CURTAIN UP! THE REVIVAL OF THE PASADENA PLAYHOUSE

Peggy Ebright

Interviewed by Bernard Galm and Thomas Bertonneau

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

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INTRODUCTION

Peggy Ebright came to the Pasadena Playhouse after its glory days, the days recounted in the oral histories of Gilmor Brown, Maudie Prickett Cooper, Oliver Prickett, and Lenore Shanewise. At the time that the first tape of this oral history interview was recorded (July 27, 1973), the future of the Playhouse looked anything but promising, yet Peggy appeared optimistic. Now the future of the Playhouse is virtually assured, and Peggy's optimism appears justified at last.

A delay in final processing of the tape made a second session possible; the announcement that the Playhouse would reopen made a fresh perspective timely.

To be a volunteer in service to a thriving community landmark is laudable; to be a volunteer in service to a moribund institution, to be persistent in the face of disappointment and bright-spirited in the face of cynicism is altruistic. Altruism, indeed, is the quality that emerges from these pages as Peggy speaks, first, to Bernard Galm, and, eight years later (November 13, 1981), to Thomas Bertonneau.

Peggy began her association with the Pasadena Playhouse as an ex officio board representative from the Pasadena Junior League, a major supporter of the Playhouse's Children's Theatre. An amateur thespian, her involvement

grew until, in 1969 when the IRS padlocked the doors, she became a founding member of the private corporation that retained vestigial title to the Playhouse and pursued ways to reopen it. Plan after plan was proposed; time after time the corporation marched to the altar--and was left in the lurch. Prospective partners included colleges--Pasadena City College, University of the Pacific, United States International University--entrepreneurs, and angels. Finally, in 1975 the city of Pasadena bought the Playhouse, discovered its value as a piece of real property, and finally negotiated an agreement with Auditorium Management Company to guarantee six seasons. The doors are set to reopen in 1983.

With characteristic hopefulness, Peggy told Tom, "I think it needs nothing more than the first coat of paint put on there, but what the community won't be rallying around it. There's no one who doesn't want it to work.

"I can't think of any glorious ending other than the expression of optimism and of the times I've imagined that curtain [going up]."

I looked forward to my telephone encounters with Peggy Ebright and her tonic enthusiasm. Her willingness to proceed with this oral history after a lapse of almost a decade surprised and pleased me. It is the same never-say-die attitude that clearly is responsible for a community institution, the Playhouse, renewed.

--Mitch Tuchman, February 1982

INTERVIEW HISTORY

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

Thomas Bertonneau, assistant editor and interviewer, Oral History Program. B.A, Scandinavian languages, UCLA.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Ebright's home in Pasadena (first session); Ebright's home in San Marino (second session).

Dates: July 27, 1973, and November 13, 1981.

Time of day, length of sessions and total number of recording hours: Each session (midafternoon, the first; midmorning, the second) lasted about an hour and a half. Three hours of conversation were recorded.

Persons present during interview: Ebright and Galm (first session); Ebright, Bertonneau, and freelance journalist Diana Alexander (second session).

CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW:

This interview was the last in a series on the Pasadena Playhouse. The participants were chosen because of their special knowledge of individual periods of Playhouse history. In 1965 Peggy Ebright became involved with the Playhouse through the Pasadena Junior League's support of the Children's Theatre. She continued to serve on the Playhouse board. From this vantage she witnessed the many attempts by a succession of administrators and boards to save the theater.

Prior oral history interviews with Maudie Prickett Cooper and Oliver Prickett were especially helpful in providing background. Newspaper accounts of the everchanging state of the theater in what appeared to be its last days were also consulted. The interviewer (Galm) prompted Ebright to chronicle these events.

It was fortunate that Alexander was visiting with Ebright when Bertonneau arrived to tape record the second session. Bertonneau's tape recorder malfunctioned, but Alexander made hers available, and the interview proceeded as scheduled. Near the end of the session, Bertonneau invited Alexander to contribute some of the insights she had formed while researching an anecdotal history of the Playhouse.

EDITING:

Editing of the first session's transcript was done by Susan Tamayo, assistant editor, Oral History Program; editing of the second session's transcript was done by Mitch Tuchman, senior editor. Both checked the verbatim transcripts against the original taped material and edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling, and verified proper nouns. The final manuscript remains in the same order as the original taped material. Words and phrases inserted by the editors have been bracketed.

Ebright reviewed and approved the edited transcript of the first session and by telephone affirmed or corrected the spellings of proper nouns in the second.

The introduction was written by Tuchman. Other front matter and the index were prepared by Program staff.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

JULY 27, 1973

GALM: Mrs. Ebright, this is an interview in a series of interviews on the Pasadena Playhouse. I would like to start by asking you what was your first involvement with the Playhouse.

EBRIGHT: I came with the Playhouse by virtue of belonging to the Junior League, and the Junior League agreed, in 1965, to support the salary of the director of the Children's Theatre. At that particular time, I was what they called the community vice-president of the Junior League and, as such, sat on the boards of the various groups which we were supporting; and so for that reason, [I] sat on the Playhouse board for that year and also worked with the Children's Theatre quite extensively. Then, by the time my year was over, I was so involved with the Children's Theatre and with the Playhouse itself that I never left the board.

GALM: Who had approached the Junior League to support the Children's Theatre managership?

EBRIGHT: I think that Dr. [C. Lowell] Lees had come here, and it was his administration that came to the Junior League and asked for their support. The Playhouse was in trouble at that time, and so it needed help from all quarters. This was when the Junior League agreed to do so for three years,

which they did. In fact, I think they extended it to a fourth year.

GALM: Was this the first time, as far as you know, that there had been cooperation between the Junior League and the Pasadena Playhouse?

EBRIGHT: Yes, this was its first involvement.

GALM: How successful was it?

EBRIGHT: Tremendously so. The Children's Theatre, I will say, was a success right through till the end. They had a director whose salary they paid. The first year, they had two codirectors who split the money that the League gave, and then after that, just one director, Buddy Youngreen. We had our Junior League people, and I think there were maybe two other semistudent employees of the Children's Theatre, and it was run quite autonomously. We kept our own books, had our own income and outgo without any . . . . We had to pay a certain amount of overhead to the association.

It was upwards of 90 percent attendance every single play. They got involved in the community, and they cooperated with the schools. For example, at least one play of our season would be in cooperation with what maybe the fourth grade would be teaching. For example, we had a play about Thomas Edison when they were teaching Thomas Edison, and so all the schools bussed their children in for special performances of that. It was a tremendous success.

GALM: So the success of the Children's Theatre really was because of the support of the Junior League. Do you think it increased it a great deal?

EBRIGHT: I think the fact that they were able to pay the salary was certainly important, because the financial status of the Playhouse precluded, perhaps, paying this. But I think children's theater is something that is easily a success. Children love the theater, and parents love to bring their children to the theater. They were good plays. They were well done. The director was a fine promoter and got out there into the community--well, like going out to the schools and this kind of thing--and got involved with bringing children from Watts in. He was a good promoter. It's fairly easy to make a success of children's theater. Also, we used students for actors, [so] we didn't have the union problems--other than in the technical crew--that the professional stage had. And our budgets were way lower. I say we made money. We maybe made $1,000 out of a budget of $10,000 annually, but at least we made our way.

GALM: How long had you lived in the Pasadena area?

EBRIGHT: We moved here in 1960. I had always been interested in theater and belonged to community theater groups. I remember I went to the Playhouse the first year [I was] here to interview Dr. [Fairfax P.] Walkup, because I worked on a magazine for the Junior League and was fascinated with it even then.

GALM: Where did you come from?

EBRIGHT: Ohio.

GALM: So you had this initial association with the Pasadena Playhouse: How did that grow? What direction did it take?

EBRIGHT: You mean from when I joined the board?

GALM: Yes.

EBRIGHT: My main involvement remained the Children's Theatre, although the longer I stayed on the board, the more involved I became with the whole association. I just was interested in every aspect of it; so the more I learned, the more I became involved. Until pretty soon, I was rather a fixture.

GALM: At one point you became secretary of the board.

EBRIGHT: Yes. Let's see, if you want the dates of that, I put that somewhere. That was in 1967, so it was two years after that that I became secretary--and stayed that way until the very end, when I became chairman.

GALM: What was the makeup of the board at the time that you came on?

EBRIGHT: You mean officerwise or sizewise?

GALM: Size and . . .

EBRIGHT: . . . how much power they had and so forth? When I came on the board, Mr. Dumm was the chairman, Wesley [I.] Dumm. He had brought in the year before I was involved a man named Lowell Lees from the University of Utah and Dr. Lees established a resident company. The first year he came,

he had a heart attack and everything was postponed for a year. The second year, which is the year I became involved, he started his resident company with classic plays.

The board was pretty much in charge. Dr. Lees was--I suppose you'd call him the president. The board was made up of an executive committee. The executive committee and Dr. Lees did most of the work, and somewhat behind the scenes, as far as the board was concerned--or at least it seemed to me, at first, that we were no more than reported to.

GALM: How large was the executive committee?

EBRIGHT: I think it was probably three or four people, which would be the officers, I guess. It's hard for me to say, because I was so ignorant of all this. It was so confusing that it took me a while to realize that the confusion wasn't all my fault. [laughter] The business side of it really was in quite a state. Dr. Lees had a magnetic personality, and he rallied the community to great enthusiasm--which was <u>too</u> bad, because then when the time came to deliver, the plays were terribly heavy and awfully long. He didn't cut anything. They were good. I enjoyed some of them, but it wasn't the kind of thing to drag husbands out to in the middle of the week, for example. <u>Richard III</u> I think as one of them, and it was close to midnight before it was over. This is a long time to sit and educate oneself. And <u>Peer Gynt</u> and things like this, which are a little hefty fare. So consequently,

I think the great enthusiasm that Dr. Lees brought out kind of dwindled over the year, and a lot of people were disillusioned about how much fun this was going to be.

Plus the fact [that] he was a bad administrator, financially. In fact, I could almost say he was irresponsible, financially. That's kind of an indicting thing to say, but at the end of that year, things were in a terrific state, financially. That's when Kenneth Hunter came in and started looking for the records, and it became apparent that he had lost tremendous amounts of money over the year, and we were in debt well over our heads. For example, he had taken a company to Catalina the summer previous, and this was supposed to make a great deal of money plus a lot of public relations. Instead, I think it went some $30,000 in the hole.

GALM: Was this something that the board weren't really aware of?

EBRIGHT: Rather not. Mr. Dumm, as marvelous as he's been, worked rather privately and was so eager that everything should be a success that I think that he maybe allowed the banks to loan money, and we got further and further into debt, rather than to have to pull in our horns. I don't know if we could have.

GALM: Do you recall why Dr. Lees was brought in in the first place? Who had left at that point? Was that [Albert] McCleery?

EBRIGHT: I don't know who had left. I think it's in there.

I don't know.

GALM: What happened during the year that he suffered his heart attack, and you say things were sort of postponed for a year?

EBRIGHT: This I don't know. I wasn't there. I do know they did a Shakespeare production with Hollywood actors who were very bad. I think the theater was just dark. The school ran.

GALM: But somehow Dr. Lees did have this Pasadena public support. How did he create that?

