Interview with Dr. Frederick G. Walsh

Interviewed by Margaret Reed for the Heritage Education Commission

Interviewed on February 23, 1988

Frederick G. Walsh - FW

Margaret Reed - MR

MR: My name is Margaret Reed, and I will be interviewing Dr. Frederick G. Walsh, Professor Emeritus from North Dakota State University (NDSU) and Director of the Little Country Theatre from 1952 until 1978, when he retired.

Would you like to tell us a little bit first, Dr. Walsh, about your background and where you were born, your education, something of your past experiences, and then how you happened to come to North Dakota State University?

FW: Well, first of all, I was born in New Bedford, Massachusetts, the old whaling city, about which Herman Melville wrote Moby Dick, considered one of the cities with the loveliest women in the world. Of course, he neglected to mention that the sailors had been at sea four years when they came back to port [laughter].

After graduating from high school there, I went to North Carolina State College in Raleigh, North Carolina, a land grant college, partially because of my total inadequacy as a high school student and partially because of the fact that my parents did not have funds to send me through a much more expensive school; and a land grant school, certainly in the Depression days, was Open Sesame to [unclear] to all poor young lads seeking to go on.

And then, after a year of teaching high school, which I learned very quickly was not my cup of tea, I then went back to graduate school intending to work in the field of psychology. Today I wonder why. But I managed to get a Master's degree in psychology, but all the time my interest was in theater and had been avocationally; and I realized I was spending so much time at that that I decided I would find some way to make it my vocation. During that time I'd been doing some writing; and a playwright, Ann Preston Bridges, who had written "Coquette," in which Helen Hayes made her first starring appearance, was a friend of mine and she'd seen some of the writing I was doing. She recommended me to Paul Green and Fred Kotch [spellings] at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill and, lo and behold, very shortly I was off on a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship in playwriting. And after two years there I managed to get a Master's degree in dramatic art, minor in comparative [unclear] literature and then went off to teach that fall at the University of Ohio. That, unfortunately, was a 1-year appointment while a man was on leave of absence; and so the next year I found myself on the road as an actor in one of Paul Green's plays, "House of Connelly," the tour of which came to an abrupt end on December 7, 1941 because the Office of Defense and Transportation closed down all traveling shows with the unsettled war.

The consequence was, then, I found myself briefly at the Baltimore Museum of Art as a designer; but very shortly in service through the United States Navy and stayed there until the conclusion of the war. And being released from naval service, I went to Bowling Green State University in Ohio, where I stayed for essentially five years and then went on to do the work leading to the Ph.D., which I got in 1952, which is when I came to North Dakota.

MR: Now that Ph.D. was from Western Reserve?

FW: The Ph.D. was from Western Reserve. It was a combination of creative and traditional Ph.D. work in theater. At Western Reserve what was required was to first of all get a Master of Fine Arts degree before being permitted to go on to the Ph.D. So consequently, I acquired that third Master's degree and was admitted into the program; and only two were admitted into the Ph.D. program that year and one of them was a former student of mine, which was a compliment to either one or the other or both of us. One of the requirements was that one be able to find an outlet to direct plays--four productions, that those productions had to be in one of three theaters--either Eldred Hall at the University, the Cleveland Playhouse, or Caramel [unclear]. Now all three of these theaters depended upon their box office for their livelihood and consequently the shows had to be of such a caliber as to sustain those theaters and consequently trying to get in as a director was not always an easy avenue for prospective Ph.D. candidates. However, in my particular case, it so happened a number of people in all these theaters knew me from various years of work in the neighborhood, so I found myself being offered a job directing at Caramel House, so not only was I getting the four plays down as part of the Ph.D. work but I was earning a living at the same time.

MR: That is a nice combination.

FW: And when the work concluded there, I came here to NDSU.

MR: How in the world did you hear of NDSU?

