

A SHORT HISTORY
of
THE CANADIAN PLAYERS, 1954-1966
by
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Abstract.

A brief history of the Canadian Players, a theatre company which toured across Canada and the United States from 1954 -1966. The company played in cities and university centres and in small towns and communities from Moosonee and Flin Flon in the North to the southern United States and from Newfoundland and the New England States to Vancouver Island and southern California.

The nucleus of the Canadian Players came from the Stratford Shakespearean Festival. Robin Patterson and Laurel Crosby crossed the continent as agents of the company, interesting influential citizens in sponsoring a theatrical company performing the plays of Shaw and Shakespeare. From a small company of eight actors performing Saint Joan on a bare stage the company grew to two casts and crews of up to twenty members, who spent eight months annually travelling by bus to perform across the length and breadth of the continent.

The information about the Canadian Players was obtained from letters, chiefly those from Robin Patterson to Tom Patterson, from newspaper reviews and reports in the press, which are gathered together in several scrap books. vertical files and micro-fiche in the Theatre Department of the Toronto reference Library and from conversations with some of the surviving members of the company. Most of these conversations have been recorded on tape. Other information was gathered from transcripts from taped interviews which were supplied by Robin Patterson. I was also privileged to be permitted the use of manuscript

material of Florence Pelton Patterson, the first secretary, and that of Tony Van Bridge, an actor and director for several years.

The contribution made to Canadian theatre by the Canadian Players in their taking drama to every part of the country and their involvement of local communities in developing an audience for the regional and other theatres which followed them is discussed.

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All the Canadian Players who made and sent me tapes or made interview tapes, or held unrecorded conversations. They are listed in the bibliography.

Introduction

In 1951 what was known as the Massey Commission¹ asked for briefs on the state of the Arts, and what their future would be in Canada. On behalf of Canadian theatre, Robertson Davies, Canadian playwright, novelist, newspaper editor and university professor, a man deeply concerned with the well being of theatre, wrote,

I suppose ... we must answer those who question whether the theatre exists in Canada at all. ... It seems to me that it exists here, as it does everywhere in the world, in those centres of population which are big enough to support it, ...Not everyone wants theatre, and of those who want it not all want it on the same level.²

Having discussed the inability of inadequate theatre companies to compete with the cinema, he says, "Canadians who care for the theatre at all are warmly responsive to first rate theatre" but also "The fact is that Canadians are indifferent to bad theatre."³ He goes on to say that performances of the classics of the theatre were rare in English speaking Canada and not appreciated there, largely due to the audiences' unfamiliarity with such plays. Even those teaching Shakespeare had seldom seen a live performance of one of his plays. After discussing the pros and cons of the amateur theatre, the paucity of good theatre buildings and the lack of money for live theatre Davies went on to say,

If I were forming a Canadian theatre company, the second man I would engage would be the best business manager I could find. ...And I would not seek to establish a company in one place. I would travel. ...I do not see why a well-equipped and artistically respectable company should not travel in a circuit, as the players did in eighteenth century England. Indeed, when one considers the success of Community Concerts in Canada one wonders if circuits might not be financed on a similar subscription plan. They would have to take in many small places to cut the cost of travel but that would be desirable.

An advantage of such a plan would be that, as with Community Concerts, the audience and the money would be assured, and the company would be able to judge its expenses with its eye trained upon its income. So long as it kept the confidence of its audience it would have

little to fear. ... The first man, and the keystone of my arch , would be a first-rate artistic director....He would have to be a man of fine taste, yet with a keen sense of what his audiences could be persuaded to like....He would have to provide inspiration, instruction, succour, rebuke and a focus of faith for all who worked with him, and he would have to provide the public with a figurehead whom they could trust and admire.⁴

Davies did not know that his recommendations would be put into practise some three years later, and that the two men who would implement this would be in complete ignorance of his formula for a successful national touring company.⁵

In 1953, before this touring company was conceived and brought to fruition, "The biggest thing, probably, in [Canadian] theatrical history occurred in one of the smaller cities of Canada and now enjoys an international reputation: The Stratford Shakespearean Festival."⁶

The story of the Festival and its founding has been well documented in many publications. Its founder, Tom Patterson, was a man with a vision of live theatre everywhere in Canada. The immense success of the Stratford Festival's first season led him to envisage a travelling company taking live Shakespearean drama across the length and breadth of the country. In 1952, many had thought Tom Patterson foolish and an idle dreamer, but he succeeded in convincing a number of hard headed business and professional men and women that, with their help, his dream could become a reality. Their faith in Patterson's vision was more than justified, and now in 1954, taking live theatre out into Ontario and later, further across the country, though highly improbable, was possible. Again Patterson could not realize his dream alone. He needed confreres who had faith in the dream and the ability to make it come true.

The first year of the Stratford Shakespearean Festival showed Canada what a wealth of good and potentially good actors the country possessed. The critical acclaim with which the opening season was greeted across the continent, on both sides of the border, is witness to this. But after the exciting three months of rehearsals and performances, from mid-May to mid-August, 1953, there was little

work in Canada for the English speaking actors and technicians until rehearsals began again in the spring of 1954. In Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver radio drama was in its heyday. Under the direction of Andrew Allan and later Esse W. Ljung, Toronto CBC company of radio actors performed season after season of highly professional polished drama. Also in Toronto were the professional companies of Jupiter, a theatre run by the actors themselves but in a precarious financial state, and Dora Mavor Moore's New Play Society. In Montreal, besides the French radio drama, Le Rideau Vert and Le Theatre de Nouveau Monde were both viable professional operations and the Montreal Repertory company at the Mountain Playhouse provided work for anglophones.⁷ Ottawa was blessed with the Canadian Repertory Company, which flourished under the able direction of Amelia Hall, whose story is told in her book of reminiscences Life Before Stratford.⁸ The west coast Everyman Theatre had closed at the beginning of 1953. As winter work for professional actors in Canada was very limited some sought engagements in America. There was a drain of Canadian actors to the south.

In 1953 Tyrone Guthrie, the first artistic director at Stratford, Ontario, brought four actors with him from the Old Vic company in England. They all returned to England at the end of that season. One, Douglas Campbell, who had been with Guthrie in several earlier productions, like Guthrie, fell in love with Canada. He determined to come back to Stratford with Guthrie for the 1954 season and to bring his wife and family with him. This time Campbell intended to stay in the country. With a view to this he and his wife, Ann Casson, the daughter of Sir Lewis Casson and Dame Sybil Thorndyke, thought that they would do a Canadian recital tour of excerpts from Shakespeare and Shaw during the winter months, and to this end they got in touch with the Dominion Drama Festival through the British Arts Council.⁹ However, Patterson, with whom Campbell

talked this over, at once saw that here was the man to realize his dream.

Campbell and Casson had both toured with the Old Vic and during the war had taken a small company by boat and lorry on a tour of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, playing to isolated communities. As the boat/truck driver and baggage mover, Campbell was experienced in the physical practicalities of a touring company. He was also a well trained leading actor. The Scottish tour had demonstrated to Campbell and Casson the need and appreciation for a company that took good live drama to communities which were deprived by their geographical position of established theatres.¹⁰ Patterson suggested to Campbell that a small company of actors performing a play would be preferable to a duo recital tour. Campbell immediately agreed with him and so the Canadian Players Company was conceived.¹¹

The aims and objects of the company were firstly, to take good live drama to as many places as possible, for as Campbell said, "How can we expect Canadians to go to the theatre if there is no theatre. It is up to us actors to provide it."¹² Secondly, the productions were to emphasize the text of the play by eschewing the use of complicated scenery and elaborate costume, which Campbell felt distracted an audience's attention.¹³ "It was in the hands of the actors to maintain the audience's interest" as Guthrie's productions on the bare stage at Stratford had demonstrated, so that "the audience became not 'viewers' but participants in the drama."¹⁴ Thirdly, the venture would also "serve to keep actors on stage and freshen and keep alive their ability to play."¹⁵

Campbell agreed with Davies that Canadian audiences could not be fobbed off with meretricious productions so that another aim of the company became to take worthwhile plays, well performed by good actors, to the country.¹⁶

The company also involved the local communities, both large and small, in their operation. By offering service clubs and women's organizations the

responsibility of selling tickets and arranging performance venues, the company made both the urban and rural populace feel part of the success of the venture. This also had been suggested by Davies's brief. The public relations officers of the Canadian Players succeeded in booking engagements for the acting company through these clubs and so assured the company of a fixed sum in return for their presentation, as the Community Concert system did. The local associations also benefitted since any sum over the agreed performance fee could be used in the community. This arrangement also provided advance publicity for which the local clubs were responsible.

It took considerable dedication and courage to launch even a small company of actors into touring the towns and townships of southern Ontario in the fall and winter of 1954. The climate was not conducive to cross country driving by dirt roads. Auditoriums were either large movie houses or halls with makeshift stages. No one knew how the audiences would receive the company as at that time only one in four Canadians had ever seen a live theatrical performance.¹⁷ The organizers of the tour thought that there would be audiences eager for their production but they had not reckoned with the reticence of the southern Ontarian to try the unfamiliar. When financial disaster seemed imminent, it was the courage of the newly appointed public relations department which rescued the company and set it on its financial feet by adopting the Community Concert system advocated by Davies in his Massey Commission brief."

Artistically the company took risks by giving young actors a chance to perform leading roles and by offering aspiring but inexperienced directors opportunities to realize their ambitions.

Like the original committee of the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, the Canadian Players were inexperienced in running a theatrical operation. Both made mistakes, but their faith in what they were endeavouring to achieve and

their integrity in the way in which they realized their ambitions overcame their shortcomings and led to success.

Like the Festival, the Canadian Players company began without monetary grants. It endeavoured to pay its own way. Initially it was supported by donations from well wishers and wealthy supporters, and by investments from a few shareholders, who, of course, hoped for a return on their money. In spite of its efforts, the company was often faced with financial disaster. As the range and size of the company increased, so did the monetary difficulties. In fact the lack of sufficient funding was probably what led to the ultimate demise of this brave and adventurous company.

During its twelve years of operation, the company, with the exception of one short period, endeavoured to live up to its original ideals. It became a well trained group of actors taking theatre classics to cities, towns and small communities across the length and breadth of the continent. Its fortunes rose and fell, for the most part, with the standard of its work. This essay will endeavour to describe how the company was established and how it succeeded in carrying out its aims and objectives during the course of its existence.

¹ Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts and Sciences in Canada.

² Davies, Robertson. "The State of Theatre in Canada". 1951. Selection of Essays Prepared for the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts Letters and Sciences. (Ottawa) 1951. Reprinted in Canadian Theatre Review 5 (Fall 1957) : 17.

³ Robertson Davies. CTR 5 : 18.

⁴ Robertson Davies. CTR 5 : 27-28.

⁵ Douglas Campbell. Conversation with V.M.P. July 5.1993.

⁶ Douglas Campbell. First Canadian Players Programme. October 1954.
Toronto Reference Library Theatre Department. Stratford Shakespearean
Festival Archives. In possession of Robin Patterson, Toronto.

⁷ Further reading on the state of Canadian Theatre at this time can be found in
the following publications: Andrew Allan. A Self Portrait (Toronto : MacMillan,
1954).

Bronwen Drainie. Living the Part (Toronto : MacMillan, 1988).

Eugene Benson and L.W. Connolly, eds. Oxford Companion to Candian
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Press, 1989).

⁹ Douglas Campbell. First Canadian Players Programme. 1954.

¹⁰ Douglas Campbell. Transcript from interview tape. In possession of Robin
Patterson. Toronto.

Grace Byatt Shaw. "Douglas Campbell" Stratford Under Cover. (Toronto :
NC Press, 1977).

¹¹ Tom Patterson and Alan Gould. First Stage. (Toronto : McClelland and
Stewart, 1987 : 213, 214.

¹² Douglas Campbell. First Canadian Players Programme. In possession of
Robin Patterson.

¹³ Douglas Campbell. First Canadian Players programme.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Robin Patterson. Transcript from taped interview. In possession of Robin Patterson.

¹⁸ Robertson Davies. CTR 5 : 28.

Chapter 1. "The winter of our discontent made glorious"
Richard III.i.1.

After the exciting first season at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in the summer of 1953, there was little winter work for the actors and technicians to look forward to. The 1954 season might have had the same "winter of discontent" looming ahead, had not Douglas Campbell and Tom Patterson had the concept of a small company which would tour, in the initial stages, the towns of Eastern Ontario.¹ With his wartime experience, Campbell knew the physical hardships of touring and the complications of taking a company on the road for an extended period.² He also had a desire to take well produced, classic plays with good actors to the theatre-starved small Canadian towns. During the 1954 Festival season Campbell looked for competent actors who might be suitable and willing to join his company in September, when the Festival folded its huge tent and became silent.

The play chosen for the tour was Saint Joan and Ann Casson was to play the title role. Shaw had written the part for Ann Casson's mother, Dame Sybil Thorndyke, and when Casson played the part in England, Shaw wrote to her:

You are exactly the right humour for it; for Joan is a volcano of energy from beginning to end, and never the snivelling Cinderella-born-to-be-burnt, that all the others - except the first - make her, so go ahead with my blessing, and be sure not to wear yourself out before you begin. Not that you could, even if you tried; but still keep a bit always in reserve³.

The Canadian Players first company was made up of actors from the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, with the addition of Ann Casson. The others, except Campbell himself, who came from The Glasgow Citizens' Theatre via The Old Vic company in England⁴, were all Canadians. Though born in the United

States, William Needles was an already established Canadian actor, whose mellifluous voice was well known on the radio.⁵ He was one of the members of the first Stratford Festival company. William Hutt had been in the Hart House company under Robert Gill's management, when he returned to the University of Toronto after serving overseas. He had been a member of the Straw Hat Players and the Canadian Repertory company, as well as being one of the first year Festival company.⁶ John Gardiner, Bruno Gerussi and Roland Hewgill had all joined the Festival company for the 1954 season. John Gardiner was a Canadian who had been living and working in England for most of his youthful life⁷. Roland Hewgill had been a member of the International Players in Kingston, Ontario, before going to England to train at The Webber-Douglas school⁸. Bruno Gerussi hailed from British Columbia and had won a scholarship to the Banff School of Fine Arts before joining Totem in Vancouver.⁹ Jack Hutt joined the company as actor and company stage manager. He was another second year actor at the Festival. With a master's degree in Theatre Arts from Northwestern University in Chicago, Jack Hutt had worked as set designer and technical director at the London Little Theatre - one of the few Little Theatres wealthy enough to have a real Edwardian theatre and a paid set designer and technical shop director - before joining the company at Stratford. During the war he had been in the R.C.A.F. in England, where he maintained intercoms and wired them into aircraft. He spent his leaves enjoying London's wartime theatres¹⁰. The other member of the company was Norman Freeman, a Stratford man. When the Festival was in gestation there was considerable controversy in the town about the projected theatre. Freeman, then a milkman, took a survey among his customers, to find out how many were for or against the project. He took his findings to one of the members of the Stratford Board of Governors, who showed it to Tyrone Guthrie¹¹, the artistic director of the

Stratford Shakespearean Festival. Guthrie was so impressed that he said that anyone as enterprising and supportive as Freeman should be offered a job in the Festival. As a result, Freeman became the first house manager and captain of ushers at the tent theatre at night and continued to do his milk round by day. When Campbell offered him the job of truck driver, assistant stage manager, and house manager with the new company, Freeman leapt at the chance to give up the milk truck for the Players' truck, and was caught by the romance of travelling with a theatre company through Ontario and who knew where else in the future.¹²

While Campbell was assembling his cast and crew, Patterson was occupied with ways and means of raising money, finding transport, arranging for office staff and an office, and founding a company. The first company (in the business sense) was composed of Tom Patterson, Douglas Campbell and John Frame.¹³ Frame was a Stratford businessman who was now a successful Toronto stockbroker. He had a keen interest in theatre and was a friend of Patterson's¹⁴. Patterson was the Business Manager, Campbell the Artistic Director. As a legal company they could now try to raise money to finance the operation. Patterson did this by interesting some Stratford residents in his new company and raised money from one or two local business men as well as from his own mother, Mrs Lucinda Patterson. He also raised money in Toronto, particularly from Lady Eaton, who had always had a keen interest in theatre, and was a well known philanthropist and supporter of the arts in Canada. As the head of a nationwide chain of stores, she had contacts in all the provinces¹⁵.. An unexpected donation came from a cinema chain owner from Detroit. Sol Krim specialised in what were then known as "Art" films. In talking to him after a performance at the theatre one night, Patterson happened to mention the company he and

Campbell were forming. Sol Krim was intrigued, and gave Patterson a most generous donation. He hoped the company would play in Detroit one day.¹⁶

Starting from scratch the company's primary needs were a headquarters office which they rented at 1 Market Place, Stratford, formerly occupied by the Stratford Shakespearean Festival. Florence Pelton, who had been the first secretary for the Festival was installed as secretary and office manager - a euphemism for a performer of an endless round of clerical duties with an aged typewriter, an answerer of a persistently ringing telephone and general odd job girl. After her experience with the beginning of the Festival, she was well qualified to cope with the new company's affairs.¹⁷

Having established this operational headquarters the next problem was that of transporting the company with its paraphernalia. Although Saint Joan was to be produced with the minimum of stage dressing, lighting and properties, and actors wearing modern rehearsal clothes, it was impractical for the company to attempt to travel by the inadequate public transport in Ontario. The management purchased an obsolete Bell Telephone company truck, which was converted by Freeman and a Stratford cabinet maker to accommodate the company's backdrop screens, the six small stools on which the actors sat on stage, the six lights and their T bar mounts, the large heavy rheostat board and the few properties. On tour Freeman drove the truck and was accompanied by the stage manager.¹⁸ At each destination these two men set up the screens and properties and Jack Hutt hooked up the lights and the board to whatever source of electricity was available, while the company dressed and made up. The cast was transported by cars, two station wagons and a large sedan, driven by Douglas Campbell, William Hutt and William Needles.¹⁹

Rehearsal space was provided by Patterson's father-in-law who owned a summer camp in the Haliburton Highlands. As these premises would be vacant

after Labour Day, he offered them to the company. Like the Everyman company,²⁰ and many others before them, the Canadian Players retreated to the peace of the woods. The actors moved in with their families. At camp the work of everyday living was shared by everyone. The men carried water and firewood, and mothers and grandmothers looked after the children and prepared meals which were taken in the camp dining room and the central lounge of the camp. This lounge was also the rehearsal hall and the common room, where, each evening, in front of a blazing log fire, a post mortem could be held on the day's work.²¹ (Appendix 1) The communal living and shared labour integrated a variety of volatile personalities into a responsible and dedicated company, as no other rehearsal environment could have done. The wilderness provided peace and quiet for solitary meditation. The actual physical chores of camp life kept them all fit, and the lack of much in the way of creature comforts prepared them for the unexpected and often uncomfortable lodgings in which they would find themselves at a later date. In spite of the discomforts and practical difficulties, a sense of romance and adventure was mixed in with the hard work, and a dedication to theatre and to Canada was born.²²

The first tour was booked by a former cinema agent, Frank Justin. Uninformed as to the mentality of the small town Ontario citizen, and ignorant of theatre booking, he went from town to town booking any available auditorium, whether cinema or high school gymnasium, and inserting small advertisement in the local papers announcing the date and time of the Players' performance of Saint Joan.²³ Needless to say, where the audiences were accustomed to the Community Concert system of ticket selling, the response to these small announcements was negligible. Southern Ontarians were not a theatre going people,²⁴ particularly if the theatrical offering were neither local nor travelling spectacular. Certainly, the towns and townships were theatre starved, but they were hesitant as to how they

satisfied their hunger. One small advertisement would not entice them to taste the unfamiliar banquet.²⁵

The First Tour. The Winter of Discontent. 1954.

In October 1954 the Canadian Players left their wilderness retreat and set out on their mission to take good live theatre to Southern Ontario. They were invited by the Department of External Affairs to open in Ottawa, to be a show-case for Canadian theatre to the delegates to the Columbo Conference, a Commonwealth trade conference meeting in the Canadian capital.²⁶ The tour opened with great pomp and colour, at the Little Theatre in Ottawa on October 5th, 1954. The Governor General, Vincent Massey, was in attendance with his official retinue, as well as many overseas visitors. As Patterson recalls in First Stage, the audience were more colourful than the actors on stage, as the delegates from the African and Eastern countries were wearing their traditional robes.²⁷ The actors wore clerical grey business suits. Saint Joan was dressed in black pants and a long grey hooded sweater, made for her in one of the Stratford knitting mills. In the trial scene she was allowed the only spot of colour, a blue pullover. The uncluttered stage, the emphasis on the text, and the excellence of the performance were acclaimed in rave reviews in the Ottawa and Toronto papers. Ainslie Kerr, in the Ottawa Journal, said of Shaw that "He had to be good. Good enough to make an audience like Tuesday night's at the first performance of his Saint Joan by the new Stratford-born Canadian Players, thoroughly revel, in almost every line of dialogue, despite the fact that the actors wore no period costumes and did the great play on a bare stage. The result struck a new and extremely high note for live drama in the capital, perhaps in all Canada."²⁸ These were prophetic words indeed. Herbert Whittaker wrote, "An exciting, remarkably forthright production of Shaw's Saint Joan is loose in the Province. Seek it out where you can"²⁹ After discussing Shaw and the play at length, and describing and explaining the platform production, he said, "His play reaches its heights through the strength and conviction of his arguments and the Canadian Players soar with it - not to

mystic or dramatic peaks so much as into the wide, cool reaches of Shavian logic. But the production does not lack emotion....this Saint Joan is well acted indeed...One has no trouble marking the changes, incidentally, as they whip off a tie, don a cross, slip off their coats to take on another character."³⁰ He goes on to praise each one of the actors and says that Campbell as the director "Shows a complete grasp of the play's argument".³¹ Patterson recalls that the British High Commissioner and the conference delegates, who had lived under British rule, enjoyed the performance.³² However, after the brilliant opening the theatre remained more than half empty for the rest of the week's run. Ottawans were not inclined to go the theatre unless they were led there by advanced publicity and a prior commitment. The idea of reading a review of a good theatrical performance and then endeavouring to see it was not part of the civic mentality.

