

TOM BURROWS

I was engaged as general manager at the Shaw Festival. I commenced working on July 1, 1971, and was there for five seasons. During that time we reactivated our fund-raising and worked for a year on the fund-raising, which had been stalled because of not having the approval of council on our site. Then we built the Festival Theatre, which opened on June 9, 1973. We came in within two to three percent of the original budgeted cost. We broke ground in April 1972 and were ready to open on June 9, 1973. It was built in 14 months, which was sort of an incredible accomplishment. The years have proven that it was the right theatre to build.

There are a couple of things I could reveal after all these years that could have been improved on that building, but escaped us under the pressure. Without delving into all of it, the theatre had been completely designed and approved by R. J. (Ron) Thom. The project architect, by the way, was Peter Smith, who is still active and is a marvellous theatre architect who has done some very good things. He was absolutely reliable, necessary and quite marvellous as a project architect. He and I attended every job-site meeting, at least once a week and often three or four times a week to get the theatre built in that time and to make the necessary exchanges of one thing for another as we went through because it was such a time-sensitive operation. Obviously, the reason we were so concerned with completion date was that we had begun selling the season in the January prior to the opening in June.

We had never had subscribers before, only memberships, which is still the case I believe, and we didn't know how many people there were. We knew we were selling out, or we were doing in the 90s consistently at the Court House Theatre which seated 402 or 404, where we built the seating riser every year before we could begin. That was fairly crudely done, but there were marvellous sets, mostly built out of green board because it was less expensive and they didn't have to shift, change or travel. They were built most often by Maurice Strike, who was the primary set designer during those four or five seasons. We had to change some things when we began touring, which I felt was very important to begin to gain more national attention as we moved toward this new building and doubling the size of our potential audience. We simply had no idea if there were another 400 people who would fill the place when we moved to the new theatre. We knew what our sales were. There had been a very good audience survey paid for by the province of Ontario. As I remember, there was something like 1,000 or 1,500 valid people included in the survey. We knew that 25 percent of our audience came from Buffalo, about 44 or 45 percent came from the Toronto area and the rest were from elsewhere in Ontario except for a small number from the United States, mostly from the Detroit area. We simply sent out our membership renewals at the beginning of the year and we were selling extremely well for that 400-seat theatre but didn't know how deep that audience was and there was no way to find out. It's never been easy to do a survey to find out who's not coming.

I don't know whether I'm getting ahead of myself or behind myself, it was all many years ago. They were great years from my point of view, very full and extremely busy. The quality of production I thought was extremely fine under Paxton Whitehead. That's a difference too. I was hired as general manager and replaced a general manager. We celebrated the tenth year of the festival as we closed the season in 1972 with a street party. We got permission to close off two blocks of Queen Street. We had an Irish folk band at one end, I think in honour of Brian Doherty, and at the other end a rock band from somewhere. We served birthday cake and soft drinks all up and down the two blocks of Queen Street. One of the first artistic directors, Barry Morse, was back for it; Brian Doherty was still with us, and Calvin Rand was chairman of the board. We simply finished the final performance of the season, we had announced the celebration, and we had already announced the new season, and we commemorated the tenth year from the Court House steps and then had the block party, which was hugely

attended by the village. I remember going down the next morning, Sunday morning. My children were quite small then. I rode down on bicycle with one of my boys to get the newspaper and saw that the cleanup we had planned had not been that carefully done. There were green garbage bags, napkins, plates and things all up and down the two blocks of Queen Street. So I went into the little storefront office we had, about two doors from the liquor store, and called Kerry, my wife, to say I would be a little while and to send the other two boys down. I found some brooms and some of our own garbage bags. Maurice Strike came down the street looking for his Sunday Times and I said, "Maurice, we've got some cleanup to do." So we had Queen Street clean by nine o'clock on Sunday morning.

I came to the festival at the invitation of the board, and that's a story that may only be interesting to me. I had been working at Yale University as managing director of the professional theatre company and assistant to the dean at Yale Graduate School. We had added a new discipline to the graduate curriculum that I co-ordinated, with several professionals from New York. [Describes Yale program to train arts administrators.] In the course of those years at Yale I met two people, one from York University in Toronto. His name was Joseph Green, an American. I got a call then, I think it was 1969 or 1970, inviting me to come to Toronto to join with four or five other people who were professionals and were affiliated with educational institutions. [Describes the others invited.] There was a keen interest in training arts administrators at York, which was a relatively new university at the time. The other person was Paul Shaffer, who had been head of the Ontario Arts Council before it was called the OAC but was then called POCA, the Province of Ontario Council on the Arts. He and Joe Green were establishing the program at York and we were there to discuss our experience and the potential with them. That was sort of the avenue to Saw, completely unknowingly at the time.

Paul Shaffer felt the Shaw Festival was the most important thing in Canada at that moment and had a wonderful vision that I shared. We never quite got to it. I still considered it and made some inroads into what his grand hope for the place was, which was that once we got our new theatre, Niagara-on-the-Lake would become the summer place for the Toronto Symphony, the opera company and the ballet. I'm sure it wasn't an original idea then and wouldn't be today, but similar things have happened to great advance elsewhere. I know the Buffalo Philharmonic almost had something like that when they had a summer season almost at Artpark for a number of years. The idea was to have another place for these companies to be and working during their contract year and it seemed very complementary to the Shaw Festival. Even in those first 10 years it had certainly shown signs of its strength and viability or we would not have had the theatre. At any rate, that was the reason for my first trip to Canada.

Paul Shaffer and I got along extremely well. As a matter of fact, he said, "There is a position open and I would love to have you up here as a visiting lecturer or whatever when we get our arts management program going." He introduced me to the man who was running the St Lawrence Centre, which had just opened, and who was searching for a manager. I did have an interview with him but I was an American and in that instance his board had very clearly determined that it was obligated to offer it, if possible to a Canadian, which I thoroughly understood.