FW: Well, it so happened that I had, while directing at Caramel House, which incidentally was a Negro theater in the heart of the Negro ghetto of Cleveland, one day a man walked into the theater and stopped in during the rehearsal and I introduced myself to him and when he indicated who he was, I invited him to hang around; and it turned out it was a man by the name of Robert Gard [spelling] from the Wisconsin Idea Theater at the University of Wisconsin. Now this was the only time in my life that I met him, saw him, or talked to him; and this was somewhere in January or February of 1952. In the meantime I had been in contact with Pasadena Playhouse and had just about come to a decision to go there, to the Pasadena Playhouse, as the Dean of the School of Theater there when, lo and behold, one day I received a wire from NDSU saying that Dr. Robert Gard had recommended me for this position here and they wondered if I was interested. So I came out for the interview and on the very day--as a matter of fact, while I was sitting in Dean [unclear] office, I received a definite offer of employment from Pasadena Playhouse and that same day received the offer of employment to come to NDSU which was known as NDAC at that time and I made the decision to stay here.

MR: How does it happen you decided to come here and not go to Pasadena?

FW: Well, that's a matter of personal philosophy, I guess. How does one measure circumstances in terms of one's own philosophy and what does one find that suits him and consequently I had grown up in the tradition of the community theater in Raleigh during my undergraduate days. I worked with Fred Kotch who was a disciple of the folk play programs--the folk play movement; I had been a devoted student of Paul Green who was an exponent of the second literature tradition. He wrote from the forces which flowed throughout the Southern tradition. It was the beginning of the outdoor dramas in the United States and consequently this whole background of experience had prepared me, really, for the kind of opportunity I saw here plus the fact that at Pasadena Playhouse I would have been involved in administration whereas here I saw the opportunity to write, to direct, to teach, to be active in a creative program. And so, essentially, it was no great difficulty to make the decision to come here. And as Raymond Massey was in my home on Twelfth Street in Fargo one night in 1954-55 and we got talking about my decision to come here; and he said, jokingly, "You were smart. You chose the snow instead of the schmo."

MR: So you stayed all the way through until you retired at NDSU.

FW: Yes.

MR: You must have been really pleased with what you found here.

FW: Well, indeed I was. I found North Dakota State University a perfect place to work. At no time was ever I told, "You have to do this or you can't do that." In other words, they said to me, "You're the head of the department; you're the director of the theater; where are you going to take it?" And I had the opportunity, really, to do a number of things because I had followed H. E. Arvold who was quite a figure; but I came in at the end of his tenure and, unfortunately, from his point of view, he was required to retire because a state law said that upon reaching the age of 70, you had to go; and I had known about H. E. Arvold. I'd read his book on the Little Country Theatre. He and a few others were the dynamic figures of academic theater prior to 1930, let's say when academic theater really didn't amount to too much. It did in a few places--University of North Carolina, Yale, Harvard '47 Workshop, Carnegie Tech with [?] Stevens; you know you began running out of them. Now every college in the country has its own theater department. So I found here an opportunity to take a program which essentially had been related to a department of speech and a program which was being offered, not from the point of view of preparing people necessarily for the professional world with which philosophy I happen to agree with, but one which was related to the business of enjoying oneself avocationally. Consequently, since I agreed in part with the program and disagreed in part with the program and because of the fact that there were a number of changes that just had to be made because if one looked at the catalog one saw that from 1925, essentially, to 1952, there had been no significant changes in the academic program of the department. So I had a wonderful opportunity to bring a program up to date with what was being done currently throughout the nation. Secondly I found the opportunity to direct about 25 plays in the time that I was there; and so many of my friends from graduate school whom I have contacted who went

off in other directions, have said they longed for the opportunity to direct plays and they hadn't had them, you see. Those who went to try [unclear] in New York maybe worked in one play in ten years and that was it. Here I was doing plays, which is what I wanted to do, once or twice or sometimes three times in a year. I was able to write plays, had one, "Fair West" [unclear] which ran 150 performances, "Old Four Eyes" 300 performances, "Louis Riel," "Bartholomew Bones," and one-act plays. It was a wonderful opportunity for me. I was able to teach classes and fortunately I was able to make the change which separated the program of theater from the program of speech. So often, speech and theater people are put in the same bailiwick and expected to be able to do both and the consequence is sometimes you get terrible work in theater or terrible work in speech. So I was able to get the program changed so that only speech personnel, those with Masters or Ph.D.'s in speech, taught speech; and only those with Masters, Master of Fine Arts, or Ph.D.'s in theater, taught theater. So administratively it was a delightful thing to do; and, of course, I was able to teach a course in playwriting and one of my former students, Rick [last name unclear], has had a number of plays published in the last few years; so it was, yes, I found here everything that I wanted.