EBRIGHT: I think the public still wants the Playhouse to be there. It's just they've lived through so many promises and savings of it, and then it falls down again. But he was a terrific promoter. He went from house to house, and people had coffees for him and he described the resident company--which I do think is a wonderful thing, if one could afford it. What he had as his dream [was] kind of patterned after the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis. I remember he described it that we would all be in love with our resident company like we are with our local baseball team and be fascinated to see who was playing what part in the next play.

The concept is valid. I think, number one, it just plain was too expensive for an organization that was already in financial trouble to take on because you have to hire a certain number of people permanently and you pay their salaries the whole year long. By this time, any professional theater was

getting to be almost prohibitive, because the unions were piling in and creating higher and higher prices on all sides, like the technicians and so forth. And then I think that his choice of plays, and the fact that he didn't seem able to cut them, was not what you might call popular fare. Not that things have to be popular fare; but for what it was, it was a little heavy going for too many people.

GALM: Was there any relief as far as the scheduling? Or was it stricly classics?

EBRIGHT: It was stricly classics. The Moon Is Blue was about the . . . . We had Shaw. The Devil's Disciple was my favorite and what I'd probably consider the lightest of the whole year.

GALM: You say that there was a resident company. Did he try to center around someone of distinction, as far as actors were concerned?

EBRIGHT: They weren't well known, but they were fine actors. Monte Markham was in the resident company.

GALM: But at that time, they wouldn't be drawing cards, so to speak. Did the board attempt to guide the choice of plays?

EBRIGHT: Yes. After the first season--and as a matter of fact, during the year--the board finally roused itself to the fact that we would like more things such as Cyrano [de Bergerac], something that might be considered corny but at least would draw people in. Consequently, they put a list of possible

selections for the next year coming in the newspaper and asked people to write in what they might want and so forth. So there was some effort made, but, of course, the next year never came. We faced, I guess, one of the big crises.

GALM: What was that?

EBRIGHT: As a matter of fact, it was that summer, 1966, that Kenneth Hunter came in and studied all the records and came to the conclusion that Dr. Lees had to resign immediately because he was taking us nowhere but further downhill. It was that same summer that Albert McCleery came, and he had been connected with the Playhouse--I guess he was a disciple of Gilmor Brown's. He had been a board member, he said, off and on throughout the years, and he had a great plan for theater again. He was duly elected producer-director.

Then, during the course of examining the records, it came out that the withholding taxes had been spent. And so the Internal Revenue Service came in and said we had to give them immediately $30,000 withholding taxes or they would close us down. And they did, because we didn't. They padlocked the old oak doors, and people came and took pictures, and Albert McCleery was another great promoter. This was in the summer. I just happened to be there the day they came, and they gave us some twenty minutes to get all our personal things out of the building. The Children's Theatre was the only thing running that summer.

At that time, we had a debt with the Bank of America of about $160,000 and about a $50,000 debt with the First Western and a $30,000 debt to the IRS which had to be paid before they would take the padlocks off the doors. And Albert McCleery was making great plans for the season to come, and the public rallied round again. It was just thrillingly exciting. People would send in dollars, and children sent money, and people would drop money in the fountain. It was very emotional.

All the movie stars came over, and we had one grand, grand gala opening in August, I think it was. We had enough money to pay them back just in time to open the doors for the great occasion, where people like Charlton Heston, Marilyn Maxwell, and Imogene Coca all did little acts; and Victor Jory was the master of ceremonies. So this was a thrilling, emotional, wonderful thing. As far as the public was concerned, they had saved the Playhouse, because we'd paid off the $30,000.

Naturally, it wasn't too many months before we were in trouble again with the Bank of America on our $160,000 loan. This is what I mean: finally, the public gets disillusioned, because one more great emotional upheaval and they saved it, and two more months and you're in trouble again. They didn't realize it was but a Band-Aid that had been applied, and they thought, "What is going on there?" It was never actually saved.

GALM: It would probably be before you arrived on the scene,

but when was the first act of Save the Playhouse?

EBRIGHT: Well, I don't know how much had happened before Dr. Lees, although the Playhouse had certainly been going downhill from its golden era. Once Charles Prickett and Gilmor Brown were gone--I shouldn't speak of this because I'm not real sure--I think they went through a series of stars who came to take the leading roles. I remember we used to go to the Playhouse when I first came here. Imogene Coca was in some of it: Edward Everett Horton used to come and was a semiregular; Maudie [Prickett] I saw play here. So the Playhouse was entertaining and popular, still, but I think administrativewise it was changing and struggling to find the same stability it had--but never did.

Now, whether the public had to come out and save it, I don't know. Dr. Lees was the first big push that I knew about, and it generated great enthusiasm for a rebirth. The year of the IRS was the second great rebirth, and from then on, the public had been asked to save us and the paper had been filled with the "dire future" off and on, until gradually the public was thinking, "This is a dead horse we're kicking."

GALM: In other words, the board would have brought Dr. Lees.

EBRIGHT: Yes.

GALM: Was it again the board who would have decided to bring McCleery?

EBRIGHT: Yes. I've just read the minutes wherein he came

in the fall of 1966. Whether there'd been behind-the-scenes work done or not, I don't know; but he came in, and I think this had been a kind of a dream of his, to come back. In fact, he said as much to the Playhouse. This, of course, was his opportunity to step into the vacuum. He had done a great deal of television work and had a somewhat substantial reputation in the theater. He came in with a complete plan [of] the kind of theater he [wanted]--and a great deal of enthusiasm and a breath of fresh air--and rather sold himself and his theories.

GALM: What was his plan?

EBRIGHT: He was going to do professional theater, but being as how he was a professional theater man, he knew what was going to draw the people and how to get them in here. Oh, he had Life with Father, and he had good plays, and they were successful.

By this time, the professional stage was becoming so expensive to produce that a house that only seats 700 people really cannot make its money back in a month. It has to run longer than that. And, of course, the Playhouse was dedicated to turning over a season in a month, and then the next play comes on in a month. And so it was almost unrealistic, even with sold-out houses, to produce professionally a season with a house that small. And, of course, he didn't have completely sold-out seasons. I think that he was really making some headway. He had some mistakes. Lady in the Dark was a very

costly thing. It was a musical. To produce a professional play is expensive; a musical is impossible.

GALM: Plus a revival, so to speak, anyway?

EBRIGHT: Yes, and this is one other thought I have on this. So consequently, already being under the yoke of indebtedness kind of bore down on him, and it made it impossible for him to get out from under it. The Mainstage was losing $50,000 to $100,000 a year, which perhaps could have been made up if it weren't for the fact that we were always under the yoke of the debt, and foreclosure was imminent, and you had to be penny-wise, pound-foolish for so many reasons--advertising, for one, and this kind of thing.

And then you're right. [With] the revivals, you're so under tyranny of the box office and you don't dare take a chance on something unknown or that might be unpopular for some reason--avant-garde, for example, or anything like this--that you tend to become too safe. Then the theater lost a little vitality that it could have had if it were turning over, turning over, like Gilmor Brown did when he would throw in something that was a real shocker; and before people could be mad about it, he'd thrown in what you might call a safe play. This is what gives theater a great vitality--when it can explore. This is a personal opinion: that we got so that we just didn't dare put on something unless we were sure the people of Pasadena would approve. And you know how it is:

if you walk too safely, you don't go anywhere.

GALM: Do you feel that the board perhaps tried to keep the real financial state of the Playhouse from the public too long? So that when it finally came out, the public was perhaps . . .

EBRIGHT: . . . shocked?

GALM: Yes.

EBRIGHT: I don't think that it was ever kept from them. I don't think you necessarily let out a news release that you have a $160,000 debt about to be foreclosed upon you, but it was certainly no secret. It came out now and again, because we would be in some crisis where we'd have to ask for money. And certainly the supporters of the Playhouse were sent mailings that described the situation.

GALM: Who were the supporters?

EBRIGHT: Oh, the mailing list for the box office. And then there would be a shorter list of people who had supported it throughout the past.

GALM: Were there any supporters of substance?

EBRIGHT: Well, Mr. Dumm, of course, put in a great deal of his money. I think he was probably the largest contributor since I've been involved. There were maybe twenty people--I hesitate to start naming who they were--and they were lesser supporters. They would give $1,000 here and $1,000 there when we would be in trouble meeting the payroll--things like that.

GALM: But there was never say . . .

EBRIGHT: . . . an angel like Fannie [E.] Morrison? No, there wasn't, other than Mr. Dumm. I would say he was of that caliber.

GALM: Did they not exist in Pasadena? Was there just no one that they could interest enough to become an angel?

EBRIGHT: There are not as many people with great wads of money to throw around. The [Pasadena] Art Museum had tapped a great deal of income in Pasadena about this time. And I think that maybe the faith wasn't there in the Playhouse. I've always had the feeling that if we could ever be a success again, I think the supporters would rally round again. But I think people were afraid to put a great deal of money into something . . . . And bear in mind, by this time, it takes a <u>great</u> deal of money to even put it out of giving for deficit spending.

GALM: In about 1963, the Music Center [of Los Angeles County] would have been still soliciting funds, or was it in the building phase then?

EBRIGHT: The art museum is what I was saying pulled money out of Pasadena.

GALM: Right. But the Music Center really didn't that much?

EBRIGHT: Oh, I'm sure it did, but I don't think it was a cause.

GALM: In other words, Dr. Lees tried his approach to theater here in Pasadena, and it bombed. Was there any talk about just making it a theater that would bring in Broadway shows?

EBRIGHT: During Albert McCleery's reign, which lasted two

years (1966-1968), we had a committee of the board that suggested bringing back community theater, keeping the school--which strangely enough remained a fine school till the end (I don't know how it ever did it, but it did)--using the students and amateur actors, only having professional directors; and therefore, you get out from under the union hold altogether. And so, [you would be] keeping it a cut above the local community theaters, but it would still be an amateur theater. Oddly enough, it wasn't until--or at least, I never heard it suggested--it came up the summer after bankruptcy that the obvious solution was to make it a community theater and bring in professional theater on a "four-wall rental basis" (is what they call it), wherein you don't have to have any union people; and if you bring in a union show, they bring their own union problems with them and take them away when they go. The few times this came up, somebody said, "Oh, we don't want to be a roadhouse," and it was dismissed.

The community theater idea was dismissed because I think part of the excellence of the school depended upon working with the professional theater. Looking back, it's amazing to me, because that <u>is</u> the obvious solution to the Pasadena Playhouse, were it to ever reopen.

GALM: So even though the school remained a good school until the end, and perhaps even paid for itself until the end, the idea that a school is attached to the Playhouse created its

own problems?

EBRIGHT: I'd almost think the reverse--the idea that the Mainstage was attached to the school created the financial problems, certainly.

When we brought in the idea of being a community theater, Albert McCleery had promised that Bob Hope was going to do this great special and it was going to guarantee $100,000 profit for the Playhouse. He announced that Bob Hope would certainly not be interested in doing this for a nonprofessional theater. As a matter of fact, I remember we got a telegram from Bob Hope during a board meeting. It became a clash between Albert McCleery, I think, fighting for his job--is what it amounted to--and his reputation. He used every angle that could be done, and he was quite strong about it and pulled these things out of the hat. So the community theater idea was shelved for the moment for various reasons, one of which was this promise of his that Bob Hope was going to do this special.

Of course, there were some people who didn't like the idea [of a community theater] at all. Leon Ames and Lloyd Nolan were members of the board at the time, and whereas they could possibly see the necessity for this, they didn't feel that they had any value to the board if it were not professional. So for whatever reasons, it was voted down.

