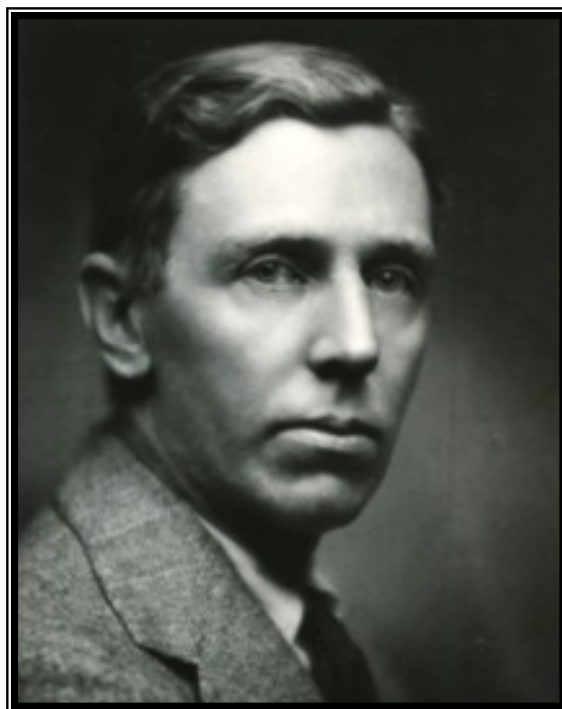


AIKINS, Carroll (1888-1967)

Author Unknown
Compiled by Naramata Museum



Carroll Aikins, poet, playwright and drama director, was a romantic, looked like one and lived like one. He was one of the most distinguished citizens of the Okanagan and, for a while, put Naramata on the map in the minds of people in eastern Canada, England and the United States.

Born in 1888 into a distinguished family, Carroll Aikins might have been expected to follow a successful business or political career. His maternal grandfather, the honourable C. C. Colby, represented Stanstead, Quebec, in the House of Commons from 1867 to 1891. He was president of the Privy Council under Sir John A. McDonald and author of a book, "Parliamentary Government in Canada." He was described as one of the ablest debaters ever heard in the house.

His uncle, C.W. Colby, was professor of history at McGill University, author of "Canadian Types of the Old Regime" and "The Founders of New France." Later he became a very successful businessman.

His paternal grandfather, James Cox Aikins was Secretary of State under McDonald and became Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba. His uncle, Sir J.A.M. Aikins, was also Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba. His father, Somerset Aikins, sat for a short time in the Manitoba Legislature.

Carroll was educated in Winnipeg at St. John's, a private school run by the Anglican Church. He told one of his Naramata Drama students, Mrs. John McDougal of Vancouver, that he also spent some time in Europe with a tutor, which is perhaps where he acquired his love of the theatre. For one or two winters, he went to school in Dijon, France, and he traveled in Germany with his mother enough to acquire a knowledge of the language, since he later translated a German book on Buddhist thought.

He attended McGill University in Montreal for one term, but later left because he did not take to academic life. Because of a spot on his lung, he spent several years in Sicily and Tunisia. Then in 1908, when he was 20, his father bought him orchard land in Naramata.

Since he shared the aversion of the turn-of-the-century aesthetes for bourgeois respectability, he gladly left his Winnipeg environment and came west for adventure. He started to clear and plough the land with the help of Chinese workers. Eventually, he owned 100 acres of orchard. "I took to the whole thing like a duck to the water," he told a neighbour. "It was an adventure!"

In 1913, he married Katherine Foster, daughter of the American Consul-General in Ottawa and brought his cultivated bride, a graduate of Vassar College, to the raw young community of Naramata, with its lack of electricity and other amenities. Mrs. Aikins later spoke of their honeymoon in Windermere in their car, an E.M. Flanders. In Windermere where the populace had never seen a car, she said that they had to have gas brought from Golden in four gallon cans which cost one dollar each.

During the 1914-1918 war, Carroll tried to enlist in the ambulance corps but was rejected because of his health, so he continued enthusiastically building up his orchard.

He showed a good deal of imagination and ingenuity in his work. For instance, one scorching summer a lot of the young trees were suffering, so he rushed to Vancouver and, not finding a diesel engine, quickly he bought a fire engine. "It had a superb lot of brass," he told me, obviously enjoying the dramatic effect it made "and a bell which was worked by a foot pedal. It arrived on a flat car at Arawana and was driven down triumphantly, the bell clanging all the way."

In the meanwhile, the Chinese workers had assembled lengths of pipe up the cliff from the lake to provide water and they were kept busy stoking the fire engine with coal night and day until the weather modified and it was obvious the trees would survive.

Another instance in which he put his imagination to practical use occurred in 1920 when he wanted electricity for the little theatre which he was building on his orchard. He found a generator in an abandoned mine and by attaching it to his tractor, provided the necessary power.

In 1917, a book of his poems was published in Canada. One of the poems, "A Prairie Cabin" was included in an anthology of Canadian Poetry for use in British Columbia Schools.

In 1919, the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in England produced his play, "The God of Gods", which deals with a romantic subject; a pair of tragic North American Indian lovers caught in a web of superstition. It is doubtful if the customs described ever existed, but the situation is full of drama and color. It was referred to by a Birmingham newspaper writer in these words: "It is one of those rare artistic delicacies reserved for the favor of the comparatively small band of enthusiastic people who delight in "art for art's sake." The play was revived in 1931, playing at the Everyman Theatre in Hampstead, England.

In 1920, the Aikins started to build the theatre which was mentioned earlier, over the packinghouse on their orchard. The idea was to found a Canadian theatre with Canadian playwrights and actors. Aspiring young students could come to Naramata to pick fruit in the daytime and to study and rehearse plays in the evening. Their tuition would be free and they would learn all the crafts of the theatre, including making scenery and costumes. They were to be billeted with local people, pay one dollar per day for their board. The following is an account of the theatre by Mrs. Aikins, incomplete because she died before finishing it.

In the late summer of 1919, my husband's play, "The God of Gods" was produced in England. Not feeling able to go over and see it was a great frustration and my husband began to think in terms of having his own theatre to produce his own plays and others by young Canadian authors.

My husband became very busy with plans for building a small theatre combined with a utilitarian packing house. He worked out the architecture himself and then secured the help of Lee Simonson, dean of New York theatre architecture and lighting to help with all the details. The building started in the spring of 1920. It was the first "Little Theatre" in western Canada or (western) United States.

To have a cyclorama, or sky dome, that received all the sight lines from the audience, the stage was not raised at all but all the seats were raised and were 20 feet from the proscenium. This gave an unexpected sense of distance and illusion of reality and intimacy.

The lighting was a fascinating innovation to all of us, again designed by Mr. Simonson. The dimmer box with flexible levers for changing and lowering lights, was a platform in the floor just in front of the seating and was

raised or lowered from the packing house below by a jack system. Spot lights and larger banks of lights were used both on the beams, high above the stage, and from the wings on both sides.

Above the stage on both sides, were dressing rooms and on the south side was a large work room for making scenery, with a large paint table designed by my husband with compartments for different colors of calciums, brushes and all painting requirements. In this room were also tools for making scenery flats, covered with burlap, beaverboard for silhouettes of mountains or houses and towns, and lumber for simple platforms and steps for interiors. There were grey flannelette curtains that took the light beautifully, and also material for making costumes was there. Everyone had to turn his or her hand to various arts or crafts of stage sets and lighting. At the entrance to the theatre, at the top of the long stairs was a foyer with small gate legged table, Chinese chairs, chests of drawers and on the wall were hung a few photographs. The whole Little Theatre was a distinguished achievement. There were write-ups in papers and magazines in the east and west and a call went out for students who might like to earn their way picking fruit and the result was astonishing. It appealed strongly to the mood of the 20s.

The formal opening of the theatre took place in the spring of 1920. The Prime Minister of Canada, the Honorable Mr. Meighen and his wife got off the train at Arawana and were met by Mr JM Robinson and my husband and that was the occasion for speeches by Mr Meighen and Mr Robinson and the written program of the objectives by my husband. Our son Colby, age three and a half presented a bouquet of flowers to Mrs. Meighen.

When the building was completed and the formal opening by the Prime Minister, we had a trial production of "The Tinkers Wedding" using boys working on the farm and other locals including Gladys Robinson who was a steady and charming recruit to our group. Dorothy Robinson became a skilled manipulator of the lights and dimmer box. It was a ridiculous play to attempt as a FIRST. We played it just once to a farm audience and friends and there wasn't a smile to encourage us. We knew how terrible it was but learned a lot from it! That was the early fall of 1920.

That winter we worked recruiting a group of students and a teacher of dancing from the New York Neighbourhood Playhouse, also a brilliant pianist Henrietta Micchelson. Students came from Vancouver, Toronto, London Ontario, Hamilton and Calgary.

After a busy winter of organization, including turning the old barn into a communal dining room which continued to have a slight "hoirset" odor in spite of much scrubbing and calcimining, we found ourselves with a local group that wanted to help, both with the technical side and acting and proceeded with our first public production of two short plays "Neighbours" by Zona Gale and "Will o the Wisp" by Doris Halman. Taking part in the first were Mrs. Ruth Rounds, Miss L Young and Mr and Mrs Alex McNicoll of Penticton. Others were Mrs. Gwen Robinson, Miss B May, Mrs. Miller and behind the scenes music was provided by Mr Keith Whimster on violin and myself on the piano. These two plays went very well and we had a good audience. Harold Mitchell was a tower of strength behind scenes, changing scenery and adjusting lights. I remember "fluffing" some lines in one of the plays, to my horror, but the rest of the cast carried on nobly and no one knew that I had skipped some lines."

Such were the ambitious plans made by the Aikins and their enthusiastic students. Who knows if the plans might have been carried out if the fruit industry had not gone into a decline and Carroll had not found himself heavily in debt. The company never went on tour - the theatre was abandoned. It and the packing house were later torn down and only the first floor, which was used for storage, is still seen from Aikins Loop.

The demise of the little theatre must have disappointed the residents of the valley, for it had the enthusiastic support of the people of Naramata.

Finances had been very difficult for some time even before the decline in the fruit industry. His daughters tell the amusing story of an example of his aristocratic contempt for the mundane matter of money. A representative of the family in Winnipeg had been sent to warn him to stop pouring so much money into the theatre. In fact, that gentleman told him if he continued such extravagance his children would be going without clothes.

“In that case,” said Carroll magnificently, “they shall grow fur!”

Finances being difficult, he taught drama in Vancouver for a winter or two. Then in 1927 he accepted Vincent Massey’s offer to direct the Hart House Theatre in Toronto which he did very successfully, judging by an account written by a Toronto Globe critic.

However, after two seasons, Carroll resigned due to a difference with Mr Massey over programming and left for New York where he was unsuccessful in finding employment. He turned next to Hollywood, hoping to have a play he had written about Paul Bunyan filmed. But refusing to abandon his artistic standards in commercially minded Hollywood, they decided to return home - firstly giving their daughter Katherine a chance to go to school with Jackie Cooper and other child actors.