I had been at Yale by then for four years and my wife and I were thinking of a move. That has something to do with the times, the late sixties, and has very little to do with the Shaw Festival except that the Shaw seemed such a beautiful place, and so did Canada. [Describes student activism at Yale.] At any event, in probably late April or May 1972 I got a call out of the blue from Muriel Sherrin—very abrupt, very businesslike. She wanted to know whether I was who I said I was and I said yes, I was. She said, "I'm calling for the Shaw board. They're very interested in interviewing you for the general manager's job here and they would like to see you. Can you come

up?" I said, "Yes, I'm sure I can arrange it." She said, "They want you to be here on Wednesday." I said, "Well, I can't come this Wednesday," so we negotiated something that was agreeable to Muriel and possible for me. The story behind that call apparently originated with the man who was for many years the general manager for the National Ballet of Canada. There had been a national search for the general manager's position at the festival and they had come up with a short list and offered the job to a Canadian who was in Winnipeg at the Manitoba Theatre Centre. At the same time, he had been able to consider the National ballet, and I think they got themselves down to the one offer, they made the offer, he considered it and decided to go to the ballet. So suddenly they had done their national search, eliminated everyone, and somehow they were able to offer it to me and the end result was that it was approved with very little problem.

So I was asked to fly up to Buffalo to go to Niagara-on-the-Lake, which was in May. I had already given my notice at Yale. I had already reached that decision and didn't know where I was going. It was very fortuitous. I had given six months notice at the beginning of the year. In any event, in response to Muriel's very cordial call, I was met by Calvin Rand at Buffalo airport—a charming man and, as I got to know him, highly intelligent and very much involved with the festival in a marvellous way. Then we did our little trip to Niagara-on-the-Lake. It was May, a very nice day, a little cool. We stopped somewhere for lunch and met one of three board members that I met on that trip. One was Don MacDonald, a wonderful man and very important to the board in those years. I think he still lives on the Parkway. He was, I think, chief executive officer of a major corporation in Niagara Falls. The others were Leo Sauve, who headed a bank in Niagara Falls, and I think Ben Bramble, a librarian in the school system. On that first trip, Calvin drove me all around the village and I thought, "This looks absolutely wonderful." We talked and talked and he showed me the various sites for the new theatre that was at that time proposed. I learned later that it had split the town in half with disagreement over where it should be built.

One place it was offered was what was called the oak grove on the Commons, where the trees are as you leave Niagara-on-the-Lake, past the Festival Theatre, just as it meets the River Road. That four-or-five-acre area had been discussed some time previous, the federal government perhaps making that available for the Shaw Festival. For whatever reason, I've never delved into it, that had been considered, but it seems not that seriously. There was another site, probably arrived at with the choice given to Ron Thom and members of the board, which was near the old Fort Mississauga where the golf course is, right on the lake. It would have been a beautiful theatre as conceived. But there was opposition to that by friends of friends; families were split. Some did finally get back together. I knew several who were so relieved when we finally decided where we were building the theatre. The compromise site that was in play—the site—was the one immediately behind the Court House. I was shown the other choices of site by Calvin, then I was shown that one.

I don't think I saw the plans; I may have seen just a sketch. But it was to be attached right behind the Court House, which is a relatively small site, and for that reason everything was designed and had been approved by the board and by Paxton, who was very concerned about the stage area, rehearsal space, dressing rooms and all the other things. It was ready to go to tender. The idea was that the Court House itself would serve as the entrance to the festival theatre. You would go up the steps to the Court House and the public areas were going to be enhanced but maintained as they were architecturally, adding bathrooms, box office and things. You would go through the Court House at that level with direct access into the theatre. It was exactly the same size; the theatre room was not changed, it was to be exactly as you see it today. The difference was that the service areas—the cutting rooms, the prop shop, the carpentry shops—were to be built up around the stage tower as opposed to being relaxed and built around the theatre as they are today. It all was very carefully and nicely done for a small site.

Back to my first trip to Niagara-on-the-Lake, Calvin could not have been nicer. He explained Brian Doherty, our founder, to me, and he sort of expressed the hope that he—no, he wouldn't have said it that day—he hoped he was sober, but I'm not sure. So we went by to see Brian, who had a lovely little cottage right down in the village and the most gorgeous roses I have ever seen. He raised beautiful roses in the back. What a marvellous Irishman; a character. But there wouldn't be a festival without Brian Doherty. When I got to know him, I loved him. He's the only adult I ever yelled at or cursed on the phone. He would call me at midnight, 12:30 or whenever he rolled back from the Oban Inn and tell me that I was destroying his festival. "You don't understand," he would say, and I would never know what it was he was talking about. I would finally say, when these were repeated, "Brian, I'm hanging up now. I'm not going to talk to you, Brian. See you tomorrow." He would come down the next morning. I don't know how he did it. He had an amazing constitution. He was diabetic as well. In the summers in spring and summer, he'd come slapping down in a pair of sandals and shorts and a sort of Harry Truman Hawaiian shirt and a little straw hat from the islands or somewhere, and razor nicks on his face, bright and shiny. He would come into our little storefront office and look at me and the two staff we had at that time and say, "Tom, you're the salvation of Shaw festival." I'd say, "Brian, do you remember talking to me last night?" "Oh," he would say.

It was getting late in the day and we had to head back to Buffalo to Calvin and Pat's house. They lived on Nottingham Terrace. We were going to have supper and then I had to get on a plane back to New Haven. I kept wondering when we were going to see the theatre. Calvin saved that for last and finally said, "Well, I guess you'd like to see the theatre." I don't know whether it was planned or not, but Calvin assumed it would be open but it was not. We could get up the steps and into the Court House but the doors to the room where the theatre is and was were closed and locked. The doors were not hung terribly well and all I could do was see through a crack that this was sort of an open ballroom. He explained that the seating got put in before the first performance, but that was the space and there were 400 seats. It was a surprise.

I went back to New Haven and then I heard from Calvin again, saying he would like me to meet the executive of the board. A couple of weeks later I went to meet them. That evening I was offered the job as general manager. My wife attended with me because that was the way we did things and I wanted her to see—no, she didn't; not that trip, the next trip, there were three, because Muriel Sherrin got on my wife's wrong side. The next trip was to officially accept the job and it was understood we had to have a place to live because I had a family which included four young children. That was all done over the phone and Muriel was to arrange for Kerry, while I was meeting the members of the board, to show her some possible places for us to live for the summer and we would do something else for the fall. Muriel had assigned Dorothy Middleditch, one of the board members, to look after it and Dorothy was sort of offhand about it. She said to Kerry, "I doubt if we'll find anything at this time." But she did show her one place. So Kerry came back and she had looked at one place that wasn't a matter of not being suitable, it just wouldn't do. Kerry asked me about it and Muriel, who was standing there, said, "Maybe you'll just have to stay in New Haven until after the summer and move up then." I looked at my wife and thought, "I've got to get you out of here." I said, "Kerry, let's go for a little walk." By this time it was early afternoon and we went to the Prince of Wales Hotel. It was run by a man with the most marvellous full white moustache and the worst toupee you've ever seen. It was just that original building then and somehow it got an Ontario heritage grant, because of the age of the hotel, and I don't think it used it very well to keep the place going. It still had a women-and-escorts-only entrance to the bar, so I took my wife in there and we had the worst martini I've ever had in my life. But I thought she needed something to stiffen her up while I talked to her and said, "Look, we'll work this out." That evening we stayed over at Randwood and it was lovely. Calvin and Pat are wonderful hosts. We were there for supper and for Kerry to meet Pat. We remain very good friends and have done over the years. Pat asked, "Where are you going to be living?" Kerry said, "We don't know." Calvin asked,

