

Grace Kiner wrote *Wedding Clothes* in the 1920s for Alexander Drummond's *Rural Life Plays Program* at Cornell University. Not much is known about Ms. Kiner, other than she lived and worked on a farm in upstate New York.

*Wedding Clothes*  
by Grace Kiner

(The rather poorly furnished combination kitchen and dining-room of the farmhouse on the Moore's rented farm. It is a morning in early spring. Mr. Moore is seated at the end of the table with an account book before him. Mrs. Moore is seated by the window sewing. Both are past fifty.)

MR. MOORE

I don't see what I can do, Ma.

MRS. MOORE

You couldn't borrow a little more at the bank?

MR. MOORE

Jackson wouldn't give me no more. He didn't want to renew the note the last time.

MRS. MOORE

You ain't sold the potatoes yet.

MR. MOORE

I been figuring. It'll take every cent of it to pay the rent and the interest on the note — maybe more. Potatoes ain't bringing nothing now, anyhow.

MRS. MOORE

We might try and charge the things.

MR. MOORE

We can't run up no more bills, Ma. What have we got to have?

MRS. MOORE

Why, you just got to get a new suit, Pa.

MR. MOORE

I can wear my old one.

MRS. MOORE

You can't, Pa. It's five years old and so shiny that I can't do anything with it.

MR. MOORE

I could send it to the cleaners and make it do.

## ROBERT GARD

I am sure that anyone expecting to understand what went on in grassroots theater and academic theater here at Cornell and New York State from about 1918 to 1960 must start with Alexander M. Drummond. His middle name was Magnus. It was his personality and beliefs which colored more than three decades of Cornell and Central New York State life and spread influence to many corners of the United States.



Robert Gard

I suppose that now with all the funding sources and wide-spreading of theater arts departments across the country, Drummond might have done some things differently. But at the time when he developed his early ideas about people and their ability to create theater in and of themselves, America was really just entering her first great awareness of mighty creative forces at the grassroots. Many more persons wanted to participate in the arts than ever had before and a new concept of native roots, local awareness, and folklore as well as a new consciousness of the possibility of an American drama depending on themes and subjects beyond mere superficial romance and popular traveling roadshow humor and story was rising.

America was growing up, and growing up very fast. On the wide American scene there was an advent of new community theaters which took root in many places and offered wide opportunities in acting and theater arts. A vigorous native playwriting movement began in such places as North Carolina and a whole movement of playwriting was being founded on regional awareness and knowledge of personal roots. In North Dakota, Alfred Arvold established "The Little Country Theatre" to which students, many from ranches and farms, came to write plays about their own lives and the lives of their communities.

It was, I am sure, an exciting time for a man like Drummond, who was prepared by his region, family, and his natural bents, to become a part of the new awareness of American subjects. He studied dramatic techniques at Harvard with George Pierce Baker, chief mentor of the new playwriting movement, and at the same time, when he was preparing himself for new, important work in local drama, he enlarged his knowledge of world theater and notably of theater aesthetics, preparing the way for the outstanding programs of graduate study he was to offer later at Cornell.

I look upon Drummond as the greatest of the early academic developers of an American spirit and consciousness in regional and local drama. His interests and genius was broad enough to encompass warm appreciation of America as it was and had emerged from its mighty century of frontier expansion, a development to be reflected in many, many creative works devoted to homeland, to homeplace, to community building, and the slow planting of the idea that art was important at home, in the rural areas, as well as in the great cities and great city institutions.

Drummond encompassed all that and brought forward into his classes and programs at Cornell a whole world-knowledge of theater which made Cornell the coveted study ground for many American scholars.

I arrived at Ithaca on the Black Diamond train in September, 1937. I was brimming with new hope, I had a fellowship to the graduate school of Cornell, and I was going to work with the man then said to be the leader in a movement to engage the people at the grassroots in theater. I had heard of such things going on in beginning ways in North Carolina and Wisconsin. But I was a Kansas boy and I wanted to learn fast about this idea which had so intrigued me.

I wanted to talk with Professor Drummond the first day I arrived in Ithaca. I wanted to discuss communities and writers and stages and people who lived on farms and in small places.

I saw absolutely no sign of him for three weeks. I took to lingering outside his office door in Goldwin Smith Hall, hoping that he might appear. Finally, he did. I was overwhelmed by his size, his definite, sure movements, and especially by the fact that he propelled himself on crutches.

I had not known then that at the age of sixteen he was stricken by polio; but even so, though one leg was useless, the legends about him grew. He became a sought-after athletic coach, and some folks told hero tales about him...How he could lean back into his crutches and throw a football seventy yards down field; how his outlook on life had changed so many lives; tales about his incredible integrity.

This was the man I most wanted to meet.

As I slowly came to know him, I could see that Professor Drummond's thinking about theater in the region centered around the hope of developing fine original plays authored by the people of the area.

His theory of countryside playwriting was that writers should be encouraged to consider the subjects and themes closely allied to their own homeplaces. Cornell, the leading institution of higher learning in the region, ought, he thought, to assume a leading role by drawing attention of writers to the promising subjects and materials. Cornell should also stand ready to assist the local writers once they had plays underway.

Drummond himself was a master play doctor. He believed that a highly usable body of plays might be jointly developed by the authors and by someone like himself able and willing to straighten out the kinks in the scripts. These plays, once they were developed, would be of great service to local theater groups which, ideally, ought to be concerned about the regions where they existed.

The prices they charge in town for clothes is out of sight and there ain't time to send away for anything.

MRS. MOORE

I know, but like as not Margaret will want you to give her away and you got to look right.