MR: I take it you found students, too, with whom you really enjoyed working. Have some of those students gone on into other professional activities, Dr. Walsh?

FW: Well, yes, they have gone off. I was afraid you were going to ask me, "Had they been successful?" and then I was going to ask you how you defined success and in what area. You see, here we get into a matter of philosophy. One has to ask the question, "What is the role of a theater in an academic institution?" Now I happen to believe--I could be wrong--but I happen to believe that if one sets up a program in a university designed deliberately, intentionally to prepare people for the professional, commercial theater, one is engaging in a criminal act. Now, that is my personal opinion. Now, why do I say this? In the first place, all one has to do is be around theater a brief time to realize that employment in the theater comes about as a result of (a) an inordinate amount of talent, which is God-given or (b) the whim and fancy of a particular director or promoter, producer, or the fad of the moment. One can think about Twiggy. She happened to be a fad, so all thin girls were being considered for roles. And I remember talent scouts coming to me years ago when I was in Ohio and their saying, "Well, now, we're looking for this particular kind of girl." And one year it would be one thing and another.

And I had one student--name I will not mention here; I don't want to be guilty of name dropping--who went on and won an Academy Award. I had her in class--had her in acting class, had her in a few other classes; but you know I had not a thing to do with her being beautiful. I had not a thing to do with the fact that her parents were rich so she could go to New York and not have to work in Macy's. I had not a thing to do with the fact that she could be in an elevator at the right time and someone said to her, "Are you an actress?" And she said, "Yes, I'm hoping to be." And he said, "Well, I'm an agent. Please come to see me in my office." And from there on, she went on to stardom and winning an Academy Award.

In other words, if one sets up a department directed to that goal, then one is saying there are opportunities here and we're going to prepare you; and I don't think any of us in the theater can do that, unlike preparing them in engineering or chemistry or some of the other professions where there are pretty standard criteria for evaluating. In the theater because the form of the drama changes, because the mood of audiences changes, the attitudes--everything is fluid; and too often the consequences, in a program directed that way, we are saying to the student, "Broadway is waiting for you; now you'd better hurry up and get there." And we send them down Heartbreak Avenue. Well, now, that's the reason why I oppose.

What should a department be, according to my philosophy? I always hoped to do one thing--through the medium of instruction in the theater, to stretch the creative imaginations of my students realizing that if I get them exercising those creative imaginations that they will go out into a world where that activity will lead them into a success; and it might be in the theater, but it could just as well be in a number of other areas, even the most wonderful area of being creatively active, being a mother and a homemaker, as many of the girls have been. As it so happens, I'm thinking right now of one young man who was with a tent show just ten years ago who right now is Vice-President of one of the big auto rental car companies; and he heads their whole program of advertising to stimulate your rental of one of their cars--the exercise of the creative imagination. We have former students who now have Ph.D.'s and I hope are duplicating, in part, the kind of program that I have. And others go into--one has established a business in Kansas City supplying the secretarial work to lawyers. We have a number of students who have gone into the law. Amazing--I had several students come to me as graduate students out of the church who went into the theater and reciprocally, I've had a number of my former students enter the church.

MR: I can see the relationship.

FW: Yes, my whole effort was designed to make the theater, not a means of earning a living, but a means of a way of living a life. And so that philosophy guided much of what I chose to do.

MR: So, you could say, very honestly, "I've had a number of students who have been successful."

