

INFORMATION TO USERS

This reproduction was made from a copy of a document sent to us for microfilming. While the most advanced technology has been used to photograph and reproduce this document, the quality of the reproduction is heavily dependent upon the quality of the material submitted.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help clarify markings or notations which may appear on this reproduction.

1. The sign or "target" for pages apparently lacking from the document photographed is "Missing Page(s)". If it was possible to obtain the missing page(s) or section, they are spliced into the film along with adjacent pages. This may have necessitated cutting through an image and duplicating adjacent pages to assure complete continuity.
2. When an image on the film is obliterated with a round black mark, it is an indication of either blurred copy because of movement during exposure, duplicate copy, or copyrighted materials that should not have been filmed. For blurred pages, a good image of the page can be found in the adjacent frame. If copyrighted materials were deleted, a target note will appear listing the pages in the adjacent frame.
3. When a map, drawing or chart, etc., is part of the material being photographed, a definite method of "sectioning" the material has been followed. It is customary to begin filming at the upper left hand corner of a large sheet and to continue from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. If necessary, sectioning is continued again—beginning below the first row and continuing on until complete.
4. For illustrations that cannot be satisfactorily reproduced by xerographic means, photographic prints can be purchased at additional cost and inserted into your xerographic copy. These prints are available upon request from the Dissertations Customer Services Department.
5. Some pages in any document may have indistinct print. In all cases the best available copy has been filmed.

**University
Microfilms
International**

300 N. Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

8222956

Larsen, June Bennett

MARGO JONES: A LIFE IN THE THEATRE

City University of New York

PH.D. 1982

University
Microfilms
International 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106

Copyright 1982

by

Larsen, June Bennett

All Rights Reserved

PLEASE NOTE:

In all cases this material has been filmed in the best possible way from the available copy.
Problems encountered with this document have been identified here with a check mark ☒.

1. Glossy photographs or pages _____
2. Colored illustrations, paper or print _____
3. Photographs with dark background ☒
4. Illustrations are poor copy ☒
5. Pages with black marks, not original copy ☒
6. Print shows through as there is text on both sides of page _____
7. Indistinct, broken or small print on several pages ☒
8. Print exceeds margin requirements _____
9. Tightly bound copy with print lost in spine _____
10. Computer printout pages with indistinct print _____
11. Page(s) _____ lacking when material received, and not available from school or author.
12. Page(s) _____ seem to be missing in numbering only as text follows.
13. Two pages numbered _____. Text follows.
14. Curling and wrinkled pages _____
15. Other _____

University
Microfilms
International

MARGO JONES:
A LIFE IN THE THEATRE

by

JUNE BENNETT LARSEN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the require-
ments for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York.

© COPYRIGHT BY
JUNE BENNETT LARSEN
1982

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

20 April 1982
date

Glenn M. Soney
Chairman of Examining Committee

April 20, 1982
date

Daniel C. Gerould
Executive Officer

Glenn M. Soney
Daniel C. Gerould
Stanley A. Warr
Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

PREFACE

I am greatly fortunate to have had the cooperation and interest of so many people who have contributed to this biography of Margo Jones. This is to express my gratitude collectively and individually to all.

I am especially fortunate to have had Dr. Glenn Loney as my dissertation director. His suggestions and emendations were always helpful, sound, and practical; his comments never failed to be enlightening. I am also grateful to Dr. Stanley Warren who continued to serve on my committee after he assumed the added duties of Acting Provost. I shall never forget the late Dr. Bertram Joseph who served on my committee and was always eager to be of aid in numerous situations. Following the untimely death of Dr. Joseph, Dr. Daniel Gerould graciously agreed to serve on my committee, adding to his already increased burden of serving as Acting Chairman of the Theatre Division. I am especially appreciative of the length of time these gentlemen generously allowed me for the completion of this work. I would also like to express my appreciation to all the professors with whom

I studied in the Theatre Division of the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

The odyssey of research actually began in the summer of 1977 in Austin, Texas. In my initial quest for a dissertation topic, preliminary research was done at the Hoblitzelle Theatre Arts Library, a component of the Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas.

Dr. William H. (Deacon) Crain, curator of the Hoblitzelle, introduced me to the extraordinary facilities of the Humanities Research Center and the treasure trove of research materials therein. Deacon's assistant, Edwin Neal, was also of tremendous aid. This was the first of many visits to Austin for research purposes. At this time I was the guest of Mary Margaret Lindsay, secretary to the late Dr. Loren Winship throughout most of his reign as chairman of the Drama Department at the University of Texas. I am most grateful to Mary Margaret for her hospitality on this and later occasions and for her interest in this study.

After returning to New York, I investigated what was available on Margo Jones at the Library of the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center, and received the assistance of Paul Myers and his staff.

My real research into the life of Margo Jones began at the Margo Jones Collection at the Dallas Public Library. I benefitted from my discussions with George Henderson,

retiring head of the Fine Arts Department. Robert Eason, head of the Theatre Division of the Dallas Public Library, was of enormous aid and assistance to me from the very beginning, offering me the outstanding facilities of the library in general and the Margo Jones Collection in particular. His delightful personality always made me feel at home during my visits: one week in July 1977; the next during the winter of 1978-1979, followed by a week in late June and early July 1979; and my last visit for a week in January 1980. The Margo Jones Collection was not catalogued when I began my research, and there was always the excitement of opening a drawer and not knowing what I would find. Later the library received a grant, part of which enabled them to have the collection catalogued. It was then I met Dr. Katherine Faust who outstandingly performed this task. We had many discussions and she was always very helpful.

During my visits to Dallas, I was privileged to interview Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Koch, Jr., in July 1979, through an introduction provided by Ann Holmes, Fine Arts editor of the Houston Chronicle. The Koches are a charming and delightful couple who enabled me to gain early insight into the personality of Margo Jones. They also shared with me several home recordings of Jones singing and reciting poetry.

Also in the summer 1979, I was privileged to interview Martha Bumpas Gaylord and Zelma Naylor who shared their memories of Margo Jones with me.

In January 1980, I was extremely fortunate to meet Floyd McDaniel at her Dallas home. I am especially grateful to Mrs. McDaniel, for she had recently been ill, yet she consented to my visit and made a valuable contribution to my knowledge of Margo Jones.

During my trips to Dallas, Mr. and Mrs. J. P. Long not only opened their home to me, but always expressed great interest in my work. Further, Dottie Dickinson Long shared with me her memories of attending Margo Jones' theatre.

My brother, Jerry J. Bennett, was kind to have often provided me with transportation to and from the Dallas Public Library. I am also grateful to him for providing me with the New York address of Jean Baptiste Tad Adoue, III.

In between my first and second visits to Dallas, in July 1978, in Hollywood, California, I met a classmate from the University of Texas. Harriett Slaughter Cibelli worked at the Dallas theatre as a young girl and eagerly shared those experiences with me. The interview with Harriett was my very first with someone who knew and had worked with Margo Jones.

Also in July 1978, my husband and I spent a wonderful weekend in Santa Maria, California, visiting with June and James Moll. June Moll was of enormous assistance to me in discussing Margo Jones for many long hours. During the course of this visit, June minimized her part in the founding of the Dallas theatre, and it was not until

later that I discovered her substantial contribution when I was researching Margo Jones' personal files.

In February 1979, I met with Theodore Apstein early one morning at a restaurant in Beverly Hills, California. He not only generously paid for my breakfast but also very generously shared his memories and observations of Margo Jones with me.

In the spring 1979, I was back on the east coast, and through the aid of another University of Texas classmate, and a close personal friend, Lowry Miller, I was put in touch with Freddie Hoskins. Freddie has long been the production stage manager of the Hartford Stage, and he contributed many delightful reminiscences concerning his years with Margo Jones and also shared with me various pieces of memorabilia, including some of Jones' personal notes to him on opening nights.

On the day before I was to return to California, May 9, 1979, I met with Richard Shepard over lunch in New York City. Dick not only contributed his memories as an actor at both Margo Jones' Dallas theatre and Joanna Albus' Houston theatre, but he also paid for my lunch.

It was in the summer 1979, that I learned that Jean Baptiste Tad Adoue, III, lived in New York City, and I entered into correspondence with him. He agreed to be interviewed in New York and, therefore, contributed a great deal to this biography. Tad also loaned me various pieces of memorabilia in connection with the Dallas theatre. Since

I was then teaching at the University of Houston, it was impossible for me to return to New York for the interview. Consequently, I asked my close friend of many years, Frank Harland, lecturer in the Department of Communications, Arts and Sciences, Queens College of the City University of New York, to meet with Tad. Frank complied, and I am deeply indebted to him, not only for the time he spent in my behalf seeing Tad Adoue, but also for his continuous encouragement to me through my Master's degree and work on the doctoral degree.

In October 1979, I spent a weekend with another University of Texas friend, Dr. Joe Manry, then chairman of the Drama Department at Angelina College in Lufkin, Texas, a few miles up Highway 59 from Margo Jones' hometown of Livingston. Joe is from east Texas, just as Margo was, and extremely knowledgeable about Jones and their mutual "stomping ground." The Manrys and Joneses have greatly contributed to the population of Polk County. Joe arranged for Maudee Carron Thames to come from Port Arthur, Texas to Lufkin that weekend so that I might meet and talk with her about Jones' early days in Houston. Despite a broken arm that at that time threatened her lifelong career as an artist, Maudee Carron Thames descended a Greyhound bus like a young girl and eagerly shared her reminiscences of Margo Jones during the course of that beautiful autumn weekend spent in the warm hospitality of Joe Manry's home.

The autumn of 1979 was a very busy one for researching Margo Jones' life. Upon moving back to Texas, I planned to see Nina Vance of the Alley Theatre. Even as Nina acknowledged learning so much about theatre from Margo Jones, I personally learned so much about theatre from Nina Vance during the years I worked as an actress at the Alley. It was not known that autumn 1979 how gravely ill Nina was, yet she was eager to see me. Many appointments were made and had to be cancelled due to the illness that led to her death in February 1980, though her illness was not public knowledge. However, during one of the periods when she felt strong enough to see people, my husband, William Larsen, visited with her while I was away in Lufkin. He found her as lovely and charming as ever, and greatly interested in my work on Margo, sharing with him some of her early experiences with the Houston Community Players.

In the summer of 1980 in Houston, I renewed my friendship with Joe Finkelstein, whom my husband and I first met during our years at the Alley Theatre. Joe was a marvelous host to me when I visited with him in his beautiful Houston home. He willingly and exhaustively shared memories of Margo with me and showed me his personal scrapbooks. Also, he played for me a recording of Jones' voice. Before and after the interview with Joe in August 1980, he and I spent many long hours on the telephone discussing Houston theatre in general and Margo Jones in particular.

I first met Malvina Holmes at the Memorial Tribute for Nina Vance at the Alley Theatre when we were introduced by Joe Finkelstein. In November 1980, I interviewed her at her home. She spoke freely about her and her late husband's association with Margo Jones and the Houston Community Players and shared memorabilia and photographs with me. She gave me a silk-screen of a turtle that was used as the symbol of the 1976 reunion of the Community Players honoring Jones' memory. Malvina Holmes is a lovely and gracious lady, and I am deeply grateful to her and Joe Finkelstein, both of whom never seemed to tire of my endless telephone calls and were a constant source of information and assistance.

A lengthy telephone conversation with Mary Alice Krah1, one of the original members of the Community Players, was also extremely beneficial.

It was through Malvina Holmes that I was finally able to locate Joanna Albus. From the onset of this research, I realized how essential it was to interview Joanna, for she was the person closest to Margo Jones for the longest period of time, with the exception of the Jones family. I called Joanna in Santa Barbara, California, and she was agreeable to my coming to see her on October 25, 1980. I spent that day and the next with her, and she talked tirelessly of the years and experiences she shared with Margo Jones. We have been in correspondence since that time. She is a gallant lady who, along with

June Moll, contributed so much to the founding of Margo Jones' Theatre '47. Further, Joanna Albus greatly contributed to the cultural life of Houston in the nineteen-fifties with her always exciting productions at her beautiful Playhouse Theatre. She also greatly contributed to this biography.

The week following my return from Santa Barbara, I went to Livingston, Texas, one of many trips, but this time to interview Mrs. J. J. Hollenburger (Corene Brock), who was willing to see me despite a recent and serious illness. Mrs. Hollenburger spoke vividly of her childhood and teenage years as a friend of Margo Jones, and was a rich source of information on life in Livingston. She shared memorabilia with me and loaned me a privately printed history of Polk County. Her son, Jay Hollenburger, was also eager to be of help and located various pieces of memorabilia for me to see. Upon leaving that day, Jay led me by car to the cemetery and gravesite of Margo Jones.

The next day in Houston, I interviewed Maxine Mesinger, the highly respected columnist on the Houston Chronicle, who graciously talked of her days with the Community Players and the positive influence of Margo Jones on her life.

Meanwhile, back to Austin: James Pringle is and has been for many years a member of the staff of the drama department at the University of Texas. Jim showed me every courtesy as he opened his Austin home to me and

made me most comfortable in his private library during the two trips I made there in 1980. Jim spoke freely of his and his wife Rita's long association with Margo Jones, and shared with me Margo Jones' personal scrapbooks, to which he fell heir, and various other material relating to Jones. I owe Jim Pringle a profound debt of gratitude.

During my trips to Austin, I was also the guest at different times of Dr. and Mrs. Francis Hodge, and Mrs. Frances Goodhue (Goodie) Loder. Dr. Hodge (now Professor Emeritus) and Mrs. Loder are professors with whom I studied during my undergraduate days in the drama department at Texas, whose encouragement of my work has never ceased. I am also grateful to Goodie Loder, as she is affectionately called, for the loan of her typewriter and the sinfully delicious lunches she packed for me when I went off to do research in Jim Pringle's library.

I was also privileged to work in the Tennessee Williams Collection and Margo Jones Collection in the Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas at Austin. The Margo Jones material there primarily consists of correspondence between Jones and Tennessee Williams, and Jones and William Inge. This material was generously donated some years ago to the Humanities Research Center by Margo's brother and wife, Mr. and Mrs. Richard C. Jones of Houston. Librarians at the "HRC" were always of aid and assistance.

In early October 1980, I spent several days at the

Oral History Collection on the Performing Arts at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. I was made to feel immediately at home by Mrs. Eleanor Solon, assistant to Dr. Ronald Davis, director of the Oral History Collection who was away on a trip when I first arrived. When I later met Dr. Davis, I readily sensed his great love of the performing arts. He and Mrs. Solon made my days there a comfort and a joy. History and performing arts students everywhere owe them a debt of gratitude for their work. I am very appreciative of the transcripts they made available to me of the following interviews, conducted by Carole Cohen, one of Dr. Davis' oral history students: Jerome Lawrence, Claire (Mrs. John) Rosenfield, Frank Harting, Louise Latham, Betty (Mrs. Robert) Winn, Martha Bumpas Gaylord, and Lilian (Mrs. Robert) Bayless.

I was not long into my research before I began to sense that Margo Jones was an elusive personality. There was a long period of time during the course of this research when I thought I would never find the psyche, the id, of Margo Jones. But that was before I met Richard and Bea Jones, Margo's brother and sister-in-law. On September 26, 1979, I met with them at their beautiful home in Houston and was greeted with the kind of warmth that elucidates the expression "Southern hospitality." From the beginning of our relationship, they, and their daughter, Judy, extended me every cordiality. Among the

many things concerning Margo we spoke about at our initial meeting was the possibility of my investigating Margo's files once they could be found. Richard and Bea's home sustained a devastating fire in recent years in which they incurred tremendous losses. Some possessions believed to have been burned were temporarily lost or misplaced in the aftermath of the fire. To my unending gratitude, Richard, Bea, and Judy set about finding Margo's personal files, eventually finding all of them. I spoke with them many times throughout 1980, and, early in 1981, I began going to their home to acquaint myself with the contents of these personal files which Richard and Bea, with the agreement of younger brother Charles R. Jones, most generously made available to me. Richard and Bea provided me with most comfortable working space in their warm and spacious gameroom, and even provided me with a typewriter so I did not have to bring my own. Often I would work in their home from 1:30 in the afternoon until after midnight. Richard and Bea never tired of my constant probings, and the afternoons and evenings in the files were broken by long conversations with them. (I also have to attribute to Richard, Bea, and Judy the gain of at least ten pounds!) The Joneses never stopped ferreting out Margo's files, and as late as August 1981, when I made my last research trip to their home, I was greeted by a plethora of new material recently rediscovered. This material they benevolently entrusted to my care and allowed me to take with me since

I was leaving to join my husband who had for some time been on tour with The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas. Richard and Bea also shared many family photographs with me, including those herein.

Getting to know Richard, Bea, and Judy, and their allowing me full and complete access to Margo's personal files, made the very fine difference between knowing only about my subject and knowing my subject. My gratitude to them is boundless.

I am also deeply grateful to Charles R. Jones who lives in San Fernando, California, for granting me a great deal of time and thought in writing to me about his sister.

Jerome Lawrence promptly responded to my first letter of inquiry to him. We corresponded, and he loaned me material which further illuminated the Margo Jones Award.

I wish to express my appreciation also to Mabel Duke, who handled publicity for the Dallas theatre, and with whom I had a telephone conversation during one of my Dallas trips. On another such trip to Dallas, I was fortunate to have spoken with Vin Lindhe who spoke warmly and candidly of Margo Jones. I am also grateful to Elizabeth Ann McMurray Johnson who sought me out offering to be of whatever assistance she could in the research of this work. Liz Johnson's bookshop in Dallas served as a box office for the Dallas theatre.

Herman Shumlin responded to my letter to him at a time when he was not far from death. I am grateful to him

for his interest, particularly at a time when I did not know he was ill. I also feel fortunate to have been a student in his class at the Graduate Center.

Mrs. Lillian Sewell, head librarian of Murphy Memorial Library, Livingston, Texas, was particularly helpful in providing me with Richard C. Jones' address when I had no idea where he lived. Aline Stephenson, Polk County Clerk, Livingston, was especially helpful in establishing Margo Jones' date of birth (erroneously reported in most publications). J. E. Tompkins, Jr., director of admissions and registrar of Texas Woman's University, Denton, verified for me Margo Jones' years of enrollment and degrees she received from what was then known as the College of Industrial Arts.

Charles Faber, drama critic for the Drama-Logue in Hollywood, spoke with me early one Sunday morning in his North Hollywood apartment about his acquaintance with Jones in the late nineteen-thirties and early nineteen-forties. The introduction to him was provided by my old friend and former boss at Curtis Brown, Ltd., Warren Bayless.

I acknowledge with appreciation the suggestion of Dr. Robert J. Dierlam, professor of drama at Queens College, City University of New York, that I write a biography of Margo Jones as the subject of my dissertation.

I am indebted to Dr. Mary Israel for her constant concern and encouragement. When the going got tough, and the going got tough, Mary was always there, gently prodding. She also loaned me, for "the duration," her copy of Theatre-

in-the-Round.

Marcia Mason, while a student of mine at Alvin Community College, Alvin, Texas, transcribed a number of the taped interviews. Jere Hill generously provided the services of her office in the duplicating of several chapters.

I will always be appreciative of the concern and help of my sister and brother-in-law, Jane and Earl Robisheaux.

Special thanks are also due to my brother John E. Bennett, and my friends Sue and Walt Burdsall for their assistance and interest in this work.

And finally, but not finally, and not ever ever, I cannot adequately express my deep gratitude to my husband, William Larsen, who has endured and supported so much in my behalf. Among numerous other factors, this dissertation was made possible by a grant from William Larsen.

A final word: after Freddie Hoskins and I said goodbye in Hartford, and I was outside the theatre about to descend some steps, Freddie appeared at the stage door and quietly said, "Thank you for wanting to write a book about Margo."

Thank you, Freddie, and thank you, Bill, and thank you, one and all.

June Bennett Larsen

CONTENTS

PREFACE	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter	
I. LIFE IN LIVINGSTON	5
II. DENTON, DALLAS, AND THE WORLD OUTSIDE OF TEXAS: 1927-1935	25
III. THE MARGO MYSTIQUE: FROM HOUSTON'S FEDERAL THEATRE TO THE MOSCOW ARTS FESTIVAL: 1935-1936	39
IV. THE HOUSTON COMMUNITY PLAYERS: 1936-1942	60
V. A CIRCUITOUS ROUTE FROM AUSTIN TO DALLAS VIA "TENNESSEE" AND BROADWAY: 1942-1945	105
VI. DALLAS; WITH INTERLUDES ON BROADWAY: 1945-1955	139
EPILOGUE	201
.	
ILLUSTRATIONS	228
APPENDIX	261
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	266
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT	275

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

I.	Margo Jones' birthplace and family home, Livingston, Texas, circa 1907	230
II.	Margaret Virginia Jones: at the well of Grandparents Jones' home in Leggett, Texas, dressed in Uncle Roy Jones' clothes.	232
III.	Early theatricals: Margaret Virginia, Richard Collins, and Stella Nell Jones	234
IV.	Margaret Virginia with crown and fern	236
V.	Martha Pearl Collins Jones	238
VI.	Mr. and Mrs. Richard Harper Jones, circa 1907	240
VII.	Margo Jones in chaps	242
VIII.	Upper: Margo Jones	244
	Lower: The Jones family (left to right): Richard Collins, Miss Pearl, Richard Harper, Margo, and Charles Roman Jones	244
IX.	Margo Jones: The Houston Community Playhouse	246
X.	Eddie Dowling and Margo Jones	248
XI.	Margo Jones and Laurette Taylor	250
XII.	<u>Summer and Smoke</u> billboard in lobby of Theatre '48	252
XIII.	Margo Jones in her apartment at the Stoneleigh Hotel, Dallas	254
XIV.	Margo Jones in her apartment at the Stoneleigh Hotel, Dallas	256
XV.	Portrait of Margo Jones by Tino Comini of Dallas	258
XVI.	Funeral notice	260

This dissertation is dedicated to my

Mother and Father:

Norma Frances Morrow and John Thomas Bennett

INTRODUCTION

Margo Jones emerged in the mid-twentieth century as one of few female directors to attain recognition in the American theatre. Her concentration was focussed on the founding of a regional theatre in which she would present new plays in arena staging. Daily, she spent long hours reading new playscripts and, while she also presented classics at her theatre, her greatest interest was in discovering new, unproduced playwrights. Her dedication resulted in her pioneering in the modern American regional theatre movement and in creating the opportunities it holds for burgeoning American dramatists.

The purpose of this biography is to explore how Margo Jones was able to accomplish what she did; what forces, events, traumas, and personalities from her early life proved vital influences on her professional success. How was a young woman in the nineteen-twenties and thirties from a small East Texas town able to combine her strengths and weaknesses to win a national reputation in the theatre? It is the attempt of this study to answer this question.

There has been no major study written of Margo Jones' life, though George Henderson, retired head of Fine Arts at the Dallas Public Library, reports that a biography

was being written some fifteen years ago, but he had no knowledge that it was ever completed, and the Dallas Public Library does not contain a copy. Subsequently, I learned that someone named Bonnie Beardsly attempted such a biography many years ago as the subject of her Master's thesis. I do not know whether these people are the same, and I have no knowledge that the Beardsly work was ever completed. One dissertation has been written on Margo Jones' Dallas theatre and one has been written which includes Jones' contribution to the establishment of repertory theatre in this country. Both are included in the bibliography.

As indicated in the Preface, research has been conducted primarily in two ways: taped personal interviews which I consider oral histories; and investigation in both public and private libraries containing primary source material. The Margo Jones Collection at the Dallas Public Library and the private library of Mr. and Mrs. Richard C. Jones in Houston have provided the widest scope of information on Margo Jones' life, professional and personal. The Dallas library is particularly useful for information on Jones' professional life and, of course, her Dallas theatre; the Jones' library for information on Jones' personal life. There is, as might be expected, some overlapping between the two. Generally, the Margo Jones Collection in Dallas contains material dating from 1947 to 1955, whereas the Jones' material extends from the

the beginning of the twentieth century to 1955, the year Margo Jones died. Again, there is some overlapping, with the Dallas library in possession of some personal correspondence dating back to the nineteen-thirties.

Valuable information was also gained by research in the Tennessee Williams Collection, the William Inge Collection, and the limited Margo Jones Collection in the Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas at Austin. Equally valuable material was obtained from the Oral History Collection on the Performing Arts at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, as well as the private Austin library of James Pringle.

As also indicated in the Preface, correspondence and telephone conversations have been key sources of information. Additionally, helpful information was sought and found in several books, newspapers and other periodicals, not the least of which was Margo Jones' book, Theatre-In-The-Round (New York, Rinehart & Co., 1951).

As should be evident, research into Margo Jones' life has been conducted across the country.

The most difficult task of all was finding the "real" Margo Jones. Someone once noted that no biographer ever penetrates the inner spirit of his subject. This is no doubt true, but I have tried to find the psyche of Margo Jones, and what follows in these pages is the honest attempt to get as close as one person can to the core of another. Margo Jones was a very private personality, and

getting to know her intimately was as formidable a task after her death as it obviously was during her lifetime.

Locale seemed the most suitable organizational method for reconstructing Margo Jones' life, and succeeding chapters are thus divided. The first chapter, for example, deals with hereditary, environmental, social, and cultural influences on Jones' early life in Livingston, Texas. The text also includes copies of photographs and an appendix.

CHAPTER I

LIFE IN LIVINGSTON

The seat of Polk County, Texas, is the town of Livingston. It is located halfway between Nacogdoches to the north and Houston to the south on what is now known as Highway 59. This highway splits Livingston and Polk County down the middle. Entering Livingston from the south, one notices on the right side of the highway a bronze state historical marker in front of a neglected two-story frame house with peeling pink paint. In 1981, an amateur theatrical group in Livingston, called The Pine Tree Players, was trying to raise enough money to buy the house and turn it into a theatre. If they succeed, they will probably call it the Margo Jones Theatre in honor of the person whose birthplace and family home it was. In those days, the house was not painted pink, there was no state marker, and there was no "Margo." Indeed, there was no theatrical group.

The marker reads:

Birthplace of
MARGO JONES
(1911-1955)

World-famed genius of drama. Won Broadway acclaim directing *The Glass Menagerie*. Led move to decentralize American theatre. Established, in Dallas, Theatre-in-the-Round (first professional resident repertory theatre of its kind) and wrote book on its technique. Premiered 58 new plays.

Discovered Tennessee Williams, William Inge and others.

A dedicated artistic humanist, she provided channels through which the spiritual qualities of creative people could be communicated.

Who, then, was this "dedicated artistic humanist", and how did she accomplish the things the marker credits her with? For a complete picture one has to go back to the early part of the twentieth century, to the roots of Margo Jones. And Margo Jones' roots were in the red dirt of Livingston.

Polk County in East Texas encompasses an area known more formally as the Big Thicket and less formally as the Piney Woods. Pines, oaks, hickory, black and sweet gums, and sycamores grow taller and larger in this area than in any other part of the state. Lumber and wood products provide a chief source of income for businesses in the area. Sawmilling was the big industry at the turn of

the century, and though it has since declined, there is hardly a town in this section of Texas that is not a lumber town.

There is usually an abundance of rainfall, and dams, springs and rivers are plentiful. The Trinity River is the largest in the area and was navigable until well into the twentieth century. It begins a few miles northeast of Houston and runs five hundred miles north through the city of Dallas, meandering along the way at the southern, southwestern borders of Livingston. It is a river to which Margo Jones would always live in proximity. The soil is sandy and often red in color. Known as the "red lands," it is an alluvial soil that is conspicuous in this part of Texas. Mrs. Corene Brock Hollenburger, a prominent native Livingstonian, said that in the nineteen-twenties this "red, red dirt" was the first topping that was put on old Highway 35 (now 59). Mrs. Hollenburger described it as "the messiest stuff, and people got it on their feet,¹ and it was lucky if you didn't track it into the house." But it is the richness of this red dirt, combined with a plentiful supply of water, that accounts for the abundance of crops and the magnificent flora that appear early in the year when English dogwood and camellias begin to bloom.

¹

Larsen interview, Nov. 7, 1980.

To Texans, Livingston is known culturally for its Indian Reservation. In fact, it is the only thing for which Livingston is known (except now as the birthplace of Margo Jones). For decades, the Alabama-Coushatta tribes have been the chief tourist attraction with their reservation museum, crafts gift shop, and ceremonial dances.

Traveling theatrical troupes played at the Livingston Opera House until shortly after the turn of the century until the advent of movies. In 1908, the opera house served as the scene for the commencement exercises of the first graduating class of Livingston High School. In 1910, the opera house "contributed 20% of the proceeds from several motion picture shows to purchase books and pictures" for the students of Livingston High.² Shortly thereafter, the Livingston Opera House ceased to exist. Exactly what happened to it is not known.

Polk County historians credit the Masons with the fostering of public education in Livingston. Trinity Lodge Number Fourteen organized the first school there in 1846, the same year that Livingston was named the seat of the newly created county of Polk.

The Methodists and Baptists established churches in Livingston in the mid-nineteenth century. Presbyterians

2

A Pictorial History of Polk County, Texas; 1846-1910 (Livingston: The Heritage Committee of the Polk County Bicentennial Commission and the Polk County Historical Survey Committee, 1976), n. p.

and Lutherans soon followed. Shortly after the turn of the century the Church of Christ and the Christian Church attracted congregations, with the Pentecostals, Seventh Day Adventists and others following as the century progressed.

The boundaries of the Texas Bible Belt are not outlined on any known map, but, like the Texas Blue Laws, where they exist, or are enforced, their presence is unmistakable. "It is very interesting to note the part the Christian people of Livingston took in trying to stamp out whiskey. . . ." wrote Miss Emma Haynes in 1937.³ Saloons had been voted in and voted out of Polk County since its inception. In 1871, a notable step toward stamping out spirits was taken when Livingstonians petitioned the commissioner's court to tax those who sold liquor. At this time saloon-keepers became required to pay an occupation tax, along with various types of peddlers, as well as "billiard bagatelle." Further, "Transient theaters paid a tax of \$250.00 . . ."⁴ But as Prohibition proved, it is difficult to dampen spirits. Thus it was that intoxicating liquors and medicated bitters once more became popular commodities in Livingston. By 1901, saloons were thriving

³
"History of Polk County," (unpublished, typed and bound, 1937), p. 91. [The Texas Room, Houston Public Library.]

⁴Ibid.

and the citizenry was again up in arms and, again, the sale of liquor was banned. Incensed saloon-keepers put torches to the business establishments in Livingston and "all except the Gerlach Brothers warehouse was destroyed."⁵ Several people were killed. Those who survived vowed and voted never again to allow an open saloon in the town of Livingston. The town was rebuilt and, despite the abundance of rainfall, Livingston is "dry" today.

Mrs. Hollenburger, for many years Chairman of the Polk County Historical Commission, said:

. . . You were very careful who you offered a drink to in your house, or if you went to someone's house and they offered you a drink you were careful who was there and whether you took it or not. . . . I've always said it [Livingston] was a narrow-minded East Texas town and rather unbending.

Larsen interview, Nov. 7, 1980.

Nevertheless, Texas was a land that promised much after its revolution and after the Civil War. People from the East headed West and, among them, were four brothers who had fought for the Confederacy. Their name was Jones and they settled in and around Livingston. Indeed, Polk County today is populated with many of their descendants. The second oldest of the four brothers was named Edward Ward Jones, and he settled in the hamlet of Leggett, eight miles north of Livingston. Edward Ward Jones himself

⁵Ibid.

fathered four sons and five daughters. His second oldest son was named Richard Harper Jones.

Richard Harper Jones met Martha Pearl Collins from Mason, Texas, when they were both studying to be teachers at what is now known as Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas. Miss Collins' family was also from Virginia, fought for the Confederacy, and after the war settled in central Texas. Miss Collins' father, William Braime Collins, surveyed and laid out the town of Brenham,⁶ just west of Houston.

Richard Harper and Martha Pearl married in 1907 and set up housekeeping in Livingston. They eventually had four children: two daughters, Stella Nell and Margaret Virginia, and two sons, Richard Collins and Charles Roman. The three oldest were born in Livingston and the youngest, Charles, was born in Huntsville (fifty miles away).

Their professions as educators brought the Joneses for awhile to Robstown in south Texas, just west of Corpus Christi, where Richard became superintendent of schools. Martha Pearl had taught German at a school in central Texas and later taught this and other languages in Robstown and, later, back in Livingston after they returned there to live. Upon their return, Richard became superintendent of schools and president of the school board.

⁶Larsen interview with Richard C. Jones, Sept. 26, 1979.

But Richard Harper Jones was ambitious and not content to remain an administrator and teacher. He entered the University of Texas to earn a degree in law. This was conferred sometime soon after the birth of Margaret Virginia, and Richard returned to his family in Livingston and entered into practice. Later in Richard Harper's life, during the Second World War, he became attorney for Polk County, a position he held until near the time of his death in 1951. " . . . But, fundamentally, he liked land more than anything else. . . . He was more of a buyer and a seller and a trader, and a good provider for his family." Thus recalled Richard Collins Jones, his older son.⁷

"Miss Pearl", as she came to be called in Livingston, continued teaching in a substitute capacity for several years after the birth of their youngest child.

Richard Harper's first law office was on the northwest corner across from the courthouse. Later he moved his office into a red brick building on the southwest corner of the courthouse grounds. When he became attorney for the county, his office was in the courthouse, the present one which dates from 1923. It is located on Highway 59 and is the dominant edifice in Livingston, then and now. Richard Harper had but a short distance to travel between the courthouse and his home which was a few blocks south on 59.

⁷Ibid.

The Jones' home was built in 1906 by a man named Smith. The Joneses moved into the large two-story Victorian gingerbread house, with upper and lower galleries, after their marriage in 1907. The three oldest children were born in the house, painted white not pink, and spent the greater part of their childhoods there. The youngest, Charles, was born during a two-year period in Huntsville, after which the family returned to their Livingston home. Family life centered in and around the home. Richard Collins described his father as having "a level head on him and he was a hard worker." He described his mother as "more the artist in the family and did a lot more talking." Miss Pearl's artistic nature was manifested in her oil paintings, in her love of music and poetry, and she "had the largest collection of books in the county."⁸ Mrs. Hollenburger said that Miss Pearl was thought to be eccentric by some Livingstonians, and it is Mrs. Hollenburger's view that it was because Miss Pearl "had a little bit more culture than a lot of the people she had to associate with. Her interests were very broad."⁸ Mrs. Hollenburger further recalled that as one entered the Jones home, to the left of the entry hall was a library with many shelves of books, a fireplace, a long table, and a piano. In remembering this room, Mrs. Hollenburger

⁸Larsen interview, Nov. 7, 1980.

said, "it gave you a warm sort of hospitable feeling . . . " Mrs. Hollenburger recalled Miss Pearl painting, writing poetry and being "a voracious reader."⁹ Miss Pearl was also very religious. She had been brought up in the Christian Church which Mr. Jones, formerly a Baptist, later joined. Richard Collins pointed out that the family was brought up more from a Protestant than a denominational standpoint.¹⁰ As she grew older, Miss Pearl was to become even more religious and was a faithful reader of her Bible.

It was in the library described by Mrs. Hollenburger that Richard Collins painted a vivid picture of his sisters playing duets on the upright piano. Also, they would often play and sing hymns with the whole family gathered around the piano and "that's when Dad would sing a whole lot with them." On warm summer evenings the family would sit out on the lower front gallery and watch the cars go by as Richard Harper Jones played the French harp "hour after hour." Red River Valley was a particular favorite. "Play awhile and talk awhile. We'd sit and rock on the front porch, Mother, Dad, and the four children . . . "¹¹

The serenity of family life was shattered in the early nineteen-twenties when influenza struck the Jones

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Larsen interview, Sept. 26, 1979.

¹¹Ibid.

household during the Christmas holiday season. Richard Collins narrowly escaped becoming an only child. Stella Nell and Margaret Virginia were desperately ill in one room, and the toddler Charles in another. On New Year's Day, 1922 or 1923, Stella Nell succumbed to pneumonia "because they could not stop the bleeding in her head."¹² Charles and Margaret recovered, but every strand of Margaret's hair came out and the illness left her quite bald. Several months later, when her hair began to grow in again--and she feared it never would--her once curly locks were straight.¹³

Born December 12, 1911, Margaret Virginia was particularly inclined towards music. She not only played piano but also ukelele and violin. Livingston could boast of a violin-maker named Sam Barrington who gave her one of his instruments. And although she studied violin, she spent more hours at the piano with an ability not only to read music but also to play by sound or by "ear."¹⁴ Moreover, Margaret Virginia showed an early proclivity toward putting on "shows" in the backyard, as photographs herein will indicate.

In those early years, Mrs. Hollenburger was Corene Brock, whose family home was directly across the road (what is now Highway 59) from the Jones household.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

Corene Brock was Margaret's closest friend. The girls had an idyllic childhood playing "House" and "Dolls," often in an area of the Brock lawn that was overhung with honeysuckle, or in back of the Jones' house where there was a pasture in which wild Cherokee roses grew. At other times they rode horses or would skate on the sidewalk in front of the Brock home because that was the only concrete in that end of town.¹⁵ Mrs. Hollenburger remembered that she and Margaret would attend the traveling circuses and the lectures of the Chatauqua Circuit that were held in a large tent erected in a vacant lot in the center of town. On some occasions a tent would be put up in a vacant lot near the railroad station, but the center of town was the usual site.¹⁶

As Margaret and Corene reached their teens, there were slumber parties at both girls' homes. No one slumbered and girls would be awake all night talking. Richard Collins remembers one such party when several of the girls played stringed instruments and Margaret led them on the ukelele.¹⁷ Corene Brock remembers them puffing away on cigarettes. And on at least one occasion, Margaret and Corene slipped out of the house in the middle of the night and went to the railroad station to

¹⁵Larsen interview with Mrs. Hollenburger, Nov. 7, 1980.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Larsen interview, Sept. 26, 1979.

meet the eleven o'clock train and another that came through at four in the morning. They weren't meeting any-one. There weren't many things to do in Livingston on a Saturday night so meeting the train was a "real devilish" thing to do, as Mrs. Hollenburger put it.¹⁸

Another real devilish thing for Margaret to do in her teens was to go riding in her father's Model T. On one such occasion, Margaret and friends were turning in-to the Jones' driveway when they were hit broadside and injured, all recovering. This accident no doubt brought to Margaret's mind an incident when she was about ten years old riding with her father in an open car to nearby Leggett. Father hit a bump and Margaret was bounced out of the car, uninjured, but with spoiled clothes that had to be washed by grandmother. These incidents caused Margaret to be ever afterward uncomfortable in automobiles.¹⁹

Margaret Virginia began first grade at the age of five. Even at so tender an age, she was advanced beyond her years, for her parents were teachers, and education started early in the Jones home. Miss Pearl read to her children, taught them to read, and taught Margaret, and perhaps the others, to memorize passages from books and pieces of poetry. Further, Margaret's brother Richard recalled that his sister could look at a page of print

¹⁸Larsen interview, Nov. 7, 1980.