Albert McCleery went into his second year and again had

fine plays, but again we lost more and more money; and by the end of his second year, we were unable to pay the salaries for the last month. The faculty worked free for a month and managed to graduate the class. I remember we signed a statement that we wouldn't rehire any faculty until their back salaries were paid. Albert left that summer, 1968, and we thought we were going into bankruptcy and that that was the end of it. In fact, we had even sent out notices that the school was closed. In August, 1968, came a man named William Sahley, and he was president of Midwestern Securities Corporation. Just as we were about to file bankruptcy--and the school had already been closed, and this was in late August--he came in and said that Midwestern Securities was willing to buy the Playhouse for $500,000 and we had the option to buy it back within ten years at the same price. They would pay to open the school, and escrow was to close on November 19, and then we would have the $500,000 to pay all our back debts. We would pay them $60,000 annual rent and be out of debt, and we would be able to carry on and buy it back.

Now, this was hardly an ideal arrangement, but it was either that or go right on into bankruptcy and give up. So under that choice, we entered into this agreement with Midwestern Securities, hired the same faculty back, and--amazingly enough--got over 100 students. This was the end of August, and by the middle of September, the school was open again--and no

professional theater, so that drain was not there.

When the escrow time came around, Midwestern Securities failed to come up with the money. By this time, school is open and they're paying all the bills--the faculty salaries and everything else--and so they said, "But we'll have it in two weeks." Two weeks would come along, and the plane that the money was on was flooded in New York--that was one reason. "But we'll have it next week." And next week, something else happened. This went on for months. But there was not really anything to do, like cancel the escrow, because the school is running and they're paying the salaries of the teachers. Of course, this quickly became a problem, because whereas they were in charge of the money and paying all the salaries and we were supposed to be the administrators of the school, you can imagine how that might bring about a little bit of trouble--because they felt what they said was the final word.

GALM: Who was representing them as far as the operation?

EBRIGHT: Bill Sahley, and they had a lady named Mrs. [Susana] Stevenson, whom they put in as the business manager. And we had our same people in the faculty, and then the board was supposed to be the executive officers.

GALM: Who was the chief, as far as the faculty? Would that be Dean Walkup?

EBRIGHT: Well, Dr. Walkup was the dean of the school at that time, and so I suppose she would be the head liaison who was

paid and who was there every day. Mrs. Stevenson was a very strong woman, and she pretty well was running everything at that time. As time went on, we learned more and more about Midwestern Securities, and none of it was good at all. Things deteriorated until there was open antagonism. They accused the board of misrepresentation on things, they upped their requests for the conditions under which they cared to go ahead with the sale, and there would be things such as "We want to subtract all the expenses we've made so far from the sale price." And yet we had no control over what it was they were spending. So obviously, they could come to the sale-price day and say, "We've spent $500,000; the building is now ours for nothing," and we would not have any money to pay off our debts.

It became untenable, and it was a matter of how to get out of the whole arrangement. It fell completely to pieces once again about a month before school was out. [And] again, the same faculty had to teach a month for nothing--just out of the goodness of their hearts--to graduate the students who were there, which they did. By this time, Bill Sahley had threatened to sue each and every one of us, and we'd threatened to sue him. And it just was an incredible ending to that chapter.

GALM: What chapter was that?

EBRIGHT: I call that the Midwestern Securities chapter. [laughter]

GALM: How many chapters were you involved in?

EBRIGHT: Well, that was near the end, because it was that summer (1969) that we had to close the school and thought to go ahead and declare bankruptcy.

Oddly enough, we were involved with the county of Los Angeles and hoping that maybe they, through a joint venture with the city of Pasadena, would purchase the Playhouse. Under those circumstances, we spent the summer reorganizing and planning how it could be run and pay its own way if it didn't have its staff, and this finally involved the theory of having it be a roadhouse: no unions, and you rent all the exciting theater that's happening in California of all kinds, and you just keep turning it over and having nothing but the best, and you can have the alumni produce a play--which they had (Midwestern Securities produced two plays, and they were highly successful and a great community-involvement program). They had, for example, readings (which weren't particularly publicized) that drew over 400 people, just to come try out. Now, this is a great public relations thing and what used to happen in the Gilmor Brown days when the whole community would come out to watch readings and/or try out themselves. And then once they'd done that, they would get involved and want to see the show.

So this was all laid out, and the county finally fell through. But, in late 1969, just before it fell through, along

came a man named John Sears. He was involved with a construction company from the state of Washington. It's a very fine construction company, very well known and four A's on the Dun & Bradstreet or whatever you get on the Dun & Bradstreet. He had an elaborate plan whereby he was going to build a building for the telephone company--I guess he was just going to build an office building--and in so doing, he was going to buy the property and give it to the Pasadena Playhouse. Thereby, he had some kind of a nonprofit association going that would save him money, and then he would lease the land back from the Playhouse and then build his office building. I'll have to look up exactly the machinations of this . . . .

GALM: But it was all going to work out.

EBRIGHT: It was a dream come true, and there was just no way this was going to fail. And on the strength of this, the bank once again postponed foreclosure. It was working, and it was all involved with the city of Pasadena, and [then] John Sears got deathly ill at Christmastime and [was] harder to get ahold of. Something happened to him that he fell into disrepute and left the company. We waited until December 31, and when that finally fell through, then we declared bankruptcy December 31, 1969. And that was the end of the John Sears chapter. [laughter]

GALM: It seems as though there was a history of people that used the reputation of the Playhouse. Would you agree to

that--in other words, used it perhaps for their own advantage?

EBRIGHT: Well, I don't know. I don't think John Sears was particularly using the Playhouse reputation. It did him no good. He had done this before with the University of Washington. I'm sorry that I'm so ignorant on the details of this kind of financial transaction, but it was a workable thing and he had done it before. It was using the nonprofit status is what it was, using it for a financial arrangement. But I don't think he used the reputation particularly.

GALM: Was it that the people who perhaps had established themselves elsewhere came to the Playhouse with an idea, but the idea just didn't seem to work? In other words, Dr. Lees did have a reputation at the University of Utah, didn't he?

EBRIGHT: Yes.

GALM: But it wasn't the right solution.

EBRIGHT: It was not, no. He was unable to take on the financial problems, and I guess at a university, he doesn't have any. He asks for what he wants and either gets it or not. He left that womb and couldn't handle [the Playhouse situation]. I don't know whether you can really blame him, although I ended up not having a lot of respect for him. But I don't know whether it was all his fault. He was desperate near the end and did some desperate things.

GALM: What title did Dr. Lees have?

EBRIGHT: I think he was called the president of the Pasadena

Playhouse Association. The actual titles have switched back and forth, from the president being a paid member to the president being a member of the board; and sometimes there would be a chairman of the board and a president of the board, and both of them would be volunteer members of the board. For example, Albert McCleery was the producer-director. And then we had a triumvirate that was trying to work out in that time. The dean of the college, the producer-director, and the business manager were supposed to be equal powers, and on the board was both the chairman and the president. That might have worked except that the three people didn't seem to cooperate too well. I think it's always hard when there isn't one person who's responsible, and everyone's eager to blame something on everybody else when you have the chance to do so. I think it's hard for anyone to come into something that's in this deep of trouble with a new idea, and they don't realize how uphill the battle's going to be. So their idea might be grand and glorious, but they're starting so far behind the gate.

GALM: Did you think that the board was straight with the people when they came into the [leadership]?

EBRIGHT: Oh, yes. There was no way to hide what was there. Albert McCleery was in on the demise of Dr. Lees and knew exactly what the problems were.

GALM: Did Dr. Lees know what the problems were, as far as you know?

EBRIGHT: I would be sure so. I wasn't there when he [first arrived], but I can't imagine how such a thing could be hidden. He was there during the board meetings when we were discussing our dire straits.

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GALM: I would like to talk about the board itself. When you became associated with the board, approximately how many theater people were members of the board?

EBRIGHT: At various times, maybe up to a quarter of the people would be theater people. It fluctuated. For example, we had Victor Jory, Leon Ames. Lloyd Nolan was on the board, [as well as] a lady named Mrs. [Ruth] Burch, who is very active in the professional theater. We had Coy Bronson, who is a professional director and was vice-president of Samuel French; he was the theater. So I think the theater was represented, although possibly not adequately. There were a number of people on the board who'd been on the board for years and years and years, some since its inception.

GALM: Who were some of these people?

EBRIGHT: Earl [S.] Messer. When I came on the board, Lenore Shanewise--of course, she certainly was a theater person. Mr. Dumm was not of the theater; he was a businessman. David [M.] Crandell was on the board and had been since--I don't know whether it was the inception of the Playhouse, but certainly many, many years. Whether that qualifies him as a theater person . . . . I suppose it must.

GALM: Who were the strong members of the board? Maybe I shouldn't say "strong," but "active."

EBRIGHT: In the latter years, when I was more involved, Roland Maxwell, who'd been president a number of years back, was vice-chairman and then president; and I would say he was one of the strongest members of the board. During Mr. Dumm's era, a lawyer named Bill Olson was a strong member of the board. A man named Roger Smith, who is not a theater person (he was with Lockheed [Aircraft Corporation]; he is a businessman), was strong. When Kenneth Hunter came in, he was not a theater person at all. He was strictly trying to apply the rules of business. And during that period, I would say the theater people were perhaps a little underrepresented.

The strong members of the board who carried through would be Earl Messer as secretary, Roland Maxwell. Chauncey J. Hamilin, [Jr.] was a strong member, but not a member of the board for a very long time--just a very short time when I was involved. Coy Bronson was a strong member of the board. These people kind of carried through.

GALM: This is maybe not fair, [laughter] but how do you define strong?

EBRIGHT: Well, this is right, and I was thinking that when I was saying some of these names. Some of them were strong by virtue of the fact that they were willing to spend the time, and they were active. I certainly wouldn't consider them [all] valuable. And some of them, such as Roland Maxwell, were invaluable--strong in all ways.

GALM: Was there disagreement between the people who were really active in the theater and those who were coming in from the business [and] financial world?

EBRIGHT: No. On the board there was not. I think sometimes there was disagreement between the--oh, Albert McCleery would create disagreement. These things are [such] personal opinions that it's kind of difficult to--because I don't like to indict someone. He was a bit of an egomaniac and, again, fighting for his life, so he pulled some pretty desperate measures to get his way at times. But I don't think the board ever did actually fight among itself; nor was there ill feeling particularly.

I think many times [when] they did turn from person to person--such as Ken Hunter, when he came along in 1966--it was a desperation measure. Here's a man who at least is going to put everything in order and get all the records down and chart a new course--certainly the old one wasn't working--and so everybody would turn toward someone like that, willing to give this a try. It got to be fairly "Desperation City" there in the last couple of years.

The board meetings, instead of being able to plan ahead or be able to plan concepts and ideas, were forever involved with "How are we going to live until next month?" You really have a hard time being creative when it's just "We've got to find $10,000 within the next week somehow," or "We've got to

put these people off for just two more weeks." A lot of effort was spent merely trying to exist.

GALM: If I would ask you [to name] people on the board who might have had visions of what the Playhouse could become, who would come to mind?

EBRIGHT: Well, again, I think Dr. Lees, in all fairness, had a vision, that failed. I think Albert McCleery had a vision, in all fairness again, that again failed.

GALM: I mean members of the board itself.

