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The American Stage Careers of Fredric March and Florence Eldridge.

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Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

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THE AMERICAN STAGE CAREERS OF FREDRIC MARCH AND FLORENCE ELDREDGE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Theatre

by

Vicki Payne Parrish
B.S., West Georgia College, 1970
M.S., Louisiana State University, 1975
August 1995
In Loving Memory
Helyn Cleveland Payne
and
Carey Payne Sills
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine and assess the theatrical careers of Fredric March (1897-1975) and Florence Eldridge (1901-1988).

Repertory and Broadway theatre reviews, extant unpublished letters and manuscripts, and contemporary reviews and articles constitute the bulk of the primary research material. These have been supplemented by the actors' own personal memoirs, biographical accounts, correspondence with surviving contemporaries, and articles from journals, books, and newspapers.

Fredric March and Florence Eldridge were important American actors whose portrayals on Broadway and in films were significant in the development of American theatre in the twentieth century. They were devoted to the stage despite outstanding success in films, and their duration as actors (spanning over forty-five years) demonstrates their enduring influence on the American theatre scene. At least two of their Broadway portrayals have gained a lasting place in the history of Broadway productions (The Skin of Our Teeth, and Long Day's Journey Into Night. Their recognition by the Academy of Arts and Science and the Antoinette Perry Awards has been established. They valued the legitimate stage as a professional artistic occupation, and they were dedicated to portraying the playwright's intentions in their interpretations. In addition, they
offered their services to the American theatre and the United States Government as Ambassadors abroad. They supported each other through forty-eight years of marriage. Their significance and influence on the development of theatre practice in America, heretofore, has been inadequately acknowledged.
INTRODUCTION

Fredric March began a distinguished professional stage career in 1920 in an era when David Belasco and Broadway still dominated the world of popular entertainment. By the time his career ended in 1973 with his portrayal of Harry Hope in a prestigious film version of Eugene O'Neill's The Iceman Cometh, March had served the performing arts devotedly for over fifty-three years. In addition to his notable stage successes, he had witnessed and been a significant player in the film industry's ascension to a dominant position in the entertainment world. Throughout his career, however, he returned often and to great applause onto the legitimate stage. Seventy motion pictures, twenty Broadway plays, two Academy Awards, and two Antoinette Perry Awards speak eloquently to his talent and longevity as an actor in both mediums.

March's favorite partner on the stage was Florence Eldridge, his wife of forty-eight years. An exceptional actress in her own right, Eldridge received Broadway recognition early in her career. Beginning in 1918 in Broadway musicals as a chorus member, she soon progressed to ingenue roles which by the time she met March in 1926 had earned her a respected place on Broadway. Though not as successful as her husband in films, Eldridge developed into a highly acclaimed Broadway actress, winning the
New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Actress in 1956 for her portrayal of Mary Tyrone in *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. Yet, her contributions as a Broadway star are not her only significance to this study. As critic, supporter, motivator and confidante, Eldridge helped to promote March from a shy, unsophisticated, novice actor into a confident and suave leading man. Her dedication to March both as his wife and leading lady is significant.

Recognizably, March's work alone would merit diverse critical analysis, but his wife, Florence Eldridge, created exceptional portrayals of her own as well as in partnership with him, and the result was a marital team comparable to that of the Lunts or Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy.

Together the Marches starred in nine Broadway productions winning awards, critical acclaim, and popular favor. They also experienced failures and financial losses that come with all long artistic careers. Among the couple's most significant stage portrayals were those of Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus in the Broadway premiere of Thornton Wilder's 1942 Pulitzer Prize winning play, *The Skin of Our Teeth* (directed by Elia Kazan); as Mr. and Mrs. Jones in Ruth Gordon's *Years Ago* (1946), for which March won the first of the Antoinette Perry Awards given by the American Theatre Wing; as Nicholas Denery and Rose Griggs in Lillian Hellman's *The Autumn Garden* (1951) staged by Harold Clurman; as Dr. and Mrs. Stockmann in
Arthur Miller's adaptation of Ibsen's _An Enemy of the People_ (1953); and as James and Mary Tyrone in the Broadway premiere of O'Neill's _Long Day's Journey Into Night_ (1956), staged by Jose Quintero, which brought Eldridge a Drama Critics Circle Award and March a second Tony award. Their work together warrants study, for their partnership provided influential models of performance excellence, stage devotion, and artistic discipline. Though the contributions of Fredric March to the film industry have been well accounted for, less has been documented about March and Eldridge's stage career. This study will attempt to reveal how important the legitimate theatre was to the Marches and to their development as artists of highest merit.

The Marches first met while members of the Elitch's Gardens Summer Theatre company, in Denver, Colorado in 1926. At the time, Eldridge was a young rising star on the Broadway stage, while March had just begun to break into the Broadway spotlight. Elitch's Gardens provided them a learning opportunity which had nurtured many other theatre illuminaries. The oldest summer theatre in America, Elitch's counted among their alumni some of America's finest actors including Minnie Maddern Fiske, Beaulah Bondi, David Warfield, Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., Cecil B. DeMille, Edward G. Robinson, Sylvia Sidney and countless others.
In 1927-28, the Marches joined the New York Theatre Guild in its first national tour of American cities. The purpose of this tour was to bring artistic plays to a large number of American communities already in the habit of receiving professional concert tours. Eldridge was the tour's leading lady while March played supporting roles. It was a brutal test of nerves for all involved. Managed poorly, the troupe played one-night-stand performances in one hundred and five cities in outlandish places which included beer halls, schoolhouses, barns, and gymnasiums. The results of this tour proved to commercial concert agencies that theatrical companies could not play daily while traveling all over the country without adequate rest periods. For the Marches, the grueling tour became a testing ground for their acting skills, and they emerged from it as seasoned, mature professionals.

In 1928 March and Eldridge moved to California and embarked on film careers. March became an almost overnight success, while Eldridge who was a more recognizable stage name, found film directors less interested in her attributes as an actress. Between 1928 and 1938, when the couple returned to the Broadway stage, March had made forty major motion pictures and was listed by the United States Treasury Department as earning the fifth highest income in the entire United States (following William
Randolph Hearst). Although on top of the film industry as a leading man, March desired to return to the Broadway stage with Eldridge as his partner. However, their first attempt, *Yr. Obedient Husband*, failed so resoundingly that they bought advertising space to apologize to their audiences. Accepting their mishap as a learning experience, they attempted a second try in 1939 with *The American Way*. This time the results were overwhelmingly positive, moving March and Eldridge another step towards their desired goal of achieving success as a Broadway acting couple.

While March played romantic leads in films, he chose to play character roles on the stage. Brooks Atkinson once said that March had "a natural talent for character parts and the imagination, the strength and the skill to illumine ideas and to pull a play together" (Atkinson, *Years Ago*). Eldridge, usually at her best in sympathetic roles, was deemed "an effective actress who fills her roles with unusual excellence" (Atkinson, *Years Ago*). Even though March made, on the average, three films a year between 1928 and 1938 (with a shooting schedule of only about four weeks each, and with the luxury of multiple retakes), he and Eldridge chose to return to the legitimate stage, where long runs could extend for months and live critical audiences replaced the erasable film camera. Dedicated to their art, together their theatre work attests
to their capacity for the discipline required in the legitimate theatre.

As visible public personalities, the Marches were susceptible to public scrutiny. In 1940, the Marches were among those accused of having connections with Communist organizations by the House Committee on Un-American Activities. It was not until 1948, after years of public bashing and false allegations, that the Marches were exonerated by their accusers. Ironically, years later (1965) they were chosen by the U.S. State Department to represent America as Good Will Ambassadors abroad. With their considerable talent as an introduction, they toured the Middle East giving concert readings, all the while winning friends for the country which had placed them on trial.

With these accomplishments in mind, this study will address the contribution made by both March and Eldridge to the American theatre and assess its significance to theatre history. The major materials examined include Fredric March's personal scrapbook, located on microfilm in the archives of the Wisconsin Historical Society on the campus of the University of Wisconsin in Madison, Wisconsin; the Florence Eldridge files, located in the historical records of the Shubert Archives, in New York City; the Fredric March files, located in the Chamberlain and Lyman Brown Collections of the New York Public Library.
at Lincoln Center, New York; the Elitch's Gardens Scrapbooks, located in Elitch's archives, Denver, Colorado; and the personal artifacts of the Theatre Guild and Thornton Wilder, located in the Binecke Library on the campus of Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. In addition, Lawrence J. Quirk's *The Films of Frederic March* served as the basis of much of my research into March's film career and Edwin Levy's dissertation, *Elitch's Gardens, Denver, Colorado: A History of the Oldest Summer Theatre in the United States (1890-1941)*, was of great help in my research of that chapter in the careers of these two artists. Also, quite informative were personal comments gathered from theatre artists once associated with the Marches, which are included throughout this study.

The careers of March and Eldridge may be divided into five distinct periods, each of which is dealt with in a separate chapter. The early developmental years and Broadway beginnings for each artist, including examinations of their courtship and eventual marriage, is the subject of the first chapter. Chapter Two focuses on the Marches' four year (1925-1928) association with Elitch's Gardens and the Theatre Guild Tour of 1927-1928. Chapter Three highlights the Marches move to Hollywood and their assimilation into the film industry, concluding with their initial decision to return periodically to the Broadway stage. Chapter Four concentrates on their most prolific
years on Broadway, including *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942), *Years Ago* (1946), and *An Enemy of the People* (1950). Chapter five focuses on the climax of their partnership together in *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (1956), and March's solo ventures ending in 1973. Chapter Six concludes the study with a summary of the research. The intent of this study is to document the contributions of March and Eldridge to the legitimate stage and thereby offer testimony to their significance as consummate artists and patrons of the theatre.
Fredric March

Fredric March, christened Ernest Frederick Bickel, was born on August 31, 1897, in Racine, Wisconsin, the youngest of four children. His father, John F. Bickel, a prominent manufacturer of farm supplies, president of a trust company, and a director of the Racine YMCA, was a "pillar" of the Presbyterian Church, respected as a man of good judgment, tolerance, and great humor. Fredric's mother, Cora McIntyre Marcher, was a devoted wife and mother whom her children adored (Reid 2).

Like most children, young March enjoyed the typical games and pastimes of children: sports, fishing, hunting, and swimming. He was an attractive, outgoing child, popular with his classmates at Winslow Grammar School. His charming and amiable personality, a trademark of his nature throughout his lifetime, won him many friends, evident in the fact that he was elected president of his grammar school class (March "Next Window" 8).

March developed early in life a love for performing, and attracted the attention of his teachers with his clear and resonant speech; he frequently entertained at church bazaars, school entertainments, and Sunday School parties with poetry recitations such as "Touissant, L'Overture."
His elders predicted a brilliant career for him "at the bar or in the pulpit" ("Next Window" 7). Although his family hoped he would become a clergyman, he became interested at an early age in banking and economics. To make a quarter or so, March mowed lawns, shoveled snow, sold magazine subscriptions, and collected old paper to sell to the ragman. He learned to keep a tidy account of his earnings and expenditures and to think of finance and banking as exciting, challenging, and glamorous ("Next Window" 6).

He enjoyed entertaining his family with dramatizations of the many adventure stories he had read, and converted the family barn into a make-shift theatre. His "Spectacular Death-Defying Slide for Life", in which he would come barreling down the grain shoot in his wagon, was the grand finale of every show ("Next Window" 7).

Throughout Racine, March developed a reputation as a talented boy-orator. At fourteen he entered the state oratorical contest, winning the preliminary rounds with little difficulty. For the finals, he and his parents traveled to Sheboygan, where he presented Spartacus' "Address To The Gladiators." Since he had never lost a contest, he was convinced that he couldn't be beaten; however, he took third prize and returned home stunned. But the next year he was at it again. This time he perfected Henry Grattan's "Invective Against Corry," and at age fifteen, won the state championship (Reid 4).
As a high school junior, he appeared in The County Chairman, the class play, setting aside oration competitions for a period. As a senior he served as sales manager for the school yearbook and was once again honored by being elected class president. It was not for his good looks that March acquired popularity, although he was handsome, but for his "unabounded enthusiasm in whatever he undertook." As a teen-ager, upon his bedroom wall hung the motto: "Be a Whole Man to One Thing at a Time". Many years later March was to say that this motto of his youth had been the guiding force in his lifetime of success. (J. Bickel 51).

The two older Bickel boys, John and Harold, had attended the University of Wisconsin, but as time came for Fredric to enter college, his father's investments took a bad turn and Fredric was forced to stay at home, working for a family friend in the banking business. His only opportunity to use his histrionic abilities was on Sundays, in teaching a Sunday School class, and so effective was he that his minister urged him to enter the ministry. But when his father recouped his losses in the fall of 1915, Fredric was sent to the University.

At Wisconsin he quickly made himself known. He won the Freshman Declamatory Contest, joined the debate team, the Alpha Delta Phi fraternity, and the Edwin Booth
Dramatic club. As a sophomore he was president of the Inter-Fraternity Society, chairman of the class finance committee, and assistant football manager. In his spare time he found enjoyment in taking roles in the campus theatrical productions. In 1917, during his junior year, the United States entered World War I, and he volunteered for the Army. Sent to Fort Sheridan, Illinois, he spent several months as an enlisted man before winning his Second Lieutenant's bars. Because of his farm boy talent for riding a horse, he was made a riding instructor and sent to Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Discharged in February 1919, he returned to the University to finish his senior year (Back 86). Back in school, he was selected manager of the football team and elected President of the senior class, the third time he had held the office of a class president. As a leading thespian in the University's Haresfoot Theatrical Club, March began to develop a fervor for the legitimate stage (Tozzi 545).

In later years Fredric recalled an incident which occurred during his senior year. His good friend, Chuck Carpenter, who at the time was captain of the University of Wisconsin football team, played the piano, and he and March were noted on campus for their ability to compose a song patter and to sing for friends. They became so adept that they often played in amateur theatricals at the University. One night a vaudeville act in the theatre
at Madison, Wisconsin, failed to show up for their show and the manager of the house, having heard of the boys' abilities to perform around the campus, asked them to fill in on a moment's notice. They went on in the manner of professionals, outwardly, but not too sure of themselves inwardly. But the act was well received, and they were paid $25.00 for the night's work. Years later Fredric wondered "whether it was the $25.00 or the success of the evening that prompted him to seek footlights" (March "F.M.: Actor").

Nevertheless, while in college, it was still the lure of the banking business that captivated Fredric's attention, and in his senior year, Frank Vanderlip, of New York's National City Bank, offered college scholarship winners a chance to study banking and foreign exchange, in order to groom men for banking posts in Buenos Aires and other South American cities. Fredric gained a scholarship, and in January 1920, went to New York where he worked in the Wall Street branch of National City Bank for $30.00 a week (March "F.M.: Actor").

He enjoyed his work at first, but eventually it became monotonous. After eight months, he contemplated quitting the banking business. Then suddenly he was struck with acute appendicitis. While waiting anxiously over an hour for the ambulance to arrive, his landlady, a former actress, helped him pass the time by telling him anecdotes
about her experiences "on the boards" ("Next Window" 5). He began to remember how he had enjoyed acting in college. Soon after surgery, disillusioned with his job behind a set of cashier bars, he decided to quit banking and pursue acting:

All my nice conventional desires for big business had vanished as completely as if they had been extracted along with my appendix. I was reborn. The fact that I didn't have the faintest idea how I was going to be actor troubled me not at all ("Next Window" 5).

March believed his parents deserved an explanation for his decision to quit his banking job, and in a letter to them he wrote: "I can not warm up to the banking business and I want to ask you to give your consent that I take a minor part in a play. . . . It may all be out of my system in a year, and I promise you I will be as good a boy when I get through as I am now" (Kaiser 2). The Bickel family reluctantly agreed to March's venture. So, in the fall of 1920, he distributed photographs to agents, and soon secured work modeling for advertisements. One agent took note of his looks, manners, and good speech and sent him to one of New York's movie studios, where he was hired at $7.50 for one day's work as an extra in an unsuccessful movie titled, Paying the Piper (Quirk 15). One month later, he had similar work in The Devil with George Arliss and, subsequently, played as an extra in several other pictures, such as The Great Adventure with Lionel Barrymore, and The Education of Elizabeth with Billie
Burke. The daily pay of $7.50, he said many years later, was "nice but too infrequent. An actor I discovered, must live," so he took to posing for commercial artists ("Next Window" 8).

Work as a model for notable professionals such as Neysa McMein, Howard Chandler Christy, James Montgomery Flagg, and Dean Cornwall, offered a promising career for Fredric, for he had the type of "Byronic Face" that had become popular in the advertisement world during the 1920's. Nevertheless, it was merely a means to an end; an acting career remained his goal. March reminisced years later about his first "break" into show business:

I helped sell cravats, shaving cream, shoes and shirts. Then one day my agent sent me to David Belasco, the producer, who was then casting Deburau. Rehearsals had already started when I presented myself at the Belasco Theatre and they needed someone right away for the very small part of Victor Hugo. No experience was necessary, so I was hired at thirty dollars a week ("Next Window" 5).

Cast under his own name, Fred Bickel, March opened in Deburau at Ford's Theatre in Baltimore 7 December 1920, with the show moving to New York's Belasco Theatre 23 December. Adapted by Harley Granville-Barker from the French of Sacha Guitry, the play dealt with the life and loves of a French pantomimist of 1839, played by Lionel Atwill. March understudied Atwill, moved into other roles as cast vacancies occurred, and many years later stated that it was a training equal to any that one could have
received from acting school (Reid 22). It was during the performances of this production that March developed a serious interest in the art of acting and began his quest to study and learn all that he could:

I ceased to dramatize myself and the actors I tried to ape. I began to look upon the theatre objectively; saw it as a vast, endlessly interesting medium; saw myself no longer as a gift from heaven, but as a very raw novice with a devil of a lot to learn. And high time, too" (qtd. in Reid 20).

Though he had only one line for his $30.00 a week ("The rope gave way and I can't think why; it had no extra strain"), March foraged in the Public Library, looking through every record of Hugo he could find for material for his "characterization." Years later, March wrote:

I think that was one of the happiest periods of my life. It was climaxed on the night when one of the principals was taken to the hospital for an emergency operation and I was shot into his place: the exquisite terror and grandiloquence of that moment when I left the dark protection of the wings and stepped into the glare of the footlights, alone on the stage with an entire audience looking to me for entertainment! I was still green enough not to be floored and Belasco was satisfied with my work. That was glory. No amount of electric lighting of my name since then has approximated the pure gratification of that event (March, "Little Old New York" 22).

Well-liked by the cast and crew, March always arrived early, hung about the wings, learned every part in the play and did not leave until the last light was out. On fire with ambition, he was rewarded by being made third assistant stage manager and by receiving two other small roles to play. When the juvenile lead became ill, March played his
part for ten days, receiving a salary hike to $35.00 a week. When an actor in a semi-important role failed to appear, March gained a break, for he knew that the actor was secretly rehearsing for another show. March stepped confidently into the role of an old man in a scene-within-a-scene, where Atwill, as a famous actor, asked the old man handling the curtain why he had dropped the canvas on him. In thin, quivering tones of senility, March replied that it was the final curtain on the life of Deburau (Tully 5).

In the play, it was a highly important and symbolic situation. Lionel Atwill (and even the great Belasco) complimented March. Then the regular understudy showed up and March returned to his smaller part (Tully 6). Undaunted, determined to learn all that he could, March read Shakespeare, took voice lessons, and spent three afternoons a week with Madame Alberti, a famous teacher of pantomime (Reid 22).

She'd make me do life studies; imitations of people I'd seen in subways, for example, and she called me "son." She'd say to me, "The world is your workshop, son. If you don't come off stage feeling that you want to go right back on again and do it better, there's something wrong (March qtd. in The Player 360).

In 1921 March read in The American Magazine an interview with the producer Henry W. Savage, in which Savage said he wanted to find and develop talent among college men. Armed with the courage of inexperience, March walked
straight into Savage's office, and told him he was there in answer to the producer's appeal for college talent. Startled by the young man's abruptness, Savage had no time to back out of the situation, and March left the office engaged for a part in a non-Broadway show starring George M. Cohan. The play, *The County Chairman* by George Ade, was familiar to March, for he had performed in it in high school.

At this time a young actress named Florence Eldridge was making her own way into the theatre spotlight. March used to watch her from his seat in the orchestra. Having never met her, his initial interest in her was not romantic. He recognized her considerable talent and studied her individual technique in order to improve his own (Durant 7).

Meanwhile, March played the "second juvenile" in a road company production of *Shavings* (1921). Upon his return to New York he had a brief stint in Al Jolson's musical, *Lei Aloha* (1921). Then came his first big part: he joined Jules Goodman's *The Lawbreaker* (as Tom Fowler) after it had opened in February of 1922 at the Booth Theatre. Produced by William A. Brady (the father of the actress, Alice Brady), the piece featured March playing a young man innocently involved in a robbery at his father's bank. The director, John Cromwell (who eventually would become one of March and Eldridge's closest friends), was impressed
with March's work, which received positive reviews from such notable critics as Alexander Woollcott and Percy Hammond, who noted his "genuine promise" (Woollcott, "The Lady and the Thief") and "remarkably unaffected performance" (Hammond, "The Lawbreaker at the Booth").

In his role of Tom Fowler, March found himself working with highly experienced actors such as William Courtenay and Blanche Yurka, whose techniques March earnestly studied: "While these top-liners polished and sharpened their interpretations from performance to performance, I did the same thing. It was a real acting education" (qtd. in Quirk 16). The Lawbreaker ran for ninety performances.

March's tenacity paid off, for he began to be cast in better parts and was "causing a slight stir in the theater as a promising juvenile" (Durant 6). Though Brady offered March a long term contract, March decided in 1922 to join Mabel Brownell's stock company in Dayton, Ohio for six months, where he played "anything and everything" in order to gain experience (Milwaukee Journal, 21 Aug. 1938). Afterwards, in 1923, he played in Chicago in a pre-Broadway run of Zeno, by Joseph F. Rinn. The play, dealing with the spirit world, at first looked promising (for it broke a house record that had been set by George Arliss), but when it moved to New York, it flopped.

Without work, March accepted his friend John Cromwell's offer to star as Emmet Carr in Cromwell's touring production
of the Gilbert Emery hit play *Tarnish*. Having seen March's performance in *Zeno*, Cromwell offered him a ten-year contract, for he had wanted to place two players, a man and woman, under personal contract for future plays. The woman he had in mind was the young actress Florence Eldridge. Though Eldridge could not accept the offer at that time, March could and he did.

Now under contract, March was persuaded by Cromwell to change his stage name from Bickel to something more glamorous or theatrical. Cromwell thought that the name Bickel reminded him of "pickle or bicker or something equally inelegant" ("Next Window" 6). Since March's Presbyterian parents were not overly-enthusingistic about his theatrical career, a change in name seemed a good thing to him. March shortened Frederick to Fredric and changed his last name from Bickel to a shortened version of his mother's maiden name, Marcher.

The *Tarnish* tour was a big success for Cromwell as well as for March, who now for the first time used his new stage name. The tour included Baltimore, St. Louis, Chicago, Milwaukee, Pittsburg, and Philadelphia, and March received in each town special recognition:

It was good young March who made the first nighters sit forward and tell themselves that all the agreeable actors are not dead yet, not even born yet. He went straight under the skin of his part, into the flesh, bone and marrow. He made us live with him the emotions of a not extraordinary youth in an extraordinary situation -- extraordinary but credible (Stevens, "Tarnish").
Pleased with the reception by the public to his new stage name, March personally announced the change on a New Year's greeting card: "This is 1924. I won't be Bickel anymore. Fredric March is now my name. Wishing everyone the same. Happy New Year" (Durant 7). Years later he said that he wished that he had kept his own original name of Fred Bickel ("Next Window" 6).

March opened on Broadway 13 May 1924, at the Ritz theatre playing the juvenile lead, Donald Clemens, in the comedy-drama, Melody Man, the first Herbert Fields, Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart show (Tozzi 547). Set in Tin Pan Alley, it depicted a composer torn between writing classical and popular music. Only two incidental song numbers by the famous songwriting team appeared in the show. Although March's role was small, he made "his usual good impressions" on the critics, but the play closed after forty performances (Quirk 17).

March next gained the role of Bruno Monte in Brock Pemberton's production of The Knife in the Wall by Frances Lightner, which opened in Providence, Rhode Island, in February 1925. The theatre critic for the Providence News said of March's performance:

Of the new school of acting where natural reading counts for something, Fredric March turns in the individual histrionic highlight. His achievement of dramatic effects by restrained tone and simple moves, is a product of the age (rev. of The Knife in the Wall, 2 Mar. 1925).
The production then moved to New York's Selwyn Theatre 9 March 1925, billed as Puppets, after slight revisions were made in the script. Starring well-known actors Miriam Hopkins and C. Henry Gordon, its melodramatic plot involved a marionette show owner, a homeless girl, and threatening whiteslavers. Though March's role was not the major lead, critic Alan Dale believed March "contributed the best work of the evening" (rev. of "Puppets", New York America 10 Mar. 1925). It closed after fifty-four performances.

In the spring of 1925, March married a well-known East Coast actress, Ellis Baker, daughter of the playwright Edith Ellis and the niece of the character actor, Edward Ellis. They had met in 1923 in Toledo, Ohio, where March had been a member of Mabel Brownell's stock company and Baker had been visiting friends. Closely associated with the actor John Barrymore, Baker was first attracted to March because he looked like a young Barrymore (Fitch 36), and she was captivated by his charm. After an engagement of two years, they were married 3 May 1925 in Milwaukee. At the time, Baker was playing in Chicago in The Showoff. Later, she would be known on Broadway for her performance in The Fool (1926) and The Arabian (1927 with Walter Whiteside) ("Ellis Baker Receives Divorce Notice"). After playing stock in Atlanta (July 1925), Baker and March went to Europe, where she starred in the London production of The Show Off.
In response to a cable from Cromwell, March returned to New York where he opened 19 September 1925 at the Belmont in Harvest, as Richard Knight. Written by Kate Horton, the play was produced by the Shuberts in association with Cromwell. Burns Mantle acknowledged March's performance for portraying a "nice juvenile", but reviewers castigated the play as drab and negative. It closed after seventeen performances (Mantle rev. of Harvest).

Two months later, March supported Flora Le Breton in Christine Norman's The Balcony Walkers, which concerns a young American couple on holiday in Paris. While the young husband is out seeing the sights, the young woman stays meekly at home, lonesome and longing for adventure. When she finally exits her surroundings for a bit of fun, she strays by way of the balcony into the apartment of the young man next door, and there meets a fervent wooer, played by March, who wants to take her to the opera ball. Two hoodlums appear, steal the couple's opera costumes and leave them bound and gagged. Discovered by her husband, the young wife, reprimanded for her adventure, is reminded of her role as a dutiful wife.

In the touring company production, March received praise from the critics who had been impressed with his talent in previous road productions. However, the cast proved to be better than the play, and it closed on the road (rev. of The Balcony Walkers, Springfield News).
In March of 1926, March opened at the National Theatre in the *Half-Caste* by Jack McClellan. As Dick Chester, March portrayed a rich brat who takes to drink, goes to the South Seas, and seduces a native girl who turns out to be his half sister. He retreats home when he discovers their sibling relationship and she kills herself. This improbable plot was described by Percy Hammond as a "brazen and half-conscious caricature", but March "impersonated the unlucky debauchee as well as possible" (rev. of *Half-Caste*, NY *Her.Trib.*). George Jean Nathan added: "The acting, except for Fredric March, is quite as sour as the play" (rev. of *Half-Caste*, NY *Tele.*). The production closed after sixty-four performances.

As fate would have it, March's contract with his friend, producer John Cromwell, was canceled when Cromwell left New York to pursue a career in the Hollywood movie industry. Cromwell's last production, *Bewitched* (1926), had failed on Broadway and his discouragement led him to seek new ventures elsewhere. With his departure, March was left without a contract. However, before he left, Cromwell arranged summer employment for his young protege with Elitch's Gardens Summer Theatre, in Denver, Colorado. Cromwell's association with the famous summer theatre had begun years before when he had suggested the talents of other young actors to the Elitch management. In fact, the young star of his failed production of *Bewitched*, Florence
Eldridge, had played lead roles with Elitch's the previous summer of 1925.

Interestingly, March harbored a grudge against the cast of Bewitched (including Florence Eldridge), for inadvertently losing him a chance for a Broadway career under Cromwell's expertise. Though he and Eldridge had never met, he had heard about her from Cromwell, seen her perform, and had admired her talent. Ironically, it was on a train to Denver and summer work at Elitch's that these two actors would meet.

Florence Eldridge

Eldridge, like March, had grown up in a stable and loving home environment. She was born Florence McKechnie in the Ridgewood-Bushwick section of Brooklyn, New York, on 5 September 1901. Her father was Charles James McKechnie, an editor on the Brooklyn Eagle, and her mother was Clara Eldridge McKechnie, a homemaker. Both were known as intelligent and hard working individuals who provided everything possible for their daughter's needs (Durant 2).

A good student who dreamed of being a lawyer or teacher, Eldridge attended Girl's Commercial High School in Brooklyn. In each of her last three years there, she headed the cast of the commencement plays, performing such roles as Portia, Ophelia and Maid Marion with schoolgirl success. She also took part in the lesser
productions given at holidays and for assemblies. Looking forward in her senior year to playing the lead in a non-classical play, she expected the role of "Miss Hazy" in Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch. She was subsequently informed that the role of Miss Hazy would not suit her, as she had always performed romantic or Shakespearean roles. She later said that from this disappointment she gained the determination to "prove to the world that I could play one kind of part as well as I could another" (qtd. in NY Her.Trib. 4 Dec. 1936).

In 1918, after graduating from high school, Eldridge worked with the Institute Players, a well-known amateur acting group and enrolled at the same time in Adelphi College. For two years she "wondered whether she would make a better lawyer than teacher" (qtd. in NY Times article n.d. Shubert Archives). But after meeting Edith King, a musical comedy star, at a summer resort, Eldridge accepted the opportunity to travel out of Erie, Pennsylvania, with a road company tour of Charles Kinkead's Common Clay. She next understudied Edna Hibbard in Jerome Kern's musical version of Baby Mine, now called Rocka-Bye-Baby, which opened at the Astor Theatre 22 May 1918. Directed by Arch Selwyn, she and seven other young ladies represented the "dancing ensemble" (rev. of Baby Mine, Shubert Arch. n.d.). Herbert Reynolds wrote the lyrics to Kern's music, and Frank Morgan was among the
stars of the cast. One night the leading lady, Ms. Hibbard, fainted and Eldridge "waved the smelling salts under her nose," allowing the lead to go on and giving up a chance to play the role herself ("F.E. Coming in The School Maid", Shubert Arch. n.d.). But Eldridge had discovered that she truly wanted to devote her life to acting, and with fierce determination, she embarked upon a stage career.

She changed her name from McKechnie to Eldridge (her mother's maiden name), and against the advice of her parents, she quit Adelphi College to pursue her ambitions. In the next year, this eighteen year old was cast as the ingenue in Seven Day's Leave, a melodrama by Walter Howard, which opened at the Chestnut Street Opera House in Chicago on 2 December 1918. Robert Campbell, one of the owners of the show, had seen Eldridge act before and believed that she was perfect for the role of "Kitty". Florence worked devotedly during rehearsals and provided in her performance proof of an exceptional talent ("Having Hard Time to Smoke Cigarettes" Seven Day's Leave).

Eldridge's first Broadway speaking role came in 1919. She was cast as Dolly McKibble in Pretty Soft, which opened at the Morosco Theatre 15 May 1919. Though her part consisted of only three lines, her "naive reading of the zippy lines was one of the outstanding features of the play", wrote the reviewer of the Herald Tribune (rev.
of *Pretty Soft*). Among others who were impressed with her performance was Howard Rumsey, owner of two summer repertory companies ("The Knickerbocher Players" of Syracuse and "The Manhattan Players" of Rochester). He asked his director, Brock Pemberton, of "The Manhattan Players" to give her an audition. This began Eldridge's three year association with the Rochester company.

In Rochester her first role was as the ingenue in *The Short Cut* (1920) by R.E. Marshall and O. Bailey. After she had proved herself a talented actress on the rise, she soon earned larger parts such as the supporting role to Marguerite Sylva in *The Song Bird* (1920) by Fredric and Fanny Halton. Leading roles in such plays as *Up In Mabel's Room* (1920) by Wilson Collison and Otto Harbach, *The Charm School* (1920) by Alice Duer Miller, and *Tiger Rose* (1920) by Willard Mack, brought Eldridge critical acclaim by local as well as Broadway critics. (Eldridge file, Chamberlain and Lyman).

On 19 March 1921, Rumsey and Eldridge were married, even though their ages were many years apart. The ceremony took place in Eldridge's aunt's home in Maplewood, New Jersey, two weeks after Rumsey's divorce from his first wife was finalized (Chamberlain and Lyman).

Eldridge then opened her second season with "The Manhattan Players" 30 April 1921, by co-starring with John McFarlane in Ray Comstock's *Adam and Eva* (1921).
Several good roles followed, including leads in *Smilin Through* (1921) by Allen Martin, and *The Crimson Alibi* (1921) by George Broadhurst ("In the Theatre", Rochester Herald 10 May 1921). (She was thereafter known as the company's leading lady until she left after her third season in 1922.)

In the fall of 1921, while walking by Broadway's Garrick Theatre she noted that the Theatre Guild was holding auditions for an upcoming production of *Ambush*. Although the role of the young pleasure-mad girl, Margaret Nichols, had been preliminarily cast, Eldridge, nevertheless, was given the opportunity to read for the part. She impressed one of the auditioners who had remembered her performances from Rochester, and a few days later, she was asked to read again for the author, Arthur Richman, the director, Robert Milton, and several of the Guild managers ("Knew Little of Stage, Yet A Hit Over Night" Oct. 1921, Shubert Archives file). She won the part, and her work as Margaret Nichols (the scheming, wayward daughter), brought her exceptional notices from critics such as Alan Dale: "Such dramatic intelligence has been seen nowhere this season" (rev. of *Ambush*, NY Amer.). Alexander Woollcott noted that "A newcomer named Florence Eldridge came to town from an upstate stock company, and gave a moving and genuine performance in the role of the daughter" (rev. of *Ambush*, NY Times).
In January of 1922, Eldridge accepted the leading role of Annabelle West in *The Cat and the Canary* by John Willard, which opened at the National on 7 February 1922. Woollcott believed that the production was enhanced by "such gifted young folk as Henry Hull and Florence Eldridge, who made it 'likable'" (rev. of *Cat and the Canary*, *NY Times*). Eldridge played a young heiress forced to spend a terrifying night in a gloomy mansion in order to claim her inheritance. The special effects (sliding panels, clutching hands, voodoo incantations, and scattered bodies) made this successful play the prototype of many mystery-melodramas that followed it. The production eventually ran for 349 performances. Unfortunately, because of a personal problem, which the *New York Herald Tribune* referred to as a "nervous breakdown", Eldridge was forced to leave the production in May, for a rest in Atlantic City ("She Yearned for Ingenue Roles: Films Grant Wish", *N.Y. Times*).

Years later, Eldridge referred to this time in her life as one of great anguish. Married at a young age to a man much older than she, and uncertain of which direction to take in her career, Eldridge admitted that she became unhappy, even to the point of suicide. She was being sought after by producers to play "the young bad woman" and she was pleased to have the work, but she longed to play the "ingenue." Her marriage was failing, she became depressed,
and a rest was badly needed. Later that year, she returned to Rochester to play the lead in the summer stock production of *East of Suez*, also a "bad woman" role ("She Wished for Ingenue Roles"). Eldridge and Rumsey divorced in the fall of 1922.

An important break in her career came in October 1922 when she won the role of the step-daughter in the first American production of Luigi Pirandello's masterpiece, *Six Characters In Search of An Author*. Directed by Brock Pemberton, it opened at the Princess Theatre in New York on 30 October and gained good notices. John Corbin in the *NY Times* stated that "the season is indebted to Mr. Pemberton for one more exploration of strange fields and pastures new". He added that Florence Eldridge as the stepdaughter overflowed "with eager youth and charm" (rev. of *Six Characters*). But the play was not a commercial success and closed after two months.

In the next Spring, Eldridge was cast in *The Love Habit* as Nadine, a young innocent wife who is the object of a young man's passion. Adapted by Gladys Unger (from the French *Pour Avoir Adrienne* by Louis Verneuil), this farce produced by Brock Pemberton was considered "amusingly naughty" (rev. of *The Love Habit*, "The Playgoer"). It opened at the Bijou Theatre on 14 March 1923 to mixed reviews, but Percy Hammond commented that Eldridge's performance was an advantage to the play, "so pleasantly does she
act it" (rev. in NY Trib.). Woollcott noted that "Nadine was charmingly played by Florence Eldridge" (rev. in NY Herald).

In the fall season, she appeared in The Dancers, by Gerald du Maurier. Staged by William Devereux, it opened at the Broadhurst Theatre 16 October 1923. In this romantic melodrama, Eldridge played Una Lowery, a young English dancer with no outside interests other than dancing. Having waited patiently for her sweetheart to return from six years of fortune hunting, she is overcome one night by passion while dancing the fox-trot with the handsome Evan Carruthers. She falls to temptation and a one-night-stand turns her life into a nightmare. Upon her sweetheart's return, she chooses suicide rather than break his heart with the news that she has not kept herself "pure". Kelsy Allen of Women's Wear Daily believed that Eldridge did "the most varied and most successful acting" of her young career ("The Dancers"). Mantle praised the cast and especially Eldridge who "does nicely by the ruined heroine, indicating her painfully distraught state of mind with good effect" ("The Dancers A Lot Like The Squaw Man"). Jean Henry of the New York Evening Journal, noted that Eldridge's "handling of the second act [was] a marvelous piece of acting leading up to the quiet horror of her suicide" and that Eldridge's controlled restraint showed better the "fatigue and elasticity of frantic youth than
could all the voice raising, hand wringing and room pacing in the world" ("DuMaurier's Dancers").

In the following spring, Eldridge began rehearsals for a new play which opened at the 49th Street Theatre 15 April 1924. Cheaper to Marry by Samuel Shipman featured Eldridge playing Evelyn Gardner, a woman living with a man out of wedlock. Though the play was "technically lopsided, childishly unconvincing and disfigured by appalling lapses of taste" Corbin believed that "Florence Eldridge illumined all that was moving and true in Evelyn," even if, "her best efforts were largely annulled by the fact that the character was never truly focused" (rev. of Cheaper to Marry). It closed one month later on 17 May.

But Eldridge's next portrayal was a triumph. When Bewitched opened at the National Theatre 1 October 1924 after playing four weeks in Cleveland, Florence became an acclaimed actress. In this she played seven parts including the ingenue, the phantom mother, the old love, the goddess of love, and the grandmother. A dramatic fairy tale (written by Edward Sheldon in collaboration with Sidney Howard, and designed by Lee Simonson), the play unfolds the story of a crashed aviator who finds shelter in an old chateau. While asleep by the fire, he dreams the tale set forth on the tapestry of Charlemagne which hangs on the wall. Burns Mantle wrote: "It is splendidly
acted, particularly by Florence Eldridge, who is impressively equal to the feminine appeal and the technical histrionism demanded of her" ("Romance Bewitched"). Robert Coleman of The Mirror wrote that Eldridge had proven herself "one of the finest young actresses", and that the adjectives "graceful, versatile, personable... hardly do her performance justice" (rev. of Bewitched).

Staged and produced by John Cromwell, Bewitched brought glowing reviews for Eldridge's talents, but failed as a production. Its closing did, however, serve as a catalyst in turning Cromwell's interest towards Hollywood and the silent movie industry. When he left New York, he canceled contracts with several aspiring young actors which included not only Eldridge but a young man unknown to her at the time, Fredric March.

At this point in her career, Eldridge had become a respected and sought after young actress, not only by the notables of Broadway but also among stock companies throughout the Mid-West and East. One of those who admired her talents was John M. Mulvihill, manager of Elitch's Gardens Theatre in Denver, Colorado, who after seeing her in Bewitched chose her to play leading roles in his 1925 summer productions. His season was composed of eleven productions with Eldridge faring very well with the Denver critics. (Pleased with her talents, Mulvihill invited Eldridge to return for the 1926 season).
After the end of the 1925 season, Eldridge returned to New York to begin rehearsals for a production of James Forbes' *Young Blood*, which opened at the Ritz Theatre 24 November 1925. Here she was cast as a young "gold-digger" whose parents forego the responsibilities of parenthood for the sake of making money. *The New York Times* stated that "with a less able group of actors *Young Blood* might have come off too artificially for its service," but the play "is well acted by a company including Helen Hayes, Florence Eldridge, Norman Trevor and Eric Dressler." Furthermore, "Miss Eldridge puts flesh on the bare bones of the conventional 'gold-digger'" (rev. of *Young Blood*, *NY Times*). The production ran for sixty-one performances, closing 23 January 1926.

Performing at night in *Young Blood*, Eldridge was rehearsing in the daytime for another show which was to open only nine days after *Young Blood* closed. The show was Owen Davis' adaptation of F. Scott Fitzgerald's famous novel, *The Great Gatsby*. Eldridge starred as Daisy Buchanan. Produced by William A. Brady, its debut on 2 February at the Ambassador Theatre was hailed as an exceptional example of dramatic material adapted from other sources. Staged by George Cukor, the play had a Broadway run of 113 performances. Brooks Atkinson stated that "Miss Eldridge portrays Daisy Buchanan with fidelity: she is the distraught, thin, weak-willed young woman drawn two ways at once" (rev. of *The Great Gatsby*, *NY Times*).
Following the successful run of The Great Gatsby, Eldridge left New York for the 1926 summer stock season at Elitch's Gardens. Once again hired for leading roles, she was told that her new leading man was to be a handsome and talented Broadway novice who was just beginning to make a career for himself on the New York stage; his name was Fredric March. Her friend John Cromwell had introduced March to the Elitch's management, who, impressed with his talent, hired him to play opposite Eldridge in selected roles for their 1926 season.

At the end of the season, Elitch's could boast of their best season ever. They attributed their success to the great ensemble playing of their company (Gurtler 65). (See Chapter II).

The Courtship of March and Eldridge

Eldridge always said that the first time she met March was in May, 1926, on a Denver-bound train; however, March claimed it was backstage at the Elitch's Gardens Theatre. Nevertheless, their admiration for each other's acting talents drew them together. At that time, she was twenty-four, divorced, and Elitch's leading lady; March, was twenty-eight, still married to Ellis Baker, and hired by Elitch's to play featured leading roles.

In an article written years later, Ellis Baker recalled that during the summer of 1926, March wrote long
letters daily to her, expressing how he missed her and how hard the work was at Elitch's, though he enjoyed it very much. Referring to March as "shy, unsophisticated and impressionable," Baker noted that she became worried as the summer progressed and March's letters stopped coming daily. Concerned, she made a visit to Elitch's. While there, she (thinking to preclude the possibility of her husband hurting his career by overestimating the value of the great success he was having at Elitch's) tried to minimize the importance of his Elitch success. She succeeded only in destroying the hard earned confidence March had built up within himself. According to Baker: because their professional engagements had forced them to live apart, and because she minimized March's success at Elitch's, their marriage eventually deteriorated into estrangement, with March obtaining a Mexican divorce twelve months later in May, 1927 (Baker, "Her Ex-husband: Fredric March").

During Elitch's 1926 season, March and Eldridge performed together in four productions: The Swan, Liliom, Love 'Em and Leave 'Em and Hell Bent For Heaven. And by the end of the summer, March's grudge against the actress had turned to admiration. They had become best friends and through Eldridge's continual reassurance and praise, March won back the confidence he needed to continue pursuing acting as a career.
After the 1926 season ended, they went back together to New York and were both signed by Edgar Selwyn for *A Proud Woman*. This was March's first chance for a major role in a Broadway production, although Eldridge had earlier made a good impression on Broadway producers (Goldbeck, "Don't Marry For Love").

But, years later, March recalled in an article in the *New York Herald Tribune* that on the seventh day of rehearsal for *A Proud Woman* (the darkest day of his life) he was fired. Selwyn had given him the juvenile lead in the play; so captivated was he to be playing opposite Eldridge (with whom he was now in love and eager to impress), that he began to show off, to the dismay of the director. Each contract in those days carried a seven-day provisional clause in which time an actor could be released from his contract if the director so desired. For six days and most of the seventh (a Sunday), March kept figuring that if he could sneak out of the theatre, unapprehended, the contract would be in force. But when the last rehearsal ended, and March was heading for the stage door, the company manager told him he was fired. As March recalled:

> Walking through Central Park that night and trying to act like a big shot was the toughest role I've ever played. Deep in my mind was the suspicion that Florence would give me the air because I was a flop" (March, "Little Old New York").

However, once again, with her characteristic understanding
and encouragement, Florence assured Fredric that it would turn out for the best (March, "Little Old New York"). She was right.

March soon obtained the leading role in The Devil in the Cheese. In spite of an alluring title, a fine cast that included Linda Watkins, Bela Lugosi and Dwight Frye, and a beautiful set by Norman Bel Geddes, the play had an awkward plot. March played Jimmie Chard, a young, handsome and poverty-stricken nobody, who pursues the millionaire daughter he loves, after she has been taken off to Greece by her father in hopes that she will forget the penniless young suitor. In the last act, Jimmie holds up a gang of Grecian bandits, outtricking them with his cunning and daring, thereby saving his love and her father.

The critics were impressed with March. Alexander Woollcott, then drama critic of the New York World, called him a "treasure trove" (rev. of The Devil in the Cheese)

Despite its weaknesses, the play had a respectable 157 performances.

As for A Proud Woman, it closed soon after it opened. Although Eldridge was temporarily unemployed, she could now watch March demonstrate his acting talents, which she believed were immense (Eld. qtd. in "Intimate Glimpses of M/M March"). Being best friends who spent their free time together, the two actors became known around town as a "couple", even though March was still legally married
to Baker. Once again hired to play together at Elitch's, they looked forward to the 1927 season.

As late spring approached, March asked Eldridge to marry him, and she accepted. Needing a divorce from Baker, who had not been in contact with March for many months, March drove from Denver to Mexico where he obtained a divorce decree from Baker (NY Post 12 Dec. 1927).

A bit apprehensive, because each had a previous marriage that failed, Fredric and Florence were determined that their marriage together would last. Being best friends, they were aware of each other's good, as well as bad, qualities. They vowed to respect always each other's feelings. Married May 30, 1927, in Colorado, their marriage spanned forty-two years, until March's death in 1975. Their life together, like most marriages, had its ups and downs, but they stayed together in spite of them, which emphasizes their admirable personal and professional commitment as a team.

Years later, after nineteen years of marriage (and film stardom for March), March was asked in an interview why he 'liked' his wife? In response he said:

I like my wife because she is the best friend I've ever had, in all that the word implies of camaraderie, helpfulness, and understanding. I like the way her mind functions and the way she cuts through sham and hypocrisy. I like her kindness to all people. I like her principles and what she stands for (Cameron "Hubbies Like Wives").
Chapter Summary

The early years of career planning and focusing had lead both March and Eldridge toward the theatre. Intelligent individuals with skills which would have most assuredly allowed them the opportunity of success in other lines of work (March in the banking business; Eldridge in the newspaper business), they chose instead the challenging (but unpredictable and often frustrating) career of acting. By 1926 Eldridge had become a successful young actress on Broadway, receiving good critical recognition. March had just begun his climb to success in 1926, but in the minds of many New York critics, March was on the road to stardom.

Of great benefit to both Marches were the experiences that each received in their tenure with repertory companies. Eldridge had spent her formative years under the guiding hand of director Brock Pemberton in Manhattan and Rochester, New York. March had earned experience working in New York, Chicago, with various tours, and in Ohio with Mabel Brownel's stock company. However, it was in Denver, Colorado, at Elitch's Gardens that they discovered their fondness for acting together as a duo; throughout their lives together Elitch's would always be remembered with special fondness.
Elitch's Gardens Historical Setting

The American theatre so long dependent upon British and European sources, came into its own in the twentieth century. As early as 1881, Denver, Colorado was known as a good theatre town; from the heyday of the road show after the turn of the century until its final decline in the 1930s, Denver was on the itinerary of every important traveling company that played the West. One of Denver's most prominent and successful theatres was the Elitch's Gardens, founded by Mary Elitch in memory of her husband.

John and Mary Elitch came to Denver from San Francisco, where they had run a restaurant frequented by actors. Developing an interest in the theatre, John invested in a traveling show, but unfortunately lost his investment. Moving to Denver, the Elitches bought acreage to raise vegetables for the restaurant they established there. Eventually, the couple developed the acreage into a zoological garden, with beautiful flowering plants and exotic animals, which John had been given by his friend P.T. Barnum (Gurtler 5). On May 1, 1890, when they opened the gardens to the public, Denver was only thirty-one years old and already firmly established as the commercial metropolis of the Rocky Mountain region (Levy 4).
Due to illness, John Elitch died the year after the gardens opened, and Mary took over the management. Loving theatre as much as her husband, and in his honor, she built an opera house to provide Denver with the best performing arts entertainment available. Gradually expanding during its first era of operations, it presented a wide variety of attractions: minstrel shows, vaudeville acts, musical comedies, plays, operettas, and silent motion pictures. By 1896, however, it became apparent that the most successful and popular attraction at the opera house was its dramatic entertainment.

In 1897, Mary Elitch organized her own stock company. With mostly only moral support, the first productions were two melodramas entitled Helene and A Bachelor's Romance. To help her, friends of hers and John's came from afar. Interestingly, one of their many theatrical friends, the actor James O'Neill, had years earlier promised John that he would one day play in one of their theatres. Keeping his promise, O'Neill played the leading man for Mrs. Elitch during her first season (Gurtler 6).

From 1897 until she relinquished control of the theatre management in 1915, Mrs. Elitch followed the policy of engaging a resident stock company, with occasional guest "stars," for a full summer season that usually began in June and continued through the first week of September.
(In the beginning, vaudeville acts were sometimes given between scenes of the play. However, by 1900 these acts were eliminated during the regular summer drama program) (Levy 56).

The establishment of the resident stock company plan at the Elitch theatre proved to be far more successful and dependable than the haphazard booking of vaudeville acts. As the reputation of Elitch's grew, many actors wished to have on their resume a record of experience at the Gardens. Elitch's Gardens provided the Denver populace of the late nineteenth century rare theatre experiences. As the only "independent" theatre operating in Denver during the monopolistic days of the New York Theatrical Syndicate, it presented many distinguished actors who otherwise would not have been allowed to perform in Denver. Furthermore, it introduced to Denver many promising young actors who later achieved renown in the New York theatre as well as in other media of entertainment. Between 1903 and 1908, the touring companies of several staunch opponents of the syndicate (Henrietta Crosman, Minnie Maddern Fiske, Sarah Bernhardt, and David Warfield) performed at Elitch's. These players greatly enhanced the reputation of the Gardens during a period when Denver audiences were almost completely dependent upon the whims of eastern managers for theatrical entertainment (Levy 125).
A peak in Denver's theatrical activity was reached in 1910, when (according to the Denver Post) eleven legitimate theatres were operating in addition to the twenty-five theatres showing silent movies (cited in Levy 67). By 1915, the number of legitimate theatres had dwindled to six. Not a good business woman, Mary Elitch was forced eventually to sell the gardens to John M. Mulvihill, a Denver businessman, in 1916. Until his death in 1930, he succeeded in building a national reputation for the Elitch repertory companies.

Soon after World War I, several enterprising theatre production groups contributed important directors and actors to Elitch's Gardens. Among them were the Washington Square Players (which later furnished the nucleus of the Theatre Guild), Provincetown Players, the Neighborhood Playhouse, and Eva Le Gallienne's Civic Repertory Theatre (Levy 208).

Although Mulvihill allowed his stage directors to select both plays and players, he reserved the right to veto any choice that did not adhere to management policy: "Nothing of a vulgar nature will be tolerated on the stage, and the performers will be of obvious high-class type" (Levy 221). Among those playwrights represented at Elitch during Mulvihill's tenure were Maxwell Anderson, Philip Barry, S.N. Behrman, Marc Connelly, Rachel Crothers, Sidney Howard, George S. Kaufman, George Kelly, Elmer Rice, and Robert E. Sherwood.
Of the hundreds of actors who performed with Elitch companies, a few are of special note. During the 1904 season, Antoinette Perry, Eugene O'Brien, and Ernest Truex were part of the company. Cecil B. DeMille played minor character roles in 1905. Mrs. Fiske appeared at the Gardens between 1905 and 1908. Ethel Barrymore played supporting roles in the summers of 1905 and 1906. Douglas Fairbanks, born in Denver, made his debut on the Elitch stage and in 1906 captured the lead in juvenile roles. Chrystal Herne (daughter of James A. Herne) and Lewis Stone acted in the season of 1913. Edward G. Robinson played character roles at Elitch's in 1920. Henry Gordon, Douglas Dumbrille, and Sylvia Sidney, throughout the 1920's, became favorites with Denver audiences. Helen Bonfils began her work in Denver in 1934. Jan Sterling played the ingenue in 1939, and David Wayne was the juvenile in the company of 1940.

By selecting well-qualified stage directors, Mulvihill had most of his theatrical management problems solved for him. He engaged new promising leading actors, as well as veteran professionals, resulting in strong and dependable resident companies during the seasons between 1920 and 1929 (Levy 222). Since Mulvihill was relatively inexperienced as a theatre man, he relegated the choice of plays to his stage directors. Out of the total of one hundred fifteen plays produced during his tenure, five
had been awarded the Pulitzer Prize and twenty-two had been selected by Burns Mantle as among the ten best of the season in which they were first presented in New York.

The basic commercial requirements demanded by the family audiences attending the gardens were that the plays have an interesting story, contain sufficient humor, and give the audience something to think about after it left the theatre. Light romantic comedies were by far the favorites of Denver audiences; however, Mulvihill was at times adventuresome in producing rather bold non-commercial plays, such as O'Neill's Anna Christie. Seeking additional means of extending the variety in a season's program, the management occasionally presented a new play. The stock rights to plays were obtained through Actors' Equity at a cost of between fifty and one thousand dollars a week, with the average for the newer and more popular plays being two hundred fifty dollars. (Levy 102).

The number of performances given in the theatre during Mulvihill's management remained fixed throughout his tenure. Each play opened on Sunday evening and was performed every evening of the week and two afternoons (Wednesday and Saturday), comprising a total of nine performances. This policy continued at the Gardens until an Equity ruling in 1949 limited summer theatres to eight performances a week (Levy 226).
Elitch's 1925 Season

Florence Eldridge preceded Fredric March to Elitch's by one season. After two significant successes in the New York theatre (in *The Cat and the Canary* and *Six Characters in Search of an Author*), she was chosen by Elitch's as leading lady for its 1925 season. Like Eldridge, the majority of the cast and crew possessed strong Broadway credentials. Mulvihill's staff included Melville Burke as director, Donald Campbell as stage manager, and G. Bradford Ashworth as scenic artist. The company featured Eldridge, Beulah Bondi, Diantha Pattison, Edith Gordon, Tom Powers, C. Henry Gordon, Moffat Johnston, Edward Butler, Douglas MacPherson, and Joseph Macaulay.

Performing between ten and twelve plays in thirteen weeks, the actors had to learn their lines very quickly. In 1953, Melville Burke described the rehearsal process he had initiated at Elitch's in 1925:

- On Monday morning at eleven, the company gathered for the first rehearsal. We went through the entire play indicating entrances, exits, groupings, and the mood we wished to develop for each character and the entire play.
- On Tuesday, rehearsal began at ten-thirty, with the actors repeating slowly, again and again, the directions of the preceding day. By this time the company had a definite idea of what it was all about.
- On Wednesday morning, rehearsals began at ten o'clock, continuing until noon, with a matinee performance of the current week's play.
- Thursday was a rest day, with no rehearsal before the evening performance.
- On Friday the cast were expected to have their lines memorized for the rehearsal that began at ten o'clock and continued until late in the
afternoon.
Another shorter rehearsal followed on Saturday, before the usual matinee.
And on Sunday, rehearsal began at eleven o'clock.
This run-through was a combination dress-technical rehearsal which included setting of lights, first use of costumes, and setting all technical cues.
Often this difficult rehearsal continued until seven o'clock, just ninety minutes before the performance began (qtd. in Levy 246).

To open the season on 14 June 1925, Burke chose the play Quarantine, by F. Tennyson Jesse. Helen Hayes had originated the role of Dinah in the New York production, and Denver audiences anticipated the debut of Florence Eldridge, who Elitch's said, could "fill Hayes' shoes" ("Elitch's Opens With Quarantine"). Eldridge had seen her friend Helen's performance in New York.

The play concerns Tony Blunt (Powers), a personable young explorer, and a seventeen-year-old romantic named Dinah Partlett (Eldridge). Dinah, aware that her cousin is going to elope with Tony, craftily takes her place, hiding for four days in a cabin on a steam liner. Tony discovers her deception and determines to teach her a lesson. When the steamer is quarantined for a week on Pigeon Island, he lets the other passengers think that he and Dinah are newlyweds and demands that Dinah share her other twin bed with him. At the end of the week a romance develops and both are eager to be married.

Both Eldridge and Powers gained critical approval: "they never appear false or unreal", noted the Denver Post, and added "the new company will prove the most
popular that has held the boards at the famous old theatre" ('Elitch's Opens With Quarantine').

The second production, *Kiki*, by Andre' Picard (adapted by David Belasco) opened 21 June. The play had previously run for 600 performances in New York. Kiki (Eldridge) appears uncouth, bold, and street smart, but within lies a girl of affection and charm.

Infatuated by the manager of a music hall in which she is sometimes employed, Kiki worships Victor Renal (Gordon) from afar. Eventually, she forces her way into his office, just as he is battling with his ex-wife and star. When his assistants try to eject her, she bites and scratches. Finally, amused by her persistence, Victor takes her to dinner and later to his apartment. When he tries to kiss her, she responds by kicking him, but then refuses to leave his apartment. Ultimately, her confession of love for Victor, pathetically linked with the story of her sad life on the street, wins the producer's love and respect.

Of Eldridge's performance, a critic said: "It is a safe prediction that as Kiki, Florence Eldridge will sweep right into the hearts of any theatregoer who did not see her and enjoy her as the proxy bride in the play last week" (Florence Eldridge Rivals Lenore Ulric In *Kiki*). *Denver Post* theatre editor and local critic, C. Lester Barnard, added: "the show belongs to Miss Eldridge and
the role should do much to establish her as an actress of unquestionable ability with the theatre-going public of Denver" (rev. of Kiki).

In the week of June 28th, Elitch Gardens presented Outward Bound, by Sutton Vane; (the play had opened on Broadway January 7, 1924, running for 144 performances). A suspense thriller, the action takes place on board a ship that is headed out to sea. All the characters are dead, but they do not know it. Among the passengers are a young couple (played by Eldridge and Powers) "laboring under a peculiar strain"; Scrubby, the ship steward; a poor charwoman; and Mrs. Cliveden-Banks, a wealthy snob. Forced together with no accommodations for class distinctions, the passengers gradually realize that none can remember where they are bound. Slowly, they become aware that they are dead and that their destination will be disclosed upon the "final judgment." According to the Denver Post critic, "Elitch's delivered their usual good entertainment with a capable cast in an implausible situation" (rev. of Outward Bound).

The week of July 5 featured Chicken Feed, by Guy Bolton (The play had run for 144 performances on Broadway). A comedy with a women's liberation theme, Chicken Feed depicts the experience of a group of husbands, wives and sweethearts, the year that neighbor Nell Bailey organizes a strike to determine the rights of wives to a proper
share in the net income of the family. Nell (Pattison), a young engaged woman, discovers on the day of her wedding that her fiance, Danny Kester (Powers), believes that wives should be subservient to the rule of their husbands. Abruptly calling off the wedding, Nell convinces her best friend Luella (Eldridge), along with her own mother, that their husbands treat them with little respect and in order to correct their situations, they should switch roles, forcing their spouses to take on the challenge of maintaining a household, which the men naively think is a simple task. In the end the men see the shortcomings of their puritanical viewpoints and Luella craftily saves her husbands' business. Though Eldridge's role was secondary, as the young wife determined to take her husband's lagging business and make it a success, she was "formidable" ("Chicken Feed at the Elitch").

The Goose Hangs High, by Lewis Beach High, opened 12 July; it had played for 159 performances in New York. The plot concerns three college siblings who take for granted the financial burden their father endures to put them through college. After the three return home for a vacation, they discover that because of their father's sudden loss of income, they will now have to face the hardships of paying their own bills. To the parents' surprise, the children accept the responsibility and in the end reward their parents with new-found attitudes.
The oldest brother, Hugh, was played by McCauley, with Powers and Eldridge playing the roles of twin brother and sister, Bradley and Lois. "Eldridge puts vim and intelligence and no little personal charm into her personation" reported the local critic ("The Goose Hangs High Is Delightful Comedy at Elitch's").

Denver's premiere of Clare Kummer's *Rollo's Wild Oats* on 19 July, followed the play's Broadway run of 228 performances. The play concerns the life-long aspirations of Rollo Webster (Powers) to play the title role in *Hamlet*. After inheriting a sum of money, Rollo goes to New York to fulfill his dream. He calls on a manager, who introduces him to a beautiful but naive actress, Goldie McDuff (Eldridge). Eventually, Rollo gets his chance to play *Hamlet*. However, on the night of the performance word reaches the theatre that Rollo's grandfather (Moffat Johnson) has died and Goldie, convinced that Rollo should be told immediately, walks boldly onto the stage, interrupting Rollo's big scene and breaking up the show. Rollo's valet, who knows all of the lines, jumps to the forefront and finishes the show. His burlesque rendition of the young Danish prince makes a great hit with the producer and the critics. Rollo discovers that his grandfather was faking his death to keep Rollo off the stage. Discouraged at the entire turn of events, he decides to quit and marry the girl of his dreams, Goldie. The
Denver Post critic stated that "Eldridge, as Goldie McDuff, does one of the most thoroughly human pieces of acting I have ever seen" (Barnard, rev. of Rollo's Wild Oats).

Lightnin', written by Winchell Smith and Frank Bacon, opened 26 July. This exceptionally popular play had run on Broadway for 1,291 performances. The title is taken from the main character of the play, Bill Jones (Powers), known to all as "Lightnin", who operates a hotel on the California-Nevada Railroad line. The place becomes a popular stopover for women going through the Reno divorce mill and who need to establish a Nevada residence. A couple of land sharks discover a valuable waterfall on Lightnin's property, and they scheme to swindle it away from him in exchange for some worthless securities. Lightnin' spends his days and nights drinking and carousing with his cronies, while his good wife (Bondi) does all the work. Now fed up with running the hotel single handed, she wants to sell the property to whomever will buy it. The second act draws all of the concerned individuals into the courtroom. Lightnin' is pressing a suit against the land-hungry crooks, while Lightnin's wife files for divorce in order to be free to sell the property herself to the land agents.

In the role of the most prominent of the Reno divorcees, Eldridge played Margaret Davis. Denver Post critic, Lester Barnard, thought she did a very good job:
"Miss Eldridge shows a new side to her character as the flashy vaudeville actress who goes to the Nevada resort to throw off the shackles of matrimony. . . . [she] is an actress with more than the usual amount of personal charm" (rev. of Lightnin').

On 2 August, Elitch's premiered Rida Johnson Young's Cock O' the Roost, an unusual choice, for it had failed in New York after only 24 performances. Young Jerry Hayward (Powers) is in love with a spoiled girl who will not have him. When the girl, Phyllis Dawn (Eldridge), and her mother (Pattison) go on a yachting cruise in search of a good husband for Phyllis, Jerry takes the henpecked Mr. Dawn (Johnson) under his wing. Mr. Dawn, a hack writer of detective stories, is convinced by Jerry not to let his "women" run his life and to move into a less expensive apartment which he could better afford. Upon their return, Phyllis and her mother are shocked into the reality that they have taken advantage of Mr. Dawn. Everyone becomes angry and in a surge of new found confidence launched by Jerry's comments, Mr. Powers stands up for his rights, asserting leadership qualities which win over the lost respect of the women.

Eldridge's performance as the rotten child who eventually seeks to change her ways was praised as "charming" by the Denver critic, who thought that both Eldridge and Powers were having "a lot more fun in their
new roles" than they had while playing in *Lightnin'*. He concludes, "I know I had a lot more fun watching them and it seems the audience in general did too" (Barnard, rev. of *Cock O' the Roost*).

*Aren't We All*, by Frederick Lonsdale, opened on August 9. In this comedy of manners, Margot Tatham (Eldridge) returns unexpectedly from a trip to India, walking in upon her husband, the Hon. Willie Tatham (Powers), kissing Kitty (E. Gordon). Surprised and hurt, Margot threatens to leave Willie. However, Willie's philandering father (Johnson) manages to save his son's marriage by coming accidentally upon a young Australian who had met Margot in India and who remembered one famous night when she forgot her home and Willie long enough to permit herself to be kissed. "Not the least persuasive feature of the production is the ability of Tom Powers... and Florence Eldridge" said local critic Barnard (rev. of *Aren't We All*).

The next production at Elitch's (16 August), *The Bride*, by Stuart Olivier, featured two bachelor brothers, Mortimer (Gordon) and Wilson (Powers) Travers: one fussy and the other handsome and timid. One evening, Marie Duquesne (Eldridge), a beautiful young girl dressed in bridal array, makes a surprise entrance through their roof door, looking for a hideaway. She comes into their lives just after an aunt (Bondi) has been chiding them
about being single. Adventures follow in which rare jewels are stolen and the young bride unfairly accused. In the end, although both brothers have fought for her affections, it is the younger who wins. Barnard wrote: "Florence Eldridge, playing the role of the bride, seems to grow more delightful every time I see her, and it is with misgivings that I think that the players at the Gardens are to do only one more play after this one before the theatre closes" (rev. of The Bride, Denver Post).

Perhaps the best play of the season was saved for the last. Anna Christie, by Eugene O'Neill, with Eldridge playing the title role, was certainly the most prestigious offering of the summer's bill. In Anna Christie, an old sea captain (Butler), from fear of what he has seen happen to women who live by and love the men of the sea, has sent his young daughter far away to live safely with cousins on a farm in Minnesota. When she is raped by her cousin, Anna (Eldridge) flees in terror, forced by circumstances into a life on the streets. Penniless, she seeks a home with her father, who knows nothing of her hardships. Together they live happily until the young sailor (Powers), with whom Anna has fallen in love, discovers her sordid past.

The Denver critic found the performance of Eldridge equal to that of Pauline Lord, who had originally excelled in the role of Anna on Broadway. He wrote: "there was
fire in [Eldridge's] performance which fitted the piece perfectly. . . . She is not [merely] an actress. She is Anna Christie" (Barnard Denver Post 8-24-25).

Barnard's description of the performance is worth noting:

In the first act saloon scene, a bartender draws glass after glass of beer from the keg and as the tang of malt tickles one's nostrils, one wonders vaguely if there are any dry agents in the theatre. In the second act the curtain rises; fog cold, damp, and clammy, drifts out over the audience and women draw their cloaks about them and men stir uneasily. It is the art of the theatre at its best" (Barnard, rev. of Anna Christie).

Years later, Eldridge would list the role of Anna Christie as one of her favorites. The challenge and complexity of this play contrasted markedly with the typical commercial fare of mysteries and romantic comedies usually offered, and the title role of Anna gave Eldridge an opportunity to demonstrate her depth as a serious actress. Long after her years at Elitch's Gardens had ended, Denver audiences fondly remembered Eldridge's admirable acting, characterized by her restraint, intelligence, and emotional control, and most superbly realized in her performance as Anna Christie (Gardener 8 Aug. 1925).

During Mulvihill's management (1916-1930), the literary quality of plays produced at Elitch's improved, which indicates perhaps an improvement in playwriting and in the taste of theatregoers. Also, since Denver had a second legitimate theatre during Mulvihill's managerial reign (the Denham), competition for Denver audiences made
the selection of plays most important. With few road companies touring during the 1920's, new plays became more readily available to stock companies than ever before. The fact that Elitch's Gardens attracted a wide range of ages to its zoological gardens, made it an important matter to select familiar pieces as well as new and provocative ones, in order to intrigue theatregoers.

Summary of the 1925 Season

The 1925 season with Elitch's Gardens had been a rewarding one for Eldridge, giving her an opportunity to portray a variety of characters. The bill of fare had included eleven plays, four of which had been listed by Burns Mantle as the best plays of the year in which they debuted on Broadway: Outward Bound (1923-24), Chicken Feed (1923-24), The Goose Hangs High (1923-24) and Anna Christie (1921-22). Four other plays, Quarantine, Kiki, Rollo's Wild Oats, and Lightnin, which had had successful Broadway runs, found equal popularity at Elitch's Gardens. Though Cock O'the Roost, Aren't We All, and The Bride had not succeeded on Broadway, the Denver audiences received them warmly. Perhaps their acceptance was due in large part to the fact that the community was familiar with and fond of the Elitch company of players.

As a local resident, Eldridge was popular with the Denver residents. Part of the duties of cast members was to attend local functions on behalf of the Elitch
theatre. Being deft in communication skills, Eldridge was known throughout the region for her "charm and soft manner" (Gardener, 10 July 1925). A competent actress of melodrama, serious drama, and comedy, she continually provided Elitch's with well defined and honest interpretations.

Twenty-five years later, in an interview with Beverly Smith, Eldridge recalled what she had learned from working with stock companies and how she hoped that the new theatre medium, television, would offer an opportunity for young actors which the movie industry did not:

> The movies have made it possible for many actors to get by with just looking good on stage and not knowing much otherwise. . . .Good legitimate actors can't get by with that sort of superficiality. Television may develop a crop of actors similar to the old stock companies, where beginners were taught facility in acting techniques, studied the art, increased their understanding of characterization and learned to think, and so to give, their characters motives for behaving as the playwright wrote them (Smith "T.V. Godsend to Young Thespians").

Throughout her distinguished career, Eldridge praised the training she had received through her work in repertory.

When the Elitch season closed in August, she left Denver for New York, where during the 1925-1926 Broadway season she starred in two productions: James Forbes' Young Blood, and Owen Davis' adaptation of F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby (See Chapter 1). When in the spring the Broadway season ended, Eldridge returned to Denver for her second summer with the Elitch's Gardens Players.
Elitch's 1926 Season

For the 1926 season, Mulvihill put together another successful company. Having signed Florence Eldridge once again as leading lady, Mulvihill chose the unknown but promising young actor, Fredric March, to play the male lead. As Denver audiences were eager for details about Elitch's new actors, the Denver Post, in describing March to their readers, began by praising his good looks and endearing personae: "a thoroughly wholesome young man, unaffected in manner, clothing, or speech. Unlike the traditional matinee idol, your most salient impression of him is his lack of egotism." Citing his acting experiences, the Post critic predicted March would be a success at Elitch's. ("Elitch's New Leading Man Refreshing Type of Modest Thespian").

Also in the company were Cora Witherspoon, Beulah Bondi, Margaret Shackelford, Winifred Durie, Edna James, Marion Swayne, Douglas Dumbrille, Moffat Johnston, L'Estrange Millman, Edward Butler and William Carey. Melville Burke was again stage director, Frank McDonald, the stage manager, and G. Bradford Ashworth, the art director.

The Swan by Ferenc Molnár opened the company's summer bill, 12 June 1926. The play deals with the aspirations of an ambitious mother of royal blood for her daughter's
marriage, the daughter's battle between her head and her heart, and the love of a scholarly tutor in the family for the young princess. Eldridge's portrayal of Princess Alexandria (which Eva Le Galliene had created in New York) moved one critic to believe that she would "fill the role of star of the company admirably" ("Elitch's Opens With The Swan", Denver News). Another critic found "Miss Eldridge's fine emotional work inspiring and exemplary" (DeBernardi Denver Post). March, the new leading man, "is much better suited to playing opposite Miss Eldridge than was Mr. Powers," observed the local critic. "He is young [and] handsome, and there is an eagerness and sincerity in his every move." As for his portrayal of the young scholar, Agi, March was "splendid in every respect" ("The Swan Opens at Elitch's"). Others reported that "his performance was smooth and finished" and commented on that the entire ensemble reflected keen appreciation and understanding of the roles they portrayed (Martin, rev. of The Saw).

In the second week, Elitch's presented John Weaver and George Abbott's comedy Love 'Em and Leave 'Em, which depicts the residents of a boarding house, all of whom are clerks in an establishment struggling to be modern, efficient and elegant. Marne (Eldridge) is in love with Billingsby (March), a fellow clerk, but her attractive sister, Janie (Swayne), steals him away from her. When
Janie, as treasurer of the Ginsberg Welfare Association, loses the society's funds, she is threatened with exposure. Self-sacrificing Mame gets the money back by shooting dice, after which Mame wins back Billingsby, and Janie goes on to pursue other and richer suitors.

Eldridge in her portrayal of the older, less attractive sister, demonstrated her versatility as an actress: "Love 'Em and Leave 'Em provides Florence Eldridge an opportunity to show you that after all she can be something other than sweet...[she] has developed [versatile skills] and takes pleasure in disclosing [them]" (Denver Post rev. of Love 'Em and Leave 'Em). Another critic noticed that "[Eldridge] is capable of submerging the charming sweet personality that nature has provided her to become a rough and inelegant young lady" (Denver Times rev. of Love 'Em and Leave 'Em).

March again impressed the critics, especially with his ability to portray so believably a character totally opposite to the role which caught their attention in The Swan. As the "philandering youth who swerves between two sisters, he does not over play anything and the quality so very desirable and not found nearly often enough, that of restraint, distinguished his performance last night" (Denver News rev. of Love 'Em and Leave 'Em).

Dancing Mothers', tagged as "the ultramodern drama of the jazz age", by Denver newsmen, was the third
weeks' bill. By Edgar Selwyn and Edmund Goulding, the play depicts the Westcourt family: Hugh, the father and husband (Dumbrille) neglects his wife (Witherspoon). Their daughter, Kittens (Eldridge), becomes so captivated by the new modern "freedom" that she, too, ignores her mother. Madly in love with Gerald Naughton (March), a bachelor with a notorious reputation, she discovers that her mother, who has set out to save her daughter from Naughton, has fallen in love with him herself.

March's portrayal "[was] even better than in his two previous plays, which is saying a lot. [He] possesses an exceptionally fine speaking voice in addition to an ability to act convincingly, and rapidly is becoming one of the Elitch favorites" (DeBernardi, rev. of Dancing Mothers). Adding that Eldridge, as the infatuated daughter, "puts into the part everything that the authors wrote into it. She is a typical jazz-age flapper in this role, which she carries off with great credit to herself" (DeBernardi rev. of Dancing Mothers). The Denver News noted that in comparison to Helen Hayes' Broadway portrayal, Eldridge's characterization was "every whit as good" (rev. of Dancing Mothers).

In the fourth week, the Elitch players presented David Belasco's The Music Master (a play associated with the distinguished actor, David Warfield, who played the title role more than 1,500 times). This comedy-drama
centers around the quest for a lost daughter (Eldridge) by a dear old musician (Moffat Johnson). Eldridge "did a fine piece of work" and March was "very vivid and impressive as [a] young German musician" (The Denver News, rev. of The Music Master).

George Kelly's Craig's Wife, which opened next on 11 July, reveals a woman who marries not for love but for the security of a home she could 'worship'. Ultimately, her selfishness leads to the destruction of her home and the revolt of her husband. In secondary roles, Eldridge as Ethel Landreth, Mrs. Craig's niece, and March as Eugene Fredricks, a young college professor, furnished the love theme.

The sixth week's production, J.C. and Elliot Nugent's comedy, The Poor Nut, featured March as John Miller, a self-conscious college student with an inferiority complex. The characters represent modern 1920's university students who "go after what they want and believe in calling a spade a spade", according to the Denver News. Infatuated by the exceptionally shy John Miller, psychology major Julia Winters (Eldridge) works with John until he not only joins the track team but also wins the relay race, upon which his school's future depends. The next day he musters up the nerve to propose to Julia and decides to pursue a teaching profession, regardless of the low salary.

The Denver Times said of March's portrayal: "he neither overplays or underplays the role, but keeps to
the business of not being too pathetic, or too ridiculous"
(The Denver Times, rev. of The Poor Nut). Another critic
made an even more intuitive analysis:

March has proved himself an able and a versatile
actor. His work has been marked by a grave
earnestness, an admirable restraint, and, no matter
how insignificant his part, he made it impressive . . . There is something of Peter Pan and Merton
in Fredric March. His performances are the kind
that make the audience observe closely every move
he makes. He hews to that fine line where tragedy
and comedy meet (Denver News "March Delights Elitch
in The Poor Nut).

Eldridge played the role of the "modern
psychoanalyzing person" with "a vengeance" said The Denver
News (rev. of The Poor Nut), while the Denver Express
termed her portrayal as "splendid" (rev. of The Poor Nut).

An incident during the rehearsals of this particular
production was reported in the newspapers. March, it was
said, objected to the big scene in the comedy of a relay
race between students at Ohio University and Wisconsin,
wherein the Wisconsin team gets beaten. March, who had
been president of his Wisconsin senior class, the football
manager, and a member of Alpha Delta Phi fraternity, walked
off the stage and refused to play the part, stating that
he would be unloyal to his university by playing a student
from Ohio who defeats Wisconsin. March later relented,
saying that "despite my feeling for my college, I intend
to make John Miller run as fast as he can to win for Ohio"
(qtd. in Denver Post "March Refuses to Play Role Coming
to Elitch"). The Denver Post also quoted sources which stated that a wire was sent to the play's author, Elliot Nugent, asking if he would consider changing the ending. His reply was that "it would upset the plot, upset me and besides Ohio State never was defeated by Wisconsin, at least we don't admit it" (Denver Post "Author Claims Never Lost"). Obviously a publicity stunt, the newspaper articles brought attention to the Elitch's Garden production of The Poor Nut. And as an extra note to the production, Cromwell Mackechnie, Eldridge's brother, was visiting her for the month of June and was added to the cast as one of the college students (The Denver Post "Actor Must First Be True to Alma Mater").

Owen Davis' Icebound, offered the company excellent opportunities for character work in the season's seventh week. Set in a New England homestead, the plot reveals the efforts of a dying woman to reform her wayward youngest son, Ben. To accomplish this end, she leaves her fortune to a second cousin, to the chagrin and disappointment of the other members of her family, who have been hovering over her deathbed like vultures. March played Ben, the black sheep of the family, a sullen, foul-mouthed prodigal son. Eldridge portrayed the second cousin, Jane Crosby, who dares to change this bad boy into a decent citizen. Her successful efforts permit Ben to begin a new life.
In *Icebound*, critics noticed that both Eldridge and March did their best stage work since *The Swan*:

The roles are those in which they excel and in which they seem more interested than in the frivolous type of character. Miss Eldridge gives a very appealing performance as Jane. She does not use a great deal of movements and does not bounce about, but in a quiet and most effective way makes you feel Jane over the footlights. . . *Icebound* is one of the finest performances Miss Eldridge has delivered this season" (Denver Post "Icebound is a Real Drama of Cheerless New England Life").

Other critics noted her "somber and stern" portrayal, which had "an undercurrent of heartthrob that makes it sympathetic, and her characterization ring true" (Denver Times,"Icebound is Stark Drama").

March's "work as Ben Jordan in the current production is without question the best of his efforts here. . . He plays his role as tho he really were living it -- living it and enjoying it" (Denver Post rev. of Icebound).

The Denver News claimed that the 'teamwork' of Eldridge and March was the best since the opening production: "both seem to have entered into their respective roles with more than the average fervor" with "splendid" results. "Miss Eldridge plays Jane with feeling, [and] an admirable restraint, and so projects her tragic but beautiful story across the footlights that handkerchiefs were much in evidence" (The Denver News rev. of Icebound). However, the Denver Express thought March did admirably as the family black sheep but "not quite so well as the reformed and penitent son" ("Icebound at Elitch's").
The Elitch company followed the next week (1 August) with a mystery comedy, Not Herbert, by Howard Irving Young. Herbert Alden (March), apparently an insecure young man, is afraid of the dark. He is held in contempt by all of his close acquaintances, who believe he is a "mooning" poet. In reality, he is a high class poetic-souled thief, who steals jewels merely for the thrill it gives him.

The Denver Post reported: "Mr. March has made such a habit of giving performances of sterling quality, that to recount the fact that he has again distinguished himself as Herbert, is trite" ("Mystery Comedy On at Elitch's"). Kaspar Monahan of the Denver Express had reservations about the play but he called March's portrayal "convincing" and added that he "makes the most of his lines and supplies the few dramatic moments of the evening." In her subordinate role, Eldridge "proved her ability as an actress" ("Elitch's Is Not Herbert").

The best play of the season followed on 8 August. Molnar's romantic fantasy, Liliom, depicts the poignant and tragic relationship between the roughneck Liliom and the trusting servant girl, Julie. Liliom (March) and Julie (Eldridge) live in poverty: their love for each other gives them hope. When Julie becomes pregnant, Liliom, desperate for money, resorts to robbery, but he fails and commits suicide. After fifteen years in hell, Liliom returns to earth in an effort to do a good deed that will
allow him into the gates of Heaven. Given one day on earth to make amends for his sins, his uncontrollable temper overcomes his best intentions, and he slaps his fifteen year old daughter, thereby losing his attempt at entering Heaven.