¹⁹Conversation with Richard C. Jones, Feb. 10, 1981.

and digest all that was written on it while most other people read line by line. Both brothers contend that their sister had almost total recall of what she read; i.e., what is usually referred to as photographic memory.²⁰ Like her mother, Margaret was "a voracious reader." When Corene Brock would visit, the two girls would often sit in the library, spread books out on the long table and read to each other. Then they would act out the characters in the books. Margaret also liked to write in notebooks, a practice she was to continue throughout her life. Mrs. Hollenburger vividly recalled an occasion when she and her friend were lying across her bed and Margaret picked up a notebook and wrote from memory a poem she had written. After she had finished, she turned the page and started writing prose.²¹

Drama was an extra-curricular activity in the public schools at this time and took the form of junior and senior plays. There is no evidence that Margaret or Corene took part in such plays. Some speech courses were offered at Livingston High, but often children were taught "Elocution" or "Expression" privately. According to Mrs. Hollenburger, Miss Pearl saw to it that Margaret studied elocution with a man in Livingston named Charles

²⁰Larsen interview with Richard C. Jones, Sept. 26, 1979, and letter, Charles R. Jones to Larsen, Sept. 17, 1980.

²¹Larsen interview, Nov. 7, 1980.

King. Miss Pearl also coached her daughter in recitation and declamation.²² Margaret appeared on many assembly programs at school reciting James Whitcomb Riley's An Old Sweetheart of Mine--so many times that fellow students longed for a new poetic selection. "She [Margaret] always liked to be sort of dramatic," Mrs. Hollenburger pointed out.²³ As with writing in notebooks, Margaret Virginia's penchant for recitation continued throughout her life.

Being "dramatic" came naturally to Margaret Virginia. Brother Richard (the family called him "Dixie" when he was younger) explained that she loved to "clown," going on to describe how she was fond of dressing up in her Uncle Roy's clothes, entertaining her grandparents when she went to visit them in nearby Leggett. [See photograph, p. 232.] She was also fond of creating her own dances. She often entertained the entire family and, from an early age, her attire often suggested that of a costume rather than conventional clothing. Numerous family pictures bear this out, some of which are contained herein. One that is too large to include is a very young Margaret in a beribboned, rosetted dress, a straw cloche with wide upturned brim over long corkscrew curls (before influenza), shading herself under a large Japanese parasol. A particularly interesting one in her late teens shows a

²²Ibid. Also Larsen interview with Richard C. Jones, Sept. 26, 1979.

²³Ibid.

confident, smiling young lady with arms crossed, wearing a floppy bow tie and a longish cape. Although Margaret had few formal experiences with dramatics in her childhood, she made her first stage appearance in Robstown when she was quite a little girl as a ring-bearer in a Tom Thumb wedding.²⁴

Debate was the major academic activity engaged in by Margaret at Livingston High. Whereas Stella Nell had been a rather quiet girl, Margaret Virginia was both outgoing and outspoken. Debate came naturally to her. From childhood, Margaret "was quite a talker," her brother Richard explained.²⁵ Margaret and Corene were usually on the same side of a debate team. Mrs. Hollenburger remembers one topic they debated because they experienced difficulty finding research materials. The topic was "Should the Philippines Be Granted Independence?" Mrs. Hollenburger also noted that she and Margaret would "get up in arms" when somebody attempted to promote a theory they were against, "which made some of the debates sort of stimulating sometimes when we went to district meets," she added. According to Mrs. Hollenburger, Margaret's outspokenness "didn't make her as popular as she could have been with people," and added that she was also like that, so the two girls had a good relationship, though they oc-

²⁴Larsen interview with Richard C. Jones, Sept. 26, 1979.

²⁵Ibid.

casionaly had their differences. It wasn't that Margaret was temperamental; indeed, she seldom became angry. She could, however, easily become indignant over a personal affront or matters philosophical. Mrs. Hollenburger explained: "She was very human and very independent and always very ambitious."²⁶ Although Margaret's outspokenness may have cost her popularity with her peers, she must have had innate charm that she saved for what she considered the right occasions. That almost indefinable quality of charm very early in her life was to be one of her most pronounced characteristics.

Life in Livingston for Margaret Virginia Jones was not limited just to school activities and girlish pursuits. Simultaneous with her secondary school education, she was receiving practical experience working in her father's law office. "She was one of the best secretaries Dad ever had," Richard Collins said.²⁷ In his practice of law, Jones was more involved with civil rather than criminal cases. He was an abstractor who liked working with titles and dealing with property. Richard Collins explained that Margaret was like her father in that she was efficient at organization and she gained early practical experience in abstract work as a result of work-

²⁶Larsen interview with Mrs. Hollenburger, Nov. 7, 1980.

²⁷Larsen interview with Richard C. Jones, Sept. 26, 1979.

ing with him. Margaret's early aspiration was to become a lawyer like her father. She enjoyed watching him make speeches in the courtroom, and at some point it occurred to her that she enjoyed court proceedings because of their inherent drama.²⁸ It was also in her father's law office that she met many people, for his was a busy office. It became even busier after the East Texas oil boom in 1930. (It was probably shortly after this that Jones founded the Polk County Abstract Company.) Moreover, Richard Harper Jones liked people and was visited and consulted by them in many capacities, including officials from Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College (now University) who periodically sought his advice on the raising of bees.²⁹ Thus, Margaret Virginia was exposed to many more people than would ordinarily be possible living in a small town. Her developing charm was evident when meeting people. "She never met a stranger," her brother Richard said.³⁰

These exposures in her father's law office provided early influences that were to benefit Margaret throughout her life. Practical business experience gained by working with her father, and being cultivated in the arts by her mother, Margaret Virginia matured with an

²⁸Margo Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round (New York: Rinehart & Co., 1951), p. 40.

²⁹Larsen interview with Richard C. Jones, Sept. 26, 1979.

³⁰Ibid.

ability to converse with a wide variety of people on an equally wide variety of subjects. She was, therefore, far more advanced socially and culturally than the average schoolgirl growing up in East Texas in the nineteen-twenties. Heredity and environment were key factors in shaping Margaret's personality, ability, and future. She did not escape the confines of small town life in order to begin her education. It all began at home.

Life in Livingston provided a foundation firmer than perhaps anyone knew at the time, and that foundation was well summarized by Charles R. Jones:

All of our family were individuals each with completely different ideas as to what we wanted to do with our lives. Our father and mother taught us right and wrong, to believe in God, to respect them and each other, to help each other, to respect all races and creeds, the value of working for what you wanted or believed in, the love of travel. The love of family was always there even though we might not have always agreed with what another of the family was trying to do, so all tried to assist the other. They gave us the desire to learn about everything and the opportunity to do what we wanted. They assisted us to do what we thought we wanted to do. What more could one want from parents.³¹

Margaret had always been an "A" student. Richard Collins remembered that once she made an "A-" in a sub-

³¹Letter to Larsen, Dec. 7, 1980.

ject "and she had a fit."³² The death of her older sister during their high school years had a profound effect on her. After that, and her own recovery from the illness that killed her sister, Margaret put all of her manifesting energy and drive into studying and was able to skip one entire grade. She grew extremely restless and became eager to leave Livingston. She graduated from high school in 1927, and later the same year, she left home, never to return there to live again. Throughout her life, however, she was to maintain close family ties.

Margaret Virginia was usually called "Sis" by her brothers, "Margaret" by her father, and "Margie" by her mother. There was a time in Martha Pearl's life when she wanted to be called by the name of Muriel, though it apparently never caught on.³³ Curiously, her daughter Margaret was also unhappy with her name and, while still in her teens, changed it because "There's just too many Margaret Joneses and I'm going to call myself Margo!"³⁴

³²Larsen interview, Sept. 26, 1979.

³³Conversation with Beatrice Lockhart Jones (Mrs. Richard C. Jones) [hereinafter referred to as Bea Jones], Feb. 19, 1981.

³⁴Richard C. Jones, quoting his sister; Larsen interview, Sept. 26, 1979.

CHAPTER II

DENTON, DALLAS, AND THE WORLD

OUTSIDE OF TEXAS:

1927-1935

In the autumn of 1927, when only fifteen years old, Margo Jones entered the College of Industrial Arts (called CIA) at Denton, Texas, some forty miles north of Dallas and approximately two hundred and fifty miles northwest of Livingston. CIA was a small, private academic institution for females only. (The name was later changed to Texas State College for Women, and it is now known as Texas Woman's University.) It was the destination of many young women from all over the state upon graduation from high school.

With extraordinary energy, Jones threw herself into every facet of college life. It was her love of drama, however, that was to dominate all other interests. She declares in her book that she knew from the age of eleven that she wanted "to put on plays."¹ But one did not go off to college in 1927 in Texas to major in drama, for there were no drama departments at this time. So Jones majored in speech. CIA offered some drama courses which

¹Theatre-in-the-Round, p. 40.

were "crowded with aspiring actresses," and Jones felt fortunate that she was the only one interested in directing. Because of her unique position, she maintains that she had more opportunities to direct plays in college than would "the average directing student in a drama department." Jones does not say, nor is it known, just how soon after arriving at CIA that she directed her first production. She also acted in a number of plays for the purpose of acquainting herself with the actor's viewpoint and problems, though she claims to have had no ambition to be an actress herself. She credits one of her teachers at CIA with stimulating her desire to read plays, and it was during her college years that she began the practice of reading at least one play every day, " . . . lighting into the Greeks, Shakespeare, Ibsen, Chekhov, O'Neill as though they were my own personal discoveries and reading all their works."²

Margo Jones was not sent off to college to be a pampered sorority darling or to be "finished." She was expected to work, both at her studies and also to help pay for her education. She more than met the challenge. Throughout her tenure at CIA, she worked at everything. She began by waiting on tables in a college cafeteria. She later typed and filed in various offices on campus,

²Ibid., pp. 41-42.

including the college library. In her last year, she worked in the office of the Dean of Women.³

Apparently, never at any time in Margo Jones' life could the word "shy" be applied to her, not even at fifteen when she was away from home for the first time. Her outgoing, gregarious personality enabled her to meet people with great ease. Her circle of friends and acquaintances was ever widening as she made herself known on the campus. She was most concerned with whatever dramatic activities she could generate, but she was also making herself known as a swimmer. Further, she contributed poetry to The Daedalian Quarterly, a literary magazine published by the students of CIA. Following are two pieces of her poetry that appeared in the Fall 1932 issue under the name of Margaret Jones:⁴

I Miss You

I'm glad that I shall miss you
This I know
I'm glad that I'll be lonely
When you go
For should your absence leave no
Touch of pain
There'd be no reason for this hope
of your return again.

Request

If I should ask of you today
One gift to take along my way,
I would not ask for everlasting love,
Or that you swear fidelity to stars above.
I'd only ask the privilege to take
The memory of one hour
For that happy hour's sake.

³Larsen interview with Richard C. Jones, Sept. 26, 1979.

⁴Vol. XIX, No. 1, pp. 30, 41. [Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Richard C. Jones.]

Although Margo Jones was never to live at home again, she always went to Livingston to visit her family on holidays and during breaks between semesters. On such occasions the family would join in their favorite pastime of singing around the piano while she played. She and her father would stay up half the night playing and singing hymns.⁵ Also, Jones would visit her friend Corene Brock and they would exchange stories. Jones' visits home were short because she was always anxious to get back to her new life in Denton. But she and her family kept in touch by writing letters. No matter how busy her schedule was at CIA, and indeed at any other time in her life, Jones always took time to write to her family, and individual members of her family always wrote to her. As is usual in most families, her mother wrote more often than the others. Jones and her mother were very much alike in that it was necessary to each of them to get their thoughts down on paper. Richard Collins Jones said that from the time his sister entered CIA, and throughout her six years there, their mother wrote to her every night, and his sister wrote to the family every morning. Richard said that often he would ride horseback across town to the depot to mail his mother's letters to his sister so that she could receive them the next day.⁶ Miss Pearl

⁵Larsen interview, Sept. 26, 1979.

⁶Ibid.

loved flowers, which, she once wrote her daughter, her own mother said were "'the smiles of God.'"⁷ Often Miss Pearl would enclose a blossom in a letter. From time to time, Miss Pearl would, amazingly, carefully pack boxes of flowers cut from her garden and send them on the train to Denton so that Jones received them the next day--all quite fresh. Miss Pearl continued sending flowers in this manner to her "precious Margie" throughout her daughter's life.⁸

A letter to her family, postmarked 10:30 A. M., August 2, 1930, not only provides a picture of her life at CIA, but also offers an illuminating view of life as seen through the eyes of Margo Jones when she was still only nineteen years old. Indeed, someone has written the word "Vision" across the envelope containing the following letter:

Dearest Folks,

I'm a pill! I wait until too late or too early to write you all. Now its kinda late but I've been having a marvelous time. For the past several hours I've been reading (interesting stuff). Before that I went to the Auditorium. Before that I went to the library which was soon after dinner. At 4:30 I went in swimming. You may have a swimming champion on your hands yet. I've been doing my best to beat some kids here. Before I went in swimming I spent six hours at the office typing letters, exam questions and catalog cards. Oh yes, I also met a class today. Well, that's my day in full, even though I did go backwards.

⁷Letter, Feb. 23, 1946.

⁸Larsen interview with Richard C. Jones, Sept. 26, 1979. Also, this practice was referred to in numerous letters in the nineteen-forties and fifties between Jones and her mother.

Maybe someday I'll get an M. E. degree and I don't mean Master of Engineering-- Instead it will be a Master of Experience. I may have a time making Professor "Hard Knocks" hand it out but I'll get it sooner or later. (Dear Folks, I'm perfectly sane only feeling extra good. I've decided I have too much energy for my own good.) I do love to do things. Please, I hope you don't think I take my school work lightly. As a matter of fact the course I'm taking is junk. The teacher is no good and I think little of it, but I am getting a tremendous amount accomplished in other lines this summer. I have made a name on the campus. I have made friends with the most important people on the campus--both faculty and students. I've learned a good bit about numerous things that are really personal investments. I really think if one believes in their own life and future that they should invest in it. If you buy books, if you spend money in travel, if you buy a typewriter, take lessons in swimming or riding--any of these things you are really investing in yourself and you will get a high percentage of interest. Do you agree with me?

I know this must be rather incoherent but I hope you can read it.

I'm counting the days now until I can see you all again.

Lots of Love,

Margaret⁹

⁹This letter is the only known piece of correspondence from Jones during her CIA years. It is of particular interest for the insight it offers, but also the letter has a curious history. In a one-page letter to Jones of "Sabbath morning, Feb. 16, 1946," her mother claims to have just found the letter and other articles under the house in Livingston. Miss Pearl included the 1930 letter in her 1946 letter to her daughter who kept them both in her personal family correspondence file. It is believed that either her mother or Jones herself wrote the word "Vision" across the envelope.

One of the "most important people" Jones met during her Denton days was John Rosenfield, entertainment editor of the Dallas Morning News and for many years leading drama critic of the Southwest. Jones would go to Dallas to put stories in the News about CIA productions. According to Rosenfield's widow, Claire, her husband became very interested in Margo Jones because of her blatant love of and dedication to the theatre. She radiated enthusiasm which Rosenfield took note of, often inviting her to films in which she would be interested.¹⁰ This was the beginning of a long and productive relationship. It is probably Rosenfield to whom Jones refers in her book when she tells of attending a lecture on campus by a Texas drama critic. In an open forum after the lecture, Jones announced to the critic, "I'm going to be a director." And she tells how she received encouragement from the critic at a time when she needed it.

Being a director became the focus of Jones' life. All of her extraordinary energy was concentrated on this goal, a goal that was unusual for anyone in the late nineteen twenties and early thirties, but especially unusual for a woman. She had no time for, nor was she inclined

¹⁰Carole Cohen interview with Claire Rosenfield, Apr. 30, 1974 (Oral History Collection on the Performing Arts, Southern Methodist Univ). [Hereinafter abbreviated to Oral History Collection, SMU.]

¹¹Theatre-in-the-Round, p. 42.

towards, the typical collegiate social life that included courtship, which was, in any event, limited at an all-girls' school. No matter, for Margo Jones was much too ambitious for romantic involvement.

After receiving a Bachelor of Science degree in Speech in 1932, Jones immediately went into the graduate program at CIA. Combining her interests of drama and psychology, she wrote a thesis on "The Abnormal Ways Out of Emotional Conflict as Reflected in the Dramas of Henrik Ibsen." It included studies of Hedda Gabler's suicide, Ellida's hysteria in The Lady From The Sea, and Irene's insanity in When We Dead Awaken. She received a Master of Arts degree at eleven o'clock one August morning in 1933, and that afternoon was in Dallas applying for a job at a newly created theatre school that had not yet formally opened.

The Southwestern School of the Drama was organized by two men named Louis Veda Quince and Frank Harting. Quince was head of the acting program, and Harting was the school's business manager and also taught stage makeup. Quince had studied acting with Richard Boleslavsky and Maria Ouspenskaya at their American Laboratory Theatre, after which he worked in various capacities for the Theatre Guild before coming to Dallas and working in Oliver Hinsdell's Dallas Little Theatre. Harting had worked for United Press in Dallas and became press agent for the first talking pictures. He later worked in New York and returned

to Dallas as movie/drama critic for the Dallas Dispatch and then became business manager for the Dallas Little Theatre. Quince and Harting shared the belief that there were not many reputable theatre schools in this area of the country which led them to form the Southwestern School of the Drama. Harting said it was not their purposeto encourage people to go into the professional theatre, but for those who could not be discouraged, their school would prepare them for the attempt.¹² In addition to acting and makeup, the school offered courses in diction, dancing and eurhythmics, fencing, and playwriting (taught by John William Rogers, a local playwright who later became theatre critic for the Dallas Times Herald).

Quince and Harting had leased the second floor of a building, over a drugstore, to house their theatre school. In the summer of 1933, they were making their quarters ready for a Fall opening. In the middle of much hammering, painting, and the hanging of draperies, there appeared a smiling young Margo Jones who introduced herself with great confidence to Frank Harting, and asked if they were offering any scholarships. At that moment the telephone rang. Harting was covered in paint and Jones offered to answer the phone for him, which she did. The caller was inquiring about the school and an amazed Harting listened as a poised and self-assured young Margo Jones gave the inquirer complete de-

¹²Carole Cohen interview with Frank Harting, Mar. 13, 1974 (Oral History Collection, SMU).

tails of the school. According to Harting, she knew precisely what courses were being offered, who was teaching them and at what hours.¹³ It was very much a part of Jones' nature to find out as much as she could about a subject that interested her and she had obviously and thoroughly investigated the proposed Southwestern School of the Drama prior to appearing on its doorstep. Harting said she knew as much about the school as he and Quince did. The telephone conversation concluded, Jones then picked up a paint brush and bucket and offered to finish painting the room so Harting could do something else.¹⁴ Harting admitted that he was completely astonished at the young woman who in appearance was "just out of the boondocks" but in attitude had an ingratiating way of taking over. And that's exactly what she did, and she got her scholarship too. Harting recalls:

. . . from that moment on, she pretty much was running things. She could do anything that needed to be done, and do it almost better than anybody. . . . she attended all the classes . . . from Louis Quince she learned what was the start of method acting in this country because that's what Louis had learned in the school in New York that he attended. So that was soaked up by Margo. . . . she didn't aspire to be an actress, and she was not talented. I don't think in any of the productions we did in the two years she was there,

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴cf. Jones' version in Theatre-in-the-Round, p. 43.

. . . she was ever in a production. But she was always absorbing everything from everybody that had to do with the theatre. And she worked on scenery, and she worked on props, and she--anything there was to do, she did it. And she was a great influence on the whole morale of the school, and she made people happy. And she gave everybody a shot in the arm if things were not going right. She had a way of making you feel they were going to go right. She was a highly motivated, positive thinker.¹⁵

In retrospect, specifics have a way of becoming vague and not totally accurate. Jones really only spent approximately nine months at the Southwestern School of the Drama, not two years as Harting recalls.

It was probably after Jones finished her work at the Southwestern School of the Drama that she went home to Livingston before going to California. She visited her family and also visited her childhood chum, Corene Brock, who by then had become Mrs. J. J. Hollenburger and was herself home on a visit. The two friends lay across the bed in Corene's old room, each telling the other about her present life. Mrs. Hollenburger recalled that Margo told her, "I don't know how I'm going to do it, but this time next year I'm going to be on a trip around the world." Mrs. Hollenburger knew her friend did not have the money for such an extravagant undertaking so she asked her,

¹⁵Cohen interview, Mar. 13, 1974.

"Well, how are you going to do it?" Margo Jones confessed she didn't know.¹⁶

In the summer of 1934, Jones went off to the Pasadena Playhouse in California to study directing in a summer workshop. She was given the opportunity to direct several plays during this short period and credits the experience as being highly stimulating and encouraging, a most important influence on her life's work.¹⁷ Upon completion of the summer course she received her first directing job with the Ojai Community Players in Ojai, California. It was here that she directed Hedda Gabler for the first time, a play for which she had particular admiration and one that she was to direct several times in her career. She remained at Ojai for approximately nine months, until probably in the spring of 1935.

Of course, all of this time Jones was meeting new people and making new friends. At some point while in California, she met a restless young widow of wealth from La Jolla who wanted to take a trip around the world. She was about ten years older than Jones and her name was Sheila Waddell.¹⁸ After Jones' engagement at Ojai ended, she accompanied Sheila Waddell as companion and secretary, which enabled her to make some small amount of money while

¹⁶Larsen interview, Nov. 7, 1980.

¹⁷Theatre-in-the-Round, p. 43.

¹⁸The name may have been spelled Wardell.

all expenses were paid by Mrs. Waddell.¹⁹ They sailed in May 1935 for the Orient.

Margo Jones was now obsessed with the theatre. It was her life. Everything she did was in relationship to furthering her knowledge and experience about the theatre. On the voyage with Sheila Waddell, she visited theatres in Japan, China, India, England, and France. (Mrs. Hollenburger said, "And 'sure nuff,' . . . I'd get a postcard from India and one from somewhere else."²⁰) Jones had toured almost all of the cultural capitals of the world before ever seeing New York City. She had a magnetism that drew people to her, though at this point of her life she was probably just realizing its full potential. Her manner was open, friendly, and direct. Consequently, she easily met and talked with theatre people throughout the world. As Mrs. Hollenburger said, when Margo Jones said "she was going to be doing something, she would be doing it."²¹

The trip around the world ended in New York City in the autumn of 1935. Jones attended the Broadway theatre for the first time. She was most impressed by the Group

¹⁹Larsen conversation with Richard C. Jones, May 19, 1981. Later material offered by the Jones family indicates that perhaps Mrs. Waddell was not widowed at this time.

²⁰Larsen interview, Nov. 7, 1980.

²¹Ibid.

Theatre, which at that time was doing Waiting for Lefty and Awake and Sing.

Of course, the United States was in the grip of the devastating Depression of the nineteen-thirties. People were out of work. Especially theatre people. The Federal Theatre Project had been organized while Jones was sailing the world. It was an attempt by the Federal government to combat unemployment in the theatre. When Jones was going home to visit her family, she learned that a Federal Theatre program was planned for Houston, a mere ninety miles from Livingston. She made application to work on the Houston project.

When Jones graduated from the College of Industrial Arts she took with her more than just two degrees. She took with her a bit of wisdom gained from one of her professors who told her, "Culture is getting through life with as little friction as possible." This struck some responsive chord in Margo Jones. She was never to forget it.²²

²²Margo Jones told this to Bea Jones, her sister-in-law, who quoted it to me Mar. 27, 1981, from a book of quotations she keeps.

CHAPTER III

THE MARGO MYSTIQUE;

FROM HOUSTON'S FEDERAL THEATRE TO THE MOSCOW ARTS FESTIVAL:

1935-1936

Houston is sometimes called "Baghdad on the Bayou" because of its gaudy image of unbridled wealth and equally unbridled passions. Although it may not seem so today, the arts have long had difficulty entrenching themselves in this city which can well afford them. The city has never been without cultural leaders, but it has been their arduous task to find ways of enticing the volatile Houston public to the box-office and art gallery. A few years after the Second World War, George Fuermann, a columnist for the Houston Post, wrote:

The trouble with the arts in Houston is that nobody can see them for the gold. The city's beckoning box-office power is the volcanic, crackbrained mythology of its wealth. Houston's cultural aspects merely bore the public, because culture is not so fascinating as Glenn McCarthy. Practically anybody prefers to hear about the Shamrock [Hotel] instead of a symphony orchestra. Nobody wants to consider circle theatres if he can consider instead the dollar bonanzas of oil pashas. What chance have the arts when you can talk about a man who gave away \$160,000,000? The city is not supposed

to make sense but nonsense, it being
presumed to be as mad as the March
Hare. . . .¹

Although the city has become somewhat more sophisticated since the nineteen-fifties, Fuermann's words still remain largely true. While Houston's cultural history has been a checkered one, theatre groups have doggedly fought for a foothold in the sprawling metropolis. Amateur groups mushroomed as early as the second decade of the twentieth century, but it was not until 1925 with the founding of the Little Theatre that Houston had a stable theatrical organization that existed for any extended period. The Houston Little Theatre eventually moved into a permanent home which housed their productions until 1952, the year they disbanded. Other theatre groups formed as offshoots of the Little Theatre, or Chelsea Playhouse as it was often called because of its location. It was under the direction of Cyril Delevanti, at the beginning of the 1933-1934 season, that the quality of Little Theatre productions is believed to have improved. Delevanti headed the playhouse on Chelsea Street until 1937, and in 1935 also served as director of the Houston Federal Theatre Project. Almost from the beginning, however, it was Delevanti's assistant who was running the show. His assistant was Margo Jones.

By the time Jones arrived in Houston in 1935, she

¹Houston: Land of the Big Rich (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1951), p. 175.

was no longer a mere country girl from Livingston. She was an experienced, if not seasoned, director and she had traveled the world in high style, not cabin class, at a time when most Americans considered themselves lucky if they had three meals a day. Jones appeared on the Houston scene a world traveler who had learned much from having observed theatre in many foreign countries. This gave her a patina of sophistication, though she never tried to conceal her small-town background. Small wonder, then, that she was hired as assistant director of the Houston Federal Theatre Project.

The Houston project's most ambitious undertaking was a pageant about Texas which Jones stage-managed. Knowing full well the advantages and necessity of favorable publicity, Jones got her name in the newspapers on numerous occasions. One article suggests that she was even then laying the groundwork for her future theatrical plans: "Girl Stage Manager of Federal Theatre Play Knew When She Was 12 What Her Career Would Be."² Unfortunately, the Federal Theatre Project was short-lived in Houston and was unsuccessful throughout the state of Texas.

During the six months that the Federal Theatre Project struggled to survive, Jones set about knowing all "the most important people" in Houston just as she had in Denton.

²Unidentified clipping from one of the Houston papers found in one of Jones' scrapbooks. It is possible that Hubert Roussel, then of the Press, could have written the article.

Knowing that drama critics were "most important people," she soon acquainted herself with those writers on Houston's three newspapers. Foremost among them was Hubert Roussel, who was with the Houston Press from 1932 to 1937, when he joined the Houston Post, where he was critic until his retirement in 1966. He was to provide great encouragement to Jones and her theatre plans.

Apparently, meeting Margo Jones was a memorable experience. Many people, including her niece, Judy Jones, have likened her to a string of exploding firecrackers because of her dynamically enthusiastic personality. Physically, Jones was not a great beauty. Her looks alone never caused heads to turn. She was not theatrical-looking, nor was she plain. The most appropriate word to describe her appearance at this stage of her life is "wholesome." She stood approximately five-feet-four inches tall and probably wore a size ten dress (she was never larger than a size twelve). She wore her brown hair more short than long in an uncomplicated style becoming to her roundish face and turned-up nose. Her eyes were dark and crinkled at the corners when she smiled or laughed, which was often. Her appearance alone was in many ways deceptive, for it belied her tremendous vitality. It was when she opened her mouth and spoke that people realized there was nothing average about Margo Jones. She spoke with strength and confidence, but she did not twang as many Texans do. Hers were rounded tones tinged with the gentility of Virginia forebears. The

"R" was never harsh; rather it was "rāthāh."³ Nor was her speech affected. But this is only a description of the instrument. It is what issued from the instrument that made her unique. To begin with, she was articulate and had a broad vocabulary. Further, her well articulated thoughts were expressed with rare enthusiasm. She was almost overwhelmingly enthusiastic--about theatre and about life. To Margo Jones, the two were inseparable: theatre was life. Everlastingly puffing away on cigarettes, she called people "Baby" and "Darlin'" and "Honey" and "Sweetheart" and "Angel," and other such terms of endearment whether she knew them or not. Jones "never met a stranger," as her brother Richard said. This familiar way of addressing people became one of her trademarks and most people seemed to have loved it. It was her genuine enthusiasm, complete self-assurance and total belief in what she was doing that added up to charisma. Margo Jones had "con," she had "moxie," and she had "chutzpa," in the best senses of those words.⁴ And she had genuine charm. Though her charm was innately Southern, it transcended region. And she was honest. When she was after something, she usually got it, but never through deception. Jones' charm, her ability to

³I have heard several recordings of her voice through the courtesies of Arthur and Fern Koch, and Joe Finkelstein.

⁴"Con" meaning to gain confidence, to persuade; "moxie" meaning boldness; and "chutzpa" meaning vigor, aggressive, courageous.

communicate, and her extraordinary vitality were her greatest assets. She was sincere, sensitive, and she had innocence. Indeed, she never ever quite lost a certain naiveté. Fortunately, she was also intelligent. Add to this an aura of invulnerability and a fixed vision of what she wanted to accomplish, and you have "the Margo mystique."

When Jones came to Houston she looked up a high school friend from Livingston named Leola Prestridge. They lived together throughout Jones' seven years in Houston, first in Prestridge's mother's home and later in rented rooms in what is now known as the Montrose area. Prestridge recalled that once they made the mistake of giving up a comfortable arrangement with a landlady named Mrs. Doan to move into an "odd 2-room 'suite'" with walls painted a sickening pink. Organ music from a nearby skating rink could be heard by day and by night. Their landlady demanded a monetary contribution everytime they ironed.⁵ Prestridge was not a part of Jones' theatre coterie. She worked as a secretary for Seaboard Life Insurance Company.⁶ The two would remain good friends and corresponded to the end of Jones' life.

From her earliest days in Houston, Jones became the center of artistic attention. A group of young artists who

⁵Leola Prestridge to Margo Jones in a letter of reminiscence, July 8, 1954.

⁶The name was changed in 1945 to American General Life Insurance Co., from which Jones purchased life insurance.

were friends of the theatre, some of whom designed sets and costumes for Houston Little Theatre and Federal Theatre productions, were magnetized by the Margo mystique. One of them, Maudee Carron Thames, explained that to most of them Margo Jones was a "goddess." Thames recalled that the group was in awe of her.⁷ This group of artists were mostly students of McNeil Davidson at her Creative Art School and included, among others, Gene Charlton, Carden Bailey, Nione Carlson, and Thames. This group was a part of a larger group that included writers and others who were interested in the arts but who had no other outlet for expression except when the group got together. Thames said they were the "avant garde" of Houston at the time, though not "wild or Bohemian." In the beginning, all they could afford to drink was coffee, she said, and usually iced. They got together once a week, usually on Thursday, and gave readings and occasionally someone would do an interpretive dance.⁸ In all likelihood, this was probably the girl from Livingston because others from the Houston days have referred to her terpsichorean improvisations which were not necessarily intended as entertainment but were for her own personal pleasure.⁹

⁷Larsen interview, Oct. 27, 1979.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Tennessee Williams refers to Jones as once having "performed a wild dance alone around the room." Letter to Donald Windham, Nov. 3, 1943, in Tennessee Williams' Letters to Donald Windham, 1940-1965, ed. Donald Windham; New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1977, p. 112.

One of the aspiring writers in the group was a young woman named Zoe Leger who was more financially secure than the rest. She would bring classical music to the gatherings and play the recordings for the group. According to Maudee Thames, Leger would also tell them her ideas for writing plays, and Jones would question her as to details of plot, action, and character.¹⁰

It was obvious to this coterie of friends that Jones was serious about the theatre and was driven by a single vision. But, Thames said, "Margo always put other people first somehow, even though she had this driving ambition." Though Jones was unquestionably quite a talker, she also listened intently to what others had to say and apparently never tried to monopolize a conversation. She was much too polite for that. She listened to her friends' problems, gave them courage and, Thames said, "always gave you a sense of feeling right with yourself."¹¹ Somehow, though, Jones stood apart from the group. It was as if she viewed them as characters in a play directed by herself. While spreading "light and joy" (to use Thames' words), the Jones girl inspired others and was able to get people to dream with her. Most significantly, she was able to get them to dream her dream. This was true within the group of artists at

¹⁰Larsen interview, Oct. 27, 1979.

¹¹Ibid.

all their meetings and when working together on the Federal Theatre Project, but became even more apparent after Jones went to work for the Houston Recreation Department. Most people found Jones' magnetism irresistible. She was so charged with energy that she was able to infuse energy in others, getting them to work and to do things. People adored her--male and female alike. She became the object of extraordinary adulation. During her Houston years, Jones began to receive numerous letters of admiration, revelations of love often with cryptic signatures, and poetry written to and about her. Although much of the correspondence and poetry is romantic in nature and the language often veiled, the implications are very clear. Often there is an unmistakable bitterness of unrequited love. One book of poetry written "For Margo Jones," as stated on the flyleaf, is extraordinary, not because it is a bound book of verse seventy-six pages in length, but because all of the poems are handwritten in a beautiful diminutive spidery script. In several of the verses reference is made to Jones' urging the writer to put down her thoughts on paper. Although some of the meanings are obscure, and different interpretations could be placed on some of the verses, clearly the writer was enamored of Margo Jones.¹² Yet another example is a letter signed

¹²The book of verse is titled Conversation Pieces by Mary Folse, whose name appears on several of the programmes of the Houston Community Players as a member of the production staff. The book is dated (but unpublished) Dec. 12, 1940, Jones' twenty-ninth birthday.

"Twisted Column," written in turgid language with occasional references to Greece. The letter petitions the "Lady Margaret" for a "charming friendship" which the writer hopes does not "repulse" its recipient. The writer's adoration of Margo Jones is plainly, if ornately, stated:

Lady, you are a thin white flame among cold ashes. You are an impregnated marvel of brilliant fire in a land of grey stupidity. Yours is a sinuous, full veined brand; the crystal luster of moon utterances.

.
I hope you will be sufficiently aloof so that if you happen to be with any great flaws, they will be shrouded in mysticism. In other girls I have known, Margaret, I have been fond of them for their flaws. I should like to meet your strength and compete with it. . . .¹³

Margo Jones was the recipient of many such letters and tributes throughout her life. She saved them all, as indeed she saved everything, but not once in all of Margo Jones' voluminous correspondence, meticulously saved by her and now preserved in various libraries, is there a letter or a copy of a letter in which she directly responds to expressions of adulation of this kind. Nor are there letters of retribution from individuals who may have felt scorned,

¹³Undated and unidentified but from this period.

and probably were--but gently.¹⁴ This indicates a remarkable maturity on Jones' part, in that 1) she was not swayed, persuaded, or overwhelmed by lavish proclamations of love and adoration, and, 2) she handled the disappointment and bitternesses of her admirers in a manner that did not create unpleasant situations or enemies. Certain liaisons and fleeting affairs are indicated during this period of her life, but she let nothing interfere with her vision of what she personally wanted to accomplish in the theatre and what she wanted to accomplish for the American theatre.

Joe Finkelstein is a noted and respected Houston actor (and retired business executive) who first met Jones late in 1936 when she was organizing the Houston Community Players. They remained friends throughout Jones' life. Finkelstein is particularly articulate on the subject of the private and public personae of Margo Jones and how she dealt with personal relationships in her professional life, even when she was in her mid-twenties. Many others have expressed this same view, but none so clearly or so ex-

¹⁴ In only one file of correspondence was there a series of letters lashing out at Jones for slighting the author of the correspondence. Jones responds to these hysterical letters, written during 1945, in a calm affectionate manner. This was not, however, a romantic relationship and the letters were written at a time when their author felt culturally deprived and envied Jones' prominence and position. The writer of the correspondence was quite young at the time. She later matured and bore no ill will toward Jones, only a profound and lasting respect. It is for this reason that I choose not to reveal the person's name. I bring it up only because later researchers may come across this correspondence and may think I had either overlooked it or chose to suppress its contents.

plicitly as has Finkelstein:

Her ambitions were so strong. . . . She could never commit herself to a marriage because her career . . . was uppermost. That was burning always in her. . . . And she aligned herself . . . with quite a few people whose sexual preference was that of their own sex. And in a way this was a sort of cushion because . . . some guy that really was into theatre--like Tennessee Williams--She never had to worry about Tennessee Williams making a pass at her! . . . Matter of fact, she could sit there for days and talk about theatre and his writings and so forth . . . to get to the guts of the thing she wanted. Even females . . . they knew she was heterosexual . . . They would not be interested in her that way, but they had something to give her from their feelings about theatre, what they knew about theatre or what they could do for her in theatre . . . But that's the way it worked. She had people around her all the time like that which is good for what she wanted and placed her under no obligation to think about marriage and home and babies. . . .¹⁵

Margo Jones simply made no known enemies. Had she done so, they would have surfaced in the course of the extensive research that has gone into her life. Not even Joe Finkelstein, who admitted to being angered and hurt by Jones many times because she never gave him a job in the professional theatre, though he played many roles in shows directed by Jones in the Houston Community Players--but not the ones that he really wanted. Not even Theodore Apstein, a promising young playwright in the forties who later be-

¹⁵ Larsen interview, Aug. 16, 1980.

came a successful television writer, who was deeply hurt because Jones never gave any of his plays a professional production, yet they remained friends.¹⁶ This kind of rejection by a friend is the most difficult kind for creative people to endure. And yet Finkelstein could say, "I loved the woman! . . . I liked her a hell of a lot more than she liked me. She was always gracious, always friendly." People were "spellbound" by Margo Jones.¹⁷

To reiterate what was pointed out by Bea Jones, Margo Jones avoided friction. She handled delicate matters in a delicate manner.

Theatre was Margo Jones' only commitment. It influenced almost everything she did. The only thing she did that was in no way connected to the theatre was to visit her family in Livingston. Her visits were as often as she could make them, sandwiched in as they were between theatrical matters, and with few exceptions almost always during the Christmas holiday season. She maintained this practice of visiting her family throughout her life. Although Jones did not talk about her family to many people, her relationship with them was exceedingly close. She remembered birthdays with cards and gifts and sent cards on holidays

¹⁶Larsen interview with Theodore Apstein, Feb. 7, 1979.

¹⁷Larsen interview, Aug. 16, 1980.

(Valentine's Day, etc.). She sent postcards from wherever she was and sent telegrams on various occasions. Especially when she was traveling, she would wire "Mother and Dad" of her safe arrival. Occasionally, she would call long distance, but these were the years before long distance calls became routinely common as they are today. Primarily, she would write letters. They were typed, usually long and extremely detailed, keeping the family informed of her plans and actions. Perhaps one of the greatest clues to the inner life of Margo Jones was the way in which she closed her letters to her family. Until her death in 1955, five months before her forty-fourth birthday, Margo Jones remained "Your little girl and sister." These letters and other pieces of correspondence from Jones to her family number in the hundreds, perhaps thousands. Almost equally voluminous are the family's letters to her. Although the family was not sophisticated in theatrical knowledge, these letters clearly indicate they were always supportive of Margaret Virginia's activities, though occasionally Miss Pearl would take exception to something that appeared in the newspapers about her daughter.