EBRIGHT: I think that we shared, certainly, Albert McCleery's vision and hopes. At least, I think I did. I think that the board was 100 percent behind him when we started, and the concept was there, and it was great.

The first dissension I suppose you'd say we had was when the community theater concept arose. But here again, it wasn't a fight between members of the board. It was a community theater concept which could also succeed, and it was a necessity. The professional stage wasn't able to handle it, so it was a concept that came about by necessity.

GALM: Did the board ever try to formulate its own concept of what it wanted the Playhouse to be, rather than . . .

EBRIGHT: . . . follow the leader?

GALM: Yes.

EBRIGHT: Here again, it's difficult to say. I think our concept was always that the school was the main reason for

existence. I think this was always the concept of the board's, and I don't think it ever wavered from that. I think the concept of a fine professional stage as an adjunct was always there; and whether it veered over to Dr. Lees and his resident company, or whether it was back to a professional stage--which is more to my personal taste--of Albert McCleery's, I don't see that that concept is that far apart. So consequently, one of the top-rated schools in the world with a fine professional theater as an adjunct, I would say, was the main concept; and it didn't really vary that much in the years I was involved.

Now the concept is somewhat different, but I think it's been somewhat forced upon us because of the cost of producing professional theater. And here again, it wouldn't be changed that much. We would still have fine professional theater. It's just that we would have to rent in productions, and maybe the fare would be more varied in that we would try to bring in opera and dance and readings. We would be able to be more varied in that we would use what other people had produced. They had paid for the rehearsals and the production, and we would only lease them the theater.

GALM: In the days of Gilmor Brown and Charles Prickett, there were two men: the one man whose vision was more towards production, the other [whose vision was] towards how you make that production possible. What was the role of the business manager?

EBRIGHT: It would be Charles Prickett's role. He would be the man who would try to keep the finances straight and try to separate the school from the Mainstage. It would be the Charles Prickett role, and the producer-director would have to be the Gilmor Brown role.

GALM: Who was your business manager during these last years?

EBRIGHT: Well, the last year that McCleery was there, Alex Holt came as business manager, and he was the one I was saying was with the Greek Theatre. He did a fine job. He was an exceptional person. But by this time, there was too much to pull out.

GALM: Do you recall who was business manager under Dr. Lees?

EBRIGHT: I think a man named Arthur Free.

GALM: The role of the business manager under Dr. Lees: was Dr. Lees the one who said, "We're going to spend so much on this production"?

EBRIGHT: Yes, Dr. Lees had much fuller rein than . . . .

GALM: Did Dr. Lees have to present any budgets to the board?

EBRIGHT: Oh, dear, I hate to make such statements of that time, because that was at the very beginning of my . . . . He had a fairly free rein, as I remember, and whether the executive committee worked more closely with him than the board--I just don't like to make statements on this because I'm not quite sure. It seemed more like it was a surprise after the fact.

GALM: Did that continue then or not?

EBRIGHT: No. Albert McCleery had definite budgets presented to the board. Sometimes he failed to fall within them, but he was working hard toward staying [within] the budget that he presented.

GALM: Of course, if he overspent or if he didn't meet a budget, it was just an added burden, then, to the . . .

EBRIGHT: . . . to the school or the debt or whatever. Oftentimes maybe the budget wouldn't be balanced because he would overestimate the income of the box office, so that's another way it could be unbalanced. Or often he overspent.

GALM: Did the theater people on the board support Albert McCleery?

EBRIGHT: Yes, I think they did, especially in the beginning. Leon Ames was in a play for him, and it was one of the biggest successes we had--Life with Father. He was a difficult man, and I think that his reputation in the theater circles wasn't totally--he wasn't one of these well-loved people that everyone is forever behind. So consequently, I would imagine some of the theater people had reservations. I certainly heard them express some.

GALM: Reservations along what line?

EBRIGHT: Well, the fact that he had been financially kind of wild before. Whether this was true, or whether you can say that about practically anybody in the theater, I don't know.

GALM: How did the board go about investigating someone that they brought in?

EBRIGHT: Again, this was before I was involved, but I think they went back to the University of Utah and interviewed people regarding Dr. Lees. Albert McCleery had been involved with people throughout the years--had been on the board for a number of years and involved with the Playhouse--so I think people knew him and his reputation.

GALM: When it was decided to bring in somebody new, do you recall how they went about recruiting someone?

EBRIGHT: Well, these were the only people that were brought in.

GALM: Right. But, say, at the time of Albert McCleery, did they have anyone else in mind?

EBRIGHT: No. He arrived on the scene with all these plans, and it was accepted. There was not a hiatus period there wherein they were actively trying to find a new person.

GALM: Was this ever, though, an attitude of the Playhouse--in other words, saying, "We need really a top name"?

EBRIGHT: Yes, after Albert McCleery left. Now, whether this happened previous to Dr. Lees, I don't know. I imagine they actively looked for Dr. Lees, so that must have been a time they were searching for someone. Whether this happened before that, I don't know. I imagine it would have. After Albert McCleery left, and we thought perhaps we would be able to reopen

via the county and/or Midwestern and/or John Sears, we had a number of discussions as to who would be the right person to run this. I know Raymond Burr was considered, and Raymond Burr was quite interested and active since bankruptcy.

We had another plan that I haven't even told you about that really almost worked. Raymond Kendall was the head of the music department at the University of Southern California and then head of the Young Musicians Foundation at the Music Center; and [he] became interested in and served on the board of the Playhouse--again, after bankruptcy. It was felt that he might be an ideal person to head up the Playhouse. There wasn't any active recruiting because it didn't actually come about that it was set in motion again. But, yes, we did have discussions on who would be a logical person to come in.

GALM: Was there any attempt, during your period with the board, of associating itself with an institution?

EBRIGHT: Yes. We requested that we be bought by or associated with Caltech more than one time. It got to some serious discussion, but they decided against it. California Institute of the Arts had requested that maybe we be part of them many years previous, and we talked with them again. By this time they were building a facility in Valencia and they didn't want to be diverse. We talked with SC and they didn't want us, [and then to] PCC [Pasadena City College]. That almost came about, but the fact that we failed to meet the Field Act

standards made it difficult for a public school to come in, because it would take a great deal of money just to come up to the earthquake code, especially for the Mainstage. So that kind of put a burden on PCC it couldn't take.

University of the Pacific we almost became a part of, and this is another whole chapter. This came about through Raymond Burr after bankruptcy. He started the McGeorge Law Library in Sacramento. (I don't know whether he started it, but he was a tremendous supporter of it.) And the McGeorge Law Library is a part of the satellite system of the University of the Pacific. A man named Dr. [Robert E.] Burns was president of the University of the Pacific and a very close friend of Raymond Burr's. He was a very vital, innovative president who was establishing this satellite concept for the UOP.

Raymond Burr had gotten him interested in the Pasadena Playhouse, and they had thought to come down and buy it and keep its entity as the Pasadena Playhouse and make of it a super graduate theater school. In November 1970, they had their retired theater head, named Dr. [DeMarcus] Brown, come down with Dr. Burns, and they had elaborate plans to make a worldwide center out of the Playhouse. They were going to innovate. Oh, they had ideas of teaching all subjects through the theater--mathematics, science. They had ideas to make a kind of a seminar atmosphere so that people all over the world who were maybe having a one- or two-month period with nothing to do, such as a Sir Laurence

Olivier, would gravitate to the Playhouse, because there he would meet other people of his ilk and they would exchange ideas.

Raymond Burr had a Sunday seminar program set up, wherein people successful in the industry were going to come on Sunday and discuss their particular field. These would be taped and maybe distributed nationally through ETV [Educational Television]. This would open the door for grants. It was a thrilling concept that was going.

By this time, we had established the fact that we would have our four-wall rental concept going and start to produce our own plays only after we were able to afford it--but not before, such as we had been doing. The city of Pasadena had given its blessing on this, and it was about to go through when, in February 1971, Dr. Burns died. He died suddenly--it was not a thing that they had anticipated--and it was a year before they [the University of the Pacific] had another president. They had an acting president, but he couldn't do anything. And by the time the year had passed, they had cooled on the whole idea and they were in their own belt-tightening program. So that just died. But that was one more thing that almost worked and didn't.

GALM: You had mentioned earlier that there was another plan. Was that the plan that you were referring to?

EBRIGHT: Yes, that was another one. That was the other, I

would say, "big one" that was about to come about.

GALM: So then, how many [plans] would you say that there really were?

EBRIGHT: Midwestern Security, and then the county was a hope, and then John Sears--I'll have to look up the name of his construction company--and then I think after that came the University of the Pacific. Since then, there have been smaller things. The United States International University actually went into escrow with the Bank of America hoping to buy the Playhouse. And again, they were going to make it a showcase.

GALM: How did that come about?

EBRIGHT: Dr. [William C.] Rust is the president of the International University. It's in San Diego. He had come up before we were ever in bankruptcy, wanting to buy the library, and evidently became interested in the Playhouse then. Then when the bank owned it and all these other things had fallen through, I called him and told him that I thought that the property was available, and that if he were interested in creating a graduate school of theater arts that it was possible he could acquire it and maybe even at a good price. This is after it had been for sale for a while, and we were afraid it was going to be torn down. I don't know whether this was any catalyst or not, but he did shortly thereafter go into escrow. I learned this from the bank, not from him.

In the meantime, Raymond Kendall--we had worked together

during the county period and the John Sears period to establish what might be the plan for the reopening--went down there to build a music department for USIU. And so he was able to talk with Dr. Rust. And indeed, it was a concept that could have worked beautifully with what was left of our plans. By then, of course, we were pretty flexible. Whatever happened, I don't know. They got into their own financial difficulties. It was involving some kind of a land transaction which fell apart and never worked. So that one fell through.

GALM: When the Bank of America took over the Playhouse, how long did the board continue to meet and operate?

EBRIGHT: We were in bankruptcy in December 1969. So the board, as such, disbanded. But there were six or seven of us who formed another corporation in order to hold what few assets we had and in order to be a nonprofit organization that was ready to accept and implement anything that might come along, such as the University of the Pacific. It gave them someone to deal with, and it was some group who had all the people's plans and all the people who were interested tied together. For example, if anybody came along, like this very last thing that's happened that almost worked, then there would be someone like myself who had contacts all around with people who were ready and willing to put forth a program at one time. Maybe it was still viable, maybe they were still interested--and in many cases, they still are. So for this purpose, we

had a little board.

We've continued to meet over the past--what's it been now?--three years, as things come up, and we hold the main. We held the library for a while, and we still hold the records and the memorabilia that we were able to buy from the auction.

GALM: So you still have the name of the Pasadena Playhouse.

EBRIGHT: The Pasadena Playhouse [name] belongs to this corporation. The Playhouse was in bankruptcy in December, and it was in August 1970 that the real property was sold. There were no other bidders, so it went into the hands of the Bank of America--which was just fine because we knew they were hoping to sell it as quickly as possible. So if a plan came along, at least the Playhouse was still there to be had.

It was that Thanksgiving--or November 1970--that the personal property was sold at a giant auction one rainy Sunday. All day long did they drone on and sell every item in the building. And it was some day. I'll not forget it! We had raised some money and were able to buy the student records, for example, the Gilmor Brown Room and everything in it, the bell, the portraits, and the record room--the little record room that held all the pictures and scrapbooks.