This apathy pervaded the towns of Eastern Ontario which the Canadian Players visited. Far from welcoming the taste of live theatre, the local Ontarians ignored it.³³ The first half of the 1954 Winter season became jocularly known as "The Secret Tour" because the houses were so empty and there was a lack of reviews in the local papers.³⁴ Justin's brief advertisements had raised little interest in the towns he booked. No one at Canadian Players realized that a small advertisement informing the public of the time and place of a theatrical performance, with no other information about the company or the play, would not attract the attention of an eastern Ontario small town audience. While the desire for live theatre was there, and while the management of the Canadian Players assumed that this desire would be satisfied, the Community Concert mentality was not aroused by one small advertisement.³⁵ In Renfrew, a mill town a few miles from Ottawa, 150 people saw Saint Joan. This was the first time in four years that a live theatre company had visited the town, and while the audience was very enthusiastic, "Better than the best movie I ever saw" a local lawyer is quoted as

saying.³⁶ 150 seats sold could not support even a small company. The houses for this section of the tour were very poor and all the high hopes of bringing desirable live theatre to theatrically starved communities were proving to be a financially disastrous delusion. Obviously, something had to be done and done quickly. Tom Patterson tried to remedy the situation by going ahead of the company and talking to the local newspaper editors, giving them copy for leaders in their papers. It was good free publicity, but it was not enough. There was no money for large scale advertising, nor could Patterson spend much time on the road, as he was still general manager at the Festival.³⁷

One result of the Ottawa opening was that Patterson hired a public relations manager for the Canadian Players. It came about in this way. At an opening night cast party for Saint Joan at the house of Nicholas Montserrat, the then British High Commissioner and well known author, Patterson was introduced to Nicholas Montserrat's sister-in-law, Laurel Crosby, who was visiting from South Africa. Crosby had been a public relations officer for General Smuts, and was looking for employment in Canada. When Patterson asked her to join his company she was happy to do so. When she arrived at the Stratford office she was greeted with a shoe box full of unpaid bills.³⁸ She immediately realised that the Players' publicity had to be improved and began by contacting the local radio stations on the company's itinerary. However, she soon discovered that an English accent was anathema to Ontarians and that someone with a Canadian accent had better take over the public relations job. Patterson could not do it as he was committed to the Festival. There was no money to hire anyone else, as already, to try to preserve some degree of solvency for the company, Lucinda Patterson, Patterson's mother, was paying Crosby's salary. Reluctantly, Robin Patterson, Patterson's wife, was cajoled by her husband and Crosby into joining the public relations team.³⁹

Robin Patterson was the daughter of a United Church minister from Victoria, who had graduated from the University of Toronto and was a school teacher before her marriage to Tom Patterson, at that time an editor of a trade magazine for Floyd Chalmers of MacLean Hunter Publications. The Pattersons lived happily and obscurely in Ajax, now an eastern suburb of Toronto, then a quiet little town twenty miles from the city. Patterson, like many another, commuted daily to his office. With the founding of the Festival the family moved to a house on the rural outskirts of Stratford. Robin Patterson was suddenly thrown into the social whirl of entertaining journalists, directors and all sorts of visiting theatrical personalities, besides looking after three small children, one of whom was born only two weeks before the celebrated Festival opening night.⁴⁰ During the months before that historic day, the Festival suffered various financial crises, many of which were unjustifiably attributed to Tom Patterson, and Robin Patterson had much to do to keep the optimistic faith that the Festival would be a success and not a howling failure. Now Laurel Crosby and Tom Patterson persuaded her that she must speak on the radio and make the local communities aware of the dramatic opportunity they were being offered⁴¹.

Robin Patterson and Crosby set off to try to salvage the remainder of the Southern Ontario pre-Christmas tour as best they could. They began to advertize the Canadian Players by getting speaking engagements on local radio stations. At this time, radio and television were live, and there could be no errors or corrections. Patterson recalls nervously talking her way through a radio interview in which she allowed the interviewer, a woman well known for permitting her victims few words, no single interruption. Once started on her theme of selling the Canadian Players there was no stopping Patterson. Her heart and soul were in the speech and, for her, "it was a matter of life and death". If the Canadian Players went down the drain, then so did the Patterson family with it,

and so did Tom Patterson's renown and good name. While the radio staff were suffocating with suppressed laughter, Patterson was speaking from desperation, endeavouring to fill the large auditorium in Hamilton.⁴²

Other radio interviews followed, but the outlook for the Southern Ontario tour looked dismal. The management owed money for advertising and hall rentals. The company had to be paid, admittedly, only a hundred dollars a week, the minimum Equity rate, and a subsistence allowance, but the money was not pouring in. In spite of the excellent reviews the company received from the New York Times and Saturday Night, as well as the Toronto and some local papers, the audience stayed away. In London, a city with a population of over 100,000, with strong support for the London Little Theatre, a large and enthusiastic audience was anticipated. Only 300 people attended Saint Joan.⁴³ Herbert Whittaker's column reported that the theatres at both Oshawa and Kingston had cancelled their fall programmes to accommodate The Canadian Players. Even so, he does not report on the size of the audiences when the Players arrived. In Kingston, the company played for three nights. Roland Hewgill was a local boy. He arranged accommodation for the company in the city, with his friends, who all turned out to see their guests perform with their own actor. The three nights allowed time for word to get around that a good production was on at the local theatre, and the friends spread the word,⁴⁴ but one reasonably successful stop would not make up for the dreary empty houses which were the norm.

In Brantford the company played in an enormous cinema to a handful of people, but in that audience were visitors from Simcoe, who had heard about the Canadian Players and had read the reviews, besides having been to Stratford to see the Festival productions. They were so impressed with the performance of Saint Joan that they determined to get the Players to their little town. They not only succeeded in this, they also accommodated the company in their own homes,

entertained them royally, and by dint of telling all their friends and neighbours about the wonderful company and the enthralling production, sold every seat in their small auditorium and there was a queue for any seats that might become available.⁴⁵ This was what could be done in a small community by theatre enthusiasts. Simcoe was unique, but it demonstrated the need for local drum beaters, a lesson not lost on the public relations department of Canadian Players. The next year the company opened in Simcoe.

In 1954, television was the new thing and was still a novelty to the people in Southern Ontario who had access to it. They were just not going out to see professional theatre. Generally, there was no one local in towns and cities to offer the counter-attraction of live theatre of high quality, or to drum up business. Simcoe had ably demonstrated what a few local enthusiasts could do. Enlisting the aid of citizens to sell tickets and guarantee audiences could be the method by which the public relations department might rescue the Canadian Players from imminent disaster.

Northern Exploration

Patterson looked at a map of Northern Ontario. Perhaps Moosonee, at the foot of James Bay, would be interested in Canadian Players. Perhaps the Northern Ontario mining towns would be more receptive to an adventurous touring company than the southern business-oriented cities were. Patterson and Crosby talked the idea over with Globe and Mail theatre critic Herbert Whittaker⁴⁶ and Toronto Telegram columnist, Lotta Dempsey,⁴⁷ a Stratford native and anyone else who might be interested. They went to see Floyd Chalmers,⁴⁸ Tom Patterson's former boss at MacLean-Hunter, who was deeply interested in Canadian theatre and was on the Board of the Stratford Festival, as well as being one of its most generous supporters. He was also an extremely practical man. One of his friends was Colonel Reynolds, D.S.O., M.C., the Chairman of the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission, and the Ontario Northland Railway, the only railway in the North, running into James Bay at Moosonee. Chalmers told Patterson that he would give her an introduction to Colonel Reynolds. He suggested that she should contact Reynolds, and interest him in the Players entertaining the community in Moosonee. If she could convince Colonel Reynolds of the desirability of the Canadian Players in James Bay, Chalmers himself would assist with money for the venture.⁴⁹

Colonel Reynolds was a veteran of the first World War, who had made his money in mining and lumber in British Columbia and Northern Ontario.⁵⁰ His was a name to conjure with in Northern Ontario towns and he knew everyone who was worth knowing. Chalmers telephoned the colonel to introduce Patterson and Crosby.

In November a letter arrived from a Festival visitor from the north of the province enquiring if any consideration had been given to a tour of the north. Campbell was consulted about this. No one knew what the rigours of such a

venture might be, or whether Campbell was prepared to risk his company in unknown conditions.⁵¹ Campbell was very much in favour of accepting the invitation.⁵² Everyone was young and optimistic in those days, and the offer seemed to confirm Patterson's idea of visiting Moosonee. To undertake the tour would be a manifestation of Campbell's theory that live theatre should be taken to remote communities who had little or no opportunity to enjoy it. His company was invited to the underpopulated north.

At the beginning of December, with almost no experience in selling theatrical productions, but with a determination not to allow so important a venture to fail, Patterson bravely left her young family and set off with Crosby, to try to salvage the winter season by booking a tour of the mining and lumber towns of Northern Ontario.

The two women drove to North Bay and telephoned Colonel Reynolds who had the reputation of being a tough business- man. They kept an appointment to see him in his office. Even though Floyd Chalmers had assured him of their credentials, he wanted to see the two business members of the company for himself. He also wanted to be sure that their project was something that the North wanted and not something that Southern Ontario was imposing on the North, because the South thought it was good for it. Intensely nervous, the two were hoping to make a good impression when they were later invited to dine with the Colonel and his wife. The atmosphere was chilly at first, but Crosby entertained their hosts with her description of travelling through small Ontario towns and her unfamiliarity, as a South African, with the stiff formality of the small town Ontario ladies. She also expressed her disappointment at the apathy and poor attendance which the Canadian Players had suffered. Gradually the ice thawed, and after dinner, while Crosby helped Mrs Reynolds with the dishes, Patterson and the Colonel discussed the first World War, in which her father had

also served. Over coffee the Colonel arranged for Crosby and Patterson to come back to his office next morning to discuss the towns and cities where the Players could possibly perform Saint Joan.⁵³ They had received the stamp of approval from Mrs. Reynolds and proved to the Colonel that the Canadian Players was a viable operation worthy of his consideration and support. The next morning, before the two ambassadors met Colonel Reynolds in his office, they made a short tour of the town. They were pleasantly surprised by the smiles that greeted them on the streets, the friendliness of the coffee shop waitress and the warmth with which they were met in shops. Everyone wanted to know what they were doing in North Bay.⁵⁴

In Colonel Reynolds' office, later in the morning, they pored over his map. He knew every town where there was a hall or a stage. He also suggested that they consider visiting Noranda and Val D'Or in Quebec. After making out a list, to their astonishment he picked up his telephone and proceeded to call one man in each centre and make sure that Crosby and Patterson would be looked after in his town and meet the people who would welcome Saint Joan and the Canadian Players to his community. When Patterson tentatively mentioned Moosonee the Colonel was overjoyed. "They can go by train and I can go too!" He then rang up a surprised Archie Michelle, the Hudson's Bay Factor at Moosonee, made arrangements for the two women to go to the railhead and stay at the Hudson's Bay Guest Lodge and discuss arrangements with an excited and enthusiastic Archie Michelle.⁵⁵

With the blessing of the Colonel the representatives of the Canadian Players were interviewed by the local press and radio station, and after the initial surprise that a theatrical company should entertain the idea of coming north, the response was excited and enthusiastic. The Shriners in North Bay agreed to sponsor the company and while Crosby went to get the contract signed, and was

subsequently photographed with the red fezzed members for the local paper, Patterson went to the radio station again.⁵⁶ North Bay was giving the Players plenty of free advance publicity.

The romance and excitement of exploring Northern Ontario gripped both Crosby and Patterson. Here they were, off on a great adventure into the unknown. From North Bay, in spite of the winter weather, the two women bravely set off by car on a tour of the Northern Ontario and Quebec towns on the Colonel's list, and, like the banns of the mediaeval travelling companies, announced the advent of a play and what it was about. They had with them press kits put together by Barbara Reid⁵⁷ of the Stratford Shakespearean Festival publicity office, which consisted of biographies of the players, a few notes of explanation about the play, the aims of the company, and posters for the local committees to put up in their own towns, announcing the play, but with the time and date of the performance left blank. As far as is known none of these press kits is still in existence.⁵⁸ They were, in their day, valuable public relations tools for the advance booking which Patterson and Crosby accomplished.

The first place on the list was the small town of New Liskeard. Here the pattern of the banns' visits began to form. Their introduction was to a member of the Lions Club. Patterson was to speak to a meeting of the club called especially to address this project. Her job was to sell Saint Joan. She "put all her heart and soul into it."⁵⁹ Then Crosby took over and discussed the size of the auditorium and what could be charged for tickets, the cost of advertising and the rent. The New Liskeard school principal was so delighted that his pupils would have the opportunity to see a live performance of a Shaw play that he said the auditorium would be rent free. The next item was a fee to be decided on and to be paid to the company on the night of the performance in the town. That night

during an evening walk in the frosty air the two discussed the problems of the company and a possible solution. The cost of the company had to be guaranteed.⁶⁰

Someone or group of people had to guarantee the money and therefore they would guarantee the audience to cover the fee. Laurel had been impressed by the energy and drive of the Shriners and the members of the Lions Club. She muttered that the cost would be different everywhere we went and the possible price of tickets would vary also.

However, with a strong club membership behind ticket sales, this should guarantee a full house. . . . The first consideration had to be the number of seats in the auditorium and also the price that it would be possible to get for each ticket. From this figure would be subtracted all costs such as rental of the auditorium, publicity. etc. The remaining figure would be split two ways - one half for the sponsors and one half for Canadian Players. This would guarantee Canadian Players its costs and allow the sponsoring group an incentive to pack the house. . . . The whole purpose of the trip began to make sense and the possibility of climbing out of the red seemed a likelihood.⁶¹

The next morning they set out for Kirkland Lake "with a new feeling of purpose and a satisfactory feeling that we now knew where we were going."⁶² In Kirkland Lake they telephoned Colonel Reynolds' contact who suggested that the women see a member of the theatre group. However, the theatre group doubted if any one club in the city would be able to sponsor the Players. As the next stop on the itinerary was Noranda followed by Val D'Or, Patterson and Crosby said they would call in again on their return from Quebec and in the meantime, the theatre group would see what Kirkland Lake could do.⁶³

Both Noranda and Val D'Or were rich copper mining towns. Many of the citizens were bilingual or English speaking. The mine manager in Noranda was obviously seeing them because he had been telephoned by Colonel Reynolds.

Having presented them each with a heavy copper ashtray, he turned them over to his recreation director. This man was an energetic and outgoing bilingual French Canadian. He was enthusiastic about bringing the Canadian Players to Noranda. He and the women talked for a long time as he needed to build a stage and find curtains and he was anxious for details about the cast of the play. It transpired that during one of his earlier jobs, in the late thirties, as a young man, he had been recreational director of a Russian cruise ship. On the last night of the cruise there was to be a talent show and he collected a list of anyone who could sing or dance or both.

Much to his rather discomfort, a couple said that they would do scenes from Shakespeare. He was concerned for them as the audience seemed in a frivolous holiday mood. It was a very dark night. The stars hung low in the sky. Silence fell on the audience as the couple moved onto the makeshift stage on the deck. The beautiful lines of Shakespeare from both Romeo and Juliet and Hamlet rang out into the northern skies. The audience was spellbound and gave the greatest compliment of utter silence when the couple had finished before they broke into thunderous applause. They were the young Dame Sybil Thorndyke and Sir Lewis Casson, parents of Douglas Campbell's wife who played Saint Joan.

Shivers ran down my spine and the recreational director finished his tale. The company could only succeed here. ⁶⁴

In Val D'Or where they, as usual, met the press and radio and stayed in an uncomfortable hotel, they were invited to dinner with the Colonel's contact. But this meeting was inauspicious and they left Val D'Or by the slippery road back to Noranda and Kirkland Lake through the snow. It was the only town on their whole tour in which they failed to get a booking.

The friends in Kirkland Lake had been busy in their absence and asked the presidents of all the service clubs in the city to attend a meeting. To everyone's delight and astonishment over twenty people turned up. Patterson gave her

speech on the background of the Canadian Players and their purpose and desire to take live theatre to as many communities as possible. Crosby talked on the problems of financing a travelling company, and explained that the company had to cover its costs. Everyone at the meeting was very keen to have the Players in town, but no one was prepared to sponsor them. After a lengthy discussion, "One young man said, 'look, we are all very keen but we realize that the project is too big for any one club. Why don't we all join together and form a committee of all these clubs? We'll pack the auditorium.'"⁶⁵ Everyone burst into spontaneous applause. This was a highlight and the pattern which developed here in Kirkland Lake was to be repeated across the country from coast to coast.⁶⁶

On the drive to Timmins they discussed what their roles were to be in the ensuing visits to the town representatives. Patterson's task was to stir up interest and enthusiasm in the audience and generate excitement about Canadian Players who would show how classical theatre could be presented in a way that would appeal to all ages. She would also stress the educational value of the experience. Then she would introduce Crosby, explaining that she was a South African, a fellow colonial, and that would mitigate the impact of her English accent. Crosby would then clarify the financial problems of a touring company and how they hoped to make money on tour, while still allowing the sponsors to make money for their local projects. They were both so enthusiastic by the time they reached Timmins nothing could stop them. Colonel Reynolds' contact was a Rotarian. He called a special lunchtime club meeting for the next day where the banns would have an opportunity to speak. They spent the morning visiting the press and the radio station. The Rotarians as a group agreed to sponsor the Players and the high school principal insisted on a matinee for his students. The performances would have to take place in the high

school. They then had to finalize the date and the money. Timmins wanted them to appear in early January. As it was already the beginning of December, time was short. Timmins would have fit in with the other towns on the tour, but they promised to give them a date as soon as possible. This promise satisfied the Rotarians, who were mostly business men who understood the problems the women faced. The president took the banns off to have the inevitable newspaper photograph and see them on their way to Iroquois Falls. This proved to be a company town, with unexpected welcome creature comforts for visitors. The mine manager and his friends were very interested in the Players and the business was concluded amicably and satisfactorily. The next stop was Cochrane and the train to Moosonee.

Cochrane was a typical Northern mining town. It had one main street of small square boxlike houses. The women's entry into the coffee shop caused quite a stir. Two women travelling on their own were unique! Once in the customarily comfortless hotel they telephoned Colonel Reynolds' contact who was the mayor of the city. "He was an Italian and the local car dealer. He was just thrilled to meet two ladies from the outside world."⁶⁷ Mr Palangio promised them that when they returned from Moosonee on Tuesday, he would have the newspaper ready for them and he himself would have talked to all the service clubs in town. Joyfully he realized that a real live theatre company wanted to play in his town.⁶⁸

Early next morning, with the snow crunching underfoot Patterson and Crosby boarded the Northland train. This train ran three times a week, making the trip to Moosonee in one day, and returning the next. While the time of departure was on schedule, the expected time of arrival varied considerably with the weather and the number of stops required. Once beyond Cochrane the train would be stopped anywhere on its northern route to load on a trapper with his crop of furs for the Hudson's Bay trading post at Moosonee, or an Indian family

with all their possessions with them, who might descend from the train miles further up the line. Or the train might be waved down by a bundled up figure holding out a small package containing a shopping list and money for the engine driver. He would purchase the reel of thread or whatever from the Hudson's Bay store and deliver it with the change on the morrow's return journey. This train was the North's lifeline. The passengers on the train, men returning to work in the North, were warned of the unusual occurrence of women on the train, so that when the women did enter the dining car for coffee and breakfast, they were subjected to silent stares. However, part way through the bacon and eggs - the only food served on the train on either trip - they broke the silence by asking questions, and once the men realized that they were really interested in the North conversation and laughter flowed freely. After the fascinating day long journey beyond the treeline the train arrived at Moosonee, where the women were met by Archie Michelle, who spent the evening with them discussing the ways and means of putting Saint Joan on stage in this remote northern town. Archie Michelle assured them that the house, a Quonset hut which served as school, church, community centre and auditorium, would be full, and that the lighting would be taken care of by the expedient of having all the settlement lights turned out so that all the current could be used for the stage lights. People would either sit at home in the dark or come to the theatre. This was before the days of the DEW line with its chain of power stations. When the women boarded the train the next morning they left the usual posters to be put up in the settlement and the hospital across the bay.

Back in Cochrane, they met the editor of the Northland Post. He was an intelligent and well educated man who had become very excited about the forthcoming production of Saint Joan, which the local Kiwanis club had decided to sponsor, with the help of other town clubs. An editorial in the paper ran:

It would be futile to attempt to disguise our enthusiasm for the dramatic developments of this week. In giving front page position and heading to the news story that St. Joan is to be presented by a competent company in Northern Ontario, we feel that we are only recognising the proper value of the announcement. To the best of our knowledge, nothing like this has ever been planned before. Not just in Cochrane, but in Northern Ontario. A good company is to appear in a great play.

