, by the fact that they couldn't get it on Mainstage. There's no way, except for an isolated one here and there. Here's a kid paying tuition who wants to go

beyond his second-year experience of playing on a little, tiny stage in the balcony theaters. He wants to get to a broader audience; he wants to get more parts. That's the entire motivation of the whole arrangement. And it was valid, too; it really was.

GALM: How much of a financial burden did it create for the organization?

PRICKETT: Well, about this time any financial burden was a thing of horror. Now we're in--where are we?--we're about '32 or '33. When is that Padua?

GALM: The Padua is '33, '34, '35.

PRICKETT: Yes. Well, things were just awful. The particular genius of my brother.... When it looked like the Playhouse was just about--how could it go on? It couldn't possibly go on. It was down, down, down. He'd had this genius for carrying on whatever debts there were, with the eventuality that they would be paid by the Playhouse. But it got to a point in these years where it was just "where is tomorrow?"--that's all.

He devised a plot and a plan which was the height of ingenuity and actually kept the Playhouse going. And that was a percentage plan. I'm sure you wouldn't be able to impose it on anybody now, with all the unions and all the--what shall we say?--lack of institutional spirit that prevails these days. I'll never forget the meeting in the auditorium.

Here's a lot of long faces. Now we've got probably seventy-five employees (I'm just guessing, but it would be around in that). So we just all gathered in there, and he put this proposition to them which had been the result of no end of work on his part. He had figured that for the ten years prior, 44.2 percent of the dollar had been paid to employees; in other words, for a rounded dollar, 44.2 had gone for salaries. So the only way the Playhouse could possibly sustain itself was to take this nut off of the operating expense. You can't cut down on anything else. [You can] just cut down on people, that's all. Well, there was a great hue and cry, and there was nowhere to get any money. There was nothing. It was just a desperate situation, that's all. It's either that or close. So the employees went along with it, and a greater, more spirited group than that gang never lived.

I remember one salary check for a week was eleven dollars--my salary. Now, this went in ratio to others. I think I probably was getting \$125 a month, which was livable in those days if you got the \$125. I would imagine the brother's salary was probably \$300. Gilmore's could've been \$450, \$500, maybe, They were the two tops.

Now, everything went in there--rentals of the auditorium, memberships that came in at five dollars a head--[and] everybody was totally aware of every penny of income. There

was a lecture series that used the Playhouse. There was the Coleman Chamber Concerts which used the Playhouse at a rental of \$100; that \$100 went in the pot. So at the end of every payday period, every source of revenue was accounted for and divided 44.2. The most ingenious thing.

You would think that this would be dire and desperate, but over a period of--I just haven't got the facts on how long we were on that. It would have gone through about the third drama festival. Now, the first drama festival had to be 1934, '35 and '36. I think it went through three drama festivals, so let's say we were on it for four years. You realize (of course, you don't) that by the time it averaged out at the end, it was 90 percent of our salary that we got? There were times when we'd do something that was absolutely smashing spectacular--Girl of the Golden West is a good example--where we got 200 percent salaries because that's the way the thing worked. The next week we'd do a Tess of the D'Urbervilles and go back to the eleven dollars again. You never could tell. It was the damndest theatrical dice-rolling device that ever came down the pike. I think it must've been four years, because I recall we went through three drama festivals. We went through the chronicle plays [of Shakespeare], Greco-Roman, and then the story of the great Southwest, which ended with Girl of the Golden West. Then the next year we took up on a regular salary basis.

There was an intro into that before we got to the first festival. It must've been in 1933 or early '34, something of that sort. But to think of that thing working out to 98 percent over an average for the entire time....

GALM: What was the reason for finally going back on a different [system]?

PRICKETT: It just got too complicated; and then, economically, things were a little better. The chronicle plays were big; they were wonderful; they were great; they were just--the Richards and the Johns and all that. Now you get down to Troilus and Cressida and Coriolanus and a few others like that, Pericles, "Ooo! Murder." They went really down. But the story of the great Southwest.... The drama festival of that year had things like Girl of the Golden West and Montezuma. A great list of shows that were attractive because they were so attractive. Just the idea of a western civilization being staged was quite an attraction.

But it's amazing how that thing worked out. And boy, you'd get a check and you never knew whether you were gonna eat the next week high on the hog or low on the hog. It was a very ingenious thing. It saved the Playhouse; it really did. Like profit-sharing in anything, it provided the employees generally with more spirit about the whole thing. They knew every buck of this company, and they were out rustling members, and they were getting people to see shows.

It was really an esprit de corps about the whole thing.

GALM: Do you think it affected the quality of performance, too?

PRICKETT: I don't think so, no. I think this quality was pretty well established.

TAPE NUMBER: TAPE III, SIDE ONE

MARCH 27, 1973

GALM: Last time, Mr. Prickett, we were discussing your responsibilities at the Playhouse after you returned to the Playhouse. And we did discuss your involvement with Playhouse productions at Padua Hills.

PRICKETT: Yes. Padua and also the other outside activity that we had at the time, the other theaters [to] which we took the third-year projects.

GALM: Let's resume your period of history with the Playhouse. This went on up until 1959, right?

PRICKETT: Yes, that's right--again, depending on you for dates or dates of plays in reference to the chronological thing. Coming in after the experience of the three or four major installations that we used for the postgraduate players, I came into the Playhouse as what is crudely called press agent, but which is now defined as public relations. What it amounts to is selling the merchandise. I was established as the editor of the program, plus all publicity, plus all advertising pertaining to the Playhouse. This is both of the production at hand, all the other stages, plus what has always been a chief Playhouse accent, and that is the institutional value in whatever plants or whatever dissemination of information we could get to the outside.

It was actually a twenty-four-hour chore of news releases, photographs [and] program copy in which I was to benefit greatly by the association with me of a chap by the name of DeWitt Bodeen, a very intelligent, knowledgeable chap who helped with the research which went into a lot of the material. At that time the Playhouse schedule was generally two weeks on a run. So this meant you had a tiger by the tail at all times. There were very few runs that went over two weeks; once in a while one would. I think I told you--or we mentioned this before--that one of the great values of the Playhouse in those days (and up to what point I'm not quite sure) was the fact that although people now think in terms of the glories of the Playhouse, and what wonderful productions there were, a great many [of them] weren't so wondrous--were "turkeys," "dogs," or whatever you want to apply. But the beautiful part of the fact is that--and to me it's such a contrast to a lot of other institutions--nobody ever blamed anybody for one of these "turkeys" or "dogs." The finger was never pointed at anybody. We just played out the string and went on with another one. But if you got one that was below par, it was accepted that it was a good try, not only by the staff but by the public, too, strangely enough.

In those days, too, there was enough institutional value for it to keep going, attendance-wise, to almost what might

be a minimum. I recall a minimum take was generally in the neighborhood of \$3,000 for a two-week run. It never went like it would in the feast-or-famine market of today, in which you close it up quick or you carry on the run as long as it will draw a dollar. So we just went on with that two-week schedule.

The chief variance in that, and one of the greatest things that ever happened to the Playhouse, was an inspiration of Gilmor's and the brother Charles's--to do something about the summertime. This had been dog days at all times. Pasadenans were inclined to go to the beach or [on] vacation, and summer fare got to be pretty mediocre. So there was instituted a drama festival series, and the first one was a sheer stroke of genius by Gilmor. It was the chronicle plays of Shakespeare. This was, I believe, 1934. It just caught fire. King John was the first one, I believe, with John Carradine. It was just gung ho through the entire--I think there were ten plays in that first series. This had an attendant spin-off of what we called drama festival breakfasts, which were held in the patio of the Playhouse and at which the speakers were people knowledgeable of Shakespeare, etc. And [these breakfasts were] also just packed to the outside doors. They were a great tangent promotion.

I think the institution of the drama festival idea

was one of the salvations of the Playhouse in those early days. It was just a gung ho all the way. We had reviewers from New York; we had [John] Hobart, the regular man on the Chronicle in San Francisco, come down, and it was just a really big event. It established the Playhouse further in doing plays which are seldom done, very seldom done. In the second drama festival, which was the Greco-Roman plays of Shakespeare, we ran into a little less enthusiasm because of Pericles, Troilus and Cressida, a few other plays which hadn't been done [often]--which were beautifully done but which had no particular draw to them. But it sustained the idea that each summer the Playhouse was going to do a series of plays which would be unusual [and which] would be thematically controlled some way by the choice of the program.

I can't recall all of them without reference point, but we came into the third midsummer drama festival with a great idea, the story of the great Southwest. [It] started with Montezuma and then went on through Girl of the Golden West and other plays of the West--Night over Taos--ending with a new play called Miner's Gold, which was probably the least effective of the whole grouping but [which] nevertheless brought it down to the discovery of gold in California.

I know you're looking for sort of little human

interest stories, but there has to be one in connection with this; and that was the naming of the Playhouse at the time of the opening of that third drama festival, naming it as the State Theater of California. Actually [chuckles]--and I'm not diminishing the stature of the name of anything like that--this was a kind of promotional gag. We had a local assemblywoman, highly respected; her name was Eleanor Miller. She had been a fixture here in Pasadena and a part of the Playhouse scene. She had actually been a speech teacher herself--or an elocution teacher, as we used to call them. She was a very devout Methodist, and a real figure in Pasadena; she was in the California State Legislature. Thinking of the story of the great Southwest, we dreamed up the idea--and I would attribute the dream to three or four of us who sat around the table one day. I can't recall who finally came up with it. The idea was that we get some recognition from the California Assembly because of the story of the great Southwest.

So I went up to Sacramento--I had known Eleanor Miller for many years--and told her what our thought was. She really just went absolutely crazy about the idea. She didn't do too much from the point of legislative activity up there; she was a figurehead. But anyway, she drafted this resolution naming the Pasadena

Playhouse as the State Theater of California, an honorary degree without any monetary attachments of any sort [and] without the potential of any state senator's daughter playing Juliet or anything comparable. She just saw this as a great magnanimous gesture. She brought it up before the California State Legislature, and "Wham!" Every lever went "Yes." It was a unanimous thing, and the Playhouse became the State Theater of California.

This had again a few spin-offs. The Native Daughters of the Golden West put a plaque in the patio. It got a lot of attention, but it also gave people the idea that now the state was in some way financing [it]. So we had a double-edged sword there. We had to keep always saying, "No, it's purely honorary. No, we don't receive any money from it."

This was the story of the beginnings of the drama festival idea, which went on until we just about ran out of ideas. I've forgotten how many there were in the final total--they're all a matter of record--but they went down, through James M. Barrie, for instance. Gilmore, in one of his trips to Europe, became acquainted with Barrie and also [George Bernard] Shaw, [and] they gave us specialized material that in some cases isn't open to rental per se. One that we couldn't do was Peter Pan, but [Barrie] did give us for a later production--as the result of this

interest in us and probably of hearing of us for the first time--an American premiere of The Boy David, which was a very interesting production.

I was with Gilmor on a trip to New York when we got to George S. Kaufman in an alley one night after a performance of George Washington Slept Here. It had just broken in, and we found out from the doorman his habits of running out the stage door just prior to the end of the performance so he wouldn't have to.... Anyway, we nailed him and got him to specify the plays that he would like in a George S. Kaufman festival, which we did with his collaborations with so many, like Moss Hart, etc. We used some very class-A Kaufman material. All this went down into the changes like the Booth Tarkington series, which was a rarity--just one after another as far as the drama festivals.

The breakfasts continued. When they were in the back end of the building--by the back end of the building, I mean the Playhouse originally in its new location--the back wall of the stage was the back wall of the institution. There was no shop in the back, [and] there was no [place for] the classes [to be] held. We rented a place across the street, a couple of tumble-down shacks, to hold classes in and for added office space. Through the gift of Fannie E. Morrison, who is

a chief donor as far as any reference to the history of the Playhouse--I think the sum was in the neighborhood of \$650,000, which, of course, wouldn't even lay the foundation today. But the back end of the building, which is the part you see now as you look actually from the back--she gave the whole building.

So the drama festival breakfasts were moved from the patio, where they'd become rather cluttered, up to what amounts to the seventh-floor level of the Playhouse. At that time, we had an elevator installed, and it was quite a thing. It happened, as I recall, during about 1935, or '36 possibly. It was in the process of being built during the Greco-Roman series. It gave us all the scene-dock area we needed. It gave us a rarity in theaters, and that is a submerged paint frame, in which things could be raised on a frame to eye level rather than using the old chalk on the end of the stick motif. And it provided ample storage.

I meant to tell you, in reference point to the other, that [with] the evolution of a programming which called for many, many plays [evolved] the problem of painting, of construction, of everything [that] had always been a problem with the Playhouse. It kind of makes a reference point back to what we have already talked about. Caltech--this seems like a far call--had originally

been Throop Institute, which was up above Walnut (I believe the name of the street is Chestnut) from Fair Oaks to Raymond. It had been called Throop Institute and was more of a technical school at the time. When they moved to where the present location of California Institute of Technology is, we used their shops. In other words, they had shops there because as the Throop Institute they were interested in doing metalwork, etc. So we used that whole area of Caltech or Throop Institute for the sets. [We] carried them on a set of rollers down to the old Playhouse, which was about a block away.

Then when work started, that building was torn down, [so] we moved this facility for all the set building and painting to another Pasadena landmark, which was Lowe's Opera House. [T.S.C.] Lowe, of Mount Lowe fame and the incline and much money, had decided, around 1890 or something like that, that Pasadena deserved an opera house. And so on South Raymond Avenue there was Lowe's Opera House, which lasted very quickly. I mean, it had soon become just a tremendous white elephant because it was too big for anything of a normal draw and it was just too much of a mosque-type thing. We always used to take out-of-town people to go and look at this elephant. But there it was. They had, as you can imagine, ample stage room back there. So then we moved the whole shebang

down to Lowe's Opera House and used their backstage area. Then this was torn down, and it went back to the warehouses in back of the Playhouse. In other words, all the scenery, all the painting, all the construction, everything, had to be toted from the warehouse back of the old Playhouse up to the new Playhouse.

Well, the building of this new building, of course, brought that all into perspective again, so that everything was done right out there in the back. All the upper floors were used for classrooms or for a radio station or for wardrobe. Functionally, it was one of the most complete and attractive units that could possibly be designed for theater operation and still is. The sixth floor had a commissary in it, which was not a Playhouse venture but which was leased out. There was a staff lounge room, and there was also ample tables around for the kids to eat there and (by the kids I mean the students) and the players and everybody. And [it was a] very delightful spot in the summertime. This entire area where the summer festival breakfasts were held allowed outside eating. People used to get a kick out of coming up there and having their lunch--although it was not too great a menu, but I mean adequacy as far as the kids and everybody were concerned.

GALM: Was there any attempt to invite the playwright--

if the playwright, of course, were living--to the festival that might feature his plays?

PRICKETT: Yes. I can't recall the specifics of [it]. There were some local [playwrights], for instance. The gal who wrote Miner's Gold that I referred to was a woman, a teacher by the name of Agnes Peterson who had done a lot of one-acts and this and that and the other. Ramon Romero, who wrote one of the plays in the great Southwest series, which was called Miracle of the Swallows [and] which had to do with the establishment of the missions and a particular reference point to San Juan Capistrano. I can't recall specifically other playwrights. Many of them were inclined to be either unavailable or dead.

But we ran out of ideas. A reference point to a single playwright gives you a great deal to work with, whereas you garble it with the number of them. If the theme is just a vagary, it didn't really amount to too much. It's more difficult to sell. I'm thinking now in terms of the...

GALM: Promotion?

PRICKETT: ...promotion thing of the plays.

GALM: You mentioned the fact that the festival did draw a group of reviewers and such from out of town. Were the critics kind to the Playhouse? In other words,

critics can determine the success of an institution to a degree. They can be more critical, perhaps, than the public.

PRICKETT: I think critics in those days were inclined to be more on the literary side than they were on the chop-'em-up side. In other words, I think criticism has gotten.... Well, I'm lost for a word there to say that it's become crisper and more cryptic and [more] inclined to "yes" or "no" it than it was in those days. I think one of the great advantages, from the Playhouse standpoint, was a critic who was at the very beginning of the North Fair Oaks days, who saw beyond the squeaky seats and the lack of facilities and the depth of the stage, etc.--a chap here by the name of Alexander Inglis. His reviews were as good as the plays. They dealt in such depth because he was a deep one himself.

The Los Angeles papers were always for us. We were very lucky because we were about the only type of.... [The] type of theater that was prevalent at the time--the Morosco, the Mann, the Majestic in Los Angeles--were inclined to stock material; and we were bringing out an introduction of a man like [William] Saroyan. Saroyan sort of typifies the Playhouse approach to something new and something sort of daring. He just happens to be one of my favorite people. I'm not just diverting the

conversation to him because I happen to be a friend, but he carried with him a spirit of the adventure-type thing.

He had written for Rob Wagner's Script, which research would divulge was the most interesting--you just couldn't wait for the next copy of Rob Wagner's Script. In my estimation, the finest critic and the funniest and the most probing of all was a chap by the name of Richard Sheridan Ames, whose writing was just--you waited with bated breath until his next review. It didn't matter what it was, whether it was about us or about whatever it was. But Rob Wagner's Script was, of course, a classic of its time. It [was] just a shame when Rob Wagner died and Florence Wagner tried to carry on, but it was on its way [out] after Rob Wagner's death.

Anyway, Saroyan had done these little things, these cute little stories! What am I saying? They're My Name Is Aram-type thing from Saroyan, but just as a kind of a throwaway. He's a Fresno Armenian who couldn't care less whether you liked it or not. He wrote it, and if the sentence didn't end, the hell with it! That's the way he was. So he brought us a play called Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning, in which I played the commentator (or the narrator or whatever) and the scenes went on as a kind of a highly intellectual, highly diverse, Our Town-type thing. But the beauty of the whole thing was

having Saroyan there. And he was there at all times and with all kinds of suggestions, like "Throw that line out! It's too damned Saroyanesque." He would yell a line, and the stage manager would be ready to write it down.

By the time we got to the performance, Saroyan was so nervous on the opening night that, before the curtain went up and when the house lights went down, he had to run, screaming, out of the house and run up and down the alley for a while; and then he came back in. He was a great guy, just a great inspiration to have around. But we found one thing. People are so inclined to think of an evening out in the space of time; in other words, a show had better be two hours long, otherwise they felt as though something was missing. This was the old philosophy. Well, by the time he had whacked and everybody had settled down, I don't think that before the opening we really ever got a timing on the show. And a lot of it was being winged. By that I mean we had new lines thumbtacked on the thing that Bill had thought of at the last minute--"Use this somewhere. That's a pretty good line."

It was a great opening, but when the curtain came down, the show was sixty-one minutes long. Now, if you open a theater at eight-thirty and everybody comes out, it's nine-thirty and everything's over.... Because he

didn't want any intermission. We called him the next morning. He left that night for Fresno, back to the vineyards.

And incidentally, speaking of vineyards--if it might be a warning to anybody in this whole wide world, never try to drink with Bill Saroyan because he had all of us under the table while he was still going, during his visit.

So he went back to Fresno, and we called him and said--the people who called was the director and myself; Frank Ferguson was the director--"Bill, we've got to do something. Have you got another play? Have you got something that would go?" As I recall it, he was then working on My Heart's in the Highlands or some other of his numerous creations. I take it that at that time he already had a trunkful. Anyway, he said, "No, we can't get it up. Would you like to do this one?" (He had some other little stuff.) "No, we just can't get up in this thing in two days--get sets and everything."

So then came one of the most brilliant phone conversations I've ever heard. He said, "Hey, do it twice!" Well, after we simmered down on it, it didn't seem like such a bad idea at that. And so for the entire run of Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning, we did it twice--

twice every night. And this was funny, because I would be up there speaking my verses--which were indeterminable--and I had to have a prompter right back of this gauze curtain at all times. The prompter's name was Teddi Sherman, whose father was Pop Sherman, who did the "Hopalong Cassidy" series. She was in school, and she just had to know that when I took just a second too long, that I was up because he had changed this. It was about six sides to begin with, one speech after another.