What were Margo Jones' flaws or failings at the age of twenty-five? Apparently, she had none. For the present and for many years to come, she was the golden girl who blazed pathways and helped others. Like a ballet dancer who must concentrate on a single fixed spot while performing

a series of piqué turns, Margo Jones' vision was firmly fixed on the theatre.

When Houston's Federal Theatre collapsed, an undaunted Margo Jones arranged a trip to the Moscow Arts Festival. She traveled with her friend Zoe Leger who, being more financially well off, probably underwrote most of the expenses. However, Jones talked the Houston Chronicle into publishing a series of three articles on the Festival for which she was paid and this helped with her travel expenses.¹⁸ Jones and Leger sailed from New York City aboard the Aquitania on August 19, 1936. Both their departure and return were well covered in the Houston papers. Numerous pictures were taken of Jones and Leger aboard ship as they enjoyed their voyage.¹⁹ Before arriving in Moscow, the two women attended theatre and concerts in Paris, Berlin, and Warsaw.

¹⁸ "Houston Girl Finds Russian Theatre is Vital and Colorful; Dramas Are Daring and Original and Masses Are Enthusiastic and Regular Patrons," Oct. 4, 1936, p. 14, cols. 1-4.

"Russian Theatre's Vigor Credited to Fact Actors Work for Art, Not Money," Oct. 11, 1936, p. 6, cols. 3-8.

"Drama Trail Leads from Houston's Federal Theatre to Moscow, Then London," Oct. 18, 1936, p. 8, cols 1-3. (The byline on all three articles is "Margaret V. Jones.")

¹⁹ These were found in Margo Jones' personal scrapbook, "Houston Community Players, 1936-1937."

The fourth festival of the Moscow Arts was held the first ten days of September 1936. The first seven days were spent in Moscow; the last three in Leningrad. During this period Jones saw productions of ten plays, three operas, one ballet, and also saw two Soviet movies. She attended numerous rehearsals, workshops and classes, including one taught by Alexander Tairov at the Kamerny Theatre in Moscow. She visited museums, factories, schools, libraries, prisons, and preserved Czarist cathedrals and palaces. She was especially impressed by the Theatre Museum which at that time, Jones reported in her second Chronicle article, housed 47,000 pictures of Russian theatre history.

Jones' articles for the Chronicle were well written and conveyed an exciting day-by-day narrative of the Festival. The articles were infused with Jones' enthusiasm and accompanied by pictures, including productions of N. Pogodin's play Aristocrats at the Vakhtangov Theatre, a dramatization of Tolstoi's Resurrection at the Moscow Arts Theatre, considered by Jones as the highlight of the Festival, and the ballet The Fountain of Bakhchisarai performed in Leningrad.²⁰ Jones steeped herself in every facet of Soviet/Russian life and art that could be managed in the ten days of the Festival.

²⁰Oct. 4, 11, and 18, respectively.

In the first article for the Houston Chronicle, Jones wrote that on the third day of the Festival she attended a rehearsal with Meyerhold directing Chekov's The Jubilee. While noting that Meyerhold was by then quite elderly, Jones observed that he had great agility "and was able on a moment's notice to suggest to his actors the exact movement to portray their respective characters."²¹ That evening Jones attended the Meyerhold production of Griboyedov's Woe to Wit at the Palace of Culture in the proletarian district; Meyerhold's own theatre was under construction at the time. Without mentioning specifics, Jones reported that "The staging was a bit confusing because of the use of numerous devices which seemed to hinder rather than help the action of the play."²² Concerning children's theatre, Jones was especially enthused over the Soviet program which included, she reported, one hundred theatres in the U.S.S.R. devoted exclusively to production of plays for children, though the actors were adult and professional. Jones further reported that children's plays were divided into two groups, for younger and older children. She particularly admired a production of Hans Christian Andersen's Fairy Tales and wrote in this first Chronicle article that the noted American children's

²¹p. 14, col. 3 ²²Ibid.

theatre specialist, Winifred Ward, told her that it was "the best-produced children's play that she had ever seen."²³ Concerning audiences, Jones wrote that all theatres, including the two cinemas she attended, were filled to capacity, and she found all audiences "enthusiastic and supportive."²⁴

In the second Chronicle article, Jones explained that Soviet theatres were all subsidized by the government and that this was the only thing that the Federal Theatre Project in the United States had in common with the theatres of the Soviet Union. She added that Soviet theatres were, therefore, not dependent on revenues from their box-offices. While pointing out that the United States and the Soviet Union have very different problems, Jones wrote:

There is, however, one great lesson that we should learn from the theatres of Russia and that is the deadening effect of commercialism on the theatre. I feel that the Federal Theatres of America and the experimental theatres of colleges and little theatres have in their hands the chance of building a new and richer drama for America.²⁵

While noting that the U. S. had many advantages over the U.S.S.R., Jones pointed out perhaps the single most significant observation differentiating American and Soviet audiences: "Our problem lies mainly in an attitude toward

²³Ibid. ²⁴Ibid., col. 2. ²⁵Ibid., col. 4.

the art of the theatre. . . . " ²⁶

In her third article for the Chronicle, Jones contrasted the drabness of Moscow with the beauty she found in Leningrad. However, she wanted her readers to know that before the Russian Revolution, theatre was for the elite and that now, in the nineteen-thirties, theatre was for everyone, and that Soviet audiences embraced it enthusiastically:

I think the most unusual difference of the Russian theatre as compared with our theatre is found in the audiences. Everyone goes to the theatre in Russia. They seem to find in their theatre not only glamor but life itself. I believe the general life of the Russian is filled with hard work and very little color. It is no wonder that they go to the theatre that glorifies their accomplishments and pictures the possibilities of the years to come. The Russian theatre added to my belief that the theatre can mean and do much for the culture of a country. It gave me moments of exalted beauty and one can not ask more of any theatre. ²⁷

Compare this quotation with the one of George Fuermann at the beginning of this chapter. Both Fuermann and Jones have made a valuable point about audiences anywhere. Jones was writing in 1936; Fuermann in 1950-1951. Not even in 1936 was the average Houstonian's life as drab as the average Soviet comrade's in 1936 or 1951. Jones saw the need for theatre in the Soviet Union, just as

²⁶ Ibid. ²⁷ Ibid., col. 2.

Fuermann saw that the average Houstonian did not need the theatre because life offered greater color and diversion. The quality of life in a city or town would seem, therefore, to be a vital factor in choosing a theatre site.

The Soviet newspapers gave wide coverage to the Festival and published several pictures of foreign visitors. Prominent in many of these photographs is Margo Jones.

Jones was able to broaden her circle of theatrical acquaintances by meeting "important people" at the Moscow Arts Festival. Notable Americans who attended the Festival and whom Jones met included the set designer Mordecai Gorelik, Herbert Klein (editor of New Theatre magazine), Albert Hirschfield (the caricaturist who was at that time working for Stage magazine), Winifred Ward, and Brooks Atkinson. (This was the beginning of a long friendship between Jones, Atkinson, and his wife, Oriana.) Jones reported that aboard ship upon leaving the Soviet Union, Atkinson told her he would always remember the enthusiasm of the Russian audiences.²⁸

Jones and Leger stopped in London on their way back to the United States and attended the theatre which, after the excitement of the Festival, was disappointing. Jones saw several productions but only Murder in the Cathedral and Pride and Prejudice interested her.²⁹

²⁸Oct. 18, 1936, p. 8, col. 3. ²⁹Ibid.

Apparently, Jones and Leger went their separate ways after their arrival in New York. Jones wanted to see plays and meet new theatre people, as well as renew old acquaintances before going off to Washington, D. C., to visit her mother's relatives. She then went home to Livingston for a visit after which she returned to Houston and began laying out the blueprint of a developing dream.

CHAPTER IV

THE HOUSTON COMMUNITY PLAYERS:

1936-1942

My ambition was to make the Houston Community Players the most exciting theatre in America.

Margo Jones
Theatre-in-the-Round, p. 47.

In the nineteen-thirties, Houston had a great many neighborhood parks spread throughout the city. They were run by the city's Department of Recreation, were generally well kept, often quite beautiful, and, then as well as now, greatly enjoyed by the populace. Each park had its own recreation director, and the complete network of parks and recreational facilities was headed in 1936 by Corinne Fonde. She wrote a series of six articles for the Houston Chronicle detailing the functions of Houston's Recreation Department. The title of the first article suggests the general tenor of the series: "Houston Recreation Department Proves Power for Fastening Community Spirit at Playgrounds."¹ The Recreation Department provided a free outlet of activities for the public in the nineteen-thirties when it was sorely

¹Oct. 4, 1936, p. 13, cols. 1-4.

needed. They had a full and varied schedule of many and diverse social programs that included all manner of instructional classes, musical programs, dances--even rodeos and circuses. It was the Recreation Department that co-sponsored the Federal Theatre Project in Houston.

Amid much newspaper publicity, Margo Jones returned to Houston from her Russian/European tour and went to work for the Recreation Department, teaching playground directors to put on plays for children in the various parks throughout the city. Fueled by her knowledge and experience, and fired by her journey to the Moscow Arts Festival, and always the optimist, Jones was now determined to have her own theatre. Houston seemed to be the ideal choice of city. Jones obtained permission from the Recreation Department to produce plays while still carrying out her regular duties. She even persuaded the Recreation Department to allow her to use one of their buildings free of charge when it was not otherwise being utilized. It was located on Buffalo Drive, and most say it was a converted incinerator, but Arthur Koch, Jr. claims it was an old mulebarn.² Photographs seem to substantiate his claim. Whatever it had been, the building was small and contained a proscenium stage at one end.

Having secured a theatre, Jones wasted no time

²Larsen interview, July 2, 1979.

placing an ad in the newspapers announcing the formation of the Houston Community Players and that auditions would be held for their first production which would be The Importance of Being Earnest. Nine people showed up for the readings and they were cast in the nine roles of the play. They were Rita Moise (Cobler), Jackson Purdy (who doubled as Jones' assistant), Rowena John, Albert Horrocks, Mamie Hathaway, Mary Alice Krah1 (who was to later become a noted voice and diction teacher in Houston), Irving Wadler (of the Houston Symphony Orchestra), and brothers Arthur and Bill Koch. All of these people were to remain with the Community Players throughout its five and one-half years existence. Jones' artist friends, Carden Bailey and Gene Charlton, designed the sets. Although no membership dues were charged, six of the original nine members contributed one dollar each toward financing this production, and six dollars was the total cost.³

Jones was fortunate in having attracted a number of people who were as interested in the technical aspects of theatre as others were in acting. Chief among these was Arthur Koch, Jr., called "Sonny" in those days. Sonny Koch worked on all of Jones' shows for the Community Players until the outbreak of the Second World War when he joined the army in 1942, the last year of the Players. Sonny Koch

³Theatre-in-the-Round, p. 46.

was born in Manhattan, raised in Larchmont, New York, and at some point moved with his family to Houston where he attended high school. One of his school friends was Carden Bailey, and it was at Bailey's and Charlton's studio on Travis Street in Houston that Koch first met Margo Jones whom he found "lively" and "dynamic." Although Koch decided against a career in the theatre, he remembers fondly and vividly the years he spent with the Community Players. He said the recreational facility that housed their productions had a stage that was raised not too many feet from the flat floor, with a very low proscenium arch. It was large enough to accomodate two-hundred to two-hundred-and-fifty folding chairs. Koch liked to build sets but was primarily interested in and knowledgeable about electricity and took over the duties of lighting the productions. He provided the following bit of fascinating information:

. . . The Houston Light and Power Company had a Mr. Blount who went around gratis at the company's expense doing makeup and providing lighting for senior high school productions. So we learned about him and he came down and introduced me to the mysteries of the salt water dimmer . . . You take a ten-gallon pickle crock and fill it with salt water and you have a broom handle with a pie tin on the end of it, you have one line on the pie tin and the other end on a piece of metal that's hooked on to the inside of the crock. And the electricity goes through the salt water from one to the other. And the closer they come together . . . when they touch at the bottom you have full lighting. But if you separate them, then the lights get dimmer. It's very dangerous. It worked, and he seemed to have enough confidence in my electrical skill he gave me his blessings to do that, and he did the early makeup. . . .

Larsen interview, July 2, 1979.

Earnest was a stylized production designed by Bailey and Charlton in black and white. Arthur Koch remembers that the actors were costumed in contemporary fashions of black and white and played against a black velveteen cyclorama. Koch doubled as the country servant and remembers being costumed in white, and his brother Bill played the city servant in a black suit.

The programme for Earnest stated that the production was directed by "Margaret Jones" and included the following acknowledgement:

The Community Players realize the 'importance of being earnest' and want to give credit where credit is due. The furniture (?) used in this play is by courtesy of the back yards of the neighborhood grocery stores. The dishes were borrowed from the doll house of the little girl next door. The tennis net came from someone's attic. The flowers worn by the gentlemen in Acts I, II and III were made from old pieces of cloth, cotton and paste board. The Players will not engage in any discussion of "expressionistic" stage sets. . . .

This initial production of the Houston Community Players was presented on two nights, December 3rd and 4th, 1936; admission was twenty-five cents. Jones was able to get advance publicity in one of Houston's newspapers which offered clues to Jones' directorial approach:

For each smart saying of Wilde's, the actors have a smart stage movement; for each epigram they have hilarious gestures.⁴

⁴Clipping, "Clever Staging Given Comedy; Community Players to Use Novel Sets." [Note: The designation "Clipping" is used often in this chapter. These were all found pasted in Margo Jones' personal scrapbook on the Houston Community Players. Few provide dates.]

At least one newspaper reviewed the production and the criticism was favorable.⁵

Jones chose Elmer Rice's timely Judgment Day as her second production. She scheduled it for February 1937, but the playhouse had been reserved for another purpose. Determined not to postpone the production, Jones approached Judge Allen B. Hannay and talked him into letting her use his 113th District courtroom in the Harris County Courthouse in the center of Houston as the setting for Rice's dramatization of the Nazi trials following the Reichstag fire. Judge Hannay and his wife were avid theatregoers and they became patrons of the Community Players.⁶ One cannot help but ponder if Margo Jones didn't know exactly what she was doing when she scheduled Judgment Day at a time when she was sure to have known that her playhouse in the park was already spoken for. After all, she knew first hand the innate drama of the courtroom from having observed her attorney father. Further, having attracted the Houston public with the novelty of her black and white Earnest, would not a courtroom drama set in an actual courtroom really make Houston take notice of her Community Players, and would it not garner her extensive coverage in the Houston papers? It was a sensational idea and Margo Jones knew it. Being a director was the focus of her life. She had to work at that. But Jones had a

⁵Clipping, Pat McNealy Barnes, "First Production by Community Players Applauded."

⁶Hannay is still a district judge today and, presumably, still loves the theatre.

natural flair for promotion. Or as one of her very closest friends put it, "Margo could sell ice to an Eskimo."⁷

There was also a very practical aspect to presenting a courtroom drama in an actual courtroom: the setting was already there. It would not have to be built. Since Jones was operating on the proverbial shoestring, it might not be economically possible anyway. (In November 1938, when the production fund was fatter, Judgment Day was repeated in their Recreation Playhouse.) Jones obviously took all of these factors into consideration. It turned out, therefore, that Jones' Judgment Day cost virtually nothing to produce in Judge Hannay's courtroom. There was no set to build (the programme credits the artist Nione Carlson with set "decorations"), lighting was provided by the courtroom and, therefore, paid for by the county, and the large cast supplied their own contemporary costumes. (Jones even pressed brother Richard into playing a small role.)

Judgment Day played to a packed courtroom on Wednesday and Thursday evenings, February 10th and 11th, 1937. The Houston newspapers praised the production and lauded the ingenuity of its director. One member of the audience was so taken with the production that it resulted in a letter to the editor of the Houston Press. H. Roberts, finding Houston to be a city in which there was so much to censure

⁷Larsen interview with Joanna Albus (née Schreiber), Oct. 25, 1980.

and so little to praise, applauded the Community Players "for uplifting art and culture in Houston."⁸

Back in their playhouse on Buffalo Drive, Hedda Gabler was the next offering of the Community Players. It was one of Jones' favorite plays, and her production was favorably received by the Houston critics. The final offering of the Houston Community Players' premiere season was a stylized production of Katayev's Squaring the Circle which, Jones described in her book, " . . . employed ladders, ropes, sawhorses and barrels, all painted a violent red and skeletonized against a black backdrop."⁹ Interestingly, several clippings from unidentified Houston papers pointed out that Squaring the Circle represented the Community Players' first attempt at a comedy, which makes one wonder about their production of Oscar Wilde's Earnest. One bit of publicity for the Katayev play included the information that "Rev. I. S. Krasnoff, well-known authority on Russian songs and dances, is aiding with rehearsals."¹⁰ Margo Jones never missed a chance to sell a show! Always the businesswoman, having found an audience in Houston, she increased the admission price to thirty-five cents on this last production of the 1936-1937 season.

⁸Clipping,

⁹Theatre-in-the-Round, p. 46.

¹⁰Clipping, "Community Play Group to Offer Rollicking Farce."

Houston welcomed the Community Players and its dynamic director whose leadership inspired a loyal company that included workers for all phases of production as well as running a theatre. People doubled in the box-office or even tripled and quadrupled in duties as did Arthur Koch, Jr. Along with the original members of the Community Players, new faces were constantly being added, as tryouts were announced in the newspapers and sometimes also by postcard. Jones liked directing plays with large casts, and Joe Finkelstein suggests this was one way she had of getting to know more people and discovering their individual talents.¹¹ It must be remembered that this was an amateur group, and no one was paid except Margo Jones, who received a salary for specified duties at the Houston Recreation Department. She did not receive a salary the first season as a director of plays, and her work as a director was carried out on her own time and could not interfere with the work for which she was being paid. Most of the members of the Community Players had full-time eight-to-five jobs, or were in school, and worked on productions after hours, often until three or four in the morning, and always on Saturdays and Sundays--and were thrilled to do it! Some, like Sidney and Malvina Holmes, also had families to care for. Some, like Maxine Mesinger who is now a noted columnist for the Houston Chronicle but who was then Maxine David and a high school

¹¹Larsen interview, Aug. 16, 1980.

student, had parents who were greatly distressed by the hours she kept, and in Maxine's mother Margo may have made her first enemy.¹²

The point is that Margo Jones inspired all of these people to work and to work hard for no money. They worked for nothing but the sheer love of what they were doing and contributing toward culture in Houston, thereby improving the quality of life as more and more people became exposed to live and lively theatre. As numerous people have said, no one said no to Margo Jones. Her redoubtable energy energized those around her and by example she taught her company the extraordinary discipline demanded by the theatre. Maxine Mesinger considers Margo Jones the greatest influence on her life and treasures Jones' legacy of discipline:

. . . If Margo said we were going to work seven days a week until three in the morning, nobody bitched; and if they bitched they weren't welcome in our group. We didn't see anybody else. That's all we did. And Margo used to say, 'It's just as important if you hammer the sets and scrub the floors'--and like fools we all believed it! And we did it. And we were a wonderful group, very dedicated. You couldn't be around Margo and not be dedicated. She had a fire . . . It was more than that. She was consumed . . . eaten alive with that. That's all she cared about.¹³

¹²Larsen interview with Maxine Mesinger, Nov. 8, 1980.

¹³Ibid.

Margo Jones mesmerized people from first meeting and, with few exceptions, throughout their relationship with her. Sidney and Malvina Holmes were about to become involved in a theatrical project of their own when Corinne Fonde of the Recreation Department put them in touch with Jones who was then rehearsing Earnest. The Holmeses, like Sonny Koch, were natives of Manhattan and considered themselves "sophisticates in Cowtown," though they had not been involved in theatre in New York. Upon meeting Margo Jones, Malvina Holmes said that she and her husband "fell in love" with her the minute Jones began talking, adding "I thought Sidney would fall off his chair. He just swooned!"¹⁴ Jones persuaded them to forget their own project and to be in Judgment Day, which they did. Jones then cast Sidney Holmes as George Tesman in Hedda Gabler, and thereafter Sidney Holmes appeared in almost every production of the Houston Community Players.¹⁵

Joe Finkelstein joined the group after reading an audition announcement in one of the papers and appeared in many of the productions but, as mentioned, seldom in the roles he wanted. Finkelstein also worked on the sets and realized Jones "cultivated" him, as she did others, because

¹⁴Larsen interview, Nov. 23, 1980.

¹⁵A young character actor considered to be richly talented, Holmes died prematurely while still a relatively young man. He is still strongly remembered in Houston theatrical circles today.

she recognized that he loved the theatre, adored her, and was only too eager to work. Finkelstein said that the roles he wanted he lost to another young actor and lifelong friend of his and Jones', Reigh Walston, who eventually went off to Broadway and changed the spelling of his first name to "Ray." Finkelstein also fondly remembers the first time a young high school drama/English teacher named Nina Whittington came to one of Jones' auditions. She was alone, knew no one there, and never forgot how Finkelstein made her feel welcome.¹⁶ She was to tell this story many times through the years. Jones cast Nina Whittington in A Comedy of Errors, followed by Family Portrait. About this same time, during the fourth season of the Community Players in 1939, Jones handed out blocks of ten tickets for Players to sell. Nina Whittington cautiously explained to Margo Jones that she was new to Houston and didn't know ten people to whom she could sell tickets, to which Jones replied, "What's the difference? Get a telephone book. Start at the A's! . . ."¹⁷ The young teacher was awed and intimidated by the force of the Jones personality, so Nina Whittington bought all ten tickets herself.¹⁸ In the early nineteen-forties, Nina Whittington married an attorney named Milton

¹⁶Larsen interview, Joe Finkelstein, Aug. 16, 1980.

¹⁷Ibid., quoted by Joe Finkelstein.

¹⁸Ibid. Nina Vance also told this story to William Larsen in September 1979.

Vance, and she was thereafter known as Nina Vance. She learned a great deal from having worked under Margo Jones, and one thing she learned was that she was not an actress.¹⁹ In 1947, she organized her own Alley Theatre in which Joe Finkelstein was to play many major roles under her direction.

Of all the many people who worked with the Community Players, none was to figure more prominently in Margo Jones' life than Joanna Schreiber. She was born in Germany and later moved to New York where she worked for an oil company that transferred her to Houston. She noticed a Community Players' audition announcement in one of the Houston papers and, having dabbled in amateur theatre, decided to attend. Schreiber remembers that she wore a hat to the reading. Jones made key notations such as "skinny," "too fat," etc., on audition cards to identify an individual. On Schreiber's she wrote, "The lady in the green hat."²⁰ Joanna Schreiber was no Iris March, but she and Margo Jones became the closest of friends from this moment on and remained so until the last day of Jones' life. Their loyalty to each other was unshakeable and frequently misunderstood by others. Like Nina Vance, Schreiber admitted to not being an actress though she appeared in several Community Players productions. Many years later she was to change her last name to Albus (her

¹⁹I have heard Nina Vance say this many times.

²⁰Larsen interview, Joanna Albus, Oct. 25, 1980.

mother's maiden name). In the early nineteen-fifties, together with another Community Players alumnus, William Rozan, Joanna Albus founded Houston's Playhouse Theatre. For a time, the Playhouse, with a professional company, created healthy competition for the established, but still non-Equity, Alley Theatre.

The list is long of Community Players' alumni who were devoted followers of Margo Jones and who still revere her memory today. Those mentioned were prominent figures in Jones' life, as was Dr. M. J. Rauch-Barraco, a Houston dentist and oral surgeon who from the first season became a patron of the Community Players and always remained a loyal supporter and friend of Margo Jones. For decades, Dr. Barraco's name appeared on the lists of patrons of many of Houston's cultural enterprises.

By the end of the first season of the Community Players, Margo Jones had proved that she had an audience in Houston eager to see good theatre. She made an offer to the Recreation Department, which they accepted, to direct the Community Players and make enough money to pay her own salary and cover production costs. She planned a bill of six plays for the 1937-1938 season and sold subscription tickets for \$2.00 each subscription. Before the start of this second season, in August 1937, Jones directed The Lay-Figure by Ethel Van Der Veer and entered the production in the State one-act play contest. The cast included the Holmeses, and

the production was awarded first prize. This was the first of three successive years in which the Community Players won first place in the annual State one-act play contest. The event was well covered in Texas newspapers, which included several pictures of a stylishly dressed and smiling Margo Jones.

Although Jones had been called Margo for some years, curiously the programmes for the first season of the Players always stated that the productions were directed by Margaret Jones or Margaret V. Jones, which was also her by-line in the Houston Chronicle articles. The programme for The Lay-Figure is the first in which "Directed by Margo Jones" appears in print as it would in all programmes thereafter.

Jones opened the second season of the Community Players with Kaufman and Hart's Merrily We Roll Along with a cast of seventy-five. The season began in October and ran until May with one production each month, except for two in December and none in January. In addition to Kaufman and Hart, the bill included plays by Thornton Wilder, Oursler and Kennedy, Hecht and MacArthur, James Warwick, and P. G. Wodehouse, in the distinguished company of Moliere and Shakespeare, all directed by the seemingly inexhaustible Margo Jones. Thereafter, Jones would include a play by Shakespeare in every regular season of the Community Players with the exception of the sixth and last. She also included the works of Ibsen and Chekov among plays by contemporary playwrights.

The Houston Community Players were an unqualified success. The Recreation Department took notice and by the beginning of the third season, Houston put Margo Jones on the city payroll and all box office receipts were spent on the productions.²¹ By now, Jones was interested in finding new playwrights and, greatly aided by Hubert Roussel, drama critic of the Houston Post, encouraged local writers to submit plays for consideration as possible productions by the Community Players. Roussel even went so far as to offer advice to would-be playwrights concerning the necessity of consistency and turning in good clean copy and mentioned that both Henning Nelms (new director of the Little Theatre) and Margo Jones would be interested in reading their work.²² It was not long before a new play surfaced. Roussel's own City Editor on the Post took up the challenge and submitted a play he had written about newspaper life called Special Edition. The play was actually given two productions, both directed by Jones. The first was in December 1938, at the Players' playhouse in the park, in which the playwright acted the lead role, and the second was in March 1939 at the Little Theatre's Chelsea playhouse, cast with members of the Newspaper Guild. Paul Hochuli, drama critic and entertainment editor of the Houston Press, played the central charac-

²¹Theatre-in-the-Round, p. 47.

²²Clipping, "Resurgence of Amateur Stage Producing Corps of Houston Playwrights, Houston Post. Also, unidentified clipping of article titled "Doors Open to Fellow With Idea."

ter in this second production. It would be two years before Jones would find another new work that she considered worthy of production.

Between the end of the 1938-1939 season of the Community Players and their first summer season, Jones went to Washington, D. C. as a delegate to the Confederation of American Community Theatres. It was the purpose of this confederation to exchange ideas and devise plans to consolidate the headway gained by amateur stage groups in various regions of the country and, most importantly, to create a national organization that would encourage and develop community or civic dramatic groups throughout the United States. An additional purpose of the conference was to create within the proposed national organization a clearing house for the exchange of actors, technicians and new plays. Jones elatedly returned from Washington and went immediately to Hubert Roussel's office at the Post to enthusiastically report on the conference. Roussel devoted an entire column to the Washington meeting, strongly supporting Jones' view and that of the conference members that serious community theatre groups should no longer be labeled "amateur," but should be termed "semi-professional."²³ The point was that groups such as the Houston Community Players had members of talent

²³Clipping, "National Little Theatre Chain May Soon Exhibit Film Actors as 'Guests': Margo Jones Back From Washington with News of Plan to Put Amateur Stage of Semi-pro Footing," Houston Post.

whose dedicated spirit differed markedly from that of the dilettante for whom community theatre was a social pastime. Roussel further backed Jones' view that in other times, when the country was not fighting its way out of a Depression, the talented would have had the opportunity to join stock companies. That no longer being possible, those seeking practical theatre experience joined community theatre groups that, Roussel pointed out, " . . . had as their models such pioneer groups that were more than a little tinged with professionalism [such] as the Provincetown Players . . . " ²⁴

Thereafter, in his reviews of Houston community theatre productions, Roussel used the term "semi-professional," but, at least in the beginning, always enclosed the term in quotation marks. Roussel also reported in his article that Jones brought back the additional news from the conference of the receptivity of community theatre directors to incorporate a system of guest stars from the professional theatre and from Hollywood motion-picture studios. ²⁵ It was the commendable idea of studio heads to farm out their young talent to little theatres so that they might receive the experience of

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵If the Community Players did this, they were not actors whose names were known to the public. Later, however, after the Alley Theatre was established, but before it became an Equity house, Nina Vance did exactly this. Albert Dekker, Reginald Owen, and Joseph Buloff were three known character actors, from Hollywood and the New York stage, who appeared at the Alley with otherwise unpaid casts.

appearing before a live audience, thereby providing a training ground for them that would save the studios the cost of building their own playhouses. It was Hubert Roussel's hope that the process might be reciprocated, and that some of Houston's actors might find themselves in the movies.²⁶ Some did, but it was not until after they had gone on to struggle for careers and a livelihood in Hollywood and Manhattan.

This Washington meeting of regional theatre leaders, which included representatives from thirty-five states, resulted in the founding of the National Theatre Conference in which Margo Jones was to figure prominently for many years. At this first meeting she served on constitutional and nominating committees. Jones returned from this initial meeting having been named "Director of the South" and with the news that she would be profiled in Stage magazine.²⁷

Margo Jones was now nationally known and recognized in professional as well as "semi-professional" theatre circles. She wanted more for her Community Players and, most particularly, she wanted to present plays on a year-round basis. This was not possible in the heat of a Houston summer in a theatre that was not air-conditioned. Not much was in Houston in 1939. But Margo Jones knew that the

²⁶Clipping, "National Little Theatre Chain May Soon Exhibit Film Actors as 'Guests': . . . "

²⁷Clipping, "Margo Jones Returns From Theatre Meet."

Lamar Hotel, located on Main Street in the center of Houston's commercial and business district, was air-conditioned. Never one to dawdle or wring her hands in frustration over a way to solve a problem, Jones went straight to the management of the Lamar Hotel and talked them into giving her a lounge on their mezzanine--free of charge, of course--so that she might present plays for the people of Houston in air-conditioned comfort. Jones then promptly sent out an undated newsletter announcing:

Lamar Intimate Theatre -- first summer theatre in Texas and only intimate theatre in the South -- opens July 10th, Lamar Hotel, Bridge lounge on the mezzanine -- air conditioned.

The newsletter also informed that money made from the summer theatre would go toward buying more comfortable chairs for the Buffalo Drive playhouse, getting better lighting equipment, and building a green room and workshop.

The Lamar lounge did not have a stage, nor a raised platform, and certainly no proscenium arch. What the Lamar lounge offered was a room--an air-conditioned room. Jones had recently been exposed to theatre-in-the-round while in Washington for the theatre conference where she saw a production of the Blue Room Players of Portland, Oregon, performed in a hotel ballroom. This particular theatre group had been formed by a disciple of Glenn Hughes, of the University of Washington, who is generally credited as being the first to introduce theatre-in-the-round to the United

States, though it was not a popular stage form. Jones immediately saw the advantages, most particularly the economic advantages, of arena staging which requires a minimum amount of set construction and usually none at all. In her determination to have a summer season, Jones sought an air-conditioned space in which she would sit the audience on four sides of a playing area that need not nor should not be especially large. She would dazzle Houston audiences with the innovation of what became known as the Lamar Intimate Theatre. Margo Jones was not, therefore, the founder of theatre-in-the-round, nor did she ever pretend to be. But it was Margo Jones who promoted theatre-in-the-round, who popularized the form and made it a viable alternative to the conventional proscenium stage.

The first summer season of the Lamar Intimate Theatre offered a bill of mostly proven Broadway comedies, just the sort of fare Jones wanted to avoid but which entertained audiences during Houston's sultry summer months in an air-conditioned hotel theatre. There was no scenery; the audiences surrounded the action of the plays on four sides, entrances and exits were made through existing doors of the room itself, and props such as telephones belonged to the hotel. Scene and act changes were made by turning the lights off and on. The shows were cast from the corps of Community Players and featured, among others, such stalwarts as Sidney Holmes, Joe Finkelstein, and Reigh Walston.

There was at least one new face among the actors (and probably more), and it was that of Cy Howard who appeared in the first Lamar presentation, the Norman Krasna comedy Louder, Please. Howard had the distinction of having played a small role in Orson Welles' production of Danton's Death on Broadway and, consequently, brought "the New York experience" into the fold of the Community Players. He was to have a special place in the history of the Players.

Houstonians were well informed through the newspapers of the Lamar theatrical offerings. Those having their lunches at the Lamar Hotel soda fountain read of coming productions on one side of Dr. Pepper advertisements which included a telephone number to call for reservations. The opening night audience included many prominent Houstonians who were greeted by an exuberant Margo Jones in a print evening dress. From the inception of the Community Players, it was Margo Jones' custom to greet the audience as it arrived and, after the show, to thank them for coming. She was like the perfect hostess making her guests feel welcome at her home. And there can be no doubt about it: the theatre was Margo Jones' home. It was, one could even say, her temple.

Houston's newspaper critics welcomed the Lamar experiment and bestowed accolades on " . . . Margo Jones, the perspicacious and supremely energetic director of the thriving Community Players, and officials of the Lamar Hotel," as

Hubert Roussel phrased it.²⁸ Paul Hochuli of the Press was genuinely pleased with theatre in general in Houston in 1939 and summed up his thoughts in the title of his article:

Amateur Players Putting Houston on
Theatrical Map: Little Theater and
Community Players are Greatly Res-
ponsible for Getting City in Spot
Once Occupied by the Dallas Groups.²⁹

Hochuli stressed the view that Dallas, not Houston, had always been considered the Texas theatre city, but that that focus had now changed due to the efforts of Henning Nelms and Margo Jones. Most ironically, as things were to later turn out, Hochuli wrote " . . . Dallas tried to lure Margo to the North Texas set-up. She didn't accept, thank goodness."³⁰

Jones ended the first summer season of the Community Players with a production of Room Service, and on the last night held a formal dinner-dance on the roof of Houston's most prestigious hotel, the Rice, after which she went to Mexico City for two weeks vacation.

A vacation for Margo Jones meant only a change of scenery. It did not mean a hiatus from the theatre. She simply went to another location and, wherever that was, attended theatre and always, always, read playscripts.

²⁸Clipping, "Margo Jones and Players To Launch City's First Summer Theater in July: Energetic Director of Community Group Will Take Over Lamar Lounge for Cycle of Comedies," Houston Post.

²⁹Clipping, Aug. 17, 1939.

³⁰Ibid.

Jones had almost single-handedly created a vortex of theatrical activity in Houston that for a time put the city in the forefront of those interested in working towards a national theatre. Certainly for the first time, Houston challenged Dallas as the cultural capital of Texas. While Jones was away in Mexico, Hubert Roussel could not ignore "the finest outburst of dramatic interest and enthusiasm" he admitted to ever having seen, going on to describe the current state of Houston's cultural renaissance:

. . . Over a week-end, this movement for a native theater, which is boiling away in our otherwise uncreative midst, seems to work itself into a ferment that can no longer remain bottled and capped. It bursts all over the place. People come vaulting into the office with startling enthusiasm, aflame with projects, plans and questions. The telephone rings with fury: there are those who couldn't get down but couldn't wait. The mail brings news from careering actors, dramatists, designers, producers and whatnot . . .

Roussel further mentioned that Cy Howard came rushing into his office and excitedly related the plot of a play he was writing, talking non-stop for twenty-five minutes. Roussel concludes the article by citing a letter he received from Margo Jones in Mexico,

. . . a voluminous airmail letter revealing that she is having a wonderful time planning her next show . . . and that she wishes everybody were there because the climate of Mexico City is fine for rehearsing.³¹

³¹Clipping, "Watching Locals Trail Glory Clouds in Drama A Good Spectacle Show: Houston Gets Out Front Among Cities Working for Native Theater Worth Respect and Attention." Houston Post.

Roussel refers to Jones as "the dynamo"--which is probably the first time she is called this in print, but it would be far from the last. Thereafter, Margo Jones received the appellations "the dynamo" and "the Texas Tornado" until they became cliché. But they summed up the amazing energy that would one day cause her youngest brother, Charles, to caution her that "I know you have unbelievable vitality but realize that others may not be so blessed."³²

The premiere summer season at the Lamar Hotel netted profits that enabled the Community Players to remodel the stage of the Buffalo Drive playhouse, to install a revolve, and to add eight feet to the existing depth of the stage.³³ The Lamar experiment having been a resounding success, the second summer season of the Community Players in 1940 was held at the Texas State Hotel, and the following year saw the third summer season housed in the grandest of Houston hotels, the Rice. The bills were all recent Broadway offerings and included such playwrights as the Spewacks, S. N. Behrman, Sidney Howard, etc. And, of course, they were all directed by Margo Jones and all presented in-the-round.

Along with the decentralization of theatre in America and presentation of theatre-in-the-round, Margo Jones' third and most passionate cause was the discovery of

³²Letter, Oct. 26, 1944.

³³Clipping, "A Nice Outing on the Bayshore."

new playwrights. If one may misquote Shakespeare, "This above all, the play's the thing," became the credo of Margo Jones. Harold Young's Special Edition was Jones' first experience with a new unproduced script. Then Jones made the discovery of Cy Howard and Richard Shannon. As the closing play of the fifth season of the Community Players, in May 1941, Jones directed their original musical, titled Howdy, Stranger. In the sixth and final season, March 1942, Jones directed another new Howard-Shannon musical called Going Up! Both were large cast spectacles and at least one of them (and perhaps both) was presented at Houston's Music Hall, then relatively new and home of the Houston Symphony, and in which some touring shows performed. But Jones' greatest coup was securing the rights to another new play, if not by a new playwright.

Edwin Justus Mayer had long since been discovered. His initial playwriting venture, The Firebrand, had been presented on Broadway in 1924. It was later made into a film and still later, in 1945, into a Broadway musical that not even the combined talents of Ira Gershwin and Kurt Weill could turn into a hit. The Firebrand was followed in 1929 by Children of Darkness, considered Mayer's finest play and lauded by no less than Joseph Wood Krutch and John Gassner. Unfortunately for Mayer, however, these plays never became commercial successes. In 1940, while on a trip to California, Margo Jones read a new play by Edwin Justus Mayer titled

Sunrise in My Pocket, an episodic saga about Davy Crockett. What could be more suitable and elicit more national attention for a small but thriving community theatre group in Houston, Texas, than to open their new season with a new play about one of the heroes of the Alamo written by a recognized American playwright? Jones wasted no time calling Brooks Atkinson in New York and asked him to arrange an introduction to Mayer. This was accomplished via a long distance telephone call. Mayer gave Jones the rights to his new play " . . . and would have given her his furniture, bank balance and collection of Wilkie buttons if she had mentioned them."³⁴ Brooks Atkinson greatly admired Mayer and his play and was extremely enthusiastic that it was to be presented outside of New York by Margo Jones and her Community Players. Atkinson had reluctantly decided that Mayer's Sunrise would probably fail if it were presented on Broadway because, to begin with, the script was two-hundred-and-forty-five pages long, but, more importantly, these pages contained "precious little dramatic architecture . . ."³⁵ Atkinson appreciated the work from a literary standpoint and admired the characters Mayer had created and thrown together who would follow Crockett to his last stand at the Alamo. But Atkinson was concerned with who could produce

³⁴Clipping, Brooks Atkinson, "Case of 'Sunrise In My Pocket' Compared With the Honeys of Broadway," New York Times, Sept. 28, 1941.