MR. MOORE

Well, we just ain't got the money, Ma. What did you think you had to get?

MRS. MOORE

I'll just have to have a new dress. I ain't got a thing but my old brown flannel and it's been made over twice. And we got to have some new curtains for the sitting-room windows. They'll have to stand up in front of the bay window and those curtains are a shame and a disgrace.

MR. MOORE

That would take all of fifty dollars.

MRS. MOORE

We can't have Margaret ashamed of us before her young man the first time he sees us.

MR. MOORE

I guess he won't care much what we look like.

MRS. MOORE

But Margaret will, and we ought to get her something for a present, too.

MR. MOORE

There ain't no use talking about it, I guess.

MRS. MOORE

Pete Sampson was over yesterday when you was gone hauling shell corn.

MR. MOORE

What did he want?

MRS. MOORE

He wanted to talk to you again about the calf.

MR. MOORE

Did you tell him I wasn't going to sell it?

MRS. MOORE

Yes, I told him that you didn't want to. He said he'd give you seventy-five dollars for it.

MR. MOORE

It'll be worth twice that much after the fair and Pete Sampson knows it. It's the best six-months-old Jersey in the county. You heard the fellow from the station say so, too, when he was out.

MRS. MOORE

Your heart's been set on that calf ever since you had to feed it by hand and it followed you around. You'd think there never was another calf in the world.

MR. MOORE

It's going to take all the prizes in its section at the fair this fall, you wait and see.

MRS. MOORE

What makes you so set on the prizes, Pa?

MR. MOORE

I'd like to show some of the folks around here that I ain't such a bum farmer after all.

MRS. MOORE

You've had a run of bad luck, with the pigs dying and all.

MR. MOORE

I guess renters have bad luck most of the time.

MRS. MOORE

Seventy-five dollars would buy all the things we have to have and the curtains and leave enough to get a present for Margaret.

MR. MOORE

I ain't going to sell that calf, Ma.

MRS. MOORE

I suppose you won't then, Pa.

MR. MOORE

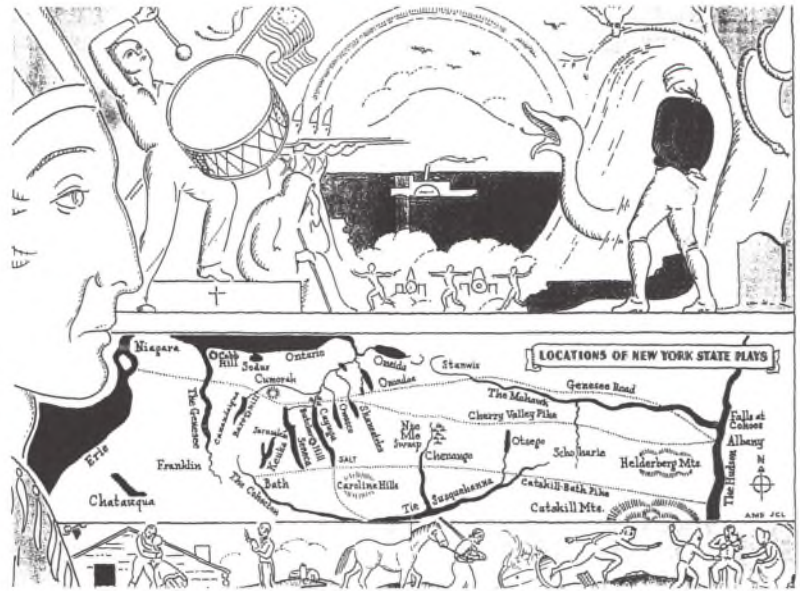
Why didn't she wait a little while? What's she in such a rush about — lettin' us know yesterday that she was coming tomorrow to be married.

MRS. MOORE

She said that her young man might have to go to Texas 'most any time on that oil business and he wanted her to go along.

MR. MOORE

Fools didn't get in such a rush to be married when we was young.



His theory about this body of original plays was extremely sound, I thought. He planned to distribute the plays on a non-royalty basis to help counteract the effect of extremely poor plays found in commercial publishers' lists, the plays, which rural groups, if left to themselves, seemed to invariably select. His chief desire was to see theater come into its own as an interpreter of regional life.

As I stood nervously outside his office I knew that the figure moving so impressively down the hall had to be the great Alexander M. Drummond. How I hoped that he might speak to me, or give an indication that I was there. He did not. He simply disappeared into his office and I very timidly decided to follow.

He got his chair into the exact position he wanted, sat down at his desk and began to straighten some papers. He arose, went to his bookshelf and after pondering over several, finally took one book and laid it on the corner of his desk. He suddenly said "Oh, dear!" with an expulsion of all the breath in his lungs and then looked around at me with a glare which seemed to me of pure distaste. Then he said, "Well, what do you think I can do for you?"

I wasn't quite prepared for the question, put as it was, and I answered timidly and a little pompously, "I am interested in a theater that will grow from the hearts and everyday lives of the American people. I want to learn from you how such a theater may be encouraged."

He glanced at me quickly and began to fiddle with some more papers. Finally, he put a sheet down and said, "Well, I dunno." And began to drum the top of his desk.