Anyway, it was the funniest thing to see people--"This is where we came in"--get up and leave. Other people would come in at the specified time in the second performance. We allowed an intermission at that time, so that we got down with the two performances, all of us hoarse, practically. [laughter] But Bill came down and he thought that was the greatest thing he'd ever seen; he could see his play twice. And, believe me, when you analyze Saroyan's words, they are actually nothing but a symphony of words. There's no connected thoughts; that's besides the point. If he could take a dictionary and use it as notes, he would, because it's just a symphony of words. That's what it amounts to.

People that came and were reasonably awestricken by this offbeat type material the first time were fascinated by it. The funny part of it is, if there were any

seats available, they would edge down and come along the side. The second performance was always very trying, because now they weren't just being startled by effect or the first time they heard it. Now they were in an analytical frame of mind. [laughter] Oh, I'll never forget it.

Then we had such a--well, not a great economic success, but it became so touted that somebody said, "New York needs this." Of course, he'd had the advantage of Time of Your Life, but Time of Your Life wasn't available at that time. It was still in the touring state, etc. He never did like Time of Your Life, you know. He said that the Theatre Guild botched it up, that it wasn't his play when they got through with it. But that's besides the point. Sort of an editorial comment from Saroyan himself. But anyway, it went back there, and they decided that they should have Canada Lee do my part. This happens to be a little black-on-white project, but anyway, the thing lasted quickly. [laughter] I guess New York wasn't ready for it or something wasn't ready for it, but it lasted very quickly back there. I mean, it closed in a big hurry.

After that, we did many, many Saroyans. We had one which we finally decided not to do, which had to do with a group, and I'm trying to think what the name of it was,

but we rehearsed it for two or three weeks. It was the cancer ward of a San Francisco hospital, and everybody was on their way out. And on their way out, they expressed themselves in terms of what they felt about this and that and the other. The eventual thing was like a Hasty Heart where everybody ended up as a corpse, eventually, until it got down to two people or something. We decided it was a little too clinical and a little too close to a number of people whose families had had a history of cancer or something.

GALM: I suppose also the fact that cancer then would've had even more of an ominous sound.

PRICKETT: That's right. It's like consumption had been years before, or TB, or something like that. Instead of attributing a performance to a March of Dimes, or going along some route that would be in some way beneficial from a point of the knowledge behind it, why.... Of course, his wasn't a clinical knowledge. His was purely a philosophical approach to those who had had it and were on their way out.

GALM: They could have been dying of anything, as far as he was concerned.

PRICKETT: That's right. It didn't matter. He just picked that. His story was the expression of [how] the Playhouse [liked] to do these things. It was the kind of

genius that Gilmor Brown had, and the attitude that we had about things like this, that allowed anything worthy to be done. And also [it was] the tolerance and the economic genius of my brother, who would not say no [just] because he knew that this one was possibly going to be an economic failure. We had that stature as that kind of an institution.

GALM: What was the general pattern? Did Gilmor Brown go out after the material? Or was a lot of the material presented to him for presentation?

PRICKETT: This was like a crystal ball. [That] is the only way I can really describe it. You would be standing around Gilmor's office, or standing around Gilmor in this beautiful office that he had--the beauty wasn't in the architectural thing; it was in the wealth of material that he had--and he would say, "It's about time we did a play by Clyde Fitch." "Oh? All right, yes, yes." Or "It's about time that we did.... Let's see, I have some plays down here in my drawer. They're new ones. Here's one that might be good." Gilmor was given to the vagaries of speaking like that, and out would come a script. There was no great board of analysis; there was a kind of the crystal ball motif. He would do Three Men on a Horse and think it was absolutely wonderful, and he would do Turandot and think it was wonderful.

The whole programming was so catholic, so diversified, that you'd get a Pulitzer Prize one week and a rummy prize the next one--not intentionally, to any extent.

I still value the quote from Daily Variety back in the early days, that the Playhouse was twelve to one over any single institution in providing people of and for the theater--which was a valued thing to us. The point I'm bringing up here in this play selection thing is that we would have some kid who graduated who was out with a company, or somebody who was in New York, who would give us the benefit of an extensive grapevine as far as values were concerned. In other words, they might have been--one comes to mind immediately. [It was] a play which had been touted [and] which had been a best seller, called Chicken Every Sunday--which isn't a very impressive title but which was a very funny book. [It was] a book on the order of The Egg and I--a valid biographical thing of a family in Tuscon, Arizona.

This thing was done by a major production unit in New York [and had been] taken out of town. We had a kid who played a bit in the thing who thought this was going to be one of the funniest things that ever came down the pike. Now, they get out of town and they get panicked. The laughs don't fall where they think they [should], or there's not as many, [or] it's too folksy,

it's too this and that. So they drag out Joe Muller, or they get a play doctor and really foul the thing up. By the time it gets back to New York, it's such a far call from the original that it has not quality to it. It's just a series of jokes put together. One thing where they can tell where everybody's going to the john because there's a creaky stairway that goes out to the area.

We would find out that a play like that really was a great one, so what we would do was try and get the original. We played Chicken Every Sunday and stacked them in for weeks, just because it needed the kind of reverence that you treat an original with. You don't just get panicked because Passaic, New Jersey, doesn't like it, or it's too unsophisticated for New Haven. But we had the time, and we had the energy, and we had the inclination to do things like that. We did a lot of shows from that kind of route.

Everybody would ask the same question in a publicity thing. They would say, "And how are the plays selected?" Now, if you said, "Out of Gilmor's bottom drawer," or "Off his casual eyesight of going around the room to look at books," this wouldn't be right either. It wouldn't be right to say that that's the momentous way a play is picked, but actually it was. Gilmor resisted agency

sale like crazy--in other words, somebody touting something so heavily that it would just be a sales pitch. There were certain [playwrights], like George Bernard Shaw--we could never go wrong with a Shaw. If it was Too True to Be Good or Arms and the Man, it didn't matter. Shaw was Shaw. And Gilmor became very close to Shaw; he saw him many, many times over there. He admired our, shall we say, "spunk" in doing some of the things which were fairly isolated--and not just sticking with Major Barbara and Arms and the Man, but going to other ones that were available.

GALM: Did he allow suggestions from his directors?

PRICKETT: At all times. From not only his directors, but from all of us. He would never close [his] mind to any suggestion at all, and sometimes these little tidbits of information that he got would add to a final choice in it.

Of course, he went to New York every year. He had been president of the National Theatre Conference, which at that time meant a great deal because it was a kind of linking of the university [and] civic theater. [It] was a strong organization and had the benefits of people like Kenneth Macgowan and others who were leaders in what was at that time a completely noncommercial area. I attended a number of meetings and did their

press work for them a couple of times when I was in New York with Gilmore--just as a convenience for them. They were never fighting to keep the unions out of their hair, or to get makeup at a discount; [they never went] in for some of the things that conventions are sometimes held for where they represented the whole country. It was a great clearinghouse for a lot of fine minds. Of course, the university theaters at that time were not nearly as prevalent as they are now, nor did they have the personnel that they have. But they were well represented by the major ones.

He'd see all the shows, and he would go around to Jasper Deeter's Hedgerow Theatre, and he would go up into what is now known as the off-Broadway area. It meant a yearly circulation that was very good, and it meant also very fine public relations as far as the Playhouse was concerned. We would have what was called a Playhouse reunion in New York on the occasion of his visit. Sometimes there would be 200 and 300 people at the Algonquin [Hotel], or wherever it was held, and they would flock to hear what was going on at the Playhouse. They'd be working shows. His annual visit there was a very valuable thing for the Playhouse.

GALM: When did that usually occur? What time of year? Or did it vary?

PRICKETT: I can't really say. It seems to me it was
Januaryish, something of that sort.

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE TWO

MARCH 27, 1973

GALM: You had mentioned that you had been in the Saroyan play. How much acting were you doing for the Playhouse once you became publicity [person]?

PRICKETT: A great many shows. We all did everything. Directors were acting; they were directing; they were holding classes. As far as I was personally concerned, the only classes that I did were an approachment to professional theater to the extent of obligations, of Equity, of Screen Actors' Guild, of professional conduct--which was purely a tangent thing.

I also coached the basketball team--which sounds a little odd, but we always had a problem at the Playhouse with the city of Pasadena populus, generally, who considered us, a lot of us at least, queer. We always had that shadow hanging over us. Gilmor was in turn its greatest asset and also a great liability from a point of people pointing the finger. We did everything we could to combat this attitude. I don't know whether this has any bearing, but it has a bearing on anybody who's lived in Pasadena for a long time. Now, of course, it is an accepted fact of life; thank heaven, there's no more pointing of fingers, etc. But in those days, it used to be a real problem;

because long hair was not an accepted way of life whereas it might have been a requisite for someone playing a part. The Playhouse had student dormitories up on North El Molino--which is up above the Playhouse by about two blocks, a block and a half--and there was a continued parade of people in shows. Sometimes they were in makeup. Sometimes they were almost in costume. Some of the girls were a little on the freaked-out side. This didn't make for a parade all day long, every day in the week, that all of Pasadena accepted--by a hell of a sight. This was a "There's-some-of-them-things"-type approach. So we had a basketball team.

We also had a regular program in which we'd rig Gilmore up in a fishing outfit--[we'd] put a fishing pole in his hand with a big fish on it--in which he'd just returned from a hike in the Sierras or anyplace we could think of. We did everything we could to combat this effort.

We had some very good boys [on] my basketball team--guys who had played ball in college, etc. But I also had what I called a wrecking crew, which was about three or four husky guys. We played, like, frosh clubs from Whittier [College] and Occidental [College] and Pomona [College] and LaVerne [College] and fire department and church teams and this and all, but we'd always get the

birdcall when we went out on the floor. I had the suits as stock as I could get them, so that we, you know.... But I had this wrecking crew, and all they had to do was just go out there and do a little mopping up--knock a few people down--so that we got off the birdcalls. I got tired of listening to them, and everyone else did. They would give it the "Oooooo" bit, you know, and the limp wrist thing. And by the time my wrecking crew got through, and a few of the other group were strewn all over the floor, people had gotten the idea that maybe this wasn't quite.... Anyway, it was just a furtive attempt. We never did win Pasadena.

GALM: Why was this so strong? Had there been incidents that they could really point their finger to?

PRICKETT: Never. Oh, folklore had it that they did; but still, when Pasadena had the tremendous purge here, when it became a great scandal, there was not one single Playhouse person involved in it. There were leading merchants; there was an assistant secretary of the [Pasadena] Chamber of Commerce; there were people of high repute--doctors, etc. There's no reason to dwell on it, except that we all dwelled on it at the time in trying to combat it. And it became a point of fisticuffs with a lot, because these kids weren't about to take it. Of course, times have changed so radically now that you just

don't go in for that sort of thing unless you're some old hat who hasn't been on the modern scene.

This didn't affect the show even remotely. It affected mainly the feelings of the staff. We just didn't like this albatross hanging around our neck, but I don't think we ever lost it. I think no matter how much virility was in the expression, we still never lost it. It was one of those things.

GALM: Was there a certain segment of the community that it was coming from?

PRICKETT: Yes, it was the old-time, the same people that would be derisive [about] other things around them that maybe didn't suit their particular stuffy taste. You've been in the business enough to know that the easiest way to knock somebody down, in esteem or whatever, was just to say--without any credentials for saying it--that, "Oh, he's a queer," or "Oh, he's a limp wrist." It's just the same kind of gossip material that goes on in so many things, in those days, around a theater. They hung it on films; they hung it on a lot of things. But being the only theatrical institution in Pasadena, the accent fell on the Playhouse. But that's beside the point.

GALM: Right. But this seems to be a point that Brown must have seen from the very beginning, because in the

early productions at the Savoy Theatre, he was very eager to get the blessing, so to speak, of the local ministry.

PRICKETT: Oh, very! Well, the local ministers--say, like a Dr. Robert Freeman--played in shows, actually. And the man who was tremendous in the Presbyterian Church, Eugene Carson Blake, was an avid goer. Another avid goer, from the point of just human interest, is a little Nobel [prizewinning] man we had in Pasadena by the name of Dr. Robert [A.] Millikan, who was the head of Caltech [and] who, for some unaccountable reason, wanted to sit in the last row of the balcony at all times. I don't think he missed a production, and I don't think Blake missed a production during the entire time. But it was so funny to see Dr. Robert A. Millikan. Here's all the so-called gentle people down there in the first ten rows or whatever, and perched up on the very top rack was Dr. Robert Millikan. He wouldn't sit anyplace else. And if you wanted to go to the theater with Millikan, you saw it from up where the antelopes play. He didn't want to see it down in the front row.

GALM: Was it for sight or acoustical preference?

PRICKETT: He was on our board. I don't know. I never did. You didn't ask him any more about that than you would about the atom. I just thought of it.

GALM: Who did you succeed as publicity manager or director at the Playhouse?

PRICKETT: I think it was either Bob Foote, Robert O. Foote, who went to the [Pasadena] Star-News. He and his wife were both on the Star-News for a long time. Or the drama editor of the Herald-Express, and I'm trying desperately to think of his name. There'd been a great deal of part-timing about it, or it had been kind of broken down into a lot of.... The Playhouse News, for instance, which was our program, had been published from outside and brought into it, sort of. Everything was sort of combined under the office of director of publicity, which is what I had.

GALM: Did you work more with your brother or with Gilmor?

PRICKETT: Both, equal. As I say, everybody did everything. It sprang from those early days in the beginning, when Gilmor had a paintbrush in his hand and the brother had a broom. Nobody was above anything. If there was a part to be played, even in one of these small traveling companies, one of the staff directors had to fill in. There was no feeling of caste about it at all. It was just for the general good, which sounds awfully Pollyannaish in today's world but was an actuality. There were people who would do chores which were actually very menial, but the next minute they would be directing

stage production. We always said we were just staff members of the Playhouse. There were those who were designated as directors, naturally, because they followed in a kind of a line--like Frank Ferguson, Addison Richards, Charlie Lane, Lenore Shanewise, Mary Green, Thomas Browne Henry. They would just go along, one after another, in being assigned this play by Gilmor, who would just merely say, "Here it is. We're going to do it." And then it was done.

GALM: Was the publicity procedure more or less set up by the time that you took over the position?

PRICKETT: I would never attribute even remotely to myself as having had anything to do with the eventual grandeur of the Playhouse, but it needed more processing. It needed more minute attention. It needed somebody on the job twenty-four hours a day. Some of the others had come in as kind of part time, with maybe a flunky there doing the menial stuff. This person [was] just coming in from the outside, writing the releases and kind of setting up the general program. When I got in there, then it became all my baby--to knock it out and to get it out and to fill those books which you saw on the shelves down there in the storehouse. It was an exciting thing, believe me, because every show was a different project. The only sameness about it would have been the dissemination

of the material.

We had the benefit of a great photographer by the name of C.K. Eaton, who became the head of the photographic division of Art Center School in Los Angeles, who did our publicity material differently than the old hack-type thing. In other words, we used considerable imagination as far as the material was concerned. He was a great one.

Oh, I don't know. Publicity is publicity is publicity. As I approached it, brass tackedly, the idea was that we were going on peanuts on a budget. We had little tiny thingabob--say a two-column, one inch--in the L.A. Times once a week, and we had probably a one by four--or possibly there was an opening of two by six--in the local bugle, the Star-News. But we had to mainly go on contact and estimation as far as people like [Edwin F.] Schallert at the Times, or Bill Oliver at the Herald-Express, or others, to not go overboard, because we hadn't anything to go overboard with except what we were selling. We couldn't have the lavish press openings or anything like that. We didn't go in for that sort of thing. And I think for them it was a theatrical outlet which was relished by most of them, because most of their stuff had been pretty confined to the L.A. openings and the road show openings and everything else. So this gave them

a little chance to broaden their horizons a little, too.

I can't think of anything particular, outside of the fact that I figured that a story was worth its weight in lineage. In other words, if you got a six-inch story in the Monrovia News-Post, this was worth whatever their ad rate was. If you got it in the San Pedro Pilot, it was worth whatever theirs was. We had an awful lot of visitation, too, fortunately, from press generally here and there. We had an awful lot of good friends. The Playhouse had always been blessed. There was no pretense; there was no fawning over them. "Here's what we have. Come see it."

_____ National magazines picked us up--Look--and we had our troubles like everybody else did with Life. Life had, you know, more assignments than they could have published until the end of time. We did a Gilbert and Sullivan like Knights of Song and Gilbert's or Sullivan's, [chuckles] (I forget which now) niece lived in San Marino. So Life came out with this whole idea of a spread on the thing. Well, I think the spread, when it finally came out, amounted to two little teeny pictures in some other reference frame than selling a show called Knights of Song, which was written by Glendon Allvine and which was a story--with the music interspersed--of Gilbert and Sullivan.

As far as I was concerned, it was just a continued grabbing for space--a continual sending out of material and hoping and praying. Of course, nothing is going to be the criteria of theatrical value except a house full of people. It's as simple as that. You can knock yourself out, as you well know, on something that hasn't any value and get a minimum return; and if you've got what they want, you haven't got enough seats. It's as easy as that. It was fun, though. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed every minute of it.

GALM: What was the reason for your eventual leaving the Playhouse?

PRICKETT: Well, I started drifting. I played in a show called All the Comforts of Home, which again is an old-timer, and which we did with spirit. It was a funny, knock-down, drag-out, almost a Marx Brothers-type thing. We did it to great success at the Playhouse, and a New York gal saw it and said, "I've got to have this for Broadway right now." They picked me up to come back and play in it back there. We had a good cast--we had Celeste Holm and Nicholas Joy and Dorothy Sands--but it just never came together the way the spirit had been at the Playhouse. We played it for two weeks to nearly a vacuity, after breaking it in [at] Asbury Park or someplace like that. It was just the lack of the spirit which

we'd put into it or in some way had conjured up at the Playhouse, and so it was a debacle.

Then I came back. I'd been working in a few films, and [I] got a little more active as far as films were concerned. And then later on, Jack Kirkland cast me in a dramatization he had done of a book that had been very successful called Mr. Adam. So I went out on about a four-, five-month tour which ended up, again, another debacle in New York. It just wasn't sophisticated enough for a New York audience.

Then back into films again, with most of my work turned over to a chap who had been kind of an assistant to me. I just kind of drifted from the Playhouse scene then. There became enough activity. I went out on a couple of road shows. The Girl of the Golden West, we took to San Francisco. Then [I] got more active in films and came back to the Playhouse only in kind of a, not part time, but in assorted capacities--playing a lot on stage, helping with publicity--but never back into the twenty-four-hour grind on the thing. I was never too much smitten as an actor because I don't think I was very much of an actor. I was just an enlarged personality that went over well here or wherever according to the part. But I had no illusions or delusions of acting talent per se. I just played me; that was all.

And that was the way--take it or leave it. Films got fairly good. I was still at the Playhouse, still working a lot there and doing a number of things--giving a few classes, etc.

I had become friends with and known Jim Doolittle for a long time. He had the Greek Theatre, but he wanted to expand. He got together with Lou [Louis] Lurie from San Francisco and took over the Biltmore Theatre--which had been closed except for an occasional splat now and then--on a regular basis. And he asked me to come with him and be production manager at both the Greek and at the Biltmore. This expanded to this extent, because of the Lurie connection: in that Lurie owned the Geary [Theatre] and was, I guess you could call it, a major stockholder in the Curran Theatre in San Francisco. Now they had been not of a production mind up there. They just took what came off the road and did it. But Jim (Doolittle, that is), being a boomer [with] all the courage and a great deal of foresight, wanted to keep the Biltmore open at all times. He wanted to get things of a production nature, rather than just single artists or whatever, into the Greek; and San Francisco went along with him to the extent of our making a deal. In other words, we'd get a show which maybe wasn't coming any further west than Chicago. We would

get the show and book it into San Francisco, then maybe do some roading of it up and down the coast and put it into the Biltmore. We'd put it into auditoriums here and there, but we tried to make as attractive a route for them as we could.