We had a man named Herbert Rempel who came along and offered to buy the library, which we felt was kind of the heart of the school. There were two other bidders for the library. They sold the library at noon, and the Playhouse was completely

packed. As I say, it was pouring down rain, and rain was dripping down onto the Mainstage right over where the auctioneer was talking with his microphone. I expected for him to be electrocuted any minute as he wandered through the puddles with his wires. [laughter] The tension was so thick, you could cut it with scissors. They finally put the library on the block, and they had it bid first in eleven sections. On each section, you had to bid, and then they auctioned it again all as one package. They said that if the one package bid were higher than the sum of the eleven packages, then it would go to that bidder; or if it were lower, then the eleven sections would to whomever.

GALM: In sections?

EBRIGHT: Yes. So they bid the eleven sections first. I had brought along a professional bidder. [laughter] He was a man in Pasadena. I must look up his name. He was just marvelous--a very well-to-do elderly man. And he sat there and would wait till the last minute and would just raise his pencil. Then the two other bidders--one I think was Long Beach State College and one was a book dealer in Los Angeles--would wait till the last minute, and then they'd raise their pencils. We bid in most of the sections--but of course, the total went for the most--and we finally got the library for $13,500. And everybody cheered and stood up, and they introduced our bidder. [laughter] And all day long, people would rush down

and say, "We've found something you've got to have. It's in a little green chest in Room 6, and it's Item 302." They'd whisper it to him, and we'd have to bid that little piece of furniture in order to get some letters and tapes of Gilmor's that we didn't know existed. There were three movie reels that we managed to . . . . It was an incredible day.

GALM: Do you recall the name of the book dealer?

EBRIGHT: No. I don't think I ever knew it.

GALM: Oh. I would be curious to know who would be bidding against you.

EBRIGHT: Of course, Herb Rempel actually owned the library, with the idea that he'd give it to the school as soon as it was open. It stayed in the library for a while. Vandalism became a problem as the building was empty, and he finally put the books into storage. After a year, there was nothing honestly on the horizon to beg him not to sell it, so he sold it to Long Beach State College. So they got it after all.

GALM: So they got it anyway.

EBRIGHT: [laughter] I hope that he sold it for what he paid for it. He was quite an angel. Another funny story that happened at the Playhouse was when Dr. Burns of the University of the Pacific came down and we went through the building. (I can't count the tours I've taken [people on].) We always started on the sixth floor and worked our way down, then showed the Mainstage, then the Green Room, and always ended up in

the library because the books were there and the furniture was there. The rest of the building was empty, and it was a warm, lovely room to end up in, psychologically. Dr. Burns had asked that we meet some other members of the administration (I suppose of the university) at the Pasadena Hilton [Hotel] for lunch at noon, and we ended up in the library at about five minutes until noon.

We had heard all these years that there was a secret room somewhere, and there was a rumor that there was a silver puppet back in there that would, of course, solve all our problems. And we never had been able to find it. So we were in the library, and Ross Eastty, who's president of the [Pasadena Playhouse] Alumni [and] Associates--whom you ought to talk with--was with me. He was sort of messing around with the dictionary and the dictionary stand, which he moved, and he moved a lot of magazines, and back behind there he found a secret panel. He pushed it open, and in the dark we could see this great big puppet. [laughter] Then we had to go to lunch, and Dr. Burns accused us of setting up the whole thing. It was so dramatic.

We went back, of course, the next day as fast as we could. It was a lovely puppet. I have it still in my living room.

GALM: But not quite silver.

EBRIGHT: But it wasn't silver. The records back there were fascinating, and they're very valuable, as far as records go.

But there wasn't any secret money or stocks or bonds. [laughter]

GALM: Who created the secret hiding place?

EBRIGHT: It was obviously there all the time, and I imagine it was nothing more than a storage room. I don't think it had quite the drama that we thought it had. [laughter]

GALM: More myth than fact.

EBRIGHT: Oh, it was fun.

GALM: There was money raised to purchase some things?

EBRIGHT: Yes. We had some donors who gave--oh, the Alumni Associates put up some money. I don't think we had much more than $5,000 or $6,000. This was all by donation and it was in order to buy the various memorabilia.

GALM: In other words, [those are] the things that now exist in the library. When I say "library," I mean the Pasadena Public Library [Central branch].

EBRIGHT: Much of that had been moved out before, and then the rest of it was, of course, in the library record room with all the records. So we had all of those to give to the library and [Pasadena] Historical Society. There wasn't anything else of records value. The rest of it was furniture, typewriters, scenery, lights, all the stage equipment, the costumes--this kind of thing. It was tragic to see it go, but at least it was replaceable. Not the costumes, but . . . .

GALM: So at this point, you were really representing the board that was formed?

EBRIGHT: That's right.

GALM: Did you have a title?

EBRIGHT: Yes. Pasadena Theater Academy. Maudie Cooper is on the board, myself, Willard Stone, Raymond Kendall is on it, Alex Holt, [and] Ross Eastty. That's about it. I'm probably forgetting someone.

GALM: And these were just people that were still interested enough?

EBRIGHT: This is right. [They were] mostly left over from the board previous, except I don't think Willard Stone was ever on the board previous. It was the nucleus of those who were still interested.

GALM: Does the alumni association still function?

EBRIGHT: Yes. The alumni association very much functions, and has a newsletter once a month, and has an annual breakfast, which is well attended. They seem to have lost none of their enthusiasm.

GALM: During the last years of the Playhouse, how much contact did the alumni association have with the board?

EBRIGHT: In the last two years, very much; in the last year specifically, very active. As I say, they produced two plays. Again, the alumni association had a very small nucleus of those who were working, and it was this small nucleus . . . . Ross Eastty was extremely active and since bankruptcy has certainly worked more than I have and has followed down every

lead that's come up, and every possibility that even smelled hopeful, to the end to see if we couldn't reactivate things.

GALM: It's Alumni and Associates. Is that its official title?

EBRIGHT: Pasadena Playhouse Alumni and Associates, yes.

GALM: Was the president a member of the board?

EBRIGHT: No, he was not.

GALM: Was there ever any thought of allowing . . . .

EBRIGHT: Yes, there was. In fact, I think the president of the alumni association usually was on the board. When I came on the board, Jeff DeBenning was president of the alumni, and he came to the board meetings. Now, whether he was a member of the board or as a representative from the alumni, I'm not sure. They had some falling out during Dr. Lees's period, and it wasn't until Ross became president that this kind of eased over and we are working together again. They felt that they should have more access to theaters to produce plays. I'm not aware exactly of what the full reasons were, but I do remember that they weren't on too close of terms when I joined the board. They were the ones who put on this gala when the IRS had locked the doors, and I think they felt they weren't given enough voice or credit or such.

GALM: Was there any attempt beyond the gala, as far as fund raising?

EBRIGHT: Yes. We've had two professional fund raisers, and there [has] been--besides that, of course--a concerted effort

to enlist the help of the successful alumni, number one, and again, of the people of Pasadena. The last fund-raising effort happened during Albert McCleery's second year. The well-known alumni never were too enthusiastic, and I've never known really why. I have a theory that they didn't want to be associated with a loser. And I think that were it to succeed, they would rally round. The people of Pasadena were disillusioned [for] the same reasons that I've given before. This is my theory. Whether it's valid or not, who knows? Maybe we didn't approach them properly or something. That was the result, at any rate.

We had a man named William Converse Jones who turned up about three months ago (June of 1973), who had been working with architects Thornton and Fagan over the past three years--he said--on a plan to make a Ghirardelli Square out of the Playhouse. The plans were magnificent! The renderings included tearing all the buildings down out to Colorado [Blvd], then stores would be added, then they were to go down a half a story and [have] fountains and patios. It would be two stories high, so you weren't aware of whether you were upstairs or downstairs, because it was sort of split-level--and all very Spanish. The whole flavor of the building was kept completely, and the theater was [to be] intact totally. He said that if we were able to find a renter who would rent the theater for $36,000 annually and guarantee ten years' lease, we could have the theater, the Green Room, the dressing rooms,

the two balcony theaters, and the scene dock (and/or part of it).

It just so happened that we found, through Trans-American Video, so much excitement for using the stage for filming breakfast shows and television shows--oh, like soap operas and specials. And [they] were so sure that they could rent it and use it themselves to such an extent that they were willing to take the master lease. This is when, I started to say, the Plumstead Players were interested--although they had never totally agreed, because it never came to that--to come [to the Playhouse] as a home.*

Then the Trans-American Video people said that people like ourselves could have the theater certainly often enough at night for the community things we wanted--such as mini-operas, leasing it to professional productions, festivals of the state college system, and that kind of thing. During the period of negotiations, Mr. [David L.] Ghent came in and went down to the bank with his $310,000 in cash, and they accepted it. So that was the last thing that looked really like it could work.

GALM: Is that definitely the end of the chapter?

EBRIGHT: Well, the escrow is not closed, but they're in escrow.

GALM: So only time will say for certain . . .

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* The Plumstead Playhouse is interested in subleasing the the Mainstage for a season of three to four months and using the Playhouse as their permanent home. There has never been a disagreement of any kind with them. [P.E.]

EBRIGHT: . . . whether something can happen to turn it around--this is really grasping for hope--and whether these things can hold together if it does turn around. It can for a little while, but I don't know [for] how long.

GALM: According to the papers, it was really Jones who alerted Ghent.

EBRIGHT: This is true.

GALM: It is definitely true.

EBRIGHT: He invited him over to look at the plans, the thought being that maybe he would be interested in renting some office space.

GALM: Really that naive?

EBRIGHT: Yes, completely naive--I guess, although I don't know why he would have reason to think he'd . . . . I really don't know exactly what happened or what Mr. Ghent's background is, but certainly it's conceivable you would talk with people about renting office space. He already had with Trans-American Video. He had a restaurant man who was wanting to sign a lease for two restaurants, so he has to show him the plans. And he had a hairstylist, and a gymnasium man who was wanting portions of the basement. So in a sense, you've got to line up your leases--at least, your long-term leases--and maybe he thought he would be one of those.

GALM: So has Mr. Ghent given you an idea of what his plans are?

EBRIGHT: Mr. Ghent is the man who has said that he won't know his plans day by day because he has to wait until the Lord informs him, that the Lord informs him day by day what's going to happen, and he doesn't plan further ahead than that. He did give some indication that he's going to try to make television films and propaganda for spreading the Word.

GALM: He's associated with what group?

EBRIGHT: I don't know. He had some connection--the paper indicated--with Melodyland [Theatre], but whether that's friends in common or whether he actually has an association, I don't know.

GALM: So in other words, his plans are no more known to you than perhaps what you've read in the paper.

EBRIGHT: Absolutely not. My one conversation with him, I gained nothing. [laughter] There was no communication. He had promised a news conference, and nobody's been able to reach him. So I have the feeling he doesn't know, either. Or if he does, he . . . .

GALM: But, certainly, he has no feeling of the Pasadena Playhouse as an institution.

EBRIGHT: Absolutely none. No, to him this is a very secular, evil idea, and anything to do with the secular has got to be wiped out. I told him--in a casual way--we owned the name, thinking maybe he might be thinking of using it, but I have a feeling he's not thinking of that at all. In fact, he wouldn't touch it. [laughter]

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE

TAPE DATE: NOVEMBER, 13, 1981

BERTONNEAU: Peggy, what I would like to start with is a kind of general question. As I was reading your interview with Mr. Galm, the impression, I think-- The most general impression that I took away from it was that in the eight or ten years covered in that particular exchange, the history of the Pasadena Playhouse was, so to speak, a series of cliffhangers. I wonder if in the period since then the same generalization could be made, or if not, what sort of general statements might be applied to the functioning of that institution?