FW: Well, you know, frequently people will define that simply in terms of the theater; and I'll say, "Yes, I had one win an Academy Award." I think that's a phenomenal record, to have one win an Academy Award out of a relatively limited number of students, I think, is fantastic. But, again, I don't take a great deal of credit for it. I just happened to be involved in it. I've had one student, Kurt Knutson [spelling], locally, who was nominated for a Tony. One other former student from North Dakota, Debbie Vick [spelling], is presently in a show in New York and was in one a couple of years ago which was considered one of the top ten best shows of the year. One of our former students performed at the Guthrie, and Tennessee Williams said, following her performance as Amanda in "Glass Menagerie," he said, "This is the finest Amanda I've ever seen in my show." So, yes, we've had them

successful in that; but I look with as much pride on the success of those who are happy out there doing what they are doing, regardless of what the work is.

MR: Your work at NDSU, then, was really all encompassing; but I think I heard you mention at another time, Dr. Walsh, that you were very much interested in outdoor drama and that you did some work at Medora.

FW: Yes, I got interested in outdoor drama as a result of working with Paul Green who won a Pulitzer Prize in 1927 for "In Abraham's Bosom" and then he went on to write in 1937 a play called, "The Lost Colony," which was about the establishment of Sir Walter Raleigh's colony on Roanoke Island in 1587. In that colony, the first white child, Virginia Dare, was born. Well, that play became such a success and I worked in it in 1938 and was fascinated by it, not only by the script--not only by the story--but by the atmosphere of a play being done out of doors. I began to understand something of the atmosphere of the Greek dramas and their open-air amphitheaters and there is a certain majesty and magnitude about that that got to me. And so I became fascinated by the subject. As a matter of fact, I wrote my doctoral dissertation on outdoor commemorative drama--1900-1950, which in effect traced the development from the pageants of boredom of years and years and years ago up to this somewhat refined outdoor commemorative activity known as the outdoor drama.

And, so, as I drove through North Dakota time and time again seeing certain historical places and certain aspects of the terrain, I kept wondering, "Is there someplace that I can do an outdoor drama?" And one evening, some people came up to me from Abercrombie and they wondered if I could do something about Ft. Abercrombie and the story there. I said, "I know only a little about it." But we began talking and they said, "Well, how much money would it take?" And I said, "Somewhere between fifty and two hundred thousand dollars." They got their hats and coats and decided to leave. Frankly, I don't blame them. But curiously, the next year, I was reading in the paper that the Theodore Roosevelt Badland

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FW: I learned that the Board of Directors of the Theodore Roosevelt Park and Badlands Association wanted to do a pageant commemorating the 75th anniversary of the birth of the Theodore Roosevelt. Well, this caught my interest immediately. I went down to see the President of the University, Dr. Coates [unclear], and asked him if he knew anyone associated with that Board. And he said, "Well, it so happens tomorrow morning a young lady is coming in here to see me about possibly giving an honorary doctorate to the Duke de [?] Rosa, the son of the Marquis de Mores; and so why don't you be here 10 o'clock tomorrow morning to meet and talk with her." And so I did meet her; she was fascinated by what I had to say and immediately called the President of their Association and he arranged that that following weekend we would have a meeting with the Board and I would talk with them in terms of my ideas. When I got there, I asked them at the very outset, "How long do you want the pageant about Theodore Roosevelt to run and how much money do you want to spend?" "Well," they said, "we want it to run two days--a Saturday

and Sunday of the weekend of the Fourth of July--and we will spend $25,000." So I said, "How would you like to spend $50,000 and have something that would run 20 years?" Well, they bought the idea and immediately I arranged for Tom Patterson to start writing the play and I'll never forget--on February 22, 1958 Hollis Dieks and Jim Barnhart, Orville Berta [spelling all], who was the President of the Board, and I went out and acting like Brigham Young, I found the spot where I thought the amphitheater would probably be placed; and they said, "This is the place." And we built it with volunteer labor--a lot of young boys from Home on the Range at Sentinel Butte--a 2,000 seat auditorium which was known at that time as the Burning Hills Amphitheater. People used to sit in that amphitheater and say to me, "You know, the scenery is so lovely it is worth the price of admission just to sit here."

MR: And you designed that whole theater.

FW: And I designed the amphitheater, yes. As a matter of fact, at one point I said to Hollis Dieks, who was going to supervise the construction, I said, "You see this bush; leave this bush here and we will use that to mark the beginning of the line from here to that particular point," and I pointed to an outcrop of shale and I said, "That's going to be the center line. Now we'll put the stage about here across that center line." And that was the way we did it. It was all done by the seat of our pants, you know. Well, anyway, the amphitheater was constructed and I'll never forget the first night that we opened on June 29; we were within 5 minutes of the close of the play when suddenly the rains came. Well, fortunately, we were able to go on and conclude. The Governor of the State, John Davis, came up to me and said, "What can we do for you?" and I said, "Well, how about some advertising?" And before long, before long, from the prison there had been made--in the prison had been made all these road signs--"A hundred miles to Medora," "Two hundred miles to Medora," "Three hundred miles," "Four"--they were put up all over the state. Well, the show ran for 6 years.

MR: 1958--

FW: 1958 through 1963. I stayed with it the first three years, and then a former student of mine, Byron Gackold [spelling] took over and directed it for the next three years. The first year, believe it or not, we gave 33 performances, 32 of which were sold out. Two thousand seats. And you realize where this is--40 miles from a town of 2,000. A hundred and forty miles from a town of 20,000; three hundred and forty miles from a town of, at that time, 45,000. And yet, night after night, it was fascinating to watch that long string of cars leaving after the performance, seeing that string of red taillights disappearing off into the Badlands, you see. The following year we did a show called "Trail West," which was about General Custer and the 7th United States Cavalry and that we located in Mandan near Ft. Lincoln.

MR: You had two shows running at the same time then.

FW: We had two shows running concurrently for a couple of years, there. Tom Patterson wrote the original script of "Old Four Eyes," but Tom was leaving for Japan sometime in

May of 1958 and I had to open the show on June 29 and so he said, "Here's the script," and I proceeded to start casting the show and having to rewrite the script. I did all the rewriting for the next three years while I was with the show and this is not uncharacteristic; any director finds himself in a situation of having to make modifications. Of course, with a new script you have to make a great many. And then Bo Chichester [spelling], who was on my staff at NDSU, and I wrote "Trail West." "Old Four Eyes" I consider kind of the zenith of the career and also the nadir because it both was a fascination and a joy and an accomplishment of something I'd long dreamed of. It also turned out to be a bitter kind of experience because, well I won't go into the details, but I found myself wanting to leave the show and get away from it; and I'm a little disappointed that Medora has been changed from the magnificent cow town, the one remaining honest-to-goodness cattle town, into a honky-tonk tourist trap; but that's history; that's the way things happen.

MR: Did you say once that you had done your dissertation on this kind of theater?

FW: Yes, as a matter of fact, I got fascinated by outdoor drama as a result of working with Paul Green and his production, "The Lost Colony." "The Lost Colony" was produced down there on Roanoke Island off the shores of North Carolina and was about the first colony to be established--well, I guess not the first colony; Jamestown was the first colony--but this was the Sir Walter Raleigh colony where the first white child born in America was born, Virginia Dare. The colony existed for two or three years and suddenly disappeared in smoke. No one knows to this day what actually happened to it. Well, as a result of working in that show, I caught some of the excitement and the majesty of the outdoor drama--the cleanliness of the show. You know you can't do a dirty show outdoors. The outdoors denies the opportunity to do--; there is something uplifting about an outdoor drama. There's a majesty about them, and it takes a different kind of acting. There has to be a dignity and an authority to the acting that some other plays don't require. And so I was fascinated by the outdoor drama as a genre and so much so that I wrote my doctoral dissertation on the subject of the outdoor commemorative drama in the United States, 1900-1950, and what it essentially did was to cover from that beginning period of the pageants of boredom right on through to the work of Paul Green which had really come to fruition there in 1937-1938 and then the latter years of the 1940s.

MR: "Old Four Eyes" and the one that you did up at Mandan--

FW: "Trail West"

MR: "Trail West"--are they reposing in your files, or are they--?