So that being production manager really was more.... We didn't produce very much. We produced Say, Darling, the Carol Channing show, and a few others; but the main thing was to grab these attractions--which again maybe weren't the greatest rockers in the world, but which kept the house open. We didn't have a chance to keep the Biltmore going with only the spot things that happened in off the road and the same things that would happen in off the road into one of the theaters in San Francisco.

Jim used so much imagination and so much courage in things like Comédie Française--you know, guaranteeing them a route. We'd take them, and we'd make arrangements for them to play in Chicago and out here. Then the things like the [Grand] Kabuki [of Japan], I mean, the real Kabuki. He was over for an Oriental trip and made these unbelievable arrangements which you gotta be either out of your mind or so full of courage. And he was both. But the Kabuki went great, and then Kabuki went from us to New York. We didn't have any valid New York connections, but we had a lot of ins so that we could get playing

time for them there. The Greek Tragedy Theatre [of Athens], which we booked around, even played in the Greek Theatre at Berkeley. I went around and booked it here and booked it there. We ended up flying the sets to Chicago and got in the Opera House.

It was just a never-ending scramble to keep attractions and things in all the houses. Some of them bombed; some of them didn't. [There were] things like the Royal Danish Ballet and things like that, that wouldn't come here [more than] once every ten years. But because of a guarantee and more dates, [they] came--because of his courage in it.

GALM: What kind of a man was he to work for?

PRICKETT: Oh, the most difficult guy in the world.

He wasn't difficult for me, up to a point. I admire the guy very much. We're still good friends. I don't say this with any indication of any particular value of mine, except that I was the buffer between him and everybody else. He had a very large temper, a very large lack of patience--which goes with that type of genius--and [I] just had to go be the go-between. People would try to get me to get the deal--to get his signature and not have him to worry about and get the thing set. It's just because I'm a softy and he's a tough guy.

He had a wonderful wife, by the name of Nony, and

I think [she was] where he got enamored of show business. She was in opera, and she was a delightful person; and if there was any big squawks or any time when Jim and I didn't see eye to eye, Nony was there to step between and kind of help. This is what probably happened with many, many others in the same category. Nony died, and Jim just wasn't the same, and we just kind of fell out.

He gave me a year's leave of absence to come back to the Playhouse--which was one of the great errors of my life because I'd been away from it so long and had so many influences bearing down on me to come back. And I say this with no bitterness at all, because I should have known, but a welcoming board of trustees went into thin air. There was no money. I'd been given the order to return the Playhouse to its full production days: in other words, to reestablish the Playbox on a going basis, to get the balcony theaters all going, to get the Mainstage without a lapse in time--to go big time, in other words, to go the whole route.

After about two weeks, I found that the whole process I had to worry about was raising the salary to feed the little mouths of all the people who were working there--sixty or seventy people--and I found that this was a bimonthly struggle that was just almost unbelievable. There was very little help, damn little, and so we just

scrounged nickles and dimes. I didn't think that we did, outside of Member of the Wedding with Ethel Waters, and Gideon and a few other things.... We played it just like a stock house, but there was no other way to get that money up for the payroll. One of the stipulations in my returning was that I was not a fund raiser and would not be. I was not about to go out and beat the bushes. And I didn't, and I couldn't, and I wouldn't.

So I was never happier to see a year end than when my year contract came to an end. It was a bitter disappointment, because the assumption was that I was so steeped in it that I could pull some kind of a miracle. But you can't do it without some money; it was just one of those things. In fact, when you get down to a point of putting out your own money for buying a lot of necessities like ads in papers and this and that, all I can do is think of it [as] being taken off the hook, finally, by one man who helped get me off the hook.

Then I went back to the Greek and to work with Jim again, but it just wasn't the same. I found that he had changed, I thought, considerably. We weren't hanging in together the way we had before. No matter how much we might have argued, no matter how much we might have had at each other, it all came out to the betterment of the association. But that's the way it goes.

GALM: When you were talking about influences for you to come back to the Playhouse, what sources were these coming from?

PRICKETT: A man by the name of Wesley [I.] Dumm had a feeling that I had some genius quality that might restore it. He had been on the board [and] was thoroughly disgruntled with the associations on the board. Everything that had been of Playhouse asset had been borrowed upon to a point where what had been the dormitories were heavily mortgaged [and] were uninhabitable. The property of the Playhouse was under heavy mortgage. Unless you had a smash hit like we had in Member of the Wedding, which ran for weeks and weeks and weeks, the margin with a small house--which was 852 seats at the time--was down to a point where you couldn't make enough to sustain you over the dogs that you were going to have.

Audience tastes had changed appreciably in Pasadena. I found there was very little of the old institutional value left. People talked real big. Board members talked in grandiose terms, but they couldn't be at the next board meeting, or they didn't understand what was going on, or they wanted to sell the place, or they wanted to lease it, or they wanted to do this. There was never any feeling that I got from them that they could assume any responsibility in going out and helping fund the

place. The only operational potential would be just to have a strict budget, go out, raise the money, cover the budget, and then live with the budget. And this wasn't possible because there was no funding available. It was one of those things where you'd get right down to the day before the payroll where you were \$670 short of the payroll. So you would ask three or four people not to cash their checks until Tuesday. And if you do this for a year, you finally run out of not only stamina but the patience to do it any further.

I found that the difference was that in the days of the brother, Charles (although the dollar value was comparable by the year), if you cost accounted in those days and lost \$2,000, he could go reasonably ashen. But I found when I was there that it was, shall we say, nothing to have a loss of \$15,000 on a production. That, of course, is peanuts compared with the pro field, but it was more peanuts than we had! You can't do that with five or six productions and hope to live. I think while I was there we lost \$90,000, and those that followed after me lost even more. So that was that.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE ONE

APRIL 3, 1973

GALM: Last session we were following your own theater work chronology, and we were speaking about the year that you did return as managing director--was that the title?--of the Playhouse.

PRICKETT: Yes, I guess that was the catchall title.

I think I elaborated on that to some extent, [and the fact] that I found it just an entirely different ball game, economically. It just wasn't the same. The spirit which we were so thoroughly endowed with had gone. There was a lot more of the selfish, get-there-quick approach, which I hadn't realized (but I should have realized) had gone on. By that I mean [that] with the people involved as players, the feeling of serving an apprenticeship, either in the school or as an actor, seemed to have diminished during the time that I was away. There was a great [deal] more aggressiveness as far as the kids were concerned; they wanted to get there right quick.

GALM: Do you think that came from the prior management of the Playhouse? Or was that just a change in actors generally?

PRICKETT: I think it's actors generally. I would attribute it to modern times, to the extent that they had

seen so many go--we call them morning glories. In other words, they bloom quickly, were picked up, and were put maybe under a contract or achieved some degree of momentary success; and whether they carried on or not was in the hands of the theatrical god. But I noticed it particularly.

I also noticed that the institutional value of the Playhouse had diminished to the extent of our never being able to reach what in prior years had been at least a reasonably satisfactory gross to carry us on. There were other impositions which had come in at the time. There was more unionism; there was higher Equity minimums; the stagehands weren't the same breed of cats they had been before, that were willing to go a little bit further than the rules required. It reflected in the board that had been so wholeheartedly [saying], "Now, we want everything to operate at full tilt," and "We want to get the Playhouse back to its former active state by all stages working." By then, the board either didn't show up for meetings, or when they did show up were noncontributory in their suggestions. They were just no help.

GALM: By that time, had it become less prestigious to be on the board of the Playhouse?

PRICKETT: I don't think it was less prestigious. But

I do think that a lot of people who thought of it in terms of prestige got on the board, or had gotten on the board, and were then disillusioned to the extent that they didn't realize what a tremendous chore they had ahead of them. There was no money. There was not the same feeling there had been back in the old days, when a board member practically stayed a board member for life. And this became part of their life in their contribution of not only soliciting funds but also adding to the general prestige of the Playhouse. I found that a lot of them came on thinking--possibly [due to] some theatrical frustration on their part--[that] it was going to be a part of the theater. But all of a sudden they found that it was a dirty old grind--getting shows on, hoping that there was at least a break-even point. And then they would--and you could see the pattern happen--be less frequent in attendance, and then all of a sudden they would [say], "Oh, I just have too much to do."

Of course, there's always been a conflict on the board between people of the theater and people from the outside. Previously, in the olden days and in the days up to the fifties, there was very little theatrical representation on the board. Then there became a few who came on the board--people like Victor Jory and Herschel Daugherty and others--who were in the profession.

Well, let me tell you that sitting there listening to the lay point of view drove them right up the wall, as it would anybody who was backgrounded in theater, because their naïveté, their what would hopefully be a denominator which would be helpful, in very few cases was helpful. It was purely a personal expression of "I didn't like that play"; "I didn't like the performance of..."; "I think we're getting a little too blue"; "I think we're getting a little too far out"; "Why don't we go back to Shakespeare and Shaw and all the rest?" It was just a changing scene, really.

GALM: Do you think that this was just because of the lack of strength at the top?

PRICKETT: I think the lack of strength was not only the lack of guarded leadership that Gilmor and Charles had given it. And believe me (and this is not out of school or anything), there were times--and I refer continually to this olden-day thing--when social forces in Pasadena would've loved to have taken over the Playhouse. Although quite often people will say, "Gilmor and Charles used to battle back and forth," believe me, they were thoroughly together. They had, to put it crudely, the neatest rubber buck that they passed back and forth, but when they saw anything that was happening....

There were two or three very profound instances of

where people actually would've loved to have taken it over as a social-type thing, and to have gotten rid of Gilmor and Charles right now. This was cruxed one time, to my recollection, in a membership meeting. There used to be a membership ([the fee was] \$5 a year, I believe), in which there was a voting power. There was a meeting held each year, which would generally turn out to be just a cordial "Ho, ho, ho! Aren't we all wonderful?" type meeting, at which a kind of a report would be given. I remember that the grapevine indicated to both Charles and Gilmor that this clique, this social grouping, was planning to do a little voting on their own at the next meeting. I recall very vividly Charles and Gilmor and all of us getting out and rounding up all the members and telling them what was happening--all the members that we knew were, shall we say, true blue as far as the regular conduct of the Playhouse. The vote was held, the attempt was made, and Charles and Gilmor and the Playhouse won by not too great a margin, because the other side was fairly well organized.

GALM: What was the aim of the other side?

PRICKETT: This is hard to say. This was, I think, a plaything more than anything. They weren't versed in the theater, except possibly they had somebody who they thought would produce the kind of theater, or through

some insight. We see these things going on now, [from] San Francisco to Lincoln Center [for the Performing Arts] to this to that to all the other areas. This was, I know in one [particular instance], an attempt to bring a man down from San Francisco--who shall be nameless--who was routed about; but that was later. The one I'm referring to, the big social crush, was way back in the late thirties. But it wasn't achieved. As I say, whatever Charles and Gilmor may have argued about, or seemed to have argued about, always resolved itself into the continuance of the good of the Playhouse. I'm not being Pollyanna in saying that, because this was a mechanical, methodical, numerical-type thing that they combated in any possible takeover.

GALM: So in other words, you left the Playhouse for the last time after that year of leadership.

PRICKETT: Yes. As I think I [said before], and it bears repeating, it was one of the nightmare years of my life because there just wasn't any money. Nobody ever thought of the Playhouse as being down financially. It's a strange thing. And if you ever get into the position or the requirement of raising funds for a theater [you'll realize that] unless you're a Dorothy Chandler or somebody who has that type of clout, people are so funny in appeals that [are] made. Now, Charles mounted two or three

appeals because he saw things coming. Everybody saw things coming. The economics weren't going to be as great as they had been, or at least as even as they had been. In soliciting people for funds or donations or wills or whatever, [they] will say, "Why, I've contributed. My God, I bring a party of ten or twelve people to practically every show. My contribution is that," rather than saying, "Here's a check, and carry on."

We would have professional fund raisers come in a couple of times, and they just threw up their hands. They said, "All these people are your best customers and your best patrons, but they will not think of you in terms of giving money." In fact, I don't think [there were many donors], outside of that wondrous person, Fannie Morrison, who gave so much in lifting the mortgage of some \$95,000 to begin with, who built the back end of the building at \$300,000-\$400,000, who did this and that and the other things. I recall [that] Sam Hinds, great man that he was, left \$10,000 in his will. But there was no continuance of this donorship, and there should have been. If the Playhouse had started its own Ford Foundation, [laughter] so-called (I say that because Ford was here in Pasadena at one time, at the very beginning of the Ford Foundation); if we--meaning Gilmor, the brother, the people who were on the board in the early

days--had started even the most meager foundation in anticipation of dry days, I'm sure it would have been a backlog that could have helped sustain it even further.

GALM: Who was Fannie Morrison?

PRICKETT: Fannie Morrison was the widow of a very wealthy Pittsburgh steel man. She was a garrulous critter. She was the horror of all first Saturday matinee actors, because she talked--she sat [in] the front row--all the way through the performance in almost audible terms. It got so [that] people would move away. She had no particular theater interest. She had had an interest in [the theater on] North Fair Oaks, which she thought was quaint and kind of fun to do on a Saturday afternoon. She wasn't a frivolous critter at all. She was a hard-rock miner. Her husband had been a Carnegie-type fellow--Pittsburgh steel.

She left a great mark on Pasadena, all of which is practically gone down the drain. She gave the Humane Society building down on South Raymond--just gave it because she loved dogs. She gave the Horticultural Center buildings down at Brookside Park, for which a flower show is done every year. She gave [the] Playhouse, in terms of money, I would say a half a million dollars when half a million dollars was an awful lot of money. And she never asked anything.

She came to all the shows--she never missed a first Saturday matinee--and sat right there on the front row. You came out and you started spouting your dialogue, and all of a sudden you heard voices. Everybody knew about it, and everybody was alerted not to climb over into the audience and start berating anybody, because this was Fannie Morrison. This was one of our patron saints. Our patron saint, actually, from a point of....

GALM: Was she not the type of social leader that would have brought other people?

PRICKETT: No. She was a total recluse. In fact-- it's a horrible story to tell, but I think it has to go into some kind of record--a banker from the First Trust and Savings Bank of Pasadena, and Gilmor, and the brother went to see her about help. The banker happened to have a couple of Pekingese dogs, so he rubbed his cuffs up against the Pekingese dogs and went with the two or three of them to see her because she had Pekingese dogs. She felt that any dogs that loved a man this much and sniffed around his feet--[he] couldn't be all that bad. And this was one of the influences, God forbid, that helped to sway her toward the Playhouse.

She came up with her chauffeur--she had a chauffeur-- and threw this check, the first mortgage check (the only reason I know this is because the brother used to laugh

about it), on his desk and said, "Now, don't expect any Oriental rugs for your office. This is it." There was no graciousness. There was no "I'm the big benefactor" thing. She just had money. When she died, there was a great expectancy locally that things might happen for a great many things in her will. But not one single penny went to anything in Pasadena. She had done her chore, in other words.

She was quite a character. She'd meet you in the hall and, for the ones that she knew of the old-timers like myself, she would just lay you out for a performance, or she would praise you for a performance. I played a thing called The Silver Whistle which she thought was just sheer wonderment, and she came to see The Silver Whistle every Saturday matinee. If you know The Silver Whistle, it's a sweetness-and-light thing and it's a lovable show-type thing. She just loved that. Now she'd get into something like a Back to Methuselah and say, "What are you wasting our time doing things like that for?" Where any theatrical urges sprang from in her being, I would never know. Nobody ever knew. Nobody ever questioned it or anything about it.

She didn't go in for "Here's a hundred dollars," or "Here's a thousand dollars." She gave a building. She lifted the mortgage the first time. But we've never

heard of her since, or anything that might be a residual of her interest in things around Pasadena at all. So I don't know. I assume that the lawyers and whoever was in charge of the will had it well under control. But God bless her, she really saved the day. She saved the day--great help.

After the year, and after the, shall we say, escape--back to my historical history--then it's back to the Greek again. As I say, when Nony--the first Mrs. Doolittle--died, a great deal went out of the relationship between not only myself and Jim but with the entire staff. To be dramatic in the thing, it found its entire crux in an unfortunate incident involving a person named Judy Garland. Judy Garland, as you know and the whole world knows, was a reasonably unpredictable critter about that time. As I think I've told you before, from the Carpinteria experience and because Mr. [Vincente] Minnelli, Vince, liked me and used me in a great many pictures, I had gotten very close to her. In fact, Vince used to have me take Liza to lunch every day during the run of a picture of whatever--just to take her to the commissary. She didn't like to eat in the big dining room; she liked to eat where the stools were, etc.

We booked Judy Garland in against everybody's better judgment. We pled with Jim that "This is going to be

nothing but murder." The first night turned out to be a smash, a great big night. Then the trouble began. She called about four o'clock in the afternoon of the second day of the run. In the meantime, during all this-- and this is no point of mine as far as being critical, or maybe it is--Jim had gone to Hawaii. As production manager and his number-one boy, I had the whole thing right on my hands. Well, about four o'clock; "She fell down last night at a party after the show. She broke her arm. She cannot appear tonight." Well, what do you do? You've got everything; you've got acts booked around her; you've got the whole schmearcase going. So we got on the phone and we got good people--wonderful people like Martha Raye and Mickey Rooney and Johnny Mathis--who came down to help Judy. They were wonderful. She had her arm in a cast. Later we were never quite sure about the cast.

She didn't show up for the rest of the week. I had to sit at the phone and wait until six o'clock every night to hear whether she was going to be appearing that night. This went on for a solid week, with my trying to effect substitutes [and] trying to get out of her contract. There was no way to get out of it because of the six o'clock bit [of] whether she was going to show. Any time-- and she was pretty hungry then--she would've wanted to

have shown up at six o'clock, we would've had to have paid the substitute [and] we would've had to pay her. We had a twenty-one-piece orchestra going under contract for the week. We had the Doodletown Pipers, I believe, or another comparable act--a youth group.

It was a horrendous week which ended up in nothing but chaos. Of course there was all the rumors, everything--of where she was, and how she was, and that she just slipped into the cast whenever anybody came to the house--all of which was a lot of hogwash. All we wanted was a show up on the deck and to take care of the dissatisfied customers. There's a cult around Judy that is a vociferous lot, as you well know. They stormed the place and demanded her appearance. What were we to do about it? What was I to do about it, except to stand there with a burlap bag? Well, all things come to an end. This too shall pass. But it was a horrendous experience trying to get something on up there on that stage. They were not satisfied with any minor substitutes. We tried to get this one, that one. After that first night, it was evident that the friends that had been so friendly on the second night realized that they were being used. So we couldn't go through the same routine every night. And beside that, she wasn't about to come to the theater.

Her husband at the time, who was one of the interim

ones, was as distraught as we were because he couldn't get her out of whatever state she was in to bring her to the theater. He would call, maybe, hopefully at five-thirty and say, "It looks like maybe tonight." Then we would prime ourselves for all the radio time we could get, grab anything to say, "Tonight she'll be on." Then at six o'clock would come this poor voice which would say, "She's not gonna make it." So then we had to cancel out. Now, we're not only cancelling out. We're turning back practically capacity money; we're paying the band off; we're paying the acts off; we're paying everything. But it was just a gruesome experience; that's all.