³⁵Ibid.

such a play; he asked the following question which he immediately answered:

Can an enthusiastic director make a pithy and bubbling stage play out of these superior literary materials? If they can be molded into stage form, Margot[sic] Jones will do it, for Davy Crockett . . . is obviously her man. . . . At the very worst, 'Sunrise In My Pocket' will outrank the junk heaved every week on the stages of Broadway.³⁶

With Sunrise in her pocket, Margo Jones announced that the Community Players would open their sixth season with the world premiere of Edwin Justus Mayer's new play. A downtown box-office was opened in the lobby of the Rice Hotel and ticket sales were brisk for the two-week run of the play in October 1941, an unprecedented length for the Players. Sunrise had a large cast and included the mainstays of the Players: Joe Finkelstein, Reigh Walston, Sidney Holmes, Virginia King, et al. The role of Crockett was given to a newcomer to the group, William Rozan. The production did indeed attract national attention. The playwright came to Houston for the opening as did Milton Shubert, nephew of Lee and J. J., who reportedly optioned the rights for Broadway.³⁷

The production of Sunrise In My Pocket was indeed

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Clipping, "Hollywood and New York Visitors See Premiere of 'Sunrise In My Pocket'!"

"a climactic moment" in the history of the Houston Community Players, as Hubert Roussel said. He wrote in his review in the Post that Margo Jones' direction was one of her best achievements considering " . . . a stage arrangement that limits action severely . . . " Roussel also had the same basic reservations about Mayer's play that Atkinson had. Roussel wrote that he found the play to be "of faulty dramatic construction" and "a long, windy and declamatory historical document" that he nevertheless thought that Margo Jones and her Players did well by.³⁸

The sixth season of the Houston Community Players was off to a rousing start. Though a Broadway production of Sunrise In My Pocket was repeatedly announced thereafter in numerous newspaper articles, it was never to be. Nevertheless, Margo Jones' production of Mayer's historical drama did much for the Houston Community Players, struck a blow for decentralization of the American theatre and the opportunities it offered for new plays and new playwrights, and it caused the national theatre spotlight to shine on "the Texas tornado."

Jones closed the sixth season, and what turned out to be the final regular season, of the Players by directing Noel Coward's Design For Living. It was presented in

³⁸Clipping, "Players Treat 'Sunrise' to Neat Premiere."

May 1942. William Rozan and Reigh Walston, respectively, played Otto and Leo, and Nina Vance played the small role of Helen Carver. To everyone's surprise, Margo Jones cast herself in the pivotal role of Gilda. It is not clear why she did this, since she had professed on numerous occasions to have no interest in acting. One can only speculate. Without any real personal life of her own since she was at the theatre every night, why not a fling in a role she thought she could play? She may have wanted to experience vicariously what her Puritan upbringing would restrain her from doing and what her dedication to the theatre prohibited: a "Bohemian" private life such as the one indulged in by the unpuritanical madcap Gilda. But since Jones was always concerned with improving her abilities, she may have wanted to experience the actor's problems as a means of becoming a more effective director. Whatever her reasons, certain individuals privately expressed the opinion that it was not one of Jones' better ideas because she was "no actress." Nevertheless, Houston's drama critics received her warmly, Roussel writing that Jones brought to the stage "the same qualities of drive and excitement that have made her the moving spirit of a restless organization." He went on to point out that, regardless, the role of Gilda demanded more than that, adding that Jones' voice lacked flexibility. Roussel concluded his appraisal of Jones' performance by saying, "But she gives a good, bustling performance, and

holds her own nicely against some of her more illustrious charges."³⁹

A fourth summer season was scheduled, again at the Rice Hotel. The bill of six plays included Shaw's Candida. In late summer, Jones went to New York to see plays and to direct a play titled A Quiet Wedding for the Rollins Studio Schools in Easthampton, Long Island. She wrote to several people in Houston of her plans for the 1942-1943 season of the Players. Paul Hochuli reported in the August 26, 1942, edition of the Press that Jones was "anxious to start work on a new Maxwell Anderson play, 'Eve of St. Mark,' which she hopes to open here Oct. 7, the same night Broadway sees it first." On September 2nd, Hochuli mentioned in his column that the Houston Community Players " . . . under direction of Margo Jones, will hold the first general meeting of the 1942-43 season in the Recreation Clubhouse at 8 P. M. Wednesday . . ." and that casting dates for The Eve of St. Mark would be announced and the entire season outlined. Jones did direct the new Maxwell Anderson play that same autumn, but it wasn't in Houston, nor was it in New York.

As things turned out, there was no 1942-1943 season of the Houston Community Players, with 1942 being the last year of production. Why did Margo Jones bring an end to what she had so successfully created, especially when there was every indication that a new season was planned? The

³⁹Clipping, "Attractive 'Design for Living' Occupies Stage at Playhouse," Houston Post.

simplest and most direct answer is that she received an offer to join the faculty of the Department of Drama at the University of Texas at Austin. Her reasons for accepting the position were based on the very real fact that the United States was at war, the Players were losing many of their ablest members to the Armed Services, and greater demands were placed on the time of remaining volunteers so that they had less time to give to the Players. But during this last year in Houston, Jones had reached some conclusions that influenced her decision to re-enter the academic world:

. . . I began to see the great necessity of rehearsing eight hours a day for at least a three-week period in order to be able to get a play on and feel thoroughly satisfied with the production. I also began to realize that if one wanted theatre at its best, it was essential to obtain the service of the most talented people available and to be in a position to dispense with their services if they were unable to do their jobs properly. Since in a community theatre it is only possible to work in the evenings, these requirements were an impossibility. I came to the conclusion that to satisfy the abovementioned needs, the ideal working situation would have to be a permanent professional theatre.⁴⁰

With the nation at war, it was hardly a propitious time for starting a permanent professional theatre, so Jones

⁴⁰Theatre-in-the-Round, p. 50.

decided that

. . . there was at least one type of theatre in which people were not leaving for war--or at least not all of them--the university theatre. My place at this time should be with the younger people who were being trained for the theatre of tomorrow. . . .⁴¹

She, therefore, accepted the position at Texas.

No discussion of the Houston Community Players would be complete without mentioning the programmes for the productions. These playbills steadily improved in appearance from the first one-page typed sheets to buff-colored, rather handsome publications. A special souvenir programme was printed for the initial production of Harold Young's Special Edition and titled The Daily Courier,⁴² the same as the title of the newspaper in the play. What is noteworthy about these playbills is not so much their appearance--though that facet cannot be overlooked because it is indication of Margo Jones' striving for the highest standards for her Players--but the fact that Jones utilized them as an instrument for informing the public about various aspects of the theatre. In the beginning, Jones primarily wrote about the work of the Community Players, but soon the articles became less insular as she began to write

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 50-51.

⁴² "Published under the auspices of the Houston Community Players in the Interests of the Local Amateur Theatre" (taken from the programme), Dec. 26, 1938.

about theatre in the United States and, increasingly, about the need for a national theatre. In these articles she would sometimes quote short passages from the writings of John Gassner and Norris Houghton, both with whom she was now acquainted, Houghton having visited the Community Players. The articles became editorials when in the souvenir programme for Special Edition she published a lengthy piece which was indeed titled, "The Shifting Scene: An Editorial."⁴³ Jones' main thrust of the editorial is urging the decentralization of theatre away from the commercialism of Broadway and in so doing explained for her readers the differences between professional and amateur theatre. She also expressed the hope that the productions of the Community Players would be judged as either good or bad, but not as "pretty good considering they are amateurs."⁴⁴ Moreover, she expressed the further hope that the so-called amateur theatres in the country would be looked upon as providing a training ground for actors, technical workers, and as a source of encouragement and laboratory for new playwrights.

Later, in a December 1941 playbill, under the title of "Aims-Beliefs-Ideals-Goals", Margo Jones published what amounts to a manifesto for a national theatre:

⁴³Pp. 1-2. ⁴⁴P. 2.

The reason for the existence of theatre in the hinterlands, or anywhere else, is to give to the people an art which can be obtained in no other way. People today are thinking and feeling more sharply, more deeply, than they have in many years but they are turning to serious radio commentators, newspaper columnists, thoughtful books and periodicals, to the church, and to music to find a clue to the half lost dream of the race. They do not turn to the theatre because they do not expect to find it there. They do not demand it for they have not found it there in the past.

It is up to the theatre itself to provide the quality of expression which will in time cause the audience to turn to the theatre and also to demand that quality. This can be brought about by

- 1) Continual presentation of the great classics,
- 2) More and more time devoted to the presentation of new plays,
- 3) Reaching out into every phase Presenting plays that will touch
- 4) the lives of all who see them.⁴⁵
the lives of all who see them.⁴⁵

Jones concluded the editorial by saying that it would take courage and it would be essential to keep the goal clearly in sight in order to bring the ideal and the reality together. It would not be long before she would carry the banner of decentralization beyond the boundaries of Houston.

Margo Jones' founding and work with the Community Players was prodigious when one considers that it did not stop with the direction of over sixty plays in nearly six

⁴⁵Programme for Out of the Frying Pan by Francis Swann, n. p.

years. Jones knew that in order to interest the public of Houston she had to promote the productions by stimulating and involving the people. She did this first by inviting the public to participate in all phases of production. With the original nine members, she acquired the nucleus of a company that was to expand to over six-hundred people.⁴⁶ As Joe Finkelstein pointed out, Jones was probably very shrewd in often choosing plays with large casts as this meant greater community involvement, both directly and indirectly. There were also promotional factors in the novel and fresh approaches she used in many of her productions (the black and white design of The Importance of Being Earnest, Judgment Day performed in an actual courtroom, etc.). Margo Jones was a master at getting free publicity for the Players and, consequently, for herself. (Jones was often her own best press agent.) In the first year of the Players, Jones entered them in the State one-act play contest which they won, as they did for three successive years, thereby garnering favorable statewide publicity for her theatre and for Houston. In the second year of the Players, Jones announced plans to build a drama library available to anyone interested in the theatre and then held a rummage sale as a first step in acquiring funds to purchase books. Jones made going to the old mulebarn [incinerator?] on Buffalo

⁴⁶Theatre-in-the-Round, p. 49.

Drive a pleasurable experience, not just by the presentation of the plays, though this of course was foremost, but by serving cafe au lait and cafe nuit during intermissions outdoors that were fragranced by the night-blooming jasmine in the adjoining gardens. But not even so sensual a pleasure would hold an audience in the heat of a Houston summer without the comfort of air-conditioning, so she seized upon the idea of the hotels. Jones encouraged, with strong assistance from Hubert Roussel, local playwrights to submit plays for consideration and created a Community Players Workshop and Laboratory Theatre in which several were presented. In 1939, Jones formed the Junior Community Players and presented children in children's plays as well as presenting informal musical concerts, the proceeds of which were added to the Players' production fund. Another fund raiser in 1940 was a country dance held at the playhouse to which the public was invited, with all proceeds going into the Players' yearly budget. Also in 1940, Jones convinced Houston's Mayor Oscar Holcombe to set aside one week in April as "Theatre Week," about which Roussel wrote that Jones "has lately developed a strong flair for publicity stunts that remind me a little of those conceived by the virtuosi of Hollywood."⁴⁷ He was, nevertheless, pleased

⁴⁷Clipping, "'Theater Week' Rather Late, But It Presents Nice Thought Anyway; Mayor Holcombe and Eloquent 'Ghost' Combine to Give Drama Some Needed Assistance," Houston Post, Apr. 12, 1940. ["Ghost" refers to Jones' writing of the Mayor's proclamation.]

with the announcement and encouraged the public's observance.⁴⁸

There seems to be no end to Margo Jones' ideas for involving the public in theatre. She had sales campaigns and contests in order to sell tickets to the shows that often served other purposes as well. In preparation for the Howard-Shannon musical Going Up!, Jones held a jitterbug dance and contest that was open to the public and highly publicized in Houston's newspapers. Admission was forty-four cents which helped with production costs. A vigorous sales campaign was mounted and headed by Malvina Holmes, with members of a service league handling the actual sales. The jitterbug contest accomplished yet another purpose: it was Jones' method of auditioning dancers since the first act finale of Going Up! required no less than one-hundred-and-fifty dancers, and the two winners of the contest would be featured in the production.⁴⁹ With this one event alone, one can quickly grasp Margo Jones' ability to promote a production and involve the public in both the promotion and the production.

Jones further involved the public by offering various instructional programs. An adjunct of the second sum-

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Gleaned from various unidentified newspaper clippings, including Hubert Roussel, "Houston Drama Groups Doing Own Valuable Bit to Aid War Chest," Houston Post. [Jones admitted all servicemen free.]

mer season of the Players was a six-week apprentice program in which Jones herself instructed the apprentices in fundamentals of theatre and offered practical experience at the Texas State Hotel Intimate Theatre. They also mounted their own production of Kaufman and Ferber's Stage Door, with Reigh Walston directing under Jones' supervision.⁵⁰ In September 1940, Jones expanded the apprentice program to twelve weeks of "Practical Stage and Radio Work, including Presentation for the Public of Three-Act Play and Radio Programs." At the same time Jones offered a "Drama Class for Teachers and Club Women." Registration for both programs occurred at the same time at the playhouse in the park.⁵¹

Margo Jones was indefatigable in her efforts to educate and entertain Houstonians as she broadened the offerings of the Community Players. Programs for such clubs as the Rotary, as well as fund raisers for charity, and most especially for the Department of Defense, became commonplace. In January 1942, Jones announced the reorganization of the Players in order to further the war effort. She announced that, beginning with the musical Going Up!, in March 1942, the Players would donate all proceeds in excess of production costs directly to the U. S. Treasury for

⁵⁰Taken from programme credits.

⁵¹Taken from clippings of notices and ads that appeared in Houston newspapers.

the War Fund. Plays would be chosen that would uplift the morale of the homefront and members of the Armed Services in particular who were admitted free of charge.⁵² Jones then mobilized her dwindling Community Players into presenting theatre at nearby army and air force bases and actually began touring on a small scale. In a letter to Edwin Justus Mayer, Jones wrote:

I've lost about 45 of my very best men actors and technicians to the army. For a time it looked as though there'd be nobody left but I figured out a way by using Ellington Field [air force base outside Houston] actors and defense industry people and then choosing plays with more women. . . . I'm trying to break in a girl electrician and it's quite a job.⁵³

The years with the Houston Community Players were fertile ones for Margo Jones, years of creativity and productivity. A trip home to Livingston to visit her parents coincided with a visit for the same purpose by her friend, Corene Brock Hollenburger. The two women discussed the disparate paths their lives had taken. Mrs. Hollenburger recalled the moment and said that she summed it up by saying that she had a baby and Margo had the theatre, to which Jones replied that the theatre was her baby.⁵⁴ Jones was

⁵²Clipping, "Players' Group to Give Earnings for War Work," Houston Chronicle, Jan. 4, 1942.

⁵³This is the last paragraph of an undated two-page letter which is unfinished and obviously never mailed. [Interestingly, after the end of the war and Nina Vance had started her own Alley Theatre, she would occasionally use "Ellington Field actors."]

⁵⁴Larsen interview, Nov. 7, 1980.

willingly sacrificing any real personal life for a life in the theatre. Not even the persistence of the dashing and dedicated Sonny Koch, who courted Jones throughout this period and well into the nineteen-forties, could break down the resolve and determination of Jones to accomplish her goals in the theatre. They were for a time unofficially engaged to be married, but Koch's devotion to "the dynamo" was no match for her devotion to the theatre.

Margo Jones was fervent about her Houston theatre. In the previously mentioned letter to Edwin Justus Mayer, she confided:

. . . I believe in this theatre a lot and come hell or high water I'm going to build up the most perfect theatre in the world--right here in the provinces.

Although she was to eventually choose Dallas as the Texas city in which to locate her permanent professional repertory theatre, the Houston experience fortified her with the foundation, confidence, and expertise to know what could be accomplished. It was not perfect, but it was in Houston that Jones drew up the blueprint of the dream that would one day be realized in Dallas. Jones produced and directed over sixty plays with the Community Players whose ranks increased from the original nine members in 1936 to over 600 in 1941. It was a self-supporting community theatre with productions financed by profits from the box office, though the Players could also boast of a list of seventy-eight patrons in its

last year of existence.⁵⁵ It was "amateur" in the sense that no one was paid except the director. It was amateur in the sense that everyone worked because of sheer love of what they were doing and accepted the high standards and discipline of the one professional.

What, then, were the tangible contributions of Margo Jones as the guiding spirit of the Houston Community Players? Some were lasting, others were not. But they all made an indelible mark on the cultural life of Houston and some on American theatre in general. Jones' pioneer work stimulated the continuing growth of theatre in Houston in the late nineteen-forties on through the decades to the present day. Through the summer theatre offerings, Jones laid the groundwork for popularizing the medium of theatre-in-the-round which she later wrote about in her book of the same name. This had the lasting effect of making people realize that they need not have a usually unobtainable conventional theatre building in which to present theatre as long as they had a space, preferably indoors. The Players provided an outlet and training ground for the creative powers of many individuals, including the actor Ray Walston, who was to become well known on Broadway and on television, and the writer-director-producer Cy Howard, who went on to fame, and especially fortune, in Hollywood as, among numer-

⁵⁵Programme credits, Design for Living, May 18, 1942.

ous other credits, the creator of the long-running television series, My Friend Irma. Margo Jones revived, for a time anyway, the waning creative powers of Edwin Justus Mayer. The laboratory productions of the Community Players provided a showcase for some aspiring Houston playwrights, though, unfortunately, none of them came to prominence. There can be no doubt that Margo Jones inspired and, by example, motivated Nina Vance into founding her own theatre in-the-round in Houston called the Alley--one of the oldest and most respected regional theatres in America today. It is unfortunate that Houston's Playhouse Theatre did not enjoy the same fate. Yet, it was that guiding spirit that led Joanna Albus and Bill Rozan into founding and raising the money to build the first professional theatre in America to be constructed as a theatre-in-the-round. For several years in the nineteen-fifties, the Playhouse Theatre presented on a paid professional basis mostly American plays by American playwrights with a full Equity company. Despite all efforts to save it, including those of Margo Jones, the theatre fell victim to mismanagement and the tax collector, and, today, with its once beautiful interior, revolving stage, and excellent backstage facilities, is a tawdry house of pornographic movies.

The filiations of the Houston Community Players are far reaching. There are the countless people who freely gave their services to the Players, many of whom still sup-

port Houston theatre. There are people who work in the theatre, like Joe Finkelstein, and Jo Alessandro Marks, who as a very young girl worked with the Community Players and later worked at the Alley Theatre and still does occasionally, and whose mother worked tirelessly for years as a volunteer in the Alley Theatre box-office. There is Marie LeMaster, who knew Margo Jones and who worked as a volunteer in various capacities at the Alley until she was finally hired as wardrobe mistress and subsequently filled in in many other capacities. There are people like Dr. Baracco, Judge Hannay, and numerous others not as well known who make spiritual as well as monetary contributions in support of Houston theatre. There is Jeannette Clift George, an enormously talented actress who played in many Alley Theatre productions and whose path crossed that of Margo Jones many times, who forsook New York in favor of her own kind of theatre in her hometown of Houston. There are at present the many "little" theatres in Houston presenting good theatre, and even some new playwrights, who may not otherwise have had the courage to do so had not Margo Jones stimulated the growth of regional theatre and the opportunities it offers for people in all phases of theatrical production. Despite what George Fuermann wrote in the nineteen-fifties, that "Houston's cultural aspects merely bore the public, . . .", it is altogether credible that what Margo Jones activated in the nineteen-

thirties and early forties is continuing to be realized, not only in Houston, but throughout the country. This is the legacy of Margo Jones and the Houston Community Players.

CHAPTER V

A CIRCUITOUS ROUTE FROM AUSTIN TO DALLAS

VIA "TENNESSEE" AND BROADWAY:

1942-1945

When Margo Jones appeared on the University of Texas campus, she no longer had to seek out the "most important people." She had become one. Jones' arrival on the Texas campus was grandly heralded in the Austin newspapers, with one proclaiming:

New Star in the Theatrical Heaven;
Margo Jones, Famed American Director,
at University on Rockefeller Fellowship.¹

She became a prestigious member of the faculty of the drama department, housed at that time in the stately old Modern Language Building, known as "MLB." James Parke, chairman of the department, was going off to war as was James Moll, a member of the drama faculty. Jones would be teaching Parke's courses, and June Madison Moll would be teaching her husband's. The two women would become friends and would later develop a close working relationship.

From the beginning, Jones' approach to academia was not conventional. Her teaching and directing methods caused

¹Clipping in Margo Jones' personal scrapbook, "University of Texas, 1942-1944."

some controversy among the drama faculty and Dean E. William Doty. Her ardor for the theatre did not lessen with her assuming an academic appointment. She viewed a drama department as an extension of theatre, for which she set her own standards, apart from those of the department or the university. She attacked her duties with the same zeal that she exhibited when forming the Houston Community Players. But if her autonomous academic methods occasionally upset the faculty, they pleased the drama students--at least those she cyclonically enveloped in her fold. Those were the ones she deemed worthy, ones who were unabashedly in love with the theatre and/or ones she considered talented. "Ah, children, I worship talent!" became a favorite exclamation of Jones.²

Louise Latham was a student of Jones' at the university in this autumn 1943, and later an actress in her Dallas company. She remembers Jones' repetition of the foregoing quotation, saying they used to tease her about the expression. Latham also remembers Jones talking to her class about grades, and at the end of the semester Dean Doty called her into his office for an explanation of why part of the class received "A"s, and the rest failed. Doty apparently explained that there had to be gradations in assessing students' work. Jones strongly disagreed and firmly told the

²Quoted by Louise Latham, Carole Cohen interview, Mar. 19, 1974, Oral History Collection, SMU.

Dean of Fine Arts:

Oh no, oh no, darling. You either belong in the theatre or you don't. And those who belong I gave "A"s, and those who didn't--they just shouldn't be here.³

Jones' instruction of students in theatre arts did not end with the class period or rehearsal or performance. Just as she had rehearsed her company in Houston until two or three in the morning and would then want them all to stay up until five so they could talk theatre, Jones in Austin would go to restaurants with her students and have them over to her apartment on weekends for readings of plays and discussions on theatre. Jones' vitality was always at such high levels that she required very little rest, and she expected others to function in the same high gear. Even as she was immersed in theatre, she would immerse those around her, and her coterie of students were willing subjects. June Moll is a strong forthright personality, given to no exaggeration of facts, and she spoke about Jones' relationship with the students:

. . . it was . . . fascinating the way she could absolutely enthrall these students. . . . This was like catching them up in some wild wonderful dream. It was a pretty remarkable accomplishment. And I think she did that almost all of her life.⁴

³Ibid.

⁴Larsen interview, July 9, 1978.

Through her work on the National Theatre Conference, Jones had been instrumental in persuading Maxwell Anderson to turn over his new play, The Eve of St. Mark, to the Conference to offer to its non-professional membership.⁵ The play was produced by The Playwrights Company at the Cort Theatre in New York, opening October 7, 1942. Margo Jones opened the play in the Experimental Theatre of the drama department at the University of Texas on November 9, 1942, with Louise Latham in her first important role. A biographical article on Jones appeared in one of the Austin papers with the announcement in bold type, "Cosmopolite Margo Directs St. Mark."⁶

Jones' next directorial effort was the following February 1943, for the Austin Little Theatre. The play was Personal Appearance, by Lawrence Riley. It was presented on the proscenium stage of Hogg Auditorium on the Texas campus. Adjacent to "MLB," Hogg Auditorium was the main stage of the drama department.

Jones' quest for new playwrights continued at an ever accelerating pace while she was at Texas. It led first to Theodore Apstein, a graduate student who previously had had one play produced by the drama department. Apstein was a talented young man who had a colorful and

⁵William Saroyan did the same thing earlier with his play, Jim Dandy, which Jones had announced she would do at the Houston Community Players, though the plan never materialized.

⁶Clipping in Jones' University of Texas scrapbook.

even, for Texas, exotic background. He had been born in Kiev, Russia, emigrated to Mexico and became a citizen, later emigrating to the United States to become a citizen. He was interested in Latin American culture and wanted to become a playwright. He had held various teaching positions before coming to Texas as a graduate student. The drama department at Texas, at that time, did not offer a doctorate in theatre, so Apstein studied in another discipline and eventually was awarded the first Ph. D. in Latin American Studies at the University of Texas. Apstein first met Margo Jones at a luncheon at which she was one of the speakers. He describes his first impression:

. . . I was just overwhelmed and in awe of her energy and enthusiasm. It really wasn't so much what she said as the way she said it. But it was what she said too. Here is somebody who can really create a theatre. . . . the following year she came to teach at the university. I think everybody was⁷ thrilled. I know I was thrilled. . . .⁷

Jones directed Apstein's play, Sporting Pink, in the round in the Laboratory Theatre. Apstein thought that she brought a definite spirit to the experience and involved the students much more closely than they had been involved in his previously produced play at the university.

In the summer of 1943, when Apstein was in South America for advanced study on a Rockefeller grant, he learned that Jones had directed his mystery melodrama,

⁷Larsen interview, Feb. 7, 1979.

Velvet Tower, at the Pasadena Playhouse. To his horror, Apstein learned from a friend who had seen the production that the entire last scene had been excised. Subsequently, Apstein received a letter from Jones saying she cut the scene because it just didn't "play." Lacking confidence at that stage of his career, Apstein never challenged Jones for the liberties she took with his script.⁸ Jones never included him among the new playwrights whose works she later directed in Dallas, and that fact was to always cast a shadow on their friendship. Nevertheless, Jones did all that she could to promote Apstein's work, sending three of his plays to the agent Audrey Wood in New York, with whom she was now acquainted. Wood returned the plays to Jones saying they were "not commercial."⁹ Jones doubtless had faith in Apstein's writing ability and turned to him when she needed assistance on the writing of Theatre-in-the-Round in the late nineteen-forties.

Jones' next directing assignment at Texas was a joint project of the drama and music departments: Von Flotow's light opera Martha. Staged in Hogg Auditorium, James Moll was to have directed the production but the army had priority on his services.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Letter, Audrey Wood to Margo Jones, June 29, 1943.

Other productions Jones directed during her tenure at Texas include Ten Nights In A Bar Room for the Little Theatre of Austin. In January 1944, as a joint project of the drama department and the Little Theatre, Jones directed Lennox Robinson's Is Life Worth Living? in the university laboratory theatre. In April 1944, Jones directed André Obey's Noah in Hogg Auditorium. The production was co-sponsored by the drama department and the Curtain Club, a dramatic organization open to all disciplines of the university, founded by Stark Young in the years before there was a drama department at Texas. June Moll is listed on the Noah programme as Acting Coach, and the cast included Alyce Faye Dorsey who was to later become the first Mrs. Pat Hingle. Noah was a spectacle with an ark fourteen feet high and included a ballet inserted by Jones into Obey's play. The university newspaper, The Daily Texan, noted that Margo Jones "stuck a thumb in every available non-realistic pie with an energetic attempt to pull out as many imaginative plums as expressionistic drama will consume."¹⁰

Noah, in 1944, was Margo Jones' one hundred and sixty-seventh production since receiving her Master's degree in 1933 from Texas State College for Women. Jones was thirty-two years old and she was now burning the pro-

¹⁰Clipping, "The Rains Will Come Tonight in Hogg but 'Noah' is Ready," Apr. 12, 1944.

verbial candle at both ends, yet her most important work still lay ahead. For some years, Jones had taken to wearing ballet slippers, and sometimes gold or silver mesh sandals, wherever she was at home and especially at rehearsals. The ballet slippers were often red. They seem now to symbolize her dervish existence. Like Hans Christian Andersen's heroine, Margo Jones would not and could not take off the red shoes. They seem to more accurately symbolize her existence than the one she chose as the object of an ever increasing personal collection. The fast-paced, high-g geared Margo, as everyone called her (she insisted upon it), chose to collect turtles whose movements and lifestyle were the very antitheses of her own. Her collection was decorative and included turtles of precious metals, stones, china, ceramics, and other materials, and numbered in the thousands. Each turtle had a name, usually that of a character in a play, or of a city or town that she had visited. Why the turtle? Was it some deep wish to be something other than what she was? Many explanations have been offered, none of them illuminating, none satisfying. The turtle: a strangely incongruous symbol for Margo Jones.

When she was not directing or teaching, Margo Jones traveled the country by plane and by train at a time when travel was most difficult with a country at war. She did

not particularly care for planes, though that never stopped her from flying in them, but trains gave her time to think-- a fact she often mentioned in her letters home to her family. She aided the war effort in various ways including traveling to Washington, D. C., as head of a committee to judge a national one-act play contest sponsored by the Treasury Department to encourage the purchase of War Bonds.

(The plays were to have dramatic structure, and the content was to motivate greater participation in the war effort with emphasis on investing in War Bonds.) Other members of the committee included Henry Morgenthau, Jr., Hallie Flanagan Davis, and Barrett H. Clark. Jones worked in behalf of the National Theatre Conference and accepted various speaking engagements. One such engagement was at Mary Hardin-Baylor College in Belton, Texas, where Jones' topic was "The Theatre in War Time." In the summers of 1943 and 1944, Jones directed at both the Pasadena and Cleveland Playhouses. She was one of three people who compiled a Living Newspaper production called Women in Service at the Pasadena Playhouse. It had a cast of thirty-four and included a song about the Wacs which Jones persuaded Richard Shannon (composer of Howdy, Stranger and Going Up! from her Houston days) to write and send from Alaska where he was serving in the armed forces. The production was stage-managed by Jones' close friend, Joanna Albus, who accompanied her both to Pasadena and Cleveland.

All of the foregoing activities, including a full-time faculty position, would be sufficient to keep the average person busy all of his waking hours. But Margo Jones was an above-average person in terms of energy, pursuit of a goal, and productivity. And always there were the letters. Jones was a prolific letter-writer and corresponded with people all over the country. She always wrote her family in extraordinary detail of her activities, which meant not only her parents and visiting relatives in Livingston, but also her two brothers in the armed services. It was not unusual for Jones to write her parents six to eight lengthy letters a month and then apologize for not writing more often. Miss Pearl was extremely discontented during these years and would write emotional letters of her unhappiness to her "precious Margie." Jones would write warm replies in which she did not directly respond to her mother's complaints but would assuage her mother's feelings of loneliness and despair by offering soothing words of encouragement. Other times Jones would send her mother sentimental cards in which such words as "love" and "heart" were underlined often as many as three times. Jones had a very generous nature and sent thoughtful, lavish gifts to her family, friends and acquaintances, and business associates. To her mother she sent exquisite linens, articles of clothing, books, and on one occasion an evening cape, on another a string of pearls. Usually, Miss Pearl found the gifts too

grand and would return them to her daughter, expressing the belief that they were too lovely for her and that her life in Livingston did not provide opportunities to use them. On one such occasion, Miss Pearl felt guilty for having returned a gift and wrote to her daughter:

. . . it was a lot of selfish pride in me. Please forgive me, darling. There were just so many years that I longed for pretty clothes and to go to Washington to see the loved and lost! And now I realize age has crept in. Then I was able, physically now I do not dare. So I am just proud to have the nice things and the dear ones I have & I must be Christian enough not to allow the pride of Egypt to come into my thoughts. Am so proud of you and your success . . .¹¹

But Margo Jones never stopped sending gifts to her mother. One of the few gifts her mother ever asked for was a pair of ballet slippers like her darling Margie wore.¹²

With the war soon to be over, Jones began activating her plans to fulfill her dream of a permanent professional repertory theatre, away from New York City, one in which there would be no star system, no long runs, and in which she planned to present plays that had become classics and, especially, plays by new playwrights. While still at the University of Texas she held informal meetings in her office and discussed her plan with students clustered about her

¹¹Letter, May 15, 1946.

¹²Letter, Sept. 18, 1945.

desk.¹³ More concretely, she began thinking in terms of a Rockefeller grant for the purpose of traveling throughout the United States, studying cities, towns, and existing theatre groups in preparation for fulfilling her dream.

In March 1944, while visiting in Dallas, Jones unfolded her plan to her old friend and mentor, John Rosenfield of the Morning News.¹⁴ She explained to "Mr. John," as she always addressed him, that she needed financial assistance to explore possibilities in the country and would he write a letter to the Rockefeller Foundation in support of her proposed application for a travel grant. As "The Critic of the Southwest," John Rosenfield's recommendation would carry great weight. Rosenfield agreed to write the letter in Jones' behalf to Dr. David H. Stevens, Director of Humanities of the Rockefeller Foundation. According to Claire Rosenfield, "Mr. John's" widow, her husband knew that since the demise of Oliver Hinsdell's Little Theatre, Stevens was anxious to see significant theatrical activity restored in Dallas.¹⁵ Rosenfield and Jones exchanged ideas

¹³ Clipping, "Margo Wants Creative Drama in Backwoods as Well as Cities," The Daily Texan, Apr. 7, 1944.

¹⁴ Letter, Margo Jones to David H. Stevens, Rockefeller Foundation, May 20, 1944.

¹⁵ "The Preliminaries for the Founding of the Margo Jones Theatre" by Claire B. Rosenfield, p. 1, n. d. This is a four-page typed article provided through the courtesy of the Theatre Division, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library. It is not known if it was ever published.

in the course of which he asked her if she would consider Dallas as the city for her theatre should her plans become a reality. Jones enthusiastically stated that she would and expressed the hope that they might work closely together.¹⁶ Rosenfield then asked her to commit her plan to paper, and on April 27, Jones returned to Dallas with the written formulated project. Rosenfield approved and pledged his support. Under date of May 20, 1944, Jones typed a four-page letter to David Stevens detailing "a plan for a native, permanent, repertory, actors and playwrights Art Theatre in Dallas." [See Appendix, p. 264, par. 3.]

There was one unexpected delay in Jones receiving the Rockefeller grant which required a physical examination of its applicants. The supremely energetic Margo Jones was anemic, and the Foundation withheld the grant until her condition was corrected. Theodore Apstein said this news badly upset her, and it was the only time he ever saw her in a state of depression in all the years he knew her.¹⁷ Jones left the university at the end of the spring semester 1944, and went to the Pasadena Playhouse with a doctor's prescription for iron and calcium that she was to take to build up her blood. June Moll wrote Jones in a letter dated June 29, 1944, "Now for God's sake, dig in and multiply

¹⁶Ibid. Also Cohen interview with Claire Rosenfield, Apr. 30, 1974, Oral History Collection, SMU.

¹⁷Larsen interview, Feb. 7, 1979.

the red corpuscles! The fate of a nation rests on the damn things!" In August, Jones' blood count reached a level acceptable to the Rockefeller Foundation which then awarded the grant. Jones then submitted her itinerary.¹⁸

By 1944, Margo Jones laid claim to the "discovery" of three new playwrights. Not discovery in the sense that she was the first to read their works or even the first to direct them. Rather, discovery in the sense that she was the first to promote their promise as new playwrights of stature and, therefore, worthy of recognition. One of these, of course, was Theodore Apstein, the immigrant from Russia by way of Mexico. Another was Horton Foote, a native Texan from Wharton. The third was a man nine months her senior, born in Mississippi, raised in Missouri, who called himself "Tennessee." Of the three, she was least involved with the career of Horton Foote. Like Apstein, Foote was to gain greater prominence as a television writer than as an author of plays. Foote was also to become a screenwriter, one of his most notable achievements being the film adaptation of Harper Lee's novel, To Kill A Mockingbird. Of the three, Jones' name was to be most closely linked with that of Thomas Lanier "Tennessee" Williams.

¹⁸Letter, Margo Jones to Alexander Makinsky, Fellowship and Travel Service, Rockefeller Foundation, Sept. 25, 1944.

Margo Jones first learned of Tennessee Williams in 1939 when his American Blues won a play contest sponsored by the Group Theatre in its declining days. Also as early as 1939, when Jones was still involved with her Houston Community Players, she read Tennessee Williams' play Battle of Angels, given to her by his agent then and for many years, Audrey Wood, while Jones was in New York after attending the Community Theatre Conference in Washington. This was prior to the Theatre Guild production of Battle of Angels, which subsequently closed in Boston en route to Broadway. Doubtless, this is "the deal" to which Jones refers in the following letter to Audrey Wood who had requested the return of the script:

Dear Miss Wood,

The morning you gave me the copy of 'Battle of Angels', I went back to my hotel meaning to put the script in my brief case and read it on the train going home--but I picked it up and got started reading and didn't lay it down until it was finished. I think it is a great play. On the train going home I had several other scripts and each time I'd start reading them, I'd find myself reaching into said brief case and coming out with 'Angels' to reread and I don't believe I'd be stretching it much to say I'd read it a dozen times. I'm so thrilled that you have a deal on it and I'm very anxious to know about what's going to happen to it. I guess when you see the condition the script is in that you will know it has been read and reread by my actors who all agree with me that it is terrific. I envy who ever gets to direct it. When I got your card yesterday I felt like a child of mine was going to leave me so I sent out word to four of my typist [sic] and begged them to come rushing down and make me a copy--

which they did. I hope you don't mind. I like both of the one acts and want to do them. [Reference is to other Williams plays.] As soon as there is some sort of let up in my schedule, I'll write you for permission to do them. I've also been trying to figure a way to finance a resident playwright and I think I'm about to get the solution. Would you give me Mr. Williams address so I could write him about it. Thank you so much for letting me read the script. I believe the play has more beauty, theatre and guts than any script by a young playwright that I've read in years.

.

If you have any other scripts of Mr. Williams that I might read, I'd appreciate your sending them to me.

I'm dying to know who plans to do 'Angels' and I'd like to kill who ever gets to direct it--cause I'd like to so.

Thanks again--I shall look forward to seeing you next time I'm in New York.

Sincerely,

Margo Jones¹⁹

The letter is remarkable in many ways. It divulges her passionate pursuit of new plays and writers, it more than hints at the type of theatre at which she was aiming, it illustrates her tenacity in holding on to what she wanted,²⁰ and it is infused with Jones' high-powered

¹⁹Jones had an occasionally maddening habit [especially for researchers] of omitting dates on letters.

²⁰On frequent occasions, Jones would type or have scripts typed without securing prior permission, though always informing the proper person after the fact.

enthusiasm--in this case for the new playwright Tennessee Williams, for whom her enthusiasm never wavered.

Shortly thereafter, in late 1939 or early 1940, Jones met Williams for the first time in New York City, and they "talked for hours that morning and afternoon, and most of the next day."²¹ After they parted, they entered into a lengthy correspondence spanning many years, became close friends and got together whenever their own personal schedules permitted. She became his champion and tirelessly sought opportunities to find showcases for his early plays. Audrey Wood was his agent (and would later become Jones'); she submitted his plays to producers, did or did not grant rights, and negotiated contracts in his behalf. She did not have to "sell" Tennessee Williams, for she, and Williams, had the great good fortune of an eager Margo Jones traveling coast-to-coast heralding him as the most important new American dramatist in decades. "Theatre" was the most important word in the Jones lexicon. From the moment she read Battle of Angels, the word "Tennessee" became equally important.