EBRIGHT: I think cliffhanger is probably still a good word for the Playhouse; since the end of this transcript there were four or five further plans for the revitalization of the Playhouse, which almost made it and at the last minute were killed, just as the ones before had been. The Playhouse now is ready to open, so I'm hoping now that the cliffhanger story is over. How be it, I'll be happier when I literally, with my own two eyes, see the doors open. But I think the end of the story is in sight.

BERTONNEAU: To move us a little bit closer to the specific issues, let me ask you to do this for me. Let us take the time period since 1973, when the previous interview

was done, and the present, and draw a verbal map, as it were, of events relating to the Playhouse and find out what the highlights are, so that we can come back and examine them in detail. Can you do that for me?

EBRIGHT: Yes, we'll just sort of stick to the highlights, because in between each of the highlights was three or four smaller, little cliffhangers. But this could go on into the next century if we included all those. I always thought the whole story was rather like a grade-B movie.

I notice we ended with Mr. Ghent, and previous to Mr. Ghent, William Converse Jones had tried to create sort of a Ghirardelli Square center. Mr. Ghent had come and failed to show up for his escrow and disappeared into history; nobody knows or heard from him since, to my knowledge.

BERTONNEAU: Can you say briefly who Mr. Ghent was, and what his plans for the Playhouse were?

EBRIGHT: I think that that's in that [transcript of Tape I]; so far as anybody knew, he was very incommunicado. I think he planned to do religious filming and religious stories. He was someone who listened only to God, so he didn't know what his plans were until God told him for the next day. This is a direct quote from him, so-- And people really didn't know what his plans were,

but I believe that's what it was.

BERTONNEAU: But apparently some hopes were pinned on him that proved to be--

EBRIGHT: Well, mostly in that I think, he was willing to pay cash for it, and the Bank of America was eager to get out from under this real estate that it was owning and not being able to sell. So the fact that he came in with an offer of cash made them zero in on Mr. Ghent, whatever his plans were. I think that they were a little nervous about it when he turned out to be such an unusual person, because in talking with some bank officials and asking whether indeed he was in escrow, they said yes, indeed he was in escrow, but they didn't sound too pleased about the whole thing. So I think they were quite delighted when he disappeared; this is an impression I got from the fellow I talked with. They might have been distraught, but it seemed they were delighted.

But anyway, Bill Jones made another effort to revive his Ghirardelli Square plan, but now he's really behind the eight ball: the economy has sort of tackled him and he had sort of lost his momentum, and so he was unable really to get that back again.

In the meantime, we had on our board Armen Sarafian, who was president of Pasadena City College. We began

to put together a plan that utilized the Mainstage with all the various groups coming in, and this Mainstage plan really had evolved during the time of William Converse Jones, when we were going to attempt to rent the Mainstage (I think that's all in that story). So the groundwork had already been laid for this plan of leasing the Mainstage to various groups, the key group of which was the Plumstead Playhouse, and this was Martha Scott and Henry Fonda, and they were looking for a permanent home (they produced mostly at the Huntington Hartford). We, of course, were delighted to have them be sort of our cornerstone. And then we had lists of people eager to lease the area: Coleman Chamber [Music Association] concerts, that sort of thing. Pasadena City College in the meantime, under Armen's guidance, was eager to expand their drama and radio and television departments and use the six-story tower building. We even had plans drawn up for converting the sixth-story roof garden and seventh-story roof garden into a television station. And using PCC and their stability as a renter and our plan for the Mainstage, we were able to convince Don Yokaitis, specifically, and the city Board of Directors, in general, that the city would be well advised to buy the Playhouse, and with the hopes of maybe being able to float a bond issue, again, based on

the stability of PCC as the major tenant, to renovate the Playhouse. Then our little plan--and we had quite a study made about it--indicated that it would be able to support itself from then on.

So the city agreed and voted in May of 1975 to buy the Pasadena Playhouse, and we were ecstatic. We thought that this was the end of the tunnel again, and I could hardly wait to go in there and say, "When do we start?" and "what's my next move?" and wrote congratulatory letters, and so forth, only to find out that they had put the Playhouse under the guidance of the operating company, and specifically, Don Pollard. And Don Pollard said he was going to have to make a study and figure out what was going to happen next, and, in effect, "Butt out," so to speak, but "would I go ahead with what I'd already started?" and that was to attain a state landmark status and then, further, a national landmark status, which I did. So we went ahead and did that.

BERTONNEAU: Can you tell me a little about the mechanics of that?

EBRIGHT: Oh, that is sheer boredom and trivia. [laughter]

BERTONNEAU: But presumably there were some practical advantages.

EBRIGHT: What it means is many, many forms, and I had marvelous help with some architects who were able to put

me in touch with the proper language to describe the uniqueness of the architecture of the building. Then we had to go back, and I had to write a history to show that it had a unique history. I've forgotten: The forms were quite long and much notarizing of this and finding of that, a tedious kind of thing.

The benefits of it: the state benefits are nothing but an honor. However, based on the fact that we had the status, we did get a state grant of some sort, the city did, amounting to some $30,- or 40,000, so it did serve in good stead. And national landmark status, again, is mostly honorary. If you use national funds, which it looks like they are doing, then because it's a national landmark you are obliged to get their approval of any restoration that you do. In other words, you can't change its style totally, or even change its purpose, without their permission. You can go ahead and tear it down if you want to, but if you're using any government funds at all, then they have that control.

BERTONNEAU: May I ask what the $40,000 constituting the state grant were used for?

EBRIGHT: I'm not real sure. I can't dare speak to that. It seems to me they used it for-- I shouldn't speak to that; the city will have to answer. I don't know. I think they had expenses during this period of time:

studies--they made many studies; they had regular operating expenses--I rather doubt they used it for that. I know they cited it when they needed it for matching funds on their EDA [Economic Development Administration] which they got from the national grant, but, specifically, I don't know.

BERTONNEAU: So we've come about the year 1975.

EBRIGHT: 'Seventy-five. Immediately after the city bought the Playhouse, there was an election, and the Pasadena City College board changed from liberal to conservative, and Armen, who was a rather liberal president, resigned, and the conservative board retracted all interest in the Playhouse for the moment; it was shelved.

BERTONNEAU: And what kind of rationale did they give to explain that?

EBRIGHT: Again, the economy, and they couldn't really think about expanding; they had to tighten their belts and so forth. So the city was kind of-- At least, Don Yokaitis, I think, was a little chagrined, because here this was based on this fact.

BERTONNEAU: Would those same financial constraints have influenced the original school board to have made the same or similar decision?

EBRIGHT: I have no way of knowing that. Armen was a strong, powerful man, and I would rather think he maybe

would have gone on with it. But who knows? It would have been a great thing, and I hope that PCC will become involved in the future, and well they might; there's still that tie there.

So that was quite a blow, and I think the next thing that happened with the city was-- I personally sort of lost track of what was going on daily, Don Pollard being somewhat of a genius at putting together mysterious plans--and some of them stayed mysteries to me. But the next thing that happened is the city went into a year's negotiation with Milt Larsen, who operates the Magic Castle in Hollywood. Milt Larsen was eager to find a home for his Variety Arts Theatre, and he wanted it to be the Pasadena Playhouse. So we spent that year working with Milt Larsen, trying to give him all the things that we had gathered together, all the various groups that would use the Playhouse, and all the various ways that he could make his plan viable. And that was fun and interesting, because we got to go over to the Magic Castle and meet his marvelous staff and a scenic designer whose name escapes me right now. But the city and Milt Larsen went back and forth and back and forth, and Milt Larsen said, "I am not going to spend the next ten years of my life negotiating this thing. It's either going to work or it isn't." And indeed, at the end of the year he was totally

frustrated and pulled out and, as you know, bought the Thursday Morning Club, or whatever that was, where the Variety Arts Theatre is now.

BERTONNEAU: What were the obstacles that caused the frustration and prevented the deal from being consummated?

EBRIGHT: Again, it was the city, and specifically Don, and trying to protect the Playhouse and make the best deal possible for the city. And, without knowing all the details, I can imagine what might have happened in light of the contract that they just signed with Auditorium Management [Company] which took two years in the making, and it must be a foot thick, detail after detail, and "what will happen, if. . .?" I mean, it's legalese in the extreme--which is good, they protected it very well--but I think they went to some extremes that were too much for Milt Larsen and almost too much for AMC.

When Milt Larsen pulled out of the deal, Don Pollard put out a request for proposals, and he got five major ones. None of these was perfect, but several of them were very interesting, and I think two or three of them could have been made to work possibly.

BERTONNEAU: Can you say a little bit about them for me?

EBRIGHT: Yes, if you want to turn off, and I'll find them. [tape recorder turned off]

One of them was the Voynow Investment Company; and

that was Stanley Sirotin. [He] was its executive vice-president and prime mover of this. He was wanting to use it-- He's a real estate development man, who incidentally is doing a lot of real estate development in the city of Pasadena now. He's building that Le Bureau on Colorado. You're not--

BERTONNEAU: I don't know--

EBRIGHT: --familiar with that? Well, anyway, he said Pasadena's the best-kept secret in the United States, real estate-wise, because its prices were under its true value. And I think he's probably right. He was an exciting man, and he planned to share the costs with the city, put up three dollars for every two dollars that they would put up, and later he wanted to float a bond issue. He had a very exciting and complicated thing that was very slick, his proposal was, and wanted it to be a professional theater. But mostly he was a real estate person.

There was a man named Frank Biggin, who had gathered together a lot of small schools, and his proposition was really quite unrealistic in my opinion in looking at-- His revenues were way overly optimistic--and I base this on our budget that we had put together--and he was expecting ticket sale revenue, for example, that was beyond anything that had ever happened in the past or that I can imagine

would happen in the future: rental prices and stability for his rental people that was unrealistic.

A new thing-- I don't even remember much about that, I think there was another religious group, and I think they might have been associated with David Ghent, but this was a--

Then there was an American National Opera Foundation, and there was a young man named Bruce Petersen who was sort of the prime mover of that, and he had quite a backing of wealthy people, and I think that the city was very interested in him, and I think that we all thought that might work for the moment.

Nathan Roth is an ophthalmologist who practices in San Marino; he became a very close friend of mine, and he was interested in opening it on a small scale, the theater particularly. He really didn't have the cash that was necessary. And he has since opened the Bank Playhouse in Pasadena.

Then the Ad-Research, which was basically the Studio Theatre Playhouse--and this is Mark Fuller and his wife, Kathryn, and they have operated the Studio Theatre on Riverside Drive [in Los Angeles] for many, many, many years --and they would have been just marvelous. They didn't have the funds, but they had the expertise to run a theater. They have a director, an artistic director, named Terence

Shank, there who's very close to Ray Bradbury, and they produced The Martian Chronicles there. Did you see that?

BERTONNEAU: I did see that production.

EBRIGHT: And they're doing something now called Dandelion Wine, which is another Ray Bradbury thing.

BERTONNEAU: Another Bradbury story.

EBRIGHT: Yeah. I went down there, I think, when Martian Chronicles opened. I went with Nathan Roth. And Ray Bradbury was there. He's just the most unusual-looking person: great big head he has, and I think, "Oh, all those brains in there."