This is my only bitterness with Jim, that I got no help from the shores of Waikiki. "Do something. Get something up there and carry on. I've gotta go swim now." This pulled us apart pretty far, enough so that I felt that I couldn't take it any longer. So that was the end between us. It was purely personal. I was not in any great economic bind myself, so I felt I could do this and live with myself at least. I wasn't going to live in that particular atmosphere any longer.

GALM: In other words, he implied that it was your fault that the whole thing didn't get along?

PRICKETT: That I hadn't been able to come up with the adequacy of a substitution which would've kept the place

open. Now, who do you substitute for the Judy Garland cult? I mean, who is there, you know? We had agents going crazy trying to find somebody, but who can you get that you can put in? And besides, we were in that frightening restricted thing. If we could have just said, "Your contract is cancelled...." But we didn't know! All of a sudden up North Vermont might've roared Judy Garland!

GALM: I'm surprised, though, that Mr. Doolittle didn't realize that he was going to be losing thousands of dollars as a result of this either/or situation.

PRICKETT: I wouldn't pretend to analyze his philosophy of it. I just think he was glad that he wasn't there, to the extent of the turmoil that went on trying to find people. We had the Tony Bennetts and "No, no, no. I'm not going to finish out any runs for anybody." We had others who weren't adequate. We had combinations of acts, for instance. It might have been topflight; it might have given a great evening. But how can you substitute that for Judy Garland? Everybody is coming to see Judy Garland. So there was just no way to beat it.

This had happened to her before, for about three years prior to this in which she had faded in different spots--and almost the identical routine. And it happened afterwards. So what we tried to do with Jim was to beg him off of even booking it to begin with because it was

just too hazardous. She was in the state where you didn't know whether she would've even shown on the opening night. Fact is, a lot of us were amazed that she was in on the opening. She turned in a hell of a performance, and we thought, "Oh, this is wonderful!" Then these things happened.

Anyway, a few months more and it was all over. So I went into--[laughter]--not a rest home but a state that one would be in a rest home for a few weeks. Then my next pickup was a call from the Music Center: would I be willing to work in a great many areas of the activity of the Music Center? This meant being swing man for different managers of different theaters if they were on vacation or were here or there. The Pasadena stand of the L.A. Philharmonic [Orchestra] had been diminishing, so they sent me over to revive the Pasadena stand--which is six concerts a year by the Philharmonic--and to build up a membership over here. So that took some time. There was no school program at the Hollywood Bowl, so I spent about four or five months developing a school program which worked out effectively there. When you've got 14,000 seats, and you've got 6,000 empty seats, you can do something with them. And so we made an effective school program which carried on there. Other promotional things: a big deal with the RTD, with the

buslines coming in. A lot of promotional things, and then managing the [Dorothy Chandler] Pavilion for a while and then working in other areas--an awful lot of representation on speech dates and programs and school things and this and that, which I kept on for a little over two years. In fact, I still do. Last week I was down at Orange for the Orange County Youth Theatre. I have a little spiel and slides and pictures of shows and this and that, which is just fun, just funsville.

There's one thing I meant to tag on as we were talking the other time. [It] was that the freedom of my movement when I was at the Playhouse was a great deal more, films and legitwise, than it was when I went into the Biltmore and the Greek to begin with. At the Playhouse I had two very wonderful assistants who would take over for me when I would get in a film run or into a legit thing which was on the outside. One of the big moments of truth in my life was that when I went with Doolittle and went with the Biltmore-Greek combination, the Geary-Curran thing, I tried to play both ends to the middle very briefly. But I found if we had a show opening in San Francisco and I was stuck on a set in Hollywood, this didn't work. So I finally just clipped it and forgot the acting phase of my life entirely.

In fact, the last picture I worked was Bells Are

Ringling, I believe, at MGM, which was Minnelli. And Minnelli, being sort of patron saint to me and using me as a good-luck charm in so many pictures, said, "Oh, it'll only take a couple of days, Oliver." Well, a week later, I was still stuck on the set. They tried to put a phone in so that I could be in contact with the show we were opening at the Geary, but it wouldn't work. It just wouldn't work. That was purely a personal moment of truth.

GALM: Did you ever act at the Biltmore?

PRICKETT: No. I wanted to, especially in the things that we'd produce, like Carol Channing in Say, Darling and a few others. I was dying to take a small part, just to get up there and get the itch out of my feet. But it wouldn't work, because you had to be at so many places. I just lived on a PSA plane between San Diego and San Francisco or San Jose--just back and forth all the time--because we had these things going.

GALM: What was Doolittle's mode of operation at that time? Was he working out of his home?

PRICKETT: No, no. He was working at the Greek Theatre office on North Vermont--a very beautiful suite of offices. Jim personally, up until the time of Nony's dying, worked from his home in the morning. He would make all the New York calls [and] this and that, back and forth. The

minute Nony was gone, he would come roaring up to the Greek at the crack of dawn, I think just because he was kind of at loose ends. So his mode of life changed considerably after that, too. I would never in the least bit put him down. He has great courage [and] great foresight for things. Getting the Grand Kabuki, getting Comédie Française, getting this and that and the other was an achievement in itself. It really was. I think he did a great deal.

He always was battling the L.A. City Council because he thought he was being done in by them. He was a great battler. He'd battle his head off. I've gone to meetings in which I've kicked him under the table many times because he was just getting red in the face and red in the neck and about to say things that weren't going to get him what he wanted to end with.

GALM: For being such an important man in the theater, do you know whether he was considered for the Music Center complex?

PRICKETT: I wouldn't know. No, I have never felt that he ever had anything but a competitive feeling towards the Music Center. I don't think he resents it. He is big enough to realize that good theater helps all theater. You can't exist where the paucity of programming is such that people forget there is such a thing as

legitimate theater. I [don't] think he would resent the fact that a good deal of money and a great deal of attention is poured into the Music Center--the Ahmansons and the Tapers and the general influence which Dorothy Chandler, God bless her, [exerts over] people. Regardless of whether she does it with a phone call or a sword, it doesn't matter. She saved everything that she's been attached to just because of her own driving force, which is a great one. Believe me, it's a great force. There should be more. There should be more Doolittles. There should be more Dorothy Chandlers.

GALM: Did you have any direct contact with Dorothy Chandler during your years at the Music Center?

PRICKETT: No, never. I knew her son, Otis, only in a very minor way. He was a track star at Stanford and put the shot and was very interested in sports. There were a coterie of us, including Vic Jory, too, who were called to a meeting one time by Meridith Gourdine--who was a Rhodes scholar from Cornell, a black boy who was just a terrific chap--and a few others to form a group called the L.A. Striders. They still are a track team. Otis Chandler was a part of that group and helped put this thing on the road, and then when his shot putting days were kind of over (this was just when he had graduated from Stanford).... But no, I hadn't known them,

except as you know these people. Once in a while you run into them socially or wherever, but not to know the driving force of the Music Center is what it amounts to.

GALM: Could you feel it, though, in the work that you did do for the Music Center?

PRICKETT: No, there was no contact there. Just saying hello and just a general cordiality is all.

GALM: Who did you work with mainly, then, as far as administration?

PRICKETT: Oh, with Bill [Severns] and with Jack Present, with all the managerial staff, with Dave Bongard in the stuff at the [Hollywood] Bowl, Jay Rubinoff with the [Los Angeles] Philharmonic [Orchestra]. This is about the time that [Zubin] Mehta came into the picture. The Philharmonic needed a pattern.

The way the Philharmonic works is that they have these outside dates; in other words, they have the obligation of paying the orchestra over the period of a year. It's a requirement that they have these dates. Well, I knew that they'd play at Santa Barbara at the Granada Theatre, at San Diego in the Civic Theatre down there, and Pasadena, of course, being my home bailiwick.... The subscriptions had just fallen off to the point, and so we devised a pattern for renewal of subscription and more interest--[we] had big dinners and things around.

It just stimulated the thing. They were about to cancel Pasadena out, and they don't want to cancel out because they need these dates very badly. Again, the school thing helped a lot. Here you've got 3,000 seats, and they were filling 2,000 of them. Well, there's no sense in letting 1,000 seats go because [you lose] not only body warmth but applause and the \$1,000. If you can let a kid in for a dollar, it's better than having to dust that seat off.

I found the Music Center a very cordial place to work, enjoyed every minute of it, and I still do. Whenever they call for anything, like speech dates or.... And, of course, I represented [it] to a degree. I was one of the three [which included] Bill Severns and Dick Drew, who was the business manager of the Civic Light Opera [and] who died about two years ago. The three of us--at that time I represented the Greek--started what has become the IA[TSE]*, the stagehands' union, Welfare and Pension Fund. The three of us were in the process, all the time, of developing enough resources so that we could set up a play which finally the union came into a big way. I served on the board of trustees of the Welfare and Pension Fund for five years and then after my disassociation with practically everything, I felt

*IATSE - International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees

that I was to a degree out of touch. And so I resigned from that board of trustees.

But it was a very worthwhile thing, because the stagehands had no pension. They had no health welfare fund; they had nothing going. I sat on the management side, and then when I was with the Music Center, I became the representative of the Music Center on that same board. I feel if there were any contributions at all that I have made, that was one of the most important, because you had prop men whose tomorrow wasn't very certain--I mean, they'll carry them so far, but not all the way. ABC, CBS and NBC were all represented on the board. We had a seven-man group from the union, and we worked entirely hand in glove. There was no bickering or anything. We had x number of dollars to do with, and, "Let's do the best we can with what we have." Now, it's provided two things: it's provided a lot of the older stagehands with at least a pittance to go with their Social Security; but it's also gotten them out of--well, you know the stagehands. You've probably seen them all over. San Francisco's got a batch of them; L.A.'s got a batch of them.

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GALM: You were mentioning the pension fund and the fact that it had provided two purposes.

PRICKETT: That's right. One was the provision of some added funds in the retirement of the older fellows.

The other, which to me was even more beneficial, was that it allowed younger fellows to come into the field.

Understand, a stagehands' union is a fairly restricted thing--partly of necessity and partly because they just guarded it that way. In other words, "If there's work to be done, let's spread it among the members we have." They had no apprentice program. They lost their greatest apprentice program when the Playhouse went out of business because in the motion pictures, TV, legit [and] everywhere are kids who were on the technical side at the Playhouse, who, like actors, learned their craft the hard way by shinnying up the grid, by doing the dirty work, by doing this and that and the other but learning their trade. And they are all over Hollywood now. I can hardly go on a set--I went the other day on a set just to do a plug for the Boys Republic, and here [were] two Playhouse kids on the crew, one in charge of sound, and another one as a director. They're just all over. I'm equally

as proud of them as I am of the ones who got their names up on the marquee, because they're probably gonna have a lot longer life and also they're in very good positions all over the place--just one after another. In this apprentice field, it was almost a certainty that a kid who had served his apprenticeship at the Playhouse could go right into the union. And this was a great help both ways. It helped an awful lot.

GALM: You had mentioned earlier that there had been an association with Vincente Minnelli and that he was sort of your patron. How did that association originate? Do you recall?

PRICKETT: I think it would all be on his side, to the extent that he seemed to enjoy my being on a set. I think [it might have been] the degree of [my] familiarity with the woman he had just married--I mean, the fact that I had known Judy Garland and had gotten along very well with her. I don't know. It was just one of those things where quite often a director takes a liking to you and then the next director takes a dislike to you. These things are the unpredictability, I guess, of anything theatrical. I found that I, for instance, loved working with Jack Kirkland, legitwise, and a lot of people didn't like him at all. But I think that is probably a normal theatrical equation.

It's like the thing with Bob Hope--that you like to have somebody like that rooting for you. As I recall, with Hope it started with a thing called The Lemon Drop Kid, which was shot out at Santa Anita [Race Track]. Hope in those days was not the kind of relaxed, magnanimous Hope he is now. They had to be sure there was a piano around, so that somebody could be banging away on it. They wanted to have a great big bag of golf balls there, so he could drive a few balls now and then. He was always the eager one. He just wouldn't go to his dressing room and sit or anything like that; there had to be things going for him.

I set up a golf game for him here at Annandale one afternoon when we finished early at Santa Anita (then it was Paleface [and] Son of Paleface), and there was a strange thing. I was on the board of directors with the Tournament for so many years here in Pasadena, and one year Bob Hope was the grand marshal. I'd worked with him in Son of Paleface, and I had a funny line which I had forgotten entirely. He was trying to manipulate the guns, and I was an old geezer and said, "Don't forget now. You leeeeean to the west and shoot toward the east." Out of context it doesn't mean a thing, but it was a funny line. So Bob [was] grand marshal and I was in charge of radio and television and head of the

committee on it. And he got in the car and right out of left field he said, "Oliver, don't forget now. I lean to the east and I fire toward the west"--or whatever the line was. I'd never forgotten it, but I would have thought he would have, you know? It was very funny.

He is such a do-gooder. He'd leave the set at four o'clock and go to some fair in Minnesota, and be back and have all these words [memorized] the next morning at seven o'clock. He is just a real old performer's performer.

GALM: So that was always more or less a part of his activity.

PRICKETT: It always [was]. He just never sits still, just can't. And why should he?

APRIL 17, 1973

GALM: During the previous sessions, Mr. Prickett, we've been sort of chronicling your life in the theater of Southern California. We sort of accomplished that, and now I would like to go back and delve deeper into your involvement with the Pasadena Playhouse. You were with the Playhouse for two different periods, the earlier period when you were a young boy up to the time you left for Berkeley. That was 19...

PRICKETT: ...20. The returning day would be 1930,

'31 or whenever I took charge of the outside production-type thing. So there is a missing link as far as my linkage with the Playhouse is concerned at that time. There was a continuation there, except for those hiatus-type things where I went on a show tour or was out for a while with a film. It was only because of good help that I was able to carry on functionally the public relations phase that I was doing at the time. And then there comes the last one, which is the year when I was brought back from the Greek Theatre Association to try to affect [an] assemblance of all the stages--to get it back into the operational capacity that it had known before. So those are the areas.

GALM: Yes. Now that year was 195-? Or was it even later in the sixties?

PRICKETT: Yes, I guess it was '59.

GALM: When was the date when you actually left the Pasadena Playhouse for the Huntington Hartford and Greek Theatre?

PRICKETT: You mean back again to it?

GALM: In other words, what were your inclusive dates for the Pasadena Playhouse? From 1930 to when?

PRICKETT: Oh, '55, I guess.

GALM: So it was shortly after your brother's death?

PRICKETT: Yes, it was not too long after that. It

became about also as an involvement as far as a contractual obligation with Desilu [Studios] in the production of a series called "The Brothers," which I was under contract for. [I] found it impossible to carry on both jobs at the same time.

GALM: So you returned to the Playhouse in the thirties. Let's talk about some of the productions that you were involved in intimately at that time and some of the people that were involved in those productions.

PRICKETT: My involvement for quite a period of time would be only as public relations director or press agent or whatever title seems fitting. I didn't really start acting too much in productions but was aware of all--Lazarus Laughed and all the rest of them--that were being done at the time. I think I mentioned that my favorite among possibly all (maybe I'm just picking out one) was Volpone, which was one of the best productions, in my estimation, that the Playhouse had ever done. Of course, there's big ones along in that time, too--Turandot, Marco Millions--just seemingly one after another of adventurous, never-done-before, never-to-be-done-again type approach [which] was the inspiration of Gilmor picking that type of play.

Shaw was a favorite because Gilmor had had contact with Shaw a number of times. James M. Barrie gave us an

American premiere of a play which had been seldom done, The Boy David, and this was a startler. Noel Coward gave us what amounted to the West Coast premiere of a play called Cavalcade, which was kind of a wartime thing which had been tried in New York. But it was so "un-Cowardish," shall we say--I mean, it didn't match with his other drawing-room-type thing--that it was a startler. And again, it was one of those things that caused a great deal of attention, as far as the Playhouse was concerned, in circles where these things were just read of but never done--enhancing that Playhouse value which was always there prior to the last ten years, when these things had been sought out and done. I see now so many productions that we did back in the old days which are suddenly being brought to life because somebody has finally discovered the value in them, not only theatrically but philosophically and every other way.

Everybody was great for Sidney Howard, with Paths of Glory and They Knew What They Wanted. We did a festival of Sidney Howard. It seems, in reflection now, kind of a shame that some of these great names are not brought to the proper perspective in their value to the theater. [Clifford] Odets was another, like Golden Boy and a number of other Odets shows. Of course, there were the standard, old, Three Men on a Horse-type play--the stock comedy

much in the vein of today's [Neil] Simon, but they were mainly out of [George] Kaufman or [Moss] Hart or somebody of that sort.

The strange thing about Lazarus Laughed reminds me that it never seemed to work that a play which would be such a smash hit at the Playhouse would ever go on in a continuation of its run to another theater. I don't know. [There must have been] something about the spirit or the intimacy of 852, I believe at that time, seats. Something was electric within that auditorium that you could never get [elsewhere]. We took Lazarus Laughed, for instance, from the Playhouse over to the Hollywood Playhouse and tried to make it go over there; because it was naturally just such a tremendous smash, and [it was] so unusual to have a world premiere of a Eugene O'Neill play. We did a Eugene O'Neill festival, too. We did Mourning Becomes Electra and all the others that were a part of his greatness--[The Great God Brown].

GALM: You were then at the Playhouse for the production of Lazarus Laughed? You were part of the staff at that time?

PRICKETT: No, I was only brought in, as all of us were. UCLA here was a part of the wardrobe and the design of the costumes. As I recall, my only affiliation with that would have been as a subrunner on publicity area, having at

that time been out with road companies.

GALM: Because that did come at an earlier period than your coming on...

PRICKETT: Yes, permanently onto the staff. I finally recall the man's name--and it should be recorded--who was the head of publicity, who was a so-called dean of drama critics in Los Angeles for the Herald at that time. His name was Monroe Lathrop, who cannot be discounted in the intellectual approach and his ability to write things of [the caliber of]--as I indicated to you, I think, before--Alexander Inglis, and who was a literate man who had access to outlets in publicity that were more than just the blurb-type thing. In other words, his analysis carried a great deal of weight because of his background and because of his theatrical knowledge. At that time he was chief correspondent for Burns Mantle in the compilation of his ten best plays, and he was one of the reasons that Burns Mantle made a few visits to the Playhouse.

Then after Monroe Lathrop died, Edwin Schallert of the Times picked up what used to be, and I don't think is anymore, a reasonable bible of playgoing. It used to be a criterion of value to make the ten best plays, and we would always follow the pattern of trying to get a production out of every year's picks. But in addition to

that, it had so many other things of value in it, too.

GALM: In looking over the plays that were produced, I was surprised to see a couple of things weren't included in the list. As of 1955, Tennessee William's Streetcar Named Desire had never been produced, nor Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman. Is there a particular reason for this?

PRICKETT: This gets into an area which is not a long story, but it's a story [which has to do with] the rights on plays. The Playhouse had operated on a amateur leasing arrangement for all the years. They were no different than any school or any drama club or anything where you paid, say, twenty-five dollars for a performance and so much for a week. For instance, you would be picking up a play of some great value for maybe \$100 a week, and running it for two or three weeks. All of a sudden a change came about in that there was a different leasing arrangement which had to be, like films, a protection of first run.

Death of a Salesman is a perfect example, because Death of a Salesman had one run into Los Angeles, and the rights were held up because it was a complete sellout--with Thomas Mitchell and [Mildred] Natwick, I believe, and a number of others--at the Biltmore. The idea was that in a case like this, they would recircuit it and

bring it back. So they held up the production rights on a number of things like that. This is about the era of the shows that you are mentioning where that all began, where we had to depend on almost a second run--which was the fallacy I indicated at Lobero in Santa Barbara: their sheer brass in going ahead and doing it and then being assessed a fine for doing it.