“What has happened?” Kerry said, “There doesn’t seem to be any place.” Pat could tell Kerry was upset about this and said, “It’s a good thing you’ve signed your contract.” And Kerry said, “He hasn’t, and we have to have a place to stay. I am not staying in New Haven for the summer.” Calvin got very busy before, during or after dinner, and by next morning he had talked with Jeanie Hersenhorn, who had just bought a house on the Common on the same block as the Pillar and Post. A brick house, it overlooks the Common at King and Mary and was an art gallery for several years. Calvin knew it might be available and that after we had sold the place in New Haven we would be interested in buying. So he had that in mind and called about it and found out someone had just bought it that day. It was Jeanie Hersenhorn, who I think was a board member at that time. Her husband, Sammy, used to conduct the CBC orchestra. She did bus tours for us for several years, coming down from Toronto. In any event, we were able to rent that house.

So that’s how I got to the Shaw Festival. I was delighted to be there. It was fascinating in those very early days. I got there when the season was already well into rehearsal because I couldn’t get there until July 1. I had been there three or four days before Paxton finally had any sort of a break. We’d said hello and met before but we arranged it was about time we had a talk. So he came into the storefront office. I had a little office of about eight-by-eight and because it was built into this space it had just a plain glass window so there was some sunlight coming in. Paxton came into my office and we closed the door and talked for about an hour or so. Everyone was terribly curious about the new guy and how Paxton and Tom were going to get along. Beverly Mitchell, the sort of be-everything business manager, was there. So was Judith Hendry, without whom I could not have got the Festival Theatre so beautifully opened with nine opening nights or toured to the Kennedy Centre. She was and is an incredibly fine professional. I think her husband Tom is still at the Stratford festival as dramaturge. Paxton and I talked and got along quite well. As he was leaving he looked round at all the curious faces and said, “Well, that’s it. I’ve been sacked,” and walked out.

It was a very different thing in those days; it was not unusual in Canadian theatre for there to be a general manager and an artistic director. It was very actively discussed in the years I was in Canada and then it changed over time. Who was running the place. Both reported to the board in most cases at that time. In some cases it seemed it was the artistic director who made final decisions and in others it was the general manager. There was no question at that time that at Stratford my friend Bill Wylie was the man. He was the general manager and despite how well they worked together, he made all the ultimate decisions. Paxton and I both reported to the board, we divided the work. I, ^{had} my hands absolutely full with the theatre itself and relied on his prior experience and he was also a very good administrator. He was a better negotiator than I was when it came to hiring designers and people who very much wanted to work at the festival. But we were able to divide the work and we shared everything. I don’t think we ever had a moment’s problem in working together that way. At that time, when I first was there, he was also artistic director in Vancouver. The summer was just three months—not quite that; it was three months inclusive. We knew we were going to begin to expand the season, both a little earlier and a little earlier, but we couldn’t until the move out of the Court House. But beginning in 1973 we had to anticipate that we were going to have to lengthen the season.

That was part of the reason for my beginning to encourage and plan tours. It had been thought about previously but I saw the opportunity. Bill Wylie was a best friend and a great supporter on introducing an American to Canada. He was a very fine administrator, he introduced me everywhere and he made the overture. He was running a very fine thing in Stratford. They took two or three shows to Broadway during those years, with varying degrees of success but certainly some artistic success. The reason we toured to the Kennedy Centre, which we did for the first time in 1971 or 1972, was that we had awfully good press coverage in those days. I was amazed at what Judith Hendry was able to do. She had an assistant, Nancy Strike, Maurice Strike’s wife,

only for the summer months. It was all we could afford. It was very lean. Over the previous two or three years we were covered by Time, Newsweek, the New York Herald Tribune, the New York Times, the Christian Science Monitor, the Detroit Free Press and the Buffalo News, and she got them there to the Court House every summer. She did marvellous advance work. She is the best I've ever known in dealing with the press—in those days, largely the press, the press were the media. It seemed to me that with this unknown audience out there, we had to get some national recognition. We were the little sister; there was Stratford and then there was Shaw. There was not that much theatre in Canada in 1971. It's amazing what has happened since that time.

I helped host a meeting that Tom Hendry wanted to have in Niagara-on-the-Lake with playwrights in perhaps my second year there. They met in Brian Doherty's garden. Among all his other claims to fame, Brian Doherty had a play that won the Drama Critics' Award in 1939 on Broadway, Father Malachy's Miracle. It was the first and only play he ever wrote. He hosted this meeting. I found after I got settled in Niagara-on-the-Lake that we had to be in Toronto, or I had to be, to have a sense of what was happening in Ontario in theatre. There were the O'Keefe Centre housing the National Ballet and the Canadian Opera Company, and the Toronto Symphony playing in the old Massey Hall. I knew about the Manitoba Theatre Centre, which was the only theatre I knew about, except the O'Keefe, living in New York before going to Yale, because I was general manager for an off-Broadway company, but we did produce a show on Broadway, called the Establishment Theatre Company. I knew about Manitoba because such people as John Hirsh were known in New York as young tyros and young directors; I didn't know he was Canadian. I knew Christopher Newton was Canadian. He and I first met when he was at the Manitoba Theatre Centre as a performer and he was hired to replace Brian Bedford. We had a production of The Knack, a play by Angelico directed by Mike Nichols, playing at our theatre in New York. Brian had a six-week leave of absence to do a film and we hired Christopher Newton to replace him in New York for the six weeks. Christopher told me many years later that he went back the next year and stayed for several months while Brian was away.