In the winter of 1942, after another trip to New York, Jones wrote Audrey Wood that she read Williams' new play, Stairs to the Roof, on the train back to Austin, and

²¹Clipping, Margo Jones quoted by Helen Ormsbee in interview titled "Margo Jones From Dallas, 'Summer and Smoke.'"

"Since I've been back, I've spent all my time promoting both 'STAIRS' and 'BATTLE OF ANGELS.'" She then expressed disgust with some members of the drama faculty who were "afraid" of the Angels script and thought Stairs presented too many production problems. Yet Jones made clear that she would persevere in her efforts to get the plays produced at Texas. Williams had collaborated with a friend of his, Donald Windham, on a play titled You Touched Me. In this same letter to Wood, Jones expresses her eagerness to read the play and asks Wood to send it to her at her parents' home in Livingston where she would be spending the Christmas holidays. Near the end of the letter, Jones wrote:

Maybe 'You Touched Me' might not offer the problems of the other two plays and maybe I could get Lem[uel] Ayers to do the sets (He sounded like he would when I was there) and maybe we could get some New York people down to see it and maybe all this would do some good. . . .²²

Jones was not able to do all that she wanted to do at the University of Texas. Joanna Albus said that one of Jones' firmest beliefs was "Theatre is the autocrat of Democracy," and that she was fond of expressing this belief in just those terms.²³ She did not do this with arrogance; she was simply stating in very plain language what to her

²²n.d., but typed at the top is "Received 12/18/42."

²³Larsen interview, Oct. 25, 1980.

was fact. Moreover, she believed firmly that the head of a theatre must of necessity be an autocrat--which Margo Jones unquestionably was. This philosophy, or attitude if you will, would meet with obstacles in most academic institutions, as it probably did at Texas. Jones never succeeded in getting Tennessee Williams' early plays produced there. This is perhaps a lamentable fact for the then Texas drama department in view of Williams' eventual rise to his esteemed position as one of America's most distinguished twentieth-century dramatists. So if the drama department would not cooperate in providing him with a showcase for his early plays, Jones knew that the Pasadena and Cleveland Playhouses would. In the autumn 1943, Jones was granted a leave of absence from Texas and directed the Williams-Windham play, You Touched Me, first at the Cleveland Playhouse with Carl Benton Reid in the lead role, and the young actor she admired in Houston, Reigh Walston, in a smaller part. This production was followed soon afterward by the one in Pasadena with Onslow Stevens in the lead role.

Of all Williams' early short plays, Jones most admired The Purification (subtitled Song For the Guitar). She had tried to persuade the chairman and drama faculty at Texas to let her direct it there--to no avail. Jones loved the play so much and worked so hard in its behalf that Williams dedicated it to her. While at Texas, she wrote a ballet scenario of the play in which she hoped to

interest Theresa Helburn of the Theatre Guild.²⁴ Nothing ever came of the plan. But later in 1944, Gilmor Brown, head of the Pasadena Playhouse, was receptive to Jones' staging Williams' play there. On July 26, Jones wired Williams, whom she had tracked to Provincetown, Massachusetts:

YOU HAVE BEEN LOST TO ME YOU KNOW.
HOW COULD I LET YOU KNOW THE DREAM
IS HAPPENING. PURIFICATION PLAYS
JULY 27, 28, 29 LABORATORY THEATRE
PASADENA PLAYHOUSE WITH THE SIMPLI-
CITY YOU WANTED GUITAR MUSIC OUT OF
HEAVEN AND ALL I'VE GOT TO GIVE.
IT'S GIVEN US EVERYTHING. STEAL A
PLANE AND FLY HERE. . . .

The cast included Rebecca Hargis, who had been in Jones' production of The Eve of St. Mark and with whom Jones had a friendship that lasted many years. Her close friend, Joanna Albus, who was now trouping the country with Jones, appeared in one of the many walk-on roles. Albus was also to develop a close relationship with Tennessee Williams.

What was Williams' reaction to the fervor of his most ardent promoter? He expressed it both publicly after he became established, and privately, especially in letters to Donald Windham.²⁵ In 1943, when Williams was a contract

²⁴Letter, Margo Jones to Theresa Helburn, Mar. 28, 1944.

²⁵Published in Tennessee Williams' Letters to Donald Windham, 1940-1965.

writer at MGM and Jones was staging You Touched Me at both the Cleveland and Pasadena Playhouses with a Broadway production in mind, Williams wrote Windham:

. . . With Mary Hunter's direction . . . I think that is the best bet of the three production offers. However Margo would die if she knew anyone else had the inside track on a N. Y. production, as she is still blissfully expecting her Pasadena showing to be removed intact to Broadway. So as long as she is doing it in Pasadena, no final commitments can be made with anyone else--that is, honorably. Not till she gives up the notion of making Broadway with it. So you see what the game is, sort of a juggler's trick, keeping two balls in the air at once. . . . Margo and Mary are sort of running neck-and-neck it would seem, and the idea is to keep them both running. Now Mary is my choice of the two, in spite of the fact that I dearly love Margo, for I think that Mary is the most intelligent woman I have ever met and would do the play better than McClintic, for instance. About Margo I can only say she has the energy of Niagara Falls and an enthusiasm which is either irresistible or overwhelming. . . .²⁶

On August 27, 1943, writing from Santa Monica, Williams wrote Windham regarding Margo Jones:

. . . The girl is rather monumental in force of character. Frankly, I am overawed by the way she accomplishes things and exerts her will over people. She is never tired or bored herself and can't imagine weariness or boredom in other

²⁶Ibid., letter dated July 1, 1943, p. 84. Mary Hunter and Horton Foote headed a theatre group called The American Actors Co. Mary Hunter also played the role of Marge on the Easy Aces radio program.

people. She wore me out this summer! [Reference is made to the period of time Jones was in Pasadena directing his and Windham's play.] But she will always be, as a personality, the most vital accident of my life.--Incidentally, I saw her student productions at Pasadena and I feel that her direction is better than any in New York, except possibly Mary Hunter's.²⁷

On November 3, 1943, Williams again wrote Windham regarding

You Touched Me and Jones' position:

Margo will not be crushed over being left out of a possible Broadway production. I told her right along that she would have to take her chances on that and she knows it. There is a core of real unselfish interest in the woman. Naturally she wants her bone to chew on, but far more than most of us she is capable of an impersonal devotion to something and evidently this play is really in her heart more than her ambition. She has gone through hell with it, certainly, and is still going through it. . . .²⁸

You Touched Me finally reached Broadway in September 1945, after Tennessee Williams' name had been established with The Glass Menagerie earlier the same year. The play written with Windham suffered in comparison, was directed by Guthrie McClintic, and met with little success.

The successful production of The Purification behind her, upon completion of her work at the 1944 summer

²⁷Ibid., p. 101.

²⁸Ibid., p. 114.

program of the Pasadena Playhouse, Margo Jones focussed her attention and revived blood count on travel and study in preparation for her professional repertory theatre in Dallas. Since she was in California at the time, it was logical to begin her travels in the area. As was her practice since childhood, she put her thoughts and observations on paper, often in notebooks. Embarking on her Rockefeller-sponsored travels, Jones kept a journal which she titled "The Trip." It begins with the notation "Started Tues. Oct. 3." She initially records observations of fellow passengers on the train upon leaving Pasadena. Much of the journal is indecipherable as Jones' handwriting was at times illegible when she was committing her thoughts to paper. What can be deciphered from the journal, however, is that she went from Pasadena to Monterey to Carmel. On October 6, she left for Palo Alto where she was met by acquaintances who drove her to Stanford University to see a rehearsal of Watch on the Rhine. One of the last legible notations in the brief and incomplete diary is that she talked by telephone with Joanna Albus, probably from San Francisco, and the conversation included some mention of Theatre Arts magazine, possibly in reference to an article Jones was to write.

An undated typed draft of a letter to a member of the Rockefeller committee, but written during this time that Jones was traveling up the California coast, requests that

she be allowed to go to Livingston on October 15 "to see my baby brother who has been overseas for two years in the Seabees." Her brother Richard was still on active duty in the Pacific but Jones explains that it is "imperative" that she spend at least one day in Livingston because "it means so much to my parents . . . to have two of their children at least under the same roof again. . . ." Jones acknowledges the fact that the trip might not be acceptable under the terms of the fellowship and, if that is the case, "my father will give me a little extra to go there as it means so much to us all to be together again. . . ." There is no concrete evidence as to whether or not Jones mailed such a letter,²⁹ whether or not the request was granted if she did, or if the trip was made. Nevertheless, under date of October 26, 1944, while back on active duty, Jones' brother Charles wrote her a lengthy letter responding to her request that he give her his thoughts regarding her plans for a theatre. After encouraging her to "follow your star", and while admitting that her plans are far beyond him, he offers his sister matters for consideration and stresses that any such venture must have "sound business management."

²⁹For all her traveling about, Jones was very careful about her correspondence. Not only did she keep copies of her typed letters, telegrams, etc., she also often kept drafts, whether handwritten or typed, of such documents.

While Jones was traveling during this autumn 1944, Claire Rosenfield in Dallas brought to the attention of her husband an article in the Morning News announcing that the city planned to build a theatre for children.³⁰ John Rosenfield responded to the article by calling his good friend Woodall Rodgers, then mayor of Dallas, asking: "What's the idea of building a theatre just for children when we need a theatre for everybody?"³¹ A luncheon was arranged for that day and Rosenfield met with the mayor and the president of the Park Board who advised him that the city would be willing to sponsor a "theatre for everybody" if Rosenfield could drum up support among the public. What he meant, of course, was that Rosenfield would have the responsibility of interesting cultural-minded people of position who would be willing to serve on a board. Rosenfield wasted no time in getting to work on the project. One of his first tasks was to find Margo Jones.

On November 19, 1944, an item appeared in the New York Daily News that said or implied that Margo Jones had given up her program sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation and was involved with another, perhaps far more exciting, venture. The Rockefeller committee immediately contacted

³⁰ Cohen interview with Claire Rosenfield, Apr. 30, 1974, Oral History Collection, SMU.

³¹ Ibid., quoted by Mrs. Rosenfield.

Jones and questioned her about the Daily News article, which in turn caused her to write John Rosenfield on November 28, 1944. The article provoked in Margo Jones a rare outburst of fury. She assured Rosenfield in her letter that, indeed, she was working on her study program and would be until December 1, when she would temporarily suspend that activity to become co-director of a new play by Tennessee Williams called The Glass Menagerie. She carefully explained that the only reason she accepted the job was that the experience would be invaluable to the Dallas project and that once the show had opened she would return to travel and study. Moreover, she wrote:

. . . I hope it will be possible for you to let the people of Dallas know that if we're to create this theatre in Dallas that it will be the interest and work of our own town and that Rockefeller's gave me my study fellowship to make me better able through knowledge acquired to be able to carry the plan out.

Margo Jones first knew of Williams' new play in the summer of 1943, when she was in Pasadena. Williams refers to the play in a letter to Jones of March 2, 1944, mentioning that while home in St. Louis he " . . . did a complete re-write of the . . . nauseous thing I read you in Pasadena, The Gentleman Caller. . . ." In September 1943, while in Santa Monica and still under contract to MGM, Williams wrote Jones that he had been working on "The Gentleman Caller", and that "it is now all one scene that would run about an hour and might be very amusing in the spirit of a Chekov

farce. . . ." He then promised to mail her a copy as soon as he finished it. Writing from Provincetown almost a year later in August 1944, Williams wrote Jones that he had completed a final version of "The Gentleman Caller," saying:

. . . It was an act of compulsion, not love. Just some weird necessity to get my sister on paper. Thank God it is done, however inauspiciously, . . .

Williams apparently continued to work on the play and consequently never sent Jones the promised drafts, for in September 1944, in an obvious response to a letter from her requesting copies, Williams declines but says he will send a synopsis. By this time he had changed the title of the play to The Glass Menagerie, and he wrote that he was pleased with the finished product because it incorporated "new techniques" and that the play "contains my sister, and that was the object." In the last part of the letter, he refers to Jones' proposed repertory theatre and how good it will be for him, for the theatre, and for the country after the war is over. In a last sentence, Williams exclaims, "Margo!--I believe that you are a woman of destiny!"³²

The Glass Menagerie opened on Christmas night 1944, at the Chicago Civic Theatre. Two Broadway veterans, each from different but overlapping eras, starred in the work of

³² This letter was written on Lincoln Kirstein's personal stationery. While Jones often did not date her letters until after she acquired a secretary, Williams often did not give complete dates on his correspondence.

a still neophyte playwright. Eddie Dowling was in his fifties at the time and more than a shade too old for the role of Tom, a fact the Chicago, and later New York, critics trod on lightly. Robert Pollack of the Chicago Sunday Times called Dowling "not a specialist in the theatre but a general practitioner,"³³ having started out as a song-and-dance man, then a writer and producer, before being considered a serious actor in William Saroyan's The Time of Your Life. It was, therefore, not surprising that Dowling would be the co-producer, co-director, and one of the stars of The Glass Menagerie. Margo Jones brought Williams' play to Dowling's attention and he optioned the rights.³⁴ Dowling's co-

³³Clipping, "Dowling Repertory, 'Glass Menagerie' Awaits Civic Curtain," Dec. 24, 1944.

³⁴There is scant mention of this information anywhere. However, Pollack wrote this in his Dec. 24 Sunday Times column which is essentially an article that centers on Dowling but also gives attention to Jones and her background. If the information was incorrect, Jones (and certainly Dowling) would have had Pollack set the matter straight. Jones was known to have an abhorrence of erroneous information. For instance, in 1949, in a four-page letter to the business manager of her Dallas theatre, she acknowledged receipt of various enclosures, one of which was an article about her in a souvenir programme that said she directed, not co-directed, Menagerie. Jones wrote her business manager, ". . . I loathe and despise misrepresentation . . ." and requested that the information be corrected in future printings.

producer, Louis J. Singer, financed the production. But it was Eddie Dowling and Margo Jones who shared beliefs about the American theatre, for Dowling intended Menagerie to be the initial production in his establishment of a Chicago repertory theatre. Much of the attendant publicity of The Glass Menagerie in the Chicago newspapers centered on Dowling's plans which, unfortunately, never materialized.³⁵

The venerable Laurette Taylor, who had become a Broadway star early in the century, widow of the playwright-producer, J. Hartley Manners, was making a comeback in the role of Amanda Wingfield. For years, no producer would risk his chances or his money on casting the alcoholic Miss Taylor. It is to the credit of Eddie Dowling, who apparently thought he could handle her, and Margo Jones and Tennessee Williams, who were still relatively young and, therefore, willing to take greater chances, that Laurette Taylor was given the greatest role of her long career which she eventually managed to metamorphose into an extraordinary personal success.

The cast was rounded out with Julie Haydon in the role of Laura (the sister and the reason Williams said he wrote the play) and Anthony Ross as the gentleman caller.

All evidence points to the belief that Margo Jones

³⁵See Chicago Sunday Times, Dec. 24, 1944, and Chicago Herald-American, Dec. 27, 1944. Later, Dowling was to investigate Houston for the same purpose, but that plan also never materialized.

assumed the greater proportion of directing the play, for Dowling was kept more than busy creating the role of Tom.

Though a small cast of four, the air backstage was charged with tension which the diplomatic Margo Jones tried, sometimes in vain, to tranquilize. Williams was to write Donald Windham on December 18, 1944, "What characters! This company is more amusing than the show!" He went on to describe the backstage madness, writing Windham that " . . . Margo is like a scoutmaster of some very jolly but wayward troop. . . ." ³⁶ Dowling and Haydon presented fewer personal problems than the other half of the cast. Ross had his own battle with the bottle, and Taylor proved to be a formidable warhorse both off and onstage. She tormented Haydon with a barrage of invective, and a young woman was hired for the sole purpose of making sure Taylor did not nip in her dressing room. There is the general belief that it was Jones' idea to cast Taylor as Amanda. Whether this is true or not, Jones treated Taylor with the utmost compassion and tact. The greatest problem with Taylor's characterization was the false syrupy quality of her southern accent. Being Southerners themselves, Jones and Williams were distressed over Taylor's seeming inability to sound naturally southern. Jones wrote of Taylor in one of her many notebooks [this one included everything from jottings regarding her theatre to

³⁶ Tennessee Williams' Letters, pp. 155-156.

Christmas and grocery lists to letters started to her family and the Rockefeller Foundation to Menagerie notes:

Still too much southern accent. She needs to lighten up--voice lighter--sometimes a little shrill--certainly dainty.

Williams was less kind and flatly stated in his abovementioned letter to Donald Windham that Laurette Taylor made the show sound "like the Aunt Jemima Pancake Hour." In a later letter to Windham, Williams indicated that Haydon had her own way of dealing with the false southern accent and with her own backstage problems with Laurette-Amanda: according to Williams, Haydon anonymously put a "nigger baby doll" in Taylor's dressing room which touched off an outburst that was volcanic in proportion.³⁷ Taylor and Dowling shared a proclivity for ad-libbing which had to be controlled by Jones. She wrote Audrey Wood, who was now her agent also, that Dowling's performance was "100% better" after she insisted on less "hoak" [sic].³⁸

The Menagerie problems were endless. Dowling asked Williams to write a drunk scene for Tom. Williams and Jones opposed the notion which turned out to be George Jean Nathan's idea, not Dowling's.³⁹ (Nathan was in Chicago to see the

³⁷Jan. 26, 1945, p. 160.

³⁸Letter, Jan. 2, 1945.

³⁹See Windham's note, p. 154, Tennessee Williams' Letters.

production and to see Julie Haydon, whom many years later he was to marry.) Williams and Jones remained firm and the scene not written.⁴⁰ However, Williams was to shortly thereafter write his own drunk scene for the play.⁴¹ Co-producer Singer attempted to pressure Williams into writing a happy ending for the play. The idea was ludicrous to Margo Jones who turned to Williams and said, "Tennessee, don't you change that ending. It's perfect." Turning to Singer, Jones warned, "Mr. Singer . . . if you make Tennessee change the play the way you want it, so help me I'll go around to every critic in town and tell them about the kind of wire-pulling that's going on here."⁴² Singer decided she was serious and dropped the suggestion.

Louis J. Singer controlled the purse-strings with a niggardly hand. Jones reported to Audrey Wood that Taylor and Haydon not only had to buy their own costumes but alter them with the help of Joanna Albus who accompanied Jones to Chicago. She was not on the payroll, but, nevertheless, worked as Jones' assistant. At the last moment before opening, the scenic and lighting designer, Jo Mielziner, thought Julie Haydon should have another dress, " . . . and to get it little Tennessee had to go out and buy it and Mr. Singer

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 154-155.

⁴¹Ibid., letter, Jan. 11, 1945, p. 156.

⁴²Quoted by Murray Schumach in "A Texas Tornado Hits Broadway; Margo Jones, Director of 'Summer and Smoke,' Makes the Stage Her World," New York Times Sunday Magazine, Oct. 17, 1948, pp. 19, 59.

wouldn't pay for it." Eddie Dowling paid twenty dollars of the cost of the dress and Williams paid the remaining ten. Jones' greatest struggle with Singer was his unwillingness to pay her one-hundred and fifty dollars weekly salary after the show opened in Chicago, though Dowling and the production "supervisor", Alex Yoekel, continued to give her work to do after that date. Jones insisted to Wood that Dowling could not give proper attention to the production because of playing Tom and the play needed "some one to mother it until it gets on in New York." Jones plead her case with Wood tactfully and gently, though firmly. She did not want to upset anyone and maintained, "I've slaved to keep peace and have most of the time."⁴³

The Chicago critics hailed The Glass Menagerie, returning again and again to see the production and writing about it in their columns. What was initially only a critical success evolved into a financial one as ticket sales accelerated with newspaper publicity. The return of Laurette Taylor to the stage completely overshadowed the welcome of a new playwright.

In January 1945, Margo Jones received a letter from David Stevens of the Rockefeller Foundation acknowledging the Chicago reviews: In the final paragraph he wrote:

⁴³Letter, Jan. 2, 1945.

Don't work too hard. You doubtless
need that advice every day of your
life.⁴⁴

The Glass Menagerie was open, and John Rosenfield wanted Margo Jones in Dallas. It is not clear what kind of arrangement, if any, Audrey Wood was able to work out with the Menagerie management for the continuance of Jones' salary. Nevertheless, she worked on the show through the month of January and part of February, going from Chicago to New York where Rosenfield finally reached her at the Royalton Hotel. With twenty-five dollars borrowed from Audrey Wood, Margo Jones and Joanna Albus boarded a train for Dallas.

⁴⁴Letter, January 17, 1945.

CHAPTER VI

DALLAS; WITH INTERLUDES ON BROADWAY:

1945-1955

Nothing I do these days or plan to the rest of my life concerns anything except the one great ideal which is to establish permanent professional repertory theatre in the Southwest. Every bit of energy, time and imagination is spent on this one job. So when you hear or I write about trips to New York or to Timbuctoo, you can be sure that it is something concerning this Dallas theatre. . . .

Margo Jones to Charles R. Jones,
letter dated November 8, 1945.

Margo Jones and Joanna Albus left New York City on a wintry February day destined for Dallas. The war was still on, the train was crowded with soldiers, and the two women sat on their suitcases in the aisles the entire trip.¹ They were met at the Dallas depot on the evening of February 10, 1945, by the chauffeured limousine of Ruth McDermott, chairman of what was known as the Salvage Committee, a group formed to consider the reorganization of the Dallas Little Theatre. John Rosenfield had told the committee about Jones,

¹Larsen interview with Joanna Albus, Oct. 25, 1980.

and Mrs. McDermott ordered him to "Find her and bring her in."² Ruth McDermott was the first wife of Eugene McDermott, a geophysicist.³ The McDermotts were prominent and wealthy citizens who were deeply concerned with culture in Dallas.

The next morning, Jones was attempting to explain her plans for the theatre to Ruth McDermott who, being in poor health both emotionally and physically, was in no condition to listen for very long. John and Claire Rosenfield arrived at the McDermott home later that morning to a scene of considerable turmoil. Shortly after their arrival, while Jones was still attempting to explain her ideas, Ruth McDermott suddenly asked for her checkbook. It was given to her and she wrote a check in the amount of ten thousand dollars payable to an astonished Margo Jones. Rosenfield attempted to explain that money was not being solicited at this time and tore up the check. The offended Mrs. McDermott accused Rosenfield of thinking the check was not good (it wasn't). The Rosenfields, Jones and Albus were then shocked to learn that Ruth McDermott had invited seventy to one-hundred of the wealthiest people of Dallas to her palatial home that evening for the purpose of hearing Margo Jones' plans for a theatre. (Rosenfield had asked her to

²Quoted by Claire Rosenfield, Cohen interview, Apr. 30, 1974, Oral History Collection, SMU.

³Eugene McDermott's second wife is named Margaret. All references in this chapter are to Ruth McDermott.

invite "a few.")⁴ The Rosenfields had a pressing appointment elsewhere that morning and had to leave. Without money, Jones and Albus were beginning to feel like prisoners in the McDermott household and had to endure the day awaiting the arrival that evening of February 11, 1945, the wealthy denizens of Dallas. Jones and Albus were to be confronted with turmoil that Jones considered surpassing even that of the Menagerie madness.⁵

They arrived in droves. It was an elite gathering that included, as Jones was to describe it, "Oil Derricks", "Cotton Fields", "Lumber Mills", "Printing Presses", "Ranches",⁶ and a number of bankers. The meeting was fraught with drama, which was perhaps fittingly appropriate for the start of a theatre. With the large gathering assembled around her, Jones, who was always fond of sitting on floors no matter how many chairs were present and vacant, sat on the carpet under the curve of a concert grand and began telling the people of her plans for a theatre in their city. Jones spoke for about fifteen minutes, exuding her usual enthusiasm and optimism that were so contagious that her listeners sat rapt and inspired. Her presentation was climaxed by the entrance of Ruth McDermott in wheelchair, es-

⁴Cohen interview with Claire Rosenfield, Apr. 30, 1974.

⁵Letter, Margo Jones to Edwin Justus Mayer, Feb. 19, 1945.

⁶Ibid.

corted by two uniformed nurses, through the drawing room doors. McDermott was reciting phrases from a radio sermon, stopped, and then said, "I believe in Margo Jones, and to demonstrate my faith here is my check for ten thousand dollars."⁷ Silence ensued, and then Margo Jones, who could handle almost any situation, "got up from the floor and went over to Mrs. McDermott, kissed her on the cheek, took the check and said, 'Bless you' (. . . a phrase Margo used on any and all occasions)."⁸ Mrs. McDermott was wheeled out in silence that was soon broken by near pandemonium.

Eugene McDermott, Ruth's husband, was absent from this meeting and was at that time in Boston looking for an institution that could treat his wife's illnesses. John Rosenfield knew he would be highly disturbed by the bizarre occurrence at his home and asked Everett L. DeGolyer, a geologist and McDermott's business associate,⁹ if Mrs. McDermott was in a position to write such a check. DeGolyer presumed she was. Rosenfield then asked John Moroney, McDermott's attorney, Lon Tinkle, then chairman of the French department at Southern Methodist University and an editor of the book page of the Dallas Morning News, W. R. Ransone, brother of Ruth McDermott, Margo Jones, and possibly DeGolyer, to retire with him to the library. Rosenfield

⁷Quoted by Claire Rosenfield, "The Preliminaries for the Founding of the Margo Jones Theatre," p. 3.

⁸Ibid.

⁹The DeGolyer Institute at SMU is named for him. DeGolyer was also chairman of the board of the Saturday Review of Literature at this time.

asked Moroney to establish temporary legal procedures for the establishment of the theatre, then asked Jones to designate a name for the theatre. Jones' designation was Dallas Theatre, Inc., to which she endorsed the check.¹⁰ The theatre would be chartered as the Dallas Civic Theatre, Inc., however, and would subsequently be changed by Margo Jones to Theatre '45, the name updated with each year, inspired by a theatre Jones had attended in Prague.¹¹

The meeting at the McDermott home adjourned rather swiftly but with dates set for the next. Jones went to Claire Rosenfield and explained that she and Albus had only \$5.47 between them but they could not stay another night in the McDermott home. The Rosenfields loaned them money and took them to downtown Dallas where they stayed briefly in a second-rate hotel before moving into more permanent quarters.¹²

John Rosenfield explained the entire situation to Eugene McDermott upon his return from Boston. Margo Jones was present at this meeting and briefly explained her plans to McDermott, who sought reassurances from Rosenfield that the theatre would not only benefit Dallas but also help his wife. Rosenfield assured him that the theatre would benefit

¹⁰Cohen interview with Claire Rosenfield, Apr. 30, 1974.

¹¹Theatre-in-the-Round, p. 63.

¹²Cohen interview with Claire Rosenfield, Apr. 30, 1974.

Dallas and that it certainly would not hurt his wife. McDermott then made the check good and, under protest, became president of the board of Dallas Civic Theatre, Inc. "He remained president for eleven years giving Margo and the theatre his constant and unheralded financial and concerned support."¹³

Other officers of the board were: DeGolyer, first vice-president; Lon Tinkle, second vice-president; H. Franklin Rodgers (an interior decorator who had been scenic designer for the Dallas Little Theatre), treasurer; and Mrs. Robert Winn (Betty Winn, an artist), secretary. Members of the board included, among others, Ruth McDermott; W. R. Ransone; Mrs. T. E. Braniff, whose husband founded the airline; Corporal Arthur Kramer, Jr., whose father was John Rosenfield's uncle and president of A. Harris & Company, a Dallas department store, whom Jones first met as a student at the University of Texas and would become very active on the board after his discharge from the army; Elizabeth Ann McMurray, who owned a book store from which theatre tickets would be sold in the future; Jed Mace, an interior decorator; Hermes Nye, a lawyer; DeWitt Bay, a banker whom Jones first knew in Houston, for a time president of the National City Bank of Dallas, then becoming senior vice-president of Republic National Bank of Dallas, and finance chairman of

¹³Claire Rosenfield, "The Preliminaries for the Founding of the Margo Jones Theatre," p. 4.

Theatre '45; the scenic designer Jo Mielziner; and Tennessee Williams. An executive committee was formed that included Eugene McDermott, DeGolyer, Tinkle, Mace, Nye, McMurray, and John Rosenfield. Margo Jones was named managing director, and Joanna Albus her assistant. Jones was given the responsibility of recruiting the rest of her staff. Dallas Civic Theatre, Inc., was chartered under the laws of the State of Texas on March 16, 1945, as a non-profit organization for "Educational purposes, and serving the public interest by development of creative writing, dramatic training, and discovery of new talent. . . ." ¹⁴

The initial optimistic plan was to open Theatre '45 in October, but complications partly as a result of a still raging war made this impossible. It would be two years and four months before Margo Jones' dream would be fully realized and a play produced. This period was fraught with its own drama. It was a frustrating time of trying to find a theatre, a search that repeatedly ended in futility and tested the optimism of even Margo Jones. It was a period of long, laborious hours of dealing with people and situations that challenged Jones' affability and diplomacy. She more than met the challenge that would have defeated the average per-

¹⁴Original Charter and By-Laws, p. 1, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library. A copy of this is included as Appendix A of Don Wilmeth's unpublished dissertation, "A History of the Margo Jones Theatre" (University of Illinois, 1964), pp. 281-285.

son of less stamina, tenacity, and charm. Although she was a dreamer with her head in the proverbial clouds, her feet were planted firmly on the non-proverbial earth. She was dealing with business people who only understood concrete terms, not abstractions. From her father, Jones had inherited a sense of organization and a business acumen that, combined with her own gift of persuasive rhetoric and intuitive knowledge of semantics, equipped her, the theatre artist, for dealing with successful businessmen. She knew they could not speak in theatrical or artistic terms, nor would they have understood her had she done so. In order to make them understand her, and in order to get what she wanted, she had to speak in language they understood. She was able to do that. Perhaps the one thing she did not anticipate was having to deal with egos and temperaments that are more commonly associated with artistic types. But she was even able to handle the delicacy of these experiences because she was fortified with a cultural sense that precluded friction, a sense of diplomacy, and innate charm that cannot be underestimated. It is a remarkable accomplishment when one considers that she was able to handle all situations without compromising or sacrificing her own ideals. There are other factors to be considered. Being a Texan and a Southerner, and not an "outsider," didn't hurt her chances of success in Dallas, though if she had not been possessed of other attributes as well, the region of her birth and upbringing

wouldn't necessarily have mattered. She did not overwhelm anyone with her sophistication, nor an exotic appearance. As many people have said, Margo Jones looked like a country girl, and as Betty Winn said, "acted always like an enthusiastic child."¹⁵ Yet, to paraphrase Winn's further assessment of Margo Jones' personal success, Jones had a will of iron and a mind like a steel trap.¹⁶ Jones had ambition and drive that is usually associated with the male sex, yet Jones was in no way a masculine woman. She was quite feminine in manner as well as dress. It is doubtful that Margo Jones would, could, have secured the cooperation of the businessmen of Dallas in the nineteen-forties, or even today, had she not been a gentle woman.¹⁷ And perhaps there is yet another reason, one that encompasses the attributes and personality traits of Margo Jones, that enabled her to eventually succeed in Dallas. Although long recognized as a city that is ultra-conservative, "Dallas has always had a soft spot in its heart for the high-class hustler; not the ordinary, but the high-class hustler."¹⁸ She would have

¹⁵Carole Cohen interview, Mar. 23, 1974, Oral History Collection, SMU.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷"Gentle" not to be confused with weak.

¹⁸Spoken near the end of a program about the billionaire Hunt Brothers of Dallas, ABC-TV, May 30, 1981.

been appalled to have been thought of in those terms but, to the Dallas mind, subliminally anyway, it is altogether possible that Margo Jones was a high-class hustler.¹⁹

Before the end of February, Jones and Albus had moved into a small pink stucco cottage in a compound of houses on an estate at Turtle Creek and Gillespie owned by a Mrs. Caroline Burford, an heiress to the Skelly Oil fortunes. The cottage at 3417 Gillespie was one of three "doll houses" built by the Burfords for their daughters.²⁰ Jones and Albus sometimes referred to it as "Burford Heights." It doubled as Theatre '45's business office, quickly burgeoning with playscripts, and a place of lodging for Jones and Albus, and later June Moll when she was added as the third member of the staff. By autumn 1945, they were in need of larger quarters and prevailed upon their landlady to remodel a garage apartment on her property. Burford complied, and on December 21, 1945, the staff of Theatre '45 moved in. The new quarters, like the old, doubled as theatre office and place of lodging, a situation that was to later cause problems for Mrs. Burford with the Office of Price Administration.

The board of Theatre '45 voted to send Jones to New

¹⁹Meaning: 1) to proceed or work rapidly or energetically; 2) to push or force one's way.

²⁰Larsen interview with Floyd McDaniel, Jan. 10, 1980.

York for the March 31, opening of The Glass Menagerie. Although it opened just under the deadline for consideration, Tennessee Williams won the Drama Critics Circle Award that year. Jones went back to New York in May for the award presentation dinner and was accompanied back to Dallas by "the boy who wrote The Glass Menagerie, . . . so grateful to be away from New York and have a little peace and quiet. . . ." as Jones wrote her parents.²¹ Jones had talked her landlady into refurbishing another of the doll houses for Williams, though it is not clear if, on this trip, he stayed at "Burford Heights" or at a hotel in downtown Dallas.²²

Williams was seemingly enthusiastic about "the Project," as he referred to Jones' theatre in its formative stage. He stayed a few days in Dallas before going on to Mexico for a rest. In July, Williams received what he termed "a typical communication from Miss Jones":

Desperately need short article on playwright's attitude toward Dallas Theatre to show Dallas and the country what we are trying to do.

Williams complied from Guadalajara and wrote in his article that Jones was unexpectedly cautious in saying "Dallas and the country" instead of "Texas and the world", for "the

²¹Letter, May 23, 1945.

²²Letter, Margo Jones to Tennessee Williams, n. d., but sometime in April 1945.

Dallas theatre idea is worth shouting to the world about." He likened the commercialism of Broadway to "a big slot machine or race track" and stated that "gamblers are not the proper groomsmen for the dramatic muse, and she will not have much to say in America as long as she is in their custody." After noting that "Margo and I are southerners" who "believe in the emotional richness and the vitality of this part of the country . . . ", he pointed out that,

Some kinds of local pride are ugly and pernicious, but the pride of desiring one's native region to assume the leadership in creating something that will be of value to all people everywhere is a good kind of pride and one worth cultivating.

Williams suggested that there could be no more effective way of offering a richer life for the country's returning servicemen than to provide them with a theatre "to serve as expression and release of all the new ideas and emotions this vast cargo of heart-hungry youth is bringing back with it."²³ He then threw it open to the people--of Dallas,

²³Published as "A Playwright's Statement on Dallas Theatre '45 Plans," Dallas Morning News, July 22, 1945. I have read the original typed article by Williams called "A Playwright's Statement" and signed by him. Interesting to note is that in the original, Williams uses the phrase "business-men and gamblers" and the term "business-men" is marked for deletion. The term does not appear in the newspaper article. Earlier in 1945, Williams committed the same gaffe in an article he wrote for Ashton Stevens' column in the Chicago Herald-American concerning The Glass Menagerie. It enraged Eddie Dowling and Louis Singer who ordered Williams' name omitted from all publicity about the show. See Tennessee Williams' Letters, p. 163.

America, and the world--to take advantage of "a big chance to do a big thing," and concludes the challenge with "If there's anything more to say--you say it."²⁴

Tennessee Williams' article was not the first to appear in print about the Dallas theatre. Rosenfield, of course, kept the people of Dallas informed of Theatre '45's progress in the Morning News, but in addition articles began to appear in the New York Times and other major American newspapers by such theatre spokesmen as Harold Clurman, Cheryl Crawford, Margaret Webster, and Rosamond Gilder. Margo Jones wrote an article that appeared in the New York Times titled "Theatre '45"²⁵ which also appeared in the July 1945 issue of Theatre Arts, detailing the plan of the theatre and reporting on its progress.

Jones and Albus' days were more than filled with business for the theatre. There was no time for even so much as a pretense of social life except as it related to the theatre. Dallas was, and is, a very social city, but for all its reputation as a socialite's paradise, Dallasites still vote the Texas Blue Laws in or out by district, and the city remains thus divided. For instance, alcoholic

²⁴Ibid. A word about Williams and the Dallas theatre: his sincerity about "the Project" was erratic and questionable. See Tennessee Williams' Letters, p. 177.

²⁵July 15, 1945.

beverages are sold in downtown Dallas, but they are apt to be banned by law a few short blocks away. Nevertheless, a good many cocktail parties were given during the two years it took to make the theatre a reality. Large numbers of people attended these gatherings at which the purpose was always the same: to inform the community about the theatre and to enlist its aid and support. Margo Jones loved parties! She was at the center of attention as she mingled, smoked, sipped Scotch, and talked non-stop about Theatre '45, the necessity of decentralizing theatre, and discovering new playwrights. Often Jones would speak to the group as a whole. Lillian Bayless (Mrs. Robert Bayless), who as a student first met Jones at the University of Texas, gave many such parties. She said that often people would say, "'Now Margo, tell us,' and we'd all group around her . . . and she would make a presentation and tell what she hoped to do and accomplish."²⁶

The most time-consuming task of Jones and Albus was by far reading the hundreds of new playscripts that were sent to Theatre '45. They read them alone and often they read them aloud to each other. They wasted no time as one would read while the other cooked or ate, or whatever, depending on what they were doing. Strict files were kept on all plays that were also acknowledged and reported on to

²⁶Carole Cohen interview, Mar. 12, 1974, Oral History Collection, SMU.

the playwright. Joanna Albus described the experience:

Our apartment in Dallas was lined up to here [indicating scripts piled nearly to the ceiling]. She could talk anybody out of anything. She could get plays out of people that nobody else could. . . . And they were not just read once. They were read many times. There was first reading, second reading, third reading, fourth reading . . . And then she would write a letter to everybody who submitted a play to say why she didn't, or why she would.

.
She used to tell this story about we were busy and one always read to the other one, . . . I was taking off my clothes and getting into bed, and as the last thing dropped off my body, I said, 'Read to me.' And that's really how we read all those plays. Morning, noon, and night. I would read to her and she would read to me. Constantly. . . . I don't know anybody who was that dedicated to one thing, the theatre.²⁷

Margo Jones' correspondence quickly became almost overwhelming, and there was no one at this time who functioned as a full-time secretary except Jones herself. Extraordinary as it may now seem, she also always made time to write to her family of progress (or the lack of it) in Dallas, and in one such letter described the difficulty of keeping up with correspondence, the burden of which didn't seem to bother her: "My letter problem gets bigger and bigger. . . . I must be a couple of hundred letters behind. But these letters all represent part of my work and I'm glad that the interest is so great."²⁸

²⁷Larsen interview, Oct. 25, 1980.

²⁸Letter undated but contents indicate it was written in late spring 1945.