But all of a sudden this changed, and it changed mainly because of the beginnings of the contractual arrangement with Equity. In other words, we entered into a contract with Equity for the benefit of allowing graduates and top players to play at the Playhouse. At the same time, the Dramatists Guild and others said, "Why are we operating on this single amateur basis? We belong in another category." So there was a change in the leasing of a play. That gradation went right along with the gradation which finally saw Equity players getting forty dollars a week, and then seventy-five dollars and then rehearsal money--in other words, one of those evolutions. At the same time, the Dramatists Guild were demanding percentages of the gross, etc.

This would account for a lot of them because if they were there with the schedule that the Playhouse had of basically two weeks on a run, we had to grab for everything. And as you can see, we grabbed for a lot of things that

probably shouldn't have been grabbed for. Sometimes it was a question of playing a Russet Mantle when you didn't want to play a Russet Mantle. But often Gilmor would say, "Well, let's have a go at it," and away we went. And [we] usually [did] sort of below-par business on it, just because it was a secondary item [which] had no really valid or great theatrical interest and it had no box office interest, either. So if there was a play handy in all those early days, I'll tell you, it was grabbed; it was taken care of. We just had to have a product, that's all.

GALM: So it was in no way avoiding a play because of controversy.

PRICKETT: No, there was no policy thing against it. We did things that were of greater, you might say, non-Pasadena-ish approach than that. They always said that Mrs. Morrison, when she gave the back end of the building and so much to the Playhouse, had said, "No O'Neill." Well, that was a falsification which we had ample reason to prove was just some folklore, because we did an awful lot of O'Neill, just gobs of it.

GALM: The directors that were associated with the Playhouse during these years, could their work be discerned? In other words, could you tell a production that was done by Lenore Shanewise from a production that was done by...

PRICKETT: ...Addison Richards or Ralph Freud or Charles Lane or Byron Foulger or any of those?

GALM: Yes.

PRICKETT: I can't see there would be too much difference in terms of the eventual projection, because it would probably all come out a little Gilmorish because he would take the last couple of rehearsals. The only thing I can say was that each director--and I guess I've worked for just about all of them--would take a little bit different pattern on rehearsal. Lenore was very slow and very thoughtful. There was no method involved. She just was a probey sort, whereas somebody else, a Frank Ferguson or somebody like that, would say, "Well, just move," and he'd set out the pattern for you.

I was thinking of the Playhouse evolution as far as techniques are concerned after our last session. Techniques in theater are really just expressed in the history of the Playhouse. When you think of, for instance, makeup, and you look at those horrible old pictures (which you've seen down in there) and the excess of makeup--because of what? Because lighting had not progressed to the point that it had. You were going against a raw set of footlights. You were going against probably three sets of borders which had red, white, and blue. Dim blue meant night; red meant liven things up; up red, white, and blue meant the

finish of the show. It was just that silly.

There's one person that I never forget in terms of makeup reference. That's a young chap by the name of Doug [Douglass] Montgomery, who was of a prominent Los Angeles family--and [the Playhouse] was up on North Fair Oaks--who used to get there in the middle of the afternoon to do a walk-on because he was experimenting. They all used makeup and they all about came out the same--with an eyebrow is an eyebrow is an eyebrow..."Wob!"...because the lights were really hitting you. Now when there was a diminishment of light, there was a diminishment of makeup.

Then we got past the Stein era, where you used grease and powder on top of it, and you got into the pancake. Then you got the good variations and the [Max] Factor factory working hard at it, so that you got a more realistic, naturalistic look than you got with any degree of makeup that you could ever [hope] to achieve [before]. Of course, the beginnings of paste-on material and abrasions and this and that to give it character began to evolve, too.

The same thing, I think, happened in direction and in staging, especially as films came along. In the early days, to upstage was something that was premeditated by a director to make a focal accent on the actor who carried

the load at that particular moment. Because "upstage" meant that the audience's attention was funneled to this person. Now we get into films, and especially in the last few years in TV, where the big head close-[up] is the thing that matters. This began to have its transition in the theater. You didn't have to play a scene on the back wall because the audience was conditioned not only to the turn-up of sound--because they were accommodated by their own device or by some picture theater that had it up--but they began to be conditioned visually so that the closer a person got, the more attention they received. This was in the evolution of the Playhouse, too. If you look in those old pictures at those old sets with that filigree, etc., you would generally see that the Sam Hinds, or the Ma Palmer, or whoever was there, was just practically hanging on the back wall. They were right there, and everybody was lined up yea, like this, [demonstrates] to pick them up. And this changed, too.

Directors' techniques, though, to point out any others.... We didn't have any real monsters as we know them in films or anything else, because there was too close living with everybody. And if a person had been a monster, they might have been cast in a part. All directors played at all times. Lenore was one of the finest actresses

we had. Ethan Frome with Doro [Dorothy] Adams [Foulger] and Onslow Stevens still stands out as one of the great performances, in my book at least. But they all--Addison Richards, Charlie Lane, Frank Ferguson, George Phelps, Frederick Blanchard, the whole list of them--were just alternately directing a Mainstage production or a student production, or playing in something, or doing both. This is part of that spirit I tried to indicate to you previously.

GALM: You're speaking, then, about the fact that the Playhouse evolved along with what was happening in the theater generally.

PRICKETT: Oh, definitely.

GALM: Did the Playhouse instigate any changes for the rest of American theater?

PRICKETT: Well, the only thing I can think of is in the broad sense of bringing to stage plays and playwrights which had not been really given enough attention. It was of great advantage to them. But as far as techniques are concerned, I can't think of any.

We were blessed with a man who was a great lighting man, Carl Huxley, who as I indicated to you, was one of the real big four--along with Gilmore Brown and Charles Prickett and H.O. Stechan--on the publicity side. Carl Huxley grew with the changing lighting patterns, rather

than being some old stuffbudget who would say, "A light's a light's a light" and throw in another gel. He really went in for, for those days, a great deal of sophistication as far as lighting was concerned. But I can't think of anything tremendously innovative that would have been particular [to the] Playhouse.

I know we were never behind, as far as techniques were concerned. We made extensions of the Mainstage out over the audiences. We used the so-called boxes on the sides. We used areas of grillwork where that was taken out where a Coriolanus would speak from one of those. Probably one of the largest feathers in the Playhouse hat was that to all recorded knowledge, we were the only theater in America--up to a point, and possibly somebody has surpassed it now--to have done all plays of Shakespeare. And I assure you that some of them would have been better off not done. Gad! There were some that were just most difficult. In fact, we lumped them all together into a kind of a series at one time. (I'm trying to think what was in there. Anyway, it was three [plays] that were just on the border edge of nowhere.) But that was quite a thing, to have done all the plays of Shakespeare.

GALM: I think it was probably the season when you did Timon of Athens, Pericles, and Coriolanus.

PRICKETT: That's in the Greco-Roman series [of] 1935.

That was the second drama festival, in which we overestimated ourselves and figured that we could do no wrong after the chronicle plays. But we found out that biting off the Greco-Romans was quite another thing.

GALM: Winter's Tale, All's Well That Ends Well...

PRICKETT: Oh, yes. I'll tell you, that Winter's Tale--that's hard to get by with, but it was done.

GALM: One thing that I would like to delve into deeper was that you said that you feel that there was, in the area of acting, a Playhouse product--in other words, a product of the Playhouse. Would you describe it, or would you define what you mean by that term?

PRICKETT: This is something that I made a note to be sure and trace with you the evolution of what might be called the training pattern of the Playhouse. This actually begins back at the old Playhouse, I would say it was 1922 or '23, in which what was called the Summer Art Colony was established. Now, this was in the old buildings of Throop Institute (which later became Caltech, of course), and was the gathering together of teachers from here and there. From that, we got one of our most valued people, Lenore Shanewise, who came, I believe, from Iowa State Teachers' College or somewhere. This was the beginning of a training program.

After the Summer Art Colony thing and move into the

new Playhouse on South El Molino in 1925, for a couple of years there, there was training of a diverse nature. In other words, you'd get a Cyrano de Bergerac scheduled, and everybody would want to know about fencing. So there would be classes which were available to everybody; the Bob Youngs, the Lloyd Nolans, the rest of them, would be a part of these classes. I don't recall if there was a fee with them or what, but they were the beginning of what became the School of the Theatre about a year or two later. I think the first graduating class was in 1928, and Onslow Stevens, Mary Mason [and] a number of others who went on from that were a part of that class.

This was the beginning of a formal training period. Of course, it was impossible to have it at the Playhouse at that time because we didn't have the building in the back. We just had the Mainstage. As I told you before, the scenic involvement of hauling from a warehouse up there was a great one. So the Eaton School, I believe the name of it was, on South Los Robles had gone defunct; and so the Playhouse took that over. Now, this was like a girls' school-type thing, had classrooms, etc.; so the entire School of the Theatre, as it was called at that time, moved to this location down on South Los Robles.

At that time also, across the street from the Playhouse--

the current 39 South El Molino--there were two or three buildings which the Playhouse rented for print shop, etc. The offices [and] the wardrobe were all confined within a very small area. Of course, all of this changed in 1935, when [we got] the new building. Then the wardrobe was in the beginning of being built to quite a 10,000-costume-type wardrobe, which made it very seldom that we had to go to Western or anyplace else for costumes. They were right there, available. We had a great volunteer staff. A woman who was a very active member of the board, Mrs. Annabel Morris (her husband [Samuel B. Morris] was the head of the Metropolitan Water District), was responsible to a great extent for the guidance and the development of the wardrobe, which became very important. Then I see that during the era just past when everything was sold, the people were going there and buying [costumes] for five dollars apiece to provide some revenue for the bank.

The training phase then went back into the Playhouse, and it provided from the School of Theatre--which was very unusual in that at that time, in those years, there was Yale; University of Washington with Glenn Hughes; there was [Edward C.] Mabee at Iowa; there was Carnegie Tech. Outside of that, there were basically only three places for a kid to go, and that was American Academy

[of Dramatic Arts] at New York, Goodman in Chicago, or the Playhouse. Now, Goodman had the advantage of better facilities; American Academy had the advantage of Broadway and the very heart of everything; and we had the obvious benefit of Hollywood. This is not to be counted in the same degree of benefit that you see now. I don't think a graduation of what had become College of Theater Arts and had an accreditation was allowed to give degrees of those who had entered who had two prior years of academic training and who had been accepted. But off of that graduation platform every single year in June, ten to fifteen to twenty kids would go to a Hollywood contract. Quite often they were proselyted to the extent--well, a good case is Eleanor Parker.

Eleanor Parker was a shy, timid little girl out of Cleveland, Ohio. She came to the Playhouse and was one of those kids who, when she was in her own league--by that I mean the student production--she was all right. But every time she tried out for a Mainstage production or something big, she would be so shook up that she would probably never be able to finish the audition. At the end of her first year, some scouts from Warner Brothers saw her in a production--I don't know what it was, a school thing--and they paid for her second year for her to continue on. At the same time that she was carrying

on the academic course and all the other things at the Playhouse, she was checking in to Warner's all the time to get the advantage of being around the lot. And then she was actually put under contract at that time by Warner Brothers.

This happened to just dozens of them, and the outlet was not only acting. It was in other areas. It was in, as I mentioned before, the IATSE. They were just looking for those who were graduates of the technical phase of the Playhouse or who were workers there. There were two areas. There were some that were put on as apprentices to work with the IA men on stage. We had a great technical course which gave them every advantage of working on any kind of a deck with any kind of a problem, and they would be put on with the regular crew at the time. And then there was makeup. A chap like Bud Look, who is still one of the heads of KTTV, went from the Playhouse stage to KTTV, along with Jack Scott, who is a director over there.

It was just a beautiful evolution that helped these kids go from one protective tent--which was the Playhouse, where they were tutored--[to another]. It allowed them to go to, say, a Paramount, be put under contract, play bits, still carry on the training phase, and get the advantage of the publicity and everything else that put

them on their way. This would be the evolution of a boy like Gig Young, who would go from the Playhouse to over there. Oh, so many--just one after another. Some of them carried on, and some of them didn't. Some of them--Russ [Russell] Arms went on to the "Hit Parade." Some of them went to other things. They went to different areas of activity, but there was always that shiny, Holy Grail of ten major studios (major in terms of production) to which they could go. Sometimes the going was under a stock contract at \$150 a week. But it was there, and it was a great advantage for them.

GALM: Did this attract a special type of student--in other words, a student who was starstruck rather than who wanted to go into the theater?

PRICKETT: Oh, a lot of them were. A lot! What am I saying? You just try to brush the stardust off any of those kids. It just wouldn't work. But they were willing to go through all the travail of learning, etc. And they had a great advantage. Just think of a case like Paul Muni. Now, Paul Muni came from the Yiddish theater and a lot of Broadway things under contract to Fox as a counteractive to Lon Chaney. He did a series of horrible things--you know, just the ogre-type thing--and so he came over and wanted to do a show at the Playhouse and had the script The Man Saul, which never became anything

great. The only reason I bring this up is that the kids who were able to play with Paul Muni at the time got inestimable value from it. Of course, they did from just about everything they did. They saw the good and they saw the bad. They saw the advantage of working with Akim Tamiroff. They saw the advantage of a Jane Cowl. They were lucky to be able to walk on the same deck with them, and there was an appreciation of it. I think now there would be a little more personal ego involved and a little more desire to project oneself quickly to wherever one was going. But we had kids who stayed on and on and on. The classic example is a boy like Preston Meservey, who became Robert Preston. He must have played in an indeterminable number of shows. He never did a bad one. But his ears stuck out; he had a low forehead--until Paramount finally decided that maybe if they put the ears back and raise the forehead....

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GALM: We were talking about some of the people who came out of the Playhouse and went into the motion picture industry. Did the Playhouse produce more actors than actresses?

PRICKETT: Oh, definitely. This is the thing we could never figure out. Men by the dozens. I still couldn't give you a bona fide answer on it, because it used to be a source of amazement to us. The gals went to Broadway a lot faster than they did to films, and I don't know why. I think that man's place in films--outside of a few real stars--has been uppermost in films, when you come right down to it. There's been a greater accent on men than there has been on the gals. I don't know why I say that, except I'm thinking of my own experience in working with, for instance, Joan Crawford. It seems like there were a lot more men involved in a Crawford picture than there would be women. I have no answer to that.

This development of the College of Theater Arts, though led to one thing. It gave, I think, the Playhouse the only two years in which there was a bona fide profit, as far as the Playhouse was concerned. And that profit

had accrued from the fact that the GI Bill was available after the Second World War, and a lot of fellows had brushed against Special Service. They had been part of setting up a troupe or they had been lucky enough to have done some minor phase, and figured this was a nice sort of a way to make a living. As a result, the enrollment reached over 300, and we had run on about a 200-250 basis. So there were a couple of years when the Playhouse was able to actually show a profit.

Of course, everybody has the illusion that a theater makes money. This is a standard illusion with everybody, because they may--as I think we went over before--have gone there on a Saturday night or some time when it was full, and they just have that illusion. But I think those were the only years that the Playhouse showed a bona fide profit. Otherwise, it was just the magic of Charles Prickett pushing the deficit back and somehow picking it up and waiting for that golden thing called a hit-- which would suddenly take care of everything (or at least momentarily take care of everything).

At that time, we had complete dormitory facilities for the college, up on North El Molino, which were acquired through those GI years, even to the point of their having their own commissary and meal provision and everything else. It was a real going thing. A lot

of those kids then lost their illusions quickly, either from no talent or because they suddenly found that studying the business of being an actor is not just getting out there and acting. There's a good deal more to it than that.

At that time, we had a staff of around sixty, which was totally affiliated with the College of Theater Arts. And it was quite a designation to be a graduate. [We had] a graduation ceremony complete with cap and gown, and some degrees were given--even a master's in theater arts to some who had earned it. It was quite an occasion, believe me; it was a beautiful afternoon in June. If you could only have looked up there and played your percentages on who would make it and who wouldn't.... It was quite a thing. This again, in the theatrical equation--as you so well know--is not only a matter of talent; it's a matter of the lightning striking. We would have a girl who would go--with all the shininess of a newcomer--to New York, and maybe get in a road company of Abe Lincoln in Illinois, and for three years would be totally employed. And somebody else with possibly greater talent would go to New York and beat their brains out.

Of course, they had to adjust to the variance--which we tried to do, and which was part of my involvement

in any contact with the college besides "the dos and don'ts of membership," and "how to achieve professionalism in your conduct." The Hollywood approach, unfortunately, was always the glad hand and "Say! Maybe we've got something for you," blah-blah--the goody-goody approach, which was a very stifling thing, really as stifling as the New York one, which was the slammed-door thing: "Don't call us, we'll call you," wham! It meant that in addition to some degree of talent and a lot of foot leather, you had to have a lot of guts to go with it. You had to just keep pounding doors and playing all the summer stock bits you could pick up and everything. It was amazing. When I look now at a page in those books in the library and see all the graduates of one year, and think of them as I thought of them then and what happened to them, it's really amazing. Each one is a kind of a little theatrical story in itself.

GALM: What are some of the more memorable ugly-duckling stories?

PRICKETT: A chap by the name of Bert Morris, who was a--well, he couldn't act his way out of a paper bag, if you'll pardon the expression. That's just the way he was. He was a great big six-footer--more than six feet--a great big husky kid, who incidentally was my scholarship student who pasted in a great many of the

clippings that you saw in the book. This was the way he was helping earn his way through. He had played in Yellow Jack--which is the story of the fever in the Panama Canal, of course--and he had played a soldier with a VD problem. Now, he was a round-faced, naive-looking kid, and Warner spotted him. (I'm ahead of my story.) He was in there pasting those books one day when I was on the phone, and a frantic voice said, "Do you mind if we cut in? It's Bert's mother. She wants to talk to him immediately, if she can." So Bert got on the phone--he had made an application for the summertime for a truck job or a swamper or something--and it was Warner Brothers. It led to Kid Galahad, which was the boxing story, which led him to a long-term contract at Warner's.

Of course, we have our classic example of Vic [Victor] Mature. He could play fully hidden behind a bush, and it came out as Vic Mature. That's all. But came that one about the body, One Million B.C., and he had had exposure in a thing called Paradise Plantation, which was a story of the planters down under. He had been practically nude except for a loincloth, and I think it was that Samuel Goldwyn picked him up. But I think of him as a delightful guy and everything. His acting in the later years became quite reasonably acceptable, where you could sort out the cuts, as far as filming is concerned.

But he was supposed to go home (he came from Louisville). His father owned the Frigidaire franchise for the state of Kentucky, and they gave him one more year to try and make his dream come true. He had played in the Playbox in a play called Autumn Crocus, in which he had been the Alpine soldier with those--what do you call those Swiss pants?

GALM: Lederhosen?

PRICKETT: Yeah, lederhosen. Anyway, this had closed up the season at the Playbox, and we were about to open the season on the Mainstage when our leading lady for the play which was scheduled to open--I think it was called The Empress--was detained in France. It was wartime; she couldn't get over. I think Lenore Shanewise directed, as I recall. It was before the college had taken up, and there was only just a fragmentary help around. So Lenore gave the order to call all the people who were in the show to report for rehearsals, and we were going to start the season with this Autumn Crocus. Well, this girl didn't know as far as telephone exchanges were concerned. She just called Louisville, Kentucky; and because she was so shaken with this tremendous responsibility that it didn't matter, she would have called Yugoslavia. [laughter]
She called and Vic's family answered the phone; and they were so impressed that their son would be called 2,000

miles away to report for a show that they gave him another rap at it. He came back and then went on to the contract at Twentieth, of course, and the rest of it.

A chap like Dana Andrews would come in just to be a singer. He wanted to amplify his light-opera career. Strangely enough, the only thing I can ever remember him singing in was State Fair or something of that sort. A beautiful voice. He went on to do a great number of shows at the Playhouse.