The meeting of playwrights, kind of hosted by me for the Festival—Tom Hendry and Brian Doherty were the ones who got all the people there. They came down to discuss the state of playwriting and theatre, and I don't mean that that began anything on its own, but there obviously was time for something to happen in the proliferation of small theatres after that. That growth goes along with the growth of the Festival and everything else. In addition to the theatres I mentioned, I had heard about the Crest Theatre, the Red Barn, I knew there was a man named Sweet or something who for many years had a program down the lake east of Toronto. I was aware of the Manitoba Theatre Centre because they cast American actors in their early years and American directors and there was a constant flow between Manitoba Theatre Centre and New York. That was my only awareness of Canadian theatre. There were the Toronto Truck Theatre, Factory Lab and one other important theatre, but after 1972, out of that came the playwrights' co-op and Tom Hendry within a year started Toronto Free Theatre and there were theatres springing up all over Toronto. It was the most exciting time. Theatre was proliferating; I've never seen so much bad stuff, but you kept going because occasionally there was going to be this wonderful thing. The marvellous directors and people who are so important to Canadian theatre now, most of them, and we're talking about 1971, 26 years ago, the leaders in Canadian theatre today came out of that seventies proliferation of stuff in Toronto, which is great to see.

Interviewer: Did the meeting of playwrights in Niagara-on-the-Lake have anything to do with creation of the playwrights' co-op?

Mr Burrows: Oh yes, because again Tom Hendry and one or two others were the ones who got the playwrights' co-op started. It sort of fitted with the vision that the Shaw Festival should be more than simply a summer

festival. My feeling was, and I don't know how much if it was shared actually by Paxton, but I was the one who was on the ground all time, going back and forth to Toronto and meeting with our contemporaries. We had a marvellous once-a-month meeting hosted by Lou Applebaum, who at that time was head of the Ontario Arts Council. It was probably the single most productive association I've ever had in terms of a professional association. Bill Wylie was instrumental in that too. Once a month, Bill and I used to drive to Toronto. We would meet Walter Homberger, Herman Geiger Torell, and representatives of the St Lawrence Centre, the Rom and the AGO. We met with no agenda whatsoever, no minutes were taken. Lou Applebaum footed the bill for sandwiches from the danish shop around the corner on Bloor Street. We met for an hour and a half or two hours and discussed mutual problems, found some solutions and shared things. It was a marvellous kind of anchor when you were out there; it was a great relationship.

We did our first season and I got a thorough look at what the Shaw Festival was. We were doing our day-to-day and I discovered in the files that Muriel had had some correspondence about taking a Festival play to another university. If I remember, it was in North or South Carolina, I'm not sure. I sort of followed up on that, and that may have given me the idea about the possibility of touring. My point about Judith Hendry was that she had already had such a very fine relationship, therefore the Festival did, with the New York press and of course the press in Toronto; we always had coverage by their first-line critics. They loved coming to Niagara-on-the-Lake. But I felt we had to find a way to get more attention because we were known to the audience we played to, and I knew we had a very high rate of returning audience—

It was exploratory, and sort of came out of the blue, out of my friendship with Bill Wylie. Bill was awfully upset at one point after I had got to know him well. The [Stratford] Festival had already been to New York on one occasion and he had other plans for Anouilh—by the way, Paxton Whitehead and Sue Grossmann did the translation, very successfully. The Stratford Festival had been invited to be the first foreign company at the Kennedy Centre. Then Roger Stevens, whom I met shortly thereafter, a marvellous man of the theatre, a legend, who was running the Kennedy Centre, had a production as I remember of *Candide* on the west coast; Leonard Bernstein was conducting. He had plans to take it to a couple of Jimmy Neiderlander's theatres and then to bring it to the Kennedy Centre. Well, he found that it was not as well received and his tour got changed and he needed to bring it into the Kennedy Centre earlier, and he bumped the Stratford Festival. Bill was furious because he didn't just say, "You can't come," he said, "You'll have to come at a later time." That was an impossibility, given their season; it was planned, and the length of the season and all the rest of it. Bill was left with no alternative, he had to say, "No, we just can't be there then." I heard him out and I said, "Bill, would you mind very much if we talked to Roger Stevens to see if he would like to have the Shaw Festival?" He said, "No, fine." So Calvin Rand and I talked about it. Calvin at that time was a friend of someone on the Kennedy Centre board, I think the chairman of the board, and he made the necessary contact. Calvin and I flew down to Washington and had an appointment with Roger Stevens. I took whatever I had with me to sort of explain that he needed to know who the Shaw Festival was, and of course all our New York reviews in *Newsweek*, *Time* and so on were very handy. He had indeed heard of the Festival and he needed someone to come in, not for the original date but for the next booking. We followed his production into the Kennedy Centre and we were the first foreign company that played there. We put a deal together. He asked what we needed and I told him what we would require with paying our company, transporting the scenery and so forth, and he agreed to pay all expenses there. He also agreed that we would have an advertising budget. We had a guarantee of a certain amount of money. Then we really went to work. Judith and I made three or four trips to Washington. We were totally unknown to the audience in Washington. We had no stars to sell, we were an ensemble, a company. We had to sell the idea of the Shaw Festival and an ensemble, and we did. We did very well there and the company went back two or three times after that. Then we did some other touring. We did a Maritimes tour at one point. But the reason for the

Kennedy centre and the reason the next year, as I remember, we went to Boston, New Haven and Detroit, was to get more— When you get marvellous coverage in the United States, the Canadians wake up and say, “That thing down the road must be important.” Maybe it worked; it seemed to.

Brian Doherty was an amazing guy. He wasn't a great deal of help with the biggest problem and I discovered what the biggest problem was. I was very busy during that first summer. There was someone with an office across the street who was dedicated to fundraising. In the course of events I learned, as I remember, that we had successfully raised \$770,000 for the new theatre, which at that time was to cost \$1.5 million. As a matter of fact, we built it for very little, and those figures are in there [Not Bloody Likely]. It's amazing to think of it today. I found when I had time to draw a breath and to talk with him that there was no progress on the fundraising. We had donations from major banks and this, that and the other. It had all been successfully done. There was a consultant in Toronto who advised the Festival on fundraising, I can't think of his name at the moment. Douglas Buck was the person in charge of development. He had his own office and a part-time secretary. When I finally started checking to know what he was doing, Calvin and the board said, “We seem to have this problem with the site. There is very little activity on the fundraising. We want you to turn your attention to that.” What I found was that there was good reason the fundraising was stalled because we didn't have a building permit and I discovered we were not likely to get one under present circumstances. I couldn't believe it. I read the files, looked at the background, and that's when it fully came in that, as I had been told, we had a fully designed theatre ready to go to tender—you know, “Just open the bids as soon as you think you have the money, let's build this thing.” But we didn't have a building permit. We had applied and it had been denied.