Eldridge, in the role of Julie "made a real appeal, not as a sentimental, sobby type, but as a woman, who knows and loves her man, and carries on. Her big scene over the corpse of her paramour, was most effective" (G.B. Denver Express "Elitch Players In Liliom"). The critic notes that it must have been difficult for the actress to keep her concentration the night that he saw the production, for a child in the audience began to cry just as Eldridge was reaching the climactic part of her monologue. But, "she surmounted the difficulty with marvelous ability." Another critic also praised Eldridge's "very moving and tragically beautiful performance. She has her heart more in this part than any she has played this season" (The Denver News rev. of Liliom).

March's reviews were excellent. The News critic stated: "Every week we marshal adjectives to herald his fine work, so we will just say that a gay regiment or two could tell of his eloquent interpretation of this roughneck afraid of his own emotions" (Denver News "Liliom at Elitch's Is Big Undertaking"). The Denver Times claimed that "[March] is Liliom. He struts and plays the stubborn,
spoiled idol of the serving maids of Budapest yet permitting the real Liliom, the sentimental boy, to shine through" (Denver Times rev. of Liliom).

_Easy Come, Easy Go_, by Owen Davis filled the tenth week of the season (15 August). This breezy farce featured the adventures of Dick Tain (March), a young man with an inferiority complex, whom circumstances make a bank robber. With a likable old side-kick (Johnston), he breaks into high society at a fashionable health farm, following a safe cracking. A millionaire (Dumbrille) aids Tain with his deception, as his own revenge toward the snobs at the resort. Bullied into swallowing absurd health foods and distasteful mineral waters, the "snobs" perform ridiculous exercises, all drawing laughter from the audience. Although not considered an exceptional play, it was inserted in the season's offerings for its amusing burlesque of want-to-be-fashionable people ("Elitch Gardener" 14 Aug. 1926 6), and it proved to be "easily the most appealing thing done by Elitch players this season," reported _The Denver Express_. _The Denver Post_ noted that "The big kick of the play is in the work of 'the three musketeers', March, Johnston and Drumbrille. Their scenes together were delightful" (DeBernardi rev. of Easy Come, Easy Go). March, it was said had a "penchant for roles requiring representation of the inferiority complex, and humorous light parts" (K.M.). Well received
by the community, the play, was sold out every night of its performance (K.M. "Easy Come, Easy Go Proves Entertaining").

Hell-Bent For Heaven, by Hatcher Hughes, followed on 22 August. The story centers about the relations between two Southern mountaineer families, the Hunts and the Lowrys and the interference of Rufe Pryor (March), a scheming, religious fanatic. Sid Hunt (Carey) has been away at war for two years. In his absence, Pryor has been courting Hunt's girlfriend, Jude Lowry (Eldridge). Upon Hunt's return, he and Jude become engaged. Outraged, Pryor stirs up an old feud between the two families by incensing Jude's brother (Millman). Shielded by the God-fearing Mrs. Hunt, Pryor is able to sway, for a time, the community sentiment in his direction, by working himself into their good graces through emotional hymn singing. But in the end, his efforts are recognized for what they are: self-seeking and destructive.

March's versatility in portraying Pryor as nervous, effeminate, and groveling, left the audience and the critics believing that this was his most powerful work of the season. On opening night, his portrayal of a man receiving a sign from God who then bursts into intense prayer, was so convincing that the audience broke into a great ovation at the end of the second act ("Elitch Players Score Success in Powerful Feud Melodrama"). With
a cast of six members, Eldridge's portrayal was termed "charming," by the Denver Express, and along with the other members, was heralded for the excellence with which he assumed the difficult mountain dialects. But the power with which March played the lead role made him stand out above the other performers: "[F.M.] is almost the whole show" (B.F. "[F.M. Has Outstanding Part in Hell-Bent Fer Heaven").

The 1926 season came to a close with Michael Arlin's comic-farce, These Charming People, beginning 29 August. Moffat Johnston starred in the lead role of an old English gentleman, 'Sir George Crawford, Bart, M.P.', who lives by his wits and whose financial maneuvers are a bit eccentric. Eldridge played the role of his married daughter, Julia, who wants to escape her unhappy marriage with a newspaper mogul by running off with one of his news editors, Geoffrey Allen (March). Because Sir George is deep in debt to his son-in-law, he desperately tries to persuade Julia not to leave her husband. After two hectic days of farcical antics to bring Julia to her senses, Sir George wins out.

Eldridge gave a "spontaneous and most attractive performance," while March, in the role of the young lover which offered him little stage opportunity, "acquitted himself most creditably" ("Elitch Players to Close Season This Week").
1926 Season Summary

In summary, the Elitch's Gardens season of 1926 became another profitable success, both financially and theatrically. As a general rule, a stock company must cater to the taste of the audience, and a summer audience desires a light diet. This the Elitch's Garden theatre provided, but it also possessed the courage to present plays of real dramatic and literary merit. Six of them had been selected by Burns Mantle as Best Plays of the Year: The Swan (1923-24), Dancing Mothers (1924-25), Craig's Wife (1925-26), Icebound (1922-23), Liliom (1920-21), and Hell-Bent Fer Heaven (1923-24). Among the six, Craig's Wife, Icebound, and Hell-Bent Fer Heaven had also won Pulitzer Prizes. With the exception of The Poor Nut (in which March scored a big success at Elitch's), the remaining five also had successful Broadway runs: Love 'Em and Leave 'Em (152), The Music Master (540), The Poor Nut (32), Not Herbert (145), Easy Come, Easy Go (180), and These Charming People (107).

The sold out audiences for each venture proved the community's appreciation of and commitment to the Elitch organization. Regardless how silly the play, it was well done. Director Melville Burke possessed the ability to present a new play every week and have each presented as a finished production.
As Elitch's leading lady for the second year, Eldridge had once again given her best efforts and the Denver audiences and critics responded with praise and admiration. Playing a variety of roles, her versatility as an actress highlighted her performances. She had been a seasoned repertory player before coming to Elitch's and past experiences had taught her to learn quickly and effectively. She had several good acting opportunities, but she proved herself most sincerely in her performance of Julie in Liliom. There she created "a feeling of silent, heavy, inexpressible emotion" that captivated her audiences better than any of her other successes. (Gardener, "Plays of Merit Presented").

After one season, March had become the favorite of many long time patrons of the Gardens. His versatility was recognized and appreciated by Denver audiences, who declared that "no part was too small for March to excel in." The Gardener writer added to his critique of the 1926 season, "March has shown marked ability and established confidence among many. He is a star in the making. He is sincere and a hard worker and, undoubtedly, on the road to great success." ("Plays of Merit Presented").

In future years, both March and Eldridge would relate to their experiences in stock work, specifically at Elitch's, as the classroom in which they learned the
fundamentals which enabled them eventually to star on Broadway. They believed it was the hardest work they had ever done and also the most enjoyable.

When asked "How could you play one part when you were forgetting the last one and studying a third?", March had this reply:

Study is so much a part of the actor's work that it becomes routine and he develops concentration to a degree of which the average person never dreams. In stock you become accustomed to this routine and you seldom deviate from it. The hardest part of an actor's work is not when he is on the stage, but in the hours of study on a part and the daily rehearsals. (March qtd. in "Hours of Study Are Necessary by Actor to Master His Lines").

With the season at an end, March and Eldridge returned to New York together to begin rehearsals for A Proud Woman. (See Chapter 1). With the end of the 1926-1927 Broadway season, March and Eldridge returned to Denver for the Elitch 1927 summer season. They were looking forward to playing onstage together. But first, they wanted to get married.

The Season of 1927

John Mulvihill was known by his friends and co-workers as a kind, generous, and yet stern businessman. His grandson, Jack Gurtler, tells the story of the day that March and Eldridge approached Mulvihill with the announcement that they wanted to get married. After rehearsing one day in May, March told Mulvihill, "I know
you've told us that in your company no one could ever be married to their opposite lead, but I've fallen in love with Florence and we want to get married." Mulvihill replied, "Is that so? Well, you know what'll happen if you do." Mulvihill would not permit the Marches to act together on stage, for he believed audiences would not want to see a leading man play love scenes with his own wife on stage.

March believed that Mulvihill would eventually see their side of the conflict. One Thursday (30 May), on the customary afternoon off for the cast, Fredric March and Florence Eldridge went to Colorado Springs and got married. When Mulvihill heard of it, he called them both into his office and said, "You know what I've told you. One of you has to go, and Florence, I've already engaged another lady for your part. You can stay here with your new husband of course, but you won't be acting in the Elitch company" (Gurtler 65). Mulvihill had hired Flora Sheffield at quite short notice to take the leading lady position. (Elitch Gardener 4 June 1927).

Mulvihill's staff in 1927 consisted of Melville Burke, stage director, returning for his third year; Frank McDonald stage manager, and G. Bradford Ashworth, art director. The acting company comprised Flora Sheffield as leading lady, Florence Rittenhouse, May Buckley, Louise Huntington, Lea Penman, Uytendale Allaire, March as leading

For rehearsals, an outdoor room was used. Just outside the stage doors that adjoined the ball park the management had set up a canvas wall to separate the stage area from the park, with a wooden ceiling and canvas sides. This provided an ideal spot for the actors to rehearse in rain or sunshine (Gardener 4 June 1927).

Torrential rains greeted the opening of the 1927 season, yet a full house was in attendance. Quality Street, by J.M. Barrie, which opened on Sunday, 11 June, involves the Throssell sisters, Susan (May Buckley), a spinster who has had dreams of love, and Phoebe (Flora Sheffield), the younger, who plainly loves Valentine Brown (March), a dashing young physician who loves her but is not aware of his own affection. In the opening scene, Phoebe tells Susan and their spinster neighbors, the Misses Willoughby (Kirby Davis and Louise Huntington) and Turnbull (Adelaide George) that Valentine is coming to their home with an important message. All believe he will propose to Phoebe. When he announces instead that he has enlisted for the Napoleonic wars, all are astounded. After Valentine returns from the wars, nine years later, Phoebe attempts to rekindle the spark of romance they may have once had.
March, as the dashing Captain Brown, was "thoroughly at home in the role" (Denver Post rev. of Quality St.). His first appearance in the play brought an outburst of applause, indicating that his fine work in the previous season had been well remembered. A local critic reported: "Fredric March returns as leading man, visibly improved after a winter's work in the East. There is a flash in his eye, a little quickness of movement and a romantic dash to his bearing, that lent charm to his part of the young officer. A crisp incisive pronunciation aids the portrayal" (Monahan, Eve. News rev. of Quality St.).

George S. Kaufman's The Butter and Egg Man opened the second week's bill (19 June). The title was based on a phrase coined by Texas Guinan, a famous night club hostess, when one of her patrons had made himself conspicuous by insisting on buying everyone in the club a drink. When asked who he was, he mumbled that he was a dairyman from the mid-west. Texas Guinan then referred to the wealthy newcomer as a "butter and egg man," and the slang expression became the identification of anyone from a small town who comes to a big city, trying to buy his way into society.

The play, therefore, tells the story of a small-town youth, Peter Jones (March), who inherits a small fortune and decides to become a theatrical producer. Conned by two would-be producers, Jack McClure and Joseph Lehman (Douglas Dumbrille and Ray Walburn), he buys a play,
engages a company, and tries it out in Syracuse, only to have it fail. His partners leave him, but through the aid of his agent's secretary, Jane Weston (Flora Sheffield), he manages to turn the tables and prove to be a big success.

Said one critic: as Peter Jones, March's "transformation, in the final act, from a small-town hotel clerk to a successful play producer is one of the funniest sequences of the play" (DeBernardi, Eve. Post, 20 May). Another critic praised March's "simplicity and comical pathos" (H.M.F., Morning Post, rev. of The Butter and Egg Man). The critic for the Morning News assessed more fully March's talents:

The play provides [March] a corking opportunity and he never permits a moment of it to get by him. March becomes the uncertain youth in figure, voice and manner and not for a moment does he get out of character. When it comes to the painting of convincing characters, there is no one who knows how to do it better than Fredric March, and his performance last evening received a noisy evidence of appreciation from the audience. So skillfully does he handle some of his best comedy moments, that the audience cannot resist the temptation to shriek (Monahan, Morning News, 20 June).

Another witness observed that March "employs a queer high-pitched wavering tone, and sustains it admirably throughout the reading of long and many lines. The lines lifted from the text are not funny, but his manner of rendering them brings the laugh" (Eve. News, rev. of The Butter and Egg Man).
The following production on 26 June, Pigs, by Anne Morrison and Patterson McNutt, is set in a rural community in Indiana. Thomas Atkins, Jr. (March) would like to be a veterinarian, but his family opposes his wishes, except for his mother (May Buckley), who raises $250.00 for him with her engagement ring so that he may buy a litter of ailing pigs. Junior and his sweetheart, Mildred (Sheffield), nurse the pigs back to health and sell them when the price of pork soars. The older Atkins (Moffat Johnston) is obsessed with financial worries, but when Junior comes forward with money to aid his father, the latter for the first time realizes his son's true worth.

No reviewer, said one critic, "could ever find fault with March's performance in any role. Mr. March's characterization of Thomas Atkins, Jr. is excellent". Another witness observed that March "accelerates his walk into that of an impatient youth and again submerges himself in the role he assumes for the evening. A very thorough and fine performance" (Denver Post, rev. of Pigs).

The fourth week of the season, Arnold Ridley's mystery-comedy, The Ghost Train, opened Sunday night, 3 July. The ghost train, a phantom string of train cars, passes by the station of an English branch railroad line periodically, at midnight. Anyone seeing the train drops dead mysteriously. The characters of the play, a casual
collection of travelers, are marooned in the haunted station on the night the death train is to pass.

March played the role of Teddie Deakin, a "lawfing, silly British 'awss'" (Denver Post rev. of Ghost Tr.). Supposedly a brainless Englishman, Deakin in reality is a Scotland Yard detective. The Morning News stated:

March suits his voice and manner to the role and plays in a staccato fashion. One of the interesting features of playgoing at Elitch's is the way this leading man puts himself into a role, rather than the role, into his own personality. Singing his praises is rather trite and one wishes he would do something not so well" (Morning News, 4 July).

The next bill, Willard Mack's The Dove (July 10), was thought by many to be the best of the season. The story reveals the determination of the rich Mexican, Don Jose Tostado (Dumbrille) to win the service, if not the love, of Delores Romero (Penman), who, in turn, is enamored of Johnnie Powell (March), the American dice thrower who works across the street from the Purple Pigeon cafe, at which Delores is an entertainer. In a frame-up, Johnnie kills a shiftless cousin of Tostado's and promptly goes to prison. Delores promises to give her affections to Tostado, if he will release Johnnie, which he does. But Johnnie tracks them down and saves Delores from ruin.

With a cast of more than 50 and four spacious and beautiful sets, Melville Burke offered a spectacular production. The Spanish and Mexican costumes, made in New York, were shipped to Denver on 5 July, just two days
before opening night. Said Lea Penman of the production, "In all my experiences in playing in costume productions, I never have seen anything put on with such care. The settings would be worthy of a Broadway production" (Penman, Evening Post, 12 June).

With Dumbrille and Penman as the leads, March took a secondary role as the card playing Johnnie Powell. The Morning News thought that March's part "demands fire and he lights it with a real blast" (H.M.F. Morning News 8 July).

_Gentlemen Prefer Blondes_, by Anita Loos and her husband John Emerson, was the sixth production of the season. It depicts two American gold-diggers seeking adventure in Europe. Lorelei (Sheffield), a wise little blonde from Little Rock, is sent to Paris by Gus Eisman, the button king of Chicago, to learn etiquette. Her unrefined and wisecracking girlfriend, Dorothy (Penman), accompanies her. On the boat over, Lorelei meets Henry Spoffard (March), a highly polished millionaire from Philadelphia, who falls in love with her. The girls progress through a series of comic episodes, which climax when Gus Eisman arrives in Paris to find her in the arms of another man. March as "the psalm-singing-risque-postcard-loving Henry Spoffard, cold and reserved of manner" gave "the character an excellent portrayal" (Evening Post rev. of Gentleman P. Blondes).
Rolph Murphy's *Sure Fire*, on 24 July, presented a young playwright, Robert Ford (March), who lives in Greenwich Village and has failed to make a living from his plays. He is advised by a successful producer and by an equally successful writer of Broadway hits to take a rest in a small town environment, where he will surely find the material for his drama. He goes to Clayville, Indiana, where he runs inadvertently into a plot concerning a grey-haired post-mistress (Buckley) with a pretty daughter (Sheffield), whose home is about to be foreclosed upon by the village skinflint (Dumbrille), because she has used mortgage money to pay her son's gambling debts. Ford becomes his own hero, pays off the mortgage, and writes the successful play he had been striving for.

March was "thoroughly true to type and satisfying in the role" (*Evening Post* rev. of *Sure Fire*). The play had earlier failed in New York (running for only 32 performances); it likewise met with an indifferent reception at Elitch's Gardens.

Sam Janney's *Loose Ankles*, the season's eighth production, involves Gil Barry (March), a young man who wants to be an archeologist but by financial necessity is driven into becoming an escort/dancer. He and his three companions (Johnston, Dumbrille and Mackenzie Ward) earn their living by dancing with overweight ladies, and then receive valuable presents from them. Ann Harper
(Sheffield), a rebellious young flapper, will inherit a fortune if she marries someone acceptable to her family. To momentarily appease her family's worries, she hires Barry to impersonate her boyfriend and unintentionally falls in love with him. The Post commented that "[March] shows close attention to the mechanics of his part and does a good piece of work" ("Loose Ank., Smart Comedy"). Monahan classified March's portrayal of a "lugubrious, hesitant dreamer," as a part "made for him" (Eve. News 1 Aug.).

On 7 August, the ninth production, The Last Mrs. Cheyney, premiered. Billed as the most brilliant comedy to be written in the last ten years, it offered the best role of the season for Flora Sheffield. Written by Frederick Lonsdale, the play's plot has the mysterious Mrs. Cheyney, impersonating an Australian aristocrat, wooed by the pompous and wealthy, Lord Elton (March). In reality a member of a gang of crooks, her identity is discovered by Dilling, who confronts her when he catches her stealing a string of pearls. Faced with disclosure, Mrs. Cheyney produces a letter in which Lord Elton discloses scandalous tidbits about his fellow peers and to keep her silence, Mrs. Cheyney is acquitted of charges.

March, as Lord Dilling, a wealthy young bachelor with a reputation among women, succeeded "admirably" in depicting the qualities of "gentleman and philanderer"
(Morning News rev. of The Last Mrs. Cheyney). The play was praised for its "brilliant exhibition of word fencing" and "constant clash of wits" (Morning News).

In the following week, the company presented Lula Vollmer's The Shame Woman, a story of the Carolina mountains and the efforts of a single mother to protect her adopted daughter from the stigma of having fallen in love with the wrong man. The season's tenth production (opening 14 August), it marked the Denver debut for actress Florence Rittenhouse in the role of Lize Burns, which she had created in the original New York production and had played for over 270 performances.

Having lived for twenty years in a lonely North Carolina cabin, Lize Burns is branded as a fallen woman by her neighbors because of her affair years before with the mayor's son, Craig Anson (March), who abandoned her and bragged to people of Lize's promiscuity. She lives with her daughter Lily (Sheffield), an adopted orphan whom Lize had nursed back to health from a fever epidemic. She adores the young girl and feels undeserving of Lily's unconditional love. When Lize discovers that her daughter has been seeing a married man, she reveals to Lily her own sad tale of abandonment. Inconsolable, Lily kills herself. When the lover calls at the cabin for Lily, Lize recognizes him as Craig Anson. To prevent him from once again "laughin' and tellin'," Lize stabs him to death.
Refusing to permit her daughter's good name to be "shamed," Lize goes to the gallows for the murder of Anson.

Although his role was brief, March gave "a fine performance; extremely credible and believable" (H.M.F. Morning News).

Two weeks prior to the opening of Spread Eagle, by George S. Brooks and Walter B. Lester, Denver advertisements had promoted the fact that in this eleventh production of the season, Fredric March was to have the best role "ever assigned to him" (Denver Post 22 Aug.). The plot concerns Martin Henderson (Moffat Johnston), the guiding spirit of a gigantic corporation whose battlements extend to every far-flung corner of the world. In order to protect his threatened Mexican mining interests, Henderson finances a revolution, and, to make certain that the United States government will intervene and save his property, employs the son of a former U.S. president to take a precarious position at one of his mines, fully cognizant that the boy, Charles Parkman (Allen Vincent), is apt to be murdered by Henderson's own revolutionists.

March played the role of Joe Cobb, special assistant to Martin Henderson, who, after discovering Henderson's scheme, deserts Henderson to work out his own salvation. While Martin Henderson motivates the plot, Joe Cobb is at the center of the play's action. Cobb deplores doing
Henderson's "dirty work," quits, joins the army, and in the final scene, returns to tell his boss what he really thinks of him.

March stated in an interview that he looked forward to playing the role of Joe Cobb: "Cobb is the composite of thousands of disillusioned men all over the U.S. today. His cynicism, his ability to turn a grim moment into a laugh, his very humanness make him a person rather than a character" (March Denver Post, 21 Aug.). Debernardi of the Denver Post reported that "[March] has the outstanding role of his career. [Cobb] is a forceful, typical, cynical man who has no illusions about the glamour of war" (22 Aug.). The Morning News called March's portrayal "superb". Details of the performance can be seen through the pen of the Evening News critic:

March plays Joe Cobb. He plays it as he has never played a role before. With all the vigor and excusable vitriol the part demands. That last time he speaks, just as the curtain falls is beautiful. He hurls it at Henderson, the murderer and dollar-a-year man. In it he seems to epitomize all the hatred for hypocrisy concerning war, expressed by cynical men at arms since the world began (What Price Glory Finds Sequel in Spread Eagle).

The final production of the 1927 season, The Cradle Snatchers, a farce written by Russell Medcraft and Norma Mitchell, had played 332 performances on Broadway with Humphrey Bogart playing the role of Jose Vallejo. The play focuses on three matrons who, discovering that their husbands are philandering under the guise of a hunting
trip, hire three college gigolos to entertain them, in the hope that their flapper-chasing husbands will become jealous and return to the home fires. May Buckley, Kirby Davis, and Florence Rittenhouse played the three matrons, and Allen Vincent, March, and Frank McDonald (the company stage manager) portrayed the three collegiates.

When the three young adventurers arrive at Mrs. Ladd's Long Island summer home, and March, as Jose Vallejo, announces that he is going to "give his mamma full weight for her money," the Elitch theatre audience erupted with wild applause. In the end, the husbands do return home, find their wives in compromising situations, and give in to the complaints of their mates.

Reported the Denver Post: "March played the pseudo-Spanish osteopath, Jose Vallejo, with all the fire and comedy flair the part calls for, taking round after round of applause for his work" ("Cradle Snatchers Gets Laughs"). March's role was filled with "poetic speeches," which he presented to the audience in "splendid fashion," with a roar following each (Morning Post, 29 Aug.). The Cradle Snatchers was a "cleverly written bit of stage stuff," according to the Post (29 Aug.), filled with sparkling lines of comedy, fast action, and laugh provoking situations."

Summary of the 1927 Season

With the close of The Cradle Snatchers, the Elitch's Gardens theatre closed the most successful artistic and
financial season in its history (Mulvihill *The Gardener* 2 Sept.). While the maintenance of a company of the standard of the Elitch Players was not primarily one for financial profit but rather an aim to provide the citizens of Denver with an opportunity to witness good plays presented by actors of the best talent obtainable, the financial success of the season was a gratifying one (Mulvihill 1). Every effort had been made to give a wide variety of plays, including the most recent New York successes. Emphasis was placed on comedy, in the belief, sustained by box-office figures, that the public enjoys amusing summer entertainment, if it is intelligent and well presented.

More than 200 plays were read by Mulvihill and Burke in an endeavor to secure twelve that would be of a certain standard of entertainment. Mulvihill and Burke made three trips to New York between October and May, viewing each attraction on Broadway. Out of the plays offered in 1926 on Broadway, Mulvihill and Burke decided that The Ghost Train for mystery, Sure Fire, Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, and Loose Ankles for comedy and Spread Eagle for drama were the best of the lot. The Last of Mrs. Cheyney, Pigs, and The Dove were secured after an order had been placed with the agency a year in advance to buy them immediately
when they were on the market. (The Elitch Gardener, 8-28-27).

The 1927 season had offered March the opportunity to play varied character parts. In twelve weeks March successfully performed the roles of an army physician, a novice theatre producer, a pig farmer, a Scotland yard detective, a professional gambler, a millionaire, a struggling playwright, an escort/dancer, a Lord, a scoundrel, a secretary with a conscience, and a college gigolo. Each of his performances was critically acclaimed by the Denver critics, and his popularity with Denver audiences was acknowledged by all connected with the Elitch theatre.

With the end of the Elitch season, March and Eldridge returned to New York to begin rehearsals for the Theatre Guild's first national tour, for which Eldridge was hired to play the leading lady roles in four plays which the Theatre Guild had produced in New York with success: Arms and the Man, The Guardsman, The Silver Cord, and Mr. Pim Passes By. March was hired to play featured roles.

The Theatre Guild Tour of 1927-28

During the 1920s, and to a lesser extent, during the 1930s, the most dynamic and creative organization on Broadway was the Theatre Guild (Atkinson 209). Not interested in commercial gain but in establishing an art theatre with modern standards, the Guild's humble
beginnings in 1919 with a group of amateur producers, was never expected to succeed. However, by 1929, the Guild had four productions simultaneously playing in four theatres on Broadway and seven companies traveling across America (Atkinson 213). The Guild was committed to producing plays of artistic merit and most of its early plays came from abroad. Unintimidated by public opinion, the Guild took an interest in Bernard Shaw, who in 1920 was in disgrace for his opposition to World War I. At the beginning of its third season, the Guild gave the world premiere of Heartbreak House, an audacious play by Shaw, which met with great success.

Believing that audiences throughout America were as hungry for good theatre as were New York consumers, the Guild in 1926 began plans to take four of its most successful artistic works on tour. Under the leadership of two of its directors, Lawrence Langner (founder of the Guild and later founder of the American Shakespeare Theatre and Academy at Stratford, Connecticut) and Theresa Helburn (a past student of G.P. Baker's at Harvard), the Theatre Guild began its first national tour in October of 1927 ("The Guild Plans a Tour" Theatre Guild file).

Remembering that Florence Eldridge had been quite successful in the Guild's 1921 Ambush production, Langner and Helburn wished to team her with well-known actor George Gaul; they would play the leads in the experimental
touring company. Aware of Fredric March's developing popularity in New York and his success at Elitch's, Langner and Helburn thought that March would be an added strength in featured roles. ("The Guild Plans a Tour" Theatre Guild File). Contacted in Denver, during the 1927 summer season, March and Eldridge were ecstatic to have such an opportunity made available to them and they signed a contract with the Guild in June 1927. ("Ridgewood Claims Eldridge", Ridgewood Times).

Chautauqua-Lyceum System

The type of touring system used by the Guild for this first tour combined two successful and proven methods. During the 1920's throughout America, several theatre circuits offered small town theatre enthusiasts a chance to book stellar attractions at an affordable fee. The "chautauqua-lyceum system", as it was called, specialized in concerts, recitals, lectures, and legitimate drama (Bernheim 107). The system operated by means of a booking office, on the one hand, and a local citizen's committee, or board, on the other. The booking office worked through correspondence and also employed traveling representatives to tour the territories and make contacts with prospective clients, almost exclusively in small towns, and then to maintain contacts with those already booked.

These representatives appeared about a year prior to the opening of the season, arranging a program and
a contract with a committee for presentations on specified dates. All negotiations and all arrangements were made by the local committee, which assumed full financial and other responsibilities. The major revenue came from committee members selling books of season tickets. Though individual tickets were sold at each attraction, this source of revenue was meager, depending almost entirely upon transients. The committee served without compensation, acting out of a sense of civic duty and for the social distinction attached. Its personnel always consisted of the substantial citizens of the community. (Bernheim 106)

Whereas a "chautauqua" consisted of a series of lectures, concerts, recitals and various forms of entertainments given on consecutive days over a period of time, usually a week, a lyceum series, unlike the chautauqua, was not run off during consecutive days, but at intervals of time several weeks apart: given during the winter months in some appropriate building which a town could afford, perhaps the high school auditorium or the town hall if there was no regular theatre. Instead of the variety of attractions which the chautauqua offered, a lyceum series generally presented only one on each scheduled date, such as a play or a recital or a lecture. Lyceum companies traveled very lightly for they appeared in all manner of auditoriums, town halls, skating
rinks, and gymnasiums whose stages varied in size and facilities, if indeed there was a stage at all. Companies generally carried few scenic pieces due to the short time allotted to erect a set. Plays with small casts, say from six to twelve, were generally selected. Comedies or dramas with simple, moral messages were most popular. Complex, tragic material did not go over well and anything bordering on the risque was taboo. A typical lyceum season averaged twenty weeks. (Berheim 107).

**Theatre Guild System**

The Guild's method of booking, which it termed the "concert plan", had often been discussed by theatre managers, but it was thought impractical due to its fast paced one-night stand schedule. With the persuasion of Daniel Mayer, a concert manager and lyceum booker (who felt that the interest in concerts was lagging, due principally to the radio, and who hit upon the idea of sending out a high-class dramatic company on the lyceum basis), the Guild began preparations for a twenty week tour. (Bernheim 108).

Mr. Mayer sold the Guild's plays at fixed sums, usually as part of a lyceum course, sometimes as separate attractions. He did business with the lyceum association in each town. The association, in turn, disposed of the tickets at whatever price it could get. Generally the most expensive ticket was $2.75, though occasionally it
sold for $3.30 (Berheim 108). The Guild received a fixed sum for each performance from Mr. Mayer. It had nothing to do with admission prices and it did not share in receipts. Whatever any local association got in excess of its contract price with Mr. Mayer, it retained for its own use. Mayer booked the Guild tour solid; eight performances a week, beginning in October, 1927 and continuing through March, 1928 and playing mostly one night stands with train rides in between them (Bernheim 108).

The Company

The "Theatre Guild Repertory Company", as they were called, consisted of a very competent troupe of twelve people with a repertory of four plays previously produced successfully on Broadway: The Guardsman, Mr. Pim Passes By, Arms and the Man, and The Silver Cord.

Along with the Marches, the company included Erskine Sanford (the Guild's original "Mr. Pim"), Molly Pearson (famed for work at that time in Bunty Pulls the Strings), Hortense Alden (considered one of the best of the younger actresses of the day), Dorothy Fletcher (who had been working with the Guild in other productions), Stanley G. Wood, Leonard Loan, Joyce Williams and Dorothy Laird: all of whom had been familiar and comfortable with the traditional one-week-stand engagements on tour or with long stays in New York. On this tour, however, the players
were to experience a string of one-night stands, reaching from the East (Philadelphia) to the West (the Colorado Rockies) and the South (Savannah) to the North (Montreal).

George Gaul and Eldridge played the leads in each of the four plays, with March playing the featured roles. (The fact that March consented to be a featured player while Eldridge carried a lead role, comments on the good working relationship that must have existed between these two talented performers. Throughout their careers, each seemed to be genuinely proud of the other's talents and promoted each other's endeavors).

In The Guardsman, by Ferenc Molnar, Gaul played The Actor, who is suspicious of the Actress (Eldridge), his beautiful wife of only six months. Believing that his wife would prefer being married to a brave soldier, the Actor impersonates a Guardsman of the Russian embassy, and tries to win her love. The plot brings out many humorous situations, with the poor actor as the butt of most of the jokes. As a final denouncement, his wife tells him that she recognized him from the first and only played up to him to see how far he would go. In truth she really loves him and now knows just how good an actor he really is.

March's supporting role was that of the Critic. When the production played in Denver to audiences familiar with his talents, the Denver Post noted: "The Fredric
March fans naturally do not like to see him out of first place, feeling he is an actor deserving of leads; but as always, he fits himself into the picture and gives a good account of himself" (Denver Post rev. of The Guardsman). The Evening Post commented: "Mr. March as a theatre critic, has the same old verve and polish that convinced this reviewer of his unquestioned place as one of the finest young players on the stage today" (H.M.F. Evening Post rev. of The Guardsman). The Morning Post added:

As to Fredric March, who plays the role of the music critic and 'friend of the family', his work is of such rare artistry as to overshadow every other character in the play. In two seasons at Elitch's Gardens as leading man, March never gave anything but a fine performance, and his ability to lose his own personality in his characterizations is just as evident now as it had been for two summers past. Beyond any suspicion of doubt, March is going to have a spectacular career as a brilliant actor (Morning News rev. of The Guardsman).

Not having seen Eldridge on stage since Elitch's 1926 season, the local audiences were excited to see her perform once again. Kaspar Monahan of The Evening Post thought that she "gave the best performance Tuesday night of any in which Denver theatergoers have seen her."

Enjoying her performance, he further commented that "her portrayal of the wife of the actor was facile, [and] polished and she tossed off her lines in a manner that brought out the true Molnarian touch" but he also added that because the acoustics were bad in the city auditorium,
where the play was performed, that people "past the parquet", were having to strain to understand her ("The Theatre Guild comes to Denver"). The Evening News thought that "Florence Eldridge, in the Lynn Fontanne role, was a revelation. Miss Eldridge has matured considerably and beautifully. Her figure enhanced by magnificent tea gowns was the talk of the audience" (rev. of The Guardsman). But, as for the scenery, Monahan thought it was "a bit worse for wear, [and] did not match the performance of the play" ("The Theatre Guild Comes to Denver").

Mr. Pim Passes By, by A.A. Milne, concerns an English gentleman, George Marden (Gaul) and his wife Olivia (Eldridge), who for five years have lived sedately and undisturbed in their comfortable country home. George, a righteous, strictly conscientious citizen, receives a terrible blow when Mr. Pim, a momentary visitor, innocently imparts the information that he has recently seen Olivia's first husband, who had been believed dead, accompanied by an Australian prisoner on a steamer. Fearing bigamy, George thinks only of the danger in losing his social position and unsoiled family name. He overlooks his wife's feelings, revealing himself as an inconsiderate and desperate man seeking his own best interests. The lovable old Mr. Pim returns later stating that he had made a mistake in his accusation, but Olivia having seen
another side to her husband's personality, doesn't forget George's selfish reactions.

Eldridge, "gave an inspired and convincing performance, completely submerging her own personality in her character, and scoring a definite personal triumph with her audience" (DeBernardi \textit{Evening Post} rev. of Mr. Pim). March played the role of Brian Strange, a young painter in love with George's niece, Dinah (Hortense Alden), and of them both, the critic called their portrayals "splendid" (H.M.F. \textit{Evening Post} rev. of Mr. Pim).

Interestingly, the practice of acknowledging an actor by applauding his first entrance on stage, so common at Elitch's Gardens performances, was not appreciated by the Guild players: "The Guilders are to be highly commended for their repudiation of the asinine entrance applause which greeted their individual appearances; and their refusal to acknowledge the interruptions and their determination to proceed with their lines, even though they might not be heard for the silly hand clapping, quickly silenced it" (DeBernardi rev. of Mr. Pim).

\textit{Arms and The Man}, George B. Shaw's satire on war and the professional fighting man, was the third play of the repertoire. The story focuses on Raina (Eldridge), the daughter of a Bulgarian army officer, and her encounter with Captain Bluntschli (Gaul), an enemy army officer.
While both her father and her fiance, Saranoff (March), are off battling the war, Bluntschli, running away from a fierce battle he cannot possibly win, sneaks into Raina's house for refuge. Frank and honest about his view of the conflict, Bluntschli convinces Raina that she need not worry about his harming her or anyone. Raina conceals him, lets him sleep in her room, and gives him chocolate, his favorite candy. After the war, her father and Saranoff return. Bluntschli also appears in order to return a coat loaned to him by Raina. Saranoff's pompous and overbearing attitude towards Bluntschli and Raina's friendship, alerts Raina to her fiancee's faults. In the end she chooses the affections of Bluntschli over Saranoff.

"Fredric March is superb in the role of Major Saranoff", wrote the Morning Post: he portrays the "young major who takes soldiering with over-zealous responsibility, strutting and playing a magnificent cock-of-the-walk, at all times." The critic added "as usual, Miss Eldridge is charming and convincing, playing her Raina with perfect good taste" (Morning Post rev. of Arms and the Man).

The fourth play in the repertoire was The Silver Cord. Written by Sidney Howard, the play explores the "pathological side of mother-love" (Atkinson 273). An early excursion into Freudian psychology, the plot concerns a mature mother who deliberately tries to keep her two
adult sons dependent upon her. Opposing every move either of her sons makes toward independence, Mrs. Phelps is outraged by their natural impulses toward other women. Eldridge played the role of Christina, a strong, intelligent, and determined young woman who is married to Mrs. Phelps' oldest son David (Gaul). When she comes to Mrs. Phelps' house for her first extended visit, Christina discovers the dysfunctional household into which she has married. Mrs. Phelps suggests that David stay with her while Christina goes alone to New York to start a medical practice, that her youngest son Robert (March) is bound for marital failure if he marries Hester (Alden), and that both boys should listen to her: for no one could love them more than their mother does. In complete despair, Christina chastises mother and sons and then walks out on them, accompanied by Hester who has been pushed into attempting suicide by Mrs. Phelps' meddling. Just as the two young women are out of sight, David comes to his senses, realizing he loves his wife more than his mother, and runs after Christina. Robert, however, is totally bewitched by his mother's convincing charms, and chooses to stay with her.

This play, which shocked some theatre goers in New York and titillated others, was a daring choice for the Guild. It was performed only in the larger cities with performances of two other pieces from the repertoire.
The *Detroit Press* found it to be "unconventional" in subject matter, but thought the characterizations by the Guild actors to be "honest, forthright and convincing" ("Guild Tours Detroit" 10 Dec. 1927).

**Tour Conditions**

In addition to cities, the Guild company successfully presented its attractions in towns as small as Kent, Ohio, which had a population of only about 4,000. In some communities where there was no regular lyceum, and where the motion picture house demanded an exorbitant rental, the production took place in any available hall. In Burlington, Vermont, the company had to wait until a noon basketball game had finished playing before it could begin to erect scenery. However, the curtain went up on time that night (Bernheim 107).

An article entitled "The Guild Conquers the Provinces", which appeared in the *New York Times* the day after the tour closed in Montreal, 31 March, gives an account of what happened on the road. Company manager, John York, was in charge not only of dispersing the payroll on Saturday afternoons and hustling his charges to trains, but also of handling all of the many varied problems which occurred in meeting such an exhausting schedule of performances:

In some places railroad connections were impossible and [we] rode in buses: in others [we] encountered innkeepers who had their opinion of show folks and wanted their money in advance. These innkeepers
had never heard of the Theatre Guild, a fact which caused desolation and fasting in the Guild's press department ("Guild Conquers").

Sometimes the stage space could not accommodate the regular scenery. To meet such emergencies, the Guild carried a skeleton set consisting of black drapes with windows, and doors, which the crew pinned on to whatever hanging devices were made available to them. In some towns there were no professional stage hands, and "sundry gentlemen of leisure had to be corralled from their perch around the store stove" to assist in the job of unloading the cars ("Guild Conquers").

For the most part, the plays were well received. However in Jamestown, N.Y., the local critic thought that The Guardsman was: "rather light, to take up a full evening." In Dallas, Texas, the company could not appear because the church organization which owned the auditorium declared that the Guild plays were "out of line" with their purposes. So, the company played Fort Worth instead and advertisements ran for a day or so in the Dallas papers. Two special trolleys transported Dallas people who wanted to see the performance ("Guild Conquers").

In Hampton, Va., the company presented Arms and the Man before the Hampton Institute, a college for Negroes (from which Booker T. Washington had graduated). Though the Hampton audience appeared to love the play, some communities opposed the Shaw comedy. It was, so Alfred
Head was told, "slightly immoral in its first act, because the soldier, Bluntschili, climbs through a window and, exhausted, falls on the lady's bed, although the lady wasn't in it" ("Guild Conquers").

In Kansas City a local newspaper stood as the guarantor, and the week was excellent. Later, Drama League executives responsible for bringing the Guild company to Kansas City, declared that it was the first theatrical troupe they had backed which had not left them with a deficit. All expenses (company, theatre rent, and advertising) were cleared and there remained a profit of $2.58 ("Guild Conquers").

In Jackson, Michigan, the only available locale was the new high school. Though the school board wanted to donate the facility for the night, a school law prohibited it. So, the town charged the Guild the unbelievably low sum of $82.50 to rent the school for the evening. They presented The Guardsman: it was the first play that Jackson had seen in a year. And in one Pennsylvania city, officials commented that they had seen nothing but movies. The spoken drama they deemed "a gift from Heaven" and patronized it by providing sold houses for the Guild players. ("Guild Conquers").

The Marches' Personal Remembrances of the Tour

Twenty years later, in an article in the New York Times Eldridge and March recalled that ground breaking tour.
According to Eldridge, Theresa Helburn had first told them that the tour was to last for only twenty weeks and would cover only the major cities of the U.S. (In actuality, the tour lasted for twenty-three weeks and covered one hundred and thirty two towns and suburbs). In addition, March and Eldridge were made to believe that after the tour was over, they would be hired by the Theatre Guild to replace the Lunts, whose contract was coming to an end. (In actuality, the Lunts unexpectedly re-signed). As Eldridge remarked:

We began that fall, on the golden road to stardom. This was our chance and we grabbed it. No matter how uncomfortable, no matter how many 4 a.m. trains, it would be worth it. [However], there was hardly a place on the entire tour that could be even loosely described as a theatre" (qtd. in McCrary, "New York Close-Up").

Whatever playing space happened to be available had to serve; this included barns, gymnasiums, even saloons. When they were lucky they found themselves in a dirty, ill-heated hall that could with twenty-four hours of applied company ingenuity, be gotten up to resemble a theatre. In one particular 'theatre', converted horse stalls served as dressing rooms. ("New York Close-Up").

According to Eldridge, the major problem with the tour was that it was not managed with the "precision" usually credited to a Guild production: "Since an independent agent was used to coordinate the tour, whether or not the troupe played in beer halls, schoolhouses,
barns or gyms did not matter to him, so long as we played somewhere" (Eldridge qtd. in *Ridgewood Times* 1).

Whenever conditions appeared unbearable, the Marches would huddle close together, cross their fingers and repeat slowly: "Remember, the Lunts are not re-signing. Remember, the Lunts are not re-signing. This is worth the suffering" (qtd. in "New York Close-Up"). As Eldridge recalled:

Freddie would repeat that to me almost every morning toward the end of the tour. I had gotten seedy and tired, and he would say it to me as he dumped me into a tub of cold water every morning to wake me up. Toward the end, all I could eat was sliced tomatoes and cottage cheese . . . 'but the Lunt's were not re-signing! Hang on!' (qtd. in "New York Close-Up").

After twenty-five weeks on tour, with two more to go, Theresa Helburn visited the cast dressing room one night before a show, and upon leaving casually announced that the Lunts had reversed their decision from the previous summer, and were, instead, re-signing with the Guild for at least one more year. The Marches were stunned. The six months on tour had been exhausting, as it often meant playing at night and traveling all day. When they got back to New York, they found there were no jobs waiting.

Lawrence Langner recalled meeting the company at the rail station the day they returned to New York: "I went to congratulate the actors on their tour, and I have seldom met such a group of indignant, overworked people" (Langner 222). Evidently, the tour was a huge success
in the minds of Langner and the Guild, but to the cast and crew it was a grueling experience. Langner quotes Fredric March as saying, "the hotel accommodations in most of the small towns were so bad that even when we did have an opportunity to sleep, the beds and the inhabitants thereof often made it impossible to do so" (Langner 220).

Not until years later was Eldridge able to tell Theresa Helburn how she honestly felt about the Guild tour. Still believing that the Guild had taken unfair advantage of them, Eldridge finally wrote her long time friend a letter expressing her true thoughts about how the cast and crew were made to suffer undue stress, due to bad planning and organization by the Guild:

The tour itself was a monument to your lack of concern for your actors. You know the circumstances of it: trains at four and five in the morning; all day rides with dinner in a station and a drive out to the highschool to play a performance and take a sleeper out. This should not have been added to with an unnecessary five hour trip with two changes between Akron and Canton. That jump could have been made in one hour . . . always is . . . at very small cost had we not been tacked on to the scenery (personal letter from Eldridge to Helburn, 25 Mar. 1947).

Eldridge continued her letter by reminding Helburn that four weeks after the tour had ended, Helburn approached them about returning again the next year. Feeling that they had "paid their debts" out of the first tour, they "decided that a second year would give us a stake to function on in the future." But, when March and Eldridge .
went in to sign the contracts for another tour, Helburn and Langner had changed their minds. As Eldridge wrote Helburn: "You were very cold and impersonal. . . As it turned out you did us an enormous service" (referring to their move to California) but "we couldn't look that far ahead and really suffered from the blow you dealt our pride" (Eldridge qtd. in letter to Helburn).

Helburn then responded to Eldridge with a beautiful gift and letter of apology (2 Apr. 1947), to which Eldridge responded back with an apology to Helburn for ever bringing up something that happened many years before (8 Apr. 1947).

In retrospect, the Marches confessed that the tour did have its brighter and lighter moments, such as their "first whiff of spring air in Ponca City, Oklahoma, or watching the birds migrating against the sunset in Benton, Texas", and then "sleeping on the courthouse steps" ("New York Close-Up").

We did enjoy it, for all the complaints. We got to polish our technique in some of the best-written plays ever. It was fun for Florence and me, this working together constantly, and we got to learn a lot about the country and the people in various regions" (Quirk, 19).

Summary of the Theatre Guild Tour

The Guild's 1927-28 tour had succeeded in bringing to many towns the first dramatic entertainment they had witnessed in years. In small cities such as Racine, Wisconsin; Binghamton and Jamestown, New York; Topeka, Kansas; and Boulder, Colorado, the Guild tour offered
the residents legitimate theatre which they had been seeking from New York producers for years ("Guild Conquers").

The Tour was exhausting. Lasting six months (opening at Amherst College 19 October 1927 and closing in Montreal 31 March 1928), the company performed almost every single day; sometimes twice a day. Covering 105 cities in twenty-nine states and Canada, they gave eight performances a week. They traveled sometimes twelve hours at one stretch (arriving at a new town almost daily) and were expected to give a rousing performance each and every time in local stage conditions which often left much to be desired. Their hotel accommodations were, more times than not, low rate (they once slept on the steps of a courthouse).

Even so, the company worked well together. So successful was the tour in the eyes of the Theatre Guild, that the next year two companies were sent out across America, and by 1929, the Guild had seven touring companies. However, none of them ever came close to matching the number of performances, the number of one-night-stands, nor the grueling traveling conditions experienced by those first Theatre Guild pioneers. Eldridge and March had been a part of a historic experiment: one which had left them physically drained but enlightened. March was quoted as saying: "So long as we played somewhere, we didn't care how brutal the tour was. We
got into everybody's hair. Every Chamber of Commerce was sore at the troupe. But we loved it. I wish we'd kept a diary" (Ridgewood Times 9).

Upon their return to New York in April, and with no prospective fall season work available to them, they bought a second-hand car and headed for California. Hollywood paid little attention to them, so they returned to Denver, where Fred began another season of stock with Elitch's and Florence began another season of homemaking. Before they left the Coast, however, a friend of March's promised to notify them if anything should come available from a new invention Hollywood was developing: the talking picture.

Elitch's Gardens 1928 Season

As early as March 1928, notice had been given in Denver that Fredric March would be returning for Elitch's summer season, and that Miriam Hopkins was to play opposite him as leading lady (Denver Post 14 Mar. 1928). In April, Sylvia Sidney was announced as the upcoming lead, replacing Hopkins (Post 23 Apr. 1928), but as the season neared, it became apparent that Isobel Elsom was to take the primary role. With no mention of Eldridge in any Denver paper during the season, one can only surmise that she was not involved in the theatre's productions. The Elitch Gardener did, however, state that March was living at
"840 Gaylord street, in a roomy English mansion" (10 Aug. 1928).

Isabel Elsom had performed with Lionel Atwill in The Outsider in its London production, receiving much praise for her portrayal (Elitch Gardener May 1928). Mulvihill's selection of her as leading lady was considered "smart" by the Denver critics (Post 20 May 1928). Other members of the company were Sylvia Sidney (as the ingenue), Jessamine Newcombe, Frances Goodrich, Edna James, Vernon Steele, Albert Hackett, Jay Fassett, Doan Borup, Francis Compton, and C. Henry Gordon. Melville Burke was again the director, Frank McDonald, the assistant director and Horace Armistead, the art director. Mulvihill had also added one additional staff member, Arnold B. Gurtler as secretary, who was Mulvihill's son-in-law.

Opening night on 1 June, had a crowd that taxed the historic old playhouse to capacity, and "greeted the smartest company of players that has graced the boards for three seasons past" (Evening Post, "Elitch Marks Opening Night"). The play, Baby Cyclone, by George M. Cohan, derived its title from a Pekingese puppy called "Cyclone": Hurby (Hackett) does not want to keep the dog because his young wife (Sidney) loves it more than she does him. He secretly sells it to Lydia Webster (Elsom), whose fiance, Joseph Meadows (March), also doesn't want the mischievous little dog.
At March's first appearance, the Denver audience greeted him with overwhelming applause, which "threatened to impede the movement of the first act" (Evening Post "Elitch's Opens With Baby Cyclone"). The critical response to the play focused on Cohan, the playwright, and the company as an ensemble: "the best balanced, best looking aggregation that has been seen at the Gardens for at least two seasons," also, March's "acting is better than ever" (DeBernardi rev. of Baby Cyclone, Den. Post).

The Springboard, by Alice Duer Miller, opened the second week, 17 June. The play depicts a woman artist named Mary (Elsom) who falls in love with and marries Victor (March), a young lawyer. Giving up a lucrative career in Paris for her husband, Mary soon discovers that Victor is not as willing to give up philandering for his wife. Deciding to marry only in order to escape his mother's ever-watchful eyes, Victor continues his illicit affairs, with no conscious regard for Mary's feelings. Seeking aid from Victor's partner (Vernon Steele), (who is glad to help her for he has loved her from afar), Mary files for divorce, to Victor's great surprise. She receives her freedom, and Victor pines away for the marriage he so foolishly squandered away.

March's portrayal of the character as "a brash young man with loads of charm, but superbly selfish and thoughtless" was "masterful" (Monahan rev. of The
Springboard, Morn.Post). "So cleverly and with such perfect understanding does he play [the role]," the critic continues, "the part could have been written for him to create, except for the fact that the same thing could be said for every role in which March has appeared in Denver." However, "throughout [the production] there were ragged touches as regards confusion of names and slip-ups in lines", which suggests that the weekly rush of getting on stage play after play inevitably produced uneven results (Monahan review).

Repeating the role she had created in London, Elsom next played Lalage Sturdee, in Dorothy Brandon's The Outsider, which opened 24 June. Lalage, a crippled girl, seeks the aid of a surgeon, Anton Ragatzy (Gordon), who has been having success with an experimental cure, which has not yet been approved by the medical profession. Embittered from being classified a quack, Ragatzy promotes his method which consists of stretching upon a rack patients afflicted with malformed joints. Lalage, the daughter of a prominent Royal surgeon, agrees to try his cure. After a full year of painful treatments, her first attempt at walking fails and her boyfriend, Basil Owen (March), becomes so discouraged that he leaves her never to return again. The doctor, 'the outsider', feels defeated, and when he attempts to leave, Lalage's love for him impels her to try to walk once more, and this
time succeeds, stopping him at the door. The critical focus was upon Elsom and Gordon and their stirring portrayals. Though March's part was small, one critic stated, "Fredric March could carry a spear and steal the show" (D.E. Eve. Post rev. of The Outsider).

Tommy, a comedy of youth from Howard Lindsay and Bert Robinson, opened on 1 July. Hackett played Tommy Mills, a young man full of ambition, and Sidney played his girlfriend, Marie. Throughout the play, the young lovers are misunderstood by their elders: Tommy shows an interest in working on the farm and the family thinks that he is trying 'to take' their land. Uncle Dave Tuttle (March) steps into the action and convinces both parties that they need to negotiate. Uncle Dave, the hero of the play, saves Tommy and Marie's relationship and secures the family's understanding. The Evening Post reported, "Fredric March was so disguised that Elitch regulars failed to recognize him until he spoke his lines... [it was] a splendid piece of character acting" (D.E. Eve. Post rev. of Tommy).

In the fifth week of the season, George Kelly's Behold the Bridegroom opened 8 July. It offered Elsom the chance to play the role of Antoinette Lyle, a rich idler, with a headstrong personality. Rude and inconsiderate of others, she selfishly takes what she wants in life. And then upon meeting a virtuous man who exemplifies all that she is
not, she discovers that she has nothing of true worth to offer him.

March, who played a supporting role as the lover, Gehring Fitler, acted "as passionate and touching a love scene as one might care to witness" (Post rev. of Behold the Bridegroom). The Denver critics found the play beautifully done and worth seeing if for no other reason than to see something different from the average run of plays presented in stock.

Nightstick by John Wray, J.C. and Elliot Nugent, and Elaine Carrington, opened 17 July. It depicts a policeman's daughter, Joan Manning, who although engaged to a young detective, Tommy Glennon (March), longs to escape from the world of policemen. Consequently, Joan (played by Sylvia Sidney) marries Chick (Gordon), an ex-convict. Complications arise over this strange matrimonial alliance: Tommy continues to love Joan unconditionally and Chick plans to use his new wife as a shield for his crooked schemes.

March's portrayal seemed just right: He "snarls and barks and flourishes his gun in magnificent manner" (Monahan rev. of Nightstick). DeBernardi of the Denver Post also liked March "in one of those roles he loves to do, indicated by the way he does it" (rev. of Nightstick). A fast-moving melodrama, the play opened to a packed audience of 1500 people.
In a backstage interview with March, who was applying his make-up for an evening's performance, DeBernardi chronicled these comments from March regarding his acting preferences:

I'd rather play characters than straight or juvenile roles. Characters give one so much greater opportunity to show whether or not he is an actor. Anybody can step out on the stage and be himself, you know. But to play a character part,-- that requires close study, and often no small amount of research. Characters are harder to create and there is a lot more personal satisfaction in playing them. I suppose you might call me a typical actor, for my ambition is for the stage ("Give Him a Character Part, Any Day" 8 June 1928).

An additional topic emerged when March was questioned about his desire to tour for a second time with the Theatre Guild. "After a poignant pause", March conceded he wouldn't join again "for fear of being away from New York too long." March impressed DeBernardi as a down-to-earth "guy" who "was truly enjoyable to talk to" (DeBernardi interview).

Arthur Wing Pinero's The Second Mrs. Tanqueray created a sensation in London's West End when originally produced in 1893. Some thirty years later, audiences at the play's Elitch Gardens opening 22 July, still found the drama boldly modern. In the role of Paula (originally created by Mrs. Patrick Campbell), Isobel Elsom 'shined.'

The plot offers complications that ensue when social aristocrat Aubrey Tanqueray, a widower with a 19 year old daughter (studying to become a nun) marries a social outcast. When the daughter gives up her religious studies
and unexpectedly returns home, Mrs. Tanqueray's jealousy of the daughter for her husband's affections threatens to ruin the marriage. March (Mr. Tanqueray), gave "an understanding interpretation of the wholly sympathetic [husband]; as interesting a piece of work, probably, as he ever will do" (Denver Post rev. of The Second Mrs. Tanqueray).

The eighth production of the season, Maxwell Anderson's Saturday's Children, opened 30 July. The satiric comedy reveals how Bobby Haley (Sidney), through the scheming of her married sister, compels Rims O'Neil (Hackett) to propose to her (Sidney), when he had no previous intentions of getting married.

March played the role of Willy Sands, husband of the scheming sister, Florrie (Elsom). While Florrie advises the young couple on how to have a stable marriage, the usually easy-going Willy, erupts with uncharacteristic sarcasm. March played the role "with his usual skill and ability" (Morn. Post rev. of Sat. Children). The Evening News added that though Elsom and March did not have much work to do, they nevertheless gave "a splendid account of themselves as the couple married several years" (rev. of Sat. Children).

During a performance of the next production, The K Guy, which opened 6 August, DeBernardi "'clocked' 118 separate and distinct laughs, chuckles and guffaws" (Denver
Post rev. of *The K Guy*). For this new, untested comedy by Walter DeLeon and Alethea Luce, Elitch's Gardens served as a try-out engagement. Director Melville Burke hoped to take the play to New York in the fall.

The play exploits the mystery surrounding the identity of the 'K Guy', whose name is not revealed until the final scene. The K Guy, a big time forger, has a $10,000.00 bounty on his capture. Adding to the spectacle, the scenes are set in a movie studio lunchroom, where film actors and extras enter and leave continuously.

March played the role of an assistant film director, giving "his usual smooth performance" (*Morn. Post* rev. of *The K Guy*). The Denver audiences liked it very much, according to DeBernardi, but one critic faulted the Elitch players for being "less sure of their lines . . . than [on] any previous opening this season." Perhaps this was because the director "was pulling and changing the piece" throughout rehearsal (*J.F. Eve. News* rev. of *The K Guy*). The critic added, "when it is obvious in the first act of a mystery play which character is the guilty one, the play is faulty" (*J.F. review*). (The play did make it to New York, under Burke's direction, for a brief appearance the following October: it closed after eight performances)

The tenth play of the season, *The Command to Love*, by Rudolph Lothar and Fritz Gottwald (opening on 12 August) was "destined to shatter all previously posted box office
records because of its smart sophistication, brilliant lines and tense, breathtaking situations." So read the Denver Post advertisement, which also declared, "For the first time this season, Fredric March will have one of those ardent lover roles in which he is so well liked by local audiences" ("Command to Love, Brilliant Satire, Is Next Elitch Play").

March, as Gaston, portrayed a philandering young military attache' assigned to the French ambassador (Gordon). His superior commands him to make love to the influential wife of the hard-to-handle Spanish War Minister. Already engaged in another love affair with the French Ambassador's wife, Gaston places himself in a precarious position which eventually erupts into chaos as the two wives discover Gaston's philandering ways.

Gaston's love adventures stirred up a controversy in Denver. In defense of this tale of promiscuity, the Morning News stated that it was "a naughty play, but one cleverly designed so as not to be offensive" (rev. of Command to Love). Denver playwright Forrest Rutherford defended the play as a "fine, smart, clever piece of playwriting; [it is] a witty [and] sophisticated French farce, tamed down for American audiences" ("Letter to the Editor" Denver Post, 13 Aug. 1928). However, after seeing the play, an audience member ("Mrs. J.H.W.") had
a different opinion. In her letter to the Denver Post, she had these remarks:

The play is not merely suggestive, it leaves nothing to the imagination. Of course, Fredric March did a wonderful piece of acting. I do not believe I have seen him do better. But such a part! The idea of asking the public to watch the leading man have a sordid affair with a married woman; it's disgraceful and positively shocking. People would be arrested and sent to jail if they talked that way on the streets. I think every decent Denver citizen should get up and walk out during the play to show their consciousness ("Letter to the Editor" Denver Post, 14 Aug. 1928).

"T.J.C." responded in a later edition:

"It is absolutely the smartest cleverest, most interesting play I ever have seen in Denver, at this theatre. While some lines are risque, they are so brilliant and pointed that they cannot give offense and the way the players carry their parts is a real delight" ("Letter to the Editor" Denver Evening Post, 15 Aug. 1928).

Still, another comment was made by critic "H.M.F." of the Morning Post who thought "the play [is] a refreshing departure from the saccharine little comedies that, alas, find their way to our town with such painful recurrence" ("Command to Love Gives Elitch's New Breath").

The Morning News reported: "Fredric March plays the attache', and it was pleasant to have him occupying the big spot. That he played it well, is understood. March makes the type of Romeo that femininity adores and in which the men are interested, observing his techniques" (rev. of Command to Love). The Morning Post added that the play was "the vehicle in which Fredric March has what
might be termed 'His Opportunity' [and he] gives his truest performance of the year" (H.M.F., rev. of Command to Love). In contrast, "B.F." of the Evening News praised March's abilities, but thought him "a little too serious in the first act," although he reached the crisis in the second act with the "proper amount of careless gaiety" (rev. of Command to Love). For DeBernardi, this was by far the best role March had been given at Elitch's: "the manner in which he manages his various affairs of the heart is highly delectable" (Den. Post review).

The Command to Love sold out every night, with many people turned away at the gate. For March the production represented a crowning success to his three seasons at Elitch's Gardens; it was to be his last. Notices appeared in the Denver papers that March had been contacted by the New York theatrical company handling the tour for the Broadway hit, The Royal Family; a satire of the famous Barrymore family. March was offered the role of Tony Cavendish (a parody of John Barrymore), in the Los Angeles production which was to open in September. With rehearsals for The Royal Family beginning before the Elitch season was over, Mulvihill allowed March to cancel his contract and the Marches left for California in mid-August, missing the last two productions.

Summary of the 1928 Season

Under Mulvihill's management, the 1928 season was once again a profitable success. Though March had to leave
the company before the end of the season, he had given Denver audiences ten fine performances. Perhaps trying to broaden the use of his players, Mulvihill chose a repertoire which cast March in a lead role for only five of the ten productions. In the other five he played secondary parts, receiving praise for his ensemble acting.

Though the season's bill included plays by George Kelly, Maxwell Anderson, and Arthur Wing Pinero, the overall season appears to have been weak in dramatic quality. Interestingly, only two of the season's plays had been chosen by Burns Mantle for his Best Play of the Year honor: Behold the Bridegroom (1927-28) and Saturday's Children (1926-27). Only four had had successful Broadway runs of over 150 performances: Baby Cyclone (184), Tommy (192), Saturday's Children (167) and The Command to Love (247). Of those remaining, three of the four were not exceptional dramatic fare: The Springboard (37), Nightstick (84), and The K Guy (8). However, there was one drama of dramatic significance, The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, and an English piece which had been very successful in London, The Outsider.

Compared to March's first season at Elitch's, the 1928 season was much 'lighter', in terms of lines to memorize. He did not star in every show, though it was clear from audience response that they would have liked
for him to. Regardless of his role, he never shirked from
giving it his full attention and best interpretive efforts.
In the 1928 season, March proved himself an ensemble player
of the highest caliber.

Chapter Summary

Elitch's Gardens provided for Fredric March and
Florence Eldridge a venerable theatrical venue where they
could discover and test their own particular,
individualized, acting styles. Fully aware of the artistic
contributions of others in the Elitch company, the Marches
felt their individual accolades were in part responses
to the work of the entire ensemble. During the Marches'
first season together at Elitch's (1926), Carlton Miles,
The Elitch Gardener editor, wrote:

It has been a great pleasure to discover a company
of talented, hard-working artists, determined
week after week, to give the best possible
performances, to keep faith with the public that
rewards them with attendance, and to find them
united wholeheartedly, without bickering or petty
jealousy, [endeavoring] to maintain the standards
set by the first week. Certain performances have
been better than others, but that is inevitable
in stock. Each member of the cast had had a chance
to demonstrate his or her talent in certain parts.
... Each summer the best stock company in America
plays here ("Last Call" The Elitch Gardener Aug.
1926).

Melville Burke's system of emphasizing ensemble
performances resulted in a number of benefits: the plays
were better cast and more effectively interpreted; the
players experienced a wider variety of parts; and the
major acting burdens throughout an entire season did not fall upon two 'stars.'

Comments from audience members and critics who saw the Marches perform in the Elitch company suggest that the Marches created memorable portraits. Eldridge had a style of acting characterized by restraint, intelligence, and emotional control which separated her from many of her fellow thespians (Levy 264). (She was so highly regarded by her fellow workers that as a tribute to her popularity in 1925, the cast and crew bought her a watch, valued at the time for over $1,000.00, and presented it to her one night after a performance).

Performing a variety of roles in company with other equally qualified and talented actors, March developed an effective acting style at Elitch's, under the knowing direction of Melville Burke. A serious performer, March worked diligently to learn key characteristic traits for each role, then 'filled in' the details as rehearsals and performances progressed (Levy 262). He developed the habit of imitating off stage, through his daily routine, the actions of his character in order to get a "feel for the character's habits" ("March is Excellent as Miller's Salesman"). Therefore, when he was on stage, his character's habits felt as comfortable as his own. One of the most succinct descriptions of March's work in Denver is found in Katharine Ommanney's textbook, The Stage and
the School, referring to March's work in *Hell Bent Fer Heaven*:

March would begin ten minutes before his entrance, walking backstage in the sanctimonious, hypocritical, slinking manner of Rufe Pryor; when he made an unobtrusive entrance at the top of the flight of stairs far upstage, he was so much in character that the malign influence of the role reached the consciousness of the audience long before he spoke (Ommanney 194-95).

In 1952, March attributed much of his earned success to the training gained early in his career at Elitch's Gardens:

The experience was wonderful; I had the opportunity to play tremendously exciting roles I never would have been able to do in New York, such as Liliom and the tutor in *The Swan*. I relished the chance to experiment and to enlarge characterizations.

I am not a particularly fast study, but Melville Burke was a very patient, helpful director. His suggestions were pointed, brief, but always effective. Working under the pressure of stock situations is never ideal, but the Elitch experience was close to perfection.

I'll always remember the warmth of the audiences. Footlights were no barrier to them; you could sense audience responses there more acutely than any other theatre I know (Levy 261).

After appearing at Elitch Gardens, several actors who had acted with the Marches went on to theatrical fame: Beulah Bondi's career was launched on Broadway after her initial season with Elitch's (Mantle 519); C. Henry Gordon and Douglas Dumbrille later gained success on Broadway, Gordon in *The Shanghai Gesture* (Mantle *Best Plays 1926* 543), and Dumbrille opposite Judith Anderson in *As You Desire Me* (Mantle *Best Plays 1930* 484); Sylvia Sidney,
only seventeen when she performed at Elitch's in 1928, went on to cinema and theatre fame; Albert Hackett and Francis Goodrich met as "juvenile' and "second woman" at Elitch's, later married and co-authored The Great Big Doorstep and The Diary of Anne Frank; and Lea Penman after two seasons with Elitch's went to Broadway stardom in Boy Meets Girl, What A Life, and Annie Get Your Gun.

Cecil B. DeMille once called the Elitch Theatre "one of the cradles of American drama" (Gurtler 59), and through the years it built a rich theatrical tradition. But after ninety-seven years of continuous operation as a summer theatre, Elitch's was forced to close its doors; its final performance came 30 August 1987, (with a performance of Nunsense). At that time it was America's longest running summer theatre. ("Company Pulling Out").

When the theatre closed its operations in 1987, Sandra Hubbs wrote an article in The Denver Post in which she interviewed a local Denver resident (Mrs. Frances Byers Hamil) who had been attending Elitch's performances for seventy-two years; she had seen over 670 plays. When questioned about who her favorite actor was, she answered without hesitation, "Fredric March" ("Elitch's No. #1 Fan"). She was not alone in her choice, for many regarded March the most popular actor ever to grace the Elitch stage (Levy 258).
CHAPTER 3

THE MARCHES' EARLY MOTION PICTURE AND STAGE YEARS
(1928-1939)

The Setting

During the 1920's the silent motion picture show began to compete with the legitimate theatre for an audience. As the competition for the public's entertainment dollar grew keener, movie house managers added elaborate stage presentations to their film programs: dance teams, singers, seventy-five piece orchestras, ballets, and expensive stage sets. The theory was that if the picture won't pull them in, the comedian, the orchestra, or the singer will. It appeared that the "featured" silent motion picture was being outglamorized by the trappings that surrounded it. Consequently, Broadway also began to offer a more commercially appealing fare, to the dismay of many patrons and critics. Percy Hammond of The New York Herald Tribune wrote: "It isn't that the people who ought to be going to the theatre are going to the 'movies'. It is that the people who ought to be going to the 'movies' are going to the theatre" (Morddern 97).

In 1926, with the development of the talking motion picture, the entertainment spotlight began to swing strongly toward films. On 6 October 1927, Al Jolson made history in The Jazz Singer, for it was the first time an actor had delivered spoken dialogue from the screen. The audience soon demanded sound movies. Weekly theatre
attendance jumped from 57,000,000 in 1927, to 95,000,000, in 1929, chiefly because of sound (Thrasher 75).

In 1929, the Great Depression affected every American. Broadway suffered substantially: fewer productions, widespread unemployment, bankrupt producers, hard to obtain credit, shorter production runs for successful shows, and half-filled, if not empty, theatres. With the Stock Market crash in October, Broadway mountings dropped from 240 productions in 1929, to 187 in 1930-31; 100 in 1938-39; and only 72 in 1940-41 (Mordden 147). Many theatre people (including 5,000 actors) were out of a work on Broadway, and audiences declined. Understandably, with no legitimate theatres being built in New York during the thirties, and many old ones being converted to motion-picture houses or to radio broadcasting studios, the focus of American dramatic entertainment had turned to Hollywood. The motion picture industry was making money while Broadway producers were losing it.

With the coming of sound, film studios began to weed out their non-talking artists. Starlets unable to memorize lines of dialogue, much less retain them before the camera, were replaced by equally glamorous, but more serious, dependable hopefuls. Rising young stars, whose voices were well adapted to sound reproduction, got a boost up the ladder. English stars, especially, enjoyed tremendous vogue because of their clear diction and low-pitched,
well-modulated voices. But many of the old favorites were
doomed to oblivion. Francis X. Bushman, idol of the silent
screen, predicted that talking pictures would mean:

> the elimination of a lot of screen pets with
> listless, dreamy voices who have never had any
> stage training and don't know the first thing
> about elocution and the worthwhile traditions
> that have made the stage the great institution
> it is (qtd. in Thrasher 79).

He was correct.

The addition of sound to films caused a huge labor
turnover. Finding stage work unavailable, New York
directors, writers, actors, and technicians invaded
Hollywood. Suffering Broadway producers blamed Hollywood
for their drop in legitimate theatre attendance. In truth,
it was easier and financially more profitable to operate
a movie house than it was to operate a legitimate theatre.
Movie tickets were less expensive and the public found
talking pictures to be highly entertaining.

Understandably, the Marches' theatrical experience
and diverse talents proved to be exceptional assets when
they began their Hollywood careers. Their departure from
the legitimate stage at Elitch's Gardens and the serenity
of the Denver countryside for the lights and glitter of
Los Angeles was to be a fateful one.

**March in Hollywood**

In the fall of 1928, well-known theatrical producer
Jed Harris was preparing to begin a tour with his Broadway
production of *The Royal Family*. At that time one of
Broadway's biggest hits, the play (by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber) was a riotously funny satire of the famous Barrymore theatrical family. One of its central characters, "Tony Cavendish," was a composite parody of the speech, manners, and social life of the infamous John Barrymore, and March had been previously approached in August of 1927 to play the role in the New York production. Already committed at that time to the Guild tour, March was forced to turn down Harris' tempting offer. (Understandably, at the end of the Guild tour when the Marches learned that they would not be replacing the Lunts as the Guild's leading man and woman, there was double disappointment).

After 196 performances, The Royal Family closed on Broadway. For his West coast production of the play, director Jed Harris contacted March to see if he would be interested in playing the Barrymore role. March, thrilled by the offer, had two plays still remaining in the Elitch's season, and was forced to make a difficult decision. With the advice and approval of the Elitch's staff, March terminated his contract with the Denver theatre three weeks early and accepted Harris' offer, with Vernon Steele replacing March as leading man for the remainder of the 1928 season (Levy 447).

Opening in San Francisco at the Geary Theatre on September 16, 1928, The Royal Family proved to be the
turning point in March's career. The cast included Emelie Melville as Fanny Cavendish, Charlotte Walker as Julie Cavendish, and Kathryn Prather as Gwen, characters representing three generations of theatrical Drews and Barrymores.

Staged by A. Leslie Pierce and produced by Fred J. Butler, the production had a remarkable success. Its opening night proved to be a memorable one, for not only was the San Francisco auditorium filled with cinema celebrities, but John Barrymore, himself, was sitting in the audience. March was told of Barrymore's presence just before the curtain went up. Knowing something about Barrymore's temperament, since March's first wife, Ellis Baker, and Barrymore had been close friends, March was apprehensive. However, the audience laughed loudly and responded with tremendous applause. In an article for The American Magazine, John Barrymore recounted the particular events that followed the last act on opening night:

I was irritated by some of the mean attacks on the other members of the family, but I forgot those in my wild amusement at Fredric March, who played the fellow who was supposed to be me. He made me an utterly worthless, conceited hound, and he had my mannerisms, exaggerated, but true to life. Especially did I like the scenes in which Ethel was forever getting me out of trouble. After I saw the performance, I went around to congratulate Freddy March. I was red-faced from laughing my hair was tousled. Freddy jumped up, stared at me and sprang into an attitude of defense. He thought I'd come to attack him. 'That's the greatest and funniest
performance I ever saw,' I said. 'Oh', he gasped and sank into a chair. 'Thank God! I'm glad, John. They told me you'd be so sore that you would probably kill me' (qtd. in The American Magazine 74).

The production moved the following month to the Belasco Theatre in Los Angeles. The critics praised the play and especially March's portrayal of John Barrymore.

It was a delightful caricature. Although younger, smaller, and darker than the scion of the Barrymores, March nevertheless managed without resorting to trick-make-up, to look amazingly like him. The exaggerated walk, scowl, and characteristic gestures sent the audience into howls of mirth (Los Angeles Times 29 Oct. 1928).

As fate would have it, a Paramount movie scout, having seen the opening in San Francisco, advised one of his supervisors to interview March as a potential talking picture actor. On 7 December 1928, March signed a five year contract with Paramount Pictures. Directors were now in need of actors who could speak the roles, not merely look the part. Before the advent of sound, character delineation had more to do with physical type casting than acting. March's highly trained vocal and acting skills, coupled with his striking good-looks, made him a marketable commodity for films (Thrasher 106).

Excited about his film contract, March wrote his father about his career move, to which his father responded: "All I see and hear of the movies is that they are pretty tough. Don't lose your reputation, Fred. Money won't count at all then." When March told him how
much he would be making, his father replied: "Not possible. Your father is too old fashioned to comprehend. I feel sure you won't ever get such a pay check. Do you have to endorse it more than once?" (Bickel, personal letter, 14 Dec. 1928).

March's Early Films

March made his first appearance for Paramount with a bit part in _The Dummy_ (1929), starring Ruth Chatterton and featuring the Marches' old friend, John Cromwell. Shooting that film during the daytime and acting onstage at the El Capitan Theatre in _The Royal Family_ in the evenings, March was working very hard. However, _The Dummy_ was a technical disaster, leading Cromwell to quip "It made us all miss the stage" (qtd. in Quirk 20). But March was on his way. Six more movies followed in 1929 alone.

_The Wild Party_ (1929) with Clara Bow, followed. (Dorothy Arzner, who would eventually become a successful woman director in films, was hired as Miss Bow's vocal coach). March played a professor besieged by a rambunctious love-struck college co-ed (Bow). His notices were good: "Vocally he reigns supreme" (qtd. in Quirk 20). Third came _The Studio Murder Mystery_ (1929); March played the bit part of a handsome, woman-chasing actor who gets murdered on a film set (Eldridge appeared as his jealous wife; one of the suspects for the crime). _Paris Bound_ (1929 Pathe') paired March with veteran stage actress,
Ann Harding. Playing a married couple with liberal views towards adultery, March and Harding fared well with the reviewers. In *Jealousy* (1929 Par.), March teamed with Jeanne Eagels in a French love triangle situation; they were criticized for employing inappropriate accents. In *Footlights and Fools* (1929 First National), March's part was subordinate to the film's featured star, Colleen Moore.

With his seventh movie, March began to receive just attention. *The Marriage Playground* (1929 Par.), based on Edith Wharton's novel *The Children*, focused on neglected European children. March especially liked working with director Lothar Mendes, who enabled March to project a sense of ease before the camera. Mendes told him: "When they yell 'Camera!', it means 'relax'. And March did. Years later March commented on how that simple direction had aided him on the stage as well: "When you are watching a play, the actor on the stage you go along with is the one who's most relaxed" (Ross 362).

At the end of 1929, Fredric March had become a much sought-after leading man. Because Paramount executives were pleased with his romantic image, they did not want to cast him in unromantic roles. March, on the other hand, felt that it would damage an actor's skills to limit him to specific roles. Regardless of his pleas for diverse roles, his first ten movies were "a variety of innocuous
potboilers" and March wondered whether he had made a mistake in signing with a movie studio (H.L. Walker, March scrapbook). Nevertheless, as a "dapper young leading man, very adaptable to lightweight roles", March was highly regarded for his acting competence (Walker) and well liked by both casts and crews. An experienced man of the theatre, March never lacked respect for fellow professionals of all levels. The electricians and grips felt comfortable enough around him to call him "Freddy." To all of them March was "a swell fellow" (Lee, Milwaukee Journal, 2-19-33). And, indeed, throughout their lives in Hollywood, the Marches were perceived by the press and public with high regard: they were nice people who respected others and cherished their privacy.

In 1930 March performed in several films, but failed to excite much notice from critics or audiences. He had a small part in Sarah and Son (1930 Par.) and a minor role as Mary Astor's estranged husband in Ladies Love Brutes (1930 Par.). Paramount on Parade (1930), an all-star Paramount extravaganza typical of the period, briefly highlighted March. Reunited with Clara Bow in True to the Navy (1930 Par.), March was miscast as a redneck sailor. Finally, in Manslaughter (1930 Par.), March received a suitable challenge. As a district attorney forced to send his rich girlfriend (Claudette Colbert) to prison, March's acting talents found a good showcase.
Then followed *Laughter* (1930 Par.). With excellent direction from Harry d'Arrast, a screenplay by Donald Ogden Stewart and a fine cast which included Nancy Carroll, Frank Morgan, and others, March professed this to be one of his all-time favorite films. In the role of the ex-lover, March's portrayal received high critical acclaim, and boost his popularity with his growing host of fans (Quirk 21-22).

In time, March's stage experience in handling different character types began to be recognized by studio executives as an attribute. In 1929 when Paramount purchased the rights to produce the movie version of *The Royal Family*, the obvious choice for the role of Barrymore was March. With the title changed to *The Royal Family of Broadway*, the 1930 Paramount film had a successful showing across the country, and Fredric March became a "star" (Quirk 23).

But not until 1931 did the movie industry realize how versatile an actor March could be. The year began with *Honor Among Lovers* (1931 Par.), directed by Dorothy Arzner and co-starring Claudette Colbert; March played an investment broker who loses the girl he loves. *The Night Angel* (1931 Par.), with Nancy Carroll, had March as a Prague district attorney; critics found the whole piece artificial. Under George Abbott's direction, March next played opposite Tallulah Bankhead in *My Sin* (1931 Par.).
March portrayed a lawyer who convinces his client, acquitted of manslaughter, to tell her husband the truth about her past. March and Bankhead were good, but the critics did not like the film (Quirk 23).

Finally, at the close of 1931, came the movie which brought world-wide attention to March's versatile talents as an actor: Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, co-starring Miriam Hopkins. For his portrayal, March won his first Academy Award. Ironically, the original movie version of this great melodrama had been produced as a silent film starring John Barrymore in 1920.

For March's depiction of the dual personalities, he used a "graphically hideous" make-up and "presented with flair and versatility a meticulously delineated contrast between the dedicated, well-meaning Jekyll and the infinitely evil, lustful, and destructive Hyde" (Quirk 23). His portrayal created a sensation with critics and public alike. Nevertheless, March thought the movie flashy and gimmicky in relation to live theatre productions. Critics thought his theatre background contributed to the film's success:

No player in pictures or on the stage could surpass his performance. Any man who can handle this heavily dramatic role with such finesse, and also put over an entirely different personality, such as he did as the rollicking brother in The Royal Family, is a first class, all-around journeyman actor (James R. Quirk, Photoplay 31)
In 1932, March made five films, receiving good reviews for each: In *Strangers in Love*, costarring Kay Francis, March played the dual roles of twins (one bad and one good, whereas the good one wins the girl in the end); In *Merrily We Go to Hell*, under the direction of Dorothy Arzner, March co-starred with Sylvia Sidney, as a playwright who marries a rich girl, drinks to excess, and reforms when she suffers a traumatic pregnancy. *Make me a Star*, a film adaptation of *Merton of the Movies*, cast March in a small guest appearance. For MGM, opposite Norma Shearer in *Smilin' Through*, March played a deranged lover who in 1868 accidently kills his lover; he reappears fifty years later as the murderer's son who falls in love with the victim's niece. The movie showcased March's talents and won him praise. His last movie role of 1932 was as Marcus, in Cecil B. DeMille's spectacle, *The Sign of the Cross*. Co-starring Claudette Colbert and Charles Laughton, the movie gave March the role of the Roman citizen who courageously chooses to die in the lion arena with the young Christian girl with whom he has fallen in love (Quirk 25).