As you have had the advantage here of having drama instructors who would be an inspiration, we dealt a good deal in the area of drama directors in junior colleges and high schools. For instance, Bob Young and Robert Preston and a whole bunch of others came from Lincoln High School in Los Angeles, where there was a gal-- and I wish I could think of her name, to give her proper credit--who would be a real inspiration to these kids coming over. Strangely enough, the same thing came from a place called Modesto Junior College. We had a one-act play tournament at the time, which had a high school division and a junior college division. This was one of the most productive things that ever came down. It was a real big thing. These students would come in and compete, and the winner in high schools was generally the Army and Navy Academy--from at that time San Diego and later

Carlsbad--because of the inspirational guidance and the talent of their instructors. In the same turn, Modesto would generally win the junior college [division]. What it did was give these kids a chance to get beyond their junior college and high school auditoriums and come to the Playhouse. We gave a scholarship in each division to a boy and a girl. It was most productive. I think you carry on here at UCLA with some kind of effort along that line. These things were new then, and there weren't the number that are available now.

GALM: There was an alumni group that was formed for people from the Playhouse. What was the name of that?

PRICKETT: Well, [when] it started out, it was just alumni. By "alumni," I mean those who had the bona fide credential as having graduated from the Playhouse. This became a very forceful thing, but it had to have inclusions and exceptions because there was a great area of people ahead of the actual formation of the college who belonged in it--I mean the Bob Youngs and the Randy Scotts and the Lloyd Nolans and all the rest of them, who worked and worked and worked at the Playhouse. I don't mean five shows; I mean twenty-five shows--[people] who were just there continually carrying a spear one week and the next week playing something more important. So we devised a Playhouse Alumni Association by a point thing--which I

think we went over, but maybe it wasn't recorded.

GALM: It wasn't.

PRICKETT: If a person played on Mainstage, they got so many points. If they graduated from the Playhouse, they were automatically included. If they played in so many Laboratory or Workshop productions.... It all summed up to a point total for them, so that a person worked to achieve. Even carrying a spear counted for some points. We had it pretty well organized. We used to have a meeting in New York; every time that Gilmor would go back for the National Theatre Conference meetings, there was a class alumni meeting in New York. We took into consideration and, because of the wonderful files we took care of, included people who dated way back into the early days of the Playhouse [and] who happened to be in New York. We had this worked out pretty well.

Then there were changes and then the slow (or too fast) disintegration of the Playhouse. This [system] got lost in the shuffle, so that people who really had no entitlement to it, other than a vocal contact as having been at the Playhouse, were allowed in. [This is] not a point of resentment on my part, because anybody who was cheering the place--it was great! But to say that a Playhouse was a Playhouse Associate.... It was called Alumni and Associates at the time that we conjured up the first pattern.

But I guess that has resolved now into a group that meets annually and tries to effect what they can in the way of the reestablishment of the Playhouse. Some of them are Johnny-come-latelies, but again, "Welcome to the club!" What they could do about it is questionable. But maybe they can. Who can tell?

GALM: Another organization that I would like you to talk about a bit is Eighteen Actors, Incorporated.

PRICKETT: One of the finest groups that ever came down the pike--the theatrical pike, that is. Well, Eighteen Actors was formed by Morry Ankrum, Victor Jory, Doro Adams, Byron Foulger, Addison Richards, Charles Lane, Cy Kendall--whose name should never be forgotten in Playhouse's history, because he goes back to old Playhouse days on North Fair Oaks. They just wanted to do things on their own. I think they did maybe four, possibly six, productions a year--Shadow and Substance, oh, a great many--that they did at the Elks Club by a space staging arrangement which didn't call for platforming. Sometimes they were at the Playhouse; sometimes they were at private homes. It lasted about four or five years and was a potent force in real pro theater. They cast according to the group, and they would do small-cast plays. They were just great; believe me, they were great.

GALM: Was there some reason why Gilmor wasn't involved in that? Or was it just that he had too many other commitments?

PRICKETT: There was no reason for him or any of us to be involved. These were old friends, and they just got together and formulated this thing. A lot of them played at the Playhouse at the same time, but most of them were, to a degree, unavailable for a long run or anything. They would do it on, say, Friday, Saturday and Sunday; over a weekend they would stage a production. They didn't have any monetary interests other than keeping their heads above water. They just would all sit around-- and they were actually Eighteen Actors, Inc.; it was their name, and there were eighteen--and they made a determination. With all those people involved, you can imagine it was quite a session to determine the next play that they would do. But it was a fun, extracurricular type thing. They always did it locally. They never spread out to even contemplate doing it on a pro tour or anything like that (although all of them were of pro caliber and could have done it). Dana Andrews was one of the members. And if they had a loss, they all lumped in and took care of it. But they were a great group. They were one of the most important tangents of the Playhouse, believe me.

GALM: Was it ever seen as an elitist group, in the sense

that they kept people out or anything like that?

PRICKETT: No, no. The camaraderie between the group was too old-time established. I was never a member of it, and I didn't feel badly because I wasn't. I mean, this was it. They were some of my oldest friends. They had this little organization going, and it was just extra-curricular fun, really. Of course, you never thought of them competitively. You just wouldn't think of it. If there was a Playhouse date open on Mainstage, they would do it on the Playhouse Mainstage. We would just make it available to them. We were as proud of them as of anything. They were definitely all Playhouse and a yard wide. Everybody in the group was of Playhouse extraction. They were really a fine group.

GALM: Did you have much involvement with the Playbox?

PRICKETT: No, very little. It was a private thing, private subscription, run entirely out of the pocketbook (I say pocketbook because that's where she kept all her notes) of Mlle. [Jeanne] Richert, who was the guiding force and the goer and doer of the Playbox.

The Playbox began on South Fair Oaks, way down near Del Mar, in a private home. I played in a couple of them down there, and they were just.... Actually, what it amounted to was the first attempt--and it's credited, along with Glenn Hughes in Seattle and a tangent of his

repertory company with the University of Washington--
with not utilizing a proscenium.

GALM: Is that the arena [staging]?

PRICKETT: Arena. And the Playbox was the same way.

If Gilmor were to come in and analyze this room for a production, he would say, "We'll do this one over here. We'll do that scene here. The audience will sit here"; or "The audience will move its chairs," according to the requirement.

Then from South Fair Oaks, it went over to his home on Herkimer (which was Herkimer Street then but which is Union Street now). [It] stayed there for a long time, and then moved to South Madison, I believe, and then went back to the Playhouse. But when I saw it, after having been away for a while, I knew that Gilmor would be so ashamed of this thing. It was practically being done in a broom closet; I mean, it was a little, little theater at its very, very worst. So I put it back [in the Playhouse] for the year I was there, in this attempt to make everything glorious again. I put it on Mainstage with a series of platforms. I got Bill Severns to get me a batch of folding chairs from the Hollywood Bowl; and we set them around and pulled the main curtain down and did everything on stage. But again, costs caught up.

As far as I'm concerned, the entire evolution of the Playhouse is just that you cannot cut it, economically, with a big theater. And when you try to do it with 852 seats, you just can't have enough hits to sustain under what was a growing economic cost level which was just so prohibitive. And it extended to everything-- from the tickets in the box office, to the help, to the Equity obligation, to lumber for scenery, to paint, to everything. It's just that in the old days, you would have been able, on North Fair Oaks, to slough off a \$250 loss; and in the early days on South El Molino, you'd have been able to slough off a \$2,000 loss. All of a sudden, you're confronted with what almost amounted to the budget of what would be a road show or an off-Broadway production. I think when I was there, I managed to achieve (if you can call it that) a loss of some \$90,000, which was entirely uncontrollable.

It was only saved by having Member of the Wedding, with the great gal, Ethel Waters, in there. This saved the ball game. But I found again that [even with] a play which I thought of great value, like a Gideon, people were stuck to their TV sets rather than going out for some kind of a reasonable theatrical experience; whereas before, the Playhouse had had a great institutional value in that a lot of people didn't even know what they

were going to see. [They] just went to the Playhouse and took their friends with them--"What's on tonight? Oh, blah blah, this and that"--and it didn't matter. They were at least satisfied that they'd had an evening out. Well, now it's the same theatrical equation that everybody's having to fight, and that is feast or famine. You either have nobody there, or you don't have enough seats.

GALM: During this period of all of the Playhouse and other experimental ventures that Gilmor Brown might have undertaken or wanted to undertake, do you think that your brother's concern with finances ever restricted him in these areas of experimentation?

PRICKETT: No, I don't think so. This was achieved by ingenuity more than gaudiness. Things were done [which] could be done anywhere. If there was a meeting of the minds--and by the minds, I mean Gilmor and Charles--that this thing wouldn't go on Mainstage, Gilmor would do it in the Playbox. Or if it didn't have quite enough for the Playbox, it would be done in a Laboratory Theatre stage. If it was a new playwright, it could be optional on where the value [lay].

The editor of the Times magazine, a chap by the name of [Robert] White, wrote a good play called Deadline. I remember this specifically because there was a question. We wanted to do it, not because we needed to satisfy the

Times or anything like that; but it was a bona fide play of the production of a newspaper--a kind of a local Front Page is what it amounted to. It finally ended up on Mainstage as a play called Deadline. It went nowhere. But it's of a great benefit to young playwrights if Samuel French, for instance, has the distribution that they have. We have people who produced plays that we used in various places, which went into the French's catalog and were picked up, maybe because it says, "6M4F." In other words, "All right. There are ten in the drama class, so we'll do a ten-person show." I know one little teacher in Pasadena [who] just ground them out like crazy, Agnes Peterson. I think Samuel French pays off twice a year, and I saw one check that she showed me for \$3,000. And she had about ten or fifteen. The cost was ten dollars for doing the play, or maybe it was even five; and, of course, in Samuel French's alignment, you'd get 50 percent of that. So she was just nickel-and-diming herself to death. But she had enough of them, and they just kept on going. This happened with a great many.

So many people are inclined to write a personal experience. The captain of a California football team--I can't think of his name--wrote a play called The Coach. We did it on the Laboratory Theatre stage. This has a momentary

interest and is quite often done here and there, just accruing to his.... Now, he never wrote anything before or since, but he had this one experience which he was able to put down, with the help of somebody who didn't have a three-minute change taking place in forty seconds-- I mean, the dramaturgy of it--so that it was playable. But I think all these advantages were the advantages of the Playhouse. To playwrights, to designers--just everybody involved in any theatrical output at all benefited from a place like the Playhouse.

Of course, in the College of Theater Arts we had the advantage of being able to give a kid what he wanted, and that is a twenty-four-hour theatrical day, which has to be a confinement and a restriction on UCLA or any other university. They cannot justifiably give a kid more than X number of units in theater. Now, the price the kid pays is a degree or the lack of it. But if, for instance, he had had the advantage of two years' college--which we try to encourage for everybody, because you're just brighter and you're more capable of reaching into that basket and getting a part out and being able to understand it and do it. But in a case like here at UCLA, you just cannot give a kid a twenty-four-hour theatrical day. They have to get it after they get out or get it with groups playing here, there and everywhere or whatever they

can pick up on the side.

This was a terrific advantage as far as we were concerned. In the same turn, this was the greatest parental deterrent that you can imagine. In those days--now, I'm talking about ancient days--the parent was just completely adamant that the kid had to get a degree. That's all. [It could be] a degree in animal husbandry or basket weaving or whatever, but [the kid] had to get a degree. It was quite often that we had to put up with some pretty horrendous parental problems, believe me. In the first place, the idea of their offspring going into the theater was not the greatest thing in the history of their hopes. To think that they were going to spend these years and come out with nothing but maybe a certificate that had their name on it--well, that's not going to help them. You can't present that to an agent, or you can't present that to the Theatre Guild office, or anybody else. It's just a piece of paper; that's all.

GALM: In any institution or organization, you speak of the golden years. What span would you term the golden years of the Pasadena Playhouse?

PRICKETT: Gee, it would just be impossible for me to say that, because to put it into some category of years.... It seems like we were always, inadvertently or on purpose, having something happen which was a tremendous, exciting

thing. Then we would go along on a certain level or go a long time, and then--no, not a long time ever, because there was always the excitement of something new coming up. We were never a stock house in any sense of the word. Even with our requirement for money, we could just do so many Three Men on a Horse a year. But you did those because there was a public demand for them, as much as there was a public demand for them on Broadway. After all, as you so well know, people go to the theater for so many different things; and it seems like, in those days, entertainment was probably 75 percent of it. Of course, they weren't as sophisticated; they weren't as platform minded, as they are now. A theater was just a little old escape box. But I think even the big productions were all striking enough to satisfy the common will.

GALM: Can you pinpoint a year or a period of the decline?

PRICKETT: No, I can't. The only reason I can't is because I didn't catch everything during the very last years to make a comparison. I don't know whether a production of the declining years would have matched the grandeur of a High Tor or something else in previous years. If I were to say it, it would be purely a subjective viewpoint, and I don't think I'm that authoritative. Maybe somebody like Lenore might be able to categorize them a little more thoroughly than I would.

GALM: Where did the decline show up? Was it in the selection of the productions? Or was it in the production values? In other words, you can do a bad play well; were they doing bad plays badly?

PRICKETT: During the decline? I think there's got to be considered in there a change of philosophy because of these increasing costs of trying to catch up. I can't relate this in terms of theatrical value, though. Audiences fell off. There was not the same feeling about the Playhouse that there had been--the automatic acceptance thing. I just am amazed at how many people were startled when they found the Playhouse was in bad straits economically. I don't know whether they then began, shall we say, picking on it from a standpoint of different values, theatrically. Maybe I am just not astute enough to know where that decline set in. I'm sure that television had a great deal to do with habits: of people being enamored of certain programs, of the fascination of the tube regardless of how silly it was to begin with.

I must point out the Playhouse is a part in these very beginning days of television, too. They came to us, because of theatrical values and reputation, to do [a show] up on the top of Mount Lee. Don Lee was, of course, a forward mover in all things electronic and everything; they had a station which was up at the top

of Mount Lee, just back of Warner Brothers. We would take a company--and they didn't care what it was, really, as long as it was nonroyalty--up there and do a Moliere with two cameras. Generally one was nothing more than a master, to pick up the master of the scene and to cut back and forth to it and to make entrances and exits, but no close stuff or anything. It was just done as if you would sit in about the twelfth row and look. But it was real pioneering stuff; I think there were not more than 100 sets in Southern California at the time.

Of course, there was no revenue involved. As I recall, the Don Lee station people gave us gasoline money. It was quite an experience, [one] that nobody took very seriously at the time, really. You had no idea of the extent of this tube. It was done in the crudest fashion--usually against drapes or against a wall--with no attempt, other than a few set peices, to go into the full production value. We never transported the entire production or anything like that. And they were usually done with students, because the experimentation thing was all they were doing it for--just to improve their own techniques. We were on once every two weeks for two or three years, up there on the top of that mountain (which was a hazardous thing to begin with).

But back to the question. I cannot tell you. I

just am not well enough aware to try to pinpoint the decline, except the panic had set in because of the economics. In the first place, the borrowing power of the Playhouse had diminished because they had had to offset losses by selling the dormitories up on North El Molino. The mortgage piled up and up and up on the South El Molino property. The board became less attached to the old placidity [under] which [they] had just taken a report from Gilmor and Charles, digested it semithoroughly (oh, "God's in his heaven. All's right with the world, and here we go"), and fulfilled a function of recall of all the community guild stocks so that the building was completely in the hands of the Playhouse Association. [The board] had never dictated to Gilmor or Charles, either one, on matters of policy. By policy, I mean play production or anything else.

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GALM: Since our last session, Mr. Prickett, you've had a chance to review a chronology of productions that had appeared both at the Fair Oaks Playhouse and at the Playhouse in El Molino, and some things came to mind.

What were some of these judgments that you arrived at?

PRICKETT: I have been delighted to go over this entire chronological listing because it brought back a great many memories of people and playwrights and things generally.

I can't get over what would seem to be--and this may be

a subjective outlook on the thing--an opulence that

existed sometime prior to the forties, probably would

have gone along in the early thirties, in fact. [There

was] a designer by the name of Janis Muncis, who you will

see in the credit lines if you notice there in the

scenic credit. Janis Muncis was a very wonderful man

from Hungary, I believe, who was interned by the Nazis

during the war. During his time at the Playhouse, he

gave great scenic wonderment to everything that he did.

There are so many listings and so many credits for him--

for instance, The Armoured Train and Turandot. Of course,

his production of The Blue Bird was one of the great things

of beauty, believe me, that ever hit the Playhouse.

Unfortunately for any revival prospect, it was caught up in a fire in the old scenic shops behind the old Playhouse. It was quite a tragic loss, because these drops that Muncis made would rate with art objects of all time, theatrically. They really would.

The Blue Bird brings up another recall which is afforded me here on these sheets, an annual Christmas production--which used to be a tradition of the Playhouse. It could be Mr. Pickwick; it could be [The] Cricket on the Hearth; it could be The Rose and the Ring; it could be any of a dozen or so Christmas-oriented productions, which were always a great attraction. [They were] not done as a Christmas exercise, believe me. The Playhouse production of Cricket on the Hearth or Dickens's [A] Christmas Carol was done with great care and attention and was always a highlight of the Playhouse season during the whole thing.

GALM: To begin with, was it the idea that it was to be a Dickens play?

PRICKETT: No, No. Dickens was only one of those who would be the choice. In fact, we didn't want to over-Dickens them to the extent that we went the whole route. It could be Alice in Wonderland; it could be Nicholas Nickleby; it could be anything that had a holiday feeling to it. [It] was done not just for the kids, because you don't

do a Nicholas Nickleby just for kids. You do it for the traditional value that Christmas had at the Playhouse.

As I mentioned before, another tradition which sprang up on North Fair Oaks was doing Gilbert and Sullivan. I think it was Sullivan's sister who lived in San Marino. This was not the inspiration for it, but was an annual visitation and a kind of a--not a local tribute in any sense of the word, but it was a nice thing to do. That was given up after we went to the new Playhouse and then revived because of the organization in Pasadena of a Gilbert and Sullivan company. This Gilbert and Sullivan company had some good voices in it and had an esprit de corps about it. We kept on with this annually for quite some time, doing some very good Gilbert and Sullivan; then it dissolved, kind of because of the orchestral problem. We had gotten to the point beyond where we could countenance squeaky violins and a lack of personnel involved in the orchestra; and the cost of hiring a union orchestra and putting it in for the length of the run was too costly for us at the time.

GALM: Do you recall any memorable performances of Gilbert and Sullivan?

PRICKETT: Not especially, except that they were traditionally great. We had an offshoot of it in what amounted to a rural premiere called Knights of Song, which was written

by Glendon Allvine, who had been one of the heads of Paramount Studios. He brought in this play called Knights of Song which he wanted to break in prior to Broadway, and this pertained to the lives of Gilbert and Sullivan and their clashes. It dealt with their personal lives and brought in--not by the ears, but in a tasteful way--a great many of their songs. In other words, [it highlighted] the creation of a lot of their varied numbers from all productions. At that time, Dana Andrews played one of the leads, and a chap started in the other lead. I've forgotten which played which, but he was smitten down in some way and unable to carry on. That was the first time that Robert Preston came to really prominent Playhouse activity. [He was] just a kid out of Lincoln High School in Los Angeles, but he got up in that part in about twenty-four hours--I believe he had played as a super in it--and carried it off beautifully. That was the beginning.

I also had a recall here on a play which should have been the Playhouse's--let's see how to put it. I hate to downgrade Abie's Irish Rose, but it should have been the Abie's Irish Rose of the Playhouse, I mean from a point of longevity and a point of national prominence. It was a play written from a book by the then-top columnist in the Los Angeles area, and that was Lee Shippey. It

was dramatized by Bob Chapin and Charlie King--two newspaper people--and it was everything. It was one of the funniest shows that ever came down the theatrical pike. It played at the Playhouse for weeks and weeks. We couldn't turn it off--we didn't want to--and [it] was one of what we would call a lead-pipe cinch to be another long run no matter where it went. It had no particular local angle; it was just the story of a great American family, with the condensation of Shippey's book. Now, Shippey, to any old-timer, would mean a great deal. He was a brilliant columnist on the Los Angeles Times.