I discovered we had a 99-year lease on the property on which the building was to be built from the town council, that we had a 99-year lease on the Court House at \$1,500 a year, and this had been all signed, sealed and delivered. I thought, “Well, what's the problem?” There were two Mennonite aldermen—I mean, that's coincidental, they happened to be; I think they both had farms, I'm sure they both did—and they had a cohort who was not immediately on council at that time but had been, Bill Andres, who later was a federal member, I believe, and they had determined they did not want that theatre built by the Court House. I spent more time that first winter and the next year at council meetings any time they met. I learned more about pig farming and irrigation than you ever want to know. I would go and sit and wait my turn on the agenda to try then to overcome the next hurdle. I got to know, I believe, everyone in Niagara-on-the-Lake. It began to come in fully on me, what I had been overhearing about the split that there had been in the town about the site of the theatre. Finally, there was this site and everyone was more or less happy, so there was every good reason in the world to try to make it happen. We had half the money committed, our fundraising was stalled because there was no progress, there was no announced date. There wasn't, “When are we going to start building?” It had lost its urgency completely. People who had given money were saying, “Well, what are you going to do with it?”

I got to know the council members because we had to keep the excitement about the new theatre up. I went to any meeting. Of course, that's a small community and my wife and I got to know it intimately. We were invited, of course, as the new general manager, everywhere. After that first season, there were parties through the summer, parties in the fall, and at Christmastime it was the case that you couldn't give anything on *that* date because that belonged to Dr So-and-so and that was the house up on Queen Street. I think I knew by name most people in Niagara-on-the-Lake because it was important, it was part of the job. As it turned out, we had a split over the site that opened again during that period when I was trying to get confirmation on the Court House theatre site. Then it began to build again. There were people in the town who didn't want it built there. Then it turned out we were going to desecrate this historic building, which was and still is balderdash. Everyone thinks that is a wonderful old building. It is not distinguished in historical terms. But they finally—”they” being some of

the townspeople—persuaded the architects from conservancy to intervene, who had no business doing so whatsoever, as they found later. Finally, that went to an Ontario Municipal Board hearing. It was a fun way to spend the first year. At the OMB hearing, by that time I could have quoted chapter and verse of every agreement that had been signed, every piece there had been in the Niagara Advance, who had signed the agreement to lease, how many times it had come up at council, and I got to know the citizens of the community who were beginning to split over the site again.

That is how I met Judy LaMarsh. I would not trade the experience of knowing her for anything in the world. Everyone knows Judy LaMarsh by reputation, if not many Canadians knew her personally. She was bigger than life, she was afraid of absolutely nothing, she was also very wise and very canny. She had just moved back to Niagara Falls after no longer being in politics and was in her parents' little house there. I know because she invited everyone in the world to a small little house in Niagara Falls for Christmas dinner. The place was jam-packed. She did all the cooking. It was just fantastic. She had chocolate mousse sitting in the snow on the steps outside the kitchen door. But Judy LaMarsh got involved and I recommended her to Calvin Rand and others and she was asked to come on the board. She was happy to, because she was back in the area. When we had the OMB hearing I said, "Judy, would you please be there with me. Do I need a lawyer?" She said, "No, you're doing fine." I said, "But you are a lawyer. Will you just sit there and kind of hold my hand?" She said, "I'll come with you, sure." So she sat through the OMB hearing.

As I remember, that was the objection to building on that site, because of its encroachment on the Court House. I explained we weren't touching the Court House except for improvement, and so on and so forth. But my two Mennonite aldermen were still opposed; they were opposed to the Festival so they were opposed to that site. They didn't want it near the Court House. I said, "But we have a 99-year lease." The reply was, "Yes, but you don't have a building permit." I soon learned what that meant. The big one, and the one that was almost impossible to overcome, was parking. There was a bylaw that said there had to be—as I remember the figures, we needed 300 and something space, a space for 2.5 people in a house that seated 800. That was one thing we needed before we had a building permit—we had to show them a plan that would solve the parking problem. The bylaw clearly said it had to be within 500 feet of the building. We went through all of that. I pointed out to them at one or another meeting that to comply with that bylaw, given the fact that they had approved the site and knew what it was for and that we expected 800 would use that facility, maybe we should look at the bylaw because if we were to create 300 parking spaces within 500 feet, we would inevitably, if we could afford it, be tearing down a historic building somewhere. "It's an impossibility. Can we talk? What can we do?"

One of the things we did was to go to St Mark's Church. One of our board members, Leno Mori, who ran a nursery, was with that Catholic church, across from the entrance to the Festival. We made an agreement that we would create a parking lot and maintain it for the church at Festival expense. We wanted use of it for all days but it would not interfere with their Sunday service. We got that approval and created 65 parking spaces there, which still exist as far as I am aware. Maybe they're still in use by the Festival. We created this parking lot with the knowledge of council. I went back and would say to my two friends, the Mennonite aldermen, "How's that?" The reply was, "Well, that's nice. That's not 300." This went on and on.

While we were working on that, there was another obstacle to be overcome. There had to be a street closing before we could have a permit. I said, "What street?" They gave a street name and they said, "The one that runs through the block behind the Court House." I said, "There's no street there." They said, "Oh, yes there is. It's still on the official plan." Of course they hadn't changed the plan, despite the fact that the Court House building went into the street right-of-way. It was still a street, it was still on the books, and I had to have a variance in

order to get a building permit. Was I going to get a variance for a street closing? No. We finally fought that one through on logic and just with sheer sweat and determination. Finally they approved that the street closing could be accomplished, that was no problem. There was the street closing; there was the architectural conservancy that said we were going to desecrate a historic building, and we had to get past that one; and there was another that I can't remember. But the big one was the parking. I finally thought, "I don't see much open space." I was so familiar with how many feet we had and everything else. A lot of people were very supportive of the Festival and very much on our side, but there was that contingent, and as we started building, of course, then out of the woodwork came those people who were residents of Niagara-on-the-Lake for the last six months or 18 months who didn't want that festival to grow any anyway.