The processing of new scripts was greatly alleviated in the summer of 1945 with the arrival of June Moll from Austin, whose husband was still in the army. She was the third paid member of the staff of Theatre '45. Moll's official position was as reader and processor of scripts, but the duties she undertook far exceeded even those formidable tasks. Later, when Jones and Albus would be in New York for extended periods, Moll, aided by Ross and Selma Lawther, held down the Dallas "fort."

Albus often referred to herself as Jones' "left hand." When she wasn't reading scripts, she undertook much of the early budgeting and bookkeeping and handled Jones' personal accounting and income taxes, detailing all transactions by hand in ledgers. She was, like Jones, an excellent keeper of records. No receipt was too insignificant to be thrown away; not even the price tags cut from new articles of clothing.

The work of June Moll and Joanna Albus as able and dedicated assistants to Margo Jones in her efforts to create a professional repertory theatre in the "hinterland" cannot be too strongly emphasized. They kept pace with the "dynamo" and worked indefatigably for the Dallas theatre. Their work overlapped and blended as they assisted Jones in processing scripts, seeking out theatres, handling an ever increasing amount of correspondence, keeping files, making appointments, and, not to be slighted, raising money.

Albus and Moll even inventoried the household items in "Burford Heights." Had they had time, they could have made a dozen cups of custard.²⁹

In the first weeks on "Burford Heights," Jones and Albus worked to maintain order in the small cottage as they had to constantly make space for the never-ending arrival of scripts. They kept house and cooked, for which they had little time. Jones loved to eat. One of her favorite dishes was black-eyed peas and cornbread, as she frequently mentioned in her letters to her family. Jones could also cook. She ". . . could cook when there wasn't a damn thing in the house. She could make something out of Farina. . . . She could do anything," said Joanna Albus.³⁰ The domestic burden would be lifted dramatically when Floyd Stanton McDaniel came to work for them. She worked Monday through Friday, arriving at ten in the morning, kept the cottage clean, took care of Jones' clothing, and cooked meals for Jones, Albus and their constant stream of guests. For the next ten years, Floyd McDaniel would dedicate a large portion of her life to the care of "Miss Margo," as she called her, and the dedication did not go unreciprocated. McDaniel said she was paid the "top price" at the time for

²⁹This was an interesting document found in Jones' personal files with carbon paper still in place between original and copy.

³⁰Larsen interview, Oct. 25, 1980.

domestic employment, and that her job with "Miss Margo" was "the easiest work I ever did." The relationship between Jones and McDaniel far exceeded that of employer and employee. When Theatre-in-the-Round was published, Jones gave McDaniel a copy inscribed, "To Floyd, my second mother from her second mother. Love, Margo."³¹

On a dresser in Floyd McDaniel's bedroom is a picture of Margo Jones. "It's the first thing I see when I wake up in the morning and the last thing I see before I go to sleep at night," said Floyd McDaniel on January 10, 1981.

In June 1945, Jones received a lengthy, emotional letter from her mother who had recently been ill. Miss Pearl was looking back at her own life and trying to put it in perspective to her daughter's. She wrote:

. . . I comprehend so little of your selected line of life. I utterly fail when I try to think of anything I can write coordinating [sic] with your present work.-- . . . My Margo! Even if I never do accomplish anything outstanding-- . . . Your one precious suggestion that it was an accomplishment to do a piece of crochet that was faultless [sic] soothed my pent up soul! I love you, Dear, let no one ever discourage you.-- . . . Just always put Jesus first! Then I will live again in you and not have failed utterly!-- . . .³²

Meanwhile, Margo Jones was facing a monumental problem in her "selected line of life" that she did not anticipate: finding a building for Theatre '45. She was to keep

³¹Larsen interview, Jan. 10, 1981. I saw the book and read the inscription.

³²Dated June 2, 1945.

her family informed of almost all phases of the search. Location was a key concern. Many buildings were investigated throughout 1945, 1946, and well into 1947, the year the theatre finally opened. Jo Mielziner served as consultant on possible structures. He was particularly enthusiastic about remodeling the Old Globe Theatre in Fair Park, a replica of London's Globe, built for the 1936 Texas Centennial Exposition. But the Old Globe was to be declared a fire hazard by the Dallas fire marshall.³³ This was a serious setback. Plans to open the theatre in the autumn of 1945 were cancelled while other avenues were explored in a renewed search for a theatre. The war was a complicating factor in the quest for a building, both before and in the months after the Japanese surrender in August 1945.

As buildings were being sought and investigated, Jones began yet another search, this one for a business manager for the theatre. She sought the advice of several people on qualifications for the job and was particularly aided in this respect by Charles Prickett, general manager

³³For a detailed account of Mielziner's work in behalf of the Dallas theatre, see the Jo Mielziner file and Jo Mielziner's Basic Master Plan for Theatre '45, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library. See also chap. 2, pp. 43-46, Wilmeth dissertation, and Theatre-in-the-Round, pp. 57-59.

of the Pasadena Playhouse.³⁴ Nevertheless, it would be some time before she found the person she considered right for the job.

Throughout this formative period of the Dallas theatre, Margo Jones had also been in correspondence with a young English teacher at Washington University in St. Louis, who wanted to be a playwright. He was a moody, insecure young man whom Jones constantly encouraged and buoyed in attempts to lift his frequently lagging spirits. He had sent her two plays, one being The Vermin's Will for which she had negative criticism. But Jones wrote the young playwright that she was definitely interested in the other play, Farther Off From Heaven, and wanted to include it in the premiere season of the Dallas theatre. The playwright's name was William Inge.³⁵ In the fall 1945, Jones asked Audrey Wood in a letter if she had ever heard of William Inge, to which Wood replied that she had not but would be happy to read the play that Jones had also mentioned.³⁶ On October 20, Jones instructed Inge to send his play, Farther Off From Heaven, to Audrey Wood, whom she also suggested as an agent. On October 22, Jones informed Wood that she wanted to option the play that Inge was sending.

³⁴Correspondence between Jones and Prickett, Sept. 19, Oct. 1, and Oct. 18, 1945.

³⁵Letter, Margo Jones to William Inge, "Sunday night", n.d., but early in 1945. It is believed that Tennessee Williams introduced Jones and Inge.

³⁶Letter, Oct. 15, 1945.

Also in October 1945, Jones made a brief business trip to New York, followed by another in November at which time Audrey Wood had given her three scripts to consider for production in Dallas. Jones wrote Wood on December 1, that while she did not get them all read on the train back to Dallas, she did read a play given to her by the actor Canada Lee, called On Whitman Avenue, by Maxine Wood. It was a play about race relations that Jones liked very much, and Canada Lee wanted her to direct it in New York. Jones had rejected earlier offers in 1945 to direct in New York,³⁷ but by December 1945, Jones felt she could take a leave of absence from Dallas while the search for a theatre continued. Matters there were left in the capable hands of June Moll, first and foremost, the Lawthers, and Rebecca Hargis whom Jones had known as a student at the University of Texas.³⁸ Jones went first to Livingston to spend the holidays with her family, then on to New York, accompanied by Joanna Albus, to direct On Whitman Avenue. With the new year, Theatre '45 became Theatre '46--at least on paper.

³⁷Among them, a play by Horton Foote, and a Jack Kirkland script titled Everything We Are, subsequently changed to Georgia Boy, based on a novel by Erskine Caldwell. Jones personally invested \$400.00 in the Kirkland production that was tried out at the Copley Theatre in Boston in December 1945.

³⁸The Lawthers, Hargis, and an actress named Olive Lockhart were all unpaid members of Jones' staff who worked tirelessly on behalf of the Dallas theatre.

Jones and Albus moved into the Royalton, a hotel Jones frequently stayed in on trips to New York (except for the summers when she sublet Rosamond Gilder's Gramercy Park apartment). Once there, Jones and Albus referred to themselves as the "New York Branch" of Theatre '46. This was usually typed at the tops of their copious correspondence which, early in January 1946, Jones urged in a postscript to June Moll, "The idea is to get these letters to each other--fast." Concerned with haste, Jones and Albus made four copies of all their letters:³⁹ one for June and Jim Moll (who by this time had been discharged from the army), one for Selma and Ross Lawther, one for Hargis, and one for Jones' files. Jones also urged Moll to keep a journal of activities concerning the theatre, which Moll did as well as writing letters apprising Jones of these Dallas events so lengthy and detailed that they are a monument to June Moll's own incredible energy.⁴⁰ It very quickly became apparent, as June Moll was to make abundantly clear,

³⁹Often Jones would write half the letter, and Albus the other half. It is always clear who was writing. Jones wrote on matters pertaining to Dallas and theatre generally, while Albus would write on their New York activities while also giving her comments on Dallas matters.

⁴⁰One of Jones' personal files, labeled "June Moll, Director, Actress," contains hundreds of pieces of correspondence dating from Jan 17, 1944 to the fall 1947. These are letters, not notes, with single letters often as many as six single-spaced typed pages on 8½ x 11" paper, often on Dallas Theatre, Inc. letterhead stationery. The file contains letters between Jones, Moll, Albus, the Lawthers, and Rebecca Hargis.

that Margo Jones' absence was being deeply felt in Dallas, a situation that was to become more tense the longer Jones was away. Jones was initially confident that her directing experiences on Broadway would be viewed by the people of Dallas as invaluable to the prestige of their theatre, but she was to write the Molls in February that she had realized that Dallas could care less about Broadway.⁴¹ Yet Jones' own distaste for the commercial New York theatre was plainly apparent when she wrote her Dallas staff the following:

I want the first thing to be said and the thing that I find the most important every day--I've got to say it long and loud--The job we're doing there is the most important job to be done in the theatre in America--each day I live up here I know more and more that that job must be done--the country is crying for it--the actors are begging for it--the designers must have it--the playwrights have got to have it--I have known about this place [i.e., Broadway] for a long time but until you really live it you can not know the real stupidity of the whole thing. Don't misunderstand this. I'm having the time of my life because I love life and people and I have two angels to work with Mark and Canada [Mark Marvin and Canada Lee, the producers; Lee also starred], and a beautiful play and a great belief that this will help what we're doing but the point I'm trying to make is that no matter what happens--no matter how long it takes--WE MUST CREATE THE THEATRE WE HAVE DREAMED AND PLANNED AND ARE WORKING ON-- . . . IT HAS GOT TO BE DONE. I believe this stronger than ever. . . .⁴²

⁴¹Letter, Feb. 26, 1945.

⁴²Letter, n.d., but either late Jan. or early Feb. 1945.

She goes on to say that her days in New York

. . . seem very glamorous but believe me it's a phoney [sic] business--once in the stream a lot of things can happen but the stream is muddy and stupid--true there are little undercurrents of beauty and even clear pools here and there but the water is tainted water--how could it be otherwise with the cesspools of commercialism pouring into it each day.⁴³

At this point, Albus continued the letter with an account of their very full and busy days in New York.

In mid-February, Jones wrote her staff of production problems with On Whitman Avenue, but the greatest obstacle being encountered was the same confronting Theatre '46 in Dallas. Jones wrote,

. . . There are 12 shows out of town waiting to come in--There are no houses vacant in New York--Nearly everything that has come in in the last few weeks has been a success which means that no houses will be vacant for several months-- . . . It's almost as bad to find a place to open out of town. Our problems of a theatre building in Dallas is the problem of the theatre all over--No houses--no houses--no houses. . . .⁴⁴

On Whitman Avenue finally secured bookings and opened out of town in Buffalo and Detroit before opening on May 8, 1946, at the Cort Theatre in New York. It received what are generally described as "lukewarm" reviews but managed to stay open for six months with the company taking cuts in salary.⁴⁵

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Letter, Feb. 13, 1946.

⁴⁵Letter, Mark Marvin to Margo Jones, May 31, 1946.

By late spring, matters in Dallas had reached a standstill. June Moll and the others had handled the situation as efficiently as possible given the tenuous circumstances, but they had functioned to the extremes of the tether allowed them by the board of trustees. There was nothing more they could do in the absence of Margo Jones, as June Moll was to explain in a strong, carefully worded, minutely detailed "cold-blooded survey of facts". Moll emphasized the necessity of Jones not just getting back to Dallas but staying there until the building situation was resolved, at which point, Moll advised, a business manager must be hired to coordinate all other activities in the event Jones had to leave again. Never one to mince words, June Moll candidly stated that the most crucial problem was "not running a theatre, but getting one", a fact that Jones was well aware of but Moll evidently felt needed emphasizing. Moll stressed that she and the rest could keep the idea of the theatre going in Jones' absence, but that it takes more than an idea to get the theatre created. Moll pragmatically advised Jones:

. . . forget what the world expects us to do [a phrase they had all bandied about], forget scripts (as far as the public is concerned), forget everything but the physical problem of a building and money. . . .⁴⁶

In response to Joanna Albus' recent suggestion that the board

⁴⁶Letter to Margo Jones and Joanna Albus, Feb. 19, 1946.

and committees must be reorganized,⁴⁷ Moll agreed that reorganization was necessary but stressed that they must first reorganize themselves. Moll got to the crux of the situation when she explained that she and the rest of the staff could function only on a limited basis in the eyes of the Dallas boardmembers because,

. . . Everything here is in terms of Margo no matter how you add it up. . . . Every thought, everything we do, everything must be interpreted in terms of Margo, . . . any real and lasting good will only come when it comes directly from her. . . .⁴⁸

On February 26, Jones responded in "100%" agreement with June Moll's conclusions. She explained that she and Albus had been thinking along the same lines but that Moll had "managed to get it into a much clearer and more articulate form." Jones recognized the necessity of reorganizing the entire situation, beginning with themselves, and that,

. . . I must quit being this stimulating soul and become 100% business manager and hire the highest powered real business manager in the country . . .

Jones lamented the fact that she was unable to make it possible for them all to function on the same basis, and faced up to the reality that she was the only one who could break the "deadlock" situation in which Theatre '46 was presently mired. Regarding the building situation, Jones

⁴⁷Letter, Margo Jones and Joanna Albus to June Moll, Feb. 13, 1946.

⁴⁸Letter to Margo Jones and Joanna Albus, Feb. 19, 1946.

wrote:

. . . I know that none of us are equipped to get a building built but that I am equipped to get someone to get it done. . . .

Jones recognized that she, and she alone, could get things moving again in Dallas for the very basic reason that it was in Margo Jones the people of Dallas put their faith and, as June Moll so wisely noted, these people were not going to accept any "substitutes for the real article".⁴⁹

June Moll reaffirmed her faith in the Dallas project, in her lengthy letter of February 19, 1946, but, nevertheless, she and her husband, James Moll, felt that with the war over they had to leave Dallas to go their own way, exerting their own individualities, and seeking their own recognition.⁵⁰ When Jones, and Albus, returned to Dallas after On Whitman Avenue opened, June Moll apprised her of all matters relating to the Dallas project. Margo Jones knew and appreciated the sincerity of June Moll's statement, "Just know that as hard as you are thinking, talking, believing in this theatre, we are too."⁵¹ For over a year, wherever the Molls were, Margo Jones kept them informed of all problems and progress of the Dallas theatre.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Subsequently, June Moll directed and acted at the University of Texas at Austin and, in the nineteen-sixties, was a librarian in the Rare Books Room at the university. James Moll was professor of acting and a director on the drama faculty at Texas for over thirty years, and was made Professor Emeritus in 1979. He has directed in regional theatre for many years and continues to do so.

⁵¹Letter, June Moll to Margo Jones and Joanna Albus, Feb. 19, 1946.

In the summer of 1946, and for some months to come, there were more problems than progress. Jones stopped referring to the project as Theatre '46 because it had become "practically a joke",⁵² and reverted to using the name Dallas Theatre, Inc. The word "discouragement" did not have a place in the Jones lexicon, but the situation in Dallas tested even her inordinate optimism.

Jones was now receiving many offers to direct in New York, yet she knew she must stay in Dallas if her dream of a professional repertory company was to be realized. For some time, she had been under contract to the producer Haila Stoddard to direct Edwin Justus Mayer's Sunrise in My Pocket, which Jones had premiered in Houston five years previously. In June 1946, Erskine Caldwell contacted Jones to direct a musical based on his novel Tragic Ground, which Jones declined due to her agreement with Stoddard.⁵³ By the end of June 1946, Jones learned that Sunrise had been postponed⁵⁴ (the play was never to reach Broadway). But by mid-July, despite June Moll's caution that Jones remain in Dallas until the building situation was resolved, Margo Jones accepted Maxwell Anderson's offer to direct his play, Joan of Lorraine, wiring that she had worked out her Dallas

⁵²Letter, Margo Jones to Frederic McConnell, Aug. 24, 1946.

⁵³Telegram, May 6, 1946; letter, Margo Jones to Erskine Caldwell, June 4, 1946.

⁵⁴Letter, Margo Jones to Audrey Wood, June 29, 1946.

schedule to accomodate the latest Broadway venture.⁵⁵

Why was she again leaving Dallas after so soon returning to her disintegrating dream, knowing she was the only one who could put it back together and get it moving again? She knew and had written her staff that Dallas was not concerned with her work on Broadway. They wanted her there. Doubtless she admired Anderson's play and cannot be faulted for wanting to direct the latest work of one of America's foremost playwrights. The fact that Ingrid Bergman was to make her American stage debut as Jeanne D'Arc would not be enticement enough to lure Jones back to Broadway, had she not liked the play to begin with. At this most difficult of times in the mounting of her repertory theatre, there had to be a reason greater than Maxwell Anderson, Broadway, and Ingrid Bergman combined to make her leave Dallas. There was.

Margo Jones went to New York in September, preceded by Joanna Albus, who was to play the role of St. Margaret in the Anderson play. On September 23, Jones wrote her mother, who was visiting her sister Stella in Amarillo, about having dinner with Maxwell Anderson and his wife at their home in the country:

⁵⁵Draft of telegram, July 18, 1946.

. . . I thought of you as I drove through the very beautiful green woods and the sun was slanting down through the trees. It was almost an ethereal light. I am sure that if you had seen it, you would have wanted to paint it. . . .

The country offered tranquility that counteracted rehearsals in New York.

The theatre/housing shortage was still being felt a year after the end of the war, and the Lorraine company was forced to rehearse in a theatre that housed another play on a stage set for that production. On matinee days, the company rehearsed in the lounge of still another theatre.⁵⁶ Ingrid Bergman, whose acting experience was limited to the camera, was insecure on the stage and unable to project her voice.⁵⁷ Moreover, she was accustomed to film directors who, generally, mold and shape screen performances and tell actors everything they must do. Margo Jones was used to directing actors who had at least some knowledge or instinct about appearing before an audience, and Bergman, at least at this point in her career, apparently had neither. The long and the short of it is, Margo Jones was unable satisfactorily to communicate direction to the star of the show. Bergman was a meticulous woman, according to Joanna Albus, and on one occasion asked Jones how to play a scene

⁵⁶Letter, Margo Jones to her family, Oct. 10, 1946.

⁵⁷Larsen interview, Joanna Albus, Oct. 25, 1980.

in which she was having difficulty. Jones replied, "Don't play it, feel it."⁵⁸ Ingrid Bergman was in need of more specific direction than that.

In the final weeks of rehearsal and out-of-town tryout, Maxwell Anderson fired Margo Jones as director of his play.⁵⁹ (Albus was also fired.) On November 10, 1945, Jones responded to Anderson, assuring him of her cooperation and "What you consider is for the good of the play I will do and will follow your suggestions of procedure."⁶⁰ The "procedure" was for Jones to appear at the final run-through and New York opening on November 18, 1946. Her name stayed on the programme as director, her salary and percentage remained intact, but Sam Wanamaker, who appeared in the play, took over the direction in the final two weeks.

⁵⁸Quoted by Joanna Albus. Other people have quoted this same or similar statement by Jones in other productions. It annoyed some and didn't bother others. Jones wrote her family, Oct. 10. 1946, that another actor in the Lorraine company, who was also a director, Romney Brent, took her aside and told her that he liked her directing methods.

⁵⁹I have never uncovered a specific stated reason for his action. However, Jones' problems in this play seem directly in relationship to Bergman. Since Anderson waited until almost the last moment to fire Jones, it would seem that at least two people, Anderson and Bergman, panicked. It is not one of Anderson's most successful plays. For all details concerning Bergman, I have relied largely on the testimony of Joanna Albus who was present at every rehearsal and often sat next to Jones. While pointing out Jones' deficiencies in communication with Bergman, Albus summed up the whole situation by saying, "It was a beautiful experience, but a lousy play." Further light was recently shed on the situation when I spoke with the veteran Broadway director and stage manager, Jerry Adler, who said, "Bergman never liked strong women."

⁶⁰There were several drafts of this letter stapled to the final copy, from which the statement was taken. The letter reveals Jones' professionalism and outer calm in especially difficult situations that affect her personally and deeply.

In two reviews, Brooks Atkinson responded favorably to Margo Jones' direction of Joan of Lorraine.⁶¹ She also received warm letters of congratulation and praise from Lee Simonson and Jo Mielziner, the latter writing that the changes made in the production after her departure were so "infinitesimal" that he found it difficult to identify them.⁶²

It was a time of intense personal anxiety for Margo Jones that the Joan of Lorraine fiasco only compounded. Throughout much of 1946, Jones' mother was in a state of depression and, in the early autumn while Jones was in New York, went to Amarillo to be with her sister Stella, for whom her first-born was named and whose early death left a wound that never healed. Late in August, Jones had written her family how much being with them meant to her, that they were her "anchor", and "The realization that you have a family that mean everything in the world to you gives a stability to life that can't be matched in any other way. . . ."⁶³ Writing from the Royalton two weeks later, Jones concluded a letter to her family by writing, " . . . I hope that you will know how much I love you and that I am think-

⁶¹"The Play in Review--Joan of Lorraine," New York Times, Nov. 19, 1946, p. 40; "Bergman of Lorraine," New York Times, Nov. 24, 1946, Part II, p. 1.

⁶²Letter, Margo Jones to Audrey Wood, Feb. 24, 1947, in which Jones quotes Simonson's and Mielziner's letters to her.

⁶³Dated Aug. 26, 1946.

ing of you every day and trying to be the kind of person that you want me to be."⁶⁴ In August, Jones wrote her family at least five lengthy letters of several pages each; in September the number increased; and in October, when Lorraine rehearsals were well underway, the letters were in excess of eight, all copiously detailed, as were her many letters during this same period to June Moll in Ann Arbor, Michigan. This prolific stream of correspondence, that was to never cease, seems to indicate that Jones was seeking relief from the strain she was under and, at the same time, assuring her family, especially her mother, of her deep feelings for them. From childhood, Margo Jones put her thoughts on paper, whether in notebooks, in letters, or on whatever paper was handy. Yet it was "one of the great sorrows of my life," as Jones phrased it, that she believed her thoughts came "out on paper so dead."⁶⁵

The seemingly static situation in Dallas was, of course, paramount among the problems confronting Margo Jones. After Joan of Lorraine, she was to experience frustration that was to increase after her return to Dallas. Her mother's return from Amarillo relieved part of her anxiety

⁶⁴Letter, Sept. 9, 1946.

⁶⁵Letter, Margo Jones to Edward Meyerson, Jan 20, 1947. Meyerson was an aspiring playwright whom Jones was, at this time, trying to get a job in New York as a play-reader.

and, wearied by the recent events in New York, Jones sought relaxation and comfort with her family, spending Christmas 1946 with them in Livingston. Jones' anxieties and feelings of discontent were seldom visible to others, yet Miss Pearl provides almost non-existent evidence of her daughter's sense of insecurity that Christmas 1946:

Precious Margie, an extra precious moment in memory to Mother is that last sweet smile when you told me to really kiss you like I ment [sic] it. I had hesitated as you had your lipstick all just so carefully done. I knew if my mother heart [sic] kissed my lovely child's dear cheeks and her pretty lips the lipstick would be all disheveled--and on my lips in place of yours. Oh, how I longed to hold you tight against my lonely old heart and kiss you again & again to try to make up for the hundreds of times I had longed for you.⁶⁶

The weekend following the dawn of 1947, Jones went to New Orleans for a visit with Tennessee Williams that further uplifted her sagging spirits as she "went to ballet--drank a lot--talked to a lot of people--danced a lot and talked to Tennessee for hours . . ." More exciting to Margo Jones than the social life, she read two new plays of Williams that he was still working on. One of them was then called "Poker Night" or "Paper Lantern"; the other title was not mentioned, but Jones considered one "as good as the other--both wonderful--".⁶⁷ (The unnamed play is

⁶⁶Letter, Dec. 30, 1946. The entire letter is an attempt on the mother's part to communicate understanding and concern for her daughter.

⁶⁷Letter, Margo Jones to Edward Meyerson, Jan 20, 1947.

almost certainly Summer and Smoke.) Jones was always stimulated by reading Williams' plays because " . . . the boy can write--whatever it is is what makes me want to do the kind of theatre job that I want to do-- . . ." ⁶⁸

With renewed vigor, Margo Jones wrote her family on January 22, 1947, a lengthy letter detailing the problems with which she was coping in Dallas, expanding on what she had told them while in Livingston. She wrote them that while she was "not trained in the trading or real estate or business finance fields", she was nevertheless learning about them. ⁶⁹ She also indicated to her family that she had set the date of February 11, 1947, as when she would present solutions to the board of the problems besetting them.

Jones wrote the Molls an extraordinary " . . . account of 'THE AMAZING EVENING OF THE NIGHT OF FEBRUARY 11th, 1947'--two years since a certain night at Mrs. McDermott's--Feb. 11, 1945." ⁷⁰ In this indeed amazing letter, Jones stated that her object was "finality"--meaning,

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹In less formal language to Edward Meyerson, Jan. 20, 1947, Jones referred to her Dallas dealings as "horse traiding[sic] and hatchet real estate carrings[sic] on" Jones was always less careful about typing and spelling when corresponding with friends, whereas she was usually careful about such matters in letters to her family.

⁷⁰The letter was written either that night or the next day.

. . . put a period on the whole thing legally by the vote of our board or put a period on the present procedures and turn a new leaf with the election of officers, the assumption of responsibility by these officers and the statement of building (since it is now proved that that is the only way to have a place to play). . . .

Jones was presently at loggerheads with Eugene McDermott, president of the board, but she was "determined to fight the battle solely on the Texas front . . . turning down all future lures in the form of directorial offers."⁷¹ Margo Jones was also fighting for her very life in the theatre as she realized that her career was at stake because belief in her as a nationally recognized theatre person was fused to her ability to make her dream-plan a reality. She knew well, as she would write in her book, that if one was to accomplish a goal, "Dreams and ideals must be combined with practical thought and action, . . ."⁷² Jones knew it was the time to apply, to herself, her adopted motto: Put up or shut up.⁷³ Therefore, on this "amazing evening," Jones was in top performance as she rose to the fight:

⁷¹Clay Bailey, "Margo Jones to Resume Fight for Theater," Dallas Times-Herald, Dec. 1, 1946.

⁷²Theatre-in-the-Round, p. 3.

⁷³Ibid., p. 52.

. . . Gene McDermott was determined that he was going to run the meeting and I was just as determined that I was. We both stood up ready to call the meeting to order and I out stood him and ran the meeting in a real filibuster [sic] way-- . . . I held the floor almost solid for two hours and report [sic] on buildings until I was red in the face and people asked questions and enthusiasm waxed high and I told them that I had planned above everything else for this meeting to have finality . . . but that due to the fact that we had neither a quorum of our exec. bd., our oper. committee nor our board of trustees that voting would not be legal and that I could not present my recommendations without a quorum. . . .⁷⁴

Jones was not able to achieve the finality she sought that night, but she was able to secure pledges from the sixteen members present that they would attend the meeting scheduled for the next week, and those present were again enthused about the project which Jones, that "amazing evening," was able to spark into movement again. The next meeting was scheduled for February 23 wherein her objectives were to be achieved once and for all, or "this final or I quit."⁷⁵

Battle, or friction of any kind, was not really Margo Jones' forte. Diplomacy was her style. She was always uncomfortable with dissension. But if something was important to her and there was no other way to accomplish her goals, she could rise to the occasion and fight to the

⁷⁴Margo Jones to June and Jim Moll, Feb. 11 or 12, 1947.

⁷⁵Ibid.

finish. This is what she did in Dallas. There was fault on all sides: people did not do what Jones expected of them, or move as quickly as she wanted; her extended absences caused delays. It was an exhausting struggle to establish a theatre, one which Jones came perilously close to abandoning. She announced this intention privately in a letter to Audrey Wood on February 24, 1947, the day after the second meeting in which she was still not able to accomplish all that she desired. Problems with her board and, most especially, the difficult task of acquiring a building seemed insurmountable. She wrote Wood that although her dream of a professional repertory theatre was still intact and she still wanted to see high calibre professional theatre in every large city in America, " . . . I now know beyond a shadow of a doubt why such theatres do not exist . . . " She further said to Wood that the only possible solution to the American theatre situation (i.e., commercialism) was ANTA's plan for a national theatre. Jones' spirits, seldom low, had now plunged abysmally.

But not for long. Fortitude was at the very core of Margo Jones' being. She knew that she, and she alone, must resolve the business of securing a theatre building. She knew that she, and she alone, could solve the problem. She began to hark back to her Houston days. When she had needed an air-conditioned space in which to present her summer productions, she had talked one hotel management after another into letting her use space in their establishments.

It worked then, it could work now. So she again seized upon the idea of the hotels, this time one to house Theatre '47, where productions could be presented in the round, though she would continue to look for a permanent structure. Jones had now rallied and wrote Audrey Wood of her revived intentions, telling her to forget the previous letter because "I will not let this thing whip me . . ." ⁷⁶

It was announced on March 23, 1947 that Theatre '47 would finally open in an air-cooled hotel ballroom. ⁷⁷ Only a few days later, however, near the end of March, Jones found a small stucco and glass brick air-conditioned building located on the Dallas fairgrounds. It had been constructed in 1936 by the Magnolia Petroleum Company for the Texas Centennial. It was presently under lease to the Gulf Oil Corporation who donated it to Theatre '47 until their lease expired, after which it was obtained from the State Fair Association and the City Park Department for a nominal charge. ⁷⁸ The building then was converted to an arena theatre with a seating capacity of one hundred and ninety-eight by Theatre '47's newly hired technical director, Joseph Londin. Jones had hired Londin on the recommendation of Jo Mielziner. At the time of Londin's being contracted, he was technical director at Hunter College in New York,

⁷⁶Letter, Mar. 7, 1947.

⁷⁷Clipping, Ken Hand, "Downgrade in Dramatic Art," Dallas Morning News.

⁷⁸Theatre-in-the-Round, p. 60.

from which he was granted three months leave of absence to do the work in Dallas.⁷⁹

Margo Jones had hurdled the major obstacle: finally, a building in which to house her permanent professional repertory theatre. She had kept her family informed of all stages of progress, writing them on March 29, 1947, of the acquisition of the Gulf Oil Building. The family was very supportive and wrote encouraging letters throughout this period. In March, her father, Richard Harper, wrote, " . . . should it all fall through it will not be your fault . . ."⁸⁰ Later, in June, Miss Pearl, enjoying the ringing of her telephone with well-wishers calling with congratulations because of having read publicity about "darling Margie" in the newspapers, wrote her daughter: " . . . To be sure I know you made it a success by the Power of Faithfulness--Everything comes to those who wait and rustle while they wait as Ella Wheeler Wilcox once wrote. . . ." Miss Pearl then mentioned that the Lord even blessed the Gulf Oil Corporation for providing the building for the theatre. The mother concluded the letter, writing:

Little did I think when going thro' it in 1936 that today you would play the role there that you now have. 'It hath not entered into the heart of man, the things the Lord hath prepared for those

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 61. See also Wilmeth dissertation, p. 51.

⁸⁰Letter, Mar. 19, 1947.

who love and serve Him.' . . . Hold my hand just a moment, look up and smile-- Mother loves you and smiles back.⁸¹

Margo Jones indeed was rustling. Having acquired a theatre, she turned her attention toward acquiring a business manager. She hired one in April who proved unsatisfactory and replaced him with Manning Gurian whom she had met in New York during the final weeks of On Whitman Avenue. Gurian was now working for Rodgers and Hammerstein as business manager of Norman Krasna's John Loves Mary, but was granted a leave of absence for the first ten-week season of Theatre '47. On May 2, Margo Jones wrote Rodgers and Hammerstein thanking them for granting the leave, writing that she was impressed by Gurian's "judgment, imagination and ability to work with people. . . ."

Jean Baptiste Tad Adoue, III, a prominent native of Dallas whose father founded the National Bank of Commerce there, was Gurian's assistant business manager. He worked on a volunteer basis the first season after which he was put on the payroll.⁸² He was to later serve for at least one season as business manager and would, in years to come, also read new plays for Jones and make reports on them, even after moving to New York in 1950. Jones found Adoue to be someone she could always depend on and they would become close friends.

⁸¹Letter, June 7, 1947. Jones' mother usually signed her letters "Martha Pearl Collins Jones", or a variation thereof.

⁸²Frank Harland interview with Tad Adoue, Jan. 12, 1980.

In April, Jones went to New York to hire a company, leaving matters in the capable hands of Joanna Albus. Once again, Jones was away from Dallas, and though it was for business reasons in connection with the theatre as always, certain board members still would not condone her absence. Now it was Albus instead of Moll writing Jones lengthy and detailed letters of daily events concerning the theatre. Events involved problems, the most serious of which were Jones' absence for three weeks and insufficient capital. On April 22, Albus wrote Jones: " . . . as always final decisions must be made by you and therefore your place is here." Much later in the letter, she wrote: " . . . This situation here is not rosy and we must face facts. . . . Everyone is waiting to see the color of your cards."⁸³

During three weeks in New York, Jones auditioned hundreds of actors and hired a company of eight. Included in that number was Tod Andrews, who would become the most well known. Upon Jones' return to Dallas, she indeed showed the color of her cards. Theatre '47 was announced as being officially in operation and rehearsals would begin the week of May 11.⁸⁴ National attention was again focussed

⁸³Albus urged Jones to think in terms of directors in addition to herself for two reasons: 1) Jones would have more time to devote to producing and business matters, and 2) Albus believed that no one director could direct every type of play. Larsen interview, Oct. 25, 1980.

⁸⁴"Theater '47 to Go Into Rehearsal This Week," Dallas Morning News, May 11, 1947,

on Dallas with the announced opening of the arena theatre, a form that was considered innovative at the time.⁸⁵

In addition to Gurian, Adoue, and Londin, Jones' staff included: Joanna Albus, production stage manager; Marilyn Putnam, technical assistant; and Jonathan Seymour, Frank Amy, Clinton Anderson, and Jack Warden as production assistants.⁸⁶ C. H. Larson was treasurer, and Mabel Duke of Watson Associates handled public relations.

Margo Jones often sought the opinions of others, especially on plays, though she did not necessarily share the opinion or follow someone's suggestion. She was a strong woman who had her own ideas and was not easily persuaded by others, though of course she was, herself, a master at persuasion. It is possible, however, that she may have heeded the caution of Manning Gurian when he suggested that she not open Theatre '47 with Tennessee Williams' Battle of Angels.⁸⁷ It is equally possible that Jones may have already decided in her own mind against this particular play of Williams', which is more likely the case. Theatre '47 was dedicated to the production of new plays and classics

⁸⁵Later in 1947, Nina Vance would launch her Alley Theatre in Houston on a non-professional basis, but also in-the-round.

⁸⁶Jack Warden would soon become a favorite actor in Dallas before going on to a successful stage, television, and movie career.

⁸⁷Letter, Manning Gurian to Margo Jones, n. d. Almost all of Gurian's correspondence to Jones, which includes hundreds of letters, notes, telegrams, etc., lack complete dates or, in some instances, is undated.

Battle of Angels was anything but a new play; Williams was now established, and Jones doubtless saw the importance of introducing another new playwright to the world, one whom she had been encouraging for some time and one whom she could claim as having discovered in every sense of the word. She, therefore, announced that Theatre '47 would open on June 3, with Farther Off From Heaven by William Inge.⁸⁸

The premiere season of Theatre '47 included four new plays and the classic Hedda Gabler, which proved to be the season's most popular production. Heaven was followed by How Now, Hecate, by Martyn Coleman, followed by Hedda Gabler. Tennessee Williams was not excluded from this initial season. His new play, Summer and Smoke, was the fourth offering, followed by Third Cousin, by Vera Mathews. All productions were directed by Margo Jones.

The dream was finally a reality! Theatre '47 was launched after two years and four months of grueling hard

⁸⁸Jones wrote Inge in March 1947, saying she wanted to open with his play. Audrey Wood became his agent. Inge later revised Heaven and retitled it The Dark at the Top of the Stairs. It opened on Broadway on Dec. 5, 1957, after he had already achieved success with Come Back, Little Sheba, Picnic, and Bus Stop. Jones encouraged Inge's writing of Front Porch, which evolved into Picnic. Inge offered Jones Come Back, Little Sheba (letter, Inge to Jones, Jan. 5, 1949), but the Theatre Guild optioned it, precluding a Dallas production.

work. It was an unqualified success. Audiences soon grew accustomed to a fashionably dressed Margo Jones greeting them as they arrived and thanking them for coming as they left her theatre.⁸⁹ And it was unquestionably Margo Jones' theatre, though it was characteristic of her that she did not want the theatre named for her.⁹⁰ Although she had experienced difficulties with some of her board members in the formative stages of the theatre, once it was open, and until her death, the board gave her a free hand and was not disposed towards refusing her whatever she wanted.⁹¹ About this, John Rosenfield said:

No one was ever disposed to turn Margo down in anything. She was modest in her requests and courteous about them. She was very, ⁹²very big-hearted and lavish. . . .

Jones adhered to her policy of new plays, new playwrights and the classics, and also introduced to Dallas several significant works by dramatists from abroad, among them Sean O'Casey's Cock-A-Doodle Dandy and Paul Vincent Carroll's The Devil Comes From Dublin. Eleven of the plays

⁸⁹Many people spoke of this, but I am particularly indebted to Dottie Dickinson Long for sharing her memory of meeting Margo.

⁹⁰After Jones' death, it was renamed the Margo Jones Theatre.

⁹¹There is one notable exception. According to Claire Rosenfield (Cohen interview, Apr. 30, 1974), the board was not favorably disposed toward Manning Gurian and insisted upon his dismissal as business manager. The wish was granted, however reluctantly. Other people alluded to this situation.

⁹²Don Wilmeth interview, Jan. 23, 1964.

premiered at Margo Jones' theatre were later produced on Broadway.

In the summer 1947, Jones moved from "Burford Heights" into the Stoneleigh Hotel in downtown Dallas. Her quarters there continued to double as the main office of the theatre and would always house a great number of playscripts. Joanna Albus left Dallas after the initial season of Theatre '47, and by the beginning of September was in Provincetown visiting Tennessee Williams. She was soon to be an assistant stage manager in charge of music on A Streetcar Named Desire.

In his Dallas Morning News column, "The Passing Show," John Rosenfield annually honored a citizen who made significant contributions to the arts in Dallas during the preceding twelve months by bestowing the title, "Man of the Year." On December 31, 1947, Rosenfield's honor was announced in his headline:

'Man of the Year' Is A Woman:
Miss Margo Jones of Theater '47.

It was the first time that a woman was the recipient of Rosenfield's accolade.

Summer and Smoke was the first new play presented at the Dallas theatre to be produced on Broadway. Jones' Dallas production is generally acknowledged to have been far superior to the production Jones also directed on Broadway. This acknowledgement is made by people who saw both, excluding Tennessee Williams who claims he didn't like either one.

though he didn't make that claim publicly about the Dallas production until Margo Jones was dead.⁹³ Unfortunately, Jones' experience with the play was more "smoke" than "summer." Nevertheless, she loved the play from the first time she read it in New Orleans at Williams' apartment in the French Quarter. The initial contract offered to her was to produce the play only in Dallas, but Jones wanted inclusion in the contract the right of first refusal to option the play for production elsewhere. Jones wrote Audrey Wood that she had at her disposal "the possibility of a good deal of producing money in no relationship to this project here [Dallas]."⁹⁴ Jones further stated in her letter that she could offer Tennessee Williams two things no other producer-director could: 1) protect him as would no other producer, and 2) greater understanding of Williams' work than would any other director.⁹⁵

Jones was finally granted the rights she wanted to

⁹³Tennessee Williams, Memoirs (Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), pp. 91, 152.

⁹⁴Letter, May 18, 1947. On June 5, 1946, Jones' mother wrote her that oil was discovered on some of their property, though it would be awhile before they realized any profits. On July 16, 1981, Richard C. Jones explained to me that his sister, Margo, shared with her family in receipts from mineral rights granted by their father on land owned by him.

⁹⁵Letter, May 18, 1947.

Summer and Smoke. Not even Tennessee Williams could deny her passionate dedication to the play. He wrote her early in 1948 from Rome that something had happened to him during the writing of the play but that he understood how she and Joanna Albus felt about it because they "are both especially equipped by nature, with sensitive hearts and responsive souls, to get things that are only half stated and to understand the unrealized intentions, . . ." ⁹⁶ He further wrote in this letter that he put all of his despair over writing Summer and Smoke into his writing of A Streetcar Named Desire, which by then had opened in New York and was a solid success. Williams emphasized in this letter to Jones that he did not want Summer and Smoke to open in the usual eastern try-out cities--"that old Hangman's trail"--because he detested "Yankee critics." ⁹⁷ Jones complied with his wishes in this respect and tried out the play in Buffalo, Detroit, and Cleveland before opening at the Music Box Theatre in New York on October 6, 1948.

Also, earlier in 1948, Tennessee Williams wrote Donald Windham that he had tried to talk Jones out of a Broadway production of Summer and Smoke, but was unsuccessful.

⁹⁶Letter, Feb. 3, 1948. Writing over a quarter of a century later in his Memoirs, Williams wrote that Jones' genius " . . . lay, not in the direction of actors or of delicate plays." p. 153.

⁹⁷Ibid.

ful. He then did what he could "to improve the script."⁹⁸ In late May 1948, Jones met Williams in Italy, presumably to confer with him on Summer and Smoke.⁹⁹ Whatever the reason, Jones and Williams would later clash for the first time over this play. Williams did not want her to bring it into New York "too soon after Streetcar."¹⁰⁰ "Too soon" is the key phrase in attempting to understand their major disagreement. Streetcar opened in New York in December 1947, and was a resounding success. Jones doubtless felt that opening Summer and Smoke almost one year later, even though Streetcar was still playing, was not "too soon." Another disagreement centered on a casting problem. Williams, of course, had cast approval. But a problem developed with the actress cast as Rosemary, whom Williams had approved, and Jones replaced her with another actress. Jones had to have considered the problem a serious one because she would go to any lengths not to fire an actor. But Williams felt that Jones' action violated the Dramatists Guild contract.

⁹⁸Letter, Feb. 20, 1948, Tennessee Williams' Letters, p. 108.

⁹⁹I could find no stated reason for this trip which is almost mysterious. Two other strong possibilities are equally likely, however: 1) Jones simply wanted to be with Williams for a while, and/or 2) Jones simply felt the need to get away from Dallas and New York for awhile, if only on a short holiday. Jones, Williams, and his male companion went from Rome to Naples to Capri to Ischia to Paris and then to London, from whence Jones flew back to the U. S. She was gone approximately two weeks.

¹⁰⁰Letter, Oct. 28, 1948.

Jones wired Audrey Wood that she "Would like a little understanding faith and trust from my favorite author."¹⁰¹

Williams was not to be placated, however, and wrote Jones, "You are about the only person in show business whose motives I never question. But your procedure is sometimes reminiscent of the Shuberts. . . ."¹⁰² Jones' adulation of Williams was so strong that disagreement with him would be especially upsetting to her. Nevertheless, Jones had her way.

Margo Jones' production of Summer and Smoke did not rival the success of Streetcar, nor could it be termed an outright failure, running approximately six months. However, only Brooks Atkinson of the New York Times had unequivocal praise for the production,¹⁰³ though George Freedley, Ward Morehouse and Robert Coleman expressed admiration for Margo Jones' direction. Other critics, most especially Howard Barnes, were caustic in their appraisals of the play, the direction, and the production.

Williams later revised the play,¹⁰⁴ and Jones pro-

¹⁰¹Telegram, Oct. 19, 1948. It is not known exactly when Jones fired the actress, but it would seem to have been shortly after the New York opening.

¹⁰²Letter, Oct. 28, 1948.

¹⁰³"At The Theatre," New York Times, Oct. 7, 1948; "Work of Art; Author of 'Summer and Smoke' Displays Again the Gifts of the Poet," New York Times, Oct. 25, 1948.

¹⁰⁴He's never stopped revising it. It is sometimes called The Eccentricities of a Nightingale.

duced and directed it in Chicago in the autumn 1949.¹⁰⁵ Tod Andrews again played the role of John, and Katherine Balfour, who had played Alma in the Dallas production, replaced Margaret Phillips, the Alma in New York. Jones' old friend from Houston, Ray Walston, played Archie Kramer in New York, with Jack Warden playing the role in Chicago.

Jones was always reticent about the 1952 production of Summer and Smoke, directed by José Quintero, which she saw, and which marked a progressive turning point in the stature of off-Broadway production.

Margo Jones was to divide her time between Dallas and the east coast with two productions in 1950 that had premiered in Dallas. One was Sari Scott's An Old Beat-Up Woman that Jones took to New Haven and Boston where it closed in late January. The other, in April, was Southern Exposure, by Owen Crump, very much a regional drama that lacked universality but which nonetheless was a tremendous popular success in Dallas. John Rosenfield did not deny the production's popularity, but had serious doubts about the casting and interpretations of the two juvenile roles.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵On May 23, 1980, I chatted with Howard Stein, then chairman of the drama department at the University of Texas at Austin, who told me that a few years ago when he was at Yale, Tennessee Williams was a guest speaker. A student asked Williams about Margo Jones' direction of Summer and Smoke, to which Williams replied in words to the effect that Jones was a woman and what would a woman know about directing. Stein reported that this response immediately turned the student audience quite cold and against Mr. Williams.

¹⁰⁶"Man of the World Instead of Youth With Bounce. . . . Second Guessing Margo," Dallas Morning News, Apr. 18, 1950.

Rosenfield warned Jones not to take the play to New York. Not heeding his advice, Jones co-produced the play in New York with Manning Gurian and Tad Adoue. The cast included two character actresses from the Dallas company: Mary Finney, who was to go on to a successful career on Broadway and in Hollywood, and Betty Greene Little, whom Jones first worked with in Houston. Brooks Atkinson's criticism concurred with John Rosenfield's, and the play closed within a month.¹⁰⁷

Jones' activities expanded beyond that of producing and directing in 1950-1951. During the summer of 1950, she wrote Theatre-in-the-Round, with editorial assistance from Theodore Apstein. Published in May 1951, by Rinehart and Company, it was considered for many years the bible of arena staging. Also in 1950-1951, Jones initiated a lecture series sponsored by the Dallas theatre. Speakers included Tallulah Bankhead, George Freedley, and Rosamond Gilder. Jones, herself, embarked on the lecture circuit after signing with the Columbia Lecture Bureau in 1951. She spoke on the American theatre and expounded on her plan to establish twenty theatres throughout the country, as set forth in her book,¹⁰⁸ but to which she first alluded in her May 20, 1944, letter to the Rockefeller Foundation. [See Appendix, p. 262; II.]

¹⁰⁷"Southern Exposure," New York Times, Sept. 27, 1950.

¹⁰⁸Theatre-in-the-Round, Chap. 6, pp. 186-201.

Further evidence of Margo Jones' branching out involved the application of her theatre ideas to the still-new medium of television as a means of aiding "the fabulous invalid." In 1951, Jones began work on a plan in which she would present live performances in the round, televised before a live audience. This plan was called "Discovery '52 Television Series."¹⁰⁹ In preparation, Jones studied television directing in New York throughout most of the summer 1951.¹¹⁰ The week before Jones was to be introduced on the General Electric television program, she received some very disturbing news from her brother Richard and wife Bea in Houston.

Their father was seriously ill. Surgery was scheduled. On November 10, 1951, Richard Harper Jones died at the age of seventy-one. He was buried the next day in Forest Hills Cemetery in Livingston. As a leading citizen, his death was reported on page one of the Polk County Enterprise which gave extensive coverage to his life and work.¹¹¹

Margo Jones had undertaken lecturing as a means of informing large areas of the country about her theatre plans. This would necessitate frequent absences that would also prepare the Dallas theatre for even longer periods of time

¹⁰⁹Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library.

¹¹⁰Don Wilmeth writes in some detail about this in his dissertation, pp. 133-134.

¹¹¹Nov. 15, 1951.

when she would be away implementing her plans. These absences became feasible when in the autumn 1951 Jones hired Ramsey Burch as associate director. He was to assume much of the directing responsibility thereafter. Burch's wife, Violet, also joined the staff as Jones' assistant.¹¹²

Margo Jones chose San Francisco as the city in which to propagate a second permanent professional repertory theatre because of its receptivity to the arts. She spent large segments of times in 1952 and 1953 in San Francisco, meeting with cultural and civic-minded citizens and researching sites for a theatre. In the end, she met with the same major problems she encountered in Dallas in 1945 and 1946: real estate and fund-raising. By September 1954, Jones discontinued the plan and the charter was nullified.¹¹³

Margo Jones was welcomed back to Dallas in late summer 1954. Despite her deep disappointment over the failure in San Francisco, she was happy to be with her company that now included, in addition to the Burches: James Fringle, who started with Theatre '51 as assistant to the designer and was now technical director and production manager; his wife, Rita, playreader, and in Chicago during The Glass Menagerie, was the girl hired to monitor Laurette Taylor's

¹¹²From this point on, Jones' correspondence revealed less of her own personality and assumed a more businesslike tone as Violet Burch assumed the enormous task of handling voluminous communications.

¹¹³Details of the San Francisco venture may be found in the Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library.

nightly nipping; Charles Braswell, whom Jones "raised" from a technical assistant to one of the most popular actors in the history of the Dallas theatre; Freddie Hoskins, recently promoted to stage manager, whom Jones decided would be in theatre the rest of his life;¹¹⁴ Louis Veda Quince, whom Jones first knew at the Southwestern School of Drama, and for whom she had great compassion;¹¹⁵ Vern Armstrong, business manager; Mary Dolan, treasurer and assistant business manager; Zelma Naylor, assistant box office treasurer who presently, in her eighties, is manager of the box office at the Dallas Theatre Center; Frank DeLuca, house manager; and Darrell Stewart, production assistant. Other actors, such as Martha Bumpas, James Field, Richard Shepard, Louise Latham, and others would at times be members of the regular company or would be cast as needed or when available. Jones mothered them all, as she did all of her companies. She was characteristically always concerned with helping people.

In late summer 1954, Jones' beloved friend, Joanna Albus, who with June Moll had worked so indefatigably to make the Dallas theatre come to life, was in need of help. She had worked two and one-half years on A Streetcar Named

¹¹⁴He remained with the Dallas theatre until after Jones' death, then worked at the Arena Stage in Washington, D. C., after which he became production stage manager at the Hartford Stage, a position he has held for many years.

¹¹⁵Quince was an alcoholic.

Desire in New York,¹¹⁶ after which she went back to Houston and legally changed her name from Schreiber to Albus. She went into partnership with William Rozen, whom she had known from the Houston Community Players days and who legally changed his last name from Rosen. (They didn't think "Schreiber and Rosen" would look attractive on a marquee.) Together, they founded the Playhouse Theatre, built as an arena theatre, which opened in 1951 and functioned successfully as a fully professional theatre for three years. But in 1954, the theatre was experiencing dire financial difficulties and the doors had been closed. That was all Margo Jones needed to hear. She gathered her Dallas company and transported her production of Sea Change, by William Case, from Dallas to Houston to give a benefit performance that would hopefully help to reopen the doors of the Playhouse. It didn't in the long run, but Jones' efforts did succeed in arresting the theatre's demise. Two performances took place that Sunday night, August 22, 1954, at the Playhouse Theatre, only one of which was Sea Change. Let Hubert Roussel of the Houston Post tell about the other one:

¹¹⁶Subsequently, Tennessee Williams wanted her to direct Streetcar, with Tallulah Bankhead as Blanche, in Florida, but Albus declined.

. . . It was plain talk--about as plain, homely and direct as the kind of talk you would hear over the cracker barrel in a country store. . . . But it probably got a reaction in this case that no other message would have stirred--as you could see by the way all those people sat up and wrote pledges of support for the Playhouse.

Miss Jones' method of stimulating a crowd to unusual enthusiasm about the theatre is an accomplishment I do not try to explain. I abandoned the effort many years ago, when she was operating in Houston. It is a gift, as some people are gifted for playing the violin or singing folk songs in a manner that makes them actually touching and dramatic.

The obvious qualities that she brings to the role of promoter are two: An absolute belief in the value and community service of the theatre, and a way of stating her conviction that is so thoroughly genuine, so completely lacking in theatrical chi-chi or pretensions of 'smart talk,' that it often takes the breath out of an audience taught to expect suave and polite nothings when 'culture' is up for discussion.

. . . The so-called sophistication of show-business has never rubbed off on this lady. She knows a very great deal about the drama and the practical business of production; she retains the excitement of the newcomer who is meeting it all for the first time, and an unvarnished vernacular that a one-gallus farmer would understand with the greatest of ease.

. . . In the artificial world of the theatre, Margo Jones has remained as simple, plain and unaffected as 'deep Texas' itself--and perhaps that is why she has got along so much better than most theatre producers who have tried, in this particular territory, to evoke the manners and atmosphere of the Lido.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷"How to Talk Theatre Without Chi-Chi: Some Notes on People, etc.", Aug. 24, 1954.

Margo Jones and company returned to Dallas. She would write and thank her brother Richard, Bea, and niece Judy for attending the Playhouse Theatre the night she gave her "little speech", saying how much it meant to her having family present who "gave me a sense of courage and emotional security."¹¹⁸ Margo Jones did not know when she wrote them that soon she would be honored at an occasion where, for once, she could be silent.

In November 1954, Eugene McDermott gave a luncheon at the Adolphus Hotel in Dallas, honoring Margo Jones and Theatre '54. The large gathering of invited guests included John Rosenfield, who was the master of ceremonies, the playwright Howard Lindsay, the principal speaker, John Wray Young, director of the Shreveport Little Theatre, who delivered a testimonial speech, and dozens of Dallas business people and other prominent citizens. The mayor of Dallas presented Margo Jones with a plaque of gratitude that would be placed in the theatre lobby, and scores of congratulatory messages from theatre luminaries throughout the United States.

Autumn 1954 brought events that stimulated and excited a Margo Jones who had so recently, so privately and for so long been enervated by anxiety so personal that few

¹¹⁸Letter, Aug. 28, 1954.

people were aware of it. Margo Jones was never one to wear her heart on her sleeve. How could one who had devoted her life to helping others continue to do so if she herself asked for help? She would seek help for a theatre, for a cause, but she would never seek help for herself personally. For all her gregariousness, Margo Jones was a very private person.

Her revived spirit was tantalized when she received a playscript from Tad Adoue who had scrawled on an accompanying note: "I double-dog dare you to do it."¹¹⁹ She read the play immediately, then reached for the telephone to call the agent Harold Freedman in New York to acquire the rights. Freedman reportedly said, "You don't want to do this play, Margo. They'd crucify you down there in the Bible Belt." She met this new challenge with, "Exactly why I want to do it."¹²⁰ The play was Inherit The Wind. The authors, of course, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee. They were contacted and met Margo Jones in Rosamond Gilder's Gramercy Park apartment in New York. Jones told them how much she loved the play, that she wanted to do it right away, and

¹¹⁹Harland interview with Tad Adoue, Jan. 12, 1980.

¹²⁰Jerome Lawrence, Actor: The Life and Times of Paul Muni (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1974), pp. 317-318. Quotations may be found on p. 318.

asked them if they would come to Dallas to work on it with her. The play having been rejected by every major Broadway producer, two elated playwrights responded affirmatively.¹²¹

Inherit the Wind exploded into life the night of January 10, 1955. The theater rocked. We all went back to Margo's apartment at the Stoneleigh and waited for the reviews. Margo made everybody in the room read John Rosenfield's and Virgil Miers' incredibly enthusiastic notices out loud over and over again. And then she kicked off her shoes and danced and sang in the center of the floor with tears running down her cheeks.

Every divinity student at Southern Methodist University was assigned to see the play. We still call Tad Adoue God-Pappy. We began the Margo Jones Award to honor Margo's memory and salute annually anybody who can match her daring in the burning of new plays and playwrights. . . .

This is Jerome Lawrence's account¹²² of his and Lee's play that was the most successful production in the history of Margo Jones' theatre and the most successful play to emanate from her Dallas theatre. It was presented on Broadway in late spring the same year, 1955, produced by Herman Shumlin in association with Margo Jones, directed by Shumlin. It was an immediate Broadway hit that ran several years. The

¹²¹Ibid. Also, Carole Cohen interview with Jerome Lawrence, Jan. 6, 1975, Oral History Collection, SMU.

¹²²Ibid., p. 318.

play was also the climax in the career of the reclusive Paul Muni who metamorphosed the role of Henry Drummond into a personal triumph.

With Inherit The Wind, Margo Jones' theatrical life (and she had almost no other) had in a certain way come full circle. The substance of the play concerns a young science teacher who is on trial for having taught Darwin's theory of evolution, and has, therefore, a setting in which Jones received so much early theatrical inspiration--the courtroom.

There was to be an ironic footnote to the history of this most successful play. Margo Jones, like the young science teacher, would find herself in a courtroom. On May 31, 1955, Herman Shumlin filed an injunction in Dallas against Margo Jones when he found out that she was repeating her production of Inherit The Wind while the play was running in New York. Shumlin's position was that Jones had no right to do this.¹²³ Jones' position, presented by her Dallas lawyers, Tom Knight and Sol Goodell, was that every contract for plays presented at her theatre specified unlimited use of the work in repertory within the season. Further, due to the success of the Dallas production, its repetition had been announced in trade papers and New York newspapers as early as January.¹²⁴ The judge in the case

¹²³Arthur Gelb, "Shumlin Disputes with Co-Sponsor," New York Times, May 30, 1955.

¹²⁴John Rosenfield, "Trial to be Tried at 9 a.m. Tuesday," Dallas Morning News, May 31, 1955, Part II, p. 8.

decided in favor of Margo Jones, and Inherit The Wind played to its previously sold-out houses at Theatre '55.

Inherit The Wind marked the zenith of Margo Jones' career.

In less than two months, she would be dead.

EPILOGUE

In the spring of 1946, in the last weeks of Margo Jones' work on On Whitman Avenue, something happened to her that she had never experienced before. At least, not as seriously and certainly not as intensely. Quite simply, Margo Jones fell in love. Her long search for a business manager led to Manning Gurian, and when she found him, she not only hired him, she fell in love with him. And, for awhile, Gurian was very much in love with her. They were approximately the same age, and pictures reveal him to be a very handsome man. He worked in theatre management, serving as business manager for On Whitman Avenue. From the beginning of their relationship, they had to face the problem of being apart much of the time. His work was in New York where he was known in the theatre world, if not firmly established. He was struggling, as all theatre people do, for a life with some financial security. Jones, of course, worked only intermittently in New York, while trying to create her Dallas theatre and twenty like it throughout the country.

Margo Jones had never had time for a lasting romantic involvement because, of course, all of her adult life was inextricably tied to the theatre. Certainly, she had suitors, most notably Arthur Koch, Jr., for whom she genuine-

ly cared--but not to the point of marriage.¹ Interestingly, Jones once told Jim and Rita Pringle that the only man she could ever marry was Tennessee Williams.² She said that probably because they had so much in common. Aside from the obvious fact that they were both in and of the theatre, they both were southerners with strong family ties and mothers who were dominant but different influences in their lives. As many people observed, Jones loved to "baby" Williams. Even as people were idolatrous of Margo Jones, she was of Williams. But she was not "in love" with him, and, indisputably, she was too sensitive a person not to have thought she had disappointed him after Summer and Smoke. That he seems to have turned against her after that doubtless contributed to her deep despair of several years' duration.

By the time Jones was working around the clock and burning the proverbial candle at both ends as she struggled to create the Dallas theatre, in the year she turned thirty-five, there is tangible evidence that she was growing lonely. She wanted someone with whom she could share the rest of her life. Margo Jones had never liked being alone. She was by

¹Arthur Koch, Jr. married Fern Goodman in 1947. When I met them on July 2, 1979, at their home in Dallas, Fern Koch, although she didn't like her voice recorded on tape, was enormously helpful in prodding her husband to share some of his more personal reminiscences of Margo Jones.

²Larsen interview, James Pringle, Jan. 26, 1980.

nature gregarious, and if she could have stayed awake twenty-four hours a day, she would have. As it was, she required little rest and could take a five-minute nap and awaken completely refreshed.³ Those five minutes bought her, say, five more working hours. There was reason for calling her the "dynamo" and the "Texas Tornado." But she did not like spending her waking hours alone. In her Houston days, she would rehearse her company until two or three in the morning and expect them to stay up two or three hours after rehearsal to talk theatre. Similar situations were the rule in Austin and, most certainly, Dallas. By his own admission, she wore Tennessee Williams out. She even had Jim and Rita Pringle move nearer to the Stoneleigh so that she could drop in whenever she felt the need, and even once entered their bedroom through a window in the middle of the night when they were asleep and did not hear her knocking. Margo Jones wanted to discuss a script she had just read, and the three of them talked until dawn.⁴ The instances are endless. In all likelihood, Jones did not know for many years that she was lonely, but by the time she reached her mid-thirties, she very much desired a private

³Many people referred to her napping on the floor between the seats of the Dallas theatre. Joanna Albus, however, was the most explicit about her five-minute naps. Larsen interview, Oct. 25, 1980.

⁴Larsen interview, James Pringle, Jan. 26, 1980.

life and someone with whom she could share it. The depths of her loneliness, her love of Manning Gurian and her concern for her work were revealed in a poignant series of personal and private notes written for herself alone.⁵

Writing in 1946, when she was in an abyss of private despair and loneliness, Margo Jones analyzed her life in twelve handwritten pages and grappled with her loss of faith, writing on the second page:

Real trouble. Joy gave out of work
because no chance of personal satisfaction
which came two ways--thru
job well done & through sharing it
with someone you love.

On the fifth page, she noted, "I have always loathed people losing their ideals as they grow older." On the tenth page, titled "Margo Must", she indicated the absolute necessity of keeping her sense of humor while recognizing that some sacrifice was going to have to be made:

- 1) Sacrifice personal life to cause.
- 2) Take chance on all beliefs & personal life.
- 3) Try to make the 2 work out together.

On the eleventh page she expressed a fear of failure, but "I've got one chance of greatness in the world and it's to prove that each large town can have prof. theatre." On the

⁵These undated notes were found in Jones' personal and private files to which it is highly unlikely that anyone heretofore has had access, outside of her immediate family.

twelfth and last page, she cautioned herself: "I must have a clear calm peaceful mind about all this."

From 1946 through 1952, Margo Jones contended with her most intimate problems, keeping the struggle so private that not even her family was fully aware of her personal crisis. There were signs, however, of which some were perceptive. Her mother sensed something at Christmas, 1946. Bea Jones noticed that her sister-in-law seemed "depressed and disillusioned" when she returned from seeing Tennessee Williams in Italy in 1948.⁶ On this trip, even Williams observed a change in her, writing Donald Windham:

Margo's visit has been a strange one.
I would not think it possible that
anyone could react as little to Italy
as she has. If you tell her something
is beautiful she agrees with you with-
out even turning her head to look at
it . . .⁷

By 1948, the Dallas theatre had been launched and Jones' concern for it never lessened. Other matters caused her introspection, not the least of which was her affair with Manning Gurian. They communicated regularly by telephone and through correspondence whenever they were apart. It is clear that they were very much in love. It is a measure of Margo Jones' discretion and sense of privacy that the seriousness of the affair was not common knowledge.

⁶ Bea Jones told me this on Feb. 10, 1981, during one of our many discussions.

⁷ Tennessee Williams' Letters, p. 219.

Not even Jones' closest friend, Joanna Albus, who lived and worked with her during the first year of the affair--the year, it would seem, of greatest intensity--was fully cognizant of the extent of Jones' attachment and relationship to Gurian.⁸

It is possible, indeed highly likely, that Jones accepted Maxwell Anderson's offer to direct Joan of Lorraine in 1946 because it gave her the opportunity to be in the same city with Manning Gurian. Their need to be together was only partially solved when Gurian became business manager of the Dallas theatre, for their professional lives still required each to travel, usually separately. Their relationship began its decline after the board insisted upon his dismissal in 1949. A business partnership between them was dissolved in December 1951, when Jones received a letter from the offices of her New York lawyer, Jonas Silverstone, requesting her to sign dissolution papers.⁹

Margo Jones knew the affair was over, partially because Gurian was now going through a period of personal uncertainty. Again, Jones outlined her thoughts on paper, this time writing ideas of ways to help Gurian out of his

⁸Larsen interview, Joanna Albus, Oct. 25, 1980. Others who were aware of the affair, but perhaps not the extent of it at the time, were Bea and Richard Jones, and John and Claire Rosenfield.

⁹Letter, Michael Rechler of Silverstone & Rosenthal, Dec. 26, 1951.

dilemma that centered on his career.¹⁰ Her ideas are pervaded with the knowledge that for Gurian to feel successful, she must in no way appear responsible for that success. Above all, Jones wanted them to be together again, but felt she must not show her feelings. Nothing Margo Jones ever wrote more lucidly illustrates the depths of her romantic nature and eternal optimism than when she wrote of their affair: "I'll write a novel just the way things are going to turn out and make it come true."

While hoping for what she termed "the miracle" [of reunion] to happen, Jones maintained her usual energetic pace at a time when it had to have been enormously difficult for her. She concealed her private agony. Its only real manifestation was in occasionally drinking too much. What she was privately enduring would take its toll on her. She plunged herself into work and expanded her activities. Ironically, during this period, she would receive a postcard from Thornton Wilder, the message containing, among other remarks, the question: " . . . What amulet do you

¹⁰ Although Gurian was a business manager, he also wanted to direct and work in television; he wrote plays, one of which, Lemple's Old Man, was presented at Theatre '48. Earlier, Jones wrote a lengthy critique to Gurian of his play, God Bless Them All, and why she didn't think it was successful playwriting. Letter, Mar. 13, 1947.

use in moments of discouragement? Even Texans must have such moments. . . ." The card was dated February 18, 1950, but not mailed until April 6, 1950. Wilder was effusively admiring of Jones, thanking her for "being a Divining Rod for American drama. . . ." Wilder also explained why the card was so late being mailed. Jones cherished this communication from Thornton Wilder. She replied on April 21, that his message was not intended to be sent until April because it arrived "the very day I needed it most."¹¹

Although not a churchgoer, Margo Jones was deeply religious, a fact known by few people (Jim Pringle is one), but borne out in her letters to her family and in her most personal and private writings. Another series of her recorded thoughts are actually fourteen handwritten pages of prayers bearing the salutation: "Dear God." She expresses gratitude for the renewal of her faith and asks for guidance in helping Manning Gurian to regain his. She is concerned with being in a state of grace, and stated her firm belief in centering her energy on work. On pages 12, 13, and 14, she wrote:

. . . It is clear I must do two things.
First be myself. Second really accomplish the T.V. plan. I simply must quit all forms of moping. I must cen-

¹¹This and a few other pieces of correspondence between Wilder and Jones may be found in the Humanities Research Center, the University of Texas at Austin. There is not much there, but what is there is choice. It is regrettable that Jones and Wilder never knew each other well, for they were alike in so many personal ways.

ter my energy on work--Theatre '52, T.V. etc. . . . I have gone so long & I know for far too long thinking of him. This has been selfish & wrong. The miracle I must make--It will be you Dear God doing it--is within myself. I must start anew. Treat everything with the freshness of the years of freshness I have known. . . . I know that starting this moment a bright new reality which you bring with me will always give us all. I am grateful to you. I know that soon--as of now--all is well. I must remember others--always. . . . God, I'm going to go to sleep & awaken with a brand new world. . . .

Margo Jones and Manning Gurian, of course, were never reunited, though they remained friendly. From Jones' personal writings, it seems evident that Gurian knew her reputation would always eclipse his. There was nothing she could do about this, no matter how desperately she wished otherwise. Gurian would soon marry the actress Julie Harris, though they were later divorced.

Jones was never vindictive about anything--not even bad reviews. Further, John Rosenfield said that he knew of several instances when she knew she was being taken advantage of by a certain few actors at the Dallas theatre. Everyone urged her, including Rosenfield, to report them to Actors Equity Association, but she wouldn't for fear she would in some way harm their careers. As John Rosenfield said, "She was extremely magnanimous."¹²

¹²Wilmeth interview, Jan. 23, 1964.

Margo Jones never carried the dead weight of ill feelings toward anyone--nor was there ever a trace of bitterness in any of her most private written thoughts. Nevertheless, the disappointment of the affair with Gurian left a deep wound.

Though her faith was spiritually renewed, Margo Jones faced the future in the way she had so desperately dreaded: alone. Work consumed most of her hours and energy. As always, she maintained close contact with her family through correspondence, phone calls and visits. Parties filled the void created by Gurian's now permanent absence, and alcohol eased the pain of loneliness. In the last years of her life, she sometimes drank heavily. She was not, however, an alcoholic; rather, she was, as Jim Pringle put it, a "workaholic."¹³

She was a fastidious woman with carefully manicured nails usually painted bright red and her hair carefully done at a beauty parlor once a week. She loved beautiful and expensive clothes and usually shopped at Neiman-Marcus and A. Harris in Dallas, Bonwit-Teller and Bergdorf-Goodman in New York. She seldom wore trousers, except occasionally when rehearsing. Her red-nailed fingers chronically held an unfiltered Camel cigarette. Once Jones, John Rosenfield, and Rita Pringle attempted to curtail their habits by smoking

¹³Larsen interview, Jan. 26, 1980.

Sanos which contained little or no tobacco. Near the end of Jones' life, she smoked with elegant Alfred Orlik white paper cigarette holders.¹⁴ For two years, she drove a 1948 Cadillac around Dallas, but sold it in 1954. She was anything but a selfish person, giving lavishly of her time and expensive well planned gifts to others. She regularly gave small contributions to many charitable and fund-raising organizations, from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, to the symphony and ballet. Every member of her company was handed a personal note of gratitude from Jones on opening nights. She required the constant presence and companionship of others, and she had many friends whose names are unfortunately not included herein.

Yet, no one claims to have been her intimate friend. Close friend, yes, but never intimate. They were right. No one was. Close as Margo Jones was to so many, she maintained a guarded core of privacy that she allowed no one to invade, not even Manning Gurian. Only in her most personal and private writings is the mask of Margo Jones not in place, the guard relaxed. Outwardly, she exuded an air of invulnerability, the "Mother Courage" incarnate, allowing no one ever to protect her. It is only in these writings that her fears and human vulnerability are revealed, that the "mother" disappears and the "little girl and sister" surfaces.

¹⁴James Pringle still has Jones' last box of Orlik holders. There were three left.

Of all the people interviewed and spoken with in the course of this research, excluding Jones' family who knew her best, none was as perceptive about the persona of Margo Jones than June Moll:

I had never known a southerner, really, and I was very curious about her just as a person. . . . I think she learned very early . . . to just simply put on a mask, and by the time she was off to school, . . . that mask had become a very permanent fixture because she knew what she wanted out of life and she knew that if she was going to get it this had been successful for her. I think that's why she kept it, really, all of her life. All of her life!

.
I think she was single-minded in her pursuit of what she wanted to do, and she did a good share of it but not all. . . . But not any of those people ever could have done it by themselves, . . . and I think she could have. You see, I think it was single-mindedness that really divorced her from very human personal relationships. . . . I think she was a unique personality. She was a southern woman and some southern women . . . are steel--much more so than many northern women. I don't know how this comes about, but I've observed it over the years that this happens--some wives sometimes have this same steely quality, their charm and everything on the outside, but they are single-minded to their devotion to their family, to their home, to their name, and to something, exceeds anything I have observed in general in the north. And I think she had that vein of steel toward one single-minded goal. This is really rare. You have to give her credit for it. . . .¹⁵

¹⁵Larsen interview, July 9, 1978.

Because the life she led was wholly focussed on theatre, Margo Jones did not have time or really much interest in many other matters, except as they related to theatre or as the theatre could relate to them. Politics, for instance, interested her little or not at all. The Second World War greatly concerned her, however, as it did everyone, and she contributed to the war effort in whatever way she could. It was typical of her not to call home the day of the Japanese surrender "so that the wires could be left free for servicemen."¹⁶ Jones had a deep social conscience at a time when social consciences were not too visible in the southern United States. This seems to have been a familial influence.¹⁷ Her interest and concern for race relations was at least one reason for her wanting to direct On Whitman Avenue. Floyd McDaniel said that once "Miss Margo" told her that were her life not so involved with theatre, she would have gone to Washington to do something about the segregation laws.¹⁸ McDaniel and her family regularly attended the final dress rehearsals at the Dallas theatre, as did the Rosenfields. Further, in 1953, Jones and John Rosenfield organized a theatre for black people in cooperation with George Allen, a black Dallas

¹⁶Letter, Margo Jones to family, Aug. 18, 1945.

¹⁷There is some evidence that Richard Harper Jones was very concerned with racial injustice.

¹⁸Larsen interview, Jan. 10, 1980.

councilman. It was named The Round-Up, for which Rosenfield had a theatre designed. Jones asked William Saroyan to write a play for the group which he did. It was called The Lost Child's Fireflies, and Jones directed it. Saroyan came to Dallas and stayed throughout the rehearsal period. An integrated champagne party was held the night of the opening, a rare social event of the era. Walls Rise Up was another Round-Up production directed by Jones. A musical, it was written by Frank Duane and Richard Shannon, based on a novel by George Sessions Perry (another old friend). It played to an integrated audience, possibly the first in Dallas' history. Unfortunately, the Round-Up Theatre was short-lived. The group lost interest and, according to Claire Rosenfield, after the Supreme Court desegregation ruling in 1954, George Allen no longer wanted to associate with white people.¹⁹

Inherit The Wind was the gratifying climax to the exhausting years spent establishing the professional repertory theatre which provided a home not only for plays deemed classics, but, most especially, untried dramatic works. The Lawrence and Lee play was also one of Margo Jones' most outstanding directing achievements. After the close of its

¹⁹Carole Cohen interview, Apr. 20, 1974, and Wilmeth interview with John Rosenfield, Jan. 23, 1964. Also, Freddie Hoskins and Jim Pringle (Larsen interviews May 1, 1979 and Jan. 26, 1980, respectively) spoke of the Walls Rise Up production. Jones was dedicated to the establishment of The Round-Up Theatre, as evidenced in her letters to her family, May 5 and May 19, 1953.

repeat performances, Jones finally had some time for an activity apart from the theatre. Sadly, it was to provide the prelude to her death.

Jones received some instruction in the basics of oil painting from an artist named Joe Glasgow, who was a good friend of Jones' long-time friend, the writer William Goyen. In July 1955, after a party one night, Jones and some friends went back to her apartment at the Stoneleigh where she showed them examples of her art work.²⁰ In the course of her demonstration, oil paints were spilled on the living room carpet and possibly also on the sofa which Jones unsuccessfully attempted to remove. The evening ended, the friends departed, and Jones went to bed, arising early the next day to have the hotel management clean the spattered oil paint and to begin reading playscripts. The Stoneleigh management was unable to remove successfully the oil paint and called in professional cleaners. Jones left her apartment and returned that afternoon of a very hot July 14, 1955, after the professional cleaners had applied carbon tetrachloride, eradicating the oil paint. Jones settled down to read plays in the air-conditioned but otherwise unventilated room. She may have sat or lain upon the sofa for a time, but, as was her habit since childhood, Jones ended up reading on the floor, the carpet having been thoroughly cleaned with carbon tetrachloride. After a length of time she fell asleep.

²⁰I have intentionally omitted names of her companions that evening because sources vary as to who was with her.

Jones awakened next morning feeling not well but left the apartment to keep an appointment. In the course of the stifling hot day, she began to feel increasingly worse and, according to James Pringle, noticed discoloration on her arms and parts of her body which she dismissed as nothing serious. Arriving back at the Stoneleigh, Jones called Floyd McDaniel and asked her to come stay with her. McDaniel stayed all night, administering to "Miss Margo" and feeding her crushed ice. (One theory of her illness was that she was suffering from heat stroke, a not uncommon phenomenon during Texas summers.) Still her condition worsened, and her skin turned very red. McDaniel summoned the manager of the hotel, Vi Burch and Selma Lawther. Dr. Kronson, Jones' physician, was called and he had her admitted to St. Paul's Hospital the same day (July 15).²¹

No one realized the severity of Margo Jones' condition. She practically moved her office into the hospital room and visitors would find her sitting up in bed reading scripts. She called John Rosenfield and asked him to send a photographer to the hospital. Margo Jones never failed to recognize the value of publicity! A picture appeared in several newspapers of a smiling Margo Jones sitting up in

²¹Much has been said and written about the night of the oil painting and the onset of Jones' illness. I have depended largely on the testimonies of Floyd McDaniel (Jan. 10, 1980) and Jim Pringle (Jan. 26, 1980), and John Rosenfield and Eugene McDermott (Wilmeth interviews, Jan. 23 and Jan. 22, 1964, respectively).

bed reading new plays.²² For several days, visitors streamed through the hospital room, always to find a vibrant Margo reading and talking enthusiastically. She received flowers and well-wishing cards from friends near and far. Jones' old friend from Houston, Dr. M. J. Rauch-Baracco, learned of her illness and came to Dallas to be with her. Every effort was made by the theatre management to dispel any cause for alarm because, one, Jones' condition did not seem to warrant it, and, two, it was believed that she would recover. For those reasons, Jones' family in Houston was not informed until it was too late. By this time, Joanna Albus came to Dallas but was not allowed to see her old friend.

According to John Rosenfield, specialists were called from the Southwestern Medical Foundation. Laboratory tests revealed that Jones' vital organs were severely impaired. One consultant knew something about carbon tetrachloride and suspected this to be the cause of her illness. He left the hospital and drove to the Stoneleigh and asked to see her apartment, verifying with the hotel management that carbon tetrachloride was the cleaning agent used.²³

²²In Wilmeth's interview with John Rosenfield, he said that Jones called him back and told him not to send the photographer. However, I saw several newspaper clippings of Jones as described above.

²³Wilmeth interview, Jan. 23, 1964.

Despite severe impairment of the vital organs from the effects of carbon tetrachloride poisoning, for nine days Jones' body responded to treatment and her condition miraculously stabilized. She then developed difficulty in breathing, became disoriented, and lapsed into coma. She was ordered transferred to Parkland Memorial Hospital where she was put on artificial hemodialysis. Chemical abnormalities were rather quickly restored to normal, and Jones began to rally. But she soon experienced difficulty in breathing and developed ventricular tachycardia, fibrillation and subsequent cardiac arrest. Emergency procedures were immediately performed, including a thoractomy for the purpose of massaging her heart. All efforts to revive her failed, and Margo Jones died at eleven in the evening, July 24, 1955.²⁴

An autopsy was performed the next morning and the lengthy report stated the cause of death as "Carbon tetrachloride poisoning due to inhalation resulting in necrosis of liver, tubule and uremic pneumonities [sic]." The pathologist also stated that Jones may have absorbed a quantity of the chemical through inunction of the skin as a result of having lain upon the carpet.²⁵

²⁴All details of this paragraph were taken from Autopsy Report #A55-265, performed and prepared by Earnest Booth, M. D., Parkland Memorial Hospital, Dallas, Texas, July 25, 1955. [Courtesy of Mr. & Mrs. Richard C. Jones.]

²⁵Ibid.

It is bitterly ironic that Margo Jones was to die as a result of taking position on her lifelong-favored ensconcement, doing what she loved most: reading new and untried plays.

It is now known that not even the hardest, strongest, youngest human being could have survived the amount of carbon tetrachloride that permeated and penetrated Margo Jones' body. The Dallas Health Department, The American Institute of Cleaning and Dyeing, and other organizations launched an investigation into the uses and misuses of carbon tetrachloride at the requests of many prominent people throughout the country, among them Dick Powell, who was then president of the Screen Actors Guild.²⁶

The news of Margo Jones' unexpected death shocked all who knew her. It was broadly announced in newspapers throughout the country, often on page one. Theatre critics such as John Rosenfield, Hubert Roussel, Brooks Atkinson, and George Freedley expressed their senses of loss and bereavement for the woman who pioneered regional professional theatre in America, arena theatre in the southwest, and who played the role of patron saint of the playwright.

²⁶Various newspaper clippings, and letter, Vi Burch to Mr. & Mrs. Richard C. Jones, Aug. 15, 1955. Note: carbon tetrachloride as a cleaning agent was then in wide use throughout the country. The only known city at that time to have banned its use for cleaning purposes is Boston, Mass., as a result of a similar investigation. Jones' accidental death caused by this chemical is believed to be unprecedented in Dallas. It is further believed that the chemical was banned nationwide as a cleaning substance as a result of Jones' death.

On July 31, 1955, John Rosenfield's tribute to "Margo Jones: Theatre Pioneer" appeared on the first page of the Sunday theatre section of the New York Times. Margo Jones would have been pleased that on the same page on the same day a picture of Ray Walston appeared as one of the stars of the musical Damn Yankees. In the same year, Tennessee Williams' new play, Cat On A Hot Tin Roof opened on Broadway. On the day of her funeral services in Dallas--July 26--an item appeared in the Dallas papers announcing the birth of a son to Julie Harris and Manning Gurian.

Expressions of sympathy from all over the country and abroad immediately began inundating the offices of Theatre '55. They were to continue throughout the summer. They came from the unknown and the known of the theatre world, friends and patrons of the theatre. One letter, from Fred Ballard of Lincoln, Nebraska, was simply addressed: "Margo Jones' Mother, Theatre '55, Dallas, Texas." Among those who responded by telegram were playwrights Tennessee Williams, William Inge, Ronald Alexander, Joseph Hayes; designers Jo Mielziner and Donald Oenslager; Audrey Wood and numerous other theatrical agents; Angus Duncan, president of Actors Equity Association; Edward Mangum of ANTA; Herman Shumlin and the Inherit The Wind company; John Shubert; Lehman Engel; the Eddie Dowlings; Jonas Silverstone and Mortimer Rosenthal; Nina Vance; Dorothy McGuire

and Don Swope of the La Jolla Playhouse; Paul Baker, then of Baylor University, but later the founder of the Dallas Theatre Center; and numerous others. Perhaps the most moving of all was from Paul Muni:

SHOCKED BEYOND EXPRESSION TO HEAR OF
THE GREAT LOSS TO THEATRICAL WORLD.
ANOTHER MARGO JONES WILL BE HARD TO
FIND. MANY OF US IN THE PROFESSION
ARE HEARTBROKEN NOT ONLY TO LOSE A
FRIEND BUT FOR THE GREAT LOVE OF THE
THEATER WHICH SHE HAD THAT INSPIRED
US ALL.

The scheduled July 25 opening of the new play at Theatre '55 was postponed until the next night. Its title: Cold Christmas.

Funeral services in Dallas were held July 26 at the Sparkman-Brand Chapel, which was filled to more than capacity. Canon Curtis W. V. Junker, chaplain of the Episcopal Actors Guild officiated. Friends and co-workers served as pallbearers, among them, Ramsey Burch, James Pringle, Freddie Hoskins, James Field, Charles Braswell, Edward Cullen, Abe Shosid, and Michael Dolan. Richard and Bea Jones led the hearse bearing their sister in the heat of a Texas summer back to Livingston for services and burial the next day.

How I wish I could run right in that
front door this moment and give you
. . . a big kiss and a hug and have
a long visit with you. . . .²⁷

²⁷ Letter, Margo Jones to family, July 13, 1951.

A typical opening sentence in letters to her family, "precious Margie" was finally coming home for a long visit. Martha Pearl Collins Jones had now survived the deaths of two daughters. Earlier, in a letter postmarked June 27, 1955, Miss Pearl had written her daughter of her happiness anticipating her next visit home. Either in this letter or a subsequent one, Miss Pearl enclosed a copy of a poem titled I Met The Master.²⁸ She had written across the top: "Somewhere, many years ago, I memorized most of this poem--and, lo, here it is again--for you!"

Funeral notices were distributed in Livingston in the tradition of the nineteenth century. [See page 259.] Services were held at the Pace Funeral Home at two in the afternoon on July 27. Margo Jones is buried in the family plot of Forest Hills Cemetery in Livingston, close to her mother and father. Her tombstone reads "Margaret V. Jones."²⁹

She left no last will and testament. Miss Pearl instructed the theatre as to the disposition of certain of her daughter's personal belongings.³⁰ When Richard and Bea Jones sorted through Margo's effects, they were concerned with her personal possessions. All matters pertaining to

²⁸This was reprinted in The Harvest Field Messenger, official organ of the Church of God, June 15, 1955. The entire pamphlet was enclosed.

²⁹The date of her birth is correctly stated on the stone as Dec. 12, 1911; the date of her death is incorrectly etched.

³⁰Letter, July 27, 1955.

the theatre remained the property of the theatre. Some confusion seems to have ensued probably as a result of Jones' Stoneleigh apartment serving also as her office. According to James Pringle, all other material not claimed by Jones' family or the theatre was placed in trunks and removed to an office of the theatre which was at that time located near a bus station. Sometime later, this office was closed and Pringle was asked to take the trunks back to the theatre. He was told that the trunks could be used to store costumes, and the contents of the trunks were to be discarded. Pringle found, among other matters, scrapbooks inside one of the trunks. He told the theatre management about them who told him to throw them away. Upon closer inspection, Pringle realized the scrapbooks were valuable to theatre history and he kept them.³¹ Eight years later, on May 28, 1963, the Stoneleigh Hotel shipped three large yellow wooden file boxes containing Margo Jones' personal files to her brother Richard C. Jones in Houston. They had lain all but forgotten in the hotel's basement all those years and came as a complete surprise to Richard and Bea Jones.

³¹Larsen interview, Jan. 26, 1980.

Tributes to Margo Jones would follow in the months and years to come. In September 1955, Nina Vance honored her memory in the programme for the Alley's production of The Rainmaker. In December 1955, a memorial cantata, composed in Margo Jones' memory, was presented by the Lyric Theatre in Dallas. The prelude was composed by her friend, Walter Hendl, conductor of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. In September 1956, Nina Vance would direct the work of a new playwright, Career, by James Lee. It is a play about the vicissitudes of life in the theatre and ends with the line, "Was it worth it?" Nina Vance dedicated the production to Margo Jones. After John Rosenfield's death, his wife established a playwriting scholarship in his name at Southern Methodist University in honor of Margo Jones. In 1965, Eugene McDermott presented two hundred thousand dollars to Southern Methodist University for the establishment of the Margo Jones Theatre. In 1967, the Texas State Historical Commission declared her birthplace in Livingston, the old two-story house on Highway 59, a state landmark.

In 1961, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee established an especially appropriate commemoration of "The Texas Tornado" when they created the Margo Jones Award,

. . . given annually to the producing manager of an American or Canadian theatre whose policy of presenting new dramatic works continues most faithfully the tradition and vision of Margo Jones.³²

³²From the original brochure. [Courtesy of Jerome Lawrence.]

In 1959, the Margo Jones theatre closed. Of the announcement of that occasion, Claire Rosenfield related:

The only time in my long marriage that I ever saw my husband get deliberately drunk was the day they announced the end of the Margo Jones Theatre. He came home about four o'clock and got out a bottle and drank himself into a stupor. And he never did anything like that before or afterward. And I knew what it was, so I just let him do it and I put him to bed, and he had an awful head the next day. But he did that instead of bleeding to death. . . . Because he liked what Margo was doing. John believed in the playwright as much as Margo did. Because he was a writer and he knew how difficult it is to write a play. He was always very sympathetic to the playwright. So he just felt badly when the dream died. And I knew he was hurt. I can see him sitting there in his chair, just slugging it back, being very mournful.³³

Why did the theatre never reopen? Eugene McDermott, president of the board of trustees as long as its founder lived, offered one explanation, perhaps the best:

If you're going to have another Margo Jones Theatre, you've got to have another Margo Jones.³⁴

Today, the Margo Jones Theatre remains incorporated, twenty-two years after its last production.

³³Carole Cohen interview, Apr. 30, 1974.

³⁴Wilmet interview, Jan. 22, 1964.

To summarize Margo Jones' accomplishments: she founded the first professional regional theatre in America, emphasizing the production of new plays by new playwrights, away from the commercialism of Broadway and, therefore, was a pioneer in the decentralization of American theatre. She encouraged playwrights to write for the theatre who might not otherwise have done so. She premiered fifty-eight new plays and was most instrumental in the careers of Tennessee Williams, William Inge, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee. Further, she popularized arena staging, and she was a female entrepreneur whose success paved the way for subsequent female directors.

Nina Vance was the first bearer of Margo Jones' torch of regional professional theatre. She carried it long and far, and now, like Margo, she lies buried in the small Texas town of her birth. Like an Olympic runner, Zelda Fichandler was the next to take the flame, and so also have others, propagating the American regional theatre, where many new plays and playwrights now find opportunities for exposure. Nina Vance said of these people in her tribute to Margo Jones, that they

. . . owe their existence directly or indirectly to her vision, that what she began shall endure and grow.³⁵

They do not yet number twenty, but they are spread throughout the country. It is fervently hoped that they shall "endure

³⁵From the programme of The Rainmaker, Sept. 1955.

and grow" because--as always Margo Jones has to have the last word--

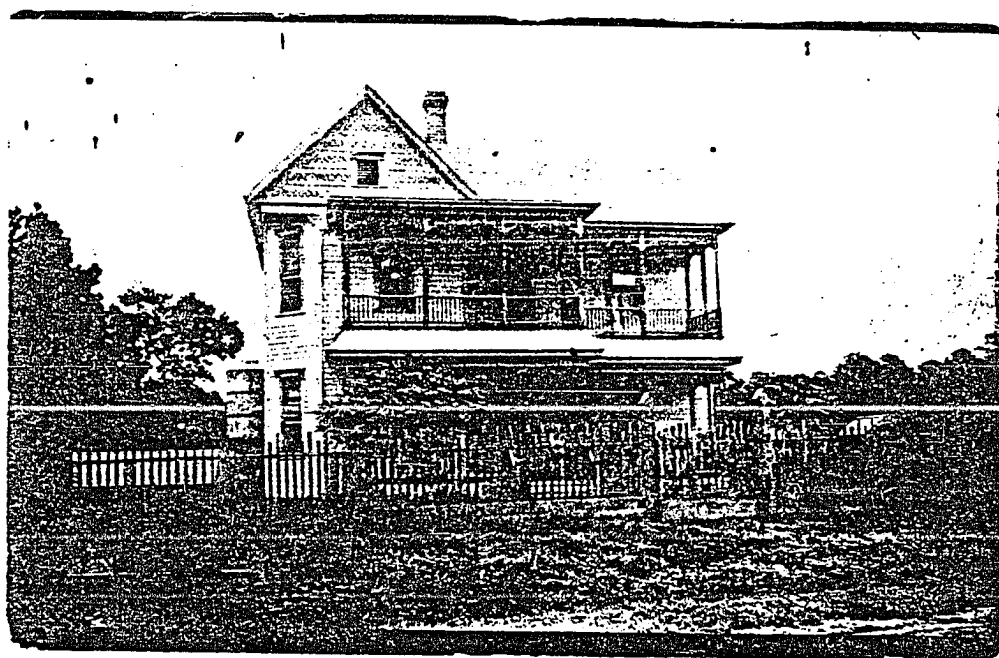
If our industries and our sciences
can develop, so can our arts.³⁶

³⁶Theatre-in-the-Round, p. 201.

ILLUSTRATIONS

The following duplicated photographs are provided through the courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Collins Jones. The childrens' pictures were all taken by Mrs. Richard Harper Jones. She was an avid photographer and referred to the pictures as "kodacks."

- I. Margo Jones' birthplace and family home.
Livingston, Texas. Circa 1907.



II. Margaret Virginia Jones

At the well of grandparents' [Jones] home
in Leggett, Texas, dressed in Uncle Roy
Jones' clothes.



I have just had a request for some pictures of myself for a large pictorial spread about my life. . . . there is a little kodak picture taken out at grandmother's with me dressed in hip boots . . .

Letter, Margo Jones to family,
October 30, 1948.

III. Early theatricals:
Margaret Virginia, Richard Collins, and
Stella Nell Jones.



. . . I think there is still another taken in Huntsville with me
dressed up like a fairy, . . . Ibid.

IV. Margaret Virginia Jones with crown and fern.



. . . I vaguely remember another picture taken in Huntsville when I either had on a nightgown or a sheet and a crown of flowers of some sort. . . .

Ibid.

V. Martha Pearl Collins Jones.

Upon graduation from Sam Houston Normal Institute,
Huntsville, Texas. 1906.



VI. Mr. and Mrs. Richard Harper Jones.
Circa 1907.



VII. Margo Jones in chaps, 1936.

The man and the occasion are unidentified.
Possibly the picture was taken during the
time of the Federal Theatre Project in
Houston when they presented a pageant
about Texas which Jones stage-managed.



VIII. Upper: Margo Jones.

Below: The Jones family in later years
(left to right): Richard Collins, Miss
Pearl, Richard Harper, Margo, and Charles
Roman Jones.

Taken in Houston in front of Richard and
Bea Jones' home at that time.

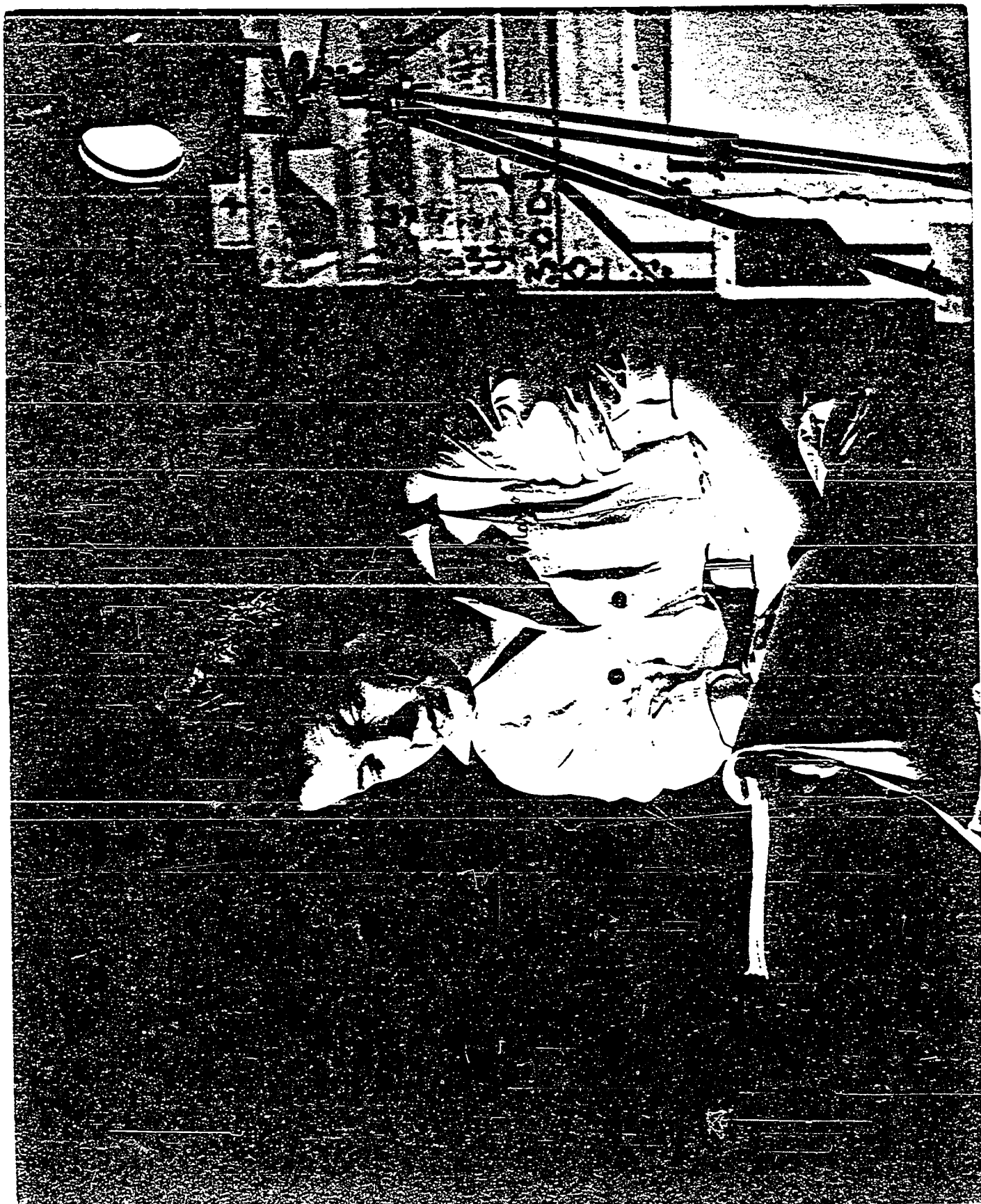
. . . I also remember one taken out where we parked the car, in a costume dress that I had with a very large skirt and appliqued flowers, in which I was doing some kind of a dance. . . .

Ibid.



IX. Margo Jones.

The Houston Community Playhouse.



X. Eddie Dowling and Margo Jones.
Backstage at The Glass Menagerie.



XI. Margo Jones and Laurette Taylor.
Backstage at The Glass Menagerie.



XII. Summer and Smoke billboard in lobby
of Theatre '47.

The couple is unidentified. Note picture
of Joanna Albus in upper right corner of
poster.



XIII. Margo Jones in her apartment at the
Stoneleigh Hotel, Dallas.

In her favorite position: sitting on
the floor studying a script.



XIV. Margo Jones in her apartment at the
Stoneleigh. Again on the floor,
writing in a notebook.



XV. Portrait of Margo Jones by
Tino Comini of Dallas.

An oil painting was done of this portrait.
It hangs on the wall of the Fine Arts
Division and is a part of the Margo Jones
Collection of the Dallas Public Library.



XVI. Funeral notice distributed in
Livingston, Texas.

Funeral Notice



MISS MARGO JONES
(Daughter of Mrs. Richard H. Jones)

Died in Dallas July 24th

Following a service in Dallas Tuesday morning, the body will be brought to Livingston where it will rest in the chapel of the Pace Funeral Home. At 2 o'clock Wednesday afternoon a service will be held in the chapel with Rev. Ernest Sampson of Conroe, officiating, assisted by Revs. Wade Hopkins and Don Harwell of Livingston. Interment will follow in the family plot in Forest Hill Cemetery.

The scheduled time for arrival in Livingston is 7:00 P. M. Tuesday.

APPENDIX

The following is Margo Jones' letter to David H. Stevens, Director of Humanities, The Rockefeller Foundation, applying for a grant to enable her to travel throughout the country to study theatre so as to better educate herself in preparation for establishing her own theatre in Dallas. The letter sets forth her unswerving ideas and ideals concerning the decentralization of American theatre. The letter was originally typed on University of Texas, Department of Drama, letterhead stationery. The following close facsimile contains some minor editing by the author of this dissertation.

The carbon copy of the original letter was made available through the courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Richard C. Jones.

May 20, 1944

Dr. David H. Stevens
Director of Humanities
Rockefeller Foundation
Rockefeller Center
New York, N. Y.

Dear Dr. Stevens,

I've been fighting a little battle down here in Texas for the past two years--ever since I left my Community Players in Houston in September 1942. Up to that time in my life I had spent every waking moment doing what I seemed to have been born to try and do--work to the best of my ability for decentralized theatre. As you know, I did create a theatre in Houston and worked with it for seven years. Then came the war. I felt as others did that the thing to do was to hang on and do the best job possible because during these times we all need faith and beauty more than ever. I hung on for dear life until my theatre left me. I did not leave it. Because my theatre was essentially a young theatre, I lost more men more quickly. During the last year in Houston, I lost 189 men and almost as many women. Since I believe that bad theatre is worse than no theatre at all, and since I felt as everyone else does these days that I should be doing a real service job, I came to the University at the request of Jim Parke who was going into the Army. I came here because I felt that in a big university there would be a great need to keep up real training of young people in the theatre, and also that it was the one place in the provinces where drama might continue during these stressing times. Well, I was right. There is a great need here, and I have worked hard these last two years and it has been a fine experience.

But all around me here in Texas, I've seen our community and little theatres close. Our state, once so alive theatrically, has now no community or little theatre that is offering a regular season. Dallas, Houston, San Antonio--each the same old story. It is perfectly understandable. The community and little theatre set-up as we knew it a few years ago is out of the question at the present time. I, for one, think we brought a curtain down on an era and, strangely enough, I think it was time for it to come down.

However, theatre in Texas is my job and I must do something about it. What I am doing here is not enough. I must see what I can do about pulling the curtain up on the next era.

The reason that I say I am glad the community and little theatre as we knew them are dead is because I think they

were all losing sight of the job we all set out to do--to create native art theatres, to encourage playwrights, present new scripts and present the classics. These aims were fast getting lost. More and more, the lists of plays presented contained nothing but warmed-over Broadway fare. A theatre should represent the people's creativeness who work in it. Writers should be born in the center of a theatre. Original native material should be used. Great plays should be done in new and fresh ways. But, no, our little theatres more and more imitated the second-rate material that had pre-publicity value. Boards of directors would say, 'This is what the public wants.' I believe that statement untrue, but nonetheless classics were done less and less, new plays and playwrights were forgotten, and cheap, fast-moving, nationally advertised comedies presented in a mediocre way (often every move and setting copied from Broadway productions) became the theatre fare of the so-called decentralized theatre. Well, I, for one, think that theatre with no standards should die.

But this is all the background of why I am writing you. I've known ever since I left Houston that I would have to do something about it. I began trying to figure out a plan that would solve our many problems. I have been batting around in this business for twelve years now, and during those years I have heard the dreams and beliefs of many theatre people expressed--a longing, a desire, and a hope that theatres would be created in this big country of ours--Theatres, not amusement halls, but places for seeing beautiful things on the stage.

'There is a war on,' I'd say to myself. 'Should I go into the Red Cross? Should I take light comedies to the camps? Should I go overseas?' These questions rang over and over in my mind, and then I knew the answer to these questions was NO. I know a great many artists in the armed forces, and they all hope to come back to a world that is better than the one they left. Because I believe this better world must be created for them and for everyone, I've decided that my war job is here. Because of all of this I've formulated a plan. I have taken four major premises that have influenced all my thought in the plan proper. They are:

I. I believe passionately in Art as a force for Salvation, and that the things art brings--beauty and spiritual growth--are the most important things in human life.

II. I believe in decentralized theatre. I believe there is no reason why good theatre should be bottle-necked in New York and Hollywood. I believe in a dramatic map for America that will include great native playhouses in every town large enough to want one.

III. This theatre must be a theatre of our Times. It must be doing a real war job now. It must be doing a real community job now and it must be planned to do an even greater post-war job.

IV. This theatre must not be planned in too big of a hurry. I have taken an oath with myself not to go into the plan until we can be sure of permanence. It must be great. There can be no half measure. I am determined that it will be the answer to the dreams of the creative persons in the theatre, that it will be a place that will provide absolute security to its workers, where a theatre man and his wife and children can grow up with it without the constant fear of where the next meal is coming from. I feel that it can be developed in not too many months, but I will wait and work until the set-up is perfect.

I was not sure what town I'd choose. But in March I was visiting in Dallas and had a talk with John Rosenfield who for years has kept this part of the country alive and aware of theatrical standards and who during my college years (spent close to Dallas) awakened in my mind a belief and faith in the possibility of great art in the Southwest. I told him about my plan. He said, 'Why don't you do it here.' It seemed to me an important suggestion. Dallas is the Texas town that has had such a great theatre influence on all of us in the state. My first year out of college was spent working in the theatre in Dallas. I shall never forget productions of Oliver Hinsdell's and Charlie Meredith's. I love this part of the country and I believe in it, and it seems to be my job. So when Mr. Rosenfield asked me to put my plan on paper and come back to see him, I did. On April 17, I went back to Dallas with the plan on paper and the determination to carry it out. This is a plan for a native, permanent, repertory, actors and playwrights Art Theatre in Dallas. I had a long talk with Mr. and Mrs. Rosenfield, and he read the plan and said he thought it was fine and would like to see me get to work on it.

The first step of the plan is that I want to spend a year perfecting all details and laying groundwork--both in my own knowledge and actual organizational set-up. I want during that year to acquire every bit of learning possible that will enable me to create this theatre. During this first year I want to plan the organization, make arrangements for subsidy, gather personnel, etc. In other words, get everything in perfect business and artistic order to begin--a big order but I think I can do it, given a year to devote every moment to this aim.

I am submitting the plan to you and requesting a year's fellowship of \$2,500. and expenses (travel) to enable me to set the groundwork for the beginning of an Art Theatre in Dallas.

I am directing in Pasadena at the Playhouse this summer and am due there June 25 through August 5. I should like to start work on the submitted plan on August 6.

I very much need your help for this year of work. I wish I could talk to you about it. If you feel that I should come to New York and talk to you about it, I'll borrow the money and fly up for a day between June 17 and June 21.

This is a job that has to be done. I have an inner compulsion about it that is stronger than any feeling I've ever had. I will be so grateful for your every reaction to the plan. I'm aware of the intense idealistic quality, and I know the many problems, but I think I can make the artistic, organizational and financial problems work. To do this I feel it will take the year.

I'm enclosing the skeleton plan, the survey of work I'd like to accomplish on the fellowship and a statement of my background.

I shall eagerly await your answer and will be so grateful for your help and anxious for your advice and suggestions.

Sincerely,

Margo Jones

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

- A Pictorial History of Polk County, Texas: 1846-1910.
Livingston: The Heritage Committee of the Polk
County Bicentennial Commission and the Polk
County Historical Survey Committee, 1976.
- Haynes, Miss Emma. "History of Polk County," 1937.
- Jones, Margo. Theatre-in-the-Round. New York: Rinehart
and Co., 1951.
- Lawrence, Jerome. Actor: The Life and Times of Paul Muni.
New York: G. P. Putnam, 1974.
- Lawrence, Jerome. "Margo Jones." Notable American Women:
The Modern Period. A Biographical Dictionary.
eds. Barbara Sickerman, et al. Cambridge, Mass.
and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University
Press, 1980, pp. 383-385.
- Williams, Tennessee. Memoirs. Garden City: Doubleday &
Co., 1975.
- Windham, Donald, ed. Tennessee Williams' Letters to Donald
Windham, 1940-1965. New York: Holt, Rinehart &
Winston, 1977.
- Zeigler, Joseph W. Regional Theatre: The Revolutionary
Stage. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota
Press, 1973; reprint ed., New York: Da Capo Press,
1977.

MAGAZINES AND PERIODICALS

- Curtiss, Thomas Quinn. "Texas Theatre." Junior Bazaar,
April 1948, pp. 74-98.
- Jones, Margo. "Theaters in the Making--Three Blueprints
for the Future." Theatre Arts, July 1945, pp. 399-
400, 405.

Jones, Margo. "Doing What Comes Naturally." Theatre Arts, June 1949, pp. 55-56.

_____. "Theatre in the Round Over America." World Theatre, I (1951), 21-23.

_____. "For Those With Courage: The Theatre." The Zontian, March-April 1951, pp. 3-4.

_____. "Shakespeare in the Round." World Theatre, III (1954), 29-30.

Krutch, Joseph Wood. "Summer and Smoke." The Nation, October 23, 1948, pp. 473-474.

Lawrence, Jerome and Lee, Robert E. "The Genesis and Exodus of the Play." Theatre Arts, August 1957, pp. 33, 94.

Perry, George Sessions. "Margo Jones Makes Theatrical History." Cue Magazine, July 10, 1948, pp. 12-13.

Rosenfield, John. "Regional Theatre: Region 4." Theatre Arts, August 1950, pp. 36, 40.

_____. "Not a Torch but a Light." Southwest Review, Winter 1951, pp. x-xv.

_____. "Margo Jones' 55." Theatre Arts, July 1955, pp. 78-79, 94-95.

_____. "Texas Regional Theaters." Southwest Review, Spring 1955, pp. viii, 180-183.

Schumach, Murray. "A Texas Tornado Hits Broadway." New York Times Magazine Section, October 17, 1948, pp. 19, 59.

Street, James. "Dazzling Dallas." Holiday Magazine, March 1953, pp. 102, 110, 112, 114-119.

Zeigler, Joseph W. "Margo Jones: Legacy and Legend." Theatre Today, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Summer 1970): 12-17; New York City: AIDART (Advanced Institute for the Development of American Repertory Theatre), affiliated with the Department of Speech and Theatre, Brooklyn College, and with the City University of New York.

This article is reprinted as Chapter 3 (pp. 17-23) of Zeigler's book, Regional Theatre.

MARGO JONES' SCRAPBOOKS

By far the greatest amount of newspaper articles was found pasted in these scrapbooks. Most articles were clipped without indicating dates. In the section of the bibliography on newspapers, one may find less entries for the Houston Post than would be expected. But it must be pointed out that from 1936 to 1942, Hubert Roussel of the Houston Post wrote an article almost weekly on Jones, the Houston Community Players, and theatre in general, and this plethora of rich Roussel writing was found pasted in Jones' scrapbooks. They also include photographs, programmes and notes. The titles of the scrapbooks are as follows:

Houston Community Players, 1936-1937.

Houston Community Players, 1938-1939.

Houston Community Players, 1939-1940.

Houston Community Players, 1940-1941.

Houston Community Players, 1941.
Includes 1941-1942 season.

University of Texas, 1942-1944.

Pasadena Playhouse, 1943.

The Glass Menagerie, 1944.

The Glass Menagerie, 1945.

Summer and Smoke, 1948-1949.

CHICAGO NEWSPAPERS

Chicago Daily News

January 4, 1945

Chicago Daily Tribune

January 7, 1945
September 16, 1948

Chicago Herald-American

December 27, 1944

Chicago Sunday Times

December 24, 1944

Chicago Sun-Times

September 18, 1949

Chicago Times

January 5, 1945

DALLAS NEWSPAPERS

Dallas Morning News

July 22, 1945
January 23, 1947
March 23, 1947
December 31, 1947
September 10, 1948
April 18, 1950
May 31, 1955
July 26, 1955
December 1, 1955

Dallas Times Herald

December 1, 1946
July 25, 1955

HOUSTON NEWSPAPERS

Houston Chronicle

October 4, 1936
 October 11, 1936
 October 18, 1946
 January 4, 1942
 July 26, 1955

Houston Post

April 12, 1940
 October 22, 1941
 June 9, 1954
 August 24, 1954
 July 24, 1955
 July 26, 1955
 August 4, 1955
 August 9, 1955
 August 14, 1955

Houston Press

June 28, 1938
 September 10, 1938
 August 17, 1939
 August 26, 1942
 September 2, 1942

NEW YORK NEWSPAPERS

The Morning Telegraph

July 26, 1955

New York Daily Mirror

October 7, 1948
 November 29, 1948
 December 10, 1948

New York Daily News

October 7, 1948
 October 17, 1948
 October 1, 1950

New York Herald-Tribune

October 7, 1948
 September 24, 1950

New York Journal-American

October 7, 1948
October 18, 1948

New York Post

April 2, 1945
October 7, 1948
December 10, 1948

New York Star

October 8, 1948

New York Sun

October 7, 1948

New York Times

September 28, 1941
July 15, 1945
November 19, 1946
November 24, 1946
September 5, 1948
October 3, 1948
October 6, 1948
October 7, 1948
October 25, 1948
December 1, 1948
September 27, 1950
May 30, 1955

OTHER NEWSPAPERS

Christian Science Monitor

November 18, 1948

The Cleveland Plain-Dealer

October 2, 1943
October 3, 1943
October 10, 1943
October 14, 1943

The Cleveland Press

September 21, 1943

The Daily Texan (The University of Texas)

March 21, 1944
 April 7, 1944
 April 12, 1944

Polk County Enterprise (Livingston, Texas)

November 15, 1951
 July 28, 1955
 February 11, 1965

PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

Adoue, Jean Baptiste Tad III. January 12, 1980.
 Albus, Joanna. October 25-26, 1980.
 Apstein, Theodore. February 7, 1979.
 Cibelli, Harriett Slaughter. July 3, 1978.
 Faber, Charles. June 3, 1979.
 Finkelstein, Joe. August 16, 1980.
 Gaylord, Martha Bumpas. June 30, 1979.
 Hollenburger, Corene Brock. November 7, 1980.
 Holmes, Malvina. November 23, 1980.
 Hoskins, Freddie. May 1, 1979.
 Jones, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Collins. September 26, 1979.
 Koch, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Koch. July 2, 1979.
 McDaniel, Floyd. January 10, 1980.
 Mesinger, Maxine. November 8, 1980.
 Moll, June. July 9, 1978.
 Naylor, Zelma. July 3, 1979.
 Pringle, James. January 26, 1980.
 Shepard, Richard. May 9, 1979.
 Thames, Maudee Carron. October 27, 1979.
 Vance, Nina. October 26, 1979.

INTERVIEWS, ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION, SMU

- Bayless, Lillian. March 12, 1974.
- Gaylord, Martha Bumpas. April 11, 1974.
- Harting, Frank. March 13, 1974.
- Latham, Louise. March 19, 1973.
- Lawrence, Jerome. January 6, 1975.
- Rosenfield, Claire. April 30, 1974.
- Winn, Betty. March 23, 1974.

PERSONAL CORRESPONDENCE

- Adoue, J. B. Tad III, to author, November 16, 1979 and November 5, 1980.
- Albus, Joanna, to author, November 22, 1980 and February 2, 1981.
- Banks, Norton, to author, September 10, 1979.
- Johnson, Elizabeth McMurray, to author, November 13, 1980 and January 11, 1981.
- Jones, Charles Roman, to author, September 17, 1980 and December 7, 1980.
- Lawrence, Jerome, to author, November 4, 1980.
- Naylor, Zelma, to author, August 9, 1979.
- Sewell, Lillian, to author, July 20, 1979.
- Shumlin, Herman, to author, April 7, 1979.
- Stephenson, Aline, to author, August 28, 1981.
- Thames, Maudee Carron, to author, October 31, 1979.
- Tompkins, J. E. Jr., to author, February 10, 1981.

TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS

Albus, Joanna. October 19, 1980 and October 22, 1980.
 Dodge, Shirlee. January 12, 1980.
 Duke, Mabel. August 30, 1980.
 Johnson, Elizabeth McMurray. February 28, 1981.
 Krah1, Mary Alice. October 17, 1980.
 Lindhe, Vin. November 1, 1980.
 Smyth, Molly Jones. February 12, 1981.

DISSERTATIONS

Rudisill, Amanda Sue. "The Contributions of Eva Le Gallienne, Margaret Webster, Margo Jones, and Joan Littlewood to the Establishment of Repertory Theatre in the United States and Great Britain." Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1972.
 Wilmeth, Don Burton. "A History of the Margo Jones Theatre." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1964.
 Yokum, Jack Harlan. "A History of Theatre in Houston, 1836-1954." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1954.

MISCELLANEOUS

Letters, journals, notes, telegrams, photographs, financial records, programmes, promotional brochures, medical and autopsy reports, personal belongings (passport, clothing, turtle collection, etc.).
 "Margo Jones Award." Brochure prepared by Margo Jones Award, Inc., New York, 1961.
 McDermott, Mr. and Mrs. Eugene. Don Wilmeth interview, January 22, 1964.
 Rosenfield, Claire B. "The Preliminaries for the Founding of the Margo Jones Theatre," n. d. Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library.
 Rosenfield, John. Don Wilmeth interview, January 23, 1964.

VITA

June Bennett Larsen was born in Houston, Texas, the second daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Thomas Bennett. She is married to the actor William Larsen. She received early theatrical training under Nina Vance at the Alley Theatre. She appeared in a number of plays directed by Mrs. Vance and created the role of Sharon Kensington in the original production of James Lee's Career, dedicated to the memory of Margo Jones. Subsequently, Larsen received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree (with a major in Acting) from the University of Texas at Austin. She received a Master of Arts degree in Theatre History from Queens College of the City University of New York, where she also taught in the Department of Drama and Theatre. During the course of the writing of this dissertation, she taught at the University of Houston. She is the author of an essay titled "Tennessee Williams: Optimistic Symbolist" included in Tennessee Williams: A Tribute (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977).

It is uncanny that in the final stages of typing this dissertation, at the end of January 1982, Larsen was offered one of the two principal roles in a new play by a new playwright: How Could I Be Forgetting (almost certainly to be

retitled The Secret of the Romany Kings) by Jon Drury. A new play by a new playwright presented in the "hinterland," away from the commercialism of Broadway, was, of course, Margo Jones' most fervent cause. Larsen accepted the offer and appeared opposite James Drury ("The Virginian" for nine years on television, and the playwright's brother) as Alma and Clairence Tildon in the world premiere of this new play, presented, for two weeks in February 1982, by Dr. Joseph Kaough, chairman of the Drama Department of North Harris County College in Houston. It is yet further evidence of the far reaching effects of what Margo Jones so successfully stimulated. This dissertation could not have ended on a more appropriate note.

June Bennett Larsen
Friendswood, Texas
March 1982