Bernard Shaw was one of the outstanding playwrights of our time. Many of his plays are dated because being a propagandist, he used the theatre to think about the problems in which he was interested. St. Joan is one of Shaw's greatest plays. It deals with problems of life in society which are as important today as when they confronted the natives of Orleans.⁶⁹

He concluded his editorial by announcing that the date for the performance would be January 10, 1955, and that he would publish more articles on Shaw and his plays before that date, so that the audience would be well prepared for presentation of the play and have a further insight into the works of the playwright. An added incentive for the Cochrane citizens to attend the performance was the local committee's decision that any profit from the ticket sales would go towards the local hospital building fund.⁷⁰

While Patterson and Crosby were on the trip to Moosonee, the friends in Kirkland Lake had contacted a theatre enthusiast in Kapuskasing, Max Porterfield. Following Kirkland Lake's example, Porterfield had called a meeting of all his town's service club presidents on the night Crosby and Patterson were due to arrive in Kapuskasing. He had also set up interviews with the radio station and local newspaper for them, so that when they arrived in town a warm welcome awaited them. Ultimately, ten service clubs agreed to sponsor the Players and a committee was formed to deal with the relevant details. The banns wended their way back to Kirkland Lake visiting their friends en route, and picking up signed contracts. A civic spirit was abroad in the northern towns for

committees were being formed to sponsor the Players, and to look for other cultural events.⁷¹

After being warned not to attempt a trip to Hearst, a large enough town, but a wild, rough place considered too dangerous for themselves alone, or for the company, and still disappointed at their failure to get a booking at Val D'Or, they determined to try again. But Val D'Or was to remain their only failure.

Heading towards home, they made for Sudbury, stopping on the way in North Bay to thank Colonel Reynolds for all his help. In Sudbury the help of the Little Theatre had been enlisted by the Canadian Legion, who had decided to sponsor the Players, but had no idea how to go about it. Once again the weary travellers put on their performances for their sponsors and news media, and went on to Barrie for a repeat performance. And at last they were home again after a marathon trip full of successful bookings.⁷² But they were fully aware that without the help and good will of Colonel Reynolds, the results might not have been as triumphant. It was already December 18th, almost Christmas Eve, and the company were due to play in Northern Ontario in January.

A Happy New Year.

While Crosby and Robin Patterson had been proselytizing the North, Tom Patterson had been negotiating with Elwood Emerick, an American booking agent, who worked chiefly on the educational circuit. Emerick was accustomed to booking speakers and recitals rather than theatre companies, but he was experienced in securing engagements in universities and colleges in the United States. He engaged the Canadian Players to perform in universities in Michigan and the New England States to complete the forthcoming spring and winter tour. In addition he managed to get them a television appearance on a prestigious and popular New York programme called Omnibus, which commanded a high standard of performance. No Canadian company had yet appeared on it. It was excellent publicity for the Players as this show would have a wide viewing area and would put the American stamp of approval on the company. There were financial difficulties which had to be overcome before the engagement could be accepted. Although it now looked as if the northern tour would pay for itself, and leave a little over to pay off some of the bills, there was still no money to transport the company from Ontario to New York and pay their wages and accommodation for rehearsal and performance time in the city, even though there was only one week to rehearse scenes from Hamlet, the programme chosen by Omnibus. A reasonable fee might be expected from the Ford Foundation, which sponsored Omnibus, but it would not be forthcoming until after the show. To lose such a prestigious opportunity for lack of money would be unthinkable, but where were the company to raise enough dollars? When she heard of their dilemma Lady Eaton generously donated enough money to enable the company to accept the New York offer.⁷³

Everyone was ready to enjoy a Christmas holiday and a well earned rest before the great northern adventure began. Once she was home again Patterson realised that her husband was ill, and after Christmas, his doctor advised him to go into hospital. No one knew how long he would be out of commission. While Pelton coped in the office with the Players' schedule, contracts and itinerary for the Northern tour, someone had to go to New York to discover what arrangements had been made for the Omnibus appearance. No one seemed to know anything about dates or payment. Emerick, whom Patterson managed to track down on one of his booking tours, told her to contact the Ford Foundation in New York. He had no details of any arrangements that might have been made with the sponsoring company. With the dawning realization that the whole responsibility for the Canadian Players was descending onto her inexperienced shoulders, Patterson set off for New York, stopping on the way in Toronto to thank Floyd Chalmers for his help in introducing her to Colonel Reynolds.

Having no idea what sort of a fee to ask from the Ford Foundation, Patterson and Crosby began to work out the costs for the trip, rehearsals and living expenses for the company, plus a little extra for unforeseen future expenses, together with a small profit to pay off the still extant debts. They came up with the figure of \$4,000. In the meantime, Campbell had agreed with the acting company that the Omnibus take should be split between the actors and the management. The actors would each receive their usual wages of \$100 a week, and the management would pay transportation and living expenses in New York during the rehearsal and performance period. In this way, he pointed out to the actors, they would be able to raise some money to keep the company afloat, and have enough to entertain the idea of a future season. So great was the

company spirit that the actors wholeheartedly agreed, thus adding their contribution to the financial survival of their company.⁷⁴

In New York Robin Patterson went to see the executive in charge of mounting the performance of Hamlet. He was relieved to see her, as he had not been able to confirm anything with Tom Patterson other than the date of January 30, 1955. Had Robin Patterson not arrived so opportunely, the production company would have been in deep trouble, as it was already into the first week of January, and the producers would have been hard put to fill the gap which a non-appearance of the Players would have engendered. Robin Patterson was overcome with fear at the huge imposing building and the magnificence of the offices. However, she managed to establish a rapport with a member of management, and when she was asked to name the Canadian Players' fee for the programme, with courage born of terror, she asked for \$5,000 - an astronomical sum in those days. Patterson left in fear and trembling, not knowing if she had ruined the whole deal, or managed a triumph. The offer was accepted. When she telephoned Elwood Emerick he was ecstatic. It was the highest fee then paid in the history of Omnibus.⁷⁵

Northern Lights

Tom Patterson was not able to resume his position as president of the Canadian Players so his wife accepted the role, while Crosby remained as head of public relations. Pelton continued to run the office and thus the Canadian Players began the new year of 1955.⁷⁶ As a pre-tour warm-up, the company performed in Stratford. They filled the Avon Theatre (then still a run down movie house) with their friends, landladies, Festival board members and visitors from the neighbouring Little Theatres. The audience was spellbound, enchanted by the magic of the production.

The next day the company set off on its great adventure They drove to Cochrane, picking up Tony Van Bridge, a recently arrived English actor, who was joining the company, and boarded the train. They were joined by Colonel Reynolds, whose private coach was hitched onto the back of the regular train. "The company was entertained to dinner in plush warm Victorian style."⁷⁷ Douglas Campbell and Ann Casson slept in the private coach, which Ann Casson records as being "very very luxurious."⁷⁸

At Moosonee the whole town turned out to meet the train and escort the company, who were attended by members of the press and an excellent photographer. On the way to the Lodge they passed a poster announcing their curtain time as "8.p.m. or one hour after the train arrives."⁷⁹ Descriptions of the evening are best left to the actors and journalists themselves, from brief notes by Norman Freeman, in his note book in the Stratford Festival Archives, and the more expansive versions by Tony Van Bridge, Ann Casson and William Hutt, and the accompanying journalists.

Cast boarded Ontario Northland Railway 10.15 a.m. courtesy Col. Reynolds.

Arrived Moosonee 8.05 p.m. Whole town met the train. Snow mobiles. Husky teams. Cast taken to Lodge.

Jack Norm and equipment to school, to set up equipment. School hall packed. Had to set up stage while audience looked on.

Show started 9.10p.m.

Curtain 12.42 p.m. (I think he means a.m. V.M.P.)

Everyone picked up by snowmobiles taken for ride across Moose Lake to Indian Hospital. Toured Hospital. Lunch served. Then on to Moose Factory. Hudson's Bay Co. Toured Factory etc. Back to Lodge. No sleep.

Boarded train 8.15 a.m. Jan.7th

Arrived Cochrane 4 p.m.

We were accompanied by Tanya Daniels reporter for N.Y. Times also Peter Dunlop reporter for Toronto Telegram.⁸⁰

Freeman's brief notes provide a bare schedule of the company's visit to James Bay. Other company members were less laconic in describing the experience.

Tony Van Bridge wrote:

Since we were a little late arriving, we entered the hall to find the audience, three parts Indian, already in their seats. There was no curtain, so for an hour that audience sat and watched us put up the lights, get out the props, and erect the rudimentary curtained set. To say they enjoyed that part of the proceedings more than the play would be something of an exaggeration, but without a doubt they found the process intriguing. Over the years we were to play in many out of the way places, many where plays had never been seen before, but nowhere were we to find that particular kind of excitement, born of intense curiosity, with which this audience followed our every move and word.

I was told that the majority of that audience neither spoke nor understood much English. Almost certainly they had no idea who Bernard Shaw was. I was not yet playing, so was able to observe to some considerable extent. I watched bits of the play from the back of the hall, creeping down the side aisle now and again to catch a glimpse of the watching faces. Normally one would hesitate to do this for fear of causing distraction, but in that house not an eye shifted towards me. The attention was nailed to the stage.

I don't really know what they made of it, but I was quite certain of one thing - they were in the midst of an experience they had never had before and one which they would remember for a long time to come. If Longfellow had been along on the trip he would have written of Hiawatha, Nokomis and the Canadian Players! I think they became a legend that night.

The faces shone, the eyes were bright, the lips parted. To the mysterious happenings on that stage they added their own images, and for all I know, came up with a deep thought or two that had never occurred to G.B.S. Perhaps in the deep sub-conscious there stirred their foregatherers' honest respect for the mystical, for the ritual of movement and of voice, an understanding of dance and incantation that led them to a theatrical experience now hardly possible among audiences of white sophisticates all intently concentrating upon what bright remarks they are going to shout to each other during the intermission.

Sometimes I would sneak out of the door into the cutting, crisp air of the incredibly cold night, and take a look at those who had not been able to get in to the performance. What had they done?....They were lined up at the windows, peering round each other's heads and shoulders, and through the thick fog of their own breathing. It was forty below out there, but they were as unconcerned about the temperature as if they stood in the embrace of a balmy summer night in the West Indies.⁸¹

While Van Bridge contemplated the production from an audience and back stage point of view, Ann Casson described her experiences as a player:

We had heard at Moosonee on Moosonee Island there was this big hospital, a TB hospital where they brought the Inuit people in and of course, it would have been a white staff that would have run it. So we thought, well, I'm sure we actually won't see any of the Indian inhabitants of Moosonee. It would be all the staff from the hospital who would come. So, of course, it was such an excitement to see that when we arrived, the hall was already packed with Cree Indians and they'd brought all their children and they were sitting there, and stayed there while we made up and everything. And while the lights were being set up. And the show was something to be believed. Because, of course, they couldn't understand a word that we said. But we found that we were turning it into a sort of pantomime. You know, we did it in mime really. We spoke but because we knew that we couldn't actually be understood, we did far more of gesturing and we acted it completely differently

because of that particular audience....Just spontaneously. We all reacted and then we noticed what the other people were doing and the whole thing was quite, quite different. And it was electrifying really. But it was entirely spontaneous. And in the middle, I forget which of the company it was said. "Look behind you". And there were three windows at the back of the stage and at each window there were people. There were Indians there with great big fur hats on and about six or seven people at each window peering in. And this was 30 below zero and they were standing in the cold and they stood there the entire evening. It was extraordinary. And then we would have back-stage sort of conversations as to what cuts we could make too, because there were certain long scenes, like the tent scene between those three people by where there was no action. It was all talk. And I think we cut that down considerably. And there were certain quite dramatic things, which they would roar with laughter at. ...It took us completely by surprise. So we'd have hurried backstage talks of sort of, "I think when the executioner comes on, let him not wear his mask because I think they think that's very funny." And then that might spoil the end of the scene. So there were quick sort of discussions like that. And for some reason, there was a little girl in the front row who thought Bruno was the most wonderful being she had ever seen. I suppose she had got the name from the programme because whenever he went to that side of the stage, she would wave at him and say, "Bruno, Bruno". It was so sweet. So it was an extraordinary evening. And of course we had a great welcome from them all afterwards. We couldn't exchange much but they were so excited with the entire thing.

And then we went off afterwards. We didn't get to bed all night because we were given snowmobiles and then we went over to the Moose Factory Hospital afterwards. And were entertained by the staff there. They gave us a wonderful party. And this went on. I don't know if we slept at all....I remember coming back afterwards, you know, it was extraordinary...And then we packed up and I suppose, yes, we didn't stay there. We were playing a Quonset hut weren't we? ...Do you remember where we slept that night?⁸²

William Hutt wrote a letter to Herbert Whittaker, part of which was published in the Globe and Mail. Some paragraphs from this letter add to what others have written:

The drive north as far as Cochrane was beautiful, particularly through the Laurentian hills around Temagami. ...From Cochrane

to Moosonee we took Col. Reynolds' Northland train and arrived at the edge of the world at about 7.30. We were met by snowmobile and what seemed hoards of fur-clad eager greeters and one Archie Michel.(sic) Archie is Col. Reynolds' manager in Moosonee, a man with a wonderfully strong figure and face and a rich warm personality. Apparently he was one of the prime movers in organizing our audience in Moosonee - building the stage especially for us, arranging accommodation, seeing we were properly transported from place to place and reflecting on behalf of the entire community a sincere and touching gratitude for our taking the trouble to come and visit them.

For us it was little trouble - on the contrary, a very great pleasure. Arrangements for us couldn't have been more painstaking in detail and design. There were no long waits in the cold, our accommodation was infinitely superior to much that we encountered in Southern Ontario, the stage, although small, was firm (not a single squeak anywhere) and covered with a large canvas ground cloth. We made up in our rooms and then piled into a snowmobile to be taken just down the road to the theatre.

The children, generally, were restless, particularly during the scenes of Shavian dialectics, yet despite this Shaw stood the test admirably. All the audience, including the children, were surely there and very much with us at the play's high moments which indicated that although their grasp of the argument may not always have been as firm as desired, their attention and interest followed us right through to the final curtain with loving and eloquent appreciation.

The end of scenes was wildly applauded; the audience turned to look for "the kingfisher" and "the English Forts" in Scene 111, and for "the vision of Rheims" in the Epilogue; the children bounced their knees to the drum beat at the end of Act 2; and the little girl cried with fright at the thundering drum and mysterious appearance of Joan in the Epilogue!

At the end their thanks was most touching by its length and clamour. I suspect that for them, as it surely was for us, the evening proved to be a "once-in-a-lifetime" experience.⁸³

Tania Long wrote in the New York Times a description of the community of Moosonee and its mixed population, and described the platform production. Like Hutt she commented on the care and effort that had been put in to make the

memorable evening a success. She also commented on the immense concentration of the audience on the stage. The aim of the company, she stated, was:

To bring the audience into more intimate contact with the sense of the play by ignoring the usual stage trappings. It is an experimental form that has received warm praise from Canadian critics during performance in Ottawa and Southern Ontario.

The company's belief is that good theatre is appreciated whatever the audience.; This belief was reinforced by last night's experience. The cast opened its tour in this isolated spot in the northern wilds with some trepidation, only to find one of its most appreciative audiences....Apart from some restlessness towards the end of the three and a half hour performance, the children sat as quiet and entranced as their elders.⁸⁴

After informing her readers that the company would be playing in Detroit, Buffalo and Corning, N.Y. she says that the company:

Has something of the spirit, and much of the fun that must have animated the strolling players of the Renaissance.

There is first of all a deep devotion to the art of acting, a constant striving for perfection and a feeling, or perhaps a hope of serving the public. On the lighter side is the zest that comes from the unexpected and adventuresome.

Mr. Campbell sees in Canada great possibilities for the theatre. He believes, moreover, that it is in the small towns that companies must first create interest as well as building a reputation for themselves.⁸⁵

Peter Dunlop, of the Toronto Telegram, commented on the colourful and varied audience, remarking that Shaw would never have envisaged his work being performed in "a crisp subarctic night, the crackling Northern Lights in the heavens and an audience of trappers, nurses and priests."⁸⁶ Indeed, Father

Leopold Morin had flown 800 miles from Port Severn to attend the performance, and was quite overcome by emotion, so moved was he by the performance and the general atmosphere of the production.⁸⁷

This visit to Moosonee, which Douglas Campbell has said is all anyone remembers about the Canadian Players,⁸⁸ is a landmark in Canadian theatre history. A professional theatre company actually touring Northern Ontario, opening in Moosonee, was, and still is, unique. Moosonee prepared the company for what unusual audiences they might encounter in the future. The huge publicity given to this performance did much to make the rest of North America aware that a brave and risk taking company whose work was of a high calibre, was at large in the country. The newspapers certainly made the Players' name familiar in the United States, so that when the company took part in the Ford Foundation Omnibus programme they were not an unheard-of obscure company, but one with a reputation associated with the Stratford Shakespearean Festival. This was good advertizing for the ensuing United States appearances which followed Northern Ontario and Omnibus.

When the company arrived back in Cochrane they found a well informed audience, as Douglas Campbell was to note, and in Timmins the newspaper was full of praise for the visiting company. Peter Gzowski, then working in Timmins, recalls seeing the company and feeling a familiarity with many of the cast, from their excellent performances in Andrew Allan's renowned radio drama nights.⁸⁹ The actors too, were delighted with the reception they received in the northern towns. Following the exciting Moosonee experience, the subsequent towns' performances might have suffered a let- down feeling, but this was not so. As Bill Botwright wrote of the performance at Porcupine under the banner headline "Memorable Performance Given by Shaw Players":

This superb platform production of Bernard Shaw's stimulating play; . . . all 20 dramatis personae were handled by just six actors and an actress...Despite the fact that half the conventions of the stage are tossed, that medieval noblemen and clerics are clad in suits cut in the latest styles, "Saint Joan" is as entertaining and braintickling as ever. In fact - maybe more so. There are the pleasures of the performance. The Canadian Players are the most sensitive vital and capable of vehicles for this provocative thinker's ideas.⁹⁰

Everywhere they went in the North they were greeted with warm hospitality and rave reviews. In Kirkland Lake, some of the reactions of the players are recorded by the Northern Daily News. Jack Hutt is quoted as thinking "It was possible that the present tour was the beginning of a new theatrical deal for the north."⁹¹ He remarked on how much better the company had done financially, how much more receptive the audiences were and how well organized the service clubs were who had made the arrangements for the company in the north. John Gardiner, one of the younger members of the company, said, "We've been wonderfully treated and the audiences have been excellent."⁹² He was looking forward to playing the school matinee and said, "We played to the school children in Timmins and they were much quicker than adults. Often with an adult audience they catch a joke after you've gone on to something else. The kids are with you all the time."⁹³

The last town on the northern tour was Sudbury, where the company played both a school matinee and an evening performance, before flying to New York to rehearse and perform in Omnibus⁹⁴.

City Lights

The format of the Omnibus programme was an erudite discussion on Hamlet, with the company performing scenes from the play. Walter Kerr, the well known New York theatre critic, was the moderator of the panel and narrator of the programme. Campbell was a member of the panel and also played Hamlet in addition to directing and rehearsing the company. It must be remembered that all television in those days was black and white, and live. There was no room for error on the night. In spite of the short rehearsal time, this first Canadian company ever to appear on a major American nationwide television programme recorded the second highest rating for Omnibus productions.⁹⁵

The company followed the successful New York engagement by playing the towns of the Eastern States which Emerick had booked for them. The thespian gods must have looked favourably on the Canadian Players. The rights to Saint Joan for the States had been granted to Jean Arthur, who was intending to tour the country with her company, playing Saint Joan herself, which meant that no other company could perform the play in the States. However, in Chicago, Miss Arthur had a falling out with her company and her management, and walked out, leaving her company high and dry, and her backers \$80,000 down.⁹⁶ This left the field clear for the Canadian Players, who played in Buffalo, and Corning, New York, and in Detroit, the headquarters of their benefactor, Sol Krim. Emerick's advertizing made sure that the public were well aware that the Canadian Players were coming to town, and the reviews were as appreciative as they had been in Canada. In the Corning paper Joe Hayes wrote, "An enthusiastic audience of nearly 1,000 made theatrical history last night when Tom Patterson's Canadian Players enacted George Bernard Shaw's 'Saint Joan' at the Glass Centre."⁹⁷ Of Ann Casson he said, "Her performance is no less perfect than that of her husband Douglas Campbell, who not only directed the

play, but also played three parts....The paucity of props and settings served only to emphasize the ability of the actors....Each of the supporting players' might be called a star, for each contributed greatly to the success of the production."⁹⁸

The review ends, "When the play ended, Miss Chernuk and Lerman received the congratulations of the audience for their achievement in bringing the Canadians to the Glass Centre."⁹⁹ In Buffalo the Courier Express had headlines

"Canadians Score Hit in Shaw Play". "The versatile Canadian Players from Stratford (Ont) Shakespearean Festival gave a moving performance of George Bernard Shaw's "Saint Joan" last night, in Kleinhans Music Hall....The extreme simplicityheightens the dramatic impact because it leaves much to the imagination." The first Canadian and American tour for the Canadian Players was over.

The company returned to Stratford for the 1955 summer season at the Festival, with a successful tour behind it, a reputation for theatrical excellence, no debts, and enough money in the bank for the rehearsal period in the forthcoming Autumn. The Stratford Box Office benefitted enormously from the tour and the television appearance. Ticket orders came in from all the towns on the tour, both in Canada and the States, from patrons who had seen the company in the flesh and from those who had been thrilled by the television Hamlet. The winter of discontent had been made glorious, and now the summer sun was ahead.