GALM: Feature writer?

PRICKETT: Yes. "Feature" in the sense that it was always called "The Lee Side of Los Angeles," which was the Lee Shippey side. But it was one of the first things you'd grab for in the Times. It was not a brilliant column; it was true and folksy, that type of thing. These boys had made a condensation of all the little human interest stuff in The Great American Family, and this was so typical.

Incidentally, in that show was what, in my estimation, had turned out to be one of the finest actors that I ever saw come out of the Playhouse (and with no personal connotations in it or anything; I've happened to have seen quite a few); and that was a boy by the name of Samuel Cregar, who turned out later to be Laird Cregar.

He played about a five-minute bit as a real estate agent, this chap. He was six feet, seven or eight inches tall [and] weighed over 300 pounds. You may recall some of his things from Fox (he was put under contract at Fox). He did the Oscar Wilde that played the Pacific Coast. He was just a tremendous actor. Again, this bit was inadvertently thrown to him, which really meant nothing, except that the way he did it just beautified it to the extent that he became an overnight sensation. He came to the Playhouse school from Germantown, Pennsylvania, on a Rotary Club scholarship. The way they sustained that scholarship, which was meager, was that every summer when he would go back from the Playhouse, he would do a production which was called the Samuel Cregar Scholarship Fund Production. He would think all winter of what he was going to do, and then he would go back, and the Rotary Club would sponsor it.

He was an elephantine chap. At all times, there was a Playhouse commissary on the sixth floor of the building. This is when hamburgers were ten cents. Sam used to be a kind of a camel-like critter, in that he would go up there and he'd have a dollar (which had considerable more value then); he would get ten hamburgers and, shall we say, eat them up. Ten hamburgers at a time! And then he'd be stoked for another day or two. The idea of eating

was not a nicety with him; it was just a matter of stoking. But he turned out to be just one of the greatest actors. [Darryl F.] Zanuck tried to argue with him at Fox about his wanting to play a greater variety of roles than he played. In other words, his size effected a diminishment of the scope of his possibility. So he took off, I think it was, seventy-five pounds in about three weeks, which killed him. And unfortunately, [it] did just that. He ended up this diet in a pine box. To me he was-- and I think a lot of Playhouse people would agree--one of the finest products that the house ever knew. He did one of his finest acting jobs as the doorman at the stage door. The idea was to keep people from going backstage and to keep them from going on upstairs to badger Gilmor or somebody for something. So he would put on this act at the stage door. When he got to a point where he could not control it, he would reach for the phone on the wall and go into a very intense conversation. What people didn't know [was] that the wires weren't connected. But he did, and we used to watch him. He did Academy [Award] performances on that disconnected telephone. He was one of the greatest, in my book.

The Great American Family--back to that--unfortunately got in the hands of a producer who had no local thoughts at all in the fact that here was a play which was by a

Los Angeles columnist. He immediately set dates for it at the Curran Theater in San Francisco, and, as the mother of the great American family, which had been played homespunly and beautifully by Mary Todd, he cast a friend of his, an English actress. This took real good care of her first entrance, because the minute she sounded a little British, this sort of destroyed the illusion of the mother of the great American family, being right off of Piccadilly. It should have gone, and it should have gone big. That's one of my reflections on it.

Then also, [there was] this recurrence, within a period of three or four years, of certain playwrights. I was trying to account for them, like Zoe Akins, who won the Pulitzer Prize. She lived in Altadena close by. She was around; she was a great help. She was always one of those people who, when we were having a one-act play tournament or a dinner or something, Zoe Akins would always be among us. It was a point of distinction, as far as the Playhouse was concerned. We did a lot of plays by Zoe Akins, a lot that were never heard of before and never heard of since. I'm looking at one right now that's called Morning Glory, which was a kind of A Star Is Born-type thing. But anyway, it's no reflection on her; she just happened to be.... Martin Flaven was the same thing. We did a play of his called

Broken Dishes, which had been a big smash. He lived in Carmel. He was around considerable, and he got to be an earlier-day William Saroyan. Now, Saroyan was around all the time we were doing so many Saroyans. As you probably noticed after looking through this list, there was just one Saroyan after another.

Of course, we followed, too, the line of the pop ones--Lindsay and Crouse, the Kaufmans, and another favorite, Elmer Rice. To me, one of the finest productions in Playhouse history, because it was so meaningful, was Judgment Day. Judgment Day was a story of the trials--not the Nuremberg, but prior to--and Elmer Rice had had the misfortune of this play folding on Broadway. At the time, he was one of our bigger playwrights--a leading light in the Playwrights' Company--and he hated to see a flop. We had almost the same experience with it in its beginning. It started out very slowly and then built to a tremendous surge of interest, and again [it was] one of those things which just went on and on and on. Speaking of my own visual association or association in some way with plays, it would have to go along with the greatest that we'd ever done. Akim Tamiroff [and] Mischa Auer were part of the cast. It was not only a beauty, but it had a great deal of meaning at the time. GALM: One thing that I noticed from going over the list

was that in the early days of the Playhouse, there seemed to be more continental drama and more English period drama being done. Then, as the Playhouse continued, it seemed to concentrate almost entirely upon Shakespeare and very little continental drama, in the sense of Molière or of other European dramatists. I was wondering if there was any reason.

PRICKETT: Well, I don't think that Gilmore was too smitten with Molière. He would rather do Maeterlinck [or] Rostand than he would the other. I can't attribute it to anything other than possibly the royalty angle entered into it. If you will recheck the list of plays that we did, for instance, at Padua Hills as training exercises--and still with an audience consumption viewpoint--you'll find a great many Ibsens, and you'll find a great many Molières. There's a great resurgence in this type of thing now, but Molière at the time was just, to put it crudely, probably not a draw--and most difficult to do properly, too. Not that that would be a stumbling block, but to do for public consumption. Ibsen hadn't gotten quite far enough with his thoughts. In other words, now, you can do a Hedda [Gabler] with kind of an analytical look at the times in which Hedda was big; but when you take Hedda or Doll's House back twenty years, you have not gotten to an historical viewpoint yet. It was almost as if it

really mattered in your thinking, when actually it didn't. I'm just reaching for an answer to your question. There was considerable Ibsen done.

If you make an analysis of any British [dramatists], you would have to come up with the Playhouse all-time favorite, and that would be Shaw. Shaw was done at the drop of a hat. Even the isolated, the Too True to Be Goods, the others ~~that~~ aren't done at all, were all resurrected at the Playhouse. Shaw did very well. Shaw was a great favorite--and, strangely enough, a great audience favorite, too. Shaw was easy to sell, as far as I was concerned. He just sold like crazy.

There's one in here that fascinates me. Gilmor took a flyer on a George Jean Nathan play called The Avon Flows, which was a story about Shakespeare. [It] never had been done appreciably anyplace, except in possibly a reading exercise, but somehow it fascinated Gilmor and went along with his thoughts on doing all the plays of Shakespeare. But The Avon Flows, we can just forget it. Mr. Nathan had a great critical sense, but as far as a playwrighting sense, I'm afraid he was a little inadequate.

I got smitten, too, with an area which we haven't discussed at all. People keep referring to the fact of the democracy of the Playhouse, which seemed to be a

prevalent thing [and] which I think created the spirit. There was one thing which was a Southern California theatrical adventure--more than an adventure to a lot of people--and that was [that] every Sunday night in what was called the Laboratory Theatre (which later became the Workshop, or vice versa) there was an open reading for a play which was coming up. This was a very democratic procedure, but [it was] not done in the sense of democracy. It was done because you found an awful lot of people. There was the director, the stage manager, and usually a production assistant--in other words, somebody who was in Gilmor's office or thereabouts--who made a card listing of every single soul. Everybody in that room, if it took till midnight, was allowed a reading whack at the play that was coming up. Now, as so often happens, you can't read bits, because there isn't enough to hang your hat on as far as reading a bit is concerned. They would maybe give them material which was a first or a second lead, and everybody would try and analyze this person's potential. We got an awful lot of people out of those open readings. Further accenting the democracy of it was that the students would be in there reading, at the same time, against somebody off the street who maybe had never had a playbook in their hand. But if a student was unavailable because of prior commitments in

some area of rehearsal or work or something, they were given a special reading later on to satisfy them. It was their just dessert to have a chance at it.

This democracy went on down to what was called the administrative council, a thought of brother Charles, which was a great and wonderful thing [and] which, as long as I can remember, was a part of Playhouse procedure. This was a meeting every Friday, no excuses granted, of every department head--from the maintenance department, Gilmore, the brother, the school, everybody. By everybody, I mean probably twenty people who met and voted upon everything that was done--with the only isolated area being the selection of plays, because this was not their ken and it would have just thrown things off. But [it dealt with] every other thing, even the dismissal of a kid from school. If a person had no comment [or] no contact, they stayed out of the voting. I've even seen the recommendation that staff people be fired from that administrative council. It got pretty hot and heavy at times, but it was the greatest clearinghouse. I don't care what the beef was; I don't care how minor it was: everything was treated in this administrative council. You had a little shouting and a little yelling, and you had this and that and the other thing. There was no outside influence in it that would be carried as an auditor;

everybody was involved in what went on in that administrative council. It was a great thing. I can imagine other institutions, but I can't imagine an institution, to begin with, similar to the Playhouse operation. In other words, you take the head of the janitor[ial] staff and stack him in a verbal argument with Charles Prickett or Gilmore Brown, this would seem to be a little difficult; but it wasn't, because everything surfaced right there. Again, as I say, we were benefitted by a lack of blamesville [and] a lack of pointed fingers, because everybody knew what was going on everywhere.

That open reading thing brought a lot of people into some degree of attention. The fact that they read a lead was not the point in any sense of the word. It was the fact that they were a potential for something else. It may have been just spear carrying, just to see if they could walk out on a deck and not fall on their face. This was part of the deal.

GALM: How long did the readings continue? Until Equity?

PRICKETT: Until everybody in the room had read.

GALM: I mean in years.

PRICKETT: Oh, it went on forever. I don't know where it stopped, just because of my lack of continuity in later years. But it was an automatic procedure, and [it was] taken seriously. This was no dummy setup [or] just a

functional thing that had to be gone through for tradition's sake, because we got too many good people out of it. When you get into a big casting, you need all the people that you can get. For instance, if it was a Montezuma or something like that, maybe you needed the type that this person represented. There was a handy file. The casting director of the Playhouse always had what was a casting office, which just had to be a clearinghouse for everything, there were so many productions going on. They could give you almost as complete--not merely from a point of the freak angle--but they could give you just about what any Hollywood casting office could have given, I mean, any office of any studio. They could have given you people who speak German, who speak French, who can carry the ball in that language. It was a great thing; it really was.

GALM: How did the role of the actor at the Playhouse change once the Playhouse became an Equity house?

PRICKETT: It didn't change too much, because in our original contract with Equity, we had enough leeway so that it didn't disturb anything, except.... And I must preface this by saying that the basic reason for the initial contract with Equity was to allow Playhouse people who were graduates or in the category of those who were preschool--in other words, Bob Young, Randy Scott,

Lloyd Nolan-type people and many more; I'm just dropping names there, but there were many, many others--to come back and play on the Playhouse stage. The fact that they had progressed to a professional state, either as a member of Equity or a member of AFTRA [American Federation of Television and Radio Artists] or a member of the Screen Actors' Guild, shouldn't defeat the idea of their coming back and being able to play on the Playhouse stage. This enlargement came about with people who were non-Playhouse, just because there were too few outlets for actors in the area at the time. So the Playhouse was one of the very few places that was available, as a stage, for them to work.

The basic contract was signed with the idea of their being able to come back and play on the stage from which they had, for instance, graduated. There was just no sense in keeping a Dana Andrews out just because, all of a sudden, he had gotten to a point where he was a "draw." Now, the fact that he was a draw helped the Playhouse a lot, but there were ten to one who were not draws (in the sense of being anything), and they were never given star billing. This is another thing that I was smitten with as I went through here. I began to see it happening about the time when the economics of the Playhouse started down into its dire and desperate spots. Star billing

began with Edward Everett Horton, with Zasu Pitts, with others who brought in what amounted to almost a summer stock motif--in other words, almost a package-type deal. This did not begin until the economics were reasonably desperate. I think this would probably be part of the evolution in the changing of public patterns in demanding a little more than just another good play. In other words, they were amused by Edward Everett Horton, by Zasu Pitts, by Imogene Coca and by others of a star nature, and so they came in; but as they came in, their demands were pretty great. They weren't playing there for the Equity minimums or anything else; this was a contract deal. Oftentimes, the contract carried with it three or four people who had played with them in summer stock or who had played with them in winter stock, who came in on a basis of anywhere from \$250 a week to \$1,000 a week. Edward Everett Horton would pack the place. He became quite a local favorite. The same with Pitts; the same with others that were in there. But as I analyzed this chronological order, I began to see that creeping in, and also I began to realize why it had crept in.

GALM: Whose decision would that have been?

PRICKETT: This would be after Charles, who never would have permitted it. He had to be sold--as Gilmor did, too, to a certain extent--on the idea of the Equity

contract, although they realized the basic value of it. But he would never have countenanced that. Gilmore, and I say this advisedly, during the latter five or six years of his life, was not the same dynamic, creative person that he had been earlier. He was willing to let somebody else do it. When a package was presented to him, he would put a stamp of approval on it because I'm sure that he saw it was a way to a production and a way to a draw to satisfy the business department. In between, you'd get shades of the old Playhouse--the lack of star billing and everything else--but you can't expect a person of stature to come in and be obscure just because of policy. So there had to be star billing. It got so that I think people began to say, "Who's in it?" rather than "Let's go to the Playhouse." But again, this is part of the economic evolution where you just had to have it. Understand, the standing Playhouse staff at this time was always between sixty to eighty little mouths to feed. It had to be a consideration. I know when I came back for my one year spasm, how lucky I was that I knew and could reach and talk with Ethel Waters for her to come back for a run. [It was] just a different ball game, just a different ball game all the time.

About this time, other influences were being felt in Los Angeles. There were other theaters popping

up which had been different than the old competition, which had been the Majestic and the Morosco and a few like that. Then your UCLA began to provide an influence with their Extension Division, the night thing. Other theaters began with Equity contracts and small houses and things that were unusual, which provided a competition the Playhouse hadn't had before--for that type of thing. And understand, the Playhouse has always been in the center of that same old theatrical equation that goes on forever. That is, one person, "Ho-ho-ho! Entertainment!" and the next one, "No ho-ho-ho! I want something said upon that stage." This had been an equation, I'd say during the last ten years of the Playhouse, which was never thoroughly answered. Has it ever been answered anywhere? You can go the Music Center now and see The Mind with the Dirty Man, and you'll find people who are as crazy about it as the other person is revolted; and you can get something far out that carries just as big a house and just as big an influence on people. I'm certain that my little teeny-tiny mind wouldn't be able to provide any answer to that equation. That has been forever and a day and always will be, I'm sure.

GALM: You were speaking of playwrights and having their run at the Playhouse. I noticed that in the early fifties, Mary Chase was very popular.

PRICKETT: Mary Chase, of course, just has two or three really--I mean, when you've gone by Harvey and Happy Birthday, then you're down into what we always used to say behind Gilmor's back (he knew it, too) that they got this out of the bottom of the trunk--meaning, of course, that all playwrights have a lot of material which they have either tried to sell and couldn't sell, but they never lost it. It was down there in the bottom of the trunk. I think every one of them had it. Strangely enough, there were very few revivals worthy of the name that came out of the bottom of the trunk. After we'd had a hit with somebody, we'd ask them for more, or they'd say, "Have you got playing time for this?" They, of course, were not thinking of our economic good. They were thinking of getting some exposure of something that was their child, and they wanted to get it up on a deck. It's as simple as that. So it didn't hurt to ask, in other words.

GALM: You haven't spoken too much about what you consider-- I don't necessarily like the term "best"--your most rewarding performance as an actor in the Playhouse.

PRICKETT: Oh, I don't think there's any question about that. Our Town.

GALM: As the stage manager?

PRICKETT: Yes, Our Town. That would rate in my book above other things that I did, even Harvey. Harvey is a

beautiful play and all that. Silver Whistle I loved because it's the joy of living and you get too damn few of those. Knickerbocker Holiday, things like that; All the Comforts of Home. To me, one of the most brilliant people in the history of the world is Thornton Wilder. I just think he is one of the greats of all time, speaking intellectually. This is a man whom we had the benefit of having around the Playhouse a number of times, and in a conversational, lunchtime type of way. This is a man who, if you said, "Beans," he would tell you the origin and the entire evolution of the bean--and do it in a nice way.

I played Our Town [in] Albuquerque, Santa Barbara; I played it twice here. I don't think any play could ever grab an actor and hold him in its spell greater than Our Town, because it says so much. To me it's the great American play, and the more you analyze it, the better it becomes. I guess I came to that part--the finale, after the funeral, after everything and back to Grover's Corners and you wind your watch and you drag out the stage light and you're about to say good night--and I don't think that I was ever able to say that last line without a deep, deep lump in my throat. Because of Thornton Wilder, not because of me, I felt that I had projected the essence of life through that play. To me,

it's the beginning and the end of everything. That's why it almost sickens me to see something like a--what's the Channing musical with Louis Armstrong? The musical which is a twenty-minute musical extended over two hours--attributed to him! [The one] which came from his Merchant of Yonkers, which came to The Matchmaker?

GALM: Oh, Hello, Dolly.

PRICKETT: Hello, Dolly. And to think that this is attributed to the same man by such indirection that it's inconceivable. In other words, by the time it gets through the whole mill....

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PRICKETT: In a personal reflection, I can't neglect what was probably one of the most attractive productions in Playhouse history, and that's Anne of the Thousand Days, in which a young man by the name of Raymond Burr as Henry VIII really came into his own. [It's] pretty hard to stack it above the BBC television production of it, which I thought was wonderful, but Ray was a great Henry, just a perfect Henry. Adding to this production's attractiveness was a young designer who was a graduate of the Playhouse technical side by the name of Edward Stevenson. [He] designed the most unique use of banners--banners only, and their adjustment and their switching around--as a total background for the scenic portion of the production. It was a great one. Incidentally, when I was with the Greek--Ray at that time had become Perry Mason to an nth degree--we tried to find some weeks available for him to do [the play], both at the Greek or the Biltmore and the Curran in San Francisco. But we couldn't find the time available, he was just so knocked out from doing "Perry Mason." We had two or three sessions in which we got together to try and align time, because to me he just played Henry VIII to a degree of

perfection. He was just wonderful in it.

GALM: I'm curious whether your recollection of the performance of Raymond Burr may have had something to do with the recent television production of "Pope John," or didn't you see that?

PRICKETT: No, I didn't see it, unfortunately.

GALM: It was screened this past Sunday, and I thought possibly that had jolted your memory.

PRICKETT: No, it's just that in reflecting and looking over the things, I'm trying to make a recall of productions which were in the same category with some of our greater productions of Shakespeare. Of course, I think the courage in the staging of Back to Methuselah, parts one, two and three, which was an unheard of thing, reached a proportion of production value which would be hard to duplicate. In fact, nobody'd be darn fool enough to duplicate it, because Back to Methuselah is not the most attractive of Shaw's work. But we did parts one, two and three, come hell or high water, and they were beautiful, but not from a point of audience attractiveness. As I go through the chronological, [I'm aware] of seeing these authors who will creep up for three and four years at a time, who will be used continually and constantly, and then all of a sudden you just never hear of them again.