After 1929, Carroll directed his talents and energies into building their future home on the lake. Not having money for the house, he began with the extensive walls, which his elder son, The Honorable Mr. Justice John S Aikins of the BC Court of Appeal remembers working on in the summers. As money came in from time to time, the stately *pyramidalis* trees which line the driveway were planted as were the large gardens along Arawana Creek. He also built a large, attractive cabin on Beaconsfield Mountain where he used to get away from it all on occasion.

After the Second World War, an inheritance permitted them to build their beautiful home.

In later years, he and his wife spent their winters in the southern United States or Mexico, or in Europe, where Mrs Aikins died while on a cruise in the Mediterranean. She is buried in Aden. Carroll died in Vancouver in 1967 and is buried in the Naramata cemetery.

Carroll Aikins has left a memory of himself as a man of artistic talent and vision, many years ahead of his time in his attempt to found a national theatre. He is also remembered for his generosity in lending books from his extensive library which was described by a newspaper that he perhaps had the most comprehensive collection of books in Canada.

Mrs. Arnold Beichman (Caroll) his younger daughter who now owns the family home, describes him as very western in sentiment, particularly enjoying the tales of pioneer times told by his rancher friends. He was also a cultivated man with a charming manner, who enjoyed living in gracious surrounding with all the luxuries he could afford.

A number of picturesque stories are told about him. He told a neighbour that he never opened bills or letters from the bank, throwing them instead into an old top hat (or his older son thinks into a wire basket). When a little money came in he would pick one at random and pay it. One day he went into the bank to see about his usual overdraft, but as it happened, it had been paid by a cheque from Winnipeg, a fact of which the bank had informed him in one of the unopened letters. Asked by Charlie Bennett, the bank manager, how he knew when he had an overdraft, he replied, “I get a burning feeling in the seat of my pants!”

His poems, though few in number, deserved to be remembered by posterity. Perhaps his romantic spirit can be felt best in his poem “In the Orchard”

*I see God in my orchard every hour
And in the downward pulses of the sun
I feel his heart beat
And in the vast unventured hill I see
The awful measure of his majesty*

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AIDS TALENTED HUSBAND IN DEVELOPMENT OF ART



MR. CARROLL AIKINS, Naramata, B. C., who is a source of inspiration to Carroll Aikins in his work to advance the claims of Canadian plays and Canadian actors.



CARROLL AIKINS

Canadian poet, playwright and manager of the Canadian Players, who is now directing the work of that organization and of the School of Dramatic Art at the Home Theatre, which is located on his fruit ranch at Naramata, B.C. Mr. Aikins' volume of "Poems" appeared in 1918; his play "The God of Gods" has been successfully produced in England and at Hart House, Toronto.

-Photo by courtesy of Wayne Albee, McBride Studio

British Columbia Fruit-Grower And His Remarkable Work In Cause of Dramatic Art

Carroll Aikins Renders Invaluable Service to Stage.

Canadian Plays by Canadian Actors His Aim.

By MARGUERITE STRATHY.

"SPEAKING of Western types," said the tourist from Quebec, "you have a wonderful man at Naramata."

"Just where is Naramata?" said the Vancouver business man.

"Naramata! Do you mean to say you do not know where Carroll Aikins lives?" "Never heard of him," said the bored one.

The Quebec man howled: "Carroll Aikins—the Canadian players! Why, he is the man that has the theatre in the packing-house, he is putting B. C. on the map!"

"I thought it was lumber," said the Vancouver citizen. "Mines, you mean," came from another voice. "Apples!" "Salmon!" "No, goats' milk, children cry for it!" But the man from Quebec went right on.

"People in London and Birmingham

and Munich and New York that don't care a hoot about apples are reading about B. C. through this man's talent. Puts on plays in his packing-house, really artistic productions."

"Where does he get his audience?" said the Vancouver man.

"From all the ranches round about and fifteen miles away from Summerland; people even motor up from Seattle to see his plays. He draws university graduates and Indians from the reserves."

The story of Carroll Aikins, fruit grower, poet and theatrical producer, is yet another tale of pioneer heroism. Like the trees, there are so many big men in B. C. that they have not yet been counted, much less appreciated. Yet our friend in the smoker was right. The progress of a country is helped as much by its talented sons as by its material resources. Once animal hunger is satisfied and shelter assured, a race must produce thinkers and writers or degenerate.

A delicate boy of 18, Carroll Aikins took up land in the Okanagan in 1909, so that today he is a young man not yet 34. A nephew of Sir James Aikins, Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba, Carroll Aikins is Canadian by birth and training. Very much of a Westerner, he has surmounted obstacles of ill-health, limited means and isolated surroundings in the realization of his ambitions. Today his house is a delightful, rambling, vine-covered place, filled with the laughter of his three children who run about barefooted as little Indians.

HAS FINE LIBRARY.

In the comfortable, homelike den is a concert grand piano, an open fireplace and books—above all, books. While other writers may consult authorities for the trouble of walking across the street, Carroll Aikins has had to gather together the technical library of his trade. He has now, perhaps, what is the most complete dramatic and poetic collection in Canada; the library of a man of ideas—especially ideas about the theatre. From Russia to Washington Square, the writers and dramatists have contributed. From the plays of Japan, hundreds of years old, to the latest book on theatrical lighting effects, he has them all! Carroll Aikins is himself the author of a book of poems of delicate beauty, and of several plays. The first of these to be put on the stage, "The God of Gods," was produced by the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in England in November, 1919. In the spring of the next year it was shown again with special scenery designed by Lovatt Fraser. Realizing that in order to write artistic and beautiful plays he must know more of the practical work of the theatre, Mr. Aikins returned to Canada with a new idea—"The Theatre in the Packing-House."

Today in his orchard overlooking the lake, the windows of this unique play-house open to scenes of Grecian beauty. Cliffs and mountains, serried orchards and the blue waters of Okanagan stretch before the eye.

The theatre was formally opened in November of 1920 by the Right Hon. Arthur Meighen. Part of his inaugural address ran as follows:

"We feel that we have reached that point in our history where we may look for a Canadian literature to record Canadian achievements, and it is in that faith that we have built this theatre for the giving of Canadian plays by Canadian actors. We hope that it will be used by the young actor as a training ground for his work; for the service of beauty and for a true expression of the Canadian spirit."

In the short time since, Mr. Aikins has put on such plays as "The Trojan Women," by Euripides, in which his wife, Katharine Aikins, played Hecuba. A New York critic has called this one of the most effective pieces of tragic acting that has been seen on the Canadian stage."

In July, 1922, was presented to a reverent audience the first Canadian Passion Play, "Victory in Defeat," or "Scenes From the Life of Christ." Photographs of these and other productions were shown in the Fine Arts section of the recent exhibition in New Westminster.

During the past summer experiments in lighting were worked out in this theatre. "Flexible scenery," that is interchangeable parts to make all sorts of steps, backgrounds, columns or entrances and several plays tried out in rehearsal.

No account of this Little Theatre would be complete without more than mentioning Mrs. Aikins, who is her husband's intelligent and sympathetic

companion, actress and interpreter of difficult roles, marvellous maker of costumes fabricated of moonshine and silver paint by clever fingers.

The educational value of the "Canadian Players" has not yet been realized. Seventy-five students have been connected with the theatre in some capacity in the past three years and Mr. Aikins has corresponded with about three hundred people. Already some of his students are making names for themselves in stock companies—alas! in the States.

But talent will not always desert us as soon as it finds itself. The founder of "The Canadian Players" intends to build up an all-Canadian company, artistically trained in the highest ideals of the theatre (which are seldom those of the box office) to interpret Canadian plays by Canadian authors.

We Canadians are perhaps too humble-minded, prone to overlook what grows at our own doors, whether apples or poets! We are willing to go to Italy for art and to California for fruit. And so we lose what we might have kept among us.

Mr. and Mrs. Aikins have been called down to Seattle to direct some dramatic work there this winter. It is not their intention, however, to leave Canada for good. Before the peach and apple trees bloom again on Okanagan benches, they hope to be back at the ranch—working in the theatre at Naramata.

Then, if sufficient talent comes forward, if students from the universities, teachers of English or dramatic aspirants, can be found to carry on the work, it is Mr. Aikins' intention to hold a summer course, probably ending in a tour of the principal cities of British Columbia.

A Community Theatre "In the Wilds"

"OKANAGAN" someone mentions; "Fruit" answers your mind if you are well Pelmanized or if, as the psychologist terms it, your mind works on the "associations in the margin of consciousness" plan. But from now on, according to your bent, the answer can be either "fruit" or "theatre."

For on the third of November of this year the first "little theatre" of Canada, built by Mr. Carroll Aikins on his ranch at Naramata in the Okanagan, was opened by Canada's Prime Minister.

It stands, a landmark for many miles around, in the midst of Mr. Aikins' hundred acre orchard. From Summerland, three miles across the lake, its clear, somewhat "churchy" looking outlines may be seen. And nearly every rancher in Naramata can see it from some vantage point of his lot. Surrounded by fruit trees, between which distant views of the Okanagan lake may be seen, its situation is as unique to the world of art as its advent is to these quiet pastoral scenes. Never was theatre placed among more beautiful scenery. But as Mr. Meighen declared in his wonderfully sympathetic speech Mr. Aikins comes of pioneer stock on both sides and it is fitting that his should be the mind to conceive the thrilling scheme of the first Canadian "little theatre." His grandfather on the maternal side was the Hon. C. C. Coffey, who has been rightly termed one of the Fathers of Canadian policy. Many people there are, even now, who remember his splendid oratory and the crowded chamber that greeted his too few speeches, when, as president of the first Privy Council, he held the paternal grandfather was James Cox

Aikins, Lt.-Governor of Manitoba and also a member of Sir John A. Macdonald's cabinet. His father, John Somerset Aikins was widely known and associated with the business development of the Middle West. The third generation has come still further West, a pioneer too, but of different calibre. Mr. Carroll Aikins is well known as a successful fruit rancher and by the initiated as a poet of infinite charm. To some also he is known as the author of a mythological Indian play, "The God of Gods," produced last season by the Birmingham Repertory Company, Birmingham, England, and it is to be

By GWEN CASH

hoped in the near future over here. His latest venture shows still more his infinite faith in Canada and her future, not

point in our history where we may look for a Canadian literature to record Canadian achievement; and it is in that faith that we have built this theatre for the giving of Canadian plays by Canadian actors. We hope that it will be used by the young actor as a training-ground for his abilities, and by the young poet as a testing-ground for his work; and we have great pleasure in offering it to them, for the service of beauty and for a true expression of the Canadian spirit."

(This is the statement of Mr. Aikins' aims taken from the opening program.)

The theatre is built over a very substantial concrete packing-house. The fruits of the earth packed for consumption beneath; the fruits of the mind given to humanity above. The grey plaster walls with green woodwork, the deep, recessed, dormer windows and the quaint old carved furniture of the tiny "foyer" near the entrance, give an atmosphere of old-world simplicity to this charming little theatre built in a very new part of the new world. The stage, as in many of the new little theatres of Europe, is flush with the floor, and the seats, beginning at a distance of fourteen feet from the proscenium, are all raised. Long pews of beautifully grained fir, green like the woodwork, will accommodate comfortably an audience of one hundred. On one side of the stage is a good-sized wardrobe room and on the other a scenery studio, well-equipped with carpenter's tools and painting materials, where settings may be evolved and carried out.

THE little talents of individuals bound together in one common effort make the genius of the people. Every community, no matter how remote or obscure, is rich in unsuspected ability and talent of innumerable sorts, and is, in fact, chiefly made up of people who have not done what they can do either for lack of opportunity or from lack of any experience which shows them that they can do it. "Two years ago, up among the hills of Vermont," an American writer tells us, "I found myself one summer afternoon on an out-of-door grand-stand in a community theatre. There was music of a simple and effective, but in no sense of a remarkable character, composed by a young man of the town and played by an orchestra which he had mustered from among the townspeople and there was a chorus similarly produced. The actors and dancers were in costumes which, though appropriate and picturesque, were made of cheap and ordinary materials. The stage was Mother Earth—a hillside with "wings" of forest to frame it, and at one side in view of all the people the town itself with its little river in the valley below. The people had come up to this spot to see, but more than that to give, a pageant."

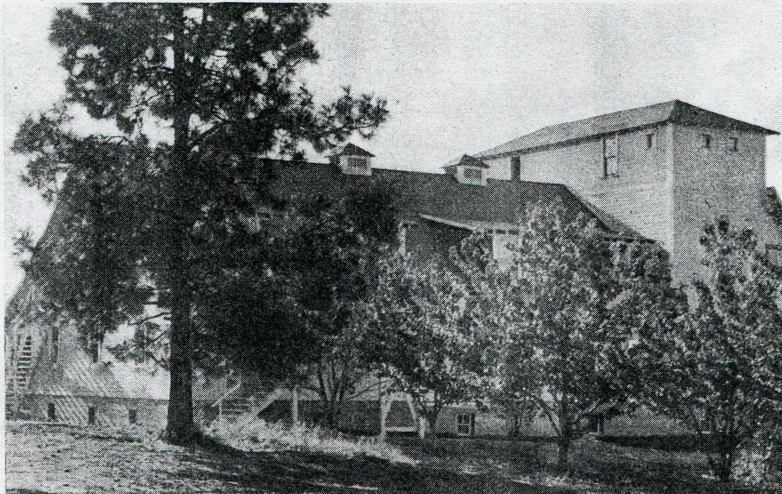
Still, the miracle of the emotions which had been produced did not seem to be explained. The amateur acting and dancing which the people had seen could not compare in point of skill with that which they could see almost any day in the theatres of their town. The same could be said of the music in comparison with the artists who visited the town to give concerts. Nor was there, here, as frequently upon the professional indoor stage any noted actor's or actress's name to give glamor to the occasion. The actors were local carpenters, bankers, farmers, merchants, lawyers, blacksmiths, the everyday people of the town and their wives and sons and daughters. None of the things shown or done on this outdoor stage were extraordinary or wonder-provoking in themselves—the wonder was that they were being done at all.

For this is the new gospel of art—that its joy and beauty and refreshment and inspiration are not for a favored few in some distant metropolis, but for all the people in any and every corner of the land—not in some far away day of wealth and "culture", but now, and with materials already at hand. Art is not something you buy and hang on a wall. It is not something you get. It is something you do. The real happiness of art belongs to the one who creates it, to the artist himself. Hence the reason for the community theatre.—Editor.

only in commercial enterprise, but in realms of art.

"We feel that we have reached that

Above the stage at the two sides are dressing-rooms, and immediately overhead every allowance has been made for a complete up-to-date lighting system which it is hoped will be installed another season. And in the near future a permanent plaster sky is to be built in at the back of the stage, similar in construction to that in the former Chicago Little Theatre, where Mr. Maurice Browne did such interesting pioneer work in lighting effects. Mr. and Mrs. Aikins have visited many of the little theatres of the United States and have tried to unite here the best features of little theatre architecture, obtained elsewhere after many years of experimental work. Mr. Aikins is doing some wonderful work connect-



Packing house and community theatre at Naramata, B.C.

ed with scenery for his new play upon a miniature stage, made to scale with the one in the theatre. In his studio he spends long hours experimenting with light and making the scenery for his "baby" stage so that he may get correct artistic values before instructing the carpenters for the theatre stage.

There is something infinitely inspiring about this little theatre among the Okanagan Hills, and about Mr. Aikins himself. He has suffered the many difficulties of an unknown poet playwright. Now he is known as one of the coming men but he stretches forth the hand of comradeship to those who are still struggling. He and Mrs. Aikins, who is deeply interested in the work of the theatre, will be glad to read plays sent from any part of Canada, and if any play seems to them to have sufficient merit, will give it the best production in their power. Next spring there are to be bunk houses built beneath the peach trees where young actors and actresses may live and study.

CANADA'S LITERARY PROGRESS IS THEME

Dr. Pierce, Mr. and Mrs.
Carroll Aikins, Guests
Of Authors.

At a reception given by the Authors' Association at the Hotel Vancouver on Friday evening to Dr. Lorne Pierce of Toronto and Mr. and Mrs. Carroll Aikins of Naramata, Dr. Pierce gave an interesting address on Canadian literature in which he discussed the characteristics that go to make up a national style.

He passed in review the God-consciousness of the Hebrew writers, the love of beauty and distinct expression of the Greeks, the strength and love of order of the Romans, the salient qualities of Anglo-Saxon writers, the finished realism of the Russians, while it could scarcely be affirmed that Canada had arrived at a national style, there were signs of an approach to it.

Early Canadian literature was no doubt largely influenced by Old Country ideals, and many of the authors of that day seemed to write under a sense of exile and with a prevailing feeling of home-sickness.

In the more modern fiction a certain similarity might be found to the modern pictorial art of Canada. Painted in our bright and clear atmosphere, these pictures showed no veil of vaporous indefiniteness, the outlines were sharp and defined. So, in our fiction, the facts of life were treated with a "plein air" realism and straightforwardness of statement. There was need, he thought, that Canadian writers should endeavor to copy the Russian example of excellence and should not be satisfied with their work till it had arrived at something that was nearer to perfection of literary craftsmanship than was commonly the case.

Mrs. Carroll Aikins gave an interesting and informing account of the Little Theatre movement in which she and her husband have taken such a vigorous part in the Okanagan in recent years. She emphasized the need of co-operation on the part of the organization with the same object in view in various parts of Canada. It was desirable that those who were working in the cause, in different capacities, should be educated people whether they were actors or designers of costumes, or musicians. They should be people who were familiar with good literature and good art, and they should have such an ideal before them as would lift them above the grade of the amateur dramatic club. At the conclusion of her address, Mrs. Aikins read a poem of her husband's entitled "My Creed."

Vocal and instrumental numbers by friends added to the interest of the evening, and Mrs. Spenlow read a poem by Mrs. L. A. Lefevre. Hearty votes of thanks were tendered.

A GREAT mistake is made by people who think that one environment is necessary, or even usual, for the development of art. Turner looked at the rather dirty shipping in the rather dirty Thames and became inspired to paint flamboyant and romantic pictures. John Masefield looked at the same ships in mid-channel and wrote "Cargoes." John Bunyan wrote "Pilgrim's Progress" in jail. Swinburne, whose verses drip with the heavy perfumes of the seraglio, composed almost exclusively during his brisk, daily walks across the English moors, or by the sea, where the fresh, bracing, salt breezes blew on him. A common actor called Shakespeare, who had a shrewd eye to business, got control of a theatre and wrote plays for his company as part of the day's work—and possibly as a matter of economy. In our own day W. B. Yeats met another Irishman, J. M. Synge, in Paris. Synge was then forty, and had spent his life in unsuccessful attempts to write. Yeats suggested that Synge go to the bleak west coast of Ireland, and there in five years Synge wrote six plays which marked their author as one of the foremost playwrights of his time. So no one should be surprised at learning that a British Columbia farm is the home of a great Canadian playwright, the site of a theatre and a very up-to-date school of dramatic art.

Situated on the slopes of the rugged, picturesque Okanagan Valley, and overlooking Lake Okanagan itself, the Home Theatre of the Canadian Players is the scene of one of the most interesting artistic experiments ever made in Canada. This enterprise is an outgrowth of the "little theatre" movement, rather than of the "community theatre" idea. Community players are to be found in three places in Canada. The lead is taken by Toronto, where distinctively modern plays, such as those of Lord Dunsany, Sir James Barrie and Mr. A. A. Milne, are presented with all the aids of the perfect appointments of Hart House. The group in Montreal is said to be suffering from inadequate quarters, nor has the one recently formed in Winnipeg a play-house of its own.

The Home Theatre makes a strong appeal to the imagination. Even if it represented only the usual effort by amateur actors to produce good plays there would be something alluring in the idea of such an organization working in a rural district miles away from city conveniences, and without a large population from which to draw its audiences. How much more amazing to learn that these pioneers have entered upon the

most ambitious program of any theatrical organization in the Dominion! The scheme of the Canadian players is to develop distinctively Canadian dramatic art; to place it upon a self-supporting, commercial basis; and to build up a thoroughly professional company, which will tour Canada in open competition with the English and American companies to which we have been accustomed. That is the ambitious program.

The underlying nationalistic impulse behind the movement is comprehensive. The widest possible interpretation is to be given to the avowed primary object of fostering Canadian drama. The plays are to be produced by Canadian actors, trained on the spot under competent directors. Here, too, the Canadian playwright has his chance to experiment with a real stage, and real actors. Here he may learn the mechanics of his art—the most important part of his education. We have seen how the virile, clever work of Merrill Denison was tried out at Hart House, and found suited to the limitations of the stage; and now his plays have been published in book form and are available to other companies. In the same way other authors will be tried

out at the Home Theatre, and will undoubtedly learn there to make use of modern stage equipment with all its possibilities.

The whole plan emanated from the brain of Carroll Aikins—one of the younger Canadian literary figures, a man of marked ability and arresting personality. I first saw him, some twenty years ago, at the old swimming hole at Stanstead, Quebec, where formal introductions were as *infra dig* as bathing suits. Our talk was not noticeably highbrow, being chiefly limited to boasts of our respective aquatic prowess. If I kept my head under water longer that day (and I hope the memory is not wholly apocryphal) Mr. Aikins may take comfort from the knowledge that it has been almost more than I could do to keep it above water ever since.