I kept looking down the street, across from where we had our 65 spaces, and I thought, if we could persuade the federal government to let us create civic and theatre parking, and Fort George parking, if we would do it at our cost, would they give us the right to have an acre of land, as I remember, to create parking—just on that corner, not to go into the Common, just to take a little piece off the corner. As I remember, the access was about 1,200 feet from the clock tower. I went back to the files, I looked at the very old correspondence with Calvin Rand or someone else from the executive assistant to the minister who looked after Fort George, and made inquiries of his executive assistant about the idea. I said I would like to come and see the minister about it. Everyone in Eastern Canada at that time was fully aware that there was to be a new Festival theatre and that the idea had been there for a while. As I remember, when I arrived we had \$300,000 committed from the federal government. First the province had come in, and if the province came in, the feds came in, so we had three and three committed—or 150 and 150; we went back for another 150 and 150. Then there was money from the municipality, but not very much. We did have federal funds committed and that seemed to me to be another reason for them to express an interest in helping us find a solution to the problem. They approved the idea of a festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake, they approved of the building; not it was a matter of where do we put it and where can we park the cars?

What I am trying to describe to you now started about mid-December and it was over by the second of January in terms of everything being accomplished. Maybe it was the first week of January; it was a hectic period. Everything was done, as it were, in camera. I didn't tell anyone about my calls to Ottawa to find out about the possibility of getting an approval, permission, a lease, whatever, under any terms to build parking there. Only my executive committee knew about it I suppose. My conversations with the minister's office led to the belief that we could, on application, get approval for the requisite parking—whether we only added another 200 or whatever, that we had chance for approval.

So before proceeding, I asked one of our board members, Henry Weins, who was very chummy with all the politicians—which bore very good fruit for him later on because there were some horrendous things that happened with permission to build the Prince of Wales Hotel from one corner to take up half a village block, breaking every previous rule in the world. Anyway, Henry was on the board and I always saw him when I was at council, which was often, so I said, "I think we should meet these two gentlemen and talk to them about this," and he said, "Yes, I'll set it up." They were all German originally. So we met in Henry's house on River Road and these two gentlemen came after church and agreed to meet with us. We all knew each other by then. We had fought some real battles with various degrees of success. But I was still there and we were still contending, and there was still mutual respect. I thought it was insane when I started but it was real, so you deal with it.

The meeting wasn't for very long. We sat down and exchanged pleasantries and I said something about having the co-operation of the church and we had those spaces, and I said, "We seem to have resolved everything else.

There is only the parking.” I described the situation briefly and said, “If the federal government will agree and the Festival creates municipal and Festival parking, which we will maintain at the Festival’s expense, and we can create up to 300 parking spaces, will you approve the building permit?” “No.” I looked at Henry and looked at these two men and said, “Well, what if we build the theatre there?” “Yeah.” That was it, just that simple—I mean not that simple, because this had dragged on for a year and we had been over and over and over it, but I had never mentioned that before. I said, “I don’t know what it will take but if I can get three acres, will you support it?” “Yes.”

Then it started. Very quietly, I called Calvin and we talked. Then we talked to the executive committee and I said, “It has nothing to do with our board, who live in London, and here, and in Toronto. Let’s just see what we can do with this.” I went over again with Calvin the thing about the original offer. Based on my remembrance, they had offered land for the theatre in the oak grove, and that’s basis on which I went back to the minister—a different minister, I think—and said, “We were offered land but this has occurred and this has occurred and now we need parking. There will be no obstruction, nothing high, nothing built; can you consider it?” and they seemed amenable. Everyone thought that was fine. Then we had an in camera meeting of the nine members of council with just two or three of my board and me. We proposed a change of site, and if we could get the approval of the federal government for the land, we had unanimous approval that they would not obstruct in any way.

Then the work began, because we didn’t know we had the land; we thought we had the land. The next thing we did was to get the mayor and I think one other alderman, maybe two, and three members of my board and Calvin, and we took a plane—we paid for it of course. I made an appointment with the minister. Now it got to the minister. I had to wait for the executive assistant to say, “Yes, he will meet you.” I said what it was about. So the mayor and the Shaw board went to Ottawa on a snowy day. We watched Don MacDonald’s wife—I think she taught in those years—she was coming up the ramp before the bridge in St Catharines, the way it used to be, the turnaround. We were going to the airport, driving to Toronto, and she was coming the other way and we watched her car slowly slide off the road and into the ditch. We slowed down, going the other way, we made sure she was okay—and we couldn’t have done this another time—but we all looked at Don and he said, “It’s all right. She’ll be fine.” and we went on.

Then we were in for a little bit of a surprise. I was not prepared for this. We all sat down in a conference room and were introduced to the minister—I don’t think anyone really knew him; I had talked to him perhaps once or twice. By that time I knew quite a few people in Ottawa and in Queen’s Park. It’s amazing how much more accessible government officials in Canada are that they are in the United States. It was wonderful. The executive assistant sort of explained and we had our plans of the theatre as it had been designed. I think we had a plan of the Common that we had probably borrowed from the colonel who ran Fort George. We were able to show where we would like this. We also knew that there was a proposal at the time for the golf course in Niagara-on-the-Lake to build a golf course on the Common. It never happened. The minister heard us out, and Calvin made all the appropriate introductions—there were names back and forth—and he alluded to the offer of land previously in the oak grove. Then I explained in more detail what we were doing. The minister let us all get through and then he looked at Calvin and said, “That offer of land on the Common, we never had a response to that offer.” Not even thank you or go to hell. They got wrapped up in a new site and there were problems in the village and no one—they were a small staff and many of the staff were in Toronto at that time—so the letter was never answered and the minister was making a little point. Then we heard a little lesson on how dear and how seldom land in right of the Queen is offered for any other purpose; Fort George was there and they would have to reconsider all of this at this point; they weren’t at all sure. That’ll take the wind out of your sails. I asked for a break, thanked him, and we went outside. I separated us from the elected officials and we sort of got ourselves in

a corner and we decided the mayor might have his little turn at making a pitch too. I wanted him on record anyway because I didn't trust this unanimity for long. We went back in and after, again, a little remonstrance we left with the undertaking that the minister would support our request for the three acres, but not for the municipality, though that was necessary too, but as far as the ministry was concerned, that they would be concerned about people within 400 feet of that site. That would include the hospital, where I met opposition; the church, where we already had a pretty good relationship, and anyone who had a house along that street that borders the land. And the Boy Scouts, I learned, had applied and had the right to build a Scout house somewhere on the three acres in that corner some many years before. I had to eliminate any objection with affidavits in writing and everything done before we could get approval. The point is I got that done and I used everything I possibly could. We talked with individual members of the hospital board. They were objecting in the beginning on the grounds that there was traffic and noise, and we got them to sign. We got the Scouts to say no, they had no intention of every building anything on the Common. Suddenly you raise something like that and some one person says, "Well, we might want to someday."