I was also struck, in thinking of people, in the terms of how many couples have been a part of the Playhouse--and this is purely that their names should never be neglected in Playhouse history--like the man and wife Sam and Dorothy Hinds, like Kay and Bob Preston, Ruth and Charles Lane. It seems that we ran in a great many couples. The Howards, Jim Howard and Bea Howard: he was the city attorney for the city of Pasadena, and Bea Howard was of the Costello family, and they met on North Fair Oaks. It seems that the Playhouse has always been a part of couples and their activities.

GALM: Well, being from UCLA I can name another--Ralph and Mayfair Freud.

PRICKETT: Yes. Of course, Mayfair's brother Murphey was a standby at the old Playhouse on North Fair Oaks. He was in practically everything. I think, as I suggested to you, that you just look for the tallest person in the cast, and there was Murphey. Ralph was so active, and in so many ways he was such a good director. He was such a good actor, you wondered why he didn't follow the acting as a total way of life. But then you realize that a man like Ralph just couldn't. I think he got his first job--this is after he had been at the Playhouse--with a Jewish theater, kind of a youth activity thing, in San Francisco. And he came back to the Playhouse from that as a [part

of the] staff, when at the time there was probably--
outside of Gilmore--Maurice Wells, Ralph, and after
'24, Lenore Shanewise. That was about the staff, until
it enlarged when the Playhouse moved to the new place;
then the directorial staff was enlarged to include a
great many. We've never had too many guest directors in.
The staff seemed to have a great adequacy in covering
all the directorial assignments. And that's with a play
every two weeks, which is just a backbreaker if you think
in terms of getting up a production in two weeks. I
mean a production of caliber, too.

There have been so many things that provided the
stimulus. I think we referred to the one-act play
tournament. The workshop cannot be neglected. What
began as the Workshop Theatre, which was a break-in
place for new plays and also for people, eventually
became the Laboratory Theatre. And then, because of the
requirement of the school for another theater, [it]
ended up in its eventual form, as being two very attractive
theaters. At first it was just a flat floor arrangement
in which the seats could be changed, so you could go either
direction--not like the Playhouse in its concept, but it
could be utilized at either end. Then [it became] two
small theaters. And rightfully so, one of them was
named the Charles Prickett Theatre, and the other was

named the Fred Huxley Theatre. At the last date, they were still there and available. They're two very attractive, seventy-five-seat houses, with the benefit of ramping now and a reasonably adequate deck so that things could be done on them. That was utilized for a laboratory production one time and then a school production the next; and then when the school took over both ends, the downstage area on the street side was used for the Laboratory Theatre, which is still there, too. [It's] a very small and attractive theater.

The Playhouse, in its original concept, had a cafe and candlelit tables--most attractive--when it began; and [this] went on for quite a few years, until the Playhouse just had to swarm over the others. It had shops on the south side of the patio. There was a lecture series that utilized the Playhouse. So it was quite a community center. Of course the oldest occupant of the Playhouse, other than the Playhouse itself, was the Coleman Chamber Concerts, which were held there at least once every month or so. The Coleman group was truly Playhouse because [of] the Colemans. Alice Coleman's husband, Ernest [A.] Batchelder, became a president of the Playhouse board and remained so for many, many years, along with so many others who rate credit as active--Archibald Young, Walter Young. The first man was (I

think I referred to this earlier) a man from UCLA who was the head of your language department, Dr. Paul Perigord, who was a very dynamic influence in seeing that the Playhouse was going to have to move out of the horrible digs on North Fair Oaks into the adequacy of a building. Of course, that building search was something. It ended up on South El Molino, but was at first slated for--and this would only be a reference point to any Pasadena--Lake and Del Mar, right across from Bullock's. This was thought to be too far out of town for people to go to because streetcars were the main conveyance at the time, so it ended up on El Molino. The thinking there was that it was between two thoroughfares--to the Pasadena concept of thoroughfares, at least--Colorado and Green, so that it had the benefit of a downtown location.

The outside production of the Playhouse at Brookside Park should have gone on to this day. This was in Friendship Forum in Brookside Park. The Brooks family had given this beautiful park to Pasadena--swimming pool, everything else that went along with it--way back in the old days (in fact, the Fair Oaks days). The Playhouse was encouraged to do something about outdoor theater and did a great deal about it, but the drain on resources was just too much. There wasn't any parks and recreation department [like there is] now to help stimulate this

sort of thing. We played down there to fogged-out nights quite often. Maybe the timing should have been better weatherwise or something, but it was a most attractive setting. This carried on for, I'd say, three or four years.

There's certainly one funny note there. Gilmor was playing Falstaff in The Merry Wives of Windsor, and after the usual performance congratulations and everything, Gilmor all of a sudden found himself alone. Brookside Park was, I would say, a mile and a half from the Playhouse, where we all dressed and then went down there. So in his Falstaff outfit he trudged down Friendship Forum, down along Walnut, until he was finally picked up by a police car. [The policemen] wondered what this grotesque arrangement was. He had his full beard, his full belly, and everything else.

GALM: A little makeup, too. [laughter]

PRICKETT: And quite a bit of makeup. [laughter]

This laughter served us for a long time, except to Gilmor. If you try to walk in Falstaff's boots, you have a project on your hands.

It's a shame it couldn't have carried on, because it could've been--nothing comparable, but--pre-Hollywood Bowl, and could have been an enlargement of a musical facility plus a dramatic thing. We did Pomander Walk

down there; we did a couple Shakespeares; we did other things that were really worthy. At that time we were a great deal more folksy. It was on ramps and levels, so that people brought their blanket and sat there. The chief source of getting there, of course, was a streetcar, which was right handy, and they would just drift on down the hill and sit.

GALM: Do you feel that the Playhouse may have been asked to fulfill too many functions? It seems that it had quite a few endeavors, and that perhaps the extent of the endeavors that it did do diminished it.

PRICKETT: Well, these things were in the earlier years when life was much more simple. I don't think the impositions on it--in the new Playhouse, and especially after the acquisition of the Fannie Morrison building--were too great. The Playhouse--and this would mainly reflect on the brother, because of his intense activity in all Pasadena activity; this followed with a great many of us--was always a part of Pasadena life. And I don't think the imposition was that great. Certainly it was an integral part of Pasadena's life, and there was a time when it was, I would say, probably the greatest thing in Pasadena. (Now, I may be a little subjective on that.) Then the Tournament of Roses rose to great stature, and Caltech, through its projections of the Jet Propulsion

Lab and its own growth, became a major influence.

I only wish the Playhouse were still in a position to be as meaningful as it was in those days, because it was-- I think it was John Drinkwater that said it was the livest thing he found in western America. I can give only one reflection to the kids who call every week and say, "What's happened to our Playhouse?" (their love and their loyalty is still there). After reflecting on the situation, the only possible [solution]--in my estimation, which is just a personal reflection--is that only through a tremendous subsidy by whatever forces are able to subsidize (by a foundation or a college or university which would control its budget--and it has to be controlled) [can it be revived]. There can't be any more abortive attempts to just revive the Playhouse to the extent of getting the door open. That just won't work anymore. I just tell these kids, "Just thank your lucky stars that a part of your life experience dealt with and was a part of this lively, wonderful thing." I went around the country with Gilmore and the National Theatre Conference things, and I didn't see anything that even came close. The closest thing I ever saw was the Cleveland Play House, but I wouldn't match it against the Playhouse. It's a "going concern" kind of feeling.

GALM: We've already talked about the year that you

came back as managing director. Beyond that involvement of a year, were you active at all in helping to revive the Playhouse?

PRICKETT: No. This is a question that some people ask me. I guess I had too much emotional feeling about it, or too much heart in what had been. Now, this may be a limp excuse, but I could not countenance what was going on. I saw exactly what was going on. This is no reflection on those who followed. A man like [C.] Lowell Lees, who came in after me from the University of Utah--you didn't have to read his mind. He had been a part of academic theater all his life, he had always wanted to be at the Playhouse, and he had always wanted to be in some place where he could mix in professionally. [It was] not an excessively notable ambition, but that's the way he looked at it. Also, he felt that having been an advisory member of the board of the Ford Foundation--areawise now, when you consider the area, you have to think of its theatrical activity. This area would have been Utah, Wyoming, other places.

GALM: Montana.

PRICKETT: Yes, that's right. He had been an advisory member of the board, and I know that he thought that all he had to do was what he would call "the right thing" in planning and the Playhouse would get a Ford Foundation

grant. If you make an analysis of the two years in which he operated the Playhouse (I think it was two), every play was chosen because it was from a list which had been used by a college or an installation which was Ford funded. He, I know, thought to influence this funding by following the pattern which had seemed to be successful in other places. In other words, he looked at the Arena Stage, he looked at Seattle, he looked at this one and that one which had the benefit of Ford funding, and said, "Well, I will do this because this was part of their pattern and was acceptable."

In the meantime, the only criticism I would have was that in trying to effect these changes, he spent what money there was left. And it was salvation time, to the extent of keeping alive. But he redid the auditorium, changed the seating, this and that and the other thing, capital investments which I think, at least in my estimation-- this is not intended as criticism; it's just a reflection-- were a little beside the point. After all, the play's the thing. And I think with programming, [he] possibly could have sustained it a little bit longer. But it was just not to be. You don't come off in theater with his diminishment from 850 to some 700 seats. You can't have enough hits that will sustain you for a period of time, that will keep you alive, theatrically. This goes

commercially; it goes any other way. I don't care how you cut it, you cannot sustain yourself on that number of seats. You have to go for the hit that is going to allow you the three or four other expressions you want to effect to allow you to do them. I don't know; that's just my theatrical philosophy on it.

I think the Playhouse was without any possible financing. The people of Pasadena had been appealed to so often; they had been just five-, ten-bucked to death. There was no great big money that was available; and, as a result, trying to live and pay a staff off the income of the box office and tuition was just not to be. It didn't even come close when I was there. I know. It was just a horrible gap. It's the modernity; it's as simple as that. It's like the Music Center having to get along without the tremendous funding which is effected over there. And in the commercial theater, it's so nip and tuck that a company is out of business in no time. Either that or they've got a one- or two-line hit on their hands. It's just not to be, that's all.

GALM: Was the city ever approached? Or was it just not even a consideration?

PRICKETT: The city was in the peculiar spot of being

approached and giving in the neighborhood of \$10,000, which is a nothing. But the city has to be answerable to its taxpayers; it has to also be answerable to other things of worthiness. And so they have to spread these few nickels they have as far as they can. As far as the city taking it over, this is an absurdity. What would the city use it for? The only possible solution would be to keep the Mainstage as a platform--I think we went into this in one of our earlier sessions about Lobero in Santa Barbara--keep it as kind of an attractive little showcase platform which is available by usage by things of worthiness, and utilize the rest of the building for an office building or whatever. But what glories have you got out of that? It would be easier for the Playhouse to go back to 1917 and somehow, with the same vigor and the same imagination, [attempt] the reestablishment of a North Fair Oaks, and to build back to whatever, without the encumbrance of the mortgage and everything that went with it. Of course, you can't do that. Or can you? A few of us thought, and they were reasonably important thoughts from reasonably important people, that "The hell with all this encumbrance--this roof that needs fixing, this whole building that has nothing. Why not go back to almost the concept of the Eighteen Actors? Of getting a shack and starting the Pasadena Community

Playhouse all over again, in an area in which the net would be down to a minimum and the potential of gross would be in the same degree of your satisfaction of the public." But I guess most of us who think along those lines are too far along in years and lacking the vitality to do it. Others have tried it since, but something is missing. Something is missing which may be missing from public acceptance now. I think there's too much available to them in the way of an entertainment equation to bother about it. Who could tell?

GALM: Do you know of attempts to get name directors to take over the Playhouse?

PRICKETT: This always sounds so good and has been going on for years. We tried to get the studios--and we had great ins as far as the potential is concerned, for instance, for Fox, and with money available at the time of, say, Cregar's death--to set up a scholarship in his name. I mean a continuing thing. I don't mean a \$500 and "Get out of the office"-type thing. I mean a bona fide... We tried Fox. [We tried] Paramount with a man who had been closely connected with Playhouse growth, Irving Pichel, who was a great actor [and] a great director. At his death, we tried to encourage them, in his name, to establish a scholarship. After all, Pichel had meant the transition from silent to sound. He had meant so

much to them. And this was not only with these, it was with every studio in Hollywood at a time when they were very substantial in their own select standing--economic, controlwise, etc. You got a great hubbub, you got a nickel's worth of publicity, and you got a great vacuity. Nothing ever happened on it. The Playhouse had been their source for so long. I think those Hollywood winds are apt to blow a little lustily, but nothing happened. It should have happened, though. They could have done it so easy. As I said before, the fifteen or twenty kids that went off of every graduation platform to studio contracts, whether they were morning glories or whether they latched into the Dana Andrews-Robert Young-Eleanor Parker-Edgar Buchanan state or whatever, they owed the Playhouse something, I think.

GALM: What I'm also getting at is whether they attempted to get an outside executive director from some other company, either like [Gordon] Ball or like Joe Papp now? But I suppose the Playhouse wasn't....

PRICKETT: It was too far gone by that time. They did bring down the chap, Gordon Ball, from San Francisco, but it didn't take very long for a person of his stature, in his personal progression, or [with] his desire for it, to see that there wasn't any money there to begin with. There wasn't anything left for him to salvage.

Now, he can go to a Lincoln Center because he knows, as Papp would know, that the world is his onion as far as the bigness of New York and the potential of getting to Rockefeller or Lindsay or something and putting this in as a part of a cultural program. But anybody who is approached, even, let's say, after Gilmor or after Charles, would see that it was purely a matter of salvation. And they just weren't interested. They brought down and they brought up and they brought over a half a dozen people who have become of stature since then, but none of them would go for it. In the first place, their salaries were completely out of the spectrum of Playhouse possibility because they were just using a couple years of their life. They're too on the brass-tacks side. They know where the theatrical bread's buttered, and it's not in saving the Pasadena Playhouse.

GALM: From the time of your brother's death until the death of Gilmor Brown, was there anyone at the Playhouse who, if they had been properly groomed, might have taken over with the same vigor that those two individuals had in their heyday?

PRICKETT: No, I don't think so. I fault Gilmor and the brother for this to some degree; I think they both had a feeling they would live forever. They had never delegated authority that way. They had never put their

feet on the desk with the idea of an assistant doing their work. They had fought their way through this jungle from North Fair Oaks adequate plus-adequate to the job of keeping the Playhouse going and alive and everything. I can't explain that. I can't explain why there was no particular continuity. There was an attempt at continuity. There was a chap by the name of [Harold] Dyer who was the brother's assistant in a business way, but being an assistant in the business way is not the adequacy of having the whole crystal ball in your hand of representing the Playhouse to all of Pasadena in a businesslike way. [There was] also the acumen of juggling. With Gilmor, there was Tom Henry; there was a number of others who had a great deal of talent theaterwise but who just didn't have the same quality that Gilmor had.

The Playhouse was Gilmor Brown and Charles Prickett. As far as attributing its growth, its everything, I would attribute it to them, totally. I'm glad they did not have to go through the rigors of what seemed an eventuality and was coming into being (in other words, the rising costs, etc.). I'm glad they had their days of wine and roses and justifiable credit for the entire creation of the Playhouse. I wish that in the early days they had established their own Ford Foundation, when Pasadena's South Orange Grove was lined with millionaires, when

they could have set up as adequately as any Ford Foundation some kind of pot in which they could have put the wherewithal to sustain it over the declining years. Maybe they wouldn't have been declining. But they didn't, because this might have meant controls beyond their control. And I don't think they frankly thought of it too much. They were too busy operationally with the business end and the producing end to even consider it. When I think of the millions that were lying around in the Wrigleys and the Anheuser-Busches and the rest of them on South Orange Grove, I'm sure they would have flipped this over their shoulders without missing a nickel of it, if it had been properly put as a foundation-type thing. Of course, people in those days weren't looking for write-offs or anything of that sort, but it still could have happened.

GALM: Could either your brother or Gilmor have approached these people?

PRICKETT: I think so. And I think they could have done it through a board of trustees which was of caliber people--I mean, of the stature of Robert Millikan [and] of others who were very big people. I don't recall ever hearing the idea even broached. This is just a ten-cent afterthought that I'm expressing now, because I'm sure it could have been effected. Strangely enough, this funny little woman who talked during the matinees, Fannie

Morrison, was the only one who really came through.
And why, you would never know, because the others--well,
you think of the Busches and the rest of them--they could
have done it very easily, I think.

GALM: Does this also mean that the two men saw the
future of the Playhouse as always being rosy? Did they
ever voice any pessimistic thoughts about the future?

PRICKETT: We had campaigns to raise money in later years.
But again, I refer back to what I indicated as a kind of
a philosophy about giving to the theater. The people
say, "I give to the Playhouse." "I must have had 250
people there during the last year." "I bought my tickets.
I'm one of your better patrons." That sort of thing.

It's a strange thing that a place like Caltech can
have a Beckman Auditorium and have all kinds of dramatic
activity down there, but people have an idea that the
Caltech function has something to do with the substantiality
of the California Institute of Technology. Arnold [O.]
Beckman, whom I doubt if he ever was even approached
as far as the Playhouse is concerned, gave them a beautiful
auditorium, and they sustain themselves very well down
there. They book in things. They've got a couple of
very, very smart men from your UCLA who ran your
department over there who play this thing professionally
and with an idea of attractiveness to their audiences

and with a great deal of variety. Chamber concerts have gone down there; other local things go down there. It's an ideal setup for an 1,100-seat house, or whatever it is.

I don't know in some degree of finality as far as the Playhouse is concerned. I just think the operational pattern would have to be so radical from what we knew it that it would have to be an entirely different concept of operation of a theater. You're not going to get anything from the outside that will play 700 seats, in contrast to the Beckman Auditorium, which is 1,100; or you're not going to play it against the [Pasadena] Civic Auditorium, which is 3,000 seats. If they can get a date in Los Angeles, they're going to get it. As far as a repertory group, this was tried. Lees tried it by hiring a repertory group. This was like the old days of the stock company but was not acceptable to the public. There was not enough follow interest, as there had been in the old days, so that pattern evidently is not workable. I'm sure there are enough little tiny companies that could probably come by and you could do little things, but this is not going to be major enough to take the Playhouse off the big hook--the big hook being the tremendous mortgage that it now sustains. I don't know. From my dotage, I look back on it as a kind of an evolution in which I see certain things. The chronological thing indicated

to me that there was an acceptance of some pretty weakish material. I wouldn't pinpoint it to the extent of naming names or plays, but there's some material in there that is certainly questionable for hookey-pookey junior high school, believe me. And then the next one was a King Lear or a Volpone or something which was enormous, theatrically.

GALM: But it was a formula that somehow seemed to work.

PRICKETT: It seemed to work. I wouldn't dare place a percentage on it, but so many people came to the Playhouse, and the first inkling that they had of what was on the stage that night was two minutes before they bought their ticket. Now, if you can attribute that quality to anything that's happening locally now, I'll eat it, because that isn't the way it works now. People are motivated off their two spot up in front of that television set or wherever to go because of the attractiveness of some article that they just find irresistible. But in those days, I guess with less of the competitive [and] with more casual moving about, they just had great faith in a place called the Playhouse which they'd been going to for years. And I run into people all over--well, even President [Richard M.] Nixon. When he was a student at Whittier College and I was in the guest line of the Tournament of Roses as a director of the Tournament, I came up to him and he said, "Oh, I remember you from such-

and-such a play!"--when he was a student--"We used to come up all the time!" I just get it from all over. It doesn't matter. It isn't just local. It's people who were, for instance, going to Occidental who would come over to see a show, or it's a Caltech student who sat in the balcony for two bits. I think the highest price in the balcony was seventy-five cents. This was part of their routine. I don't know where they go now. I'm sure it isn't to a two-bit seat or a seventy-five-cent seat even.

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