On the occasion referred to, the young playwright-manager-to-be was the guest of his distinguished relative, the late Honorable C. C. Colby. I did not see Mr. Aikins again till 1911, when he returned to his native city of Winnipeg after having lived for some time in Paris. Shortly after this meeting I heard that he had moved to Naramata, and had started out as a fruit rancher. About the same

time Mr. Aikins married Miss Katherine Foster, whose father was, for many years, the American Consul-General at Ottawa. Besides cultivating his garden and his orchard, he seems to have cultivated the Muses, for in 1918 I came across his volume of "Poems," which opens with the characteristic "Credo"—"I believe in God and fairies." A little later news reached Canada that an Indian play of his, "The God of Gods," had been produced successfully in England at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. This has since been performed at Hart House. Last came the tale of the formation of the Canadian Players, the building of the Home Theatre, and its formal opening by Premier Meighen in November, 1920.

This theatre is built over the fruit-packing house of the ranch, and seats one hundred persons; and here are regularly gathered people living anywhere from twenty to fifty and even a hundred miles away to see and hear the wonderful plays that are presented periodically by the talented players under the able direction of Mr. Aikins in one of the most beautiful play-houses in Canada. Its design and mechanical appointments inspired a long article in the "Theatre Arts Magazine," New York, for January, 1922. The drama plays, as yet, such a small part in Canadian life, and its technique is so little known to us, that I am going to refer the curious reader to that article for details about "flats," "flies," "spots," "grips," "borders" and such things used in the Home Theatre.

Some of these properties have been ingeniously manufactured on the premises out of hay wire, iron pipe and other materials usually found on a British Columbia farm. The power for the lighting system comes from a dynamo purchased from the owners of an abandoned mine. This "hitched" to one of the farm tractors, which is run on kerosene. What could not be made satisfactorily at home was imported, and no expense was spared. The lighting system is the best on the continent west of Chicago. The equipment for it came from New York, and was planned by L. Simonson of the Theatre Guild. It includes a specially built dimmer-box with very flexible resistors for twenty four-light circuits. The plaster two-sky dome is the only one in Canada. But to avoid multiplicity of detail the theatre is equipped with the best modern appliances, and it is interesting to note the tribute of Miss Ruth H. Kerr, to whose article I have already called attention:

"The progress of the art of stage decoration since 1912 c

Box 112, Naramata, B. C.
February 2, 1968.

Dear John & Mrs. Aikins

Thank you for your letter,
of January 31st, with the enclosed cheques.

I have handed the cheque, made out to St. Peter's
Church, to Mr. Grove Clough, the treasurer, and
have explained your wishes to him.

I have, also, discussed the matter the Rev. Ray
Turner, of Penticton, as Mr. Moorhouse, the rector, is
away at the moment.

With regard to the other cheque, in both our
names, I can only say a heartfelt 'thank you'.
on behalf of us both.

Though we certainly do not deserve such
generosity, we can only accept in the spirit of Christian
fellowship in which it came to us.

May Almighty God, in His loving mercy, abundantly
bless you, each one, along the way.

Sincerely yours

W. S. Seames

Gertrude E. Seames.

Carroll Aikins

canadianshakespears.ca

Carroll Aikins (1888-1967) was born in Stanstead, Quebec, into a well connected family. His maternal grandfather was the Hon. C. C. Colby, Member of Parliament for Stanstead from 1867 to 1891, and president of the Privy Council under Sir John A. Macdonald (Hoffman "Carroll Aikins and the Home Theatre" 51). His paternal grandfather, James Cox Aikins, served as Secretary of State (1869-73, 1878-80) in Sir John A's cabinet before becoming Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba from 1882 to 1888 (51). Aikins' father, John Somerset Aikins, was a successful businessman, and a member in the Manitoba House of Assembly between 1879 and 1883 (O'Neill 66). He went to private school in Winnipeg, and spent a year at McGill University, but when doctors suspected he had tuberculosis he embarked on a European study tour, where he saw the work of Edward Gordon Craig (1892-1966), Jacques Copeau (1879-1949), and Adolphe Appia (1862-1928). He may also have seen productions of Shakespeare by Harley Granville-Barker (1877-1946) and Max Reinhardt (1873-1943), as well as important productions by English repertory theatres (Hoffman "Aikins, Carroll" 8). In 1912, Aikins married Katherine Foster, daughter of the American Consul-General in Ottawa (Hoffman "Carroll Aikins and the Home Theatre" 51).

Aikins was connected through class and family to an upper-class group that was adapting Shakespeare in the last decades of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth century. Aikins' uncle was Charles W. Colby, a professor of Canadian History at McGill. Colby would have known Charles Moyses, professor of History and English Literature at McGill, who published *Shakespeare's Skull and Falstaff's Nose* in 1889, and Andrew Macphail, McGill's first professor of the history of medicine, who published *The Land* in 1914. As a Member of Parliament himself, Nicholas Flood Davin, who published *The Fair Grit* in 1876, would have known both Aikins grandfathers, and perhaps his father. These relationships clearly indicate the ways in which Shakespearean adaptations in Canada in this period were associated with certain class and educational privileges (if not a reinforcement of these).

In 1919-20, Aikins built the Home Theatre, an art theatre inspired by the Little Theatre Movement in the U.S., on his 100-acre fruit-ranch near Naramata, British Columbia, named after the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York. The building

was a combination fruit-storage area on the ground level and theatre above. The theatre (40' by 80') was wooden, with a steeply pitched roof, large dormers, and over the stage a raised fly space with dressing rooms; it seated 100 on sloping wooden pews, with a stage at floor level backed by a plaster 'sky dome' and a foyer and scene shop along the sides. (Hoffman "Aikins, Carroll" 8) [indent]

The theatre was officially opened November 3, 1920, by Prime Minister Arthur Meighen (1874-1960). It was to house the Canadian Players, whose members were drawn from across the country. They received room and board at cost, or by picking apples in the mornings, and were given lessons in acting, dance, design, and playwriting by Carroll and Katherine, and others recruited from the Neighborhood Playhouse (Tippett 20). In the program produced for the theatre's opening, Aikins explains his project:

We feel that we have reached that point in our history where we may look for a Canadian literature to record Canadian achievement; and it is in that faith that we have built this theatre for the giving of Canadian plays by Canadian actors. We hope that it will be used by the young actor as a training-ground for his abilities, and by the young poet as a testing-ground for his work; and we have great pleasure in offering it to them, for the service of beauty and for a true expression of the Canadian spirit. (qtd. from Hoffman "Carroll Aikins and the Home Theatre" 56) [indent]

Aikins wanted to "purify the theatre of its box-office nature" by making Home Theatre non-profit (53), but, ironically, his theatre in Paradise had to close after only two years in operation when the prices of apples 'fell' in 1922. After the fruit market collapse, Aikins moved to Toronto. He became director of Hart House Theatre from 1927 to 1929.

The God of Gods was produced twice at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre: a two-week run in No-

ember 1919, and another five days in April 1920, designed by Barry Jackson. The play was produced in Canada at Hart House Theatre in 1922, and again in England in 1931, at the Everyman Theatre in London. Billed in Birmingham as "An American-Indian Play", English reviewers liked the play, "praising it as a 'rare artistic delicacy', with special commendations for the acting, the lighting, the 'quaint and weird' tribal music, and the script, which was felt . to be 'good, original work [that] deserves a wider popularity'" (Hoffman "Carroll Aikins and the Home Theatre" 55).

The play is a loose adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* that uses 'native' motifs. Suiva, a tribal girl is in love with Yellow Snake, a singer, but Mablo, the fat son of Amburi, Chief of the Seven Feathers, also wants Suiva "for his woman." To keep Suiva and Yellow Snake apart, Mablo bribes Waning Moon, the high priestess, to choose Suiva as the next priestess. When Yellow Snake is seen at the ceremony making Suiva the new priestess, Amburi tells Mablo to kill Yellow Snake, which he does by shooting him in the back with an arrow. The body of Yellow Snake is brought to Suiva as a sacrifice for the "God of Gods." When she recognizes his body she leaps to her death.

Writing at the end of World War I, Aikins transfers his exploration of contemporary state abuses of power and propaganda, and the war's tragic slaughter of young men, onto Native American society. Shakespeare pursued an analogous agenda in *The Merchant of Venice*, where he uses the figure Shylock in medieval Venice to discuss contemporary issues surrounding money-lending in England. (For more on Shakespeare's use of Shylock, please see the National Film Board of Canada's documentary *Shylock*.) Through official ceremonies resembling Christian antiphonies, the tribe is kept in fear and tribute:

Waning Moon: [L]et him fear the God. The God is great.

Worshippers: He giveth us full bellies.

Waning Moon: The God is good to them that love his priestess. (47)

The tribal power structure is maintained by manufacturing fear of "the God." When Suiva becomes the new priestess, Waning Moon explains to her the tribe's system of power:

Waning Moon: Amburi fears the God as a blind man fears thunder. No matter what you tell him, he'll believe it. He's the best friend we have. He keeps the tribe in order. For fear of him they dare not slight the God. But he's a just man. It's all one to him, the priestess and the people. It's the God he fears. So, if you speak from God to make a law, you'd better mind it, for if you break it, and he catches you, he'll kill you quickly as he would a squirrel.

Suiva: Then it's the Chief who punishes the priestess?

Waning Moon [slightly tipsy]: The God, the Chief, the priestess, how do I know? We're so mixed up together, who can tell? (52)

Amburi has Yellow Snake murdered for offending the God, and the body is brought before Suiva, the new priestess, as a sacrifice. Her ceremonial offering speech reads like a memorial to a fallen soldier:

You were a fighter but you'll fight no more. You were a hunter but you'll fight no more. You were a singer but you'll sing no more. You were a dancer but you'll dance no more. You were a lover but you'll love no more. You'll toss no more your dark hair to the sky! (63)

In 1919, 1920, and 1922, this speech would have sounded all too familiar to English and Canadian audiences, who were still mourning the thousands of casualties of the First World War. The themes of tragic loss and waste made *Romeo and Juliet* the perfect play to adapt after "the war to end all wars."

When Suiva discovers that the sacrificial body is Yellow Snake she desecrates the image of the God, before leaping to her death:

Suiva: The God won't hurt you. [She picks up the wine cup.] Look! [She dashes the wine in the face of the image.] His name is fear! [She drops the cup.] Now kill me!

The Worshippers [recoiling]: Profane!

Suiva: This is not God. The God is dead. You killed him. He walked among you but you did not know him. He was God.

The Worshippers: Profane! Profane!

Suiva: He was the singer of the joy of life. His name was love. You killed him. He was God. (66)

[indent]

Compare the above speech with Frederick Nietzsche's famous pronouncement in *The Gay Science* (1882):

God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, console ourselves? That which was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet possessed has bled to death under our knives - who will wipe this blood off us? With what water could we purify ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we need to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must not we ourselves become gods simply to seem worth of it? There has never been a greater deed - and whoever shall be born after us, for the sake of this deed he shall be part of a higher history than all history hitherto. (section 125) [indent]

Suiva's last speech humanizes Nietzsche's aphorism. Suiva's god was her lover who was murdered by the tribe's corrupt leaders. The play can thus be read as a social critique of contemporary power structures, or as an allegory for the war, where young men died for the outdated beliefs of old men. How, then, do we reconcile the progressive social commentary with the play's racist language (Kotwi, Suiva's mother is described as a "fat squaw" [3]), historical inaccuracies (wealth is determined by head of cattle, but cows were brought to the Americas by the Europeans), and bizarre faux-native dialogue ("How should we eat if the fire died?" [5])? And what do we make of the fact that many contemporary commentaries, and some later ones, saw the play simply as a representation of Native American culture? Ernest A. Bendell, who read the play and recommended it for a license to the Lord Chamberlain writes: "In setting and in dialogue the Play is vaguely picturesque and quite inoffensive in its rather incomprehensible illustrations of the barbaric tenets and rites of an Indian faith" (qtd. from O'Neill 76). After seeing the 1919 show, a reviewer for the *Birmingham Post and Journal* states, "There is nothing in *The God of Gods* which cannot be believed-it might have happened, and if it happened it must have happened in this way" (qtd. from Brigg 33).

Gordon Lester

CARROLL AIKINS AND THE HOME THEATRE

James Hoffman

Carroll Aikins founded the Home Theatre in Naramata on Lake Okanagan in British Columbia in November 1920. Having just had his play The God of Gods produced at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in England, Aikins, adhering to the 'Art Theatre' principles of Gordon Craig and Maurice Browne, began the Canadian Players, a training company intended to mount and tour indigenous drama on a national scale. Recruiting instructors from the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York, he commenced work in his theatre building which was designed in collaboration with Lee Simonson of the Theatre Guild. The company produced a regular season of new works by such authors as Synge, Gilbert Murray, and Anatol France. When the venture closed, Aikins went on to direct for several seasons at Hart House Theatre in Toronto in the late 1920s. This paper includes a brief biography of Aikins, a survey of the Canadian Players, a discussion of Aikins' ideals, as well as a consideration of the practical problems and eventual closure. There is also a chronological listing of the plays produced by the Home Theatre.

Carroll Aikins fonda le Home Theatre en Naramata, sur le lac d'Okanagan, British Columbia, en novembre 1920. Après avoir joué The God of Gods produit au Birmingham Repertory Theatre en Angleterre, Aikins, s'inspirant des principes du 'Théâtre des arts' de Gordon Craig et Maurice Browne, fonda les 'Joueurs canadiens', un troupe de formation, dans l'intention de monter une tournée de pièces indigènes à l'échelle nationale. Recrutant des instructeurs du Neighborhood Playhouse à New-York, Aikins commença à travailler dans son propre théâtre, lequel fut décoré avec la collaboration de Lee Simonson du Theatre Guild. La troupe produisit des pièces nouvelles dès sa première saison régulière: pièces de Synge, Gilbert Murray et Anatol France. Quand le théâtre, ferma les portes - c'était la fin des années 1920 - Aikins déménagea à Hart House à Toronto. Annexées à ce journal sont: une brève biographie d'Aikins, une études des 'Joueurs canadiens', une discussion sur les idéaux d'Aikins ainsi qu'une réflexion sur les problèmes pratiques d'une fermeture éventuelle, et une liste chronologique des pièces produites par le Home Theatre.

If the newspaper and magazine articles of the early 1920s are to be believed, Canada enjoyed many theatrical 'firsts' in 1921 and 1922: 'the first national theatre in Canada'; 'the first Canadian Little Theatre'; 'the first Greek drama presented in Canada'; 'the first Passion play ever given in Canada'; and the first 'dome-horizon' - a form of cyclorama - to be installed in Canada. The writers of these turgid phrases were reflecting both the wish for and the fact of - however incipient - a national cultural renewal that was especially manifest in the post World War I years. What is surprising in this case though is that all these claims of 'first' refer not to several progressive theatres in urban Montreal or Toronto, but to one theatre located in the middle of an orchard in the sparsely populated rural hills of central British Columbia. This paper will examine the development and operation of Carroll Aikins' Home Theatre as it flourished briefly and perhaps even for a moment brilliantly in the early 1920s.

Carroll Aikins was born in 1888 in Stanstead, Quebec, and while not born into a theatrical family nor directly encouraged towards the performing arts he was, because of his temperament as well as his family background, inclined in a number of ways to the written and spoken arts. Several of his forebears were noteworthy public figures. His maternal grandfather, the Hon. C.C. Colby, was Member of Parliament for Stanstead from 1867 to 1891, president of the Privy Council under Sir John A. Macdonald, wrote *Parliamentary Government in Canada* (Montreal 1886) and was a notable debater in the House of Commons. *Maclean's Magazine* (1 January 1921) commented that there were 'Many people ... even now, who remember his splendid oratory and the crowded chamber that greeted his too few speeches Aikins' paternal grandfather was James Cox Aikins, lieutenant-governor of Manito-

ba (1882-1888) and also, as Secretary of State (1869-73, 1878-80), a member of Sir John A's cabinet. His uncle, Dr. Charles W. Colby, was a longtime professor at McGill University, who specialized in early Canadian history and wrote *Canadian Types of the Old Regime* (New York 1908). His obituary notice in the *Montreal Gazette* (12 December 1945) cites his lifelong 'mingling of academic and business interests', his 'cultivated mind', and 'his life of varied service', an epitaph that in many ways characterized his nephew, Carroll. Aikins' father was John Somerset Aikins, a successful businessman in real estate and insurance, who, before his abrupt death while Carroll was in his mid-twenties, was also a Member of Parliament. Carroll's book *Poems* (Boston: Sherman, French, 1917) was dedicated to the memory of his father:

Greater than temples, greater than the song
Of priest and chorister at their craft and art,
Are the nice balances of right and wrong
That swing to mercy, in a good man's heart.

Carroll, in his own upbringing, also seemed destined for some form of public life appropriate to one born into comparative wealth and good family connections. Moved to Winnipeg a few weeks after his birth, he attended an Anglican private school, St. John's, and seemed a regular child. Someone¹ who met him when he was fifteen describes a spirited, youthful carousing at a swimming hole. He attended McGill but left after one year because, according to his daughter,² formal education appeared not to be vitally necessary; besides, enjoying sufficient means, he had 'too many options - he could do anything he wanted without a degree'. Also, it was discovered at this time that he had a spot on his lung indicating suspected tuberculosis. Thus it was that he commenced several years of living and touring abroad for health and educational reasons.

He made a study tour of Europe, went to school for at least one academic year in France and travelled for awhile with his mother through Germany. Dates and details are hard to find, and there is no record, by his own hand or even second hand, of his discovery of modern European theatrical innovation, whether by visits to the playhouses or by his readings or by discussions with others. It is likely that, as a cultivated person in the process of acquiring a broad, humanistic education, he included an up-to-date theoretical knowledge of drama as part of his learning; and as the thoughts of the contemporary dramatic prophets like Craig and Appia were enunciated in idealistic, even religious tones, they probably greatly appealed to this eager, Anglican youth from a country just beginning to entertain possibilities of a new, national drama. Certainly he acquired a visionary and abstract rather than a practical understanding of the theatre, for when he began his work in the Home Theatre it was, as one commentator stated, 'a dream of a great adventure' by someone who 'previously knew nothing of theatre problems.'³ Indeed, the picture of Aikins that emerges both in his farming affairs and in his Home Theatre work is of an inspired, spontaneous, slightly aloof artist, rather than a systematic, organized man of business. And with a wealthy family capable of financially bailing him out, as they sometimes did, he could afford to indulge his dreams. But only, however, within limits: he was often nearly broke, and was reported, by the mid-twenties, to be tying ribbons on selected fruit trees only, since he could not afford to spray the whole crop.

Aikins' theatrical ideas took shape during the period of the 'new' theatre as proclaimed by effusive visionaries. Aikins must have encountered in some fashion the precepts of that passionate Wagnerite Adolph Appia, perhaps through one of his influential brochures and books, published in the 1890s, which described and illustrated the importance of light as a unifying equivalent of music, and Craig, who by 1908, was elaborating his extravagant dreams of directorial creativity in *The Mask* and in other writings. Aikins, with a reading knowledge of French and German, probably acquired these and other documents of the European art theatre. During the time of the Home Theatre he was noted for his large collection of books on the theatre. It is easy, in any case, to see the influence of Craig and Appia in his close, perfectionist attention to details and simple yet highly suggestive artis-

tic use of stage settings and lighting - all rendered by the poet-director.

The pre World War I era was the age of the new artistic director and it is probable that Aikins witnessed the work of Granville-Barker at the Court theatre in London during the 1904-1907 years, or in New York in 1915, with the New York Stage Society, or the work of Reinhardt in his groundbreaking productions in London and New York in 1911 and 1912. There can be little doubt that Aikins was present and made personal contacts at the English repertory theatre that had formed on the heels of the Court in Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham, for it was at the last that his play *The God of Gods* was produced in a two-week run in 1919, with a set designed by Barry Jackson himself. The influence of these companies, which were to England what the little theatres were to the United States, can be seen in Aikins' emphasis [sic] on ensemble acting and the encouragement of new playwrights, as well as in many of the construction principles of theatre building. His style at the Home Theatre was theirs: he wanted to purify the theatre of its commercial, box-office nature - he announced to newspapers that the venture was strictly not profit-making. He was an experimenter more interested in new ideas than traditional methods. He emphasized participation: a glance at an early program reveals that he involved a cross-section of the community, from farm-hands to land-owners, in a theatre of communal self-expression, people who were to be, in Maurice Browne's words, the 'raw material' ⁴ of the new drama.

But perhaps the strongest contender for the role of Aikins' spiritual mentor was Copeau: in his efforts to stage the poetic, to purify and simplify stage settings and maintain high standards even at the price of sequestering his work from the masses, this French dramatist - especially as he and his company were resident in New York from 1917 to 1919, may have contributed the most idealism to an impressionable Aikins. Copeau, like Aikins, worked in the isolation of the country and attempted to train young actors in the very purist ways of the art theatre.

By this time Aikins was in direct contact with several members of the newly-created Little Theatre movement in the United States. A frequent visitor to the United States, he must have visited both the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York (established 1915) and the Chicago Little Theatre (1912) because in establishing the Home Theatre Aikins received encouragement, advice and even personnel from these significant theatres, which, like their European counterparts, were formed to display newer dramas and recent stagecraft methods. The Neighborhood Playhouse, like the Home Theatre, was small, was first occupied by enthusiastic and idealistic amateurs, and was situated, as its name suggests, among a cross-section of the populus in the lower east side. From this theatre Aikins hired Florence Levine, a dance and movement instructor; and from the Washington Square Players, also of New York, he gained invaluable consultation on theatre and lighting design from Lee Simonson.