It all had to move rather quickly. I got a marvellous man named Wilson who ran a Gulf station and sold Toyotas or something on the main street where our Chinese lady has built her place. He had little coffee klatches with his neighbours, he invited them, and he asked me to come and speak to them and explain, after all this delay, why there, and what we would do to protect their interests. By that time, there were descriptions of berms that would go up and trees that would be planted. As soon as we got back from Ottawa, just before Christmas, I got all this paperwork done and back to Ottawa. I found two little maiden ladies who were members of the Catholic church, which didn't object, who were also both volunteers for the hospital. They objected. The municipality had to publish this and anyone within 400 feet could object. I remember coming back from a long day in Toronto on business, because I was finally able to get these two little ladies to meet me. They lived out on Shakespeare. I spent about three hours with them, having tea and talking and listening, and finally getting them to agree that they would withdraw their objection and to sign a little piece of paper. They were the last. We got all of those removed and knew that we could proceed. I had nothing but verbal approval but the papers were forthcoming. Then, with that done, we were able to council for another vote. I don't think more than eight or 10 days had transpired.

Before the announcement and before the board could go ahead, I called Ron Thom— Oh, no, that was before we went to Ottawa; yes, because I didn't know what would be sufficient for the theatre and 300 cars. At this time, we had met periodically over the course of a year. He was agitated: "When are they going to build this goddamn thing? What's wrong with those farmers down there? What the hell's going on?" I said, "Ron, I need you. Can you come down to Niagara-on-the-Lake?" "When?" "Today." "Why? Are you ready to build a theatre?" I said, "Yeah. We have a different site." "What do you mean?" Then I explained briefly. He said, "I'll be right down." He came down, I think with Peter, or maybe alone. I said, "I've got a tape measure," and I got a surveyor to come and have a look with us. He came down with a camera and looked over the site and referred to his plans, and said, "Yeah, we can do it." I said, "Time is of the essence." Here we were in soon to be January and we had to be open not the coming June but the following June. He said, "We can probably do it better, but I'm not going to change anything that doesn't have to be changed." He said, "We're not going to go back to the board?" I said, "No. What I want to know is how can you do it on the site that will appeal to you, that will be aesthetically pleasing and, more important, will work as you've designed it?" He said, "Well, it looks as though I can just relax everything we put around the stage tower and put it in a logical fashion around the theatre. I can work on that very quickly. I can show you something tomorrow and we can talk and see if we are going in the right direction." In three days I had a drawing.

There was a very practical reason for the nine opening nights. I'm sure I mentioned that Judith Hendry and I worked very closely on all of this. She was publicity director. We were a reasonably small staff in those days. She was shocked when I said originally, "We need eight opening nights." She said, "What?" It was very simple. We had had two fundraising efforts because it had sort of shut down after we ran into the problem of getting of the site approved. No one was going to come on board with large dollars if we didn't have a firm kind of beginning time and so on. We geared it back up with Darcy Doherty heading some of the triumvirate of fundraising leaders. Darcy Doherty, a marvellous man. I had asked for a little data on how many people had given us, and I can't remember whether it was \$25, \$50 or more, specifically for the campaign. We came up with a list of about 12,000. Assuming that if we invited them all and 60 percent came, that came to about 8,000. I did the math and thought that if we had eight opening nights and filled the 832 seats we might just get away with it. That meant we had to make each opening night, whether it was the actual calendar first or the final, important to those who were invited so they couldn't complain about going to this one and not another one.

We designated each opening night and began to use it in all our publicity when we wrote about or issued invitations. We decided this six or eight months in advance of the actual opening. As I remember, we had a Peninsula night, an Ontario night, a Canada night, a United States or hands-across-the-border kind of evening. We always had strong support from the New York side. We had a senator, Seymour Knox Sr, a good friend of Calvin Rand and ours, and various people on that evening. On each of these we had a guest of honour—Pierre Trudeau on Canada night and William Davis on Ontario night. He was very supportive; a charming man, and his wife was very pleasant as well. For each of these we invited certain people. On Ontario night we invited important people in the province who were associated with the government, or not. On Peninsula night we invited every mayor in the Peninsula, our own council, and so on. We had a performing arts night and invited artistic directors and general managers from all the theatres across the country. I was amazed at how many came. This all somehow worked. But we still had a few, as we got closer and closer to the date, who were somehow a little disaffected that they didn't really like that night, they wondered why they couldn't come another night.

During the same period, we had been hoping and believing that the Queen would come and that was a fixed date at the end of this opening period, so the ninth opening night became the royal visit. Anyone who really had a great deal of clout or a very strong feeling that they should be there, we were able accommodate everyone by the time we filled up that house. That one drove me crazy up until the day of the performance because we had a colonel who was assigned to co-ordinate things for the province of Ontario and he kept telling me that he had been told that the Queen and Prince Philip would only stay for an hour of the performance. We had meetings for six or eight months prior to the actual visit. A marvellous former air force colonel was the Queen's secretary and he came on each of these visits, but our Ontario colonel kept insisting she would only stay for an hour. I said, "That simply won't work. Which hour is she coming for?" We knew she was going to be in town for most of that day. I said, "If she comes for the first act and then leaves, the audience will not come back in the theatre. And if she is not attending until later because of the rest of her schedule, I won't be able to get people into the theatre and it wouldn't be appropriate anyway." He insisted, "Well, that's the way it is," so I just stopped asking. What I had planned was that they would attend the theatre, and that is the way it worked out. They stayed for the whole performance and went backstage. It was quite marvellous. They were so well briefed, as I'm sure they always are and make sure they are. But there was something pleasant or something almost personal that they had to say to so many of the cast members. Of course it wasn't the first royal performance for our lead, Stanley Holloway; he was wonderful, he wasn't fazed by the Queen coming to a performance.