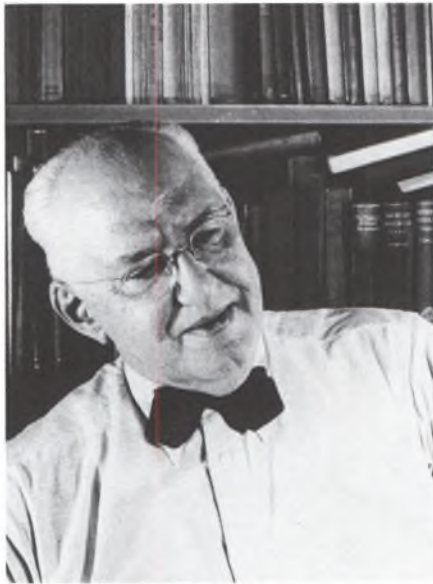
I got up to leave, sure that he wanted to get rid of me. But he let me get as far as the door of his office and then said, "Oh, Gard!"

I turned around and saw that he was holding out the book he'd taken down from the shelf. "Have you read Carl Carmer's *Listen for a Lonesome Drum*?"

"No, sir."

"Well, you might look it over. Pretty good."

I took the book, thanked him and got to the door again. He called



Alexander Drummond

me back several times, just to chat about inconsequential matters. I was very puzzled when I left his office. I was sure that he knew a great deal about me; but that I knew nothing about him.

I wish I had space to dwell upon the fascinating and at times unbelievable method by which Professor Drummond taught. Possibly it is enough to say that it was an ordeal by fire under a terrifying master. His famous Course 66 was where one had to measure up, absolutely, to the Drummond standards of scholarship. It wasn't easy,

but at the end, you found that you were a whole lot less conscious of small conceits and vanities and foolish ambitions.

I built scenery in the theater, assisted with play production and did whatever was required of me, and wrote, I thought, some credible plays. He gave no sign whatever that any of the things I had been doing impressed him. Finally, he cast me in a play for which I was sure I was unsuitable, the character of Captain Shotover in Shaw's *Heartbreak House*. I had such a small voice in those days that Mr. Drummond called me "the whispering Mr. Gard." But he seemed to think it worthwhile to create a voice for me; and his sure coaching gave me at least some hope of portraying the character. Maybe I was partly successful, for a lady from New York who happened to see our production told me, "Oh, yes. Your Captain Shotover was much, much more effective than Orson Welles'." Since I had no way of comparing, I took her at her word.

But there was precious little talk about a theater of the people and nothing about a new playwriting movement. I guess I became very discouraged, finally. I had written a full-length play that I liked and had passed it on to Professor Drummond. He had held it for three months. I thought he must think it awful. And then one day in May I received a letter from Nita Glass, President of Sweet Briar College in Virginia, offering me a job as instructor and head of the theater.

I was terribly in need of a job and I decided that I must see Professor Drummond and tell him I had to leave Cornell.

Finally I did tell him.

"Who told you to go?"

"Well, nobody. I just thought . . ."

"Better think it over."

He obviously had more to say. I stayed waiting. "Better think it over," he repeated. "I've been working very hard the last two months to get you a fellowship with the Rockefeller Foundation. I want you to stay and help me start a new theater project in New York State. Maybe we can learn something about stories and people and theater

MRS. MOORE

You can raise another calf next year.

MR. MOORE

There won't be another one as good as this.

MRS. MOORE

I suppose not. Has the mail gone yet?

MR. MOORE

It's time for the mailman, ain't it? I expect I can go down and get it.

MRS. MOORE

Seems like we ought to hear from Margaret again.

MR. MOORE

It ain't likely you'll hear again, when she's coming tomorrow. There's somebody coming up the road. Maybe they thought to stop and get it.

MRS. MOORE

Who is it?

MR. MOORE

Looks like Pete Sampson's team. What's he coming for?

MRS. MOORE

He said yesterday that he would stop in this morning to see you again about the calf.

MR. MOORE

Did you tell him I'd let him have it?

MRS. MOORE

No, I didn't say you would.

MR. MOORE

I want to do what's right for Margaret, Ma. You don't see what it means to sell the calf now.

MRS. MOORE

It don't seem to me like a calf's very important against Margaret's getting married. The last child we got.

MR. MOORE

I can't see as children are such a sight of comfort after Carrie.

MRS. MOORE

Hush, Pa. Don't you say nothin' against Carrie.

MR. MOORE

Pete's tying up. Mrs. Sampson's with him.

MRS. MOORE

You better go out, Pa. Come in, Mrs. Sampson. There ain't no use of your standing out there to freeze.

MRS. SAMPSON

It's real fresh out this morning for March, ain't it?

MRS. MOORE

You might just as well be in the warm while Pa talks to Mr. Sampson. Come over to the register. Pa just fixed the furnace.

MRS. SAMPSON

The heat feels pretty good all right.

MRS. MOORE

You had quite a drive. Won't Mr. Sampson come in?

MRS. SAMPSON

No, Pete never gets cold. I guess they can talk better without women folks around.

MRS. MOORE

You better lay off your wraps, you'll catch cold when you go out.

MRS. SAMPSON

Is Sam going to let Pete have the calf?

MRS. MOORE

I'm afraid not. He hates to sell it so bad. It's the best one he ever raised.

MRS. SAMPSON

Pete tried to buy it in town last week and Sam said he wouldn't sell it for love or money.

MRS. MOORE

Pa's counting a lot on taking the prizes at the fair with it.

MRS. SAMPSON

So he told Pete. Funny how men are about things like that. You'd think the world would come to an end if they don't get some prize or a cent more for their hogs.

MRS. MOORE

There's lots of things more important than prizes.

MRS. SAMPSON

What you working on?

that will help the whole idea of American theater along."

I sat very still. The reversal was terrific. I felt like laughing, then I felt a great wave of affection for this great man who knew exactly what to do.

He said, "I had just this morning received a letter from Dr. David Stevens in New York. He would like to have you come down to the Foundation to see him."

I stood up. "I would like to stay at Cornell if you really think I can help." He suddenly shoved the play I was so proud of across the desk to me. "I was going to send you back your play this morning. I'm sorry I held it so long."

I saw that he had written on the cover, "This play has a real flavor of America that I like tremendously. Come and see me. I have some news for you."

That evening, I dined with Professor Drummond at the Ithaca Hotel. After dinner, the check lay between us for a long while. Then, suddenly, I recalled the legend: that if a graduate student achieved any kind of respect in Mr. Drummond's eyes, he might be left to pay the check. I guess I picked it up. I don't know to this day how I ever paid the bill. Perhaps I still owe the Ithaca Hotel for that dinner. It was worth it! The next morning there was an envelope for me with a round trip ticket to New York, and a note that said merely, "Good Luck."

I did see David Stevens; he became my great and lifelong friend. When I met him I clutched my play. I thought he might like to read it, right there. He made no such suggestion. He said, "Glad you could come down. I've just talked with Professor Drummond. Your fellowship is arranged. We want you to go to Kansas for a week to visit your mother. Then you can come back to Cornell and go to work."

I traveled all over the state. I met the people everywhere. I heard yarns about outlaws, bogeymen, farmers, pretty teachers, milk strikes, revival preachers, murderers, buried treasures, race horses, haunts, wondrous cures, and probably hundreds of other things. I sat in crossroads stores, hung over back fences, sat on front steps, milked cows, chewed the fat with the boys at the Spit and Whittle Club at Dryden, New York, and generally engaged in any occupation that allowed for yarn swapping. It was a happy time and all through it Professor Drummond left me quite alone. Then one day he sent for me.

I went to his office with acute hesitation. Surveying my activities I could not actually see that I had accomplished much. I felt that what I had seen and heard from the people had point in the sort of theater I imagined might spring from the land and the people, but I feared that Professor Drummond would ask me what books I had read and I knew that I could not impress him. I expected the ax to fall.

I went into his office. He was writing and he wrote for a while. Then he said, "Well, what have you been doing?"

I blushed and said, "Professor Drummond, I have been hearing stories and swapping lies."

"Where have you been?"

I named two or three dozen places I had visited. He said, "Well,

there's plenty to do."

"Yes, sir."

"You think this floating around is worthwhile?"

"Yes, sir."

He said, "I was hoping you would think so. It's the only way you ever get the real flavor of the region." He stood up. "I have my car downstairs. Let's go!"

Touring the central New York countryside with Professor Drummond was like being blind and suddenly seeing the unbelievable beauty of sunlight and landscape. It was like that, yet something more, for he seemed to endow the land with a mystic poetry that sprang from his sensitivity to present and past. There seemed no back road that Professor Drummond did not know. There was no hilltop he had not seen and no valley to which he attached no mysterious significance. The land, the people, the winds, and rains all added up to a complete and satisfying unity for Professor Drummond, and so perfectly were these things reflected in his observations that word pictures dropped from his lips like impressionistic paintings.

Sometimes at night we would stand on a high place called Butcher Hill from which all the land seemed to drop way to the north, to Lake Ontario, and then all the grumpiness, all worldly disillusion, the entire burden of life rolled away from him and he would speak for hours of the legend and of the folklore of places.

As such talk went on and on, broken occasionally by excursions to eat wonderful country food in corners of the land that only Professor Drummond seemed to know, I fell more and more under the spell of the country. It was a bewitchment that stimulated fantasies of imagination and sapped creative strength. I lived every day as a mad kind of excursion, breathing into a subconscious creativeness everything I saw and felt and heard. I had no inclination to work. I rebelled against writing. The whole state was my stage, but I could not formalize the product of my senses into characters that were like life, nor could I merge the fantasy of ideas that rushed through me into tight packages that were the plots and themes of plays.

There was a sudden stop to this madness. I visited a county fair one day at Morris, New York. In one tent a stage had been set up, and the tent was packed with people. They were old folks and young folks and farmers and city people. They were eager; they were in festival mood. They wanted theater, excitement. They wanted hearty humor, dramatic picture, furious impact. They had a right to expect such things, for the plays they were there to see were billed as being from rural life. Rural life to these people meant kindness, neighborliness, strong appreciations of land and wind and color. Rural life meant the strength of outdoor bodies, the good simplicities of food and work and neighborhood fun. Rural life meant songs and games, stout problems in land economics, education for the kids, and a savor of the things that were part of their own place. Rural life meant a tiny thread of loneliness, too, and maybe a very occasional breath of tragedy. Rural life meant the neighborhood arts of careful canning, weaving, quilting. Rural life meant everything these people knew and understood — the whole goodness of their lives.

MRS. MOORE

A new shirt for Pa. I have to make all his shirts myself. The store ones don't seem to fit him in the arms.

MRS. SAMPSON

Nice piece of goods. What kind of material is it?

MRS. MOORE

English broadcloth, the clerk said. It was terrible expensive.

MRS. SAMPSON

Ain't it terrible the way goods stay high. You folks must be getting all dolled up. Going to New York to see Margaret?

MRS. MOORE

No. Margaret's comin' home tomorrow.

MRS. SAMPSON

Well, that's fine for you. Is she going to make a very big stay?

MRS. MOORE

No. Just for a day.

MRS. SAMPSON

Not a very big visit for such a big trip.

MRS. MOORE

She's coming home to be married.

MRS. SAMPSON

To be married! Well, I never. Who's she marrying?

MRS. MOORE

A young man she met there. He's an engineer.

MRS. SAMPSON

An engineer? On a train?

MRS. MOORE

Oh, no, one of the kind that builds bridges and roads and such.

MRS. SAMPSON

Is he coming with her?

MRS. MOORE

Yes, they're just coming to be married and going right back. He can't stay away from his job any longer than that.

MRS. SAMPSON

Well, well. Ain't that fine.

MRS. MOORE

What do you suppose those men are doing all this time?

MRS. SAMPSON

Oh, they're just arguing, I guess. Are you going to have a wedding?

MRS. MOORE

No, just Carrie and the minister and his wife. She didn't want much fuss because his folks can't come.

MRS. SAMPSON

Well, I think it's just fine to have her get married at home. So many young folks don't nowadays.

MRS. MOORE

I always wanted to have a nice home wedding. I never felt just right about Carrie getting married away.

MRS. SAMPSON

Yes, a woman sort of feels better to see her girls get married. Have you seen the young man?

MRS. MOORE

No, you see Margaret ain't been home since last summer. She sent us a little picture. It's kind of dark, but you can see what he looks like.

MRS. SAMPSON

He ain't no beauty. But handsome is as handsome does, I guess.

MRS. MOORE

He must be real nice from what she says. I wish she could stay a little longer, though. She ain't been home now for a year.

MRS. SAMPSON

Why didn't she come sooner, so she could of got her sheets hemmed and some comforters tied? I'd 'a' been glad to help you. It'll cost like everything if she has to buy everything.

MRS. MOORE

She wrote that he was likely to have to go to Texas any time now on a big oil job, something about a pumping station and he wanted she should go along.

MRS. SAMPSON

Well, she better take him while he's willing. Good men ain't so easy to come by. So, you're getting new clothes for the wedding.

The plays were billed as rural life plays and they were played by local young people and adults. When they began, I, too, was eager, for I had seen the broad, free life of American country places. But when the plays were over, I looked at the faces around me. Anticipation had turned to a solemn disinterestedness. There was no laughter, no tears — only definite exodus that was filled with vague irritation. There was no festival here — only the departure of an initial eagerness that had seemed very precious and deep.

The reason seemed to me then quite clear. The plays were not rural plays. True, they were supposedly set in the country, but their characters had no relation to the kind of country life I and the folks around me knew. They had very little relation to life anywhere. They were dreary in tone: they were filled with bad jokes lifted from a collection read somewhere or heard on somebody's radio. The characters were stereotypes of real people. They maundered on and on about poor housewives who had no pianos or washing machines or they talked in cliches about cruel fathers who would not let sons or daughters have boy or girl friends or join 4-H clubs. They hinted at shotgun weddings, and they dusted off the only conflicts between the farm and the city. They sawed back and forth on the fringes of obscene jests about the farmer's daughter and the city slicker.

I remember thinking, as I walked out of the tent into the autumn sunlight, that this was the only real theater the people in this place knew, that there could be only failure and disillusionment in such plays, and that such plays were evil and would kill any art that might grow here. I paused as I thought of the rural life that I knew in Kansas, of the wheat fields, of the mighty machines biting through the yellow grain, of the harvest parties, and of the wild singing and dancing. I thought of New York State grape pickers singing on a steep hillside, of a farm mother holding a little child against her breast, of the terror of a violent storm, and of faces full of suffering from pain and lost crops. As I stood thinking, the great Butternut Valley that was all around Morris turned golden in the afternoon light. I looked at the hills, and suddenly my spirit was filled and lifted with a clear knowledge. I knew that there must be plays of the people filled with the spirit of places, and my aimless activities assumed meaning. I felt the conviction then that I have maintained since — that the knowledge and love of place is a large part of the joy in people's lives. There must be plays that grow from all the countrysides of America, fabricated by the people themselves, born of toiling hands and free minds, born of music and love and reason. There must be many great voices singing out the lore and legend of America from a thousand hilltops, and there must be students to listen and to learn, and writers encouraged to use the materials.

The next day I went back to Ithaca and sought out Professor Drummond. When I told him what I had been thinking, he said, "I'm glad some of the ideas have been jelling for you." And we sat down at his table and made some plans for a playwriting project from the State of New York.

Professor Drummond said that there were probably a lot of people in New York State who wanted to write plays. He said that we would try to get in touch with these people and that the result of our efforts

might be such a bloom of country-grown plays that the entire state would enjoy the aroma of up-country life. He said that outside the University playwriting classes, there had been almost no attempt to get the people to think and write dramatically of themselves. When I asked him how many people might try writing a play, he refused to estimate, but his eyes warmed up, and I knew that he was dreaming of a large number and that both he and I were hoping for sensational results. I suppose that when we were alone and remembered the soul-tormenting rigors of playwriting, we had some serious doubts, but these doubts did not in the least deter us from trying. Indeed, so great was our faith in the people, so real was our dream of a people's theater, and so confident was our belief in the goodness of the folklore and life of the region that it was almost as though some old central New York Indian god had endowed us with this dream as a special mission.

This dream soon became a reality. Our first task was the preparation of a letter which we circulated widely through the mails and got printed in papers and magazines. The letter pointed out that many persons, young and old, should be interested in writing a play about New York State, that as soon as good plays became available they would be circulated through-out the state, and that anyone might receive advice and perhaps assistance by writing to Professor Drummond or me at Cornell University. The letter stated also that we were eager to get in touch with folks who might have some good ideas for plays so that we might pass these ideas on to possible authors and that we wished people would get in touch with us who might like to present some of these plays in their own communities.

Perhaps Professor Drummond knew what we were letting ourselves in for, but I did not. All I had was enthusiasm and a capacity for work. I needed both, for immediately our mail overflowed the boxes. There were letters scattered everywhere. Such a good thing as a secretary to help handle this spate of potential culture was a part of our dream that he had not dealt with. But every letter was answered, and the ideas, the encouragement, the offer of free publicity, good will, even love, made us believe that maybe, just maybe, we had touched a popular chord. The letters were filled, some of them, with a sort of fresh hope, as though a farmer or a housewife or a grocer or a country doctor after years of working and thinking and dreaming suddenly saw a chance to speak of the things he lived by. Some of the letters were neatly typed. Others were written in illegible scrawls and soft lead pencils. A few were written in foreign languages — in French, German, and Finnish.

There were letters that I remember particularly well. One was from a farmer's wife in Cattaraugus County, New York, Mrs. D.H. Chambers. She wrote that she was much interested in writing a play about the Dutch Hill War, a rather comic incident of the land troubles of the 1840's which took place on her farm. She wrote: "I have never expressed myself in the dramatic form, but I am willing to learn. I have a brother who has been fairly successful in dramatic writing and you may have heard of him. His name is Maxwell Anderson."

People began to drift into Ithaca to see us about their work. A woman from Buffalo brought her play about underground railroad

MRS. MOORE

I don't know if we can get much or not. We really ain't got anything suitable, neither Pa nor I, but you know how tight money's been lately.

MRS. SAMPSON

I should say I do. You ought to hear Pete go on about it.

MRS. MOORE

It's worse for a renter. We can't hold the potatoes. The landlord wants his rent.

MRS. SAMPSON

Pete's holding his. He says they'll go to a dollar before the winter's over.

MRS. MOORE

I'd like to get a nice present for Margaret, too.

MRS. SAMPSON

The calf ought to bring enough to get most of the things. Pete'll pay cash.

MRS. MOORE

I don't know if Pa'll sell it or not.

MRS. SAMPSON

Oh, Pete'll talk him into it. Pete always gets the things he sets his heart on. He's been talkin' about the calf for the last month.

MRS. MOORE

I'm so excited over the wedding. I ain't slept a wink since we got Margaret's letter.

MRS. SAMPSON

You don't say.

MRS. MOORE

I tell Pa I wasn't so upset when I was going to be married myself.

MRS. SAMPSON

I expect I will be too, when my girl gets big enough to be thinking about weddings. When I was married, I'd been to a party every night the week before and I was so tired I just about went to sleep at the wedding dinner. Pete jokes me about it yet. Are you going to have a dinner?

MRS. MOORE

Yes. Margaret wrote that they would have the service at noon and eat at one, so as they could catch the three o'clock train.

MRS. SAMPSON

What are you going to have to eat?



MRS. MOORE

We're going to kill one of the turkey hens we been saving and I got some canned pumpkin for pies.

MRS. SAMPSON

Could you use some of my quince preserves? I had extra good luck last fall and they kept fine.

MRS. MOORE

Why, I don't want to rob you. My grape jell is all gone.

MRS. SAMPSON

It won't be robbing me at all. I got plenty. I'll just send some over in the morning.

MRS. MOORE

I hate to have you go through to so much trouble.

MRS. SAMPSON

There come the men folks. Sam let Pete have the calf; they got it on the wagon.

MRS. MOORE

I sort of hate to see him go. He's such a nice calf.

MRS. SAMPSON

I knew Pete would get him. That's why he drove over in the wagon instead of using the car.

MRS. MOORE

He's a pretty good load.

MRS. SAMPSON

Well, I must be going. Pete's in a hurry.

MRS. MOORE

Won't he come in for a minute?

MRS. SAMPSON

Oh, no, he ain't never cold. I hope you have a nice day tomorrow.

MRS. MOORE

Well, thank you. Come in again sometime, when you can stay a little.

MRS. SAMPSON

I will. I was telling Pete the other day that I was coming over here sometime and just spend the afternoon. We folks in the country seem to get out of the habit of visiting. Tell Margaret to stop in a minute if she has any time to spare.

days at Niagara Falls. An old man with long gray hair came to see me with a jolly little play about antique collectors. A machinist from around Rochester brought two scripts about workmen. A girl from the western part of the state brought her play about grape pickers. A thin young man came with his play about a schoolhouse that was painted in big red and white checks. (One faction in the community had once wanted the schoolhouse painted red, the rest of the community wanted it white. They had compromised.) Folks came from all points of the compass with plays that reflected many facets of regional life.

There was excitement in meeting these people and talking with them. They were new signs of an art expression that seemed to be springing up joyously everywhere, and so infectious was the spirit of this simple movement that Professor Drummond and I were caught up in it. We began to write, too, and several plays were our individual or joint efforts.

We tried out a lot of new plays in the Cornell University theater and slowly began to build up some really actable scripts. Then we decided that we must write a long show that would set the temper of the thing we were trying to do. We hoped that such a play might draw the attention of the state to our project. For a subject we turned more or less naturally to one of the greatest of the New York State tales, the famous yarn of the Cardiff Giant.

Almost anyone, these days, knows the story of this hoax that took place in 1869 in the little village of Cardiff when a great stone man was uncovered by well diggers on the farm of "Stubby" Newell. The discovery of this figure aroused thousands of simple, God-fearing folk to fever pitch, for they believed the stone giant to be a religious manifestation, one of the Biblical giants of Genesis. Great scientists, too, were hoodwinked for a time and considered the find to be one of the important paleological discoveries of the age.

The hoax was actually fabricated by a cigarmaker from Binghamton named George Hull. One day George was arguing with a preacher in Fort Dodge, Iowa. The preacher claimed loudly that there "were giants in those days" and Hull maintained there were not. The preacher did George down in debate, and George went out and hired men to cut a great block of gypsum out of the river bank at Fort Dodge. Then George shipped this block of stone to Chicago where he got a tombstone cutter to carve the block into the form of a giant. George got the giant to Binghamton then shipped it by wagon to Cardiff, the wagon travelling at night for secrecy.

George was first cousin to "Stubby" Newell. Stubby let George bury the giant on his farm. In the dead of night the deed was done. The giant lay buried for a year. Grass grew over the spot secluded under the shadow of a great hill. One day, Stubby hired a couple of men to dig a well right on the spot where the giant lay buried. When the men encountered a great stone foot and dug a little more to see what manner of creature lay buried there, they both tossed their shovels and ran to the village to spread the news.

In a few days, Newell's farm was tramped over by seething humanity. A tent was erected above the giant's grave, and Hull, Newell, and Company, which included by this time the famous

Homer, New York, banker, David Hannum (later known fictionally as David Harum), were coining money at the rate of 5 percent on \$4,000,000!

Everybody wanted to see the giant. Certain ladies viewing the sculptured wonder fainted dead away, for Hull's tombstone carver had left nothing to the imagination. A dentist, Dr. Boynton, pronounced the work to be of Caucasian, not Indian origin, and called it the noblest work of art that had come down to us. The Board of Regents of the State of New York came to view the colossus, bearing with them insurance in the words of the state geologist, Dr. Hall, who called the giant the "most remarkable object brought to light in the country deserving of the attention of all archaeologists."

And so it went. Preachers basing sermons on the giant gleaned converts like falling chaff. One fool from the Yale Divinity School identified the giant as a Phoenician idol brought to this country several hundred years before Christ. P.T. Barnum, recognizing the giant as a magnificent showpiece, offered to buy it for sixty thousand dollars, and when he was refused, went off to New York to make a duplicate. He displayed it as the only authentic Cardiff Giant.

Professor Marsh of Yale at last exposed the hoax for what it was — a crude and recently carved block of gypsum, something which President Andrew D. White of Cornell had maintained from the first.

While Professor Drummond and I were speculating about the Cardiff Giant as a potential dramatic subject, a dreamer from the South came to visit us at Ithaca. This was Paul Green, who long before had caught a vision of a people's theater with Professor Koch of North Carolina University.

This tall man with the sensitive face and deep eyes made a profound impression on me. His plays were pointed out as the foremost regional dramatic expression in America. He spoke simply, yet like a poet, and everything in the earth and sky and of men had a philosophic meaning for him. He spent long hours talking with me. When he heard the story of the giant he began to grin and get excited and to walk up and down. He said the yarn demonstrated the universality of human folly, and he insisted that Professor Drummond and I start writing the play immediately.

So one day in the early spring we drove up to Cardiff, up Highway 11 that runs north from Cortland to Syracuse, and we paused a little while on a great hill that the glaciers left across the Onondaga Valley like a high wall. We looked down the valley flats, across the salt well derricks, toward the little town of Cardiff near which the giant once lay. The valley was quiet and mysterious, with the hill they call Bear Mountain shadowing it from the west. It was a scene to inspire awe.

We found an old man in Cardiff, Mr. Nichols, who lived alone in a shack. He was the son of one of the fellows who had dug the well and uncovered the giant's foot. Mr. Nichols had seen the giant lying in its grave, and he had some yellowed photographs of the scene and the wonder. He took us to the exact spot where the hoax

MRS. MOORE

I'll tell her. Did Pete give you the check, Pa?

MR. MOORE

Yeah, I got it. I made him give me eight-five for him.

MRS. MOORE

Eight-five dollars. That's a lot of money for one critter.

MR. MOORE

He'd 'a' been worth a lot more next winter.

MRS. MOORE

I know, Pa. But there didn't seem to be no other way to get the money.

MR. MOORE

Well, there ain't no use of crying over spilt milk. I suppose you'll be wanting to go to town this afternoon.

MRS. MOORE

Yes, I'll get right at the dinner so as we can get a good early start. You know how long it takes you to get a suit.

MR. MOORE

What kind of a one have I got to get?

MRS. MOORE

It better be a black one, I guess. Your shirt is just about done, all but the buttonholes. And I'll get a black silk, they're always so dressy. I hate like poison to buy one ready made, they charge so much for them. But I ain't got time to make anything.

MR. MOORE

What are we going to get her for a present?

MRS. MOORE

I been thinking. We could get her some wool blankets, she'll need them.

MR. MOORE

Seems like you ought to get something more fussy than that.

MRS. MOORE

We better wait till after we get the things we got to have. If we got enough left we might get some silver knives and forks, maybe the spoons, too.

MR. MOORE

They cost like everything.

MRS. MOORE

I expect they would. I want to get some curtains for the sitting room, too. I'll have to run them up on the machine after we get home. It's a good thing we got busy and cleaned up the house yesterday. We better stop on the way in and see the minister.

MR. MOORE

I better go and feed the team if we are going to get an early start.

MRS. MOORE

Why, they're coming back. What do you suppose is the matter?

MR. MOORE

I don't know. Left something, maybe.

MRS. SAMPSON

Forgot to give you folks your mail. We got it when we came up by the box. Thought we'd save you a trip down.

MR. MOORE

It's too bad to give you so much bother.

MRS. SAMPSON

No bother at all, we almost forgot it. Goodbye.

MRS. MOORE

Any letters, Pa?

MR. MOORE

Guess not. Yes, I guess there is one. It's from her, I guess.

MRS. MOORE

Yes, it's from Margaret. Telling us some more about when she's coming, I suppose.

MR. MOORE

Well, read it, Ma.

MRS. MOORE

"Dear folks, I've only a second to write. We must rush for the train." Why she wrote this Saturday. She wasn't taking no train then.

MR. MOORE

Go on. Maybe she tells where she was going.

MRS. MOORE

"Howard was ordered to go to Texas yesterday and he didn't dare to try and put it off. So we were married this mornin — " Oh, Pa, she's married already.

had taken place. From him we got the atmosphere and the flavor of the event. We found other old-timers who remembered songs that were sung at the revival meetings or who had poems that had been written to commemorate the find. We discovered relatives of Stubby Newell, and little by little we assembled a fine body of working materials.

Such materials included, in addition to the items described, notes made from the newspapers of the period, the *Syracuse Journal* and the *Ithaca Journal*, especially, from articles in magazines describing the wonder, and from actual statements gleaned from published lectures by various personalities involved. We also dug a bit into the backgrounds of Stubby Newell and George Hull, and we did extensive reading relating to the topics of the times and to the state of New York crops and climate in 1869. In other words, we assembled a fairly complete body of information pertaining generally to the region in the particular year we wished to set the drama.

During our work collecting materials, we discussed the form of the play. We believed that the play must be flexible in form to allow for the inclusion of many scenes and numerous characters. We wanted to draw a merry picture of country life in New York State with its color and variety including the social "bees," the rural school, the church picnics, the political argufiers, and all the rest. To do this we knew that we must think more in terms of a "show" than of a strictly plotted play. Therefore, with the excellent models of the ancient Chinese theater, the "living newspaper" dramas of the Federal Theatre, and the newly produced *Our Town* before us we conceived a New York State show.

I got up a first draft of the play which seemed pretty good to me, but Professor Drummond said: "Gard, this is too long. We'll have to cut it." And then he began to work on the play. He proved that he was a true lover of New York State and her stories, for he lengthened the play, added characters, scenes and generally filled the whole thing with his intimate understanding of the people, the language, their music and poetry. The final draft of *The Cardiff Giant* had ninety-eight speaking parts. In the first production in the Cornell University Theater I played nine parts myself.

When the curtain rose to an enthusiastic crowd of New York Staters and the Narrator was on the stage saying, "You gotta imagine your back in 1869; that's when the hoax jelled — in October 1869," it was as if the spirit of central New York State had come alive.

And in the very first scene the folks began to go to Cardiff to see the giant, and the Erie canallers sang their famous song:

"We was forty miles from Albany, Forget it I never shall.

What a terrible time we had one night, On the E-r-i-e Canawal!"

Politicians, farmers, merchants, professors, Indians, rich men, poor men, beggarmen, dogs! And the preachers began preachin', and the ladies of the Methodist, Free Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Hard Shell, Spiritualist, and all the other churches began singin' revival hymns, and Dave Harum, P.T. Barnum, Bob Ingersoll, the Board of Regents of the State of New York, the Bloomer Women, and the Yale professors all got on stage at once yelling that the giant was an honest-to-God sign from on high! Yes, sir, in the first scene

there was a lot going on. But there was more to come, with the giant lyin' in his grave there on the stage, and crowds of people milling around and demonstrating plenty of kinds of human folly!

When the audiences saw the big show they went away thinking that the New York State Plays Project was sure off to a good start, and some of them went home and did some thinking about New York State and sent us a lot of good yarns.

I can still feel the central New York State land calling me. When I close my eyes, the patchwork hillsides across the deep valleys are as vivid to me as though I stood on the Cornell campus on a May morning and looked west toward Mecklenburg. I might have lived and dreamed forever in the Finger Lakes country if it had not been for the war. But suddenly one day, there it was, and the course of our creative project in New York State was instantly altered. There was writing, yes, but it was frenzied writing on war-time themes, and when we looked about the land, there were no longer home-grown plays on country stages. Sadly, we admitted that the dream must wait, and for me, indeed, the New York State Project is only a green memory. I have never lived in New York State since.

There were many ideas that I took away from Cornell. Most of these ideas were simply a part of the maturing of other, larger ideas and not definable in themselves. But the large ideas about regional theater that I took away were definable. Reduced to general terms they are these: A concept of theater must be broad enough to include many things. The traditional materials of the region, at least those having possible literary significance, must be assembled. Writers must be encouraged throughout the region. The people of the region must be "let in" on what the regional drama project is trying to do and a friendly public attitude toward the project must be established. The university should take a role of leadership in the theater arts not only on campus but throughout the region.

MR. MOORE

Is that all she says?

MRS. MOORE

No, there's some more. "I hope you won't mind. It will save you all the work and fuss. We'll try and come home after Howard gets done with his job. I'll write more later. Love, Margaret." Oh, Pa, and you sold the calf and we got all ready.

MR. MOORE

I would 'a' taken the prize at the fair if I'd 'a' kept it. I suppose Pete Sampson'll show him now.

MRS. MOORE

Don't you suppose he'll let you buy it back?

MR. MOORE

Not much. Pete don't give up the things that he wants himself.

MRS. MOORE

I did so want one of the girls to get married at home.

MR. MOORE

There, there, Ma. Where did she say she was going?

MRS. MOORE

She didn't say. Seems like she might 'a' written a little more about it. I hope they had a minister.

MR. MOORE

Yeh, it seems like.

MRS. MOORE

Maybe we ought to send her the money for a present. She'll need lots of things, getting married in such a hurry.

MR. MOORE

Maybe. We'll see how much the potatoes bring. Guess, I better go tend the stock.

MRS. MOORE

You might as well turn out the old turkey hen.

MR. MOORE

Yeh.

CURTAIN