From the Chicago Little Theatre Aikins received the friendship and inspiration of its director and one of the leading lights of the American Little Theatre movement, Maurice Browne, who had written 'The Temple of a Living Art' (*The Drama* November 1913) about the 'fire that tests and purifies' (p 177) that the American dramatist of tomorrow will endure as he established a true art theatre. It is interesting to note, incidentally, in the light of Aikins' subsequent attempt to establish a national Canadian drama in 1920, Browne's statement that by 1913 there was in the United States no theatre 'of even national, far less international importance.' (p 164)

For the sake of his health and to offer Carroll a living, his father sent him to the Okanagan area of British Columbia in 1908, close to Naramata, where the first section of the eventual 100 acres of sage-covered, hilly lakeside property, later named 'Rekadom' - meaning 'house by the water' - was purchased for the purpose of developing a fruit growing operation. Four years later, in 1912, Carroll

married Katherine Foster, daughter of the American Consul-General at Ottawa. With her personality and background (she was educated at Vassar) she was to be an ideal partner in the Home Theatre venture, performing major roles, directing and assisting with the teaching. During World War I, having been refused the opportunity of military service because of his health, Aikins supervised the work of his orchards and engaged in a number of creative projects.

He was seriously writing at this time and published his book of poems which displayed the romantic, 'Oh drench me in the sun's downpouring light / Or give me starflung passionate delight!' ('Prayer'); the religious, 'I see God in my orchard every hour' ('in the Orchard'); and what can only be described as the work of a dreamer, 'So do I write with pen and ink / The dreams I dream, the things I think' ('Sardonyx'). He was completing *The God of Gods*, a melodramatic play about a 'devout Indian maiden' who loves an outcast singer but is tricked by the conniving chief's son into unwittingly killing her lover, after which she flings herself to death from a precipice. Billed on the Birmingham Repertory program as 'An American-Indian Play', the production featured an orchestra playing a hodge-podge of pieces such as 'Pawnee War Song and Dance,' 'Cherokee Cradle Song,' 'Dakota Scalp Dance,' and 'Omaha Tribal Melodies' - surely, like the play's plot, a blend of native Indian motifs with familiar European, theatrical style. The English reviewers generally liked the play, praising it as a 'rare artistic delicacy',⁵ with special commendations for the acting, the lighting, the 'quaint and weird'⁶ tribal music, and the script, which was felt, although with perhaps a few too many echoes of Lord Dunsany, to be 'good, original work [that] deserves a wider popularity.'⁷ One personal problem for Aikins was that he was unable to travel to England at this time to see the production, even though it provoked interest sufficient to bring about another staging at the Everyman theatre in London in 1931.

The same year (1919) Aikins was busy in theatrical endeavours at home. To assist the war effort, he produced at Naramata, probably in the Opera House, Oliphant Down's *The Maker of Dreams*, with proceeds going to the Red Cross. He also, while his play ran in Birmingham in November, travelled to the Cornish School in Seattle, an interdisciplinary fine and performing arts institution, where Maurice Browne was guest teacher. Carroll and Katherine saw the school's production of Shaw's *The Philanderer*, and were encouraged to found a new kind of theatre. Katherine recalls:

That November we went to Seattle to meet the Maurice Browns [sic] and see their production of *The Philanderer*, at the Cornish School of Drama. We enjoyed the production and the theatre talk that followed in the next few days, and liked Maurice Brown [sic] and his wife, Ellen van Volkenburg, who encouraged the idea of a 'Little Theatre' in the Canadian west. In the course of the play we heard a voice behind us say: 'What is a philanderer?' and that too convinced us that more sophisticated theatre was needed west of the Rockies.

My husband became very busy with plans for building a small theatre combined with a utilitarian packing house.⁸

That winter Aikins spent designing the theatre building. For assistance he appealed to Lee Simonson, who seems to have commented upon and approved Aikins's own drawings. Simonson likely designed and strongly recommended the particular lighting equipment which was purchased in New York. Again, there are no extant letters or other communications between Aikins and Simonson, nor are there any sketches or drawings of the theater building; with Aikins' well-known spontaneous methods of working, it is likely that the building was informally drawn, and improvised as he went along. Although it caused much commentary after its opening, the theatre project, especially as it was being constructed, was a well-kept secret and one wonders whether there was an extended period when he maintained the option to complete the structure simply as a well-situated barn or storage shed. A small item in the *Penticton Herald* (3 June 1920), exactly five months before the official opening of the theatre by the Prime Minister of Canada, announced only that: 'Mr. C.C. Aikins is con-

structing a very fine packing and storage house on his fruit property.' Also, he couldn't have been too busy discussing or promoting his theatre that summer: the same newspaper noted that he and his wife took a month-long motoring trip through the Caribou area during July and August.

One local paper, however, the *Penticton Standard* (26 May, 1920), did manage to note that something special was occurring:

Mr. Carroll Aikins, of Naramata, works in a quiet way. He has financed and built on his property, one of the coziest, most modern, and up-to-the-minute theatres it is conceivable to devise, and all without the usual blare of trumpet and newspaper advertising that accommodates enterprises of much less importance than that in which Mr. Aikins is engaged. He built the theatre primarily for the education and training of Canadian actors and the Naramata building will be, or is, the home of the Canadian Players. It is the intention of Mr. Aikins to offer the public the higher class productions of the legitimate stage and the residents of the Southern Okanagan will be fortunate in this respect.

The theatre was officially opened 3 November 1920, by Prime Minister Arthur Meighen who no doubt welcomed, in those days of social unrest culminating in the Winnipeg General Strike (of which he was an active, principal antagonist), this pleasant, non-controversial cultural event flowing with national ideals. In a program produced for the opening Aikins wrote:

We feel that we have reached that point in our history where we may look for a Canadian literature to record Canadian achievement; and it is in that faith that we have built this theatre for the giving of Canadian plays by Canadian actors. We hope that it will be used by the young actor as a training-ground for his abilities, and by the young poet as a testing-ground for his work; and we have great pleasure in offering it to them, for the service of beauty and for a true expression of the Canadian spirit.

This statement was published in *Maclean's Magazine* (1 January 1921), which also contains what seems to be the only extant photograph of the outside of the Home Theatre - somewhat obscured, unfortunately (but naturally enough), behind a row of fruit trees.

The theatre occupied the second storey above an eight-foot-high concrete fruit packing and storage room, the foundation measuring 80 by 40 feet. The theatre itself was a wooden, shiplapped structure pitched roof that featured three large dormers on each side by three cupola-like air vents, the entire edifice resembling, especially with its raised fly space over the west end, a country church, or, as one contemporary observer noted, a temple, with 'The fruits of the earth packed for consumption beneath; the fruits of the mind given to humanity above.' (*Maclean's* 21 January 1921) Situated on a rolling benchland several hundred feet above and about half a mile from Okanagan Lake, the theatre dominated the local view and was clearly visible even from across the lake in Summerland, where residents, paying 500, rode across on a ferry to see the plays.

Audiences came from Naramata (the townsite is about a mile from the location of the theatre), Summerland, Penticton (about eight miles away), and from other parts of the Okanagan. Aikins, in keeping with Little Theatre ideals, seems not to have encouraged a strictly élitist audience. There are reports of how the Indians from a reservation across the lake came to watch the plays and were particularly impressed with the lighting effects. There were also special guests, like W. R. MacInnes, vice-president of the CPR, Maurice Browne, and members of the University of British Columbia Varsity Players.⁹ This audience saw fairly recent, modern plays produced in a simple, yet often powerfully

evocative manner by (mainly) dedicated young student actors; Aikins sometimes requested the spectators to refrain from applause in order to maintain the special atmosphere, disallowed curtain calls, and appended to the programs blank sheets for the audience to write critical comments to be returned to Aikins.

The audience walked from the ground up a long stair to the north side of the building (see illustration) and entered a long, narrow foyer decorated, in Katherine Aikins' words,

... with [a] small gate-legged table, Chinese chairs, chests of drawers, and on the walls were hung a few photographs: the English actress [Susan Richmond] who took the leading role in the English production of *The God of Gods*, a signed picture of Pavlova, and some photographs of our own group.

There was seating for 100 persons in twelve rows of 'mission-style' benches, or pews, which ascended gently upwards from stage floor level in the front to about five feet at the back. Access to the more elevated rear rows was by means of a stair of six or seven steps from the foyer through what appears to be a small aisle to the middle of the seating. The first six benches went straight across, about twenty feet in length, the rear benches were split by an aisle. Above, the roof peaked directly over the centre of the benches, and throughout the atmosphere was simple, rather austere, in a color scheme of 'white, subdued in a harmony of greens and soft, velvety greys.' (*Maclean's*, 1 October 1921)

The stage was on floor level and extended, from the first row of seats, to the back wall approximately thirty feet, assuming the benches to take about fifty of the available total length of eighty feet. The width of the acting area was probably twenty feet - at least at the proscenium.¹⁰ Above the stage was a fly area, two stories high and therefore about twenty feet from floor to grid. In the fly space there was a form of grid made largely from wire and piping - staples of the fruit farmer - that held the various lighting instruments and curtains. There were 'wooden perches', a kind of catwalk arrangement that allowed technicians to install and adjust lights. To each side of the fly space was a dressing room, one for men and one for women, the latter equipped with a shower.

On the stage level, along the entire length of the back wall was the permanent plaster cyclorama, or 'sky-dome' as it was then labelled. To one side of the stage, at stage left, there was in the wing space a small costume storage area. The identical space at stage right was used for an entrance-way into the long and narrow scene shop which, like the foyer on the opposite side, ran most of the length of the theatre, a distance of about sixty feet. Inside the shop there was, again in Katherine's words,

... a large paint table designed by my husband with compartments for different colours of calciums, brushes and all painting requirements. In this room were also tools for making scenery flats, covered with burlap, beaver-board for silhouettes of mountains or houses and towns, and lumber for simple platforms and steps for interiors. There were gray flannelette curtains that took the lights beautifully. And also material for making costumes was there. Everyone had to turn his or her hand to the various arts or crafts of stage sets and lighting.

The shop, like the foyer, could only have been about ten feet wide.

The lighting system seems to have been designed by Lee Simonson and manufactured in New

York, with additional advice from Maurice Browne. The system, capable of handling 10,000 watts of power, was described in *Theatre Arts Magazine* (January 1922):

Mr. Aikins received the assistance of Maurice Browne and Lee Simonson in the selection of his lighting equipment - probably the most modern and complete in Canada - and it represents the combined ideas of these two practical artists of the theatre. Mr. Aikins did the actual work of installation and arrangement of lights, after the wiring was completed. The battery of twenty dimmers controlling spots, X-ray borders, strips, floods and house lights, is in turn controlled by a master dimmer, the entire 'lighting organ' a masterpiece of modern designing. And not only because the lighting facilities are so complete, but also because they are used in the most flexible manner by means of the clamps and pipe battens, is the stage a valuable experimental ground for young artists.

Mrs Aikins reports that the dimmer box was kept on a platform just in front of the first row of seats and could be raised or lowered (so the dimmer was below floor level) by a system of jacks, which causes one to wonder where the lighting operator worked during a performance. One former student, Muriel MacDougall (née Evans), interviewed by telephone (18 March 1985), recalled that the lighting person operated the controls from a position in the stage left wing.

The first production of the Home Theatre, although not the first official one, was staged in the fall of 1920 and it was not auspicious. Using 'boys working on the farm and other locals' (Katherine Aikins) Aikins mounted Synge's *The Tinker's Wedding*. In the words of Mrs. Aikins, 'It was a ridiculous play to attempt as a "first". We played it just once to a farm audience and friends and there wasn't a smile to encourage us. We knew how terrible it was but learned a lot from it.'

Part of that winter the Aikins spent recruiting students for the proposed school. By means of traveling to larger centres, giving addresses to drama clubs and the like, and by articles in magazines, Aikins promoted the venture. Mrs Aikins says the 'response was astonishing', although there is no record of numbers of inquiries, interviews or auditions, and even in its heyday the school never had more than a dozen or so students. About this time an old barn was remodelled into a communal dining room. In the spring of 1921, Carroll was in Penticton to watch the University of British Columbia Players Club touring production of Pinero's *Sweet Lavender*; after the performance he met the cast and described to them his own plans for the Home Theatre. He interested two members of the cast, Dorothy Adams and Muriel Evans - and possibly one or two others, as yet unconfirmed - who were among his first students, joining the company some months after that first production by locals.

The first official student production took place on four evenings in late June 1921, with a double bill by two American playwrights, *The Neighbors*, by Zona Gale and *Will-O'-The-Wisp* by Doris Halman, and several songs by two visiting artists, 'Miss Craig, Miss Monica Craig' between the plays. Whatever plans Aikins had for the nationally-oriented Canadian Players, his actor 'students' were so far still persons young and older from Naramata and nearby Penticton: the nationally-recruited students had not yet appeared. Only one of the names on the program of this first official production appears on subsequent programs. Nor was Aikins yet staging Canadian drama although the scripts were recent, and in Halman's work, he was offering a product of the groundbreaking playwright's classes of Professor George Pierce Baker.

The production was well received locally, with 'demand' requiring a request performance. The *Penticton Herald* (25 June 1921) praised the 'artistically produced' work: 'The excellence of the performance was such that one is tempted to criticize the acting by the standards from which one would judge more experienced performers.' Even the *Vancouver Province* (1 July 1921) took notice

in a review that, while complaining of some 'inevitable crudities' in the production, such as '... the electricians, unfortunately, put[ting] an evening sky on their plaster background for a daytime scene', was quite impressed with the overall work and with Aikins' courage and willingness to experiment.

Immediately following this production Carroll and Katherine Aikins were in Seattle for ten days to attend the official opening of a new theatre at the Cornish School. They also discussed arrangements to bring performing groups from that school to the Home Theatre. The *Herald* (27 July 1921) reported that Maurice Browne and Aikins 'plan to co-operate eventually in forming a circuit for their repertory companies'. Plans called for visits to the Home Theatre of two musicians, Dean Wells and Francis Armstrong, Adolph Bolm, a choreographer and former dancer in Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*, and the Seattle Repertory Company in productions of Shaw's *The Philanderer*, Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, and Ficke's *Dr Faust*. Only the two musicians, however, ever performed at the Home Theatre, in August of the same year.

In July, six students arrived, two of whom at least were from Vancouver, members of the UBC Players Club, and one, Aileen Beaufort, from Edmonton, where she had worked in amateur theatre. Muriel Evans, who had just completed her first year at the University of British Columbia, regarded the Home Theatre as a place to 'learn acting'. She and Dorothy Adams spent two summers at Naramata. The first summer she reports staying with three other girls in a little shack about a mile from the theatre, at a neighbour of the Aikins. They were roomed and boarded for one dollar a day. At the Aikins farm they picked fruit during the mornings and were paid a dollar a day. Lunch was provided in the orchard, and about 1 pm they commenced classes in the theatre, working there in the evenings as well.

Sessions were held in every aspect of the theatre: there was instruction, mostly from Carroll Aikins, in acting, voice, mime, set and prop construction, and lighting. Katherine Aikins also assisted with the vocal training and scenework. As for a regular curriculum though, it was, in Evans' words, 'a hit and miss affair'. Aikins, a man of ideals and dreams, was not concerned with organization; he taught 'whatever happened to strike him - his blue eyes would sparkle and he'd be inspired, [but] he was no planner'. Aikins brought a great variety of material, poems, play excerpts, prose readings and the like, for use in the classes. One of his own poems was spoken accompanied by music as part of the intermission entertainment in his first season. There is little doubt that he was a good, if maddeningly disorganized, teacher. Dorothy Somerset ¹¹ (interview, 18 March 1985) took acting classes from him in Vancouver in the mid-1920s and confirms that he was 'a fine teacher of acting ... he had great imagination and was highly creative'.

In August Ellen van Volkenberg, wife of Maurice Browne and notable performing artist in her own right, presented at the Home Theatre an evening of her famous imitations, in which she mimicked Ethel Barrymore in the lead role in Barrie's *Alice Sit By The Fire*. She also managed to play all the other roles in this one-person show, a feat that greatly impressed the local audience.

In the next month the second student production took place, with performances of *The Maker of Dreams*, by Oliphant Down, and a segment of the Gilbert Murray translation of Euripides' *The Trojan Women*. By now the idea of the enterprise seemed to be almost as thrilling as the actual work. Even Gilbert Murray himself, according to a note in the *Summerland Review* (9 September 1921), had 'taken a great interest in the Home Theatre and its work'. To assist the cause, he refused to accept a royalty for this production. Again the press was generally appreciative and marvelled at the artistic simplicity of the setting and effects and the truthfulness of the acting. The *Penticton Herald* (21 September 1921), however, felt that the work on the whole was not as good as that in the first produc-

tion and complained that it was a major mistake to cast a girl as Pierrot in *The Maker of Dreams*; as for *The Trojan Women*, it was 'a trifle too heavy, both for the audience and the players ... it is a piece which requires the very highest art in its performance and this can hardly be expected from students.'

But by now the enterprise had caught the imagination and mood of the times, leading to international notice. *Theatre Arts Magazine* (January 1922) described the operation in some detail, believing that Aikins was one of the 'new type which has come into the experimental theatre,' called his work 'utopian' and concluded that his theatre was a place, indeed a 'shrine', where true Art would flourish. *Billboard* (11 March 1922) in an article headed 'Gem of a Little Theatre', told its American and British readers of a 'unique enterprise' to offer free training for talented Canadian actors who would tour Canadian plays.

There never was a tour, however, during this first season nor during the second in 1922. Judging from the reviews of the productions, the comments of those who knew and worked with him, and the fact that Aikins had only new, very unpractised performers, together with his free-wheeling manner of rehearsing, one cannot help but conclude that he had a long way to go before he could mount a successful tour. The element of costs, too, was always a problem for him. More than once, his family in Manitoba had to bail him out of difficulty. Betty Clough,¹² writing of Aikins, tells how he never opened his bills but instead threw them into an old top hat; when some money was available, he would select one at random and pay it.

By the summer of 1922, after an April production of *The God of Gods* at Hart House Theatre in Toronto, Aikins was working with students from Vancouver, Edmonton, and London, Ontario. Florence Levine, a dance instructor from the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York, was also at the Home Theatre instructing in movement. The first production of this season was as close as the group ever came to an authentic, original 'art' production. *Victory in Defeat* was subtitled in the program as a 'study in spiritual progress in the life of Christ'. Close to the purist spirit of Craig and Appia, it featured a series of eleven carefully lit black and white tableaux, each in silhouette behind a scrim, with titles such as 'The Adoration of the Child', 'On the Steps of the Temple', and 'The Betrayal'. Each was preceded by an appropriate reading from the Bible, and the actors did not move during the scene, while distant, meditative music was heard. This production, probably as much for its novelty as its artistic or entertainment qualities, obtained for Aikins his best reviews. Even the *Christian Science Monitor* (9 September 1922) took notice, publishing a photograph of one of the scenes, and found the production 'completely convincing, and one revealing, in its sincerity and simple beauty, the high ideal behind it.' The 'art' purity of the production, and indeed in the style of the Canadian Players, was shown in the players' names not being revealed - there are only blank spaces opposite the dramatis personae, since, again according to the *Monitor*, 'Owing to the nature of the play it was considered wise not to reveal the names of those taking part, and since none of them is working for commercial gain or for personal glory, it is of small matter. Their aim, with that of the director and owner of the theatre, Carroll Aikins, is to serve - to infuse new life into the theatre.'

Despite this high promise, however, there was only one more production by the Players. In August Synge's *Riders to the Sea* was staged along with Anatole France's *The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife*, a play that Aikins may have seen in Granville-Barker's important production for the New York Stage Society in 1915. A dance drama was performed between the plays, under Levine's direction, with music by Henrietta Michaelson, a pianist apparently recruited from New York. Although good work was done and national commentary grew, it was to be the final effort of the company; there seems not to have been a sudden momentous decision to halt the venture but rather a slow, and likely a pained realization that the project could not continue. It is ironic that in early 1923, as the

Home Theatre was effectively, if not actually finished, a number of magazine articles appeared, each glowing with the accomplishments and promise of the theatre, one of them (*National Life*, February 1923) concluding, 'With any kind of luck, Mr. Aikins should succeed. The field is wide open. There are no competitors.'

The main reason for the termination was that the prices fell drastically in the apple market in the fall of 1922, and the Aikins' business affairs, and therefore their continued subsidy of the theatre, were badly threatened as debts mounted. Only one tantalizing, untitled, and undated newspaper clipping in Aikins' scrapbook hints of any desperate attempts to salvage the operation:

The friends of Mr. and Mrs. Carroll Aikins, in appreciation of their great service to the artistic life of Canada, have organized the Canadian Players' friendly Society.

The first and immediate object of the society is to secure to Mr. and Mrs. Aikins the continued use of the Home Theatre stage lighting equipment which has passed from their possession. This equipment has been offered to the directors for a reasonable sum which they hope to obtain by contributions from all who believe with them that the closing of the Home Theatre would be a serious loss to the Canadian people.

A search of the local newspapers of the years following 1922 reveals no resident or touring shows playing at the Home Theatre. In time it seems to have become a storage and recreation area; his daughter and neighbors recall playing games such as badminton inside. No one interviewed can recollect with exactness the fate of the structure. It was dismantled, probably during World War II, and its parts were used in the construction of the Aikins' estate house, which stands today near the lakeside. The original foundation of the theatre remains, covered with a low pitched roof, and is still used (although no longer owned by the Aikins) as a fruit storage shed.

In sum, the accomplishment of Aikins in his Home Theatre was that, besides achieving a number of apparent 'firsts' in Canadian theatre, he for a brief while realized the dream of a Canadian art theatre. He understood, even as they were barely taking root in the United States, the ideals of the modern European theatre, and, as poet, dreamer and enthusiast, he possessed the personal qualities needed to implement principles of the art theatre in the construction and operation of the Home Theatre. Clearly, in his efforts to establish the Home Theatre and the Canadian Players, his goals were admirable: to stage plays from the modern world repertory and Canadian plays in pure 'art' productions free of commercial or even normal amateur methods; to bring these to Canadians at Naramata and other towns large and small by means of touring; and to form a kind of international touring circuit of such plays with Maurice Browne in Seattle.