It really all came off extremely well and I must say everyone was deservedly tired when it was all over. We still had a whole season to do, of course, but the season played out beautifully because we were 95 or 98 percent sold

in that first year and it just continued at that level. The theatre was such a success.

Interviewer: The night Indira Gandhi was there, I heard there was some kind of bomb scare.

Mr Burrows: Not that I remember, not a bomb scare, but there were a couple of placards when she arrived in the driveway and someone sort of lunged out of the crowd to say something to her, but that was all. I probably told you about getting a call from Trudeau's assistant saying, "Do you mind if the Prime Minister brings a guest?" I said, "Of course not." He said, "You might." I said, "Well, who is it?" He said, "Indira Gandhi." He asked, "What about security?" I said, "We're prepared to protect the Queen a couple of nights later. I'm sure we can take care of Indira Gandhi. We've got 108 policemen from four different forces all willing to be and around the theatre."

Interviewer: She stayed at Dr Jameson's house, didn't she?

Mr Burrows: Yes. My wife and I were very good friends with Jamie. He wanted to be a good host and somehow the schedule called for a meal for her entourage—not for herself; she was having dinner elsewhere. He asked my wife to do it and among others things she made curried carrot soup. I said, "You what! You're making curry for Indians." They liked it very much.

Those were great days, they really were. We opened the theatre in 1973 and I left after the 1974 season, I think. I stayed on until December, as I remember, and then took a job at the O'Keefe Centre as general manager. I think I was there five seasons altogether at The Shaw. Paxton was still there, then there were two or three years in between before Christopher came and they haven't looked back since. He has done a phenomenal job, he really has. Not easy; the growth has been incredible.

Interviewer: I was wondering whether Judy LaMarsh was involved in any other aspects of the festival.

Mr Burrows: Judy came on the board and that was when we were still trying to get approval of the site. She was just a good friend of the festival.

Not Bloody Likely was the book we thought we should do to cover the first 10 years. We closed the Court House; we knew it would be the last performance of the tenth year. We had a huge birthday cake. We had permission to close two blocks of Queen Street. We had an Irish band at one end and a rock band at the other. It was very much a community event and was very well received. We made marvellous statements from the steps of the Court House—Calvin, Brian and Barry Morse, who was on hand for the tenth-anniversary celebration. We had lights, music and stations with soft drinks and birthday cake along two blocks of Queen Street. It was a great community party. I may have mentioned that the next morning I went down early to get the paper and they hadn't done a very good job of cleaning up. Maurice Strike, Nancy Strike and I went down with our brooms and our bags, making sure we didn't blow this good spirit that we had created. In those days the community was very much involved, I don't mean in the running of the festival but in its support and involvement.

Once the new theatre was open we had to use that facility. We built our winter activity around a concert series. The most important thing was to find musical groups that were appropriate. That acoustically very dry house we built for Shaw, which was wonderful, was terrible for music. We had a shell but even with that it held difficulties. We had a residency with the Canadian Opera Company. Jan Rubes was in charge at that time. That was when they did tours and I knew they needed space, time and assistance. They spent about four weeks there to rehearse

and refurbish their scenery, which probably came out of storage somewhere. They gave us one or two dress rehearsals or preview performances, which I was able to put on our concert series, and it gave them their final rehearsals before they went on tour. It worked well for us. We started a residency with the musical group Camerata. We had a school later with some extremely bright young people. We were doing new music in those years with some ties to this organization [UB Center for the Arts]. It was impossible to get an audience of more than 100 dedicated people. We used to do that in St Mark's Church. But the whole series was important at the time. It allowed us to do things with the community and for the community.

We had a sprung floor. That was a change order as we were building the place. Peter Smith would say, "I don't see why they need to put drywall on these corridors. Why don't we just paint the block." I would say, "Fine. How much do we save?" He would say three or four thousand. I would say, "Good. Now we can put a sprung floor in the rehearsal room," because the original design said it would be just a slab. So that was a good room, and we started ballet classes for local students and that was quite successful.

I can't remember exactly how we got into showing movies. I got grants and things together and used 35mm projectors. We wanted to do something for seniors. We canvassed all the seniors residences in the whole Peninsula area and got a grant from the province or the feds, I don't remember, for transportation. The grant was to transport them, so we were able to offer a ticket to seniors very inexpensively. We played to 600 or 800 from time to time. I don't know how many times you can see My Fair Lady or that kind of thing.

Interviewer: There are so many things that were done there and then they just stopped being done.

Mr Burrows: I really don't know why. Of course I haven't been close enough, but I'm sure there are reasons. I certainly understand, I can see even from a distance how Christopher has really dedicated himself to a repertory development company and that certainly is one of the most important things he did. He took the time, he took the risk, and he began to develop a company. So his emphasis very much went there. I don't know; maybe it's because with Paxton his attitude or his whole involvement was different from Christopher, which is very dedicated, very focused. Paxton was certainly focused when he was there. He was the best negotiator. He signed all the designers and so on; he was meaner than I was but they wanted to work with him. He gave all his energy during the summer to the season but then he was off doing other things. It was not part of his job when I first came to get the site approved, to get the fundraising underway again. So there came to be, in planning the tours and so on, which we decided was important, a good division of responsibility. It was very clear that he was the artistic director and I was the producer-manager, and it worked.

With Christopher, his approach to it, it would seem, he has had very good work on the management or business side but he has kept the reins very much in his hands on the whole thing. I'm not critical of that; it's a very valid approach. Paxton and I divided things and I felt for my part, and the board certainly agreed, and maybe it was because we were so close to having come through community spirits disagreeing with us, but part of the job for me was to heal the wounds in the community and make sure we were all moving in the one direction. That was pretty much desired by the board at the time, which was of course much smaller. A lot more attention was given to the community. It was very much in the front of our thoughts as we made decisions. And to me it was important that they take pride in the accomplishment. They had been volunteers aiding in whatever we had on opening night, serving the champagne and punches and things. These were very prominent people in the community who wanted to do their part in that way. So we were quite close. I had to know the community. It's not that large once the summer is over and because it was so proactive in terms of trying to get agreement on a variety of things, I had to know everybody.

When we took the company to the Kennedy Centre we had to make sure we had a set that wasn't made primarily of greenboard. That's what we were using because it wasn't going anywhere, we couldn't store it. It weighs a ton and would be impossible to properly transport and set up in another theatre. There were growing pains. We knew in advance and we were prepared.

Curtain