When rehearsals began at the Festival, Tyrone Guthrie told Campbell that he knew at once who had been out with his company. Their acting was so improved and their general stage bearing was now composed and authoritative.¹⁰⁰

Unwittingly, the company had proved Robertson Davies' theory that in Canada, a travelling company of high calibre, with a competent business

manager and an exceptionally talented director, performing classical drama could succeed both artistically and financially.

¹ Tom Patterson and Alan Gould. First Stage. (Toronto ; McClelland and Stewart, 1987) : 212-214.

² Douglas Campbell. Transcript from interview tape in possession of Robin Patterson.

³ G.B.Shaw. Letter to Ann Casson. In biography of Ann Casson in the first Canadian Players programme. Copies in possession of Robin Patterson, Stratford Shakespearean Festival Archives (Norman Freeman Collection) and The Toronto Reference Library, Theatre Department.

⁴ "Douglas Campbell." Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre. eds. Eugene Benson and L.W. Connolly. (Oxford : O.U.P., 1988) : 73.

Transcript from tape interview. In possession of Robin Patterson.

⁵ "William Needles." Biographical notes in first Canadian Players programme.

⁶ Keith Garebian. William Hutt: A Theatre Portrait (Oakville : Mosaic, 1988).

⁷ Biographical notes. First Canadian Players programme.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Jack Hutt. Interview. (unrecorded at request of Jack Hutt). August 10, 1991, July 16, 1992.

¹¹ "Tyrone Guthrie." Oxford Companion to the Theatre. (Oxford : O.U.P., 1988) : 362-3.

¹² Jack Karr. "Stratford Festival House Manager Strode 'The Milky Way' To Drama." Hamilton Spectator. Undated newspaper cutting. In possession of Robin Patterson.

Laurie Freeman (son of Norman). Interview tape. August 10, 1992.

¹³ Biographical notes. First Canadian Players programme.

¹⁴ Biography in On Stage. 1 (1960). In the collection of Toronto Reference Library, Theatre Department.

¹⁵ Lady Eaton (Flora McCrea Eaton). Widow of John Craig Eaton, president of the T. Eaton Co. Mother of John David Eaton, president of the T. Eaton Co., in all provinces of Canada in 1954. Lady Eaton was well known for her interest in all things musical, and for her philanthropic works. (See Who's Who in Canada (1955) : 57.

¹⁶ Tom Patterson. First Stage : 215-216.

¹⁷ Florence Pelton Patterson. Manuscript for deposition in Stratford Shakespearean Festival Archives. In possession of Florence Pelton Patterson. Stratford.

¹⁸ Douglas Campbell. Interview. Taped August 17, 1992.

¹⁹ Ibid.

William Needles. Interview. Taped September 3, 1992.

²⁰ Hoffman, James. "Sydney Risk and the Everyman Theatre." B.C. Studies. 76 (Winter 1987-88) : 40.

²¹ "They Took To The Woods To Rehearse A Play." Weekend Magazine. 4 (November 1954). Cutting in possession of Robin Patterson.

²² Ann Campbell. Transcript of taped interview. October 1986. In possession of Robin Patterson. Toronto.

Douglas Campbell. Transcript of taped interview. September 20, 1986. In possession of Robin Patterson. Toronto.

Roland Hewgill. Interview. Taped August 22, 1992.

²³ Florence Pelton Patterson. Manuscript.

- ²⁴ Robertson Davies. Report to the Massey Commission. 1951.
- ²⁵ Florence Pelton Patterson. Manuscript.
- ²⁶ Columbo Conference. Commonwealth Trade Conference. 1954.
- ²⁷ Tom Patterson. First stage : 216.
- ²⁸ Ainslie Kerr. Ottawa Journal (October 5, 1954).
- ²⁹ Herbert Whittaker. Globe and Mail (October 6, 1954).
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Tom Patterson. First Stage : 216.
- ³³ Ibid. : 217.
- ³⁴ Robin Patterson. Transcript from interview tape.
- ³⁵ Robin Patterson. Taped Interview. August 27 1992.
- ³⁶ Renfrew newspaper. Untitled. Undated. Newspaper cutting in Norman Freeman's scrapbook in Stratford Shakespearean Festival Archives.
- ³⁷ Tom Patterson. First Stage : 217.
- ³⁸ Robin Patterson. Transcript from taped interview.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Robin Patterson. "My 85,000 miles with the Canadian Players. Mayfair (1958).
- ⁴¹ Robin Patterson. Transcript from interview tape.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ David Burke. London Free Press (November 5, 1954).
- ⁴⁴ Ann Campbell. Transcript of interview tape. October 1986.
Robin Patterson. Transcript of interview tape.
- ⁴⁵ Ann Campbell. Transcript from interview tape. October 1986.

- ⁴⁶ Herbert Whittaker. Theatre critic of the Globe and Mail Toronto. Originally from Montreal.
- ⁴⁷ Lotta Dempsey. In 1954 a columnist for Toronto Telegram. Originally from Stratford and at this time still very conscious of the Stratford scene.
- ⁴⁸ Floyd Chalmers. President of MacLean-Hunter Publications. Well known as a supporter of the Arts, particularly Theatre.
- ⁴⁹ Robin Patterson. Letters to Tom Patterson. December, 1954.
- ⁵⁰ Who's Who in Canada (1954).
- ⁵¹ Robin Patterson. Transcript from taped interview.
- ⁵² Ibid.
- ⁵³ Robin Patterson. Letters to Tom Patterson. December, 1954. In possession of Robin Patterson, Toronto.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid.
- ⁵⁷ Barbara Reid. Stratford journalist who worked in the publicity office of the Stratford Shakespearean Festival. in its first years. She later worked for the Stratford Beacon- Herald.
- ⁵⁸ Robin Patterson. Interview tape, August 27, 1992.
- ⁵⁹ Robin Patterson, Transcript from taped interview.
- ⁶⁰ Robin Patterson. Letter to Tom Patterson. December 1954.
- ⁶¹ Robin Patterson. Transcript from taped interview.
- ⁶² Robin Patterson. Letter to Tom Patterson December 1954.
- ⁶³ Robin Patterson Letters to Tom Patterson.
- ⁶⁴ Robin Patterson Transcript from taped interview.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Northland Post. Thursday, December 9, 1954.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Robin Patterson Transcript from taped interview.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Florence Pelton Patterson. Manuscript.

⁷⁴ Robin Patterson Transcript from taped interview.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Tony Van Bridge. Manuscript. In possession of Tony Van Bridge. Toronto.

⁷⁸ Ann Campbell. Transcript from taped interview. October, 1986.

⁷⁹ Garebian : 110, 111.

⁸⁰ Norman Freeman. Manuscript Notebook. Stratford Festival Archives.

Freeman is at fault here. The reporter was Tania Long of the New York Times. His notebook also has an illegible first name for Daniels, whom he thought was possibly from MacLeans.

⁸¹ Tony Van Bridge. Manuscript.

⁸² Ann Campbell. Transcript from tape. October 1986.

⁸³ William Hutt. Letter to Herbert Whittaker. "Showbusiness" Globe and Mail. January 16th, 1955.

⁸⁴ Tania Long. New York Times. January 7, 1955.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Peter Dunlop. Toronto Telegram. January 7, 1955.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Grace Byatt Shaw. "Douglas Campbell" in Stratford Under Cover (Toronto : NC Press, 1977) : 120.

⁸⁹ Peter Gzowski. The Private Voice. (Toronto : McClelland and Stewart, 1988) : 81.

⁹⁰ Bill Botwright. "Memorable Performance Given By Shaw Players". Untitled. Undates. Newspaper cutting in Freeman's scrapbook.

⁹¹ Northern Daily News Kirkland Lake. January 18, 1955.

⁹² Ibid. January 10, 1955.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Robin Patterson. Transcript from taped interview.

⁹⁵ Tom Patterson. First Stage : 218.

⁹⁶ J.Burke Martin. The London Free Press. January 10. 1955.

⁹⁷ Joe Hayes. The Corning Leader. February 3, 1955.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Robin Patterson. Transcript from taped interview.

Tom Patterson. First Stage : 218.

¹⁰⁰ Robin Patterson. Transcript from taped interview.

Tom Patterson. First Stage : 218.

Chapter 2 The Second Year. Going West.

Much of the success of the first season of the Canadian Players was due to Patterson and Crosby's advance publicity and their ability to co-opt private citizens to sell the Players locally. In the States it was largely achieved by the advertizing and booking of their agent, Elwood Emerick. The standard of production was the other element in the success formula.

Early in 1955 Tom Patterson retired, due to ill health, Robin Patterson assumed the presidency of the company, and Lady Eaton became the patron. In a letter to Robin Patterson, Lady Eaton wrote:

I am, as you know, most interested in development of Canadian Theatre, and I am anxious that such an excellent troupe should have the support of people from coast to coast, so that theatre may become well known, not only in the big cities and towns but in the smaller towns and villages throughout Canada. The performances you have already given in the North and East showed the desire there is on the part of Canadians for real theatre and should augur well for the eventual great success of the company.¹

Working on Campbell's theory that actors should take theatre to the people, Campbell and the other members of the company's management decided that two plays should be mounted for the 1955-56 season, Saint Joan and Macbeth, and that the territory should be extended to the West Coast. While the actors were still touring the north and the eastern United States, Patterson, armed with a TransCanada railway timetable and map, listed all the towns with a population of over 500 between Stratford and Victoria. She and Crosby wrote to each of these communities setting out their proposal that the Canadian Players should bring Macbeth and/or Saint Joan to their community in the following winter touring season. With the replies and a list of non-respondents, the intrepid pair set out by car to follow an itinerary from Stratford to Vancouver Island.²

This booking tour had to be made in the early spring, in spite of the unpredictable weather, in order to find local businessmen in residence - by late spring and summer they were away or uninterested in winter pursuits.³ As they had done in Northern Ontario, Patterson and Crosby tried to contact local service club representatives, but with no helpful introductions by Colonel Reynolds, this was more difficult. Lady Eaton gave them introductions to the local Eaton's store managers across the country, friends sent introductions to friends, but the west was not easily won. The local newspaper and radio staff were usually the most helpful in locating people who might be interested in sponsoring the Players.⁴ The publicity aids distributed to the prospective sponsors were the same style of press kits previously used in the North, with the addition of Jack Hutt's form. This was a form for the sponsors to fill in the dimensions and size of their stage and auditorium, and was sent back to the office in Stratford for the house and stage managers' use on tour. In addition, Patterson carried round with her a scrapbook full of press photographs and reviews of the previous season, which she showed at sponsorship meetings.⁵

With the TransCanada Highway yet unbuilt, and the unpredictable spring weather, the publicity journey to the West was a hazardous undertaking. Robin Patterson's letters to Tom Patterson describe some of these drives through prairie blizzards and floods. To reach such places as Le Pas and Flin Flon, the women went by plane, sometimes to find that the return flight was cancelled by wind storms and the return journey had to be made by drafty, unheated taxi, over boneshakingly bumpy roads. To rouse enthusiasm in bored businessmen after such journeys was a Herculean task. Small wonder that the enthusiasm sometimes flagged when Patterson and Crosby were out of the public eye.⁶ Sometimes the local Eaton's managers were uninterested and only went through the motions of assisting because they were expected to by head office. One

manager was stricken with an attack of conscience and found an excellent auditorium for the Players. Elsewhere the luck varied. At one meeting of bored service club executives a man who had been yawning in a corner stood up and harangued the club into doing something for the good of the community, instead of profit for the service club. He carried the meeting, but was afterwards heard to say, "I'd like to see my wife drag me to that long-haired stuff." In Portage La Prairie Patterson read in the local paper of a young minister who had won a scholarship to Harvard, and by contacting him managed to find an enthusiastic group of sponsors who knew about the Stratford Shakespearean Festival and were keen to have the Players perform in their remote town. In some places it was the women's clubs that sponsored the Players. Despite Lady Eaton's patronage, the I.O.D.E. were not helpful, but the Women's University Clubs and the Quota clubs, whose membership usually comprised working women, were very keen to bring good live theatre to their communities, often taking up the sponsorship where the men's clubs had haggled themselves out of competition. In Prince Albert, while the women awaited a decision from a men's committee arguing in a hotel bar, Patterson contacted the priest at the local penitentiary, where the Players' performance was welcome. In Saskatoon, university professors greeted their friends of the previous summer in Stratford, with open arms and open doors. The premier of the province also met them there, gave them his support, and, like Colonel Reynolds, telephoned friends in the province who were ready to welcome the Players' representatives when they arrived.⁹

The response of the Little Theatres was mixed. Some were very keen that their members have the opportunity to see good professional theatre. Others, possibly felt threatened. One Little Theatre lady remarked to Patterson, "The purpose of our group is to promote local talent."⁹ In Moose Jaw, Tania Long, of the New York Times, who had been with the company in Moosonee and New

York, had visited the managing editor of the local paper and praised the work of the company and warned him of the advent of the banns. Once again they were assured of a friendly welcome.¹⁰ From here on westwards, they were heralded by friends and were received very cordially. Having worked their way out to Victoria Patterson and Crosby returned to Stratford via the Lakehead and the friendly towns of the previous season's tour.

Commenting on their eleven week 10,500 mile trip, Patterson said that the west's response to the Canadian Players' proposed tour of western Canada couldn't have been more heartwarming. She cited the literary societies and arts councils who had co-operated to finance the Players' appearance in small auditoriums. She also noted that invitations to play for extended runs had to be refused, due to lack of time. This lack of time also prevented the company's appearing in all the towns which had requested an appearance.¹¹ The now established formula for engendering enthusiasm for live drama and co-opting local citizens' groups to guarantee the houses had proved itself again.

While Patterson and Crosby were storming their way across Canada Emerick was busy in the States. He booked the Canadian Players on a tour of the New England states and an appearance in Washington, D.C., before the western tour, which was to be followed by engagements in the midwest, prior to the company's completing its tour in northern Ontario.¹²

Saint Joan and Macbeth

In September 1955 the actors again retreated to Camp Gay Venture to rehearse. Campbell led the company and directed both plays, Saint Joan and Macbeth. Of the original players Douglas Campbell, Roland Hewgill, William Hutt, John Gardiner and Jack Hutt remained, as did Norman Freeman, the house and company manager. Ann Casson retired from the troupe as she was expecting her fourth child, who was born in October. The new members of the company were Frances Hyland, Amelia Hall, Margot Blavey, Ted Follows, George McCowan, Bob Gibson and John Horton. Frances Hyland was to play Saint Joan, Lady Macbeth and second witch. A native of Regina, where her mother was a high school teacher, Hyland had won a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, in England, from the Dominion Drama Festival. She was beginning to make a name for herself in England when Tyrone Guthrie invited her to Stratford to play Isabella to James Mason's Angelo in Measure for Measure in 1954. Rather than return to England after the Stratford season, she had spent the winter at the Crest in Toronto, in preference to the prospect of a long stint of playing ingenues in England. Campbell's offer of the 1955-56 tour was too good to turn down. It would mean that the 26-year old Canadian actress would return to her native Regina as leading lady in the roles of Lady Macbeth and Saint Joan.¹³

Amelia Hall, that great lady of the Canadian stage was cast as Lady MacDuff, first witch and a gentlewoman. Hall found touring arduous and uncomfortable, as she was particular about her lodgings and her diet, but she had a great sense of dedication to a professional theatre in Canada, and went on tour as on a mission. She was intensely critical of her own performance, always striving to improve it, and very sensitive to audience reaction, feeling the warmth or disinterest of the house throughout the performance.¹⁴ William Hutt was

Macbeth, his first opportunity to attempt this demanding role. This was what Canadian Players was about. Young, promising actors were challenged with demanding and difficult roles. Campbell had great faith in his young actors and was theatrically brave enough to take a chance on their success. His faith was justified in Hutt who went on to play leading Shakespearean roles with much acclaim, ultimately becoming well known internationally.¹⁵ Ted Follows joined the company to play Ross and the first murderer. Follows, as a very young actor, had been on tour with Risk's Everyman company, and knew what he was letting himself in for. He had just completed his first season at Stratford. George McCowan joined the Players from the newly formed Crest Theatre company in Toronto. He was a young Canadian who wanted to expand his potential. He knew the acting experience would be excellent, but he already aspired to being a director. By joining the Canadian Players he was able to watch a first class director at work as well as having the opportunity to work under that tuition, while at the same time broadening his scope as an actor. John Horton, Margot Blavey and Bob Gibson were young members of the 1955 Stratford Festival company who had just completed their first season there.

Camp life with its shared chores and wilderness environment helped the members of the company get to know one another quickly. Although the rehearsal time was short, it was very concentrated, and with few extraneous distractions there was opportunity for discussion and exchange of ideas after rehearsals were over. The actors were melded into a company before they took on the rest of Canada and the States.

Lady Eaton, as president of the company came to visit "her" players in their backwoods retreat. Arriving in a silk shirt and jodhpurs, she spent a day and a night in camp with the actors and their families, watched a rehearsal and enjoyed herself immensely. After this visit to "her" company she invited a

number of Canadians in various parts of the country to act as patrons of the company on the forthcoming tour.¹⁶ Both productions were mounted in the simple and uncluttered style of the previous season, the only difference being that some indication of costume was added for Macbeth in the form of short tunics over dark trousers and swirling hooded cloaks. These were designed by a young Canadian, Clarence Wilson, who had spent the summer in Stratford working under the tutelage of Tanya Moisiewitsch.¹⁷ This was his first production, but other work was beginning to appear for young Canadian designers in Canada. Where the Players employed Canadian talent others followed in their footsteps.

Follows has said that Macbeth did not work as well as Saint Joan because it was more difficult to differentiate between the characters in Macbeth than it was in Saint Joan, and the audience tended to become confused as to who was who, particularly in the final scene.¹⁸ David Dunsmuir, after seeing the production in Toronto wrote, "Macbeth does not come off with the unqualified success that marked last year's "Saint Joan".¹⁹ He attributes this discrepancy to the difference in the two plays. Macbeth is "a dynamic study in terror" and "physically active and intellectually fairly static, in direct contrast to the Shaw play."²⁰ Other reviewers, particularly Herbert Whittaker, of the Globe and Mail thought the differentiation of the character presented no difficulty, as will be seen in reviews of the tour.

At the beginning of October the company set off on its 1955-56 tour in its new bus. The advantage of this mode of travel was that the whole company and all their paraphernalia were under one mobile roof. The bus had the rear seats removed and a rail slung athwart the empty space, on which the costumes were hung. The screens, lights lighting board and stands were packed underneath,

and the actors' personal baggage was stowed in the luggage bins.²¹ The initial cost of the bus was provided by Lady Eaton.²²

The tour opened on October 4, 1955 with Macbeth, in the Simcoe High School auditorium. In spite of extraneous noises and the back screens being held up by a sweating Macbeth,²³ the play was a great success. One enthusiastic high school student is quoted as saying, "Isn't it wonderful how you can see their faces. It's just as good as television!"²⁴ Herbert Whittaker called the production:

A vigorous and exciting Macbeth, a worthy successor to their history-making Saint Joan. With William Hutt reaching new heights in the title role, the players are presenting an interpretation of the Shakespearean tragedy which bears the bold stamp of their director, Douglas Campbell, and stands further witness to his present value to our theatre. ... It throws emphasis back where it belongs, on the actor and the spoken word. ... These Canadian Players as we well know are not afraid to speak the word clearly and loudly...they give full value to the great lines.²⁵

After describing the platform production, he goes on to say, "He does not limit himself to shirt and trousers of the earlier production but has given his actors indicative costumes, tunics vaguely suggesting the Elizabethan, dark trousers and ample cloaks to add swirl and action to the scene...though the backing is as before, plain curtained, there are a few platforms to add variety. The staging is designed to push forward the action of a strong interpretation."²⁶ Of the cast he said, "They are bent on pushing the play forward, not in relishing individual performances. The team spirit evolving is startling and one senses the strong generalship of Mr. Campbell in this too." He found Hutt's Macbeth, who loses his reason early in the play, "Hamlet-like, weak and vacillating." He found Hutt less successful in the first act, but as the play progressed, "Sweeps us along with its mad terrors as the evening draws to its disasterful (sic) close."²⁷ For Whittaker, Macbeth was well served by Macduff's strength and Frances Hyland's Lady Macbeth, small and "very feminine, [who] urges her husband without

dominating him. ... When madness seizes her husband she is left a lonely and afflicted creature."²⁸ For Whittaker the supporting roles were well realized and, in spite of the doubling and trebling of roles, there was no confusion as to who was who. He concluded his long review, "This small company carries a tremendous load, but it is a stalwart company to represent our theatre through the United States and across the western provinces."²⁹

In a later article, written after the company had played in Toronto on its way south to the United States, Whittaker commented on the "terrific impact" that this spare production of Macbeth made. He felt that what was lost in introspection was gained in excitement by Hutt's ravings being belted out in full voice. While he thought that these would be somewhat modified during the run of the play, he justified them by saying, "If you are going barnstorming, as the Canadian Players are, then you must storm your barns and win your citadels lost since the stage's polite conversational tones were drowned out by the first barking of the talking pictures and the first whoopings of the radio." He wished the company every success on its "heroic tour" and concluded the article by saying, "Mr. Campbell and his company are blasting [sic] a Western trail for our theatre which I hope others will be able to follow soon. But these will be remembered as the first who dared."³⁰ Whittaker was always supportive of the Canadian Players and did his best to give them any publicity he could. This is not to say that he was not critical; he had too much professional integrity not to criticize adversely where this was justified. His retrospective comment on the Players' productions was that the early ones were of a good professional standard, but in later years the quality of the work varied.³¹

David Dunsmuir, of the Stratford Beacon Herald also saw this Macbeth in Simcoe and commented that William Hutt and Frances Hyland both deserved applause for the originality they brought to their roles.

Macbeth a speculative and sensitive man, his mind early weakened by his being prodded into action, and Lady Macbeth...unthinking little fliberty-gibbet who let herself in for more than she had bargained for. ...This viewpoint of characters lent added pace to the action, but it deprived them of any tragic grandeur. Apart, that is, from the sleepwalking scene, in which Lady Macbeth, frail figure on the stage, finally admits to herself the weight of guilt that she cannot contemplate in her waking hours. Foremost among the rest of the cast were Douglas Campbell as stolid Macduff, setting Scotland free from a tyrant, with alarming gusto, and Ted Follows, human and sympathetic as Ross and dangerously chirpy [sic] as the first murderer. Other cast members contrived to be on all parts of the stage at once, being all sorts of people simultaneously, yet they seldom left the audience wondering who was who at any one moment. George MacCowan, well known to Toronto theatergoers played freezingly righteous Banquo with bristling conviction.

Macbeth is a rewarding experience, and even a stimulating one. When it come to Stratford, local residents will see that there is more than one way of refurbishing the Bard in Canada today.³²

Dunsmuir contradicts himself in his later review of the Toronto performance, quoted earlier, in saying that the double and triple role playing confused the audience. Few reviews make this comment; most find the delineation of character quite clear.

Going south from Toronto the company crossed into the United States, where they received rave reviews for both productions. In Burlington, Vermont, where they performed in the university, a professor said, "For my part the Canadian Players are not the least bit overrated. A group of extremely talented artists from stars to supporting actors, their performance last year on tour excited everyone, including the conservative New York critics. Douglas Campbell is an artistic workman whose originality and experience add tremendously to the scope of all the Players' productions." ³³ The Vermont paper called the productions, "vigorous drama" and the company. "One of the ablest acting companies on the continent." ³⁴

By the end of the Eastern Seaboard tour, on November 22, 1955, the company had been as far south as Lexington, Kentucky, and played in such major cities as Washington, D.C., Rochester, Buffalo, Cincinnati, and Cleveland.

In Lexington a crowd of 13,000 saw one production.³⁵ The theatre trade paper, Variety, commented on the tour, "A superb production."³⁶ For the first week of December the company played Toronto's Crest Theatre, giving Toronto audiences a chance to see what the only Canadian touring company was doing, before taking a well earned Christmas break which MacCowan and Hyland celebrated with their marriage.

New Year 1956.

During the Christmas holiday some cast changes were made. William Hutt left the company to become part of Tyrone Guthrie's production of Tamburlaine The Great as did Ted Follows. They were replaced in the Players by Bruno Gerussi, who had been a member of the 1954 company, and Max Helpmann. Helpmann was an Australian. A member of the Old Vic company in 1939, he spent the war years in the Royal Navy, and returned to the Old Vic on demobilization. He emigrated to Canada and joined the Crest company in Toronto. In January 1956 he joined his old friend Campbell for the western tour of Canada and the U.S. middle west. The company started the new year rehearsing in Toronto. Campbell took over the role of Macbeth, and Helpmann and Gerussi the other roles left by Hutt and Follows in Saint Joan and Macbeth. During this period a virus invaded the company, but rehearsals were not impeded to any great extent and most patients recovered quickly, so that the company set off on their long two months western tour on schedule.

Their reception was unexpectedly enthusiastic. In almost every town they visited they were feted and treated to almost full houses.³⁷ In Brandon, Manitoba, the local paper wrote about the touring company's economical use of both actors and staging, saying, "Under the direction of Douglas Campbell, scenery was reduced to the contemporary minimum of Shakepeare's day and the cast doubled and trebled roles in realistic consideration of costs. Without this coat-cut-to-cloth, Western Canadian audiences would never see good theatre performed by top professionals."³⁸ The writer goes on to point out that all seven of the town's service clubs had co-operated to bring the company to Brandon and that the successful selling out of seats had been a combined civic operation which had cost very little effort to any one person or club. As in

Northern Ontario, the Canadian Players were uniting the local citizens into collaborators with the performing arts.

In Winnipeg, Tom Hendry recalls that he had just finished stage managing a Winnipeg Little Theatre production in which several things had gone wrong when the Canadian Players arrived. With no fuss at all, they put on two highly professional shows, which ran smoothly and efficiently. He was so impressed that he immediately resolved to join a professional company. If a travelling company, doing one night stands of two shows, could put on such polished and well run productions then he must learn to do it too.³⁹ Hendry at this time was an accountant and an amateur actor and stage manager. He became co-founder with John Hirsch of the Manitoba Theatre Centre.

From Swift Current the company took the train to Vancouver, where Joy Coghill remembers the immense sense of dedication which was evident in all members of the company, and the tremendous respect in which Campbell was held by the company members. She was introduced to Campbell by her friend Gerussi as an experience she must not miss. For Gerussi it was Campbell who made and held the company together.⁴⁰ It was also Campbell who quelled a noisy Edmonton high school audience by striding to the front of the stage and saying, "Please little boys and girls, we're trying to do a play and you're expected to use your imagination. It makes it difficult for us and you are getting nothing from it. Now we'll start that scene again." The play proceeded to a quiet house which gave the actors an enthusiastic standing ovation at the end of the performance.⁴¹

Invited by the Ministry of Defence to entertain the armed forces base at Cold Lake, the company was flown in from Edmonton by an RCAF plane. On arrival the pilot found the runway blocked by a snow drift, over which he had to leap frog his plane. The hospitality and comfortable accommodation of the officers'

mess compensated for the terrifying approach, as did the appreciation shown by the personnel of the base.⁴²

Hyland, who thought she was suffering from the virus of the rehearsal period, found that she was pregnant. Although the audiences might accept a pregnant Lady Macbeth, but not an enceinte Saint Joan, Hyland was finding the daily long bus journeys and demanding playing schedule too much for her.⁴³ In the Stratford office Pelton endeavoured to find an actress to replace Hyland. Initially Norma Renault joined the tour to play Saint Joan, while Pelton invited Kate Reid to take over both roles. After some delay Reid refused the invitation, and in desperation, Casson, whose son Ben was only four months old was asked to come to the Players' rescue as Lady Macbeth. Within a week, still learning her lines, Casson was on the plane to Regina. Home again, Hyland thankfully retired, and Casson and Renault carried on the tour.⁴⁴

From Swift Current and Estevan, the company turned south into the United States, playing Muncie on February 29, 1956, and then worked its way eastwards to Fargo, North Dakota,⁴⁵ whence it made for the Lakehead and back into Canada, at Fort William, where it played to a packed house.⁴⁶ The northern Ontario towns, many of which had been hosts to the Players on their first tour, had booked only Macbeth. Lady Macbeth was now taken over by Barbara Chilcot, sister of the Davies brothers of the Crest Theatre, and an actress familiar with most of the company, as she had been part of the Festival company in the previous summer of 1955.

In Sault Sainte Marie, a new town on the circuit, an editorial expressed the wish that some philanthropist would provide the city with this sort of cultural entertainment on a regular basis. This editor, though somewhat critical, found the production "A superb Macbeth" and insisted that his criticism did not detract from the "stature of an excellent and enjoyable play."⁴⁷ The Owen Sound Sun-

Times commented on the fact that all walks of life in Owen Sound were represented in the capacity audience at the Collegiate Vocational Institute, and that everyone enjoyed the performance. The reviewer also looked forward to a return visit of the company who were then on their way to play Macbeth in Renfrew," where they had previously had such a small but enthusiastic audience, and then to Timmins for two nights, a town which had given them two full houses on the last year's visit, and on through northern Ontario mining and lumber towns as far as Espanola, the last call on the itinerary, before returning to Stratford on April 22, 1956," in time to celebrate Shakespeare's birthday the next day.

Commenting on the western tour, Laurel Crosby said that the success of the tour had been "past our wildest expectations," and "unbelievably good."⁵⁰ A press release put out by the Canadian Players office stated that on the western tour at "38 performances there were 38,415 subscribers, giving the West a total of ninety eight percent houses,"⁵¹ surely success beyond their wildest dreams and worth all the hazardous driving through blizzards, ice, and spring floods, and the wearisome cajoling of apathetic meetings. The Canadian Players had taken good live theatre to at least half their own country, and to the eastern seaboard and middle west states of America. It remained for them to invade the Province of Quebec, the Maritimes and Newfoundland.

¹ Stratford Beacon Herald Undated. Newspaper cutting in Norman Freeman's scrapbook.

² Laurel Crosby. Interview tape. August 27, 1992.

³ Robin Patterson. Interview tape. August 27, 1992.

⁴ Robin Patterson and Laurel Crosby. Interview tape. August 27, 1992.

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- ⁵ There is a collection of Robin Patterson's scrapbooks, from 1954-65 in The Toronto Reference Library, Theatre Department. As these volumes are very fragile there are now photocopies here for public use.
- ⁶ Robin Patterson. Letters to Tom Patterson. April 1955.
- ⁷ Robin Patterson. Letter to Tom Patterson. April 22, 1955.
- ⁸ Robin Patterson. Letters to Tom Patterson. April 1955.
- ⁹ Robin Patterson. Letter to Tom Patterson. April 25th, 1955.
- ¹⁰ Robin Patterson. Letter to Tom Patterson. April 1955.
- ¹¹ Beacon Herald. Stratford. June 25, 1955. Newspaper cutting in Norman Freeman's scrapbook.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ken Johnson. "Canadian Players" Mayfair. February 1956.
- ¹⁴ Amelia Hall. Diaries. National Archives of Canada, Ottawa.
- ¹⁵ Garebian.
- ¹⁶ Lotta Dempsey. Untitled. Newspaper cutting in Norman Freeman's scrapbook.
- ¹⁷ Tanya Moisiewitsch. An internationally recognised stage and costume designer. Designer of the Stratford Shakespearean Festival stage. Designer of many theatre and opera productions. Production designer at Stratford, 1954-55-56 and many years following. Honorary Director of the Stratford Shakespearean Festival.
- ¹⁸ Ted Follows. Interview tape. August 29, 1992.
- ¹⁹ David Dunsmuir. The Beacon Herald. Stratford. October 20, 1955.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Mervyn Blake. Interview tape. July 24 1992.

- ²² Report to the annual general meeting of Canadian Players, 1956. In possession of Robin Patterson.
- ²³ Jock Carroll. "Players from the famous Ontario festival are touring Canada and the United States" Weekend Magazine 6, no.1 (1956).
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Herbert Whittaker. Globe and Mail. October 5, 1955.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Herbert Whittaker. "Show Business" Globe and Mail. October 6th, 1955.
- ³¹ Herbert Whittaker. Interview tape. June 23. 1992.
- ³² David Dunsmuir. The Beacon Herald. Stratford. October 11th, 1955.
- ³³ Untitled. Undated. Newspaper cutting about Burlington University, Vermont. In Norman Freeman's scrapbook.
- ³⁴ The Vermont Daily News. Quoted in Weekend Magazine 6, no.1(1956).
- ³⁵ Untitled article dated June 25th 1956, in Norman Freeman's scrapbook. The article pertains to a visit to the Stratford Shakespearean Festival by a group of university students from Lexington.
- ³⁶ "Variety". Quoted by Jock Carroll. Weekend Magazine 6, no.1, 1956.
- ³⁷ Press release no.2. Canadian Players. Stratford. April 20, 1956. In possession of Robin Patterson.
- ³⁸ The Brandon Sun. Undated. Newspaper cutting in Norman Freeman's scrapbook.
- ³⁹ Tom Hendry. Interview tape. August 20, 1992.
- ⁴⁰ Joy Coghill. Telephone conversation. October 1992.

- ⁴¹ Untitled. Undated. Newspaper cutting in Norman Freeman's scrapbook .
- ⁴² Ted Follows. Interview tape. August 29, 1992.
- ⁴³ Florence Pelton Patterson. Manuscript.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Canadian PLayers Itinerary for 1955-56. Possession of Robin Patterson.
- ⁴⁶ Times Journal. Fort William. Reprinted in Beacon Herald Stratford. April 19, 1956.
- ⁴⁷ Star. Sault Ste Marie. Reprinted in Beacon Herald. Stratford. April 9, 1956.
- ⁴⁸ Sun-Times Owen Sound. Undated cutting in Norman Freeman's scrapbook.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ Untitled. Undated. Newspaper cutting in Norman Freeman's scrapbook.
- ⁵¹ Canadian Players press release. April 20, 1956. In possession of Robin Patterson.

Chapter 3 The Third Year.

The Canadian Players press release put out in June 1956 announced that there would be two companies of Canadian Players in the next season.¹ The plays to be performed by the first company would be Hamlet and Ibsen's Peer Gynt, and by the second company, Othello and Shaw's Man and Superman. The tours would range from Sydney, Nova Scotia to Victoria, B.C. and from Flin Flon to Salt Lake City. The continent would be crossed from East to West and North to South. This was an immense undertaking, but the success of the Western tour refuted the doom mongers who had predicted that the company would find itself bankrupt and stranded in some remote prairie town, and the enthusiasm with which the advance publicity envoys were greeted in the Maritimes augured well for the eastern tour. Again, the doubters had warned Patterson and Crosby that they were mad to suppose that the Maritimes would have any interest in any made-in-Upper Canada theatre. How wrong they were. The Canadian Players were welcomed and played in all the provinces as a Canadian company, not as emissaries from another region.

While the acting company had been storming its way through the west, in the winter and spring of 1956, the public relations team had turned east, and contacted citizens groups through Quebec and the Maritime provinces. This tour was not as arduous for the advance publicity representatives as the previous year's western tour had been. For one thing, the inter-city distances were not as great, and for another, the name of the Stratford Shakespearean Festival was more widely known. The local newspapers co-operated in spreading the word of the advent of the Players from the famous Stratford Festival, and by their coverage of the visits of the Players' advance booking agents helped to ensure their welcome. By now, the name of Tom Patterson was beginning to be recognized by anyone in Canada who had any interest in

theatre or in civic development. When Patterson and Crosby arrived in Halifax, in a blinding snowstorm, they were greeted by citizens anxious to meet the wife of the founder of the renowned Festival, who wanted to bring some part of the nationally acknowledged theatre to their city. More people in the provinces had been to the Stratford theatre, and so the initial work of introducing the local people to the aims and objects of the Players company was less difficult, and they had little difficulty in selling the tour. The women had also become more experienced in dealing with indifferent or hard-to-convince committees. In Bridgewater, where they encountered some apathy from the men's and women's organizations, they threatened to erase the town's name from the Players' itinerary. The effect was dramatic. The local Home and School Board president made sure that Bridgewater pupils would not be deprived of an opportunity to experience Hamlet professionally performed.²

Reporting on the success of the eastern booking tour to Lady Eaton, Patterson wrote:

We have had a wonderful reception here in the Maritimes. We had arranged thirteen dates in Nova Scotia. The one date I think which pleases us the most is in a French area; in a boys' French Classics school and college. It will be the first English classic that any of these or the surrounding countryside will have seen. We have arranged dates at Halifax, Bridgewater, Liverpool, Yarmouth, Church Point, Annapolis Royal, Wolfville, Windsor, Truro, Antigonish, Sydney, New Glasgow, Amherst, in Nova Scotia and Charlottetown and Summerside in Prince Edward Island.³

Patterson, dedicated as she was to Canadian theatre, had suggested that the Players should perform L'Escarbot's masque of Theatre de Neptune en la Nouvelle France as part of the 1956 repertoire, to celebrate the three hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the first recognized live theatre performance in Canada.⁴ This play was not included in the Players' programme (why it was omitted is not known), but the suggestion did indicate that already the company management was looking for Canadian plays to perform.

Having returned to Stratford via New Brunswick, Quebec, and the friendly towns of northern Ontario, Patterson and Crosby again set off to the west to book engagements for the second company.

For the two tours there was no shortage of actors, even though the Stratford Shakespearean Festival company was to accept the invitation of the Edinburgh Festival to take Henry V to Scotland at the end of the 1956 Stratford season. The Shakespeare company would be back in Canada before the end of September. Campbell now had a number of competent actors who would be prepared to go on a six month tour and there were several younger actors looking forward to the opportunity of joining the company. Except for playing at the Stratford Festival, most Canadian actors had little opportunity to play a part for more than a week or two. In the Players there was the opportunity to develop a role, since the actor would probably play it for six months. He also had the challenge of keeping the performance fresh and lively, during the long season with all its hardships and weariness, and boredom with long bus trips.

The present problem was to find directors. When he returned from Edinburgh Campbell was going to direct Peer Gynt. The second tour to the West was not due to open until the New Year, so Campbell would be able to direct Othello and Man and Superman. This left Hamlet without a director, as it would be physically impossible for Campbell to direct two plays and have them ready for the road in the three weeks between returning from Edinburgh and the opening date in October in Simcoe.⁵ Once again Campbell's courage and his faith in his young associates solved the problem. George McCowan would direct Hamlet and William Hutt would play Hamlet.

The principle of the barebones stage was to be adhered to, though some costume innovations would be incorporated, giving another young designer the opportunity to try her hand in the unusual designs for Hamlet.⁶ While the

company would wear basic rehearsal costumes in Peer Gynt, jeans for the men and dirndl skirts for the women, changes for some scenes would be the addition of minor accessories. The Hamlet costumes, which would be worn over the basic costume were "half costumes," designed to "indicate both sides of the wearer's personality".⁷ (Illustration appendix II, III).

Peer Gynt was performed in unadorned rehearsal clothes. The stage properties consisted of two step ladders and a plank. The Troll king held court from the plank spanning the two ladders, which later served as the ship's deck in the storm scene. Peer scaled the mountain by way of a ladder, and the final scene dissolved into darkness on a bare stage as Peer peeled his onion to its empty core.

Peer Gynt is a demanding part, encompassing a long and varied life, full of Peer's encounters with the natural and supernatural. Ibsen's Everyman requires the utmost from an actor. The young Gerussi played the part with great understanding and fidelity, growing old convincingly and sustaining the character throughout the many scenes.

To some audience members this stark production was moving and disturbing, and aroused admiration for Gerussi's tour de force, but for the more literal minded it had moments of the ridiculous, as one recently emigrated scientifically minded man was to remember his first introduction to Canadian theatre as "that laughable scene of Peer Gynt staggering up a step ladder pretending it was a mountain".⁸

Peter Mellors commented on the sparse stage dressing, "Happily we are back to relative sanity. Producers are coming round to the belief that the playwright's intentions are important. But even in these happier days the bare boards style of production is still rare. ..The Canadian Players are leading the way back to true sanity. The play's the thing for them." He goes on to point out that "the

Canadian Players did not choose their style of production arbitrarily. ...They had no choice. You have to travel light when your itinerary stretches from Halifax to Dallas, from Washington to Fort Worth." He goes on to describe the bareness of the stage and the actors' everyday clothes.¹⁰ Other reviews were full of admiration for Gerussi's *Peer Gynt*. Whittaker, writing in the Globe and Mail says of the production, "It centres round a performance by Bruno Gerussi which is a staggering creation. His *Peer Gynt* should put this young actor near the top of his profession in this country ... they [The Canadian Players] are building a masterpiece."¹¹

The Brantford Expositor thought that "a visit to the theatre may never be the same again for those who saw the exciting production of Peer Gynt by the Canadian Players. ...Bruno Gerussi put on a terrific performance."¹²

The autumn itinerary took the company as far south as Tennessee, whence it worked its way back into Canada, via Niagara Falls, and then east to Montreal where both Peer Gynt and Hamlet were performed for a week before the company disbanded for the Christmas break.¹³

On January 3, 1957, the Maritimes section of the tour was preceded with a performances in southern Ontario, where the previously apathetic London, Ontario, found Peer Gynt was .."likely to win laurels for this country's theatre movement, ...a personal triumph for Bruno Gerussi."¹⁴.

David Gardner's journal for the eastern tour records the variety of auditoriums in which the company acted, from the noisy high school gymnasium in Simcoe, to the vast university auditoriums in the United States, and the rare real theatres. In the Canadian Maritimes there was again a mix of gymnasiums, school auditoriums and theatres, the most unusual being in Sainte Anne's Catholic College, where the auditorium was built over a natural ice rink.¹⁵ As the temperature was hovering round the 0 degrees C mark, it was freezingly cold

and the audience was muffled in overcoats, earmuffs, scarves and mitts. The frigid temperature in the substage dressing rooms obviated their use, so that the actors had to dress and make up in the fathers' apartments and then proceed through the college and the audience to the stage. Once there, the only crossover was under the stage, across the ice. Barefooted Ophelia, watched her feet turn from blue to white and longed for her death when she could put on her snow boots again.¹⁶ This was also an unusual engagement in that the company was playing to a French-speaking audience, the majority of whom had not seen a live performance of an English classical play before.¹⁷

The reviews for Hamlet were very good. Opening the American section of the tour in Buffalo, in the vast echoing Kleinhans Music Hall, where voices carried for the actors and the audience sounds were reflected back to the stage, it was difficult for the distant audience to see the expressive faces of the actors.¹⁸ Ken Johnson wrote in his review:

For Hamlet, the Players could not have found a better actor among their ranks than William Hutt. This young actor has a most mobile face which he does not distort to excess but rather uses as a mirror of his thoughts. His Hamlet was indeed a tragic figure - not tragedian in the full-throated manner but a young man carried to a tragic end by his own impulses.

Frances Hyland was a pretty fragile Ophelia, all innocence and lovestruck, truly compelling in her mad scene.¹⁹

He found Horatio, David Gardner, a true friend, "staunchly loyal to Hamlet as a man" and not just a hanger-on at court, while he thought both Roland Hewgill and Deborah Cass too young for Claudius and Gertrude. Bruce Swerdfager's Polonius was convincingly "bumbling and gentle." Johnson thought Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were the "most boring characters in all literature," but that John Horton and Bruno Gerussi managed to make them amusing.

Some other reviewers of Hamlet said:

The production symbolizes the swift moving and energetic Canadian approach to Shakespeare. The Bard's words leap to life and memories of long boring hours in the schoolroom are forgotten.²⁰

William Hutt's Hamlet was an aural delight. This gifted actor has a magnificent range of tones.²¹

....a bold venture, often absorbingly eloquent, giving new meanings to ancient lines.²²

Herbert Whittaker found that there was "freshness and originality in the characterization."²³

For the winter and spring tour Deborah Turnbull replaced Frances Hyland as Ophelia. The Maritime towns greeted the Canadian Players with warmth and goodwill. This oldest part of Canada was overjoyed to see a professional touring company again after so long. Engagements in this area were out of the ordinary. The company played at the French-speaking Sainte Anne Catholic College, and at the Canadian Navy base, H.M.C.S. Cornwallis, where the Navy orchestra played before the curtain and during the intermission.

At Moncton, New Brunswick, Hamlet was so well received that the company was asked to stay another night and play Peer Gynt on the following evening. Although it was the company's night off, the actors pleased the warm hearted New Brunswickers by doing Peer Gynt in a makeshift hall, much to everyone's gratification, and the company were honoured with a reception and a lobster dinner as a token of the community's gratitude.²⁴

Crosby commented on the two productions, "These young Canadian actors, in a style which has become almost a Canadian tradition, present the two plays with a completely fresh approach. ...It has been said of Hamlet that they have taken the barnacles off the mid-Victorian methods of production, and the 20th century mood of Peer Gynt attracts and holds the audience's attention like a magnet."²⁵

From New Brunswick the tour took the Players through Quebec and Northern Ontario to the Lakehead, thence into the central United States and south to Alabama, before they returned home to Stratford.

Having rehearsed in Stratford, as the first company did, the second company opened its tour in Simcoe, with Man and Superman on January 7, 1957.²⁶ The cast included Campbell, who had directed both Man and Superman and Othello, the other play presented on this circuit, and his wife Ann Casson, Tony Van Bridge, Max Helpmann, Ted Follows, John Gardiner and Dawn Greenhalgh, with Jack Hutt as the stage manager. The itinerary took the Players through Ontario to the towns on the now established northern circuit before they took flight from Sudbury to Winnipeg, thus saving valuable time for the long western sortie, which entailed a peregrination to the western United States, to Sacramento, San Jose and Salt Lake City, before they played in British Columbia. From Vancouver Island their way led through the Rockies to Calgary and Edmonton, with another perilous flight to Cold Lake, before they could drive home to Stratford to catch their breath before starting rehearsals for the 1957 Shakespearean Festival season.

Herbert Whittaker "counted himself lucky" to have been in Kirkland Lake on the afternoon the Canadian Players performed Othello in the high school, to an audience which overflowed the seating into the aisles, in the gymnasium/auditorium.²⁷ In his lengthy review in the Toronto Globe and Mail he said that "The Canadian Players Othello is a fine one, full of drive and vigour, its piteous story, boldly outlined, its characters set forth in broad convincing style."²⁸ The staging was sparse, consisting of an arch and two steps, and Campbell had "devised stage business as inventive as that he did for Saint Joan and Peer Gynt."²⁹ In contrast he thought Martha Jamieson's costumes were "extraordinary and mannered," but effective, Othello being "opulently arrayed."³⁰

The performance opened with "pace and edge" so that "the student audience was caught from the first curtain, despite the unfamiliar language."³¹ Whittaker thought that Follows' Cassio "was one of the best" he had seen, "a gallant who recognized his weakness in drink, collapsed distressfully under it and fell from grace most piteously, to regain true stature by the end of the play. Here was a Cassio who could well succeed Othello's command." "Mr Helpmann's Iago was such a one as we have not seen equalled either. Blunt, soldierly, a big man with a turn for practical villainy, Mr. Helpmann made a powerful study of self-advancement." He was convincing in his insinuations which destroyed Othello's faith in Desdemona. Of Van Bridge's Othello he said, "Mr Van Bridge swept on to his deadly purpose. Emotion filled the theatre. Not a sound was heard, though I myself could scarce forbear to cry out when the Moor turned the dagger on himself." Desdemona was a "lovely figure" and Emilia "fiery." Campbell's production enchanted the audience in spite of the minor mishap of a sticking curtain, and the play running long past the time for the school buses to leave. The entranced students were content to face a long, cold hitch-hike home in sub zero weather. For Whittaker "it had been a memorable afternoon in the Northland, filled with the tale of the Moor betrayed and the audience conquered."³² It must have been a memorable day for many students at that school, and there must have been many more such afternoons and evenings which are not recorded.

Summing up the season Peter Mellors wrote that Peer Gynt had been the most successful of the Canadian Players' four productions. "Ibsen appealed to audiences more than Shakespeare and Shaw because his play is more suited to Canadian Players style of production. It suffers less from the absence of costume and sets than Hamlet, Othello and Man and Superman."³³ Mellors also commented that Campbell wanted to take more modern plays on tour. The

works of Shaw and Ibsen, in everyday language and dress were more acceptable to people unaccustomed to theatre than were plays about kings and princes who sometimes speak obscure blank verse. He also said that Campbell felt that the works of Wilder, Paul Claudel and Brecht would be "popular with Canadian Players intelligent yet unsophisticated audiences."³⁴

Mellors also states that both companies' tours in the 1956-57 season were very successful and that they actually made money. This statement seems, once again, to bear out what Robertson Davies had predicted, that a touring company with an excellent business manager and a superb artistic director could succeed in Canada, if it presented good, well directed live theatre, and managed its box office on a subscription system. Much of the credit for this success must go to the advance publicity and acute business management of Patterson and Crosby, Davies' excellent business manager, and Campbell, a director who could inspire and teach his company.

The future for the Players looked hopeful. Once again Patterson and Crosby had traversed the country from coast to coast, booking the next season's engagements in Canada. The newly formed Canada Council gave out its first awards for artistic endeavours, and bestowed \$10,000 on the Canadian Players for the next season, provided the company toured the breadth of Canada.³⁵ In the short space of three years what began as an experiment in Canadian theatre had become an established, respected professional theatre institution.

¹ Canadian Players press release. June 25th 1956. In possession of Robin Patterson. Toronto.

² Robin Patterson. Letter to Tom Patterson. Feb. 15, 1956. In possession of Robin Patterson. Toronto.

- ³ Robin Patterson. Letter to Lady Eaton. March 12, 1956. In possession of Robin Patterson. Toronto.
- ⁴ Robin Patterson. Letter to Tom Patterson. March 25, 1956.
- ⁵ Robin Patterson. Transcript from taped interview.
- ⁶ Globe and Mail. Untitled. Undated. Newspaper cutting in Norman Freeman's scrapbook.
- ⁷ Untitled. Undated. Newspaper cutting in Norman Freeman's scrapbook.
- ⁸ Conversation with Dr. Norman Wignall. Vancouver. October 10, 1992.
- ⁹ Peter Mellors. Untitled. Undated. Newspaper cutting in Norman Freeman's scrapbook.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Herbert Whittaker. Toronto Globe and Mail. Undated. Newspaper cutting in Norman Freeman's scrapbook.
- ¹² Clifford Hulme. Brantford Expositor. Undated. Newspaper cutting in Norman Freeman's scrapbook.
- ¹³ David Gardner. Journal. 1956-57. Canadian Players' tour. In possession of Dr. David Gardner. Toronto.
- ¹⁴ London Free Press. January 5th, 1957.
- ¹⁵ Dr. David Gardner. Journal. 1956-57 Canadian Players tour.
- ¹⁶ Robin Patterson. "My 85,000 miles with the Canadian Players" . Mayfair. 1959. Cutting.
- ¹⁷ Robin Patterson. Letter to Lady Eaton. March 12, 1956. In possession of Robin Patterson.
- ¹⁸ Ken Johnson. "Canadian Players Begin U.S.Tour" Toronto Telegram Oct.15, 1956.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ "Atlantic Tour of Canadian Players" Atlantic Advocate. 47:5 January 1957

²¹ Syracuse Post Standard. Quoted in Atlantic Advocate 47:5 January 1957

²² Rochester Times Union. Quoted in Atlantic Advocate. 47:5. January 1957.

²³ Herbert Whittaker. Globe and Mail. Quoted in Atlantic Advocate 47:5.
January 1957.

²⁴ David Gardner. Journal.

²⁵ Laurel Crosby. Atlantic Advocate 47:5 January 1957.

²⁶ Itinerary of Second Company of Canadian Players, January 7, 1957. In
possession of Robin Patterson.

²⁷ Herbert Whittaker Globe and Mail January 15, 1957.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Peter Mellors. Untitled. Stratford, 1957. Newspaper cutting. In possession of
Robin Patterson.

³⁴ Peter Mellors. Untitled. Stratford, 1957.

³⁵ Beacon Herald. Stratford. July 1, 1957.

Chapter 4 The years of consolidation.

If the first three years of the Canadian Players are considered as years of exploration, trial and error, then the next years can be seen as years of consolidation and growth. By the fall of 1957 the Players' visits had become an annual event for the majority of towns on their circuits. As the company's reputation became more widely known, new engagements were added to the itineraries. By 1957 the company had grown out of their dilapidated office premises in Stratford, where the workload had increased beyond the capacity of one efficient hard working secretary with occasional part time help. The office was the hub of the operation. Contracts, itineraries and salaries all emanated from here and it was the communications centre for both the business and touring companies. The house managers telegraphed the proceeds from each venue back to the Stratford office whence Pelton banked it. Each Thursday she telegraphed the total sum for the week's expenses to the company managers, who cashed the cheques and paid the actors' salaries and subsistence allowances. (Canadian Income Tax did not recognise acting as a profession. This meant that actors could not deduct food and lodgings while on tour as a business expense from income tax. Away from home they were paid as hockey players were, a salary plus a per diem subsistence allowance.¹) The office work was commensurate with the increased size of both the company and the tours and larger business headquarters was a necessity. Patterson and Crosby moved the offices to Toronto. Pelton left the company to work for Emerick, thus not severing her connection with the Players.²

Crosby left for other work in Toronto.³ In 1954 Crosby had rescued the Canadian Players from impending disaster by recognizing that good publicity was what was needed to sell the company's productions. She and Patterson had put the Canadian Players into a solvent position by her competent system of

booking the Players' engagements with guaranteed returns and by her management of the finances. She was also responsible for the media publicity given to the Moosonee visit, and to subsequent major company events.⁴ By attracting the notice of such correspondents as Tania Long of the New York Times she ensured that the Canadian Players were not entirely unknown in the United States when their appearances began in New York and the eastern states. When Crosby left the company the shareholders had been paid, all debts cleared, and there was enough money in the bank for the rehearsal period and the start of the next season's one company's trans-continental- tour.⁵ Crosby and Patterson together had become the efficient manager Davies had cited as one of his necessities for a successful Canadian nationwide touring company.⁶ Patterson remained as the president of the company and Lady Eaton continued her patronage and financial support as the honorary president.⁷ Dennis Sweeting was appointed as manager and Margaret Symonds the principal secretary.⁸

In 1957 the Canada Council was established by act of Parliament and one of the first grants made to a theatrical enterprise was \$10,000 to the Canadian Players, provided they toured coast to coast.⁹ While this was a help to the company's finances it could not begin to cover the cost of a trans-continental-Canada tour. Though solvent at the end of the 1956-57 season, Canadian Players was sending out only one company for the next season, 1957-58, in the hope of remaining debt-free.¹⁰

At the end of the Stratford Festival's 1957 season, on behalf of the Board of Governors, Michael Langham, the Festival's artistic director, invited the Canadian Players to become a part of the Festival as a touring company.¹¹ The Players had done much to publicize the Festival as the box office receipts showed.¹² However, this invitation was not acceptable to all the Canadian

Players Company. Some members were opposed to the affiliation, perhaps because they feared the company might lose its independence. The offer was declined¹³ and the Canadian Players remained a separate company, though it was frequently associated with Stratford in the minds of its audience. The majority of the Players' actors were members of the Festival company and new young actors from the touring company often graduated to the Shakespearean Festival in ensuing years.¹⁴

The 1957-58 tour had been booked by Patterson and Crosby, and the single company rehearsed and on its way before the administrative move to Toronto. The tour itinerary extended from Halifax to Victoria and Lynn Lake to Miami, and the plays were a repeat of Othello and Man and Superman. Douglas Campbell and Ann Casson had left the country, after Campbell had supervised rehearsals. Tony Van Bridge took over as the leading company member and played Othello again. This time he altered his make-up somewhat, which proved to be an enhancement to the role and made him more comfortable in it. In the previous season he had used very dark skin tones and curly hair. For the new season he wore lighter make up and shaved his head, playing as a bald-headed Levantine, rather than a Negroid type.¹⁵ Again Max Helpmann was a jealous, hard and greedy Iago.¹⁶ A new member of the company was Mervyn Blake, an actor from the Old Vic and Stratford-on-Avon, a friend of Campbell, Helpmann and Van Bridge, who had joined the 1957 Festival company. He, like the other United Kingdom emigrants, had much touring experience in many parts of the world.¹⁷ He assumed Campbell's Brabantio and took over Roebuck Ramsden from Ted Follows, who now played Jack Tanner in Man and Superman. Deborah Cass, who had played Aase to Gerussi's Peer Gynt, and Dawn Greenhalgh took over Ann Casson's roles of Emilia and Ann Whitfield respectively.¹⁸ The majority of this company was experienced, but there was, as

usual, a small number of tyro actors learning their trade. This pattern of actors re-engaging and plays being remounted was to continue in succeeding years, as was a nucleus of older and experienced actors in the company, supporting and supported by young actors.

With the administration established in Toronto and the company out on its marathon tour, Patterson and Sweeting began to put the 1958-59 season together. Two companies were scheduled for two full tours. This became the pattern for the succeeding years. One company was known as the American company, and opened its circuit in Ontario and then proceeded south through the United States and returned via Montreal to Ontario. The Canadian company toured Canada from Newfoundland to Victoria and the western United States, sometimes before the Christmas break, joining the American company in Montreal to play a two week repertory of four plays.

In 1958 Patterson and Sweeting were faced with a shortage of competent Canadian directors. Campbell had gone to England. McCowan, who had proved himself in his presentation of Hamlet in the 1955-56 season, was not available for the forthcoming rehearsals and tours. However, Tony Van Bridge was. An English trained actor and soon to be a Canadian citizen (in 1957 it took five years of Canadian residence to be eligible for citizenship), he had done some directing, and felt himself ready to do more. He was presently leading the company successfully. As the Canadian Players took chances with new talent, so Van Bridge was offered the direction of Romeo and Juliet and Pygmalion for the ensuing season. He was also expected to travel with the company. To find another director Patterson consulted Michael Langham and friends in England.¹⁹ As a result, from the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School came Dennis Carey to direct As You Like It and The Devil's Disciple. He was a great asset to the company, being accustomed to teaching and directing young actors.²⁰

For its two companies for the 1958-59 season Canadian Players engaged a larger proportion of new young actors than previously because fewer older, more experienced actors were prepared to spend six to eight months on tour. More lucrative television work became available at home. In addition, the Manitoba Theatre Centre opened in 1958, in Winnipeg, offering actors a winter season without touring.²¹ Canadian Players provided young actors with a place to learn their trade and be challenged with roles for which they would not otherwise be considered. By going on an extensive tour an actor got a chance to develop the character he was playing and to learn the technique of producing a fresh and animated performance, even if he was playing it for the umpteenth time and he was tired out with the busy schedule and long hours of bus travel.

Not only did the Canadian Players train actors, it also discovered its own directors. Van Bridge continued to direct annually until 1964. McCowan returned to direct the 1960-61 productions of The Tempest and Brecht's Caucasian Chalk Circle. Campbell returned to Canada in 1960, when he acted on the Canadian tour, and directed Julius Caesar and Saint Joan for the 1960-61 Canadian tour. David Gardner, an actor, like Van Bridge and McCowan, wanted to direct for the Players. In the 1962-63 season he directed King Lear and The Lady's Not For Burning and the following year, Masterpieces of English Comedy and Coward's Private Lives.

As the new manager, in 1958 Sweeting took over the booking tours and spent three months of each year on the road as Patterson and Crosby had done.²² In keeping with the company's original concept, he booked the Players into some smaller communities which did not have enough funds to cover the cost of the engagement, hoping to recover the loss from more affluent centres.²³ Where Crosby and Patterson had insisted on the required fee or no performance,⁽²⁴⁾ Sweeting felt that smaller, impecunious communities were entitled to their share

of live theatre. He continued this practice as long as he was with the company. In actual fact, neither Sweeting's nor Crosby and Patterson's systems worked perfectly.²⁵ While the first management team made and kept the company solvent by their booking policy and monetary contributions from private citizens, chiefly Lady Eaton, and from the increased number of shareholders, Sweeting endeavoured to carry out the concept that live theatre should be accessible to as many Canadians as possible. Unfortunately, succeeding years showed there was not enough public or private funding for this ideal. The Players continued to perform in university centres as well as in major towns across the continent. The fees from these larger centres subsidized the small communities by their contribution to transportation costs. Playing in the small towns more or less en route from one large centre to the next kept the actors engaged every night. This was one of Davies' original concepts for making possible performances in more remote venues as well as keeping the actors busy every night, and thus making the operation viable. It was necessary for the company to play in major cities, which, in the 1950s had little visiting or resident professional theatre. Once they saw what the company provided, these centres welcomed the Players annually. Their larger ticket sales, which covered both the transport and production costs, helped the more sparsely populated areas to their share of live drama. This concept was also in accordance with Davies's original proposal for a touring company.²⁶ In addition, Lady Eaton established a fund whereby school children across the country could see the Canadian Players productions. This was much appreciated by the pupils who wrote to her to express their gratitude.²⁷ Whittaker had commented on the large and attentive audience at Kirkland Lake high school in the winter of 1957. Patterson and Crosby had found on their first publicity tours that high school principals were anxious for the players to perform in their schools, offering their makeshift auditoriums rent free.²⁸

In the United States Emerick continued to book the tours, often scheduling the company on very long cross-country journeys. He had problems in fitting the Players into university and college programmes,²⁹ but the actors, and Sweeting, felt that he often made their back-tracking and criss-crossing journeys unnecessarily long.³⁰ However, America paid better than Canada and the Players continued to tour south of the border, these tours to some extent subsidizing the Canadian ones.³¹ As the Equity rate was higher in the States, the actors were compensated for their seemingly interminable journeys by their higher salaries.³² Emerick never shared the company feeling that existed between the actors and the Canadian administrative officers. He was regarded by the actors as a parsimonious man who had little regard for their well-being or the union rules for travelling and working hours. They thought he made a great deal of money out of them and gave them little in return.³³ He was responsible for the sometimes filthy or non-existent lodgings which he reserved for the company, and for the expensive and unsuitable hotels he often chose. His disregard for the regulations governing the hours the bus drivers spent on the road was reprehensible and endangered the company, particularly in the severe winter weather which the eastern and middle western states endure.³⁴ Emerick was a business man and did not have the commitment to live theatre that the Canadian office staff shared with the actors. On the other hand, his publicity was excellent and he made sure that the Players' full houses were representative of all sorts of audiences, besides those of universities and colleges. In doing this he committed the company to performing on unsuitable occasions, such as service clubs banquets, or in the place of after dinner speakers, in competition with the clatter of crockery and cutlery.³⁵ These unnecessary difficulties were resented by the acting company as much as the expensive shoddy lodgings and lengthy backtracking inter-urban journeys.³⁶

While it might be argued that the American university circuit was not entirely within the Players' mandate to take live theatre to centres lacking this, it should be remembered that in the decade of 1954-64 college and university audiences seldom had the opportunity to see such performances as the Players presented. Theatre departments tended to be academic rather than practising.³⁷ The Players introduced Shaw, Chekov, Coward and Fry together with live Shakespeare to the student audiences who had studied drama without seeing it professionally performed. The audiences for the majority of the Players' productions were enthusiastic, and as the schedule was fully booked and sponsored it appeared to be good business practice as well as sustaining the company's aims and objectives, to continue with the American tours, in spite of the drawbacks. In the later years of its operation the company began to lose money in America,³⁸ though these losses were not as great as those in Canada.

In 1961 the establishments on the American circuit were given the alternative of booking the Players directly through the Toronto office or continuing to use the Emerick agency. The majority preferred to remain with the agency, and so the affiliation remained until 1964.³⁹

In 1960 the limited company of the Canadian Players became a foundation and set up guilds in major cities across Canada, which sent representatives to the Foundation meetings held in Toronto. The chairman of the Foundation was Carl French, an industrialist who was interested in theatre and experienced in corporate fund raising. Lady Eaton was the honorary president and his Excellency the Governor General, the Honourable Georges Vanier, became the patron. Until this time, obtaining money to subsidize the Players had been by the expedient of requests to the Canada Council, and by personal appeals by and to private citizens, some of whom had become shareholders in the company. The ticket sales were expected to keep the company solvent, but

unforeseen expenses always seemed to stretch the expenditure beyond the income. The purpose of the guilds was to raise money for The Canadian Players Foundation and members of the public were invited to join and subscribe.⁴⁰ Guild members received a copy of the in house magazine On Stage which informed its readers of the Players' current operations, what was planned in the different centres and other items of interest including profiles of the cast and company officers. The premier of each province wrote an appreciative paragraph welcoming the Players. The magazine, like the touring company, linked the provinces together. In addition, it was good publicity and showed the guild members where their money was going, but it did not produce much financial aid. However, as the Canadian Players was now a foundation it could legally operate with a deficit and solicit contributions as a non-profit organization.

From 1958 onwards productions became more elaborate. The bare stage and rehearsal dress of the first years was gradually added to and then submerged in grandiose period costumes and properties.. While this employed Canadian designers and showed their skill to a wide audience, as well as providing work for seamstresses and property makers, it made the presentations considerably more expensive, even though the generous T.Eaton Company helped out by supplying material to the company.⁴¹

This elaboration reached its peak in the 1961-62 production of King Lear. Directed by David Gardner and designed by Herbert Whittaker, Lear's Inuit kingdom was somewhere in the Arctic. The philosophy behind the spectacular designs was to bring home to Canadians the concept of an early civilization.⁴² The costumes were magnificent, Lear and his daughters being opulently fur-clad in pelts donated by the Hudson's Bay Company.⁴³ Immense in a fur anorak and crowned with a coronet of walrus tusks, William Hutt dominated all around him.

His daughters and sons-in-law were as luxuriously dressed. The wealth and barbarity of Lear's kingdom was demonstrated in the costumes. (Appendix IV, V) In spite of the magnificence of its design and high calibre of its cast, King Lear, with Hutt's regal presence, was received controversially. Some audiences found the production uneven and implausible and the interpretation of the characters not in keeping with the Inuit clothing.⁴⁵ Keith Garebian says, "Timothy Findley thought the director's concept was crazy, particularly the Fool as an animal pet."⁴⁶ Hutt himself was never happy in the role or the production,⁴⁷ but Herbert Foster, who played the Fool, cast as some sort of strange pet of mixed ancestry,⁴⁸ said, "I suppose it would probably be impossible for anybody's Lear to surpass my idea of Bill Hutt's Lear. Every Lear I see now is informed by my close association with his".⁴⁹ Reviewers in Canada were not convinced by the Eskimo environment. The Ottawa Citizen complained that the geographical position of Lear's kingdom could hardly be threatened by a French invasion, and that the scantily clad Poor Tom would be more than cold in that climate. It was too much to accept.⁵⁰ In Toronto a reviewer objected to associating Shakespeare's primitive society with that of the Inuit as "rank nationalism."⁵¹ Conversely, college audiences in the States were bowled over by the production, and "fascinated that you would do a play set in Alaska."⁵²

This production played in tandem with Fry's The Lady's Not For Burning, which Whittaker also designed. He had to devise a set which would be suitable for both plays and transportable in the limited space of the bus. He very cleverly used pieces which were set up on stage and were reversible, showing one face for King Lear and another for The Lady. By moving and turning these pieces the stage was transformed from Lear's polar kingdom to the summer of mediaeval England.⁵³

In The Lady's Not For Burning, a verse play popular in English speaking theatre at this time, William Hutt also played the lead. Again, the company was not entirely happy. Whittaker had designed Puritan costumes, which the actors found difficult to reconcile with the text of Fry's play.⁵³ These two productions were remounted for the fall tour of 1962. As can be seen, the bare boards and simple costumes had given way to magnificence of costume and scenery, which, as Campbell said, distracted the audience from the text as the reviews show. Again, the price of this production and its transport was very expensive.

For the winter of 1963 a completely different and much less costly production was mounted. Masterpieces of English Comedy was an anthology of scenes from English plays from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. It was commissioned by the Canadian Players from Andrew Allan, the well known Canadian writer and radio drama director. To celebrate the ten seasons of Canadian Players operation a review of English theatre seemed an appropriate gesture. It was also an economic one. The scenes were performed by four actors, William Hutt, Eric Christmas, Amelia Hall and Frances Hyland, who travelled by station wagon with their stage manager. A trailer carried their properties and costumes. The small cast had little in the form of costume to carry them through five centuries, and effected their changes of period by the addition of a scarf or lace collar to the basic dress. There was little in the way of stage dressing. Directed by David Gardner this unfamiliar presentation was favourably received by most reviewers. The opening performance was in the newly built theatre at Waterloo University, which Michael Langham had helped design. The tour went west to Winnipeg where the reviewer complained that the presentation "was too long and not always professionally impeccable.... The actors had bitten off more than they could chew or the audience digest."⁵⁴ However, further west the reviews were almost all favourable although one or

two critics, while pleased with the humour of the piece, wanted a return to full length plays The Sheaf of Saskatoon thought it "some of the best drama to be offered here for a long ,long time".⁵⁵ In Northern Ontario the Dryden critic said, "The idea of scenes from plays rather than a complete play is a new one for audiences and evoked mixed reactions. Many appreciated the opportunity providing new experience and knowledge of pieces about which they had known nothing."⁵⁶ He reiterated that the purpose of the Players was "To bring drama and enjoyment and knowledge of drama to hundreds of communities across the country, the device of following a theme through a number of works seems to be an admirable one, and the sort of thing that might well be done at some future time."⁵⁷

Since the anthology format had proved to be acceptable to Canadian audiences and the small cast was economical, Masterpieces of Comedy was repeated for the autumn tour of the United States. There was one cast change, Zoe Caldwell replacing Frances Hyland. This production played in tandem with Noel Coward's Private Lives. Both presentations opened in Toronto in October 1963, and proceeded south through Ontario and across the American border. At the end of the year, 1963, both Hutt and Caldwell left the company for other engagements.

The 1963-64 Canadian company, which was not cut down to station wagon size, crossed Canada with Henry IV, Part 1 and An Enemy of the People.

Still endeavouring to use national talent and to employ a small cast, the management followed up its apparently successful anthology programme with another in the same genre. Written and directed by Tony Van Bridge, Passion and Destiny was an anthology of scenes from Shakespeare. It was a suitable presentation for 1964, when the theatre world was celebrating Shakespeare's four hundredth birthday. There is a dearth of reviews or memorabilia concerning

this production, probably because it had a short run and was not repeated in the autumn of the year.

King Lear was certainly a high point in the Canadian Players' history, but it was also a turning point. Having reached an opulence of production never envisaged by the original artistic director, this presentation defeated itself. According to the press the price was too high.” For a risk-taking and innovative company the concept of King Lear was within its boundaries, although not in keeping with its original idea of simplicity of the visual. The unforeseen lack of audiences willing to cover the costs of this aberration was a financial setback. The anthology programmes and the small cast Coward play were an attempt to recover both audience and solvency. In spite of its popularity and established continent wide audience the company was now financially unstable. Canadian theatre was changing. The opening of more regional theatres with their resident companies not only took actors from a peripatetic existence to a solid home based operation, it also limited the audience for the touring company. The citizens who had welcomed the visiting actors now had their own theatre with its resident actors to support, not on a once a year basis, but on an ongoing year-round one.

Scene changes.

Early in 1964 Sweeting and Symonds, now married, but at variance with the chairman of the board of governors, resigned and went to the Kawartha Summer Festival. French, the chairman of the board of governors of the Canadian Players, had already invited Tom Hendry, who was presently working in Europe, to return to Canada and take over as general manager of the company. At the time Hendry was not informed of the company's financial shortcomings.⁵⁹ At this point the aim of the Canadian Players changed. Now the object became to make money. Hendry cancelled the American tours, as an economic measure, although the actors felt this was a mistake.⁶⁰ They thought, as earlier management had done, that business was more lucrative on the American college circuit.⁶¹ What the actors did not know was that the next production was to be purely Canadian. The board of governors commissioned a historical revue from Len Peterson, a Canadian playwright and CBC script writer. The board's idea was to present popular Canadian entertainment and recoup some money. A small company was to be rehearsed in Winnipeg with John Hirsch, of the Manitoba Theatre Centre, who would direct the production in collaboration with Hendry.⁶² Designated as a vaudeville and entitled All About Us, the script Hendry received was very long and more suitable for a radio production than a visual performance.⁶³ The two directors cut or rewrote the material to such an extent that shortly before opening night, Peterson disclaimed all authorship of the revue, and refused to be held responsible for the content of the script.⁶⁴ The vaudeville opened in Winnipeg on October 28, 1964 with a cast of six men and one woman, accompanied by a pianist, Charles Mountford, whose music was compiled by Neil Harris and Vic Davies from songs from various periods of Canada's history.⁶⁵ A press release claims that all the words spoken on stage had been said or written at some time in Canada.⁶⁶ The scenes ranged from

farce to tragedy, covering such topics as a royal visit, the hardships suffered by the early settlers and the trial of Louis Riel. Between tears and laughter the audience was invited to see itself and Canadian history as they really were.⁶⁷ There is no known complete script of this vaudeville still extant, though several scenes and songs without accompaniments are in the possession of Barbara Franklin Perkins, the one woman in the cast.

From Winnipeg All About Us travelled as far west as Vancouver, where it was performed in the newly opened Queen Elizabeth Playhouse. The second half of the tour was confined to Ontario, and culminated in a week's run at The Royal Alexandra Theatre in Toronto in March of 1965. Writing in the Ottawa Citizen Audrey M. Ashley said that thanks to the efforts of the very competent company of Canadian Players, "Canada, the unknown country is becoming better known to large numbers of Canadians." She also found the production "A lively, fast-paced polished show which refuses to be put into any particular category."⁶⁸ Although the All About Us company toured much less extensively than had former Canadian Players, the production did not make the Players solvent. The original object of taking good live drama to as many audiences as possible had been lost and many ties with the circuit communities severed. Hendry advised the board of governors that they needed to find an artistic director as well as a general manager, and eight months after his appointment to the Players, left the company.⁶⁹

Jean Robertson and Marigold Charlesworth, who held a lease on the charming little Toronto Central Library Theatre, were approached by French. Charlesworth was offered the position of artistic director and Robertson that of general manager of the Canadian Players. Both had previous affiliations with the company, Charlesworth having played Juliet in Van Bridge's production of Romeo and Juliet in 1958. Robertson had been on the administrative and stage

managing Players' staff for three seasons. She knew the acting company and its problems, as she had been out on tour besides having run the office. Robertson had come to Canada from the United Kingdom with extensive stage management and administrative experience at Stratford-on-Avon and the Old Vic. She taught stage management at the National Theatre School from its inception in 1960. With Charlesworth and William Whitehead (another Canadian Players actor) she had run the Red Barn summer stock theatre successfully since 1962. The new administrator and the artistic director were asked to put together the 1965-66 season.

The format of the season changed again. With no United States circuit, only one company would be required to tour. The Central Library Theatre was available to the Players through its directors, which meant that a resident and a touring company could alternate, thus reducing the length of time the peripatetic actors were on the road. The rise of the Community theatres had obviated some of the need for a regular touring company as these new establishments took their companies on the road in their vicinities. Nevertheless, there was still a need for a touring company. A home base for the Canadian Players would be an advantage to the company. The theatre provided a permanent rehearsal space and all the company's operations could be under one roof. Toronto's growing audience was expected to keep the small theatre auditorium full, which indeed it did, while its company played six plays in repertory, when the other company was out on tour. The touring play joined the repertoire after three months, and one of the other plays took to the road. The season opened in Toronto with Synge's Playboy of the Western World, joined a fortnight later by Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral. According to Scene both productions were playing to capacity houses, while the touring The Importance of Being Earnest was being accorded

rave reviews and full houses wherever it went, in large and small centres and in Montreal.⁷⁰

As the season advanced more productions were offered at the Library theatre, including Max Frisch's Firebugs, two short plays by Jacques Languirand, The Partition and Les Grand Departs, The Glass Menagerie and the returning Importance of Being Earnest, which was replaced on tour by Murder in the Cathedral. In the spring the Canadian Players sponsored Les Jeunes Comediens, a French speaking company composed of recently graduated students from the National Theatre School in Montreal. The Players gave this young troupe an opportunity to try its wings by lending its name as the parent company and by giving the French actors a two week run at the Central Library Theatre at the completion of its Quebec provincial tour.⁷¹

Such a full, varied and apparently well attended season would lead an observer to expect that the Players were at last making money, or at least breaking even. However, this was not so. This financial shortfall was in part due to the fact that the Central Library theatre was small, and even with full houses the company could not break even.⁷² It is possible that the board of governors thought that the deficit of the small house would be offset by the grants which the foundation received from the Canada Council, the Ontario Council for the Arts, the Ontario Department of Education and the municipality of Toronto.⁷³

In 1965 the Crest theatre in Toronto was in serious financial difficulty. French, the chairman of the board of governors of the Canadian Players, was also chairman of the board of governors of the Crest. He decided to amalgamate the two already large boards and the two debts. The board asked Charlesworth and Roberts to put together a programme for the 1966-67 season, employing both Crest and Players actors. Most of the Crest actors were happy to be asked to

join the company at the Central library.⁷⁴ Accordingly, the two directors put together a programme for the next season, anticipating the same repertory and touring pattern as the previous season, which had produced such a high percentage of box office sales. Without consultation with the artistic director or the chief administrator, the board publicly announced that there would be no further Canadian Players tours or performances at the Central Library Theatre. The company was closed.⁷⁵ Roberts and Charlesworth were given no explanation for the closing. They were informed that the company was no longer in existence.⁷⁶

There is little public information available about this abrupt closing. In the Toronto Reference Library there is a micro-fiche of a press release stating that the finances of the Foundation were in such a bad state that the company could no longer operate. Speculations about the reason for the sudden closing are still rife among the survivors of the Players' casts.⁷⁷

This sudden and unexplained demise was a sad end to a company which had achieved so much, often so brilliantly, in twelve short seasons.

¹ Laurel Crosby. Interview tape. August 27, 1992.

² Florence Pelton Patterson. Manuscript.

³ Laurel Crosby. Interview tape. August 27, 1992.

⁴ Robin Patterson. Transcript of taped interview. .

⁵ Laurel Crosby. Interview tape. August 27, 1992.
Robin Patterson. Transcript of taped interview.

⁶ Robertson Davies. CTR : 27.

⁷ Stratford Beacon Herald. October 25, 1957.

⁸ Dennis Sweeting. Letter to V.M.P. September 15, 1992. In possession of V.M.P.

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- ⁹ "\$10,000 Grant's Would Aid Tours Of Drama Group" Beacon Herald.
Stratford. July 2nd, 1957.
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⁷⁰ Scene. Toronto. Nov.7-13, 1965.

⁷¹ Tom Hendry. Interview Tape. August 20, 1992.

Scene. Toronto. Nov. 7-13, 1965.

⁷² Laurel Crosby. Interview tape. August 20, 1992.

⁷³ Scene. Nov. 5-13, 1965. Toronto.

⁷⁴ Jean Roberts. Interview tape. August 31, 1992

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

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Bruce Swerdfager. Tape Interview. July22, 1992`.

Chapter 5 Public Relations, Players and Plays.

As the first public relations officer of the Canadian Players, Laurel Crosby brought the company to the notice of the citizens in the southern Ontario towns where the actors were scheduled to play. When it became apparent that it was necessary for the advance booking agents to make personal contact with influential townspeople in order to arrange an engagement for the acting company, Crosby and Patterson drove across the country meeting and speaking to local service clubs and interesting them in sponsoring the travelling theatre company, as has been related in detail above. The outcome of these extensive tours by the first public relations team, and later by subsequent booking officers, was a co-operation of the service clubs in many towns.¹ Where an association felt itself inadequate financially and physically to sponsor a Players' performance, by joining forces with other similar organizations and thus pooling the town's resources, enough funding could be raised for this presentation, for the benefit of the community. This led to the formation of committees to sponsor other cultural events.² Where Community Concerts was a commercial organization introducing aspiring young musicians to patrons across Canada and the United States, the Canadian Players depended on the real co-operation of the towns' communities themselves. This aroused civic pride. Each venue on the circuit wished to welcome the touring company and to show its appreciation for the eagerly anticipated annual visit of "their theatre company". Almost all the sponsoring committees held post-performance receptions for the company and the audience. Here the actors and audience met on level ground. The audience discovered that the players were neither rogues and vagabonds nor glamorous beings from an unimaginable world, but hardworking men and women like themselves. The receptions provided the opportunity to discuss the merits of the plays and the standards of performances. In a friendly atmosphere, the

sponsors discussed with the players the merits or demerits of the current play and compared it to those of previous years.³ The actors discovered how critical the audience had become. The criticism was not inimical but amicable. The audience wanted only the best for and from "their" company. The friendly relations which grew up on these tours were very real and very warm. When Bruce Swerdfager was house manager at the Stratford Festival his office was visited, almost nightly, by members of the audience who wished to renew their acquaintance with him or with members of the Festival cast whom they had met as Canadian Players.⁴ When Bernard Behrens and Deborah Cass married in Stratford, the Festival announced it on CP. From all parts of the country presents and cards of felicitations poured in for couple.⁵ For dozens of Canadians, two of their dear friends were married and they wanted to wish them well.

Box office receipts could be used as a barometer for the popularity of the touring productions, as an editorial writer in The Sheaf of Saskatoon remarked. He blamed the unpopularity of the previous year's Julius Caesar for the small audience attending what he considered "One of the best things to be seen here for a very long time",⁶ Masterpieces of English Comedy. The audience was friendly, but not without discernment. When the touring company was a new phenomenon there was nothing for an audience to take as a measuring stick for the merits of a performance. After years of the Canadian Players tours the audiences had acquired some sophistication, and a sense that live theatre was a part of their community life, an anticipated annual experience. The original public relations officers of the Players founded and consolidated the co-operation of the different factions of the communities, and the touring companies consolidated the friendship and respect between audiences and actors.

The many actors who played in the company over the years were, for the most part, Canadians. Many of those who joined the company as emigrants, in time became Canadian citizens, thus making the company a truly national one. These actors were prepared to give up six to eight months of the year to travel long distances in all sorts of weather across the length and breadth of the continent, playing one night stands. (Appendix VI). This travel was not without its hazards. Winter in Canada and the United States is not conducive to long journeys by road. There are travellers' tales of the Canadian Players nearly being wrecked in the Fraser Canyon, and of being stranded in a blizzard in Gander airport with the Canadian Opera Company, which caused them to miss their next engagement, the only time in all their years of touring that this occurred.⁷ It is surprising that more performances were not cancelled due to the weather. The credit for this should go to the dedication and skill of the bus drivers. These men drove long hours through snowstorms to keep the schedule Emerick had set for the American company, without any consideration for the delays caused by winter roads.⁸ One driver, when the Canadian police had closed the roads during a maritime blizzard, piloted his unlighted bus to the ferry terminal so that his passengers could catch the boat to their next engagement.⁹ On another occasion, in Northern Saskatchewan, the company were stranded with only a small portion of their baggage. A passenger plane flew the company in to Lynn Lake, a mining town almost on the Arctic circle, but the freight plane with the lights and the rest of the luggage was stranded first by engine trouble and then by inclement weather. The acting company borrowed lights from the local Little Theatre, found hessian and pale green cotton for a backdrop, and improvised everything else. The two shows went on, somewhat unusually, with Saint Joan signing her death warrant wearing snowboots and with a green ball-

point pen, and the next night the triumvirate pledging alliance in empty soup cans.¹⁰

As the younger members of the cast doubled as assistant stage managers and wardrobe mistresses, they were always fully occupied before a performance. The men had to transport the heavy lighting board and the stage level boxes, which contained properties and some costumes, to the backstage area, which might be on an upper floor, attainable only by an ice covered outside staircase. They then had to set up the stage under the stage manager's direction, before dressing and making up for the performance. The women had to iron and repair the costumes and sometimes effect a running repair between an exit and entry. When the curtain came down everything had to be repacked and stowed in the bus. Dressing rooms were often classrooms some distance from the stage which necessitated the costumed and made up cast walking through the audience to the acting area.¹¹ There were occasions when two performances a day were scheduled, followed by a long drive to the next night's venue which demanded an early morning start. There was little leisure time for anyone on a Canadian Players tour.

Auditoriums varied from night to night. In the States the company would be playing in a huge university auditorium with sophisticated lighting and stage equipment, and the next night, edging its way between tables on a makeshift stage at a service club banquet, where Emerick had booked them as after dinner entertainment¹². In Canada school gymnasiums with narrow platform playing areas were fairly common, but sometimes a stage would be constructed of tables wired together, with the only crossover being under the tables, a difficult feat for the women in long dresses.¹³

If the auditoriums were full of surprises, lodgings, especially in America, were also unpredictable. William Hutt, in Garebian's William Hutt: Portrait of an Actor

describes the uncomfortable and sometimes filthy lodgings booked for the company by Emerick's management. Even worse than this inadequate accommodation was the non-existence of the hotel into which the company was sometimes booked. Either these premises had been closed or torn down in the time between the booking and the arrival of the Players. With only a short time allowed for the company to set up the stage and raise the curtain at the appointed hour, to have to find alternative lodgings was an added anxiety. The company often had to drive miles further on, late at night, to find somewhere to rest before the next morning's scheduled early start.¹⁴ In Canada the accommodation booking was better managed by the officers who negotiated the performing engagements. In isolated industrial company towns and Armed Forces bases the actors were made welcome in the comfort of the attached visitors' facilities or officers' messes. In these communities the annual visits were anticipated with great pleasure, with half the population turning out to meet the Players' plane and help take the baggage to the stage area. In other remote or smaller towns the actors were welcome guests in private houses. Here again the local inhabitants greeted them as friends, meeting the bus and helping with luggage. These warm receptions offset the impersonal and chilly arrivals at other places. David Gardner's diary records all the theatres, hotels and restaurants, as well as the post-performance receptions which the Players attended during the 1956-57 tour of the eastern States and the Canadian Maritimes. The disparity between the best and the worst experiences, and his brief comments, make fascinating reading.¹⁵ He enjoyed many experiences. Crossing to the mainland on the bridge of an ice breaker was one of his tour's highlights. Other actors were overwhelmed by the extent and beauty of the country they travelled. In no other way could either the emigrant or indigenous actors have experienced this, and all those who reminisce about their peripatetic

days with the Players express this gratitude for the opportunity to see so much of the continent and to meet so many people in so many diverse walks of life.

The company achieved more than it set out to do in that it succeeded amalgamating diverse citizens into homogeneous committees for the extension of the Arts in rural and urban communities and aroused civic pride. It also generated a lasting respect and friendliness between audiences and actors across the continent.

When the regional theatres were established, beginning with the Manitoba Theatre Centre, in 1958, followed by Neptune in 1962, and others later, the nucleus of the resident companies was composed largely of Canadian Players' actors. The company had trained young actors and given them professional experience in their own country, a privilege which was not available to them before 1960, when the National Theatre School opened. MTC and Neptune both benefitted greatly from the experience and expertise of the Players' actors, and from the goodwill which the travelling company had generated between the actors and the audience.

As the accompanying copy of the Canadian Players records of plays performed between 1954 and 1966 shows, the major dramatists were Shaw and Shakespeare. Shaw's contemporaries, Chekov, Ibsen, Synge, Wilde and Brecht were also included, and twentieth century writers were represented by Fry, Coward, Eliot and Frisch. The only Canadian works played were those of the anthologists, Andrew Allan and Tony Van Bridge, and the vaudeville by Tom Hendry in co-operation with John Hirsch. This choice of plays was largely governed by the tastes of the sponsors, who felt that the theatre they brought to their communities should be educational as well as entertaining, as the negotiations with the various committees demonstrated.¹⁶ In the 1950's and early 60's Shaw and Shakespeare were the major authors preferred in academic

circles. The Players introduced their audiences to Shaw's contemporaries and to the twentieth century verse plays of Eliot and Fry, which were currently in

Plays performed by
THE CANADIAN PLAYERS
in Canada and the U.S.A.

1954-55

SAINT JOAN
George Bernard Shaw

1955-56

SAINT JOAN
George Bernard Shaw

MACBETH
William Shakespeare

1956-57

HAMLET
William Shakespeare

PEER GYNT
Henrik Ibsen

OTHELLO
William Shakespeare

MAN AND SUPERMAN
George Bernard Shaw

1957-58

MAN AND SUPERMAN
George Bernard Shaw

OTHELLO
William Shakespeare

1958-59

PYGMALION
George Bernard Shaw

ROMEO AND JULIET
William Shakespeare

AS YOU LIKE IT
William Shakespeare

DEVIL'S DISCIPLE
George Bernard Shaw

1959-60

COMEDY OF ERRORS
William Shakespeare

DEVIL'S DISCIPLE
George Bernard Shaw

TAMING OF THE SHREW
William Shakespeare

THE CHERRY ORCHARD
Anton Chekov

1960-61

THE TEMPEST
William Shakespeare

THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE
Bertolt Brecht

JULIUS CAESAR
William Shakespeare

SAINT JOAN
George Bernard Shaw

CANADIAN PLAYERS

JULIUS CAESAR (SHAKESPEARE)	1960/61	
SAINT JOAN (SHAW)	1960/61	
KING LEAR(SHAKESPEARE)		
THE LADY'S NOT FOR BURNING (FRY)	1961/62	
ARMS AND MTHE MAN (SHAW)	1962/63	
TWELFTH NIGHT (SHAKESPEARE)	1962/63	
MASTERPIECES OF COMEDY FROM THE ENGLISH THEATRE	1963	
AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE (IBSEN)		
HENRY IV, PART 1 (SHAKESPEARE)	1963/64	
MASTERPIECES OF COMEDY		
PRIVATE LIVES (COWARD)	1963/64	
ALL ABOUT US (CANADIAN REVUE)	1964	
		<u>TORONTO</u>
THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST (WILDE)	1965/66	XXXXXXXX IN REP. FR.
PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD (SYNGE)	1965/66	IN REP. FR. OCT. 7, 1
MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL (ELIOT)	1965/66	IN REP. FR. OCT. 21
THE FIREBUGS (MAX FRISCH)	1965/66	IN REP. FR. NOV. 19
THE PARTITION	1966	IN REP. FR. FEB. 17,
LES GRANDS DEPARTS (JACQUES LANGUIRAND)	1966	IN REP. FR. FEB. 17, 1
THE GLASS MENAGERIE (T. WILLIAMS)	1966	IN REP. FR. JAN. 21,

production in English speaking theatres, as were the plays of Coward.

Sweeting tried to find Canadian plays, but as a look at the then available works of Canadian playwrights will show, there are few three act plays which could have been performed by a touring company with their limited number of actors. As Campbell said in his notes in the first programme, any three act play in one set, was not what he had in mind for his company.¹⁷ In spite of Sweeting's efforts to find home grown plays, his best efforts could only manage anthologies of English dramatic works. As Wasserman has indicated in his introduction to Modern Canadian Plays there was little significant Canadian drama before the late 1960's." This is not to ignore the work of Gwen Pharis Ringwood, Herman Voaden and Robertson Davies whose work contributed greatly to Canadian Theatre, but none of their plays were suitable for the Canadian Players to take on tour across Canada and the United States.

The one commissioned work from Peterson, which was adapted for the Canadian Players, All About Us, was not in the company's tradition of a well written play, but was a "vaudeville". This departure, an endeavour to attract a wider audience than the one previously faithful to the Players, had only limited success, and did not tour as extensively as had the previous seasons' presentations.

Languirand's one act play Les Grands Departs was the first Canadian play performed by the company, in the Central Library Theatre, in 1966, did not go out on tour. Had the company continued, as it expected to, after 1966, it is possible and indeed probable that Canadian plays would have been taken across the country, but this is only speculation. By 1967, the Canadian Players were no longer in existence to bring the magic of live theatre to Canada.

The Canadian Players has been criticized for its mainly English choice of plays, but, in retrospect, it would have been difficult to select other more

acceptable works for a travelling company whose aim was to introduce as many people as possible to good live theatre. Davies, in his brief to the Massey Commission, remarked that his countrymen were unfamiliar with much standard drama. Campbell, in his introduction to the first Canadian Players programme, said that he wanted his company to perform worthwhile plays, "not any three act play with one set."⁹ The plays of Shakespeare are for all time, and many of Shaw's too. The Canadian Players endeavoured to bring enduring and lasting works to its audiences, presented in a way in which audiences could empathize.

¹ Robin Patterson. Letters to Tom Patterson and Lady Eaton.

Dennis Sweeting. Letter to V.M.P. September 15, 1992

² Robin Patterson. Letters to Tom Patterson.

"Lesson in Group Action" The Brandon Sun. Undated.

Newspaper cutting in Norman Freeman's scrapbook.

³ Ken James. Taped Interview. August 25, 1992.

Bruce Swerdfager. Taped interview. July 22, 1992.

Claude Bede. Taped interview. August 6, 1992.

⁴ Bruce Swerdfager. Taped interview. July 22, 1992.

⁵ Bernard Behrens and Deborah Cass. Taped interview. August 5, 1992.

⁶ A.V. The Sheaf Saskatoon. February 26th, 1963.

⁷ Mervyn Blake. Interview tape. July 24, 1992.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Bruce Swerdfager. Interview tape. July 24, 1992.

¹⁰ Ronald Evans. "On Cue". The Telegram, Toronto. Reprinted in On Stage. 1 no. 6 (April 1962) : 14.

¹¹ Ken James. Interview Tape. August 25, 1992

¹² David Gardner. Journal. 1956-57.

"Players from the famous Ontario festival are touring Canada and the United States" Weekend Magazine. 6, no.1, 1956.

¹³ Ken James. Interview tape. August 25, 1992,
Claude Bede, Interview tape, August 6, 1992,
Bruce Swerdfager, Interview tape, July 24, 1992.

¹⁴ David Gardner. Journal. 1956-57.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Robin Patterson. Letters.

¹⁷ Douglas Campbell. First Canadian Players programme. October 1954.

¹⁸ Wasserman, Jerry. Modern Canadian Plays. Vancouver. Talon Books. 1985.

¹⁹ Douglas Campbell. Introduction in first programme of Canadian Players.
1954.

Conclusion.

Without having read Robertson Davies's brief to the Massey Commission, Douglas Campbell¹ and Tom Patterson carried out, almost to the letter, the recommendations of that report. From the near failure of its first tour, which Robin Patterson and Laurel Crosby rescued and transformed into a resounding success by their valiant effort in selling the Canadian Players to tough northern industrial communities, it became a reputable and respected company across the length and breadth of the continent. The Players did something that no one had done before, in that they took good live drama to small isolated places, giving them the same highly professional shows that were given in the major cities of Canada and the United States. As Whittaker said, "they will be remembered as the first who dared."² The company survived on a "starvation budget and a schedule that was just plain hell"³ but without which it would not have been possible for "such talent to appear at smaller centres at the nominal fee charged."⁴ Implementing the Davies and Campbell doctrine was not easy physically or monetarily, but the company did succeed artistically, as the many reviews over the years verified.⁵

The United States university and college circuits introduced many student groups and others to live professional theatre⁶ and brought groups of students to the Stratford Shakespearean Festival. They informed the States that Canada had an active and proficient professional theatre alive and well north of the border.

The excellence of the business management of Robin Patterson and Crosby, coupled with the unique quality of the artistic direction of Douglas Campbell, and the company he selected, proved Davies' point that a travelling company with an exceptional artistic director and producing good classical theatre could succeed in Canada. The early years of the Players, although grantless and impecunious,

were successful, both artistically and financially. The Canadian Players was not designed to make money, but to take live theatre to everyone in the country. This was Robin Patterson's mission and why she dedicated three years of her life to trying to achieve this aim.⁷ Douglas Campbell imbued his companies with the same spirit.⁸ He also inspired his inexperienced actors to attempt and succeed in roles for which they themselves thought they were incapable.⁹ He trained and inspired his companies.¹⁰

Lady Eaton supplied the much needed financial help in the early years, paying for the bus to take the players across the country in the 1955-56 season, and picking up the deficit for several years after that. Her patronage and social standing, as well as her pioneer spirit and desire to see that everyone in Canada had an opportunity to see good live theatre¹¹ did much to help the Players and live theatre in this country. Her fund to ensure that school children had the opportunity to see the Players also helped develop audiences for the future.

The performances the Players put on developed the critical faculties of their audiences and the local press, as may be seen by the increasing perspicacity of the reviews in the smaller papers over the years of the Players' operation. As the ambassadors of the Stratford Festival they brought not only good will but also a marked increase in the audience, and when the Shaw Festival opened in 1963 as a fully professional operation, there was a nucleus of an educated audience for Shaw, thanks to the Canadian Players. The tours also opened the door for the consequent regional and alternative theatres by their attracting and enchanting audiences in both large and small centres.

Although the Players searched for Canadian plays suitable for the touring companies,¹² they only succeeded in realizing two anthologies from resident writers, besides the only commissioned original work, All About Us. On the other hand, the company showed the country intellectually stimulating plays which

were examples of the best in both contemporary and classical drama. Ibsen, and Brecht as well as Chekov were presented with Shaw, Shakespeare, Synge, Eliot and Coward. They opened the door for the ensuing flourishing of Canadian playwrights by educating both actors and audience. In fact, the whole burgeoning of theatre in Canada was prepared by the Canadian Players who gave otherwise uninformed audiences a taste of and for good live drama.

The individual contributions to Canadian theatre by the many members of the Canadian Players are too numerous to cite. The names of actors and managers who have been in the company at one time may be found in all branches of the entertainment business. There are artistic directors, actors, stage managers and theatre business managers who all gained their experience and expertise from this comparatively small company, as did numerous Canadian television, radio and theatre script writers. Many of those who taught, or who are still teaching, in university and community college drama departments in both Canada and the United States graduated from the Canadian Players.

It could be argued that the changing structure of Canadian theatre, that is to say, the emergence of the regional and alternative theatres, contributed to the demise of the Canadian Players, as did the diversification of grant money. Where there were limited funds and increasing number of recipients, each grant was reduced proportionately. While sometimes solvent, the Players struggled "with a starvation budget and a schedule that was just plain hell" and succeeded in overcoming both¹³ until the change of policy by the board of Governors and the then artistic director, Tom Hendry, in 1964. It must be presumed that this policy aberration was engendered partly by the changes in the Canadian theatrical scene, and in an effort to raise revenue. But from this time the fortunes of the Canadian Players declined and despite the efforts of the new

artistic director and business manager, Charlesworth and Roberts, and the permanent theatre at The Central Library, never recovered.

The abrupt press release announcing the demise of the Canadian Players paid no tribute to the company as a whole or to the many members who contributed so much to Canadian theatre in the short space of twelve seasons.¹⁴ That a company of such courage and artistic integrity should be dismissed so ignominiously reflects unfavorably on the Board of Governors of the Foundation. It is fortunate that the Toronto Reference Library holds the collection of scrapbooks started by Robin Patterson, which hold reviews and commentaries concerning the Players from 1954 until 1966. This preserves much of the history of the Canadian Players, which was part of the first stirring of the now flourishing national theatre scene and does not deserve to be relegated to obscurity, but to be recognized for its role in modern Canadian theatre.

¹ Douglas Campbell. Confirmed in conversation. July 5, 1993.

² Herbert Whittaker. Globe and Mail. Toronto. October 1955.

³ A.V. North Battleford. News-Optimist. Saskatoon. February 22nd, 1963.

⁴ J.H. The Sheaf. Saskatoon. February 15th, 1963.

⁵ Six Canadian Players scrapbooks of reviews, etc, compiled by Robin Patterson and others Toronto Reference Library, Theatre Department.

⁶ Christopher Newton. Interview tape. July 11, 1992.

⁷ Robin Patterson. Letters to Tom Patterson. 1955-57.

⁸ Dawn Greenhalgh. Interview tape. September 5, 1992.

Joy Coghill, telephone conversation, October 1992.

⁹ Dawn Greenhalgh. Interview tape. September 5, 1992.

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¹⁰ Dawn Greenhalgh. Interview tape. September 5, 1992.

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¹¹ Lady Eaton. On Stage. 1 (1960), 2 (1961). In possession of Robin Patterson.

¹² Dennis Sweeting. Letter to V.M.P. September 15, 1992.

¹³ A.V. North Battleford. News Optimist. Saskatoon. February 22nd, 1963

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Interview Tapes

1. Herbert Whittaker. Toronto. June 23, 1992.
2. Jack Merigold. Stratford. August 8, 1992
3. Robin Patterson and Laurel Crosby. Toronto. August 27. 1992
4. Douglas Campbell. Toronto, August 17, 1992.
5. Roland Hewgill. Kingston. August 22, 1992
6. Bill Needles. Stratford. August 3, 1992.
7. Leslie Yeo. Toronto. August 12, 1992
8. Barbara Miller. Stratford. August 7, 1992.
9. Laurie Freeman. Toronto. August 10, 1992.
10. a. David Gardner. Sutton West. August 4, 1992
b. Bernard Behrens and Deborah Cass. Toronto. August 5, 1992
11. Bernard Behrens and Deborah Cass. August 5, 1992.
12. Ted Follows. Kitchener. August 29, 1992.
13. Dawn Greenhalgh. Toronto. September 5, 1992.
14. Bruce Swerdfager. Stratford. July 22, 1992.
15. Mervyn and Christine Blake. Sebringville. July 24, 199
16. Claude Bede. Toronto. August 6, 1992.
17. Ken James. Toronto. August 5, 1992.
18. a. Elisabeth Webster. Elmwood. June 28, 1992.
b. Jack Medley. Niagara-on-the-Lake. July 8, 1992
19. Jack Medley. Niagara-on-the-Lake. July 8, 1992.
20. Christopher Newton. Niagara-on-the-Lake. July, 11, 1992
21. Patricia Galloway. St. Marys. August 30, 1992
22. Don Lewis. (Lewis Gordon). (This tape is defective)
23. Gary Krawfurd. Toronto. September 4, 1992.
24. Barbara Franklin Perkins. Toronto. August 25, 1992.

- 25. Tom Hendry. Toronto. August 20, 1992.
- 26. Jean Roberts. Ottawa. August 31, 1992
- 27. Jean Roberts. Ottawa. August 31, 1992
- 28. Desmond Scott. Toronto. August 26, 1992.
- 29. Peter Mannering. Victoria. November 14, 1992.





UNUSUAL DESIGNS—Martha Jamieson, designer for the Canadian Players' productions this fall, works on two of the off-beat costumes she is preparing for the touring company's fall production of "Hamlet." The dress is a combination of orange, red, and dove-grey. Behind Miss Jamieson is one of her ultra-modern "half-costumes," designed to indicate both sides of the wearer's personality. The costumes fasten around the basic rehearsal outfit, and end neatly in the centre.

Norman Fegeman's Scrapbook.

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William Hutt, left, as "Hamlet." William Cole, centre, as "Marcellus," and David Gardner as "Horatio" in the ghost scene from Hamlet.

Robin Patterson - papers.



In possession of David Gardner.



Goneril

Regan

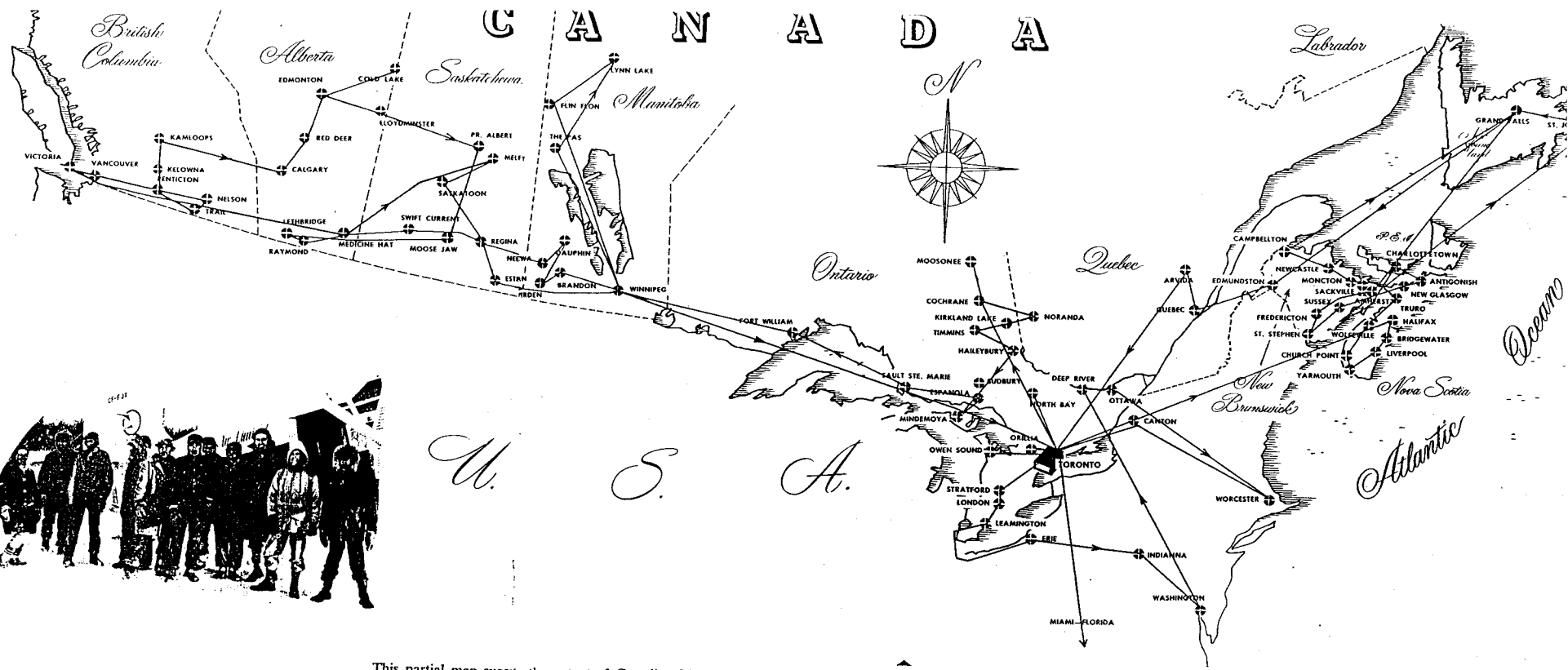


Cordelia

In possession of David Gardner.

Whitaker '61
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CANADIAN TOUR, 1958-1959

This partial map suggests the extent of Canadian Players' itinerary through Canada and the United States during the 1958-59 touring season, when two troupes travelled some 40,000 miles and staged 175 performances before 175,000 people.

Appendix VI

On Stage. II (1960.)