

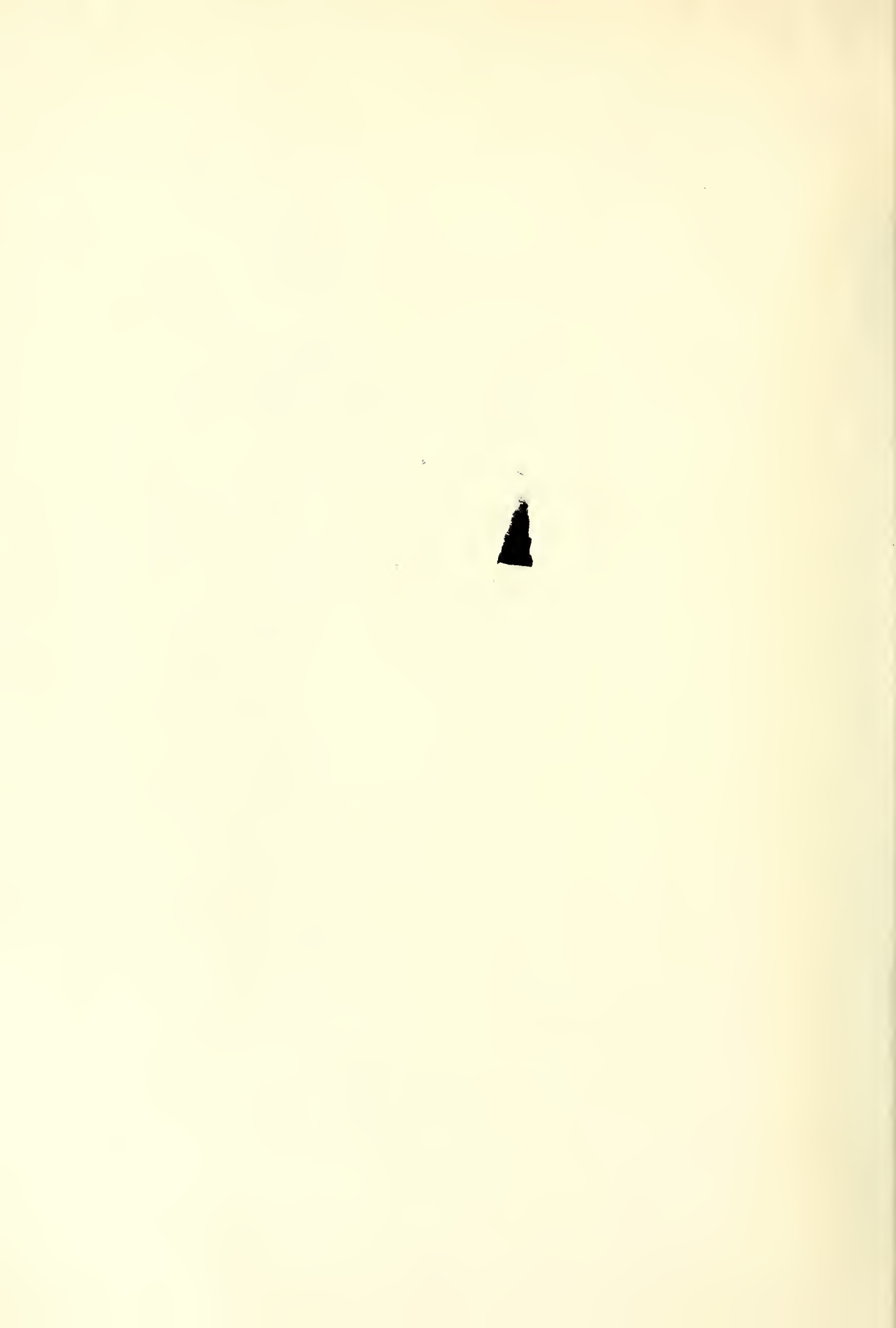
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1984

'ECHOES IN AMERICA'
TOUR REPORT

**Major Road
Theatre Company**

29, Queens Road Bradford BD8 7BS
Tel. 0274 480251

APRIL 1984



AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The concept behind the tour was to trace the progression of the textile industry from its origins in Yorkshire through the textile regions of New England and on to the south using 'Echoes From The Valley', an oral history show based on the recollections of forty retired textile workers in the Aire valley, as the centre piece. The 'Echoes in America' programme was designed to include performances, workshops, discussions and introductory lectures and an exhibition of photographs.

PERFORMANