

Appalachian theater comes to the prairie

By VICKI VOSKUIL, Tribune Staff Writer

Roadside Theater will come to rest in Bismarck Sept. 30 after an unprecedented statewide tour of 13 North Dakota towns, 18 performances, more than a dozen workshops and a statewide public television broadcast.

The mountain theater's home is the central Appalachian coalfields of southwestern Virginia and eastern Kentucky: All of Roadside's actor/storytellers and musicians were born in that region.

Roadside will appear at the University of Mary at 11 a.m. in "Mountain Tales." Bismarck State College will host a workshop at 2:30 p.m. and a public performance of "Pretty Polly" at 8 in Sidney J. Lee Auditorium.

Tickets for "Pretty Polly" are \$5 for adults and \$3 for students at the door.

Roadside Theater draws the content and style of its original productions from the history and culture of its mountain home. The region has a rich tradition of music, storytelling, strong family structure and dramatic church services.

"Mountain Tales" is a lively performance of the traditional songs and stories of the Appalachian Mountains.

"Pretty Polly" is tall tales, family remembrances and traditional songs accompanied by guitar, banjo and fiddle to tell the story of a storyteller, Polly Branham Johnson.

Polly's stories and songs were collected in the 1930s and

'40s by the WPA Writer's Project and are a combination of fact and fiction, humor and warmth.

Aunt Polly, as she was called by all who knew her, was born on Big Beaver Creek in eastern Kentucky in 1864. She died in 1947, leaving behind a great wealth of stories and songs which Roadside Theater recreates in "Pretty Polly."

Performing from the 12-member company are: Tommy Bledsoe, a musician and storyteller from Snowflake, Va., who works with Roadside in three other productions; Ron Short, a musician, storyteller and writer from Big Stone Gap, Va.; and Angelyn DeBord, a storyteller who has been with Roadside 12 years, since its founding in 1974.

Roadside Theater tours all parts of the United States and has appeared at Lincoln Center, the Festival of American Folklife in Washington, D.C., Europe, and has been in residence a number of times off-Broadway in New York City.

The block-grant tour is sponsored by the North Dakota Council on the Arts with funds provided by the National Endowment for the Arts.



"Pretty Polly" players from left, Tommy Bledsoe, Ron Short and Angelyn DeBord.