Three movies for Paramount came in 1933. *Tonight is Ours* (a film version of Noel Coward's *The Queen Was in the Parlor*) co-starred Claudette Colbert, as a Queen who falls in love with a commoner (March); *The Eagle and the Hawk* (a more substantial piece of work), cast
March as a World War I pilot who loses his courage watching his comrades die in battle, and who eventually commits suicide; Lastly, Design for Living, an adaptation of Noel Coward's play, co-starred March with Miriam Hopkins and Gary Cooper in a spoof of sexual mores. March was deemed "too masculine" for the part (Quirk 26).

At the end of 1933, with his five-year contract with Paramount almost completed, March was reluctant to sign again. Perhaps as a move to pressure him into signing, Paramount cast him in two mediocre films and one winner. All of Me (co-starring Miriam Hopkins, George Raft and Helen Mack), presented March as a college professor who desires to go out West as an engineer in the fields. Opposite Sylvia Sidney, in Good Dame, March portrayed a carnival cardsharp saved from destruction by the pure love of a good woman. Both movies received feeble reviews.

Finally, in Death Takes a Holiday (1933), March (as Death, disguised as a handsome Prince) received fine reviews in one of his best Paramount movies. Mitchell Leisen adapted his screen play from the popular play by Alberto Casella (Maxwell Anderson wrote some of the dialogue) (Quirk 26).

By 1934 March had become a noted film personality, but his career had suffered under Paramount's control; the studio had placed him in whatever films it desired, regardless of the credibility of the roles. March then
signed a two-picture contract with Darryl Zanuck's studio (20th Century Fox), first starring in *The Affairs of Cellini*, giving a dazzling performance as the philandering Florentine artist. The film, adapted from the play *The Firebrand*, featured Frank Morgan in the role he created on stage. Meanwhile, between the two films for Fox, March starred in two MGM productions, *The Barrets of Wimpole Street* and *We Live Again*. Irving Thalberg cast March in the role of Robert Browning in MGM's 1934 production, also starring Charles Laughton and Norma Shearer. The movie helped raise March's standing into the prestigious ranks of Hollywood celebrities. Next, in an adaptation of Tolstoy's novel, Samuel Goldwyn cast March in *We Live Again*, a film about a Russian prince who takes advantage of the affections of a peasant girl. Eventually he realizes the error of his ways and joins her in exile in Siberia (Quirk 28).

Back at Fox in 1935, March completed his contract with Zanuck by portraying Jean Valjean in a screen adaptation of Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*. One of his all-time favorite films, March played the role of a man convicted for stealing a loaf of bread and sentenced to ten years in prison. When finally released, he discovers that honest work is impossible to obtain. On the brink of resorting to crime, he is befriended by a good man whose generosity enables him to establish himself as a
decent and respected citizen. However, his past continues to haunt him, as he is relentlessly stalked by a policeman, played by Charles Laughton.

When asked by Zanuck to sign another contract, March refused: "I wanted permanent freedom to pick roles I felt were right for me. At that point I was moving up toward forty, and I couldn't afford mistakes" (qtd. in Quirk 28). Warned by Zanuck that he would be lost in Hollywood without a company contract, March decided to remain a free agent. In 1935 March was making $125,000.00 a picture, without having to pay much in taxes. By 1937, he was one of Hollywood's highest-paid actors (Quirk 28).

At MGM, March co-starred with Greta Garbo in an adaptation of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1935). Playing the handsome cavalry officer, Vronsky, March's career received great benefit from this project; he became one of the industry's most sought after screen-lovers (Quirk 28).

Samuel Goldwyn then hired March for *The Dark Angel* (1935), in the role of a war veteran, struck blind by shrapnel who prefers to let his girlfriend, Merle Oberon, think he is dead rather than burden her with his disability.

Enjoying for a time his status as a free-agent, March chose his own roles. In 1936, Eldridge joined March in *Mary of Scotland* (an adaptation of Maxwell Anderson's
stage play), in which she played the crafty English monarch, Queen Elizabeth. March co-starred with Katharine Hepburn, who received most of the attention. Eldridge, received good reviews but disliked the direction given her (See Eldridge in Hollywood): critics felt that March, as the masterful Earl of Bothwell, was hampered by a screenplay which made his character appear too heroic.

But being a free agent had its drawbacks. March did not have any control over when his films would be released for public viewing. The Road to Glory (1936) (with Warner Baxter, Lionel Barrymore and March, who played an army lieutenant seeking a nurse's affections) opened in New York one week after Mary of Scotland. Three weeks later Anthony Adverse (1936) (in which March plays an orphan who grows up to be adventurous and successful) opened. Thus, March had three movies appearing in theatres at the same time, but was then not seen on screen for a nine month stretch (Quirk 29).

In 1937 A Star Is Born (Warner) won March his second Oscar nomination. Directed by William A. Wellman and co-starring Janet Gaynor, March played an alcoholic, has-been movie star, who avoids hampering the career of the woman he adores by killing himself. The film had an exceptional critical and popular reception. Nothing Sacred (Warner) in the same year co-starred Carole Lombard; March played a sensation-chasing reporter who discovers
a girl he thinks is dying of radium poisoning, and he turns his printed rendition of her sob story into lucrative gain for himself. Both March and Lombard were at the peak of their careers in this remarkably successful film.

March completed one more film before his return to the Broadway stage, depicting Jean Lafitte in Cecil B. DeMille's epic The Buccaneer (1938 Par.). Some reviewers found his French accent faulty and his performance "mannered and artificial." Regardless, he was still a major box-office draw for Paramount or any other studio (Quirk 30).

In 1938, with forty movies to his credit, March decided to return to the legitimate stage. In an interview for Screenplay he stated:

Hollywood is insidious. The salaries, the flattery, the adulation: all those things are devastating. It is wise to get away, even if you fail. I feel the stage [will] tune me up. I need the personal fight it provides. It [is] good to face audiences, and have the nightly battle to win them (Smith 54).

Putting aside his movie career for a period, he and Eldridge returned to New York in 1938 to play the leads in Yr. Obedient Husband, staged by their longtime friend John Cromwell.

Eldridge in Hollywood

Eldridge, too, found opportunities in Hollywood to exercise her acting talents. While March had been rehearsing for The Royal Family, Eldridge had been rehearsing the role of Raina in Everett Horton's production
of Shaw's Arms and The Man. Horton (who was in his own right an acclaimed actor/producer) had established a resident company at Los Angeles' Vine Street Theatre, where his 1928 production of Shaw's play was its first professional presentation west of the Rocky Mountains. Opening in September of 1928, the production was rated by Edwin Schaller of The Los Angeles Times as "excellent entertainment" ("Shaw's Arms and the Man"). Florence Lawrence of the Los Angeles Examiner concurred: "The Vine Street Theatre stepped up several notches in its production status last night in producing Arms and The Man" (Vine Street Presents Shaw Comedy).

On Approval, by Frederick Lonsdale, followed in the same season. Eldridge played the role of Mrs. Wislack, a widow who receives a proposal of marriage from a gentleman who has admired her from afar for many years. She suggests that, accompanied by a financially distraught Duke, they spend a month in Scotland in order to get to know each other better. There they discover that their attraction is only infatuation and return home convinced that the marriage would have never worked. The play had a successful seven-week run.

On 10 November 1928, Horton opened Her Cardboard Lover, a sophisticated comedy by Jacques Duval in which, according to the Los Angeles Examiner, "Horton outstripped in finesse and brilliance anything which his earlier
presentations offered" (Lawrence, rev. of Her Cardboard Lover, 11 Nov. 1928). The play depicts Simone (Eldridge), an attractive divorcee, hiring Andre (Horton) as a so-called lover, in order to restrain her from rushing madly back into her ex-husband's arms. As expected, Simone and Andre fall in love with each other, and what was supposed to be a temporary arrangement turns into a lifetime commitment.

Lawrence described Eldridge's performance as "captivating" and labeled her as an actress of "subtlety" (rev. of Her Cardboard Lover). When the production moved to the Majestic, a theatre with a larger seating capacity, Eldridge again received good reviews: "a talented actress, she lends charm and poise to the characterization" (Hunt, rev. of Her Cardboard Lover).

Meanwhile, Eldridge made her screen debut opposite her husband in The Studio Murder Mystery (1929), playing a murder suspect. She soon acted other featured roles, giving deft performances in Charming Sinners and The Greene Murder Case, (both in 1929). She returned to the stage in Horton's production of Among the Married (by Vincent Lawrence), featuring herself and Mary Astor. Opening in November of 1929, it ran through the first week of January 1930. At this point, Horton, now being offered movie contracts too lucrative for him to resist, allowed his lease on the Majestic to lapse, and disbanded his
company. Meanwhile in 1930 Eldridge was featured in two more movies, *The Divorcee* and *The Matrimonial Bed*, before returning to the New York stage in the fall.

**An Affair of State**

Eldridge returned to Broadway in Robert L. Buckner's *An Affair of State* (1930). Staged by her friend Moffat Johnston at the Broadhurst Theatre, Eldridge played the role of Alexa, an archduchess of a small polis located near the Danube River. As the wife of a philandering monarch named Otto (Wilfred Seagram), the two have been unable to produce an heir apparent to the throne, and the citizens are disturbed. Assuming that the Archduke is infertile, the Chancellor (Moffat Johnston) decides the Archduchess needs a different mate and chooses a young military captain as a suitable sire. In the meantime, the Archduchess has become infatuated with a handsome lieutenant who had come to her aid during a frightening fireworks display. Complications in the plot arise when it is discovered that the Archduke is actually the legitimate father of the three children which the handsome lieutenant believes are his own true offspring.

The play opened 19 November 1930. Critic Wilella Waldorf called the play a "bad dream", and it quickly closed after eight performances. Eldridge, it was said, "works hard and capably" (Boehnel, rev. of *An Affair of State*); "is beautiful, slender, airy" (Dudley, *Eve. News*
rev. of *Af.of State*); and "carried a large part of this comedy on her own charming shoulders" (Rathbun, *NY Post rev. of Af.of State*).

When the play closed, Eldridge returned to Los Angeles where she played Amanda in a road production of Noel Coward's *Private Lives* (1931), with Everett Horton co-starring as Elyot. Russell Lewis staged the witty Coward farce at the Majestic. A typical review recognized that "the strong talents of Florence Eldridge and Edward Horton highlight the play, delivering Coward's wit, and light scornful word play in a delightful tour de force" ("Majestic Presents *Private Lives*").

Another featured film role came in 1932, in *Thirteen Women*. Late in the year, Eldridge and March adopted their first child, Penelope; thereafter Eldridge's acting career became secondary. Content with occasional supporting roles in films, and philanthropic fund raising activities and events, Eldridge dedicated herself to maintaining a strong family bond between herself, March, Penelope, and their son, Anthony, whom they adopted in 1934. Eldridge said in 1957:

> Ever since my husband and I have acted together I've made it clear that his career comes first, and it does. While the children were young I took long vacations from [acting] to be with them. I called myself an 'intermittent' actress" (Ormsbee "Likes Acting with Husband:").

In 1933, in addition to her role as mother, Eldridge was seen in three films: *Dangerously Yours, The Great Jasper*
(a film version of her stage success *The Great Gatsby*), and *The Story of Temple Drake*. *A Modern Hero* came in 1934, followed by one of her most memorable roles (the forlorn destitute, Fantine), in *Les Misérables* (1935), which starred her husband.

Eldridge's final role during this early film period came in 1936 as Queen Elizabeth in *Mary of Scotland*. Though most critics found her interpretation acceptable, she did not. In an interview years later with William Stiegler, she expressed her belief that the director, John Huston, completely ruined Dudley Nichols' adaptation of Maxwell Anderson's play:

There can be no compromise about the interpretation of historical characters. To soften or sentimentalize a figure like Elizabeth... to satisfy a demand for a more sympathetic screen effect is neither good drama nor accurate history. It is absurd to ask an actor to forget or discard all his impressions and convictions about some great historical character. If the player is as intelligent as he or she should be to play such a role, those impressions and convictions are the result of intensive reading and careful study. The Elizabeth I played was not the Elizabeth I should have liked to have played (Stiegler).

Eldridge was intuitive about the shortcomings of the film, according to the critique by Pauline Kael who found the movie "performed in horribly high-flown style... with Florence Eldridge playing Elizabeth as a wicked witch" (Kael 367). Eldridge closed her comments by saying "Personally, I think the opportunity to develop characterization by experience is totally lacking on the
screen" (Stiegler). After *Mary of Scotland*, Eldridge did not return to the screen for twelve years.

**Days to Come**

In mid-December 1936, the actress returned to the New York stage to portray Julie Rodman in Lillian Hellman's *Days to Come*. A bitter play, *Days to Come* depicts labor troubles within a brush manufacturing company in a small town where everyone knows everyone. Andrew Rodman (William Harrigan), a weak and inefficient boss, takes bad advice from a treacherous business associate. By naively importing a gang of thugs, known only to Rodman as strike-breakers, he incites a heated verbal battle among the town's people, which soon turns into violence and murder. Rodman's wife, Julie (Eldridge), estranged from her husband because of his weaknesses, seeks love elsewhere, eventually leading her into the arms of one of the labor leaders. As the thugs take over the factory, the final act of the play ends with the entire town confused and angry, dreading the "days to come".

Opening 14 December 1936, the play closed after only eight performances, though Eldridge received good reviews. Burns Mantle thought that Miss Hellman's play, though "wisely cast and carefully staged", failed to win the audiences' approval. (The *Daily News* rev. of *Days to Come*). John Mason Brown found the play "a dull, incredible, muddled drama [and] one can only feel sorry for such good
actors as Clare Woodbury, William Harrigan, and Florence Eldridge, as they struggle with impossible lines in impossible parts" (NY Eve. Post rev. of Days to Come). Brooks Atkinson simply stated "although Days to Come is laboriously written and acted with dogged determination, it never once comes firmly to grips with any of the subjects it nudges in passing" (NY Times rev, of Days to Come). Gilbert Gabriel ended his critique by stating: "Miss Eldridge did all things possible to lift her scenes out of the glue" (NY American rev. of Days to Come). Disappointed, but not disheartened, Eldridge returned to California in late December 1936, to the serenity of her family and home. Twenty years later Eldridge admitted she had a problem with stage fright: "Nervousness seems to turn me to stone... perhaps that is why I dread Broadway" (Ormsbee). With her last two Broadway attempts flopping, she was not planning to return to New York, unless March returned with her.

Throughout their marriage, March gave credit to Eldridge for being the guiding force in their relationship. They spent their money prudently and were well liked for their "unaffected geniality and quiet dignity" (Quirk 25). In Hollywood, they became examples for the less disciplined performers. Since Hollywood had brought the Marches financial security and March was assured of a strong future in the movie industry, Eldridge did not
have to work, but she chose to work. She loved acting. However, Hollywood did not take to her quite as readily as it did March. Often praised for her intelligence, charm, and sophistication, she was also known for her assertiveness and strong opinions.

In her earlier career, Eldridge was sometimes noted as being "difficult" to work with because of her insistence on playing a role the way she perceived it. Directors were apt to consider her "too hard, too metallic for any but their most disagreeable roles." But after her marriage to March, she mellowed considerably. According to March, Eldridge was his most ardent supporter. And according to Eldridge, March was hers (Goldbeck). In Hollywood, Eldridge's major focus became her family, and although she loved to act, she did not want to do it alone. Her dream was to return to Broadway with March by her side. Their big chance was to come in January of 1938.

The Lure of the Legitimate Stage

Two actors who exemplified the term 'star' during the twenties and thirties were Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne. Highly acclaimed by critics and the public, they provided for the theatre community a kind of rallying point in the stage versus cinema conflict, for neither of them abandoned Broadway for Hollywood, even though virtually everyone else who was asked, did so. They made only one talking motion picture, The Guardsman (1928),
which was based on their stage production. Later, during the depth of the Depression, they turned down a contract offer from MGM for just under a million dollars. The theatre community, journalists, and entrepreneurs, insisted that an actor would be selling out if he left the legitimate stage for Hollywood, and that he would ultimately lose his skills as a live stage performer, due to his infusion into the cosmetic glamour of film making. To prove their point, critics would point to the often embarrassing performances which movie actors had given when they returned to Broadway (Mordden 138). Many once successful stage actors were afraid to leave the comforts they had found for themselves in Hollywood.

But for March and Eldridge, winning success on Broadway as an acting couple was a goal they were determined to accomplish. Their genuine admiration for the Lunts had convinced them that they, too, could conquer Broadway as a pair: "We feel that our work would be immeasurably better. We could work ideas out at home until they jelled. I am certain the Lunts must do that" stated March (qtd. in Harless "Marches Lured by the Stage"). Eldridge added:

There is an intimacy in acting with someone you know very, very well that gives a great deal to the part. I have watched the Lunts so closely that I feel I know what things they have practiced at home, and how they did it. There is a quality in their acting which comes from their being married, I know" (Harless).
March was so successful as a film actor, many wondered why he would want to return to the difficult and less lucrative task of stage acting. His response to skeptics, who thought the Marches' return was merely a gallant gesture on his part to permit Eldridge "to emerge from comparative obscurity," was to the point:

I wanted to do this play every bit as much as she did. I have never licked the theatre, or even got a reputation in it, [whereas Florence has]. It seems perfectly natural that I should try. Movie people are always talking about going back to the theatre, but they never do it. (March, "March Tells Why. . .").

Realizing that the motion picture industry had made him a 'star', March was appreciative. Nevertheless, he always knew the difference between acting in front of a camera and acting in front of a live audience:

The screen is an industry, the stage is an art. The movie industry rolls you up in a can and sends you out like so much spinach. They muffle you, they gag, they type you, they regiment you, they make you of a puppet dancing to a director's tune. Then they give you five years and dump you into a dustbin. I was lured to the movies because of the money in it. Nine of ten are lured for the same reason. But I didn't sneer at the movies. I thought they were putting on plenty of trash. (Well, doesn't the stage?). I thought for anything as new in the field as they were, they hadn't much to apologize for. I received a different baptism than screen actors during my first years in the legitimate theatre. I have always loved the legitimate theatre. When I started, my name meant little in the entertainment world. Whatever it means now I owe to the screen. I did my best, but the movies gave me the opportunity to do my best. (March cited in Hayes, Stage and Screen Feb. 1938).
Yr. Obedient Husband

Turning down an offer for the leads in Talbot Jennings's This Side Idolatry, the Marches continued reading scripts. Then Horace Jackson, a screen writer, presented them with a copy of his play, The Christian Hero. Based on the life of the eighteenth century essayist, Richard Steele, the play was a domestic costume comedy. The central characters were Steele and his wife Prue, and to the Marches, the play appeared to be perfectly suited. So convinced were they that this was the right play for them, March helped finance the play's Broadway production (now called Yr. Obedient Husband) which opened 10 January 1938 at the Broadhurst. The production included several fine actors: Dame May Whitty, Brenda Forbes, Katherine Stewart, Freida Altman, Martin Wolfson, and a young Montgomery Clift as Lord Finch, who received the best notices of them all.

Act I begins with baliffs surrounding Steele's home (which was depicted on stage in close proximity to London's debtor's prison). Dodging creditors for not being able to pay the rent on his middle class home, Steele is residing in his favorite tavern presumably "on business". There he writes floods of letters to his patient Prue, explaining his absence and making plans to move into an even more elaborate house in Bloomsbury. As Act I comes to an end, Steele introduces into his household his
illegitimate child, whom he had thoughtlessly forgotten to tell Prue about. In Act Two he runs away from a dinner party to fight a duel. In Act three, he suffers from a hangover, at which Prue throws up her hands and packs her bags, only to be stopped in the nick of time by a messenger offering Steele a government position with a 700 pounds a year salary. Saved from ruin, the couple reconciles.

The critics did not like the play. Sidney Whipple described it as "flimsy material" that offered neither a "serious study of the irresponsibility that sometimes accompanies genius, nor... a frolicking comic view: not even mildly exciting" (NY Telegram rev. of Yr. Obed. Hus.). Whipple thought Eldridge gave a "highly spirited performance," but nevertheless, "perhaps we have expected too much of Mr. March and Miss Eldridge." He added:

the winning quality is there, under Mr. March's polished and genial hands, but the less attractive traits are exercised for the most part off-stage, and we are permitted only to guess at the actions that arouse his wife to wrathful tantrums" (Whipple).

Critic Richard Watts compared the Marches' portrayals to the famous American comic strip, "Mr. and Mrs.", which featured domestic brawling and misunderstandings. He found the play "gracious, good-natured and rather engaging in its slow and dawdling fashion" (NY Post rev. Yr. Obd. Hus.), but why would March choose such a play? Watts surmised:
I suppose that Mr. March was partially attracted to the play by the fact that it enables him to make his first entrance vaulting picturesquely through a window, which is a proper manner for a film hero to make his appearance. Then too, the role permits him to strut attractively and be humorous, boisterous, and sentimental by turn. All of this he manages with his characteristic engaging style, but I fear that he was so much attracted by the facade of the part that he failed to get its interior, with the result that his Richard Steele is more often a romantic drawing of a dashing young rake than a recognizable human being (Watts NY Post rev. of Yr. Obd. Hus.).

Watts was more impressed with Eldridge, who "as the wife is more believable as a person, although she is inclined, in the interest of realism, to make Prue a pretty trying woman upon occasion" (Watts NY Post rev. of Yr. Obd. Hus.).

Robert Coleman thought the play was not "worth the effort and the expenditures which [went] into its presentation" (Daily Mirror rev. of Yr. Obd. Hus.). Richard Lockridge found it "an unbroken and pretty flat expanse of not very animated amiability (Eve. Sun rev. of Yr. Obd. Hus.)."

But it was John Mason Brown who blamed March's acting for the failure of the play:

Mr. March attacks period comedy with all the seriousness John L. Lewis brings to the delivery of a speech. He makes his first entrance jumping through a window, curls flying, great hat askew, eluding some unseen baliffs onstage. Yet, even this entrance suffers from being too studied and too cold. It is about as spirited as D'Artagnan would be if his image were reared in snow. Thereafter, Mr. March struts, fences, frowns, laughs, swaggers, drinks, smiles, kisses and holds his for-once unwigged head in pain when he is suffering from a hangover. In fact,
he does everything except be gay, and fit into
the period into which he has strayed. For an
actor who has succeeded so well on the screen,
and who there has shown himself to be a reliable
and zestful comedian, Mr. March's present stage
performance is baffling. His facial expressions
lack variety and projection power in the theatre.
His body is stiff. His playing superficial.
And two gestures he seems to be particularly
fond of: tapping his head, the other... swinging
one arm up and down in mid-air as if he were
milking a cow (Brown Eve. Post rev. of Yr. Obd.
Hus.)

Certainly the Marches found the reviews disappointing,
but they were realistic and put up the closing notice
after six performances. They placed an advertisement in
the New Yorker which showed a cartoon of an acrobat missing
the grip of his aerial partner who has jumped towards
him in mid-air. The caption reads, "Oops, sorry!" The
New York critics heralded the Marches's dignity and good
humor by writing comments in their columns about what
good sports the Marches had been and how Broadway hoped
they would return again, but with a better play.

Interestingly, the publicity brought the general
public's attention to the Marches and the critics'
rejection of their production. Film fans of the Marches
filled the mailboxes of New York dramatic editors with
bitter complaints that the play had been "killed in cold
blood by the critics before the public had a chance to
make up its mind about it" (Carberry "Film Folk Made Wary
By March Play Failure"). Several lesser known critics
then jumped in to the controversy saying that they had
personally liked the play and were on the side of the public:

The casual contempt with which Yr. Obedient Husband was dismissed by the critics' circle astonished me. I thought it a pleasant play. . . I found both Mr. and Mrs. March good, if not superlative . . . I mourned [the play's] passing " (Carberry).

One citizen, Robert Sichiruse, wrote to the New York Times:

By what authority do you criticize Fredric March in your column of Wednesday. Mr. March does not attempt to be Mr. March on stage; he tries to be and IS Richard Steele. And if Steele was a dull fellow to your taste, why not lay the blame where it properly belongs" ("Careful About Movie Idols" 22 Jan. 1938).

Well-known personalities, seeing The New York Times cartoon, were impressed with the Marches' sense of humor. William Brady, producer and old friend of March's, was quoted in Louella Parson's column concerning his feelings towards Fredric March:

He's my idea of a good sport. Moreover, he is a young man with excellent judgment. He realized Yr. Obedient Husband was a bad play and rather than have people pay their good money into the box office because they want to see a movie star, he closed the show after a very short run. He called himself a 'goop' in the newspapers and that made a hit with every Broadway producer as well as the public (Brady qtd. in NY Jour. and Amer. "...Dean of Stage Praises Hep. and March").

The Marches clearly showed that they were professionals who could respect the judgement of the Broadway establishment. They had laughed at their failure and turned that failure into a learning experience. Gladys Hall for Screenplay Magazine stated:
I think I have never seen an actor take a spanking on his ego more sportingly than Freddie. He proved that Hollywood success doesn't soften after all; doesn't do something to the fibres of its darlings so that they can't take the raps when they come. I gaze upon Freddie with new respect superimposed on the respect I have always felt for him" ("Freddie Takes A Fall").

The Marches blamed no one else for their flop. However, unknown to the New York critics, during final rehearsals March had been suffering from a form of arthritis, which caused the opening to be delayed from the first week of January until the second. Plagued with pain during the play's try-out tour, March had undergone a leg operation to speed his recovery one week before the show opened on Broadway. But March never used his ailment as an excuse for the failure of the play. As he said in an interview:

I'd wanted to try my luck on the stage again for a long time. I'd been reading an endless stream of manuscripts. Maybe that steady reading dulled my point of view; chloroformed my judgment. Anyway, I was inveigled into doing *Yr. Obedient Husband*, in spite of certain qualms about it. But it seemed the best manuscript in sight. I was tired of Hollywood and wanted Broadway, and that warped my judgment. I produced *Yr. Obedient Husband* with my own money. So my rush into the New York theater can be checked entirely to me. I alone am to blame. Maybe my illness hurt things. I know I was infinitely glad when the curtain came down on the last night and I could go to bed. I'm sorry I hit New York feeling so wretchedly but I doubt if my physical condition had much to do with my play's fate. I picked the wrong play, that's all (*Freddie Takes A Fall* Screenplay).

The Marches remained in New York for several more weeks while Fredric completed medical treatment for his
arthritis. They returned to Hollywood at the end of February. But the urge to return again to Broadway maintained a prominent position in the minds of both March and Eldridge.

The American Way

In November 1939, Eldridge was approached by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart about a leading role in their epic folk drama, The American Way, a chronicle of the life of a German immigrant who comes to America in 1896. Inspired by Noel Coward's Cavalcade, which had celebrated British patriotism, Kaufman and Hart felt that with the threat of Nazi turmoil in Europe and fascism in America, the United States needed to show its patriotic colors as well.

She was so inspired from the portion of the script she read and her conversation with Kaufman and Hart that she went home and announced to March that the following day they were to meet with the authors to talk business. On 10 November 1939, March and Eldridge signed a contract with Kaufman and Hart for the major roles in what would become one of the most spectacular productions ever produced on Broadway. ("Hit Puts F.M. Even").

The American Way is the saga of a young German couple, Martin and Irma Gunther, who immigrate to America and who work long and hard all of their lives to achieve the American dream of liberty and happiness. Beginning with
Martin's solo arrival at Ellis Island in 1896, the play traces his life as he establishes a cabinet shop in a small Ohio town, the joyous arrival from Europe of Irma and their children (Lisa and Karl), and Martin's progression from a small business owner into a prosperous furniture factory owner and eventual mayor of the town.

The mood of the play changes when the plot focuses on the shattering events which occur as America enters World War I. With the outbreak of world tensions, Martin and Irma are forced to make an agonizing choice of loyalties between their love for their German birthplace and their love for America, which has given them much prosperity. When Irma refuses to let their son Karl go and fight against German kindred, Martin convinces her that their allegiance must now be with their fellow Americans, who have also fought hard and diligently for their freedom. Irma is convinced by Martin's persuasive words, and Karl enlists. Sent to France, he tragically dies in action.

As the years in the play progress toward 1939, Karl's son has been unable to find meaningful work, even though he has a college degree. Discouraged and vulnerable to the lures of a group of radical young men who feel they must make a visible change in America's established way of thinking, the son is about to join their ranks. Martin, even though he has lost his business to the Depressions,
is appalled at the young rebels' attitudes and disrespect for their country. While trying to convince his grandson to break from their ranks, Martin goes to their secret meeting, interrupts them with a patriotic speech on American freedoms, and is then pummeled to death by young cowards who flee in flight. The play ends with the funeral procession of Martin's casket draped with an American flag, his grandson's dedication to "the American way".

March and Eldridge were thrilled at the opportunity to portray such resourceful, hardworking, admirable individuals. As soon as they signed their contracts they began researching the roles. They passed up parties, took voice lessons three days a week, and studied under a German dialect coach. They went to German movies and hung around the local residents in Yorkville in order to develop the proper cadence of speech and mannerisms. They were determined to be well prepared for their second try at Broadway ("Sullivan in New York", Dec. 1939).

The Production

The production was monumental, both in size and problems. Rehearsals began on 15 December 1938, with 250 actors and supernumeraries under contract. The only theatre in New York City large enough to hold the cast, the sets, and the crew was the Center Theatre, but its location was several miles from the Broadway strip. To change the sets for the production's twenty-one massive scenes, three
elevators were needed. Seven floors of dressing rooms were devised in order to accommodate all of the actors. Production cost were estimated at $200,000, a very large sum of money in 1939, and the producers calculated that they would need to make $30,000 a week in revenues just to keep the show running (Kihss 45). But when Kaufman and Hart announced that the Marches had signed a contract to star in the production, $100,000 was raised within a twenty-four hour period to finance the endeavor (Parsons 1939). Evidently many people believed in the collaboration of Kaufman, Hart, Eldridge and March, though it was stated that March did not himself invest in the production.

Highly publicized, The American Way opened on Saturday night, 21 January 1939, under the direction of Sam Harris and Max Gordon. A long show, the curtain came down each night at 11:15. Extremely well received by the public, the production was in essence a patriotic salute to all Americans who had dedicated themselves to hard work and honest living. Profitable for its backers, the production also endeared the Marches into the hearts of the public through their sympathetic portrayals of hard working immigrants.

Walter Winchell of The Daily Mirror described the production as an "emotional epic . . . a panorama of the American Scene". Brooks Atkinson thought Kaufman's staging "masterly" and wrote of March's portrayal: "Avoiding the
mawkishness that a hackneyed actor would let into the part, March gives out of his skill as an actor and his sincerity as an American a pride in character that pulls the whole play together" (Atkinson, New York Times rev. of The American Way). Burns Mantle thought that New York was "especially fortunate to have enlisted the services of March, who has come back from Hollywood, determined apparently, to recover such prestige as he sacrificed in Yr. Obedient Husband" (Mantle Daily News rev. of The American Way). Richard Watts thought of the acting:

[It is] so good that the work takes on qualities of humanity that are most necessary to it. There is for example, a particularly skillful portrayal of the patriotic German by Fredric March, who plays with honesty, modesty, simplicity and feeling, making Martin Gunther a fine gentleman and good citizen . . . Miss Eldridge is splendid as the wife, endowing her character with a lovely quality of gentle womanliness . . . they are players of distinction (Watts, NY Herd.Trib.).

John Mason Brown commented that in the midst of such a huge pageant "Florence Eldridge and Fredric March manage to give deeply human and admirably individualized performances". He found Eldridge, "excellent throughout; warm, compassionate, and winning" (Eve. Post rev. of The Amer. Way). It must have been satisfying to the Marches to read such praise from the critic who had so disliked Yr. Obedient Husband. Brown emphatically praised March's portrayal of the aging immigrant: "all the town, if indeed not the whole nation, is bound to become Mr. March's obedient servant because of the fine and gentle humanity,
the skill and the controlled pathos with which he acts the aging Martin Gunther" (Eve. Post review).

About March's ability to age realistically on stage over the forty years depicted in the play, John Anderson said: "he manages the transition in years not only with pictorial accuracy but with superb emotional inflection, [giving] a deeply imagined performance, vividly sustained, and projected with vitality and color." Eldridge's performance, Anderson continued, had not "quite the same clarity or power" but had "excellent effect" (Anderson NY. Jour. and Amer. rev. of The Amer. Way).

According to Richard Lockridge, "[March and Eldridge] both played with rare simplicity and skill [while March] makes his character a portrait of simple humanity: it will be difficult to forget" (Lockridge NY.Sun rev. The Amer. Way).

However, in the midst of such acclaim, socialist critics found fault with the production. John Cambridge of the Daily Worker condemned the play as a "libel on the democracy it pretends to serve." He was especially horrified at the depiction of a "happy relationship between the workers and their employer," and the portrait of a "benenvolent banker". Worst of all, Kaufman and Hart seemed to be enjoying their "prostitution of the common laborer" in return for great financial gain (Drama Was A Weapon 208). To Mr. Cambridge, The American Way was not a true
depiction of the terrible conditions most Americans were experiencing during the era of the Great Depression. The run of 244 performances, however, indicated that the spectators, whatever their income, were pleased with the production.

All involved with the production were praised for their creative efforts: Kaufman and Hart for their script; Kaufman's direction; Donald Oenslager for his massive sets; Hassard Short's lighting and technical direction; and Irene Scharaff for her task of costuming 250 actors. But the most lavish praise was given to the Marches. The New York critics remembered well the admirable manner in which the Marches had accepted the failure of their first Broadway debut as an acting duo in Yr. Obedient Husband. With this new success, they were for the most part met with open arms.

"It was just the kind of thing we wanted to do," said March. "A great big heart-breaking play that would reach every American --and make them think that, however we differ among ourselves, the American way is wonderful and worth holding on to" ("Hit Puts F.M. Even. . ."). The success must have been special for March, for unlike Eldridge, he had never before accomplished such strong critical acclaim on the New York stage.

More important to the Marches than the praise and the success was the work itself, which challenged them
as artists. In one New York Times interview they mentioned the stress of working with less qualified professionals. "In Hollywood", said Eldridge, "the director feels he ought to do it all. They call you up and say, 'Now, don't come down to work with any preconceived notions of the part'. Well, now," she added, "that's just what an actor wants—his notion of the part." For the Marches the entire process had been "marvelous: No screaming; nobody pulling his hair out by the roots; every costume ready when needed; no rehearsals after midnight." Eldridge concluded:

It was a revelation of what a marvelously capable director can do. I've been in plays where there were six people and we were kept rehearsing all night and the director stood up and screamed all night until he collapsed. Then he lay down and screamed" (Eldridge qtd. in "Hit Puts Fredric March Even With Actress Wife" NY Times).

After the production closed on 23 September 1939, the Marches took a brief vacation. They recalled the fall of 1926, when as 'best friends' they had traveled together to New York from Elitch's Gardens, and how for entertainment they would drive through the New Jersey countryside admiring country homes. Now married and prosperous, they bought a farm in Connecticut (still retaining their California home and New York apartment). The American Way had promoted March to star status on Broadway and helped to reinstate Eldridge's earlier standing.
Grateful for their own prosperity, the Marches were sensitive to the hardships faced by others. In an interview with a reporter for the Christian Science Monitor, the Marches expressed their concern for social responsibility and the need for Hollywood celebrities to promote the civil rights of all Americans. March noted that the developing "liberal movement in the United States was being born not in Union Square, but in Hollywood" and cited the names of James Cagney, Franchot Tone, Robert Montgomery, Joan Crawford, Herbert Biberman, John Ford, and Dudley Nichols as only a few of the Hollywood crowd who were at work in "divers good causes." Claiming that most actors are eager for important pictures which "say something," Eldridge added that she thought movie stars, by their actions, could probably "do more to influence the great body of film goers than any single group of people." As a member of the board of directors for the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, Eldridge was trying to do her part. Together she and March had worked for the "lifting of the Spanish embargo" which had taken place earlier in 1939, and for the civil rights of minority groups across America. Dedicated citizens, the Marches pledged to continue working for the good of others.

Chapter Summary

When March and Eldridge moved to California in 1928, the skills they possessed as seasoned stage actors were in demand. They had the stage experience and professional maturity that the majority of silent-picture stars lacked, and perhaps their biggest asset was their understanding of the discipline required to practice their art.

The contributions made by the Marches to the film industry during the early years of talking pictures are notable. Commenting in 1929 on his success as a rookie, March noted that every movie he had made was the first 'talkie' attempted by its director. Directors and actors had learned from each other, and the pictures improved as the makers experimented. Pioneers such as Bob Milton, Dorothy Arzner, and Frank Tuttle had added something of value to the development of talking pictures, and March felt honored to have been a part of that experience. (March qtd. in Walker).

Between 1929 and 1940, March appeared in forty-three films. Hired by Paramount, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Universal, Pathe, 20th Century Fox, and Warner, March had worked for every motion picture studio in Hollywood. He had co-starred with Hollywood's most famous actors. Beginning featured with the stars of the early sound films (Clara Bow, Ruth Chatterton, Jeanne Eagels, Colleen Moore, Mary Astor, and George Bancroft), he soon moved up to playing
leads with the industry's biggest names (Greta Garbo, Tallulah Bankhead, Norma Shearer, Claudette Colbert and Charles Laughton). By the end of the 1930s, March had become one of the motion picture industry's favorite leading men, co-starring with the industry's most famous women: Katharine Hepburn, Janet Gaynor, and Carole Lombard.

Eldridge, too, found some success in motion pictures, but not near the success of her husband. He was a handsome personae for the screen, who could be a romantic leading man, or a character actor (i.e. Les Miserables, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde). She, on the other hand, was never typed as a glamorous or romantic lead for the screen, although she had been on the stage. She did not have March's ideal 'beauty', nor his versatility as an actor, which made a difference in her obtaining screen roles. Nevertheless, during the decade of the thirties, Eldridge was featured in twelve films, three of which were with March. The legitimate stage, however, was where Eldridge's talents were best showcased. Performing in Everett Horton's stage company in California and in two brief runs on Broadway, Eldridge proved she was still a talented actress.

Consequently, with the demands of maintaining a secure and loving homelife for March and their two children, Eldridge appeared content to shift her major role as actress with that of homemaker.
Since their earlier success together at Elitch's Gardens, the Marches dreamed of acting as a couple on Broadway. Taking periodic leave from Hollywood, the Marches returned to New York in 1938. Their first attempt at Broadway stardom flopped (Yr. Obedient Husband). But their second attempt, in 1939 with The American Way, was a success with critics and public alike.

Avid readers, the Marches spent much of their free time reading plays, always in hopes of finding one they could act in together. Though the popularity of the motion picture industry continued to affect the legitimate stage, the Marches thought the standard of commercial fare produced on Broadway during the thirties represented an improvement over the pre-depression norm. With such playwrights as Lillian Hellman, Clifford Odets, William Saroyan, Thornton Wilder, John Steinbeck, and Sidney Kingsley (all friends of the Marches) producing works, March and Eldridge wanted to be a part of the legitimate stage's future. Understanding the discipline required of a good stage actor, March made these comments in 1929:

You must love your job in order to study a role as hard as you need to do in stage work. That thoroughness is one of the most important contributions that stage people are going to make to pictures. The nature of their medium induces an exhaustive study of the character to be portrayed. They work for weeks before the play opens, live with their characters, [and become] those people every day during the run of the play. It is a very different process from pictures, in which a scene is perfected, shot and done with within one day, the picture finished in a few
weeks, and the actor goes on to a new portrayal (March, cited in Louise, "Freddie For Keeps").

By the early 1940s, with his film career well-established and their success as an acting couple on the legitimate stage verified, the Marches had achieved their original career goals. In addition, they had proved that the training they received as stage actors was a valuable resource for screen actors, and that it was feasible (and could be beneficial) for screen actors to periodically perform on the legitimate stage to sharpen their skills. And in so doing, they testified that the most gratifying aspect of being an actor is not in its monetary rewards, but is found in the self-fulfillment of portraying a character so honestly and completely that the audience recognizes fully the author's intentions.
CHAPTER 4
THE MARCHES ON BROADWAY
(1940-1955)

The Setting: World War II and Post-War Era

With the success of The American Way (1939), the Marches had earned critical and popular respect for their work as an acting couple. Through the next fifteen years they would return together to the legitimate stage seven times, at intervals interspersed between eighteen more films starring March.

The movie industry in the decades of the 1930s and 1940s had become big business, diminishing demands for the legitimate theatre. New York's theatre business declined and the many playhouses could not be maintained. Monumental theatre buildings were no longer economical. Consequently, the most successful theatre industry on Broadway during the forties was the film industry. Houses such as the Paramount, the Capitol and Loew's State had to maintain their rent by leasing out public office space. (Atkinson 424).

The theatre of the thirties had concentrated on a pacifistic outlook towards American involvement in world affairs, turning its focus upon the plight of the American common laborer. (Mordden 190). Such plays as Jack Kirkland's long running Tobacco Road (1933), Clifford Odets' Waiting For Lefty (1935), and John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men (1938), had captivated the attention of theatre audiences.
In the 1940s, though the Depression was coming to a close, times were still overwhelmingly difficult for most Americans. With the entry of the United States into World War II, the general public's taste in theatre altered. To meet the paying public's needs, the American entertainment world focused on 'escapism' fare.

To draw audiences, Broadway offered diversionary entertainment which avoided dealing with world problems. Comic, sentimental, or patriotic plays were well received, such as Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit* (1941), Mary Chase's *Harvey*, and Garson Kanin's *Born Yesterday* (1947)). Other successful long running productions included *My Sister Eileen* (1940), *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1941), *Angel Street* (1941), and *I Remember Mama* (1944). Some serious drama was produced, including Lillian Hellman's *Watch on the Rhine* (1941), and Sidney Kingsley's *The Patriots* (1943), along with Thornton Wilder's innovative and epic depiction of the journey of man, *The Skin of Our Teeth* (which starred the Marches). But the public's preference was for comedies and musicals.

Veteran musical comedy composers, such as Harold Allen, Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, and Rodgers and Hammerstein, provided Broadway with excellent entertainment, establishing Broadway as the world's leader in musical comedy: *Pal Joey* (1940), *Oklahoma* (1943), *On the Town* (1944), *Carousel* (1945), *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946), *Finnian's Rainbow* (1947),
South Pacific (1948) and in the fifties, The King and I (1951), The Pajama Game (1954) and Damn Yankees (1955).

In the beginning of the post-war era, a month long visit by a renowned British theatre company, The Old Vic Company of Bristol (April 1946), influenced Broadway's aspirations for putting the war behind and moving in new directions. The stunning productions of Chekhov's Uncle Vanya, Shakespeare's Henry IV, Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, and Sheridan's The Critic, made an impact on American theatre. British acting and production designs in these classic pieces, achieved with such technical brilliance, challenged American artists to reassess the state of their theatre.

The Old Vic's extraordinary company included Laurence Olivier performing Sheridan's comical Mr. Puff and Sophocles' Oedipus on the same evening, Vivien Leigh as Jocasta, Ralph Richardson as Falstaff/Vanya/Tiresias, Margaret Leighton as Yelena, Joyce Redman as Doll/Tearsheet/Sonya, and Harry Andrews as Creon. Broadway found them quite impressive.

Taking the challenge, in an explosion of creativity, the American stage presented in the post-war era a wide range of new works, including farce, melodrama, musical comedy and serious/tragic drama. Original productions of plays by Eugene O'Neill (The Iceman Cometh, 1946), Lillian Hellman (Another Part of the Forest, 1946), and Maxwell Anderson (Joan of Lorraine, 1947) were well received by the critical public. Two young American playwrights dominated
the post-war years: Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller. Beginning with his 'memory play', *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), followed by such works as *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), *The Rose Tattoo* (1951) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), Williams became one of America's major dramatists of the post-war era, along with Arthur Miller, whose *Death of A Salesman* (1949) remains one of the great American tragedies of the Twentieth Century. Miller's adaptation of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* (1950), which starred the Marches, along with *The Crucible* (1953), identified Miller as a playwright who envisioned the theatre as an institution which could promote social change.

Other writers who made an impact in the fifties were William Inge, with *Come Back Little Sheba* (1950), *Picnic* (1953), *Bus Stop* (1955); and Robert Anderson, *Tea and Sympathy* (1953). During the 1955-56 season, Broadway offered a fertile range of comic and serious works: *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *The Lark*, *Tiger at the Gate*, *The Chalk Garden*, *Waiting for Godot*, *The Matchmaker*, *No time for Sergeants*, and *My Fair Lady*.

Nevertheless, in the fifties, theater business continued to drop. Besides the escalating value of real estate in New York which made theatre buildings uneconomical, political disillusionment within the nation darkened the festivity of the Broadway scene. Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin convinced the federal government that disloyalty to the
United States was being harbored in the entertainment community, specifically the film and television industries. With the approval of the government, McCarthy harassed celebrities with charges of Communist affiliations: most of whom had done nothing more than befriend people of European descent. Though Broadway was not endangered to the degree that the others were, it did shun certain controversial professionals. Many were blacklisted from the entertainment field. Some, like March and Eldridge fought back.

After its creative surge in the twenties and thirties, Broadway dropped to the level it held during the first years of the twentieth century. As Brooks Atkinson surmised about the dilemma in which Broadway often created grandiose productions without considering their practicality in a business sense: "In similar circumstances, Studebaker and Packard automobiles went out of business" (Atkinson 428). In 1948, with eighty percent of Broadway actors unemployed, the emergence of television was for actors, writers, and technicians a financial life saver. Television could offer them steady and lucrative employment, whereas Broadway could not.

When March and Eldridge returned to Broadway in 1941, it was to a different audience.

Broadway Interlude

In 1940 March was listed as one of the wealthiest men in America (Los Angeles Observer, May 1940). The success
of his film endeavors, coupled with his knowledge of financial investments, allowed him the freedom to choose or decline whatever ventures he desired. After the success of *The American Way* (1939) on Broadway, the Marches returned to their California home. Hired for his masterful speaking voice, March had performed some radio readings in the mid-thirties and in 1939-40, narrated documentary films (two of which were *China's 400,000,000*, concerning China's struggle with Japan, and *Lights Out in Europe*. (Quirk 30). On 4 July 1940, March gave a rousing, reading of a patriotic selection entitled "Call to America Pledge", which was broadcast across the East Coast by radio station WJZ, New York (CBS Files, "March file").

In Hollywood March was to star in four more movies before returning to the stage. In 1940 March received positive reviews for his work in *Susan and God*, co-starring Joan Crawford, directed by George Cukor, and based on the play by Rachel Crothers (in which Gertrude Lawrence had made a Broadway success). Also in 1940, March's friend, John Cromwell, directed *Victory*, a film adaptation of the novel by Joseph Conrad and co-starring Betty Field. March played a recluse who musters up his courage against would-be robbers. In the same year, March starred as a German refugee fleeing Nazism who encounters other sojourners on his route across Europe in *So Ends Our Night*. Based on the novel by
Erich Maria Remarque, the movie was directed by Cromwell and featured young actors Glenn Ford and Margaret Sullavan.

**Initial Communist Allegations**

On 14 August 1940, the Marches received perhaps the biggest shock of their lives. A witness before the Los Angeles Grand Jury submitted a list (which became glaringly publicized) of more than a score of Hollywood personalities whom he labeled as Communists or Communist sympathizers. Among those listed were March and Eldridge. It was claimed that heavy financial contributions by these individuals had served to finance sixty-five per cent of the Communist activities in Southern California ("F.M. Faces Accuser, Denies He's Red"). With no proof that the allegations were true, the Grand Jury eventually dismissed the case, but only after the names of the accused had been slanderised.

It had all begun shortly after World War I when, fearful of Communist aggression, the F.B.I. began to promote the notion that if you were born, reared or resided in Europe, then you had Communist affiliations. With a sizable percentage of Hollywood dignitaries having immigrated to America from Europe, the F.B.I. feared that through infiltration in studio labor unions, the Communist party might gain control of the vast motion picture industry, using it then as a means for Communist propaganda. Knowing that something needed to be done to stop such un-substantiated allegations from being taken as truth, a group of
educators, writers, actors, and political figures banded together in November 1938, under the name of "Films for Democracy", to produce or distribute, on a non-profit basis, motion pictures designed to "safeguard and extend democracy in America" (Boehnel, "Film Group Organized to Defend Dem."). March, Walter Wanger, Dudley Nichols, and Fritz Lang were among its members.

Even though the Grand Jury charges were dropped, March's affiliations with the "Films for Democracy" group (and his congenial relationship with all other Hollywood luminaries mentioned on the Grand Jury list) were used years later by the F.B.I. as propaganda against him. For the next ten years the Marches suffered the outrage of having their names publicly linked with Communist activities. Time and again, the Marches denounced the charges as completely false. But the publicity given the charges was so widespread that it was impossible completely to diminish its effect. Accusations against the Marches continued until 1949, when during the "Cold War" era, they had escalated into a bizarre witch hunt.

Continuing in films, one of March's most applauded interpretations came in 1941, when he portrayed a Methodist minister in journalist Hartzell Spence's, One Foot in Heaven, based on the true life story of Spence's own father. The critics agreed that March had mastered the character of William Spence: a "lovably human" minister whose attributes
included a realistic humor, an instinctive knowledge of the human heart, and a religious fervor in his faith (Quirk 31). Many times in later years, March would list One Foot in Heaven as one of his favorite movies. Undoubtedly March's strong Presbyterian upbringing and his experience as a Sunday School teacher in Racine, Wisconsin, added to his knowledge of the part. (In the March files, located in the Wisconsin Archives, are deposited numerous letters of praise and congratulations from 'ordinary citizens', ministers, and fans. Because no other March movie or play file contains more than two fan letters, it can be assumed that March was very proud of his portrayal of the minister and of the public's response to it). Determined to return to Broadway, the Marches continued their search for an appropriate play. A play by Sophie Treadwell entitled Hope For a Harvest provided the opportunity. Hope For a Harvest (1941)

Sophie Treadwell, a talented California writer and a friend of producers Lawrence Langner and Teresa Helburn of the Theatre Guild, set her play Hope For a Harvest in the San Joaquin Valley, where she had been raised by her parents who were pioneers in the settlement of California. Langner and Helburn thought that Theatre Guild alumni, March and Eldridge, would be excellent in the lead roles of the play. Having remained friends through the years with the Guild management, the Marches still envisioned themselves
becoming as renowned onstage as the Lunts (Langner 335). When the offer came for them to perform again for the Guild, they accepted.

The premise of the play is that the America of the 1940s has lost its devotion to hard work and dedication and has settled for quick fixes and easy living. The play portrays sturdy and determined immigrants who have leased the land away from old-stock American owners, who have gone to seed, too lazy and too proud to work on the land. The play illustrates this premise by contrasting the present conditions of one of the old families with that of its new and vigorous Italian successors.

Carlotta Thatcher (Eldridge) returns home after living in France for a number of years. Thinking that profits from a successful harvest on the farm bequeathed to her and her cousin Elliott (March) will sustain her financially, she discovers instead that Elliott has allowed the farm to go completely unattended and has left the physically demanding task of peach farming to run a filling station. Content with doing much less work, Elliott has assumed a superior posture towards the immigrants who now run the old farm. Another cousin busies herself buying cars and frittering away her time at the movies. When Carlotta decides to try to farm the old ranch herself, she is met with discouragement from both family and friends. In the end she does succeed in making the farm work, but only because she allows one
of the robust Italians to teach her how to do it.

A didactic play, *Hope For a Harvest* drew praises for Eldridge and March, although the play itself was seen as flawed by the New York critics. Before coming to New York, the play had made a preview tour of five weeks through Washington D.C., Boston, Philadelphia, New Haven and Pittsburgh. With the production receiving rave reviews from the out-of-town critics, the Guild believed that a success on Broadway was assured. But for the New York critics, problems lay in the play's weak plot and mechanical writing. (Watts, "The Theater: When Critics Differ"). Lawrence Langner and the Guild thought that the New York critics simply did not want to see a play about rural America. Regardless of the play's success in the out-of-town theatres, the negative reviews of the New York critics turned audiences away from *Hope For a Harvest*.

Nonetheless, the New York critics found the Marches' personal performances very acceptable. Burns Mantle thought March managed "to make more than a playwright's prig of cousin Elliott" and praised him for his "fine sense of character [which] has brought him many successes in the theatre and on the screen" (Mantle, *NY News*, rev. of *Hope For Har.*). Other critics agreed that March gave an excellent performance: (Atkinson *NY Times* rev. of *Hope For Har.*, Watts *Her. Tribune* rev. of *Hope For Har.*, Pollock, *Bklyn. Daily Eagle* rev. of *Hope For Har.*). Of Eldridge, Atkinson's
description of her performance as "pleasant and shining" represents the critical response of Burns Mantle in the New York News, Richard Watts of the Herald Tribune and Wilella Waldorf of the New York Post. John Mason Brown summed up the whole project: March and Eldridge "are obviously good people, pleasant and high minded, who have earnestly set about doing a good job. The only trouble is they do not succeed in making Miss Treadwell's play interesting" (Brown Wor.Tele.).

After only thirty-eight performances, Hope For a Harvest closed, against strong protest by Langner and the Guild. With customarily gracious acceptance, the Marches left for Hollywood where March had contracted for another film. Langner had wanted them to stay and attempt to move the production to another theatre, and when they refused, accused them of being uncooperative. In a letter to "Lawrence and Terry", Eldridge tried to explain their feelings:

We feel the theatre has become like roulette. You contract to play a number and if it doesn't come up it seems better to accept one's losses with good face and withdraw with dignity. The actor [has lost] time, other opportunities, and prestige; the manager [has lost] money. Like all people who are meticulous about keeping a contract (and our experience has included keeping one that brought seven months of unexpected one-night stands and Freddie standing pat on his first five-year picture contract with agents wringing their hands and begging him to walk out and demand more money). We react perhaps with too much outrage on being asked to abrogate it from the other side. I guess the theatre will [always] be its' participants form of gambling... an endearing mistress, though unstable (Eldridge's letter to Langner and Helburn).
In 1942, March completed two more successful movies. *Bedtime Story*, co-starring Loretta Young and directed by Alexander Hall, had March portraying an eccentric playwright who tries to convince his "leading lady wife" not to retire from the theatre. In *I Married a Witch* (1942), co-starring Veronica Lake, March portrayed a descendent of a New England elder, who, responsible for the deaths of Salem 'witches', is haunted by the reincarnated spirit of one of the victims.

In the summer of 1942, March and Eldridge were approached by producer Michael Myerberg to play lead roles in his upcoming production of Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth*. It was to be one of the most memorable experiences of the Marches' careers.

*The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942)

On 18 November 1942, Thornton Wilder's boldly innovative *The Skin of Our Teeth*, opened at the Plymouth Theatre in New York with March and Eldridge leading the cast. A satiric survey of the history of mankind, beginning with the ice age and progressing to modern times, the play featured March and Eldridge as George and Margaret Antrobus, "always a little comic in their ignorance, and a little pathetic in their determination to survive" (Mantle "S.O.O.T. Fantastic Satire"). Through multiple reincarnations, they suffer and triumph with mankind through its history. Besides March and Eldridge, the cast included young Montgomery Cliff as their son Henry.
(formerly known as Cain), Florence Heflin as their daughter, Gladys, Florence Reed as the fortuneteller, and the irrepressible Tallulah Bankhead as the flippant maid and harlot, Lily Sabina. Because The Skin of Our Teeth made such an influential impression on the world of theatre, a more thorough synopsis is in order.

The Antrobus family lives in Excelsior, New Jersey. As the play opens, Sabina is dusting the furniture, talking cordially, directly to the audience about her employers. The temperature outside is below freezing and when a messenger comes to the door, a dinosaur and a mammoth slip slyly into the house. Mr. Antrobus arrives home from work where he has been busy inventing the alphabet, the multiplication numbers, and the wheel. A crackling fire is built, fed by the orchestra chairs (handed to March on stage by the stage manager). Neighbors crowd in from the cold, forcing the dinosaur and mammoth to be ushered out (which inevitably leads to their extinction), and Antrobus and his wife begin cramming their children with knowledge, in the hope they will survive somehow and will build again in another age.

The second act is set in Atlantic City, at the convention of the "Ancient and Honorable Order of Mammals, Subdivision Humans", where Mr. Antrobus, pompous with power as the group's president and tired of his chattering wife, falls prey to the sexual advances of Sabina, who
has just been crowned Miss Atlantic City. Henry runs wild on the boardwalk with a slingshot; the fortune teller warns of an approaching hurricane; and Mrs. Antrobus ushers everyone, including a pair of each of the animals at the convention, into a boat, thereby saving them from destruction (she even saves a place for her husband and his temptress, Sabina).

At the beginning of Act Three, a war has ended. Mr. Antrobus feels beaten. Mrs. Antrobus is still hopeful, still full of fight. She says: "I could live seventy years in a cellar and make soup out of bark and grass, without doubting that this world has work to do, and will do it." (Act III, 78). Denouncing his son Henry, (who has become Hitler) George says "It's easier to fight you than to live in the same world with you." Dispirited and wounded, he tells Mrs. Antrobus that for the first time, he has lost the most important thing of all, "the desire to begin again, to start building." He says that in a war you think of a better life, but in peace time you think only "of a more comfortable one." (Act III, 80). And then he remembers the three things that have always gone together when he has been able to see mankind's problems most clearly: the voice of the people "in their confusion and their need," the thought of his wife and children and their home, and his books. In the end he relents, however, and offers Henry a haven (after dousing his head with
cold water). As voices from the past (Plato, Moses, Aristotle, Spinoza) speak to the Antrobuses, the audience, and the world, teaching them about man and God, a somber mood is sustained until the clock finishes striking twelve and the stage darkens. When the lights come back up, there is Sabina, dusting the Antrobus' furniture, repeating the lines which opened the play. It is Wilder's way of saying that man is always at the beginning, always learning, always progressing, always starting anew.

In Wilder's highly imaginative script, walls lean, bits of scenery rise and fall, and the long-suffering stage manager interrupts the action on the stage in order to correct a problem or converse with an actor. Its non-traditional staging confounded many audience members, causing some to walk out of the theatre during the opening night performance. One of the first dramas directed by Elia Kazan, it bore the stamp of his own creative and personal style (Atkinson Broadway 314).

March's character, Mr. Antrobus, evolved throughout the play. In Act I he was an exuberant inventor, in Act II, a paunchy, disagreeable, turban-bedecked president of a secret social fraternity, and finally in Act III, a weary war-torn survivor seeking the strength to begin again. One critic said of March's varied character interpretations: "He plays each with strength, eloquence, and variety" (Beaufort "S.O.O.T. in NY"). Robert Coleman labeled March "terrific
as the humane, intelligent, well-meaning, backsliding ever-hopeful Mr. Antrobus" ("S.O.O.T. Provocative Pl.").

Eldridge's role of Mrs. Antrobus called for a characterization depicting a woman of intelligence, determination, perseverance, restraint and tolerance. Said Burns Mantle, "Florence Eldridge is perfection itself as Mrs. Antrobus, the homebody" (Mantle). She appeared at times as submissive and flippant (as well as a socially minded, satiric symbol of a ladies auxiliary president); when faced with the onslaught of the hurricane, it is she who takes control of the situation and saves her family from the flood (Beaufort). And it is she who never loses her optimistic view that mankind can and will survive. In a letter to Wilder, Alexander Woollcott expressed his preference toward Eldridge's portrayal: "March is good. . . Florence Eldridge is simply superb" (letter to T. W. 4 Nov. 1942).

As for the production itself, Lewis Nichols thought Wilder's play was "the best pure theatre" of the forties ("Season Found Actors Better"). Wilder's story "of man's constant struggle for survival, and his wonderment over why he so struggles, is presented with pathos and broad comedy, with gentle irony and sometimes a sly self-raillery" (Nichols). Wolcott Gibbs of The New Yorker agreed that the play was:

by far the most interesting and exciting . . . I've seen this year. . . Fredric March and Florence Eldridge, as Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus, achieve just the proper combination of the normal and the
supernatural; they speak with the unmistakable accents of suburban America, but it is also easy to believe that they have been married for five thousand years" (Gibbs, The New Yorker, 12-7-42).

Brooks Atkinson thought the Marches were giving "their most ebullient performance, for they know what to take seriously and what to toss off lightly" (Broadway Scrapbook 216).

**Early Production Plans**

Though a critical success, *The Skin of Our Teeth* had been a director's nightmare. The script called for a complex array of machinery including overhead projectors, trap doors, and scenery that collapsed and rose. The large thirty-five member cast included roles for a baby dinosaur and a mammoth. An epic Brechtian form of theatre, at least a decade prior to Brecht's import upon American theatre, the play challenged viewers to accept a non-realistic allegory of man's journey from the ice age to modern suburbia. If that was not enough for young Elia Kazan to deal with, he had also to serve as a referee between the outspoken Tallulah Bankhead and the other members of the cast and crew.

Originally, Thornton Wilder had visualized Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne in the roles of Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus, with Ruth Gordon playing the role of Sabina. He had also wanted Jed Harris to be director/producer for the production. He knew them all well and trusted and respected their talents. But they were unavailable. Gordon was already committed to Guthrie McClintic's production of *The Three Sisters*. Jed Harris was apprehensive about the script, for though he
thought the first act of the play was good, he felt the second act was trivial and did not want to produce it. The Lunts declined the acting roles (Letter to T.W. 4 Dec. 1941).

After Jed Harris and all other producers had rejected the script, Michael Meyerberg acquired it in January of 1942. Within three weeks, Meyerberg had interested the Marches in the production, though March could not begin rehearsals for six months due to a film contract. The young veteran of the Group Theatre, Elia Kazan, was then secured as director. Both Helen Hayes and Fanny Brice were offered the role of Sabina, both turning it down (Hayes, because she felt the part belonged to Ruth Gordon [whom Wilder had in mind when he wrote the role] and Brice, because she didn't want to leave Hollywood) (Wilder file).

Eldridge had been in favor of Helen Hayes for the role of Sabina and when Hayes turned it down, Eldridge wrote Wilder a letter suggesting that maybe Helen would consider playing Mrs. Antrobus, while she, Eldridge, would consider the role of Sabina: "If Helen does not decide in our favor of Sabina, how would you like to consider a switch of roles for me? You see, I originally thought of Lily in terms of beauty and bursting sex, and naturally didn't aim so high, but maybe I could capture some of my former "on stage lure and give it a whirl" (F.E. letter to Wilder, 9-2-42). But Meyerberg had other plans. At the urging of Helen Hayes, herself, and to the dismay of Kazan, Wilder, and critic Alexander Woollcott
(who felt the play a masterpiece), Meyerburg hired Tallulah Bankhead for the role of Sabina.

When in February Meyerberg announced publicly that he would produce the play, a number of people (remembering the financial success of *Our Town*) thought of investing in Wilder's script. But thirty seven of those who looked at the script, shook their heads and declined, thinking that the public would never accept such a fantastic play. The *New York Times* reported that Morris Jacobs of the Music Box not only wouldn't take a share but declined to book it in his theatre; John Wildberg talked a client with $10,000.00 to invest, out of the idea; and Paul Streger warned his clients (including theatre professionals Dudley Diggs and Walter Huston) not to invest in it. Alexander Ince promised aid, but then couldn't find a person in New York or Hollywood to put up a cent. ("Gossip of the Rialto" 29 Nov. 1942).

Fredric March, however, had complete faith in the play. He not only took a five per cent interest in it, but he turned down $200,000.00 worth of film work in order to appear in the project. Lee Shubert then put up $5,000.00 for a 10 percent interest, over the violent protests of his staff, and against his own better judgment. S.H. Fabian took a 5 per cent interest for $2,500.00. All of the remaining original financing came from Mr. Myerberg. After the Philadelphia opening, shares worth ten-and-a-half per cent were bought by speculators. (The irony of the story is that the entire
production costs of $35,000.00 were recouped by 12 December 1942, just twenty-four days after its Broadway opening ("Gossip of the Rialto").

The Rehearsal Process

Actual rehearsals began in early September for a pre-Broadway New Haven opening of 15 October 1942. But despite the brilliance of the cast, rehearsals turned out to be a nightmare for Kazan and for certain company members. One of the production's commercial assets was also the cause for some of its problems: namely Tallulah Bankhead. A critically acclaimed actress, Bankhead thought she should be able to improvise her actions on stage. Almost immediately, an antagonism developed between her and Eldridge, and the two ladies stopped speaking to one another and remained enemies for the length of their respective engagements. Moreover, Bankhead had little respect for Kazan's directorial talents, and she proceeded to ignore his suggestions and devised a performance that was her own very original and personal interpretation (Wilder File).

All the time, Wilder, (serving in the Air Force, in California) was bombarded by letters and long distance phone calls from all the principals involved, each of whom regarded him as a 'court of appeals', and the soul of reason and persuasion. Eldridge's letters were especially enlightening. In one letter to Thornton's sister, Isabel Wilder, Eldridge
complains of Bankhead's continual additions to Kazan's blocked pieces of business:

there has been the last two performances a new laugh made of flouncing and pulling up skirts. As we came off I said, 'Tallulah, you have so many laughs must you destroy the mood of the 'divorce scene' with this unnecessary one? She turned on me like a tigress screaming, 'I'm sick of your frustration. I'll have no more of it'.

Drawing the letter to a close, Eldridge added these words:

If I have any frustration it comes from trying to paint a picture and having my elbow constantly joggled and the paint splashed. I have never felt frustrated in any but the serious spots in the play. By this diagnosis, Freddie, for all his success, is frustrated also" (F.E. letter to I.W. 3 Feb. 1943).

A second letter to Isabel Wilder is worth repeating in its entirety for it displays not only Eldridge's thoughts, but also her gift for words which she once used professionally writing for _The Brooklyn Eagle_:

The performances you saw Tallulah give were miracles of restraint compared to what had been going on before 'Gadge' (Kazan) had a knock down fight and did eliminate such tasty bits as the mammoth sticking his snout up her dress. But now 'the horse is stolen and the barn door must remain open', I'm afraid. From the beginning of rehearsals, Tallulah had the 'bit in her teeth'. I have always felt that most of the confusion people find in the play results from the fact that Sabina never retreats to the body of the play between Miss Somerset's interruptions. On the other hand, she probably made it the popular success it is as it is definitely a performance for the majority. We stem the tide as best we can fighting laughs that seem destructive to mood. As Freddie says, it is a continuous sparring match, not a collaboration. We have written it all off to experience, and I think that is all that can be done. It has all been a very disillusioning experience. Up to the time Thornton saw the play, I was hopeful that the balance would be restored, but when he was so obviously pleased, too, we decided
we must be too perfectionistic in our point of view, which has always been that the ultimate in acting is to make a play not a circus . . . To us, it is a closed book, as one cannot allow such an uncontrollable circumstance to sour all of life. This play is so followed by disaster [that] Thornton has something when he says, we pull through by "the skin of our teeth" (F.E. to I.W. 29 Feb. 1943).

The tension on stage was visible to the company. Kazan and Bankhead exchanged 'words' often, and on one particular occasion, the stagehands, caught in the middle of a feud between them, burst into applause for Kazan as a temporarily battered Bankhead left the stage (Kazan, *An Amer. Odyssey* 61). But Kazan was not blind to Bankhead's theatrical talents. In regard to her performance on stage, Kazan wrote in a letter to Wilder, "[Her performance] is vulgar, and vulgar, and generally vulgar and in bad taste. At the same time, it is shot with genius" (Kazan letter to T.W. 1943). As for his view of the Marches, Kazan found them to be "charming, intelligent, and highly professional" (Kazan letter to T.W.).

Still, another problem was Myerberg. His moods alternated between hysteria and megalomania (Goldstone 169). Having never before produced a Broadway play, Myerberg lacked experience and understanding. In a letter to him, Eldridge, wastes no words in expressing her thoughts:

> Your lack of courtesy and consideration toward every member of this company has been so shocking and unprofessional that it exceeds description; your idea of authority is sadly dated. Authority is not snapping your fingers at writers or in
this case actors. It is something innate. Something that springs from inner dignity, true knowledge, tolerance and simplicity. In your obviously frustrated desire to be at long last respected, your utter disregard for human relationship have succeeded only in making of yourself a figure of ridicule (Letter to Myerberg from F.E.).

At one point, on the evening of the Philadelphia opening, a hysterical Meyerberg approached March, offering him the opportunity to purchase the entire production for $35,000.00. March was willing to accept the offer, but the next morning, after the Philadelphia papers appeared with favorable reviews, Meyerberg retracted his offer (Goldstone 169).

Production Experiences

In Ed Sullivan's column "Little Old New York", his interview with March discloses some of the trials and tribulations experienced by The Skin of Our Teeth:

In Baltimore [19 Oct.] the audience hooted at the actors and actresses, 'Give us our money back'. . . On top of that, the word-of-mouth propaganda was so bad that people who had ordered tickets in advance cancelled their reservations. We reached Philadelphia [26 Oct.] just in time to run smack into the opposition of the touring company production of This Is the Army. We played Washington [2 Nov.], and then headed for New York [18 Nov.] (March, cited in Sullivan).

Not knowing what to expect on Broadway, the cast was greatly comforted when the Marches' close friends, director John Cromwell and playwright Phillip Barry, (who had traveled to Philadelphia to see the show), assured them that they would "stand New York on its ear" (March cited in Sullivan). And that they did. In addition to the Pulitzer Prize, The Skin of Our Teeth won for Kazan the New York Drama Critic's
Award for best director. In June of 1943, having been performing since October of '42, the Marches and Bankhead left the play. Though the show continued, it closed four months later on the 25 September. The three stars were the crux of the production and without them audiences lost their interest.

The Drama Critic's Award for best play of 1942 did not go to The Skin of Our Teeth but to The Patriot, by Sidney Kingsley. Many critics were influenced by Joseph Campbell's and Henry Morton Robinson's accusation of plagiarism against Wilder, comparing The Skin of Our Teeth to James Joyce's Finnegans Wake. After the Drama Critic's Award had been given, the accusations against Wilder were proven unfounded (Campbell "The Skin of Whose Teeth").

The Skin of Our Teeth aimed to reassure Americans, who were submerged in the heat of World War II, that man has and can live through anything. The play ran on Broadway for 359 performances. For the rest of their lives, the Marches would refer to the joys, trials, and tribulations of The Skin of Our Teeth as one of the most memorable experiences of their lives.

Seeking a much needed rest, the Marches settled into their Connecticut farm, where they enjoyed gardening. With the war raging, March volunteered his professional services to help those he could. With two young children, Eldridge
stayed home, while March ventured overseas. (Perry "The Dramatic Temperament").

**USO Tour: Spring 1944**

During World War II, Broadway stepped forward in magnificent form to do its part in the war effort. Through its support of the United Service Organization (USO), it inaugurated Camp Shows in April 1940 (twenty months before America declared war on Germany). Many celebrities, representing every branch of show business, volunteered their time and talents to alleviate pain and suffering which the war cast upon the American people. So far reaching were these efforts that in December of 1945, there were only thirty productions on Broadway, while fifty-nine USO touring companies crossed America and 228 traveled overseas. The USO employed 2,200 workers: ninety-seven percent of them received salaries, while the remaining three percent (composed of highly acclaimed stage and screen stars), volunteered their talents for no pay. Fredric March was one of the stars who volunteered.

On one occasion March spent fourteen weeks on a USO tour, entertaining troops in South America, Central Africa, Egypt, Persia, North Africa, Sardinia, and Italy. Accompanying him was Sammy Walsh (well-known nightclub comic), Evelyn Hamilton (an accordionist), and Jean Darrell (singer). March was well-equipped with skits (as well as
jokes and bits of conversation), especially written for him by his friend George S. Kaufman.

In every locale the feeling of the audience was the same. The show was welcome and gratefully applauded. One realistic camp had billed the show "Two Girls and Fredric March." But it was the reminder that Americans back home cared for their service people overseas, that impressed the soldiers the most. As this fact dawned on March, he further realized from conversations with the men, that they would welcome serious excerpts from his repertoire as well as comedy.

The soldiers would shout for March to re-enact a scene from one of his plays, such as The American Way or The Skin of Our Teeth, or one of his movies: "They liked to see how I changed from Dr. Jekyll to Mr. Hyde" (March cited in Ormsbee, NY Her.Trib.). From a book of quotations he carried with him, he chose a few short pieces from Washington, Jefferson, Thomas Paine, Lincoln and Roosevelt, "things that were not hackneyed and that seemed as if they had been written today. The men liked them" (Ormsbee). Eventually cutting his comedy down to a short exchange of jokes with Walsh and a story or two, March would then present the soldiers with some great words out of their own heritage. Two of his favorites were Thomas Paine's famous lines from The American Crisis ("These are the times that try men's souls", etc.) and the last two paragraphs from President
Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms" speech ("We are fighting, as our fathers fought, to uphold the doctrine that all men are equal in the sight of God", etc. ("Two Girls and Fredric March" The. Arts).

The show would generally end with March standing simply, hand in pocket, on a bare stage, speaking to the troops extemporaneously about the war. It was not a humorous speech, but "it said something they wanted to hear, and to the G.I's, [March] was an okay guy" (Shollsky, Post "Hollywood Tintype", 6 May 1944). The tour carried the troupe of four 33,000 miles, performing more than 150 shows. Then after over three months of touring, March and his friends returned home tired but invigorated ("Two Girls").

A Return to Films and Stage

In 1944, March starred in the title role of The Adventures of Mark Twain for Warner Brothers. Though the film was castigated for "its episodic, superficial glossing-over of a complex artist's literary and personal life", March received high praise. Perhaps the greatest testimony to his characterization came from Samuel Clemmons' own daughter, Clara, who wrote March a personal letter, stating that he had come as close as anyone could to reproducing her father's personality and temperament (Gabriloeuitocles, 9 May 1944).

Returning to Broadway, this time alone, March earned critical acclaim for his performance in John Hersey's A Bell for Adano
The play dealt with the efforts of a U.S. Army Major to provide services to a small Italian town, which has been ravished during the War by the Germans. Eldridge did not participate in this Broadway venture, but remained at their home in Connecticut.

A Bell for Adano (1944)

Adapted by Paul Osborn from the novel of the same name by John Hersey (war correspondent for Time and Life), A Bell for Adano was produced by Hollywood agent, Leland Hayward (husband to Margaret Sullivan), and directed by H.C. Potter (returning to the stage after years of making movies). It opened 16 December 1944 at the Cort Theatre.

Categorized as a postwar play, it told very simply and quietly what had happened in a small town in Sicily after the war had torn through it and left it behind.

Major Joppolo (March), an American-born son of Italian parents, has been assigned to restore order to the town of Adano, after the Germans have devastated it and the American invasion has passed through it eastward. The captured townspeople, filthy, hungry, and war-scarred are pessimistic when Joppolo, civil affairs officer for the Allied Military Government, moves into City Hall at the beginning of Act One. With tact, good will, and a number of military police, Joppolo tries to straighten out the every day problems of the little town. Interestingly, Adano's most mournful loss is the town's 700 year
old bell, which the Germans had stolen to make rifle barrels.

Production Plans

Because of the skill called for in the portrayal of Joppolo's complex personality, Paul Osborn thought that March was the best choice for the role (Gaver "Play Saved By Acting"). Through the application of justice and fair treatment Joppolo wins the loyalty and respect of the people: he puts a real fisherman in charge of handling harbor affairs; he countermands an irate American general's command to get mule carts carrying much needed water and food into the city; and he even manages to swindle the Navy out of a new bell from a destroyer, to replace the one stolen by the Germans from the Adano citizens. When his actions are reported to his superior officers, he is removed from his command, relocated to Africa, and forced to leave the citizens he has grown to love. Forever indebted to him for his help, they send him away at the end of the play, expressing their everlasting gratitude.

On its pre-Broadway tour, the opening in Boston received a lukewarm reception, critics finding the play too long, and the acting overblown. Elliot Norton of the Boston Post thought March appeared "a little unconvincing" in the dramatic moments, and that he went
"a bit overboard" with his Bronx accent ("Adano at Wilbur").

Taking note of the out-of-town reviews, Osborn must have made a few changes in his script and March certainly re-examined his interpretation, for when the play opened on Broadway, it and March's performance received only excellent reviews (Nichols, _NY Times_ rev. _Adano_). "[March] is a sage choice for the plum role of Joppolo . . . a completely sincere interpretation of the humane soldier . . . His range of emotions is 'thesping' at its best" (Bone, _Variety_ rev. _Adano_); "[March] who has frequently seemed to me to be a rather wooden actor, is magnificent in the part (Barnes "Theatre Ringing"). Robert Coleman's review sums up best the critical response: March "makes [Joppolo] as real as life, human, irritated by protocol, eager to do a good job, anxious to make his parent's people understand and like Americans. It's a glowing, moving performance, off the top shelf" (Coleman "Adano Hits Right Note").

With _A Bell for Adano_ March obtained high stature as a Broadway performer. As one critic commented, "Without [March's] sincere and warm playing of the role of Major Joppolo, there would be some fifty percent less to the attraction at the Cort Theatre than there is now. With March present, a visit is recommended" (Gaver"). Running for 217 performances, _A Bell for Adano_ was listed in Burns
Mantle's *Best Plays of 1944-45*, as one of the ten best plays on Broadway that year (The play was later made into a movie, with John Hodiak in the March role).

Later in 1944, March's film with co-star Betty Field, *Tomorrow the World*, was released. March depicted a professor whose Nazi-sympathizing nephew came to live with him, after the boy's parents had been killed. The focus of the play was so much upon the role of the young boy, that many March fans wondered why he consented to his smaller role (Quirk 32). It was not until years later, after the Marches had successfully defeated their fanatic anti-Communist attackers, that March fans would realize that March's role in *Tomorrow the World*, as the uncle who believes staunchly in the democratic process, was perhaps a means for March to voice his own anti-Communist beliefs.

**Blacklisting**

For two years after *Tomorrow the World*, neither March nor Eldridge was seen on screen. Their absence was not necessarily by choice. Because of the pressure placed on the movie industry by F.B.I. inquiries into Communistic affiliations, March and Eldridge (along with many other actors, directors, writers, and producers were placed on a black-list. Stemming from the Los Angeles investigation in August of 1940, despite their many denials, they were still considered Communist supporters
by the F.B.I. Accusations labeling them disloyal to the United States appeared in front page headlines of many papers across the nation. However, their own personal responses to the accusations were printed on the back pages, never earning equal coverage with those of their attackers. Until accusations concerning their leftist affiliations were proven false in 1949, both March and Eldridge found it difficult to find work.

But in 1946, Samuel Goldwyn (for RKO) disregarded the blacklist and cast March in one of his most memorable roles as the compassionate army veteran in The Best Years of Our Lives. For his performance March won his second Academy Award. Robert Sherwood wrote the screenplay and William Wyler directed March and co-stars, Myrna Loy, Dana Andrews, Harold Russell, Virginia Mayo and Teresa Wright. In the film March is an infantry sergeant who returns home to his small Midwestern town and his patient wife (Loy), but finds no pleasure in his job as vice-president of a bank where he is forced to scrutinize the collateral of prospective loan applicants.

A superb film in every department (writing, acting, directing and cinematography), The Best Years of Our Lives was and remains without doubt the finest film depiction of postwar American veterans recuperation. Having toured the world with his USO show, talked to hundreds of soldiers in the fields, and, himself, being blacklisted, March
knew first hand the anxiety and frustration exhibited by the characters portrayed in the film. He played both comic and serious scenes to perfection.

**Years Ago**

In December of the same year, 1946, March and Eldridge opened together on Broadway in Ruth Gordon's *Years Ago*. This auto-biographical play, focuses on the relationship between Gordon and her parents during her senior year in high school (1912). The story affectionately traces the girlish hopes of Ruth Gordon Jones to become an actress and her determination to do so, even against her father's wishes (he would like for her to go to Sargent School and become a 'physical culture' instructor). Spirited and determined, the youngster must first convince her traditional parents that acting is an honorable profession. This is not an easy task. When Ruth finally has the courage to tell her father of her decision to leave home, he reacts with understandable shock and concern.

Interestingly, the principal character in the play is not Miss Gordon, but that of her father, Clinton Jones (the role played by March). Having worked as a sailor and long shoreman from age nine until he married, he displays an external tough, and at times, formidable facade. Promoted to the rank of Second Mate on a well-known freighter before settling down, Clinton Jones is now reduced to a Mellon's Food Plant employee, making
only $37.00 a week. Epitomizing the dreary surroundings and frustrated feelings common to striving middle class families before World War I, Jones is bombastic and opinionated, yet often unexpectedly sympathetic. March described his character as a "worried wage earner of the early 20th century" ("F.M. Makes A Play"). When his daughter is turned down for a role at the Castle Square Theatre, Mr. Jones unpredictably comes to her defense and publicly brands that company as 'amateurs.' Then, offering to sell his treasured spy-glass in order to obtain the finances needed to back Ruth's move to New York, Mr. Jones demonstrates his respect for his daughter by giving her his approval.

**Pre-production Plans**

According to Variety, it had been Miss Gordon's original intention to have March and Eldridge act the roles of her parents in the play; however, they had already committed themselves to Laurence Olivier's London production of *The Skin of Our Teeth* (Variety, 12 June 1946). Consequently, Garson Kanin, the director (and Ruth Gordon's husband), cast Victor Killian, Ellen Hall and Barbara Leeds in the major roles. Under the title *Miss Jones*, the play had its first trial run in Wilmington, Washington, and Philadelphia, where it received lukewarm reviews. Gordon and Kanin then pulled the play off its preview run.
Coincidentally, Olivier's London production of The Skin of Our Teeth was postponed and the Marches became free from their contractual obligations. The Miss Jones producer, Max Gordon, went to California to see Eldridge, offering to her a second time the role of the mother and to March, the role of the father. When they accepted the roles, Ruth Gordon set about rewriting the play, changing its name to Years Ago.

High Praise for the Marches

The revised script's preview performance in Boston met with high praise, especially for the Marches: "They are an admirable pair of actors, who catch the basic honesty, loving kindness and simple loyalty of the characters, which they portray with humor and skill" ("Hol. Rep." Var. 6 Nov. 1946). The play then opened in New York on 3 December 1946. What accounted for the success of the play its second time around? According to the critics, it was that "Miss Gordon shortened the play and added the Marches" (Garland "Yrs. Ago at Mansfield"). The reviews were fine: "Both March and Miss Eldridge lose their identities as Mr. and Mrs. Jones" (Eager "Yrs. Ago At Copley"); their roles were "very beautifully and effectively played" (Norton "Yrs. Ago True Story"). Of particular interest to the critics was the acting couples' skill in defining the subtleties of their character roles:

Fredric March, who gets to be a better actor every time you look at him, is beyond criticism
as Father Jones—walking with a jaunty lurch
... sucking his teeth, ranging from artificial
fury over cats and telephones and his daughter's
histrionics to real anger and despair over a
life that has given him so little. Just as the
part he takes is the core of the piece, his
performance has most to do with its success,
but a good deal of credit must also be given
to Florence Eldridge. . . [though playing]
somewhat in [March's] shadow, [she] does so with
great intelligence and charm" (untitled, March's
scrapbook).

Brooks Atkinson wrote: "Since [March] is playing the part,
Miss Gordon's father will now have to be added to the
gallery of stage worthies to be remembered and respected.
... this is character-acting of great distinction by a
master of the craft" (Atkinson "Yrs. Ago"). Commenting
in his Broadway Scrapbook (1970), Atkinson added:

Mr. March's performance in this interesting role
is superb. As a character actor of first eminence,
Mr. March takes full advantage of the
picturesqueness of the part. His acting has the
color and vividness of a vigorous lithograph.
But beyond that Mr. March is contributing his
personal admiration and respect for a human being
who is doing the best he can in a world he cannot
control. There is something more solid than popular
comedy in the part and in Mr. March's enlightened
acting (Atkinson 260).

For his acting, March was a recipient of the very first
Antoinette Perry Awards.

The Antoinette Perry Awards

In 1946, the Broadway theatre industry honored twenty
men and women with the first annual Antoinette Perry Awards
for outstanding contributions to the theatre world. (Miss
Perry, celebrated actress and director, had died the
previous year and was being honored through these awards
given by the American Theatre Wing, of which she was chairman during the war years. Twelve hundred people gathered in her honor and to cheer the first winners at a midnight ceremony at New York's Waldorf-Astoria Hotel).

Unlike the prizes awarded by the Motion Picture Academy of Arts and Sciences, the first presentations of the Tony Awards did not designate its recipients as 'best' or 'first', but in classifications and categories. Acting awards in 1946 went not only to March for his portrayal of Mr. Jones in *Years Ago*, but also to Jose Ferrer for *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Helen Hayes for *Happy Birthday*, Patricia Neal for her first Broadway appearance in *Another Part of the Forest*, and Ingrid Bergman for *Joan of Lorraine*.

Representing the directors of the American Theatre Wing, who selected the recipients, Brock Pemberton, long a friend of Eldridge and March, presented the awards. For the women, each Tony award was an initialed sterling silver compact case. The men received engraved gold money clips.

(Other Broadway productions honored were: *All My Sons*, for its author Arthur Miller and its director Elia Kazan; *Finnian's Rainbow* and its dance director Michael Kidd; Agnes de Mille for her dance choreography in *Brigadoon*; David Folkes for designing the set of *Henry VIII*; Burns Mantle for his annual publication, *The Best Ten Plays*; and to Kurt Weill for his score for *Street Scene*).
Winning the Tony Award for his Broadway performance was a great honor for March. But to win a Tony Award and an Academy Award (for his outstanding performance in *The Best Years of Our Lives*) in the same year (1946) was truly a remarkable compliment to March's versatility as an actor. He remains the first and only male actor to receive both the Tony and the Oscar in the same season ("Twenty Stage Notables Get Perry Awards", *NY Times*, Jan. 1947).

In an interview that attempted to account for his great success in films and on stage, March suggested that any picture will be good if it has "simplicity and sincerity in story, good directing, and honest acting." As for himself:

> Whatever success I've had in pictures and on the stage is due to the fact that I don't know how to act. I 'feel' parts that are simple and sincere and play them just as I react to them. Each part should be a 'think' part; an actor ought to research it and try to understand the feeling and motivations of the character he portrays. Otherwise, you're just a robot ("F.M. Considers Brando Top Actor" 1954).

**Film Portrayals 1948-1950**

After the long run of *Years Ago* ended in late 1947, the Marches appeared together in two films. In *Another Part of the Forest* (1948) (from the stage play by Lillian Hellman), March and Eldridge played members of the notorious Hubbard family, who guiltlessly reverted to blackmail, theft, and even torture to achieve their personal selfish desires. As the Southern traitor and vicious profiteer,
Marcus Hubbard, the critics thought March was "convincingly malevolent" (Quirk 32).

In *Live Today for Tommorrow* (1948) (later titled *An Act of Murder*), March played a court judge who when faced with having to watch his fatally ill wife suffer, chooses to end her pain by euthanasia. Living up to his own high standards, he confesses to the crime and insists on standing trial. Playing his suffering wife, Eldridge gave "a particularly affecting performance" (Quirk 32).

Of the pictures March appeared in with Eldridge, he reportedly liked *An Act of Murder* the best, for it allowed both of them excellent in-depth roles within a drama of maturity and importance: "Highly intelligent, beautifully directed, sincerely acted, especially by Eldridge who is poignant and true in the finest screen work she has ever done" (Quirk 32). Director Michael Gordon observed the Marches while working with them on *An Act of Murder*:

That they were enormously gifted actors is common knowledge. Their meticulous concern for the quality of their performance was readily apparent to anyone who saw them. But the extent and depth of their preparation, their relentless and exhaustive search into the characters they were portraying could be fully appreciated only by those who were privileged to work with them. (Gordon qtd. in Quirk 196).

With no favorable offers for work in the States, the Marches went to England to star in J. Arthur Ranks' *Christopher Columbus* (1949), in which March played the title role, and Eldridge the part of Queen Elizabeth. The
movie proved to be "long on pageantry and short on drama" (Quirk 32).

Then returning to the United States, March and Eldridge prepared for their next Broadway venture: Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep (1950).

**Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep**

Based on Ludwig Bemelman's best selling novel of the same name, *Now I Lay me Down to Sleep*, by playwright Elaine Ryan opened on Broadway 2 March 1950. Produced by George Nichols III and Nancy Stern, it was directed by Hume Cronyn and starred the Marches. Great expectations accompanied the opening, for Broadway had critical respect for all involved in the production. Yet despite the presence of lusty humor and fabulous scenery, the play bogged down when it shifted from satire to a somber, even somewhat ghoulish, ending.

March portrayed Leonidas Erosa, a South American General, who attained his military rank through political influence rather than any skill in the art of warfare. Eldridge was seen in the role of his faithful English governess/nurse, Lenora Graves, whom the General rescued from a suicide attempt twenty years earlier and who now dedicates her life to taking care of him and his epileptic seizures. He is a red-blooded, earthy, and likable playboy while she is a prim, proper and disapproving (though secretly adoring) spinster.
The bizarre comedy begins with the General's quick departure from his Biarritz, France villa, shortly before the town falls to the German Army. Heading to his hacienda in Ecuador on a Greek freighter, he is accompanied by an odd assortment of characters: Lenora, his companion; a naive mistress; a devoted Indian follower; and a cunning stowaway who becomes the perfect valet. In love with life, the General lives from moment to moment in a whirlwind of carefree experiences, squandering money, time, and energy thoughtlessly. He is held in check only by the restraining influence of Lenora. As diametrically opposed as these two people appear to be, each has an unfulfilled romantic feeling for the other. The play traces their erratic trek from Biarritz to the General's villa.

Important to the plot is that whenever the General is lured by the attentions of another woman, Miss Graves slips into deep depression and attempts suicide, seemingly preferring death over her torturous delusions. And as a reminder of her slim foothold on this earth, she insists on taking her own coffin along to Ecuador, so that, when the 'happy time' comes, she can be shipped home to England for burial (later in the play she decides on cremation, because this way she can be sent air mail). To complicate matters even more, following an earthquake, General Erosa
drowns in a subterranean pool when seized by an epileptic fit. This leaves Lenora to care for an illegitimate child the General has sired with the illiterate Indian girl.

Except for the script, which most critics thought was complex, cumbersome, insufficiently motivated, and thematically anybody's guess, "every other aspect of the production was wonderful" (Stern "Theatrical Oddity). The critics raved about the Marches: "They are simply out of this world, giving their characters the benefit of long years of superlative and sensitive acting" (Stern); "Mr. March gives the character the heartiness and the simple guile [Bemelmans] conceived. It is another finely wrought portrait by an extraordinarily accomplished and lovable actor" (Chapman "Scenery Is Pretty, but "); "March and Eldridge are giving the most enjoyable performance of their career together" (Atkinson NY Times ); "March has the infinite resourcefulness of a veteran: his detail is so satisfactory, his command of the part so easy that he makes credibility out of the incredible" (Taylor "Cronyn's Dir. Skilled"); "Miss Eldridge has the clear light voice that carries so charmingly . . . a most skillful blend of idiocy and elegant wit" (Taylor); "March and Eldridge take puppets and breathe into them a fanciful footlight life" (Murdock "New Comedy Has Premiere").

Perhaps one of the most interesting critiques came in the form of a personal note to the Marches from
playwright Clifford Odets:

. . . Saw the show last night--was sick and didn't come back. Critics aside (except for Clurman who took me), the show is one of the best entertainments I've seen in years, interesting (but sometimes crude) everywhere, touching--with some heartbreaking scenes . . . Freddy, the epileptic scene I will never forget in my life--I found myself weeping in Row F. And then how you died, my brilliant dear. But everything was exciting and theatrical and entertaining to me. I liked Hume's direction, too. Can't wait to come again and cry in Row F. Then will come back and shake your hands. (Soon) . . . With Love, Clifford O. . . . P.S. Clurman agreed with me and probably will say same in his two columns . . . Florence, best performance I've ever seen you give. Freddy. I must get a copy of what you say at that moment of swooning (letter from Clifford Odets to the Marches, March scrapbook).

Odets appears to be trying to find an excuse for not coming back stage after the performance of a play he did not like, but whose actors he well respected. The six bizarre sets and forty-seven characters, coupled with Hume Cronyn's inexperience in directing huge productions, probably added to the confusion experienced by the critics when they witnessed a performance.

Though Jessica Tandy and Akim Tamiroff performed in Cronyn's try-out production at Stanford University of Now I Lay Me Down To Sleep, Cronyn enlisted the services of Eldridge and March for his Broadway production. In his book, A Terrible Liar, Cronyn remarked about his respect for the Marches:

Working with the Marches was a joy. Freddy was not only a superb actor but had great panache: a charisma that overshadowed Florence and was absolutely right for the general. Florence, on
the other hand, was, I think an even better actress. Less flamboyant than Freddy, she was at least as talented and extremely intelligent. She was the balance wheel in their relationship" (Cronyn, 215).

Regardless of the actors' fine performances, the public did not promote the production. *Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep* closed at the Broadhurst April 8, 1950, after forty-four performances.

Later that same year (1950) the Marches opened again on Broadway in Arthur Miller's adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*. Miller stated in interviews that he saw in the play an up-to-date protest against "suppression and oppression" (Miller *Timebends* 324). Having faced the nightmarish ordeal of continually defending themselves against false allegations of Communist affiliations, the Marches were clearly excited about Miller's play and the opportunity afforded them to portray such affecting roles.

*An Enemy of the People*

"The stage is the place for ideas, for philosophies, for the most intense discussion of man's fate," wrote Arthur Miller in 1951 (Atkinson "Postscript" 432). In 1950, when McCarthyism was emerging into public focus, Miller was approached by Bobby Lewis (a veteran of the Group Theatre) with the idea of a new adaptation of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*. Lewis thought it was entirely pertinent to modern times, for it dramatized the "need, if not the holy right, to resist the pressure to conform" (Miller
In the roles of Ibsen's protagonist, Mr. and Mrs. Stockmann, Lewis had envisioned Fredric March and Florence Eldridge.

In his desire to prove Ibsen relevant to today's modern society, Miller adapted the play to reflect subtly the terrors afoot for American citizens in the McCarthy era. Dr. Stockmann discovers that the springs which have made his town a tourist attraction are detrimental to people's health. When he informs the authorities about it, he is condemned by the town's people for endangering their financial income. Having a vested interest in keeping Dr. Stockmann's findings a secret, the people believe that he should compromise his position and change his story. When he refuses, the whole town turns against him, stones his house, abuses his family, and boycotts him from society, declaring him "an enemy of the people."

Variety called the play a "powerful indictment of the forces of greed in entrenched authority, and a dramatic plea for freedom of speech" (Bron Variety rev. of Enemy). The New Leader found the play "flashes of bright humor and searing satire" (The New Leader, 29 Jan. 1951). But Broadway audiences, never much interested in political debates (Atkinson 432), did not attend, the production closed after only thirty-six performances. But it had successfully provided an occasion for a number of actors to 'stand up and be counted for.' Among these, the Marches,
Morris Carnovsky, Art Smith, Lou Gilbert, Fred Stewart, and Bob Lewis had all expressed publicly their discontent with any society which allows a man to be crucified by a mob (Miller 323). In the midst of the McCarthy witch hunts, Miller's version of Ibsen's An Enemy of the People, was vividly relevant (Atkinson 436).

The Production

In the beginning, Miller was surprised, yet pleased, that veteran theatre people like the Marches, "whom I never connected with radical politics," agreed totally with his concept of Ibsen's message (Miller 323). Clearly, the Marches understood the pain and suffering felt by Miller's characters, for the attacks upon their own reputations were still vivid in their own minds.

Although the critics differed in their judgment of Miller's adaptation, they agreed concerning the Marches' interpretations of their characters, which were "superb" (Bolton Eve. Tele.); "overwhelming" (Atkinson NY Times); and "inspired" (Morehouse rev. Enemy). Wrote Pollock: "It is not unusual for first night audiences to cheer when the curtain finally comes down, but in the case of An Enemy of the People, the cheering happens every night" (The Compass "The Marches Make Ibsen Thrill Again"). The production surely was expected to run longer. Perhaps Brooks Atkinson's introduction to his column reveals why it was not commercial Broadway fare: "Next to King Lear,
it is the bitterest play in town . . . it is pure Ibsen, angry and defiant" (Atkinson NY Times 29 Jan. 1950).

Arthur Miller believed that the production had been strong and forthright:

a full-blown production with solid sets and a Freddie March in the flood of his considerable art, and bristling with his private anger besides. Eldridge did her dammedest to rub some color into the rather gray role of Stockmann's worried, faithful wife" (Miller, 324).

Collegiate Honor

In January of 1951, the "National Collegiate, Honorary Dramatic Fraternity" chose March as "the actor making the greatest contribution to the American Theatre in 1950."
The citation was voted upon by the organization's Executive Council, which represented fifty-two active chapters in colleges and universities from coast to coast, for his work in *An Enemy of the People*. March was noted for his compassionate and exciting performances, and the Council added these words:

The deep humility with which this long time star approaches each new assignment, the respect he accords his fellow artists and audiences alike, have earned him the admiration and affection of his colleagues and his fellow citizens. To all of them Fredric March is a symbol of the best in American theatre" (Proctor, Players Magazine, "Fredric March: The Constant Star . . .").

Two days after the final performance of *An Enemy of the People*, the Marches began rehearsing for Lillian Hellman's new play, *The Autumn Garden*, which opened on Broadway March 8, 1951.
The Autumn Garden

Lillian Hellman's story of 'middle-aged frustration', The Autumn Garden, was produced on Broadway with a distinguished cast that included March and Eldridge, Kent Smith, Ethel Griffies and Jane Wyatt. Produced by Kermit Bloomgarden and directed by Harold Clurman, this comedy in the Chekovian style examined the fears and apprehensions of mid-life existence.

The play is located in a guest house on the Gulf of Mexico coastline, near New Orleans, where every year a group of good friends make it a tradition to spend part of their summer vacations together. Here Hellman brings together the forlorn spinster landlord who arranges the gathering each year, a miserable bachelor who has been in love with the spinster for twenty years, a retired general who is weary of his fatuous wife and desires to slough her off, but who is restrained by guilt due to the fact that she has a bad heart condition, a philandering artist and his wife, a firm and funny grandmother accompanied by her rich daughter, spoiled grandson, and the spinster's French niece.

All of the characters are in some way frustrated and unhappy. Under the illusion that some day things will be better, eventually they come to realize that they are incapable of any real revolt against their past lifestyles,
and that what they have made of themselves in earlier years is what they are when old age approaches.

March played the role of the philanderer, Nicholas Denery, who returns to New Orleans, the scene of his youth, in search of some sort of comfort. A weak, vain, and self-deluded artist, he has been able to retain the love of his rich wife (played by Wyatt) through his skill as a masterful charmer.

Eldridge played the General's wife, Rose Griggs, a boringly childish woman. Described as a "middle-aged Southern nitwit", Rose talks constantly. Having used her political influence to further her husband's military career, she is now using her bad heart condition to keep him with her. One critic noted that "with her inevitable taste, [Eldridge] acts this ridiculous woman, with no thought of being comical or piteous. The result is an uncannily real person" (Hawkins "A.G.Is Rich and Mellow"). Thomas Dash called Eldridge's depiction of the loquacious, simpering and silly wife, "superlative" (Dash "The Aut. Garden"), and John McClain called it "a masterful job" ("Play at Coronet").

Critics agreed that March's character served as the play's catalyst. With his bravado and back-slapping attempts to pretend that old friendships with these people are not forgotten, he touches off a situation already charged with
emotional and psychological conflicts. He tries to be a "cheerful fixer-upper" of everyone life, but succeeds only in being basically annoying (Chapman "Hell. A.G. Meaty Comedy"). He gave "an elegantly funny performance" (Chapman) "playing his role with a blatant flamboyance" (Crotty "Hell. Drama at Colonial"). Thomas Dash of Women's Wear Daily, agreed that "[March] is magnificent" offering "one of the best drunk scenes witnessed on Broadway" (Dash).

After closing on Broadway 2 June 1951 (101 performances), a touring production was assembled that fall with the Marches recreating their Broadway roles. Beginning in November in Detroit, the tour then went on to Chicago, Kansas City, St. Louis, Cleveland, Boston and finally to Baltimore in mid February, 1952.

Films: 1952-55

Between the Broadway closing in June 1951 of The Autumn Garden and its tour which began in November, March returned to Hollywood to star as Willy Loman in the film version of Death of a Salesman. Having been approached by Miller to play Loman in the original Broadway production, March had turned down the role without really reading the script. He felt fortunate to be given the chance to play Loman in the screen version: "Having made a spectacular error in judgment once, a fellow isn't often given so beautiful a chance to redeem himself" (March, Her. Trib. "F.M. Tells How He Became Willy at Last").
Actually, after *Death of A Salesman* opened on Broadway, March was offered the part of Willy Loman in the London production, and again in the American road production:

Somehow, having muffled the chance to open on Broadway, I found that neither of these other offers appealed to me. Playing Willy in the film is different. [Stanley] Kramer rehearsed the entire picture for ten to twelve days before the shooting began. I had not done this since my first picture back in 1928 . . . From an actor's point of view, this technique is excellent" (March, *Herald Tribune*, 3).

According to movie critic Alton Cook, "*Death of A Salesman* is one of the rare plays that becomes a more emotionally effective vehicle on the screen than on the stage" (*NY World-Tel.* "Salesman Bet. On Film"). With a screenplay adaptation by Stanley Roberts, produced by Stanley Kramer and directed by Laslo Benedek, the movie was a huge success. Benedek believed that the factor of 'audience identification' was a vital consideration in casting the picture. The part of Willy Loman demanded "not only an actor of great power and depth but beyond that also a quality of complete universality . . . I feel very fortunate and most grateful that we had Fredric March to play Willy" (Benedek *NY Times* "Trans. Death o.a. Salesman to Film"). An important change in March's interpretation of Loman, compared to Lee J. Cobb's superb Broadway portrayal, was that March played Loman with less "a sense of foreboding doom":

March is a more zealous and eager Willy, more insistent on dodging the realities of his downfall... He makes more of Willy's mental failings, avidly retiring into hallucinations whenever he is threatened with recognition of his failures... [resulting in] a touching and ardent performance (Cook).

March admitted that his interpretation was influenced by his recent visit to the Scandinavian countries, where *Death of a Salesman* had been quite successful. With many different interpretations of the role before him, March said that he wanted "to approach Willy with less intrepidation [than others] and simply attempt to bring my own conception and understanding to the part" (March *NY Her.Trib.*).

Costarring with March were Mildred Dunnock, Kevin McCarthy and Cameron Mitchell. Al Hine, who interviewed the cast and crew of the movie, stated that actors who had worked onstage with other 'Willies' (Lee J. Cobb, Gene Lockhart, Thomas Mitchell, Albert Dekker, and Robert Simon) hailed March as the best (Hine "From Great Play to Greater Movie"). March was nominated for an Oscar for his portrayal, but lost to Humphrey Bogart that year for *The African Queen* (Adams, Feb. 1952).

Now approaching their mid-fifties, the Marches began to curtail their professional engagements. They sold their home in California and lived very contently at "Firefly", their Connecticut farm in New Milford. Involved with community activities, they also enjoyed traveling and gardening. March told an interviewer:
Florence and I have always felt that it is narrowing to live only in the world of the theatre, however much we love it. An actor is only as good as the person behind him, only as deep and only as broad-ranging. So we keep busy with a variety of interests, we travel, we study, and I hope, grow as human beings" (March qtd. in Law. Quirk 34).

Though Eldridge was semi-retired from the movie industry during the fifties, March continued delivering fine film performances. In Man on a Tightrope (1953 Fox), written by Robert E. Sherwood, Elia Kazan directed March in the role of a Czechoslovakian circus owner, who attempts to escape Communist domination by tracking across the West German frontier towards freedom. In the end he escapes, but at the cost of his own life. (Quirk 32).

In Executive Suite (1954), March portrayed a conniving executive determined to take over a huge corporation after the sudden death of its chairman. He co-starred with William Holden, Barbara Stanwyck, Walter Pidgeon, and Louis Calhern. Most critics thought that March's portrayal was a step above the rest. (Quirk 34).

In The Bridges at Toko-Ri (1955) March portrayed a strong but sensitive Navy Admiral who carries the guilt of knowing that the young pilots he sends flying off his aircraft carrier will most likely die. In the same year, he starred in the film version of Joseph Hayes' play, The Desperate Hours (1955), depicting an executive whose family is held hostage in their own home by escaped convicts. Humphrey Bogart, as the leader of the convicts, co-starred with March.
Chapter Summary

Between 1940 and 1955 March and Eldridge starred together in six major Broadway productions, becoming one of America's premiere acting duos. Together they completed three films, with March adding a total of eighteen more films to his already large cinema repertoire. For his performances in Years Ago and The Best Years of Our Lives, March won the most coveted awards given to an actor by the theatre and motion picture industries.

But with the honor and glory of celebrity status, came the burden of being targets for publicity seeking activists. Accused falsely time and again for being affiliated with Communist activities, the Marches suffered the frustration, humiliation, and degradation of slanderous assaults. Blacklisted in Hollywood, they found many doors of opportunity closed to them. Yet, through the turmoil, the Marches emerged vincicated. Their display of courage and determination to fight their accusers through the court system prompted other victims to seek legal assistance. They proved that America's freedoms are worth fighting for.

As consumate professionals, the Marches' first consideration in selecting a role was to analyse the merits of the play:

I find myself judging the play as a whole. Simultaneously I try to decide whether I can play the part, whether it's dramatically interesting, whether I feel I can make it make sense. It's a
mistake to go for 'parts' as some actors do. I'll never do a part in a play or a picture that makes me lose my self-respect. (Ross 363).

March and Eldridge did not shy away from performing a play in fear of the public's response to it. Their portrayals were always derived through incisive preparation. As March pointed out:

Acting is basically just a business and actors are business men. A majority of players devote an entire lifetime to perfecting dramatic technique. They usually serve apprenticeships in stock, vaudeville, the little theatre or as an extra and bit players in the movies. The majority struggle every inch of the their way up. And the best ones are usually the ones who had the hardest time making the grade. They learned by their mistakes. They made a lot of mistakes, but if they were any good they profited from them (March, "Actors Just Business Men" 1941).

In November 1956, March and Eldridge returned to Broadway after a five year absence. It was to be their last and most memorable performance as an acting couple on the Broadway stage.
CHAPTER 5
LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT:
THE CLIMAX TO THE MARCHES' DISTINGUISHED CAREERS

The Setting: 1956 to 1961

Costly productions were becoming more and more dependent on star performers' willingness to remain with productions for long runs. For the Marches, long term commitments were difficult. He was fifty-nine and she was fifty-five.

On the political scene, this period marked the beginning of what was to become years of social turmoil. America's entry into the conflict in Vietnam, riots over desegregation, and the Cuban Missile Crisis helped to undermine America's belief in her own stability. Off-Broadway became the mouthpiece for dissenting voices, while Broadway had to rely on the public's preferred taste to meet its financial obligations. And the public's preference was still for musicals: My Fair Lady (1956), West Side Story (1957), The Music Man (1957), The Sound of Music (1959), Camelot (1960).

British productions, too, made their way over to the U.S. Actors such as Laurence Olivier, Wendy Hiller, John Gielgud, Michael Redgrave, and Richard Burton became popular Broadway attractions. Audiences were drawn by innovation and creativity.
Outstanding dramas such as Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) and Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker* (1961) premiered during this period. But no other play equalled the anticipation which accompanied Jose Quintero's production of Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, which starred March and Eldridge. As Durrenmatt's *The Visit* (1958) marked the farewell performance of Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, *Long Day's Journey Into Night* marked Eldridge's farewell to the theatre.

**Long Day's Journey Into Night**

Opening at the Helen Hayes Theater in New York on 7 November 1956, Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, offered a portrait of his own dysfunctional family. O'Neill had written "this play of old sorrow . . . [with his] tears and blood" (Quintero 214). Three and one-half hours long, the play depicted the story of O'Neill as a restless young man, his alcoholic brother, his miserly father, and his drug addicted mother. Under the direction of Jose' Quintero, a distinguished cast performed to unanimous acclaim. March played James Tyrone, the father; Eldridge played Mary, the mother; Jason Robards, acted the elder brother, Jamie; Bradford Dillman, Edmund, who is O'Neill impersonated; and Katherine Ross, the part of the serving girl, Cathleen.

The play held the opening night audience spellbound. (Hobe, *Variety* rev. of *Lg. Day. Jour.*). Remarkably good
reviews heralded the opening performance. Walter Kerr found the production "a stunning theatrical experience" (NY Her.Trib. 8 Nov. 1956); John Chapman pronounced Long Day's Journey Into Night to be "O'Neill's most beautiful play" (Daily News 8 Nov. 1956); Brooks Atkinson noted that with this production the "American theater acquires stature and size" (NY Times 8 Nov.1956), and Henry Hewes of the Saturday Review, called it "the most universal piece of stage realism ever turned out by an American playwright" (Hewes 8 Nov. 1956). The major New York critics were united in their opinion that the debut of O'Neill's autobiographical play marked a landmark event in the annals of American theatre history (Hinden 12).

Florence Eldridge as the mother was "believable and touching", said Hobe for Variety (14 Nov.56). Chapman declared her performance "magnificent. . . [reaching] stunning heights in the art of acting" (Daily News 8 Nov. 1956). Critic Walter Kerr wrote:

Florence Eldridge makes the downward course of an incapable mother utterly intelligible. She does not have the deep resonant notes that will sustain her woman through the blinding, tragic center of the play; she cannot quite fight fury with fury. Yet there is a hidden delicacy that is often touching in the shallow gaieties and transparent pretenses of a convent girl who could not survive the world (Herald Trib. 8 Nov. 1956).

In this demanding role, Eldridge was on stage most of the time. For her performance she won the New York Drama Critic Award for best actress in a straight play, 1956-57.
Faced with perhaps the most challenging role of his long career, March gave a superlative performance as James Tyrone. As the aging actor who stands at the head of his family, March created a superb delineation of James Tyrone's multi-faceted personality. Petty, bullying, impulsive, and sharp-tongued, he was also a man of strong passions, and deep loyalties. Brooks Atkinson recorded that March's "masterly performance . . . will stand as a milestone in the acting of an O'Neill play" (NY Times 8 Nov. 56). Walter Kerr thought March "in every way superb" (Herald Trib. 8 Nov. 56). A more detailed description of March's brilliant character interpretation and his respect for those of his fellow actors onstage is found in Henry Hewes's review of the play:

[March's] James Tyrone is a miraculously sustained portrayal . . . [avoiding] the flamboyance that has marked drunk scenes from [other actor's] performances . . . he captures a true alcohol saturation that he holds onto with complete discipline. Even in the wild and ridiculous moment when he jumps on top of the table to screw in the three light bulbs, melodramatically shouting, "We'll turn them all on. . . The poorhouse is the end of the road, and it might as well be sooner as later," [March] does not abandon the characterization to indulge himself in a virtuoso stunt. Because his performance is relatively subdued, it becomes possible for Jason Robards, Jr. to explode and steal the show. (Sat. Rev. Lit. 24 Nov 56).

Never one to upstage another actor, March's respect for stage professionalism was always highly regarded by his colleagues. This speaks soundly of the impact he must have made upon the younger, less experienced actors who
worked with him. For his performance of James Tyrone March received the New York Drama Critics Award for the best actor in a straight play, and the Tony Award as the best actor of the year.

Production Arrangements

*Long Day's Journey Into Night* had its world premiere at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm, Sweden in February of 1956. Since it was a recognizable portrait of the O'Neill family, O'Neill had specified that the play not be produced until twenty-five years after his death. However, three years after O'Neill's death, Mrs. O'Neill permitted the play to be produced in Sweden, where O'Neill had believed that the theatres had given his plays the more faithful interpretation. American producers and directors yearned to produce the great O'Neill masterpiece, but it was into the hands of director Jose Quintero that Carlotta O'Neill placed the script.

As Jose Quintero relates in his book *If You Don't Dance They Beat You*, from the very beginning of his planning it was March and Eldridge whom he envisioned playing the roles of James and Mary Tyrone: "Who in the whole of the American theatre can play James Tyrone, I ask you? No one but Fredric March" (Quintero 207). "Why did we go to see *The Autumn Garden* three times? To see Florence Eldridge. She was magnificent. . .Can you imagine what she would do with a part like Mary Tyrone?" (Quintero
When approached, the Marches accepted the roles without hesitation. From their first telephone conversation, Quintero realized that "these two great stars" were as thrilled and honored to be performing in O'Neill's masterful play as he was to have the opportunity to direct them (Quintero 208).

A week after their first telephone conversation with Quintero, the Marches attended a performance of The Iceman Cometh, in which Jason Robards was playing Hickey. Quintero and Bradford Dillman joined them at the theater and, as Quintero relates, upon his first meeting with them, the Marches were extremely impressive. They had watched Robard's performance with keen alertness and when it was over stood up and shouted "Bravo, Bravo". After bowing, Jason looked at them, and once again they hailed his performance. (Quintero 209).

The Marches then invited Quintero, Robards, and Dillman to spend the next weekend with them at their Connecticut home, to get better acquainted and have a read through of the play. The visitors were given the use of the Marches newly converted barn for their lodging. Early Saturday morning the five of them began to read the play together aloud. March asked Quintero if he minded if he, March, could start "fooling around with a brogue" as an interpretive part of his characterization of James Tyrone. Eldridge prepared them all for the fact that she
saw herself as a poor reader, and asked that they be patient with her. "I think Florence and Freddy were more frightened than Jason or Brad, or myself for that matter," commented Quintero (212). That weekend in Connecticut, a truly brilliant ensemble began to form. Upon their arrival the day before, March had commented, "There is only one thing I want to say, and I promise I'll never say it again. Florence and I are very happy you came and we are very happy we are going to be working together. You feel those things right away. I hope you feel the same" (Quintero 209). By the end of the weekend, Quintero knew he had a very special cast for a very special play.

Actual rehearsals began two months later, where according to Quintero they worked very hard, every day. Never was anyone late nor did anyone complain of fatigue. When Quintero needed Robards and Dillman to work after rehearsals, March and Eldridge insisted on staying to feed them their cue lines. It was, according to Quintero, the type of creative experience that every director dreams of.

One night, after the first three weeks of rehearsals, Quintero brought Mrs. O'Neill into the theatre to watch the rehearsal, without the cast knowing about it. When their performances began to produce tears in her eyes, Quintero stopped the rehearsal, and Mrs. O'Neill came down on stage to tell the actors how wonderful she felt
they all were. Moved by her presence, the cast responded in kind. (Quintero 214).

Devoting two chapters of his book to Long Day's Journey Into Night, Jose Quintero made some insightful comments about the Marches:

The Marches came in early [to rehearsals]. After we greeted each other, they went to the very corner of the stage, sat down and quietly began cueing each other. The theatre was absolutely empty and the only noise I could hear was the low murmur of the Marches, which sounded as if they were privately saying their beads. Finally, I sat down way upstage on the opposite side from where they were sitting. They were totally unaware that I was looking at them. I smiled. There were these two enormous stars looking very small, huddled together, as if protecting each other from the cold, sitting in what I fancied to be the last two folding chairs in an abandoned church (Quintero, 224).

Quintero went on to note that Eldridge had been a star on Broadway before March, and that March had become a movie star of the first magnitude while Eldridge had to settle for supernumerary roles, and he wondered how it was possible to adjust to being a star in one medium and a featured player in another? He recalled how as a child in 1936 he had waited impatiently to attend the cinema where Fredric March was starring in Anthony Adverse, and how March's skill as an actor had impressed him. (Quintero 224).

Undoubtedly, both Robards and Dillman respected and learned much from the Marches. As Robards was to go on to play the lead in other acclaimed O'Neill plays,
certainly when he portrayed the role of James Tyrone in a 1988 revival (under the direction of Jose Quintero) he thought of the interpretation which March had rendered. Dillman, in an interview with Jan Suzukawa, commented on the great enjoyment he had received from staying with the Marches at their Connecticut farm, and what an inspiration the Marches had been to him both as mentors and as friends (Suzukawa, tele. conversation 22 Aug. 89).

The Broadway production of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* in 1956 was a major event in theatre history. The part the Marches played in making it memorable cannot be overestimated. They were two very strong parts of a collaborative effort which yielded ensemble acting at its very best. After 178 performances, the play closed in New York. Selected to be shown in July of 1956 at the Theatre of Nations Festival (held at the Sarah Bernhardt Theatre in Paris) as the play which best represented American theatre, Quintero's production was loaded aboard a Pan American Clipper and left for Paris one week after its New York closing. First performed onboard ship for a very enthusiastic audience, the production met with great acclaim from their Festival performances as well. (*O'Neill's play was later made into a movie with Sir Ralph Richardson as James Tyrone and Katharine Hepburn as Mary*) (Quirk 35).
After performing in Paris, the Marches returned to New Milford and their comfortable farm. Here Eldridge retired for a time from the theatrical spotlight, finding contentment in helping with neighborhood enrichment programs, gardening, and supporting her husband's activities. 

In 1957 March suffered a minor heart attack, and by his doctor's advice, he began to slow down his professional pace. However, he completed three more movies before returning to Broadway for his final venture in 1961. In 1959 he starred with Kim Novak in the Columbia release, *Middle of the Night*, directed by Delbert Mann. (Edward G. Robinson, an Elitch's Gardens alumnus, and Gena Rowlands had been very successful in the stage version). In 1960, March finally got the opportunity to play opposite his long-time friend from Wisconsin, Spencer Tracy, when he played the role of Matthew Harrison Brady (which Paul Muni and later Melvyn Douglas had played on Broadway) in Stanley Kramer's production of *Inherit the Wind*. Eldridge came out of semi-retirement to act the role of Matthew Brady's wife in the movie and March made himself up to closely resemble the legendary William Jennings Bryan (complete with bald pate, thick mid-section, and flamboyant mannerisms). March received excellent reviews, as did Tracy for his portrayal of Henry Drummond. For March and Tracy, it was a lifelong ambition being
fulfilled. So much did the two men enjoy having the opportunity to work with each other, that all the cast and crew relished in their performances on the set. As Kramer later recounted:

During the filming of Inherit the Wind, we had March and Tracy nose to nose for long courtroom battles in dialogue and assorted histrionics. The stage was filled with people from every office on the lot. And how these two luxuriated in the applause of the audience. Every take brought down the house, and their escapades were something to see. March would fan himself vigorously with a large straw fan each time Tracy launched into an oration. . . Tracy sat behind March and [blew] his nose during March's three-and-one-half-minute summation. (Kramer cited in Driver "Wis. Artists On Film").

Kramer added that each performer achieved his own well thoughtout effects without infringing on the other's territory. While Tracy had the more sympathetic role, he was kept from stealing too many scenes by the talents of March, who compensated with subtle gestures and facial expressions for what his part lacked in warmth, for his character was the personification of bigotry and intolerance.

When Inherit the Wind was released in 1960, the NY Times described it as "one of the most intelligent, respectable, and entertaining movies of the year . . . the clash of Mr. March and Mr. Tracy is not only the crux of the film, it is the triumph of the picture" (Driver 3).

In 1961, March played a crusty doctor of pathology who bluntly speaks his mind to his tight fisted supervisors
in *The Young Doctors*. Starring in the movie was Ben Gazzara, but it was March who garnished the best reviews:

Chewing his way through cigar after cigar and scene after scene, this country's most talented impersonator gives a rare kind of performance -- the kind that, while clearly a performance, is so right that one feels like cheering every time he merely walks on screen" (Newsweek "All March" 7-61).

**Gideon**

On November 9, 1961, March and co-star, Douglas Campbell, opened at the Plymouth Theatre in Paddy Chayefsky's *Gideon*. In his variation of the Old Testament story of the layman, Gideon (which is found in Judges, Chapters 6-8), Chayefsky captured the humor present in a confrontation between a mortal man and God (who is depicted in the guise of an Angel). The production was a success and March could claim much of the credit for making it so. It was a fitting final role for an outstanding stage actor.

**Production Plans**

The Marches had been at their home in New Milford when Chayefsky called and asked March if he would be interested in playing the part of the Angel in his upcoming production of *Gideon*. March was hesitant. He was then sixty-four years of age, and the part was long and difficult. But Chayefsky was convincing. With Tyrone Guthrie as the director, Douglas Campbell of the
Stratford, Ontario Shakespeare Company, as Gideon, and what March felt was "the best play of [Chayefsky's ] career" (March, Theatre Arts Monthly). Eldridge persuaded March to accept the role. Signing a six-months contract and contributing $5,700.00 to the production, March began preparing for his final Broadway performance ("In Gideon, March plays God").

Having been an avid church member and substitute Sunday School teacher in his youth, March was familiar with the story of Gideon. Especially captivated by the play's conflict between man's will and that of his Maker, March found the role challenging. He researched and studied the Books of the Law located in the Old Testament, and attended synagogue to hear the manner in which the priests recited their chants. (Morehouse "F.M. Wears a Robe. . .")

Rehearsals began for March, Guthrie and Campbell on 11 September 1961. The rest of the cast came in on 18 September. With the opening set for 14 October in Philadelphia, they had four weeks of preparation.

Staged by Guthrie, with settings and lighting by David Hays, the production was visually imaginative: sombre drab tents and sacrificial altars decked a tricky, steeply raked set, designed to give an impression of the barren, hilly landscape of Israel. (Taubman, "Chayefsky's Gideon"). At one point in the play March
entered from high upstage, winding his way downward around the bends and turns of a mountainside. Wearing ballet slippers for a better grasp of his footing, March often feared falling, for he was blocked to "leap around a lot" (March cited in Morehouse).

The Play

The story begins when the Angel (March) visits the erring and sorely oppressed Israelites. Here He selects the unlikely candidate of Gideon (Campbell), an awkward and inarticulate farmer, to destroy the altars of Baal and lead His people against the aggressive Midianites. Not convinced that he is capable for the task, Gideon hesitates. Through the Angel's divine skills of persuasion, Gideon accepts the challenge, leads his mere three hundred men against overwhelming odds, defeats their enemy, calms the warring factions among his people, and then rejects their offer to be crowned King.

All of this makes the Angel very proud. But when the Angel demands obedience from Gideon by ordering him to kill the old men of Manasseh and Succoth, who worshipped false gods and prophets, Gideon finds himself powerless to carry out the command. He believes that human life is too dear. Instead, returning to his tent in Joash with the daughter of one of the condemned men, Gideon offers a golden robe to God as an atonement for his disobedience.
Gideon's actions bewilder the Angel, who then becomes thoroughly enraged. Not wanting to sacrifice any more men, Gideon begs to be 'divorced' from God's alliance, pleading that he is too human for God to consider him as 'spiritual'. At this Jehovah thunders. But when faced with the thought of the loneliness of an existence without the companionship of man, the Angel asks Gideon not to forsake Him.

Though the play had a serious focus, it was filled with humor. March's character, the Angel, was an imposing figure, while Campbell's character was a most ordinary man, and in reality, an unbeliever. When he first meets the Angel, Gideon does not offer him 'homage', he offers Him a freshly baked cake. The Angel accepts, sits down to munch on the cake, and an easy, colloquial exchange follows. When the Angel suggests to Gideon that he could be a great leader, Gideon laughs and shrugs the offer off as a joke. All of this Chayefsky arranges with a neat lightness, with no touch of mockery.

March was costumed in a flowing black robe and a black patriarchal wig and beard streaked heavily with grey. His character was loving, patient and even witty until challenged by Gideon's disobedience. Then he became stern and demanding, content with taking only a sampling of Gideon's mortal vanity and skepticism before he rose
in powerful wrath. In contrast, Gideons was cloathed in the humble attire of a crude farmer.

**Critiques**

The production, well received by the Broadway critics, ran for 233 performances. "Haunting, fascinating, bold", said Richard Watts of the New York Post, "a powerful and provocative play" ("Chayefsky's Bib. Drama"). John McClain wrote that March "in his constantly assured and powerful portrayal of the deity, displays an engaging sense of humor coupled with a fierce and unrelenting awareness of his omnipotence" ("Chayefsky's . . . Hit"). John Chapman concluded that "only an actor with the integrity, the stature and the voice of March could essay a role like this and triumph in it" ("In Gideon Campbell and Mar. Illumine"). Howard Taubman, writing for the New York Times thought that March "carries off the difficult assignment of being both simple and imposing with fine balance. [He] played brilliantly" ("Chayefsky's Gideon"). Time magazine described March's performance:

The Lord is wrathful and jealous; yet his fatherly love is ever close. Gideon is skeptical and petulant; yet at times he almost swoons in an ecstasy of faith. To watch March and Campbell shade in the lights and shadows of this relationship is to see something like acting genius at work. March hisses and rumbles like an active volcano, and his "I am the Lord" is an eruption of molten lava. At times, March seems to take an actorish delight in playing the Lord, but he is awesome when, with magnetic all-seeing
eyes, he probes for Gideon's soul in a speck of human dust (Time, 11-17-61, p.17).

The critics also praised Campbell and especially the ensemble work of the two actors. After only a few rehearsals of the play, March realized that Broadway newcomer, Douglas Campbell, was a superb actor. He was so taken by the Scotsman's skill that he had Campbell's name placed beside his own as co-star on the billings. "Everybody in the company was terrified," Campbell said, at the thought of a newcomer like himself being cast in one of the lead roles. But it was March who gave him confidence: "So much of what you do depends on who you are playing with. I feel a unity of structure with Freddie" ("Scotch Actor Bemoans Overnight Stars").

Personal Comments of Gideon Cast Member: Mitchell Jason

Among the many critiques of the Broadway production of Gideon, the most insightful one, especially in regard to March as a person, is found in a personal letter this researcher received from Mitchell Jason, who played the role of Joash in the 1961 production.

Jason's admiration for March began when Jason was a young man. As an amateur actor in Philadelphia, he had grown up watching March in many films and had considerable regard for his work. But his admiration became even greater once he became a professional actor and was privileged to be in the audience when March and Eldridge performed in Hope for a Harvest (1941), in which March "embodied
a true man of the soil, dressed in farmer's denim overalls with rolled-up shirt sleeves that revealed strong forearms and hands covered with good brown Napa Valley dirt. What's more, he sounded like a farmer, a country man." In 1944 Jason next saw March portraying "the citified Brooklynese sounding Italian Major Joppolo" in A Bell for Adano, followed sometime thereafter as a rather "sophisticated inebriate" in Lillian Hellman's Autumn Garden (1951).

Jason writes that while he was performing the role of "Mr. Peachum" in the Theatre De Lys' production of The Threepenny Opera, in New York (1961), he was spotted by Tyrone Guthrie and hired to replace a stricken actor in Guthrie's production of Gideon, which was trying-out prior to Broadway in Philadelphia. Playing Joash, Gideon's bearded father, Jason took his final curtain call at March's right hand, which truly made him proud. Along with the rest of the cast, Jason was greatly impressed by March's entire persona: "Despite his professional eminence, and with his robust sense of humor and down-to-earth personality, he was extremely well-liked by his fellow actors" (Jason, personal letter, 9-22-92).

Jason goes on to relate that March's make-up as the Angel closely resembled Michaelangelo's Moses. During the Broadway run, one of the first closed-circuit TV broadcasts of a special event was attempted and Gideon
was photographed in a 'live' performance for simultaneous showing in theatres, in Rochester, N.Y.

Jason wanted to give March a "going away" gift when March's contract had ended and he was preparing to leave the production to visit his daughter Penelope, in Italy. So, he bought him a detective novel called "Gideon's March", which he thought March would read on the plane. During March's last performance, when he had time off-stage, March climbed up five flights of steeply graded steps to Jason's dressing room in the Plymouth theatre, which Jason shared with another supporting actor. Answering a knock on the door, Jason was completely startled to find March standing there, in full floor-length costume and make-up. "He had taken the trouble to make that perilous trek to bid [us] good-bye, say warm words about our work and give me special thanks for my gift to him. Any other star would have had the stage-manager summon a supporting actor to the 'star's' dressing room" (Jason).

The climb took on special significance sometime after Gideon closed, when one day Jason ran into the man who had been March's dresser on the show. Reminiscing about March, the dresser shared a story with Jason. It seems that March's first entrance in Gideon was quite spectacular. Guthrie had used a magician's misdirection trick to fool the audience, making it seem that March's
Angel had suddenly appeared in a puff of smoke out of nowhere perched on a round eighteen-inch tree stump, on the steeply raked, cracked earth hillside. Guthrie had placed the bellydancer, Little Egypt, on a cart at stage right and surrounded her gyrations with a host of Biblical nomads, wildly cheering the rhythms of her finger-cymbals. While this was going on, March had to climb up an off-stage ladder to the six foot high crest of the set's hillside and then make his way, in his floor length robes, onto the stump, before the smoke-pot went off and he was 'revealed'. This required considerable agility, since this hillside was bathed in blinding light and the stump was quite small in circumference. In relating the story, the dresser informed Jason that March had had a detached retina during Gideon's run and had been almost blind in one eye. No one in the cast ever knew of this condition. Jason adds, "And, mind you, this was the man who negotiated five flights of stairs to bid two supporting actors good-bye" (Jason).

The last thing that Jason recalls about March reveals what a truly warm-hearted person March was. Sometime after Gideon closed, Jason was acting in a very small Off-Broadway theatre on Fourth Street, in New York's Lower East Side. The play was Telemachus Clay and the actors shared a common 'chorus' type dressing room, which was separated by a thin partition and cloth curtain from the
area where the audience could buy coffee and smoke during the play's single intermission. One matinee, during intermission, the stage manager came back from the audience to tell Jason that there was someone outside who wanted to see him. Assuming it was "some misguided relative from Philadelphia", who didn't have enough sense to know that actors were not to be pestered during intermission, the stage manager had to press Jason to see the person. Reluctantly Jason went through the curtain, and there, with his hand extended, was a man who said, "You may not remember me, but my name's Freddy March". He then ushered Jason over to a corner of the room where Eldridge was sitting and introduced Jason to her as a "Gideon ex-patriot". She was most gracious, but Jason was so flabbergasted by their presence that he cannot recall the details of their conversation. When the bell rang, ending the intermission, March put his arm around Jason's shoulder, and walking him back to the dressing-room, said: "Listen, Kid, you can't be making a Hell-of-a-lot here. Do you need anything?" Fortunately, Jason was pleased to be able to tell him he had another Broadway show lined up and didn't need anything, but he thanked him profusely. Jason adds in his letter "I will always remember the humanity and compassion of his gesture." He concludes his story by adding that the dresser told him that March
was "an easy touch", so there must have been many who benefitted from his generosity over the years.

Though Jason has very high regard for the film work that March did, he remains captivated by March's skill on the legitimate stage: "In this medium, he was not merely a 'pretty Hollywood leading man', relying on his movie persona, but a richly mature and versatile delineator of character." Jason closes his letter by stating "Fredric March was a wonderful actor and man" (Jason, 9-22-92).

March was sixty-four years of age when he played the Angel in Gideon. In talking to friends, March relayed the message that he felt he must slacken his pace, for plays were very taxing on his nerves as well as his stamina: "My time is limited now, and I want to enjoy life, travel, rest for what time is left" (March qtd. in Quirk 35). Even so, March continued being a productive theatre professional for years thereafter, and Eldridge continued being his greatest supporter.

State Department Tour

In April of 1965, when March was sixty-seven and Eldridge was sixty-three, they were asked by the U.S. State Department to represent the cultural exchange program as both theatrical entertainers and ambassadors of good will in a tour of the Middle East. Since full-size play productions were costly and difficult to arrange for
presentation in various areas of the world, the Marches' two man show was perfect for their needs.

The tour lasted six weeks, covering eight countries chosen by the Marches: Greece, Iran, Turkey, Italy, Egypt, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Syria. Their repertoire represented personal favorites of theirs as well as of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. Included were five poems by Robert Frost, Alan Seeger's "I Have a Rendezvous with Death", Longfellow's "The Building of the Ship" and a John Donne excerpt, along with scenes from three of their Broadway shows (The Autumn Garden, The Skin of Our Teeth, and Long Day's Journey Into Night). "The choices", said Eldridge, "were something we wanted to say to the world. We tried to stress the possibility of the universality of man". (Eldridge qtd. in "F.M., Wife Embark on Unique Tour for State Department").

Their program was entitled "An Evening with Fredric March and Florence Eldridge." First on the program were Frost's five poems: two recited by March ("Mending Wall" and "Departmental or The End of My Ant Jerry") two by Eldridge ("Why Wait for Science" and "An Importer") and one they recited together ("Home Burial"). Second were excerpts from Act II and Act III of Wilder's The Skin of Our Teeth, with the Marches portraying Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus. Third were excerpts of Act II and Act III from Hellman's The Autumn Garden, with March reciting the role
of General Griggs and Eldridge the role of Rose Griggs. Fourth came excerpts from Act III and Act IV from O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, with the Marches as James and Mary Tyrone. To complete the one hour and a half program, Eldridge recited Alan Seeger's "I Have a Rendezvous With Death", and March recited Longfellow's "The Building of the Ship." March closed the program with an excerpt from "No Man Is an Island" by John Donne. ("F.M., and Wife Embark"). [A personal letter from Eldridge described, as follows, the tour].

Although the program was described as a reading, the couple memorized every word. Having attended such a program a few years earlier in Athens, Greece, Eldridge remembered that members in the audience were offended that the performers read their material; she convinced March that they needed to have every line memorized, and they did.

Opening in Cairo, they received a warm response from some 200 artists, actors, critics, drama students, and Government officials and friends, who were invited to the opening night performance. Not expecting some of the American colloquialisms to be understood by the audience, the actors were delighted to discover that about ninety per cent of what they recited was understood. (Smith "Cairo Welcomes F.Marches")

From Cairo they flew to Luxor, Egypt, where they played in the American Embassy and the Pocket Theatre, followed
by supper in "a great handsewn tent" with Prime Minister Fawzi. Then to Alexandria, where crowds of people had been waiting for two hours. Every seat was filled, and as tickets had been counterfeited, there were over 200 people turned away at the door. Next came Beirut, Lebanon, where at the American University, they gave two performances before large English speaking audiences. Later, escorted by government aids across the Syrian border into Damascus, they performed for various diplomatic officials (strained relations between Syria and the U.S. made their playing to a general public audience in Damascus impossible).

From Damascus, they drove to Aleppo, a commercial city where their audience was far more public. (The Marches were told after their performance that because of the Moslem Haz holiday soon approaching, the consul had canceled appearances by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and an American pianist, but had taken a chance on the March show because "as old pros, [they] could handle the heckling."

Fortunately, there was not any heckling, though their stage manager did get his briefcase slit).

From Aleppo, they flew back to Beirut, then on to Istanbul, and Ankara, where they visited with American servicemen on the U.S. military base located there, and then back to Istanbul for three performances and on to Teheran, where they stayed at the Embassy. Having to adjust from night to night for audiences which fluctuated from
150 one night to 800 the next, became a challenge for the seasoned performers. In Afghanistan, the King spoke no English but was able to communicate with Eldridge through French, which she spoke fluently.

Four days were spent in Athens with three performances, two of which were at the Royal Theatre. Next came Rome, and finally Naples, where performing to capacity crowds, the translators made so much noise that a man in the audience screamed "Silencio," which terrified the Marches, until they realized that he was shouting at the translators and not at them.

Eldridge was the "chief diplomatic representative of the March family", according to March. (qtd. in "F.M., Wife Embark"). "Wherever she went she made people feel comfortable and at ease. She instigated conversations with young and old, rich and poor." According to Eldridge what had impressed her the most was that in each of the eight countries, young intellectuals had found common expressions in their own avant garde plays which corresponded with American "Off-Broadway." Each capital city had its own equivalent theatres, with many of the same plays being done in translation in each of the eight countries. She added, "We felt so often that it's the old quarrels that men lug on their backs generation after generation that do the damage. If men would just lay those down and sow some fresh
thinking, we might get some place" (Eldridge, qtd. in "F.M. and Wife Embark"). At the end of the tour, the Marches made a visit to their daughter, Penelope, in Italy. Though tired, they had enjoyed their "hard-work" immensely (Eldridge letter).

Their mission had been not only to promote cultural awareness but also to serve as ambassadors of American good-will. Having been the first theatrical exhibit sent out in four years under the State Department's cultural exchange program, the Government was extremely pleased at the results:

The State Department congratulates and thanks you for having initiated with outstanding success a new phase in the cultural presentations program. Your highly effective performance in both a professional and a representational sense has made a real contribution to the program's basic purpose of building respect for our artistic achievements and thereby to the cause of improved international understanding" (Dean Rusk, letter to the Marches, by way of Ambassador Reinhardt in Rome).

In their sixties, the Marches were still an impressive couple both onstage and off.

**Film Work 1963-1973**

March returned to film in 1963 in the role of a German industrialist during World War II, who ambitiously serves whatever government is in power, and who has hidden in the attic his Nazi son (Maximilian Schell). March thought the film, The Condemned of Altona, had an
important message. However, critics found this ambitious directorial project of Vittorio De Sica's to be both ponderous and pretentious (Quirk 35). March, himself, received the only favorable reviews.

In 1964, March played the role of the President of the United States faced with a nuclear-arms crisis in the screen adaptation of Knebel-Charles Bailey's novel, Seven Days In May. While Kirk Douglas and Burt Lancaster were the leading men, March received the best reviews, with film critic Stanley Kauffmann calling March "easily the best of the three" (Quirk 35).

As a 1880's Indian reservation agent in Hombre (1967), March embezzles money from the struggling Indians in a very convincing performance, March played opposite Paul Newman.

In 1970 March portrayed a small Southern town mayor who takes an honest and realistic approach towards a newly-hired Black sheriff, who is forced to deal with racial prejudices in tick ...tick ...tick. March was listed third on the billing, behind Jim Brown and George Kennedy. But according to Richard Schickel of Life magazine, "the best thing about the film is the presence of Fredric March, too long away and certainly deserving of something more interesting to play than the crusty mayor of a dusty small town" (qtd. in Quirk 35).
March's Final Performance

In 1973, at the age of seventy-five, March completed his 71st movie role; that of the tough old Harry Hope in a four-hour (two intermission) version of Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*. Directed by John Frankenheimer and starring Lee Marvin as Hickey, the project was one of several stage hits being transferred in 1973 to the screen by Ely Landau's American Film Theatre.

Frankenheimer asked March to play the part of the saloon keeper Harry Hope. At first, thinking his health too bad, March turned the offer down. But after Eldridge, John Cromwell and Bob Anderson "twisted [his] arm", March agreed (qtd. in Flatley). But complications in fulfilling his contract arose. Unexpectedly, March had to go into the hospital for prostrate surgery, and he told Frankenheimer to find someone else to play Harry Hope, but Frankenheimer refused. Postponing filming until March had recovered from his surgery, the film gave second billing to March, beside Lee Marvin's name.

The film was long and criticized for its overuse of single person close-up shots. However, March received good personal reviews. Vincent Canby of the *New York Times* felt slighted that the cinematography failed to catch March's actions as he responded to others in the bar: "so marvelous [was] March, that we keep wanting
to see more of him, to study his reactions" ("Iceman Cometh too Close"). Nora Sayre praised March for his "befuddled childlike air" ("Iceman Film Does Justice") portraying O'Neill's character of the saloon keeper, Harry Hope. Other cast members in the production included Robert Ryan as Larry Slade, Bradford Dillman as Willy (the law graduate), Jeff Bridges as the son who delivers his mother over to the police and Moses Gunn as the Black rebel, Joe Mott. With this last movie, March ended his professional acting career.
This study has traced the careers of actors Fredric March and Florence Eldridge from their early years of struggle in stock through their maturity and success as an outstanding acting couple on the Broadway stage. A journey that spanned over fifty years, it has included artistic portrayals of significance on stage as well as in film. More importantly, it identifies these two talented artists as devoted practitioners and supporters of the legitimate theatre.

Gaining fame as exceptional actors, both March and Eldridge credited their early work in stock companies as the training ground for the development of their fundamental skills. Apprenticeships, specifically like that at Elitch's Gardens, provided valuable experience and practical appreciation for the work and dedication needed for success in the legitimate theatre. Later, when the Theatre Guild enlisted them for its first National tour, casting Eldridge in a starring capacity and March as a supporting actor, the couple dedicated themselves to the task. Enduring hardships which tested their stamina and talents, the Marches capitalized on their touring experiences by absorbing valuable lessons and using their acquired knowledge to advantage throughout their long
professional careers. This early work developed in the Marches an everlasting bond with their art.

Continually seeking theatrical opportunities, the Marches were totally committed to the acting profession. The arrival of talking pictures and its subsequent infringement on the legitimate stage, an earnest desire to grow as artists, and their mature self-confidence, brought March and Eldridge to the decision to enter the film industry. Though more recognizable in 1928 as a stage actress than her husband, Eldridge found work in films difficult to obtain, March, on the other hand, was hired almost immediately. His exceptional good looks, clear articulate voice, immense acting dexterity, and amiable personality provided a potential asset to film producers and directors entering the relatively new genre of sound films. During the period of 1929 to 1938, while March's film career made him famous, Eldridge busied herself with appearing on the Los Angeles stage, where she met success. When she returned alone to the New York stage in 1936 in Days to Come, she met with disappointment and refused further offers there until she and March could appear together.

Meanwhile, by 1938, March had achieved star status as a handsome and debonair leading man, playing opposite most of the leading actresses in Hollywood. In fact, between March's first movie in 1929 and his return to
Broadway in 1938, he made forty films, representing every major studio in Hollywood.

Putting aside his screen career in 1938, March returned with Eldridge to Broadway in a desire to find success as an acting couple. However, their first venture, a production of *Yr. Obedient Husband* (1938) met with failure. They accepted this critical rejection in good grace and absorbed it as yet another positive experience. Undaunted, confident, and committed to stage work, the Marches starred together on Broadway seven more times between 1939 and 1956, earning respect, admiration, and praise from critics and colleagues for their devotion and professional artistry.

Actors who recall working with the Marches cite their 'professional attitude' as one of their strongest attributes. Dick Van Patten, as a boy just entering the acting profession, fondly recalled working with March and Eldridge two different times: first in *The American Way* (1939) in which he played Karl Gunther, their nine year old son, and second in *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942), where he played the 'Telegraph Boy'. As Van Patten attests, "March would carry his script around during the first week of rehearsals, writing in all of his blocking, then by the second week he knew all of his lines, word perfect." March seemed always to create a congenial working environment for the casts and crews. At the same time,
he was disciplined and hard working, and all business when acting in rehearsal or performances, furnishing an ideal model for all to follow. Van Patten recalls him as being "very strict, never late to rehearsals... [and] he never slighted [a performance]." He recalled Eldridge as "nice but serious." In his own career, Van Patten added that he tries to emulate some of March's habits: never to be late, to enjoy the excitement of getting the story of the play across to the audience; to avoid self-indulgence, and to consider 'the play the thing' (Van Patten, personal letter).

At the age of seventeen, Bethel Leslie was a featured actress in the Broadway production of *Years Ago* (1946). She especially remembers what "great enjoyment in acting" March displayed throughout the production, even "playing tricks" on the cast outside of rehearsals. She recalls how conscientious March was in responding to what the director (Garson Kanin) wanted in particular scenes. For example, "Freddie would ask questions like, 'Do I light my pipe on this word or that word?" But what impressed Leslie most was that "He loved to act." Leslie added that while Eldridge was a good actress, she believed that Eldridge was cast as Mrs. Jones (March's wife in *Years Ago*), because Garson Kanin wanted March to play Mr. Jones. (Leslie, personal letter).
Jane Wyatt portrayed March's wife, Nina Denery, in *The Autumn Garden* (1951). She recalls March as a "straightforward and conscientious actor. . .a delight to work with." Noting that his performances never varied, Wyatt adds "He could be counted on. He never let down or shuffled through a single show. He gave a great deal to the other actors in the play." Wyatt said that Florence was a "good actress" but "she had to work hard to get what she wanted. Freddie was dead sure of what he wanted to do. Florence wasn't. As opposed to Freddie, her performances varied, trying new approaches to her part, which was disconcerting unless she warned you before" (Wyatt personal letter).

Though each was fiercely individual, the Marches thought alike, and they shared a conscientious commitment to the stage. Both were incredibly disciplined. Their ability to concentrate completely on stage was noted by all who worked with them. They respected the talents and skills of all with whom they worked, and were always receptive to the contributions of their fellow actors. They never accepted roles that they did not respect and likewise, they accepted the blame when they were miscast.

Their devotion to the legitimate stage was unique. While others were wooed by the money and prestige of the film industry to stay constantly in Hollywood, the Marches insisted upon periodically returning to the stage for
what they could learn from the experience, and the interaction and excitement generated by performing for live audiences. Challenging both themselves and the public, the Marches performed in exceptional plays. Some of them, such as Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942), O'Neill's *Long Days Journey Into Night* (1956) and Miller's version of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* were among the landmark theatrical productions of the mid-twentieth century.

As an actress, Eldridge fared best in roles depicting the loyal, patient wife. Though she sometimes frustrated directors with her desire to play a role too sympathetically, she achieved consistently high praise for her focused performances. Though a highly competent screen actress, she never attained the success in films that she had on the legitimate stage. A consummate actress, Eldridge is remembered for her fine interpretations of independent women. Critics, in her early career, were captivated by her portrayal of beguiling, assertive young women. As she matured, so did her understanding of the more complex roles in which she was cast. Her portrayals of Mrs. Antrobus and Mary Tyrone could stand alone to make her a significant contributor to theatre history.

One contributing factor to March's success was the fact that Eldridge was his most avid supporter. In his
formative years as an actor, when March would question his potential, it was Eldridge who instilled in him the confidence needed to pursue acting as a lifelong career. Throughout their lives together, her powers of persuasion with him were noted. Extremely intelligent, she was acknowledged throughout the theatrical world as the 'negotiator' of the March family. One thing is certain, if a producer wanted March in his play, he was wise first to contact Eldridge and convince her of the worth of the production. It was Eldridge who persuaded March to return to Broadway. After their failure in 1938, she again persuaded him to return in 1939, where they succeeded. She also secured March for Thornton Wilder's legendary masterpiece, The Skin of Our Teeth (1942). She persuaded him to return alone to star in A Bell for Adano (1946) and in his later years to accept the role of the Angel in Gideon (1961). And in 1973 when cancer threatened March's physical stamina and emotional happiness, Eldridge persuaded him to accept the role of Harry Hope in a film version of O'Neill's An Iceman Cometh. Even under such physical strain, many felt that March's performance in the film was the best of the cast. As his best friend, Eldridge was conscious of how much March loved acting, and how important it was for him to continue doing it.

When the Marches served as Ambassadors for the U.S. State Department, it was Eldridge who guided the endeavor.
Comfortable and poised in every situation, intelligent and charming, she persuaded diplomats and commoners, alike, that Americans were concerned with other cultures of the world and were committed to world harmony and peace.

Between March and Eldridge, March was certainly the more famous. Unlike most film stars, March's career in films developed simultaneously with his legitimate stage career. Becoming popular through sophisticated comedies which highlighted his handsome appearance and slightly sardonic persona, March proved to studio executives his versatility in playing complex characters, a skill he had developed in his years of repertory work. He kept his talent in premiere form by returns to the medium that had originally nurtured his talent. At such times he enriched the theatre with memorable, thought-out performances.

In an occupation which won him two Academy Awards and two Tony Awards, March was outstanding. Possessing strong, and articulate vocal tones, cultivated through stage experience, March's voice earned him additional high recognition in films, radio and television. Tall, dark, and very dapper, film cameras found his face to be photogenic and screen fans fell in love with him. His versatility as an actor was well noted. His range stretched from comedy to high tragedy, from modern farce to costume drama, high adventure, biographies and soul-searching
psychological pieces. His power to lose himself in a characterization, and yet retain a complete naturalness in interpretation of a role, is characteristic of the acting gift he brought to the screen as well as to the stage. His naturalness encompassed a winning ease and a compelling effortlessness in character delineation which made his acting so artful, so subtle, and at times so skillfully underplayed, that it hardly appeared to be acting. March proved false the myth that without youth and romantic appeal, an actor's life is limited.

As a team, the Marches were known as one of the legitimate stage's finest acting couples. Along with the Lunts and the Cronyns, the Marches became hallmarks of excellence on the stage. They enjoyed their careers so quietly, and with such disdain for fanfare and the kind of noise that often accompanies celebrities that perhaps the excellence of their achievement has been often overlooked. Always maintaining an atmosphere of privacy and amiable domesticity that distinguished them from others in the theatrical spotlight, they were universally admired. As Eldridge once said, "Our idea of sheer heaven is to be actors without being public characters" (qtd. in Beebe). They achieved a personal remoteness from Broadway and the glamorous life associated with stardom, which was unique in the theatre world. As nice people who could accept success with as much dignity and humor as failure,
they had a sense of values and ethics which applied to all undertakings. In an industry not known for its successful long-term relationships, March and Eldridge were an exceptional couple.

Like others in the theatrical spotlight, the Marches involved themselves in what they discerned as worthy causes, associating with many different cultures of people. Falsely accused of Communist affiliations, they suffered years of agonizing media scrutiny, humiliation, and lost work. Displaying courage and fortitude, they faced their attackers in Federal Courts, finally achieving complete exoneration from all charges. Their example led other unjustly accused celebrities to take a stand against similar assaults.

Throughout this study, one fact remained clear: the Marches were devoted to each other as partners and steadfast supporters of each other's careers. Their marriage of forty-eight years, was a testament to deep love and commitment. Like the Lunts and the Cronyns, the Marches shared not only their devotion to each other but also their deep devotion to the legitimate theatre. As March once said, "The screen is an industry, the stage is an art" (Hayes, 23).

In 1975, Richard Rodgers paid tribute to the Marches by stating, "Nowadays we hear the term 'beautiful people' bestowed upon members of the fast-paced, fast-buck,
international set. They aren't beautiful at all. To me, the beautiful people are those like Fredric and Florence March" (Rodgers, 53.).

In 1975, at the age of seventy-seven, Fredric March died of cancer. Florence Eldridge lived to be eighty-six years of age and died in August of 1988.
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Additional Help


APPENDIX A

A Compilation of the Legitimate Stage Work of Fredric March

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Date</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deburau</td>
<td>the Promoter</td>
<td>Granville Barker</td>
<td>1920</td>
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<tr>
<td>The County Chairman</td>
<td>Tillford Wheeler</td>
<td>George Ade</td>
<td>1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lawbreaker</td>
<td>Tom Fowler</td>
<td>Jules E. Goodman</td>
<td>1922</td>
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<td>Zeno</td>
<td>Emmett Carr</td>
<td>Joseph F. Rinn</td>
<td>1923</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tarnish</td>
<td>Emmett Carr</td>
<td>Gilbert Emergy</td>
<td>1924</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Melody Man</td>
<td>Donald Clemens</td>
<td>Herbert Lorenz</td>
<td>1924</td>
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<td>Puppets</td>
<td>Bruno Monte</td>
<td>Frances Lightner</td>
<td>1925</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harvest</td>
<td>Richard Knight</td>
<td>Kate Horton</td>
<td>1925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Balcony Walkers</td>
<td>the neighbor</td>
<td>Christine Norman</td>
<td>1925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Half-Caste</td>
<td>Dick Chester</td>
<td>Jack McClellan</td>
<td>1926</td>
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<td>The Devil in the Cheese</td>
<td>Jimmie Chard</td>
<td>Tom Cushing</td>
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**Elitch's Gardens:**

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<tr>
<td>The Swan</td>
<td>Agi</td>
<td>Ferenc Molnar</td>
<td>1926</td>
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<tr>
<td>Love 'Em and Leave 'Em</td>
<td>Billingsly</td>
<td>George Abbott &amp; John Weaver</td>
<td>1926</td>
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<td>Dancing Mothers</td>
<td>Gerald Naughton</td>
<td>Edgar Selwyn &amp; Edmund Goulding</td>
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<td>The Music Master</td>
<td>the Musician</td>
<td>Charles Klein</td>
<td>1926</td>
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<td>Craig's Wife</td>
<td>Eugene Fredricks</td>
<td>George Kelly</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Poor Nut</td>
<td>John Miller</td>
<td>J.C. &amp; Elliott Nugent</td>
<td>1926</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Director(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Icebound</td>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Owen Davis</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not Herbert</td>
<td>Howard Young</td>
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<td>Liliom</td>
<td>Liliom</td>
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<td>Hell-Bent fer Heaven</td>
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<td>Hatcher Hughes</td>
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<td>Geoffrey Allen</td>
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<td>Quality Street</td>
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<td>The Butter and Egg Man</td>
<td>Peter Jones</td>
<td>George S. Kaufman</td>
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<td>Pigs</td>
<td>Thomas Atkins</td>
<td>Anne Morrison &amp;</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Patterson McNutt</td>
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<td>The Ghost Train</td>
<td>Teddie Deakin</td>
<td>Arnold Ridley</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Dove</td>
<td>Johnnie Powell</td>
<td>Willard Mack</td>
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<td>Gentlemen Prefer Blondes</td>
<td>Henry Spoffard</td>
<td>Anita Loos &amp;</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>John Emerson</td>
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<td>Sure Fire</td>
<td>Robert Ford</td>
<td>Rolph Murphy</td>
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<td>Loose Ankles</td>
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<td>The Last of Mrs. Cheyney</td>
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<td>Spread Eagle</td>
<td>Joe Cobb</td>
<td>George S. Brooks &amp;</td>
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<td>Walter B. Lister</td>
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<td>Jose Vallejo</td>
<td>Russell Medcraff &amp;</td>
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<td>The Springboard</td>
<td>Victor</td>
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<td>The Outsider</td>
<td>Basil Owens</td>
<td>Dorothy Brandon</td>
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Dates: 1926, 1927, 1928
Tommy  Dave Tuttle  Howard Lindsay & Bertrand Robinson 1928
Behold the Bridegroom  Gehring Fitler  George Kelly 1928
Nightstick  Tommy Glennon  John Wray, J.C. & E. Nugent, Elaine Carrington 1928
The Second Mrs. Aubrey  Arthur W. Pinero 1928
Tanqueray
Saturday's Children  Willy Sands  Maxwell Anderson 1928
The K Guy  film director  Walter DeLeon & Alethea Luce 1928
The Command to Love  Gaston  Rudolph Lothar & Fritz Gottwald 1928

The Theatre Guild Tour:
Arms and the Man  Saranoff  Bernard Shaw 1927
The Guardsman  The Critic  Ferenc Molnar 1927
The Silver Cord  Robert Phelps  Sidney Howard 1927
Mr. Pim Passes By  Brian Strange  A.A. Milne 1927

Broadway:
Yr. Obedient Husband  Richard Steele  Horace Jackson 1938
The American Way  Martin Gunter  George S. Kaufman & Moss Hart 1939
Hope for a Harvest  Elliott Martin  Sophie Treadwell 1941
The Skin of Our Teeth  Mr. Antrobus  Thornton Wilder 1942
A Bell For Adano  Major Joppolo  Paul Osborn 1944
Years Ago  Clinton Jones  Ruth Gordon 1946
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<td>Now I Lay Me Down To Sleep</td>
<td>Gen. Erosa</td>
<td>Elaine Ryan</td>
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<td>An Enemy of the People</td>
<td>Dr. Stockman</td>
<td>Arthur Miller</td>
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<td>Nick Denery</td>
<td>Lillian Hellman</td>
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<td>Long Day's Journey Into Night</td>
<td>James Tyrone</td>
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<td>Gideon the Angel</td>
<td>Paddy Chayefsky</td>
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APPENDIX B

The Legitimate Stage Work of Florence Eldridge

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<th>Play</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rocka-Bye-Baby</td>
<td>chorus</td>
<td>Jerome Kern</td>
<td>1918</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seven Day's Leave</td>
<td>Kitty</td>
<td>Walter Howard</td>
<td>1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretty Soft</td>
<td>Dolly McKibble</td>
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Rochester:

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<tr>
<td>The Short Cut</td>
<td>the ingenue</td>
<td>R.E. Marshall</td>
<td>1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Song Bird</td>
<td>support role</td>
<td>Fred. &amp; Fanny Halton</td>
<td>1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up In Mabel's Room</td>
<td>Mabel</td>
<td>Wilson Collison &amp; Otto Harbach</td>
<td>1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Charm School</td>
<td>the ingenue</td>
<td>Alice D. Miller</td>
<td>1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiger Rose</td>
<td>the ingenue</td>
<td>Willard Mack</td>
<td>1920</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adam and Eva</td>
<td>lead lady</td>
<td>Ray Comstock</td>
<td>1921</td>
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<td>Smilin Through</td>
<td>lead lady</td>
<td>Allen Martin</td>
<td>1921</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Crimson Alibi</td>
<td>lead lady</td>
<td>George Broadhurst</td>
<td>1921</td>
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Broadway (1921-1926):

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<td>Ambush</td>
<td>Margaret Nichols</td>
<td>1921</td>
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<td>The Cat and the Canary</td>
<td>Annabelle West</td>
<td>1922</td>
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<td>Six Characters In Search of an Author</td>
<td>Luigi Pirandello</td>
<td>1922</td>
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<td>The Love Habit</td>
<td>Nadine Morand</td>
<td>1923</td>
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<td>The Dancers</td>
<td>Alma Lowery</td>
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<td>Cheaper to Marry</td>
<td>Evelyn Gardner</td>
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<td>Title</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bewitched</td>
<td>the girl</td>
<td>Edward Sheldon &amp; Sidney Howard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Young Blood</td>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>James Forbes</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Great Gatsby</td>
<td>Daisy Fay</td>
<td>Owen Davis</td>
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<td>Elitch's Gardens</td>
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<td>Quarantine</td>
<td>Dinah Partlett</td>
<td>F. Tennyson Jesse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kiki</td>
<td>Kiki</td>
<td>Andre Picard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outward Bound</td>
<td>young wife</td>
<td>Sutton Vane</td>
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<td>Chicken Feed</td>
<td>Luella</td>
<td>Guy Bolton</td>
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<td>The Goose Hangs</td>
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<td>Lewis Beach</td>
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<td>Rollo's Wild Oats</td>
<td>Goldie McDuff</td>
<td>Clare Kummer</td>
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<td>Lightnin'</td>
<td>Margaret Davis</td>
<td>Winchell Smith &amp; Frank Bacon</td>
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<td>Cock O' The Roost</td>
<td>Phyllis Dawn</td>
<td>Rida Johnson</td>
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<td>Aren't We All</td>
<td>Margot Tatham</td>
<td>Frederick Lonsdale</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Bride</td>
<td>Marie Duquesne</td>
<td>Stuart Olivier</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anna Christie</td>
<td>Anna Christie</td>
<td>Eugene O'Neal</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Swan</td>
<td>Princess Alex</td>
<td>Ferenc Molnar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Love 'Em and</td>
<td>Mame</td>
<td>George Abbott &amp; John Weaver</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leave 'Em</td>
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<td>Dancing Mothers</td>
<td>Kittens</td>
<td>Edgar Selwyn</td>
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<td>The Music Masters</td>
<td>lost daughter</td>
<td>Charles Klein</td>
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<td>Craig's Wife</td>
<td>Ethel Landreth</td>
<td>George Kelly</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Poor Nut</td>
<td>Julia Winter</td>
<td>J.C. &amp; Elliott Nugent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Icebound</td>
<td>Jane Crosby</td>
<td>Owen Davis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not Herbert</td>
<td>young woman</td>
<td>Howard I. Young</td>
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<tr>
<td>Play</td>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Author</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liliom</td>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>Ferenc Molnar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hell-Bent fer Heaven</td>
<td>Jude Lowry</td>
<td>Hatcher Hughes</td>
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<tr>
<td>These Charming People</td>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>Michael Arlen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Off Key</td>
<td>Alice Reynolds</td>
<td>Arthur Caesar</td>
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**The Theatre Guild Tour:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play</th>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>Arms and the Man</td>
<td>Raina</td>
<td>George Bernard Shaw</td>
<td>1927</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Silver Cord</td>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>Sidney Howard</td>
<td>1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Pim Passes By</td>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>A.A. Milne</td>
<td>1927</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Guardsman</td>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>Ferenc Molnar</td>
<td>1927</td>
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**Broadway (1930-1956):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play</th>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An Affair of State</td>
<td>Alexa</td>
<td>Robert Buckner</td>
<td>1930</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private Lives</td>
<td>Sybil Chase</td>
<td>Noel Coward</td>
<td>1931</td>
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<tr>
<td>Days to Come</td>
<td>Julie Rodman</td>
<td>Lillian Hellman</td>
<td>1936</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yr. Obedient Husband</td>
<td>Prue</td>
<td>Horace Jackson</td>
<td>1938</td>
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<tr>
<td>The American Way</td>
<td>Irma Gunther</td>
<td>George S. Kaufman</td>
<td>1939</td>
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<td>Hope for a Harvest</td>
<td>Carlotta</td>
<td>Sophie Treadwell</td>
<td>1941</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Skin of Our Teeth</td>
<td>Mrs. Antrobus</td>
<td>Thornton Wilder</td>
<td>1944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years Ago</td>
<td>Anne Jones</td>
<td>Ruth Gordon</td>
<td>1946</td>
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<tr>
<td>Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep</td>
<td>Leonora Graves</td>
<td>Elaine Ryan</td>
<td>1950</td>
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<td>An Enemy of the People</td>
<td>Mrs. Stockmann</td>
<td>Arthur Miller</td>
<td>1950</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Autumn Garden</td>
<td>Rose Griggs</td>
<td>Lillian Hellman</td>
<td>1951</td>
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<tr>
<td>Long Day Journey's Into Night</td>
<td>Mary Tyrone</td>
<td>Eugene O'Neill</td>
<td>1956</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VITA

Vicki Jo Payne Parrish was born August 30, 1948 in Atlanta, Georgia. She is married to Daniel Claude Parrish of Temple, Georgia and they have three children: Matthew, Andrew, and Lindsey.

Vicki began her college career at West Georgia College in Carrollton, Georgia, where in 1970 she received a B.S. in Health and Physical Education. After teaching three years in the Bremen public schools, she enrolled at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where in 1975 she received a M.S. in Physical Education, with an emphasis in Dance.

In 1976 she began teaching dance at Northwestern State University, directing and choreographing the college dance line. In 1984 Northwestern's Dance division moved from under the auspices of the Physical Education Department to the Department of Creative Arts. She returned to Louisiana State University in 1987 to begin her doctoral studies in Theatre. She continues to teach theatre and dance at Northwestern State University. Natchitoches, Louisiana.
Candidate: Vicki Payne Parrish

Major Field: Theatre

Title of Dissertation: The American Stage Careers of Fredric March and Florence Eldridge

Approved:

[Signature]

Major Professor and Chairman

[Signature]

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination:

May 18, 1995