FW: Yes, they're now also rans. They are something that are memorabilia because the thing about an outdoor drama is that essentially it is written about a specific person or event or circumstances which took place at a particular locale; and consequently there is an association of locale. And the play is written in many forms, many ways, to take advantage of the land--of the atmosphere--in which the theater is built. For example, at Medora, here we built the amphitheater on the side of this butte and to the left was an outcropping of rock maybe 50 feet above our stage level. So I began the show by putting a balladeer up

there and he sings the opening ballad and all the introductory moments and ballad phrases from up there. There was no tree originally up on top of the butte, but we went down to the river bottom and got an old tree, brought it up, and planted it up on the hill; and some scenes of the show had us showing riders riding over this hill and one scene specifically showed us hanging a man from the limb of the tree. You see, these are things that are related to--things about "Old Four Eyes" that are related to Medora and it told a story of Medora and it told a story of Medora in Medora. And the production took advantage of the terrain in such a way as to make the audience feel, my goodness, that they were right there. They recognized that this was not artificial scenery. This is life. This is the reality. And so there is that kind of fascination with that kind of production.

MR: But you can't transplant it to--.

FW: And consequently it can't be transplanted. Every once in awhile someone asks me if it would be possible to do "Old Four Eyes" here, and I said, "Oh, we could do it but it wouldn't be the same show."

MR: "Old Four Eyes" is named for Teddy Roosevelt.

FW: Teddy Roosevelt because he wore--the cowboys all called him "Old Four Eyes" because he wore glasses.

MR: Well, that's very interesting.

I also know you had something to do with Askinase Hall, Dr. Walsh. Can you tell us a little about that?

FW: Yes, I had wanted a new theater from the time--in fact, from the very first interview. I asked people, the President specifically, "What chance is there of a new theater?" and he said, "Well, possibly a good one. At the moment I would say you are fourth on the list." Ten years later I was no longer on the list, partly I suppose because the presidency had changed, which always makes a change in things, as I'm sure you're well aware. But we had, as a theater for NDSU, a facility which was on the second floor of Old Main; and I suspect you could go to a hundred different, or two hundred, maybe three hundred colleges in this country of ours and find a twin brother of this kind of theater--some old assembly hall on the second floor of one of the older buildings on the campus and that has been made into the theater. The Theater Department struggles throughout its existence there. Our stage actually was a 17 foot 6 inch proscenium arch with 20 feet of depth (actually I think 15 feet--it's been so long ago now). It was very shallow--I know, specifically, 3 feet of space in the wings. Very restrictive amount of space. I remember doing a play one time called "The Days Between" and we had to have four rooms of this household on the stage at the same time--a living room, a kitchen, and two bedrooms. The sort of circumstance you find in Eugene O'Neill's play, "Desire Under the Elms," where you see many rooms of the house at the same time. Do you know those four rooms took up less space than I had in my own living room at home because of the nature of the stage?

So ultimately the time when I met Mr. Askinase and then the course of conversation indicated I wanted to get a new theater, and he at one point then said, "Well, here's $50,000; let me see what you can do." Well, with that as the beginning point, I went to the Dean and he said, "Well, take the summer off and sit at a drawing table and draft the drawings" because he knew that in my undergraduate work I'd been involved in the study of architecture. And so I spent that whole summer designing what ultimately became Askinase Hall and I say "ultimately became" because obviously my plans could not be used for construction purposes; those have to be done by a registered architect. And so my plans were turned over to a registered architect in town, Johnson & Lightowler, and I must say they were very good to me. They made very few changes in the basic plan; a lot of details changed, but not the basic plan of the size of the auditorium, size of stage, and the relationships to each other, and all of that. And then, of course, I got involved in the money-raising business because Mr. Askinase had said, "Well, here's 50; what are going to do with it?" And, fortunately, a number of good friends in town formed a committee headed by Fred Scheel, who said to me, "You call Mr. Askinase back and say to him that we are ready to raise $100,000 if he will match it dollar for dollar." And his immediate answer was, "Tell him to get back to work." So within a short time, we had, through the generosity of people in the city of Fargo, we had $250,000, and ultimately between that beginning point which was 1965, when all of this really started, through to 1973, when we put on an addition to the building, I had raised essentially $850,000 which was the cost of the two elements, of which only $62,000 was tax money from the State of North Dakota. And, so, yes, I was involved in those two ways.