It is Aikins' credit that he completed his theatre and was in production only a season or two behind Hart House Theatre in Toronto, that he opened his first production five months before the much larger Vancouver Little Theatre Association commenced operation, and that he accomplished this in rural British Columbia, distant from sources of assistance, artistic or otherwise, inspiration, example, or even, as was the case with many urban little theatres, endowment. He managed to bring creditable productions of Synge, Gilbert Murray's Euripides, and even special staging events like his pure light and sound work, *Victory in Defeat*, to residents of the Okanagan, whose other theatrical options at the time were the occasional minor English actor on tour - sometimes a tatty affair: one, a Lawrence D'orsay, being described as 'dreary' by the *Herald* (19 October 1921) - annual visits by the UBC Players Club, amateur dramatic evenings, the Dominion Chautauquas, and, of course, the movies. He did for a while establish an ongoing school for the training of Canadian actors in the newer ideals of the theatre, and several of them returned for a second summer. At least one, Dorothy Adams, went on to a successful professional acting career in California, while another, Aileen Beaufort, went

on to spread the inspired message of the Home Theatre in several articles.¹³ One report ¹⁴ says he trained actors from six provinces.

But, like many British Columbia pioneering pipe dreams, whether in gold mines or in the theatre, the Home Theatre was caught in the boom-or-bust marketplace and fell victim to a fruit market that only one year after giddy success had turned disastrous. The fact that Aikins was a far better dreamer and poet than a farmer only expedited the end of his financial and physical commitment to this idealist theatre. Thus he never formed his permanent company of actors, nor did he ever stage a Canadian play, or even inspire one person to continue his work locally or elsewhere. It was, indeed, a brief and promising two-year existence, more important for what was believed and what was attempted rather than for what was done. Some of the reasons for its demise were built into the little theatre movement itself: the rarified, often impractical principles (the tiny theatres that were favored allowed few of the masses to participate, much less be audience); the disdain of the box office; the uncertainty about whether to emphasize participation or production; and the frequent reliance on generous, private subsidy. The Home Theatre, like the Neighborhood Playhouse and many other little theatres of the post-World War I era, was only a brief, if inspiring moment in the genesis of modern North American theatre, and, for Canada, is another good example of the wonderful 'mixed grill' that, according to Robertson Davies,¹⁵ characterizes so much of our theatre history.

Carroll Beichman, 84

LESLIE HOWARD

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Horsewoman, intellectual, teacher, grape grower. Born Oct. 11, 1928, in Naramata, B.C., died Jan. 8, 2013, in Palm Springs, Calif., in an accident, aged 84.

An article in a California newspaper laid out the shocking facts, yet did not come close to telling the story: 84-year-old Harriett Beichman of Naramata, B.C., had been killed by a van while crossing a busy, darkly lit street in Palm Springs.

The image conjured up was that of an elderly woman having sadly lost the ability to manoeuvre through downtown traffic becoming the victim of a tragic accident. The only truth was the tragic accident.

To begin with: the name. Not seeing herself as a Harriett, she had chosen her own name, calling herself Carroll Aikins after her father.

On the day Carroll died, she was preparing to meet an old friend, Pulitzer-prize-winning author Herman Wouk, and had just returned from a long horseback ride in the desert. That wasn't unusual for her: She loved horses and had spent much of her childhood riding the sun-beaten trails of the Okanagan Valley.

At 21, itching for adventure, she went to New York and found plenty. Getting a job at the British Information Service, she soon met and married Arnold Beichman, a journalist and academic 15 years her senior.

They came from disparate backgrounds, he an American and the son of Ukrainian Jewish immigrants, she a daughter of the Canadian establishment.

She loved telling the story of her two great-great-grandfathers, both members of Sir John A. Macdonald's cabinet. Of one, Macdonald reportedly said: "I don't trust him, he drinks too much." Of the other: "I don't trust him, he doesn't drink at all."

Carroll and Arnold set up an apartment off Central Park and held many fabulous parties where the intelligentsia regularly gathered. It was not long before their two sons, Charles and John, arrived.

Always looking for ways to simplify problems, Carroll dealt with the 1962 bus strike by ferrying Charles around town on the back of her scooter. A photo was captured by a newsman and it went global. A cartoonist for the New Yorker sketched Carroll in Bloomingdale, dressed smartly, and gently resting her boot on the back of her prone, tantrum-throwing two-year-old to prevent him from bolting.

After the years she spent teaching at the acclaimed Brearley School and Milton Academy, she and Arnold returned to Carroll's family home in later life. There, they were saddened by the death of Arnold's son from his first marriage and struggled to find a way to deal with the loss. They settled on the idea of turning their property into the family "meeting pool," a concept borrowed from a favourite children's novel.

They invited relatives, neighbours and many friends to join them each summer, and

everyone came. From England, Japan and all over North America, they gathered for swimming, bonfires, water skiing, fruit picking, horse riding and of course, wine drinking.

To help pay for it all, Carroll worked the property herself. She repaired irrigation and endlessly moved sprinklers, pruned fruit trees, raised bees and grew grapes.

If you are lucky enough to get your hands on a bottle of Kettle Valley Syrah from the Beichman Vineyard, raise a glass to Carroll, a most remarkable woman who is dearly missed by her large extended family.

Hart House Theatre

Although Carroll Aikins (1888-1967) was the fourth artistic director of Hart House Theatre, he was the first one to be Canadian born. Initially born in Stanstead, Quebec, his family moved to Winnipeg when he was merely a boy. The Aikins family had a long history of wealth and prestige: for instance, Carroll's maternal grandfather, the Honourable C. C. Colby, was Stanstead's Member of Parliament (1867 to 1891), and the president of the Privy Council under Sir John A. Macdonald, while his paternal grandfather, Sir James Cox Aikins, was a senate appointee and served under Sir Macdonald as the Cabinet secretary of state (1869-1873, 1878-1880) before he became the lieutenant-governor of Manitoba (1882-1888). Even Carroll's father, John Somerset Aikins, served in the Manitoba House of Assembly for a single term between 1879 and 1883. Carroll, however, pursued a career distinct from politics once he dropped out of McGill University after only one year, and spent some time travelling Europe until his father convinced him to permanently settle in Naramata, British Columbia in 1908.¹

The twelve years Carroll spent as a fruit farmer in British Columbia allowed him to observe the burgeoning ideals of the "Little Theatre" movement in the United States and Canada from a comforting distance. Being inspired by this zeitgeist and his encounters with the works of theorists Adolph Appia and Edward Gordon Craig, Aikins quickly wrote at least four plays—*The Destroyers* (1915), *The Fullness of Life* (1917), *Real Estate* (1918), and *The God of Gods* (1918)—which attempted to reconcile the social concerns of modern drama with the kitsch of melodrama. *The God of Gods* has the distinction of being one of the first Canadian plays to receive production abroad—specifically at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in November 1919 and April 1920—yet Hart House Theatre did not consider him for his talent as a playwright or a poet, but as a theatre manager.² Curiously, the only theatre Carroll managed was an unexpected failure.

Carroll founded the Home Theatre in Okanagan Valley, BC, a seemingly natural offshoot of his fruit farm. Indeed, the theatre itself was located on the second storey of a building which on the first floor, was fruit packing and storage room. Carroll announced, of course, that the theatre was not made for profit; it only sat about 100 people meaning its production costs were met by the profits he made from fruit farming.³

Like others before him, Carroll wanted his "Little Theatre" to be an experimental workshop for dramatists in his community and in Canada. As Carroll Aikins proclaimed:

"We feel that we have reached that point in our history where we may look for a Canadian literature to record Canadian achievement; and it is in that faith that we have built this theatre for the giving of Canadian plays by Canadian actors. We hope that it will be used by the young actor as a training-ground for his abilities, and by the young poet as a testing-ground for his work; and we have great pleasure in offering it to them, for the service of beauty and for a true expression of the Canadian spirit."⁴

Prime Minister Arthur Meighan officially opened the Home Theatre on November 3, 1920, calling it one of Canada's national theatres. Yet when the fruit market crashed, suddenly Carroll's dream was over, and the Home Theatre closed its doors in August 1922.⁵

Carroll's nationalist pandering caught the eye of Hart House's Board of Syndics, however. When Carroll arrived as a "guest" artistic director at Hart House Theatre in the 1927 season, he vowed to "fulfill the function that it [the theatre] was originally intended to perform."⁶ For Carroll, this meant getting students more involved in the productions of Hart House Theatre Hart House Theatre, even if that meant that students would stumble during their performances, as what happened during the opening night of Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird*.⁷ Carroll ended up staying involved in Hart House Theatre until 1929, where he plays were continually praised for his use of stagecraft and spectacle—a difficult challenge considering the architectural limitations of Hart House Theatre. After two seasons, Carroll Aikins failed to renew his contract with Hart House Theatre, and he never held a position in the theatre again.⁸

March 18, 2015

A JOURNEY TO NARAMATA: UNCOVERING THE WORK OF CARROLL AIKINS AND CANADA'S "FIRST" NATIONAL THEATRE

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"We feel that we have reached that point in our history where we may look for a Canadian literature to record Canadian achievement; and it is in that faith that we have built this theatre for the giving of Canadian plays by Canadian actors. We hope that it will be used by the young actor as a training-ground for his abilities, and by the young poet as a testing-ground for his work; and we have great pleasure in offering it to them, for the service of beauty and for a true expression of the Canadian spirit."⁴

Prime Minister Arthur Meighan officially opened the Home Theatre on November 3, 1920, calling it one of Canada's national theatres. Yet when the fruit market crashed, suddenly Carroll's dream was over, and the Home Theatre closed its doors in August 1922.⁵

Carroll's nationalist pandering caught the eye of Hart House's Board of Syndics, however. When Carroll arrived as a "guest" artistic director at Hart House Theatre in the 1927 season, he vowed to "fulfill the function that it [the theatre] was originally intended to perform."⁶ For Carroll, this meant getting students more involved in the productions of Hart House Theatre Hart House Theatre, even if that meant that students would stumble during their performances, as what happened during the opening night of Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird*.⁷ Carroll ended up staying involved in Hart House Theatre until 1929, where he plays were continually praised for his use of stagecraft and spectacle—a difficult challenge considering the architectural limitations of Hart House Theatre. After two seasons, Carroll Aikins failed to renew his contract with Hart House Theatre, and he never held a position in the theatre again.⁸

Kailin Wright



At left are the remains of the little theatre on the Aikins property. At right is the author with Naramata Museum volunteers.





Naramata Heritage Museum



Naramata Heritage Museum



Naramata Heritage Museum

First to have a car in Naramata, Carroll Aikins went on to own several vehicles seen in these photos.



Carroll Aikins and Family





Naramata Heritage Museum

The elegant ranchhouse, Rekadome, was built in the 1940s.