So, anyway, those basically were the groups.

BERTONNEAU: I think you said that none of these proved to be viable proposals.

EBRIGHT: Right. They kind of let them hang, and the reason they let them hang-- They had promised to let them know right away--you were going to know "in three weeks"--and they had to put up a bond to even enter these proposals. (I'm missing one here. I can't think what it is.) [It] was because Don Pollard knew that the answer to this national grant, EDA grant, $1.3 million, was in the offing, and if they had gotten it, why then, this changes the whole picture.

Well, so, the requests for a proposal were in the fall, and they were supposed to know within three weeks, and

they let them sort of dangle on a string until at the end of the year when indeed they did get the $1.3 million grant, and so they wrote whole, new ground rules and asked whole new request for proposals. And some of the people backed out, and some of them hung in there, mainly Riverside, the Studio Theatre Playhouse.

And then all of a sudden into the picture came the Auditorium Management Company. And this--

BERTONNEAU: What was the cause of their advent, as it were?

EBRIGHT: David Houk, who's the principal in Auditorium Management Company (which is based in Glendale--or, he lives in Glendale; I don't know where his company's based --it's based downtown now) is a young man who--and young he is, too: he was thirty-one or -two or something -- He has been able to gather a lot of investors, and, I think, a lot of foreign investors among them (I'm not real sure: I shouldn't say that, since I don't know). But anyway, he's interested in revitalizing downtown areas. He loves the thought of taking a depressed area and bringing the people back downtown. He bought the Philharmonic Building in Pershing Square, and he wanted to restore it to its original status. He has grandiose plans, that are exciting, of taking the Baptist Temple, and he's putting a circular-- Have you seen his renderings?

BERTONNEAU: I've seen some drawings and read something about them.

EBRIGHT: Yeah. Then above the Baptist Temple a circle of stained glass is going to be--myriads of stores and hotels and office space and so forth.

He found this Steven Rothman, who was in Illinois, and asked him if he would come out and help restore the Philharmonic and be artistic director there. While Steve was out here talking about that, did he, or someone, hear that the Pasadena Playhouse was available, so to speak. So they came out to look at that, and they got so excited (as does everyone who goes to see the Playhouse who has any interest in the theater) that he decided to buy that, too. They were going to do it concurrently, and as it stands now, the Playhouse has taken priority time-wise; they want to do that first. So they launched into this with incredible enthusiasm--it was all going to happen within weeks--and, of course two years later [laughter], bowed but unbeaten, they signed the contract on the stage at the Playhouse after quite an up-and-down struggle.

BERTONNEAU: Can we talk about some of the things that went on in those two years?

EBRIGHT: Well, in the meantime the price of land had inflated, as you know. It was going up 10 percent a

month or something unbelievable. So where the city was chagrined, where Don Yokaitis used to kind of grin sheepishly when he was reminded that he was the one who introduced this, now he's the hero, because now he's got a piece of property for $300,000 which is now, they claim, worth over $1 million.

So, the negotiations would take time. They'd hold an election, and a new Board of Directors would be elected, or a new member would come on the board, and he'd have a whole new idea of what should be done. They tended to be going in both directions: one was to save the Playhouse, in which case their prime concern would be how to negotiate this deal so that the Playhouse would indeed be protected--if the AMC went broke, they couldn't turn it into a parking lot or a movie house or whatever, and then on the other hand, there were those who were thinking we cannot give away $1 million worth of property for $300,000 or whatever the price was. So you tended to lose sight as to what it was you wanted to do: did you want to save the Playhouse, or did you want to make the most you could out of the real estate? So those two directions were at odds always.

The protection of the Playhouse became extremely complicated. They divided it into three sections: the Playhouse, the tower building, and the parking lot. The

parking lot is a tremendous piece of empty land behind the Playhouse that goes right straight on through to Madison. Since the Plaza Pasadena has been built, this has become a very prime piece of real estate, and so this was the carrot for Auditorium Management, because if they could develop on that land, they would have got a real piece of property for a little bit of money. And this was forever thrown in their faces: if it was a bad thing that they were going to make all this money. But at the same time Auditorium Management was willing to restore the Pasadena Playhouse theater. I think they ended up guaranteeing for six years its operation as a theater. And by that they meant specifically six professional plays per year, and if they didn't make money, Auditorium Management has to make up the shortfall. And anything over the $1.3 million spent in renovation of the Mainstage in the theater building, Auditorium Management makes up. After they have completed that, then they must restore the tower building, and they must do it within a year, so they can't let it drag on like that. Any rentals that come from that they get to keep. Then, after all that's done, are they allowed to exercise their option to purchase the parking lot. So it was quite a deal that the city managed to squeeze out, and still there was a lot of suspicion that-- People looked upon Auditorium Management

with suspicion, whether they're trying to--

BERTONNEAU: The answer to the question I'm about to ask is implicit in a lot of things you've just been saying, but let's see if we can't crystallize it. At the point about which we are now talking--1975, '76, '77--when the deal with Auditorium Management Company was consummated, what was the relationship between David Houk's company, the government of Pasadena, and the community of Pasadena?

EBRIGHT: Well, I think, first, the community was all behind David; what there was of it that was interested. You have to understand, the community by now is looking upon this whole thing with some cynicism.

BERTONNEAU: Understandably.

EBRIGHT: Right, "One more article in the paper about the Pasadena Playhouse. Yeah, yeah, yeah." So the community's excitement didn't play as much of a part as we all would have wished, because that would perhaps have helped the city move a little faster. David and the city: it was very congenial. It was just that it took tremendous patience, and everyone, I'm sure, especially David, got exasperated at times, but there was never any belligerence at all. Everyone really wanted it to work. It's just it was such a tedious negotiating time that-- I think exasperated is a better word than

anything else. And as David pointed out, if you were in this only to make money, you would have gone many other directions than to spend two years trying to purchase the Playhouse.

BERTONNEAU: So you felt at that point that you'd been rescued by someone who was fairly idealistic and would probably create in the Playhouse the kind of theater that you'd been hoping to have for an awfully long time.

EBRIGHT: Precisely. You put it perfectly. I felt that if I could have made up the script, I couldn't have written it any better. There may be tiny things one would change, but basically I can't imagine it working any better. They intend to run it as a nonprofit corporation; they intend to run it as a professional theater center; they want community involvement; and I'm lucky enough to be able to be involved with that part of it.

BERTONNEAU: What is at the present time your function in the Playhouse?

EBRIGHT: Well, I have a title, and it's called Director of Community Development.

BERTONNEAU: Director of Community Development.

EBRIGHT: Which is very impressive-sounding, and all that means is I get to run around and continue to interest the non-professional bookings, the same things that I've

been doing for the past ten years. The likes of the Coleman chamber concerts and the ballet groups and the festivals that might happen and that kind of thing.

The involvement with the American Society of Interior Designers was a perfect example of what I'm proud of bringing together with the Playhouse: they are going to go through the Playhouse and make an overall plan for its total interior decoration. In fact, they're doing that right now. Then they're going to create a brochure with all the beautiful renderings and price each thing out. For example, the lobby will be $75,000 and subheadings under there will be "tapestry: $50,000"--I'm making these figures up--"chair: $25"; "a picture:--"; "a doorknob: $10"; and then the brochure will be made available to the public, and then they can adopt whatever they choose. You can buy a $10 doorknob, or you can buy the entire lobby, and that will naturally be listed in brass, bronze, or tin [depending on] what you bought. So that's the kind of thing that I'm able to do now, simply because of having been involved with it for so long. Having talked with ASID a thousand years ago, it's a natural thing to put them together with the Playhouse. When they open, it will be more performing groups that will come in and use it. And, of course, the more the community involvement, the broader base of support for

the professional theater, so the better chance they have of growing.

BERTONNEAU: Now, things were straightened out, as it were, finally about 1977. Is that the year when the agreement with Auditorium Management Company was--

EBRIGHT: No, it's just been signed.

BERTONNEAU: It's just been signed now, so since 1977, which was the last date we mentioned, I think, there's still been a lot of negotiating.

EBRIGHT: Well, let's see, after Milt Larsen left, the next major thing that happened was this request for proposals; that took about a year. And then the five [proposals]. And then the wait for the grant; and that took about another year. And we were at 1978 when AMC came into the picture--1978 or '9--because this was just signed-- It hasn't been that many months ago. I swear time goes pretty quickly. I think it was probably last spring.

BERTONNEAU: When you look back at the history of the Playhouse and you look back at your involvement in it, in that first period, to which the conversation between yourself and Mr. Galm belongs, what do you now see as the mistakes that were the most important mistakes made?

EBRIGHT: Mistakes? In the attempt to revitalize it or in the reasons for it closing?

BERTONNEAU: Well, let us address both of those questions.
EBRIGHT: Well, in the attempts to revitalize it, I don't know whether one could call it a mistake, but I think that the components that were missing, and I have to say I think we knew this at the time, one, first and foremost, was just cash: we never were able to come up with enough cash. Well, perhaps that isn't the first and foremost. I think the first and foremost would be one really strong, powerful person to lead the development of the plans or the ideas. You might say Armen was one, but Armen was, after all, busy being president of a college, and time wasn't-- A person like that could have pulled this together. We had all the components, but there was none of us on our little board capable of the stature of pulling this together. And we never were able to find that person. Had you found that person, maybe he would have to be famous, a big name, I don't know. Or a big man in industry. Or extremely wealthy. Any of those things could have done it, but we never were able to pull that together. I think that was the thing that was lacking, because I think our ideas were on the right track. I still think that.
William Converse Jones: that wouldn't have been a bad thing. I like what's happening now much better, because that would have altered the Playhouse and scattered its forces into a lot of commercial things. I think he was

a victim of the times. He couldn't pull it together fast enough, and the economy took a turn, and his little leases that he tried to tie together fell apart, and he just couldn't cut it. Previous to that, I think the University of the Pacific idea would have been a great one, too. Again, that was an economical thing and a deus ex machina really. The president died, and by the time they got another one, their interest in satellite colleges was gone.

BERTONNEAU: Throughout what we might call the first period of the attempt to revitalize the Playhouse, there was a strong desire to have a school of drama associated with the theater. That is no longer the case? There is no school connected with the theater?

EBRIGHT: Well, there isn't, but they definitely intend to have one. The next on their priority-- In fact, they already have had meetings. They have already a group of advisors, of some of the top theatrical educators in the country, headed somewhat by Jean and Lee Cork (I think they're sort of the movers behind this conservatory that they plan to start right away). I'm sure they want this, and I know I think it's immeasurably important. There are so many advantages you can have in a professional theater. The unions: you can have breaks from the unions when you have a school connected with your

theater. So I think that that will no doubt happen.

BERTONNEAU: What kind of plans are being made at the present time? What sort of repertory are you planning on? I notice that there was some problem with repertory during some periods, plays being put on that were perhaps not precisely the sort of fare to bring in good receipts and so on.

EBRIGHT: Well, that is such a tough one, because the balance between doing things that are safe, that are box-office hits, and being exciting and on the cutting edge of what it's all about these days is so tenuous. If you're too safe, you get boring. And if you're too way-out, especially in the Pasadena area, although I think Pasadena's a lot more sophisticated than it used to be, you tend to lose a certain audience. And so this is going to be Steve Rothman's problem, not mine. Although I'll be glad to advise if he'd listen. [laughter]

BERTONNEAU: If he were giving you his ear right now, what suggestions would you make?