When we got ready to move into Askinase Hall, people said, "Oh, aren't you going to be happy, moving into that wonderful place!" And I said, "Indeed we are; I'm going to love it." And they said, "Well, you won't miss the old place at all." I said, "Oh, no, I'm not saying that." I said, "One of the things--we are definitely going to miss something very much." And they said, "What could you possibly miss?" I said, "You know, that theater was so constrictive, so restrictive, that the only way in which you could make use of it successfully was to stretch your creative imaginations. To put a seagoing vessel on that 17-foot stage which was needed for "Mr. Roberts," to put a four-set show such as was needed for Casey's "The Power and the Stars," to put a four-room set such as for "The Days Between"--this required some real exercise of the imagination. Now, with all that space we will have in the new auditorium, there won't be that insistent demand, you see, that imperative to be so imaginative. It will still be fun being in there.

MR: So you really got the theater you designed, basically, and wanted.

Tell me about that addition that they have. I think it's got the name of Frederick G. Walsh on it, hasn't it?

FW: Well, that is going to happen sometime this spring, I understand, when they are going to name that addition to Askinase Hall--they're going to name that the Frederick G. Walsh Studio Theater. Now, that particular addition has its own private entrance, its own separate entrance, and its own separate lobby; and it has its theater area. Essentially, as a studio theater, it is what I think it should be--four walls surrounding uncluttered space--

unrestricted. And everything about it is to be shaped according to the needs of the particular play they are doing. The seating can be put in any arrangement that is desired; the staging can be placed in any particular fashion that the director desires. It's a case where the imagination of the director is uninhibited.

MR: That's really a very beautiful honor and very well deserved.

FW: It is indeed an honor, and as someone said, "I thought this only happened to people after they were dead." "Well, maybe," I said, "I'm reading my obituary early."

MR: Well, I would take it from that and from other things you have said, Dr. Walsh, that you really felt strong community support for the kind of work you were doing.

FW: There has been--the thing which is a common characteristic in North Dakota--a readiness to support things on the part of the people. It was one of the joys. Would you believe when I was first married, my wife and I did what so often young people try to do--we said, "Where shall we spend our lives?" Well, there are so many wonderful places in the world. We said, "Well, let's take the opposite view; where don't we want to live?" And the very first place we crossed off the list was North Dakota. And, lo and behold, I came here and found it was a magnificent place to live because of the people. Essentially it boils down to that. You know, climate--what you can say bad about North Dakota climate, you can say bad about Florida climate--it's just a difference of degrees and kind. And what you can say good about most places is what you say that is good about North Dakota. And it always boils down to the people, and the people of North Dakota were supportive and certainly at the University I couldn't have had a better job anywhere in this world than I had at North Dakota. I woke up in the morning singing, I went to work looking forward to being there, and there was not a day that I didn't want to go to work. That's not to say I didn't enjoy taking a vacation, but there was never a day I resented going to work. It was a wonderful way to work because the people gave support.

MR: That's a real accolade for the people here in this area.

Well, in retrospect, Dr. Walsh, how do you look back on these years, assessing them? Do you ever wish--? Well, I guess you really are answering that question in the way you have been talking about North Dakota. Do you ever wish it had been different--anything that you've done?

FW: Well, you know, I suppose I would be dishonest, I suppose I would be other than human, if I said, "Oh, no, I wouldn't have wanted it different" because I'm sure there are an awful lot of things I would want different; but let me put it this way--I don't regret a single thing that has transpired, you see. I'm very happy with what I've been able to do. I've been very happy with the kind of life I've been able to lead; and, yeah, I wish that I could have written a play that won the Pulitzer Prize. I wish that I could have done an awful lot of things. But the fact is that, you know, I've lived for 27 years with a bunch of wonderful young people and we were able to do a number of shows. I was able to take the group over to Europe at the request of the USO and performed 64 performances over

there. How much more does a man want out of life? I've had it. It was wonderful and I have no complaints.

MR: I want to thank you very much for letting us tape your story, Dr. Walsh. And I thank you very much, and I wish you all kinds of success.

FW: Well, thank you. It was my pleasure.

[End of Interview]