EBRIGHT: Well, I think that he-- His plans, I know, involve star vehicles. I think he wants to do--and I think it could be exciting--I think he wants to take plays that haven't been done for a while, that are fine, good plays, and match them up with big names. I'll take the example he uses so often, and that's Sally Struthers (who remained

very loyal and is kind of a real close friend of Steve's) would be perfect in a revival of Born Yesterday, for example. Ed Asner is another good friend, and he talks about Ed Asner coming in and doing Death of a Salesman--that kind of thing. That sounds exciting to me. He also plans to do premieres, and if he's good enough and if he can create enough reputation, then he'll be able to gather fine, new plays. This would be really exciting if they're good. I'm a person who's in love with the Mark Taper [Forum], so this would be kind of where my interests would lie--at least, Mark Taper in the last several years, I didn't think it was so much fun at first. They have had so many thrilling, wonderful, new things happen there. If we could do that on a larger scale, because the theater's larger--

BERTONNEAU: In the past you've had public readings of plays and amateur productions, and, I think, a certain amount of involvement of the people who come to the theater in the theater itself. Will things of that nature still be an activity of the Playhouse?

EBRIGHT: I hope so, and that's what my little job is.

BERTONNEAU: Oh, good.

EBRIGHT: So that excites me very much. I think the Alumni and Associates is a very strong, loyal group, and I think it would be a healthy thing if they produced

at least one show a year. There's a new company called--Well, the reading, you asked about reading. We created a Reader Theatre a number of years ago, and we always hoped that eventually that would go into the Pasadena Playhouse in one of the smaller theaters and maybe be able to attract a stable of writers, like Lawrence and Lee and Neil Simon--not that Neil Simon needs this--but people who would be writing plays and they would like to know how it's working, and they bring it to our readers' theater, and we would read it unrehearsed, cold. Then if they thought it was working well, we would give it a rehearsed reading. And then if it's really moving in the direction they wished, perhaps we could do a staged reading. And this could be kind of an in-subscription group for people who were very interested in the theater, and they would come, and if it got reputation enough it would attract producers and publishers.

BERTONNEAU: Will you be doing, for example--

EBRIGHT: That would be exciting for me. Wouldn't it?

BERTONNEAU: Will you be doing children's theater? Will you be bringing--

EBRIGHT: Children's group: they already have a support group started called Friends of the Pasadena Playhouse, which is already starting a children's [tape ends]

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EBRIGHT: Well, the new support group that's been formed, called Friends of the Pasadena Playhouse, has already started a children's theater that they mean to take a production into the schools. Certainly there'll be a children's theater. It was one of the most popular, and it develops, after all, new audiences.

BERTONNEAU: Who is the audience at the Pasadena Playhouse, or will they be, when things get started again?

EBRIGHT: Hopefully, they'll be made up of a great number of Pasadena-area people, but I think that we would be pulling from the entire San Gabriel Valley, and hopefully, start to pull from the West Side, Los Angeles, although Los Angeles--

BERTONNEAU: Have you not been able to do that before?

EBRIGHT: There is some, but Los Angeles people tend to think Pasadena doesn't exist. And I think that we have to thank Ambassador College for hanging in there and pulling people from Los Angeles over and starting the habit of coming across that ten-minute, teensy drive on the freeway, just to get to Pasadena. So I think that we'll be able to pull from the entire area then.

There's another component here that's started that's

interesting, and that's a Pasadena Musical Theater. It was called the Pasadena Civic Light Opera, and it started about two years ago. I've been serving on the board of that, so they want to produce musical theater in the summertime. We've had three professional musicals. Old, old, revivals done in an exciting new way; they're patterning themselves after the Goodspeed Opera in Connecticut, who produced Man of La Mancha and Annie and Little Johnny Jones. They're in the process right now--They've had a complete programming study drawn up by Arlene Chambers--it's called the Western Theatrical Management Company--and Len Bedsow, who now operates the new Orange County Light Opera. They're out now busy doing a financial feasibility study, to see if it's possible to raise the funds for this.

The Playhouse is very excited about this, naturally, because they're obliged to keep the building open and operating, and this would be their summertime fare then. So that's exciting, another new little thing falling into place.

BERTONNEAU: Diana has been attending very patiently to this exchange, and I wonder if I could involve you a little bit at this point.

ALEXANDER: Lovely.

BERTONNEAU: I'm not certain, but I'm very curious about

what your interest in the Playhouse is. You have a kind of historical interest. You're writing a book, I believe.

ALEXANDER: An anecdotal history.

BERTONNEAU: An anecdotal history. Would you say for me how you got interested and exactly what your approach, what your slant is on this?

ALEXANDER: It's a warning to people. Peggy was saying earlier that this building is exciting to people. The alumni today, they look at it, and they're depressed by how horrible it looks, but someone who doesn't know about it, it is a beautiful theater. And I made the mistake of liking old buildings and making the tour, and I found just an incredible world of the theater, with the school and the theater together, that intermeshing of the two worlds. So I did a screenplay, which was "on spec" and my agent suggested that it would be a very interesting, valuable project to do an anecdotal history on it.

BERTONNEAU: And what have you found out? What kind of general impressions about the Playhouse can you convey? What makes it unique as an institution, apart from the obvious fact of its incredible architectural interest as a building?

ALEXANDER: One thing, the world that went on there. I think the alumni, when you talk to the alumni and the

associates, their loyalty-- Loyalty! They're like a Chamber of Commerce for the Playhouse today; they love this place even though it's twelve years after it closed. That is the most pervasive thing, I would say, that I've encountered about the Playhouse is the sense of family, the sense of excitement people had while they were there. Almost everyone that I've talked with, for them it was the most exciting, the most lovely period of their lives. They all want that in the book. They said that if you want something about the Playhouse, that's it. Regardless of the quality of the shows, regardless of the quality of whatever, I can't tell, because I wasn't there. I'm always going on secondhand information. But that warmth and love.

BERTONNEAU: This is a question which I might address to both of you. Either one of you can answer it. Does this warmth, do you think, spill outside of the theater, the alumni groups, and so on into the community itself? You spoke of the community being a little bit cynical about the Playhouse, but is there a sentimental feeling about the theater in the community at large? Please you go ahead, Peggy.

EBRIGHT: Well, absolutely. I think it needs nothing more than the first coat of paint put on there, but what the community won't be rallying around it. There's no one

who doesn't want it to work, and everyone is excited at the thought that it will be opened. People remember when they were little going there and their parents taking them there, and everyone has a memory of it who was brought up here. So I'd say yes, definitely.

BERTONNEAU: And have you gotten the same impression in your research?

ALEXANDER: Yes. I have the impression that you have, and then you have the whole new group of younger professionals that seem to be attracted now with the-- There's been a total, not total, but a large change in the city in the years since the Playhouse was in trouble. That was really a low point for the city, I'm discovering. And since then, they've attracted corporate headquarters, enormous numbers of people. The kind of people who go to theater and are excited by theater are living here.

EBRIGHT: Plus they've built the convention center, and so they're having conventions, so they've got to have things for the people who come to conventions to do at night.

BERTONNEAU: So it seems that really the misfortunes of the theater were the misfortunes of our times, in that the shutting down of the theater really reflected economic conditions in the world at large and the country and the state.

EBRIGHT: I don't think we can blame it entirely upon that.

I think that that certainly had a lot to do with the difficulty of revitalizing it. But certainly its closing down had as much to do with its sort of lack of real direction at the end.

BERTONNEAU: Let me ask some general questions, some philosophical questions. Answer as best you can. I'll address this to you, Peggy, and I may ask you the same question, Diana. What is the place of the theater in the community? What does the community get out of it, shall we say, spiritually? Why do we need theater in any case.

EBRIGHT: Well, historically it seems the worse the times economically, the more successful the theater, which would indicate that theater is a very important part of people's lives as far as escape is concerned. I know the argument goes on as to whether theater leads society or whether it follows society. I personally think that theater has an ability to lead society in values. For example, I really hate to see the violence and things that happen in the movies, because I really believe that this creates violence in society. So I think theater has a tremendous responsibility to--and I don't mean it should be Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm by a long shot--but to at least paint life fairly and not dwell upon the ugly and the-- And if not, to serve as an uplifting thing really.

Being involved with the community involvement side of it, I would love to see it be a center for all the people in Pasadena, where you'd be comfortable just to wander down there, and there'd be things happening in all four of the theaters. And there's going to be a restaurant. And you could go here and wander out at intermission and see people wandering out of another thing and exchanging ideas and have it be a very vital experience that would make people proud and make people curious and more alive and striving for individual excellence. And hopefully-- Well, I could pontificate on that one a long time. I'll pass to Diana before daybreak. [laughter]

BERTONNEAU: How would you respond to the same question, Diana? What do you think the function of theater is going to be in this community? What is it in a community?

ALEXANDER: I think it's like an adventure, ticket to an adventure. When I think of the theater personally, for myself, it's been a chance to go into another world, to explore. Seeing Peter Pan, I was absolutely in tears in the beginning, the magic of the theater--and it's pure theater magic, which is rare. But when it's there, how exciting! To learn about yourself, to learn about people: I think it's invaluable in that sense that psychology can tell you people are "blah-blah-blah,"

but when you see other people and the playwright setting up for you so that you can understand them in a way you can't in real life, I think that's a way of spreading humanity in that sense. Understanding of humanity in the theater is invaluable. So you have both the entertainment and the understanding, the education that you get from theater. It's unlike anywhere else.

EBRIGHT: That's so true. I wish I'd said that. [laughter]

BERTONNEAU: Let me ask you if there is anything at this point that I should have asked you that I have failed to ask you? Is there anything you can think of that we have failed to speak of? Are there any anecdotes or stories that you want to tell me connected with the theater in the period that we've been discussing?

EBRIGHT: I'm drawing a blank right now. I'm sure there are so many. Certainly I'd have to say--this is premature, but one looks forward and has visions of the day the first time the curtain opens--that it makes me sad to think of the people who won't be there to see that, because we've all worked so hard over the years. I think of Maudie Prickett and Roland Maxwell, in particular, and Lenore Shanewise.

BERTONNEAU: Well, you feel pretty secure at this point. The theater is anchored, and the future looks predictable at this point.

EBRIGHT: Oh, absolutely, Tom, but you've got to understand,

I felt this way starting from plan one. But I have never lost my optimism, and this time I don't really see how it can fail. If they actually renovate the theater and something should happen to the Auditorium Management Company (which would be dreadful, because I love their philosophies), we're a giant step forward, and we have a renovated facility.

It's been asked, "Are you in love with the Pasadena Playhouse or are you in love with the building?" which was kind of a blow of a question, because, soul-searching, I really am in love with that building.

BERTONNEAU: You wrote a little note on the end of the first interview, that you thought it ended kind of abruptly. I don't want this to end abruptly, so I suppose, if you have any concluding comments, we ought to put them on.

EBRIGHT: I wish I had Diana's articulateness. Maybe she can feed me my lines.

I can't think of any glorious ending other than the expression of the optimism and of the times I've imagined that curtain opening. You know they say in the Pace Seminar, if you imagine something hard enough, it will come true. If that's true, it will come true.

BERTONNEAU: Thank you very much, Peggy, for answering all my impertinent questions.

EBRIGHT: Thank you, Tom.

BERTONNEAU: Thank you, Diana, for your contribution and for the use of your tape recorder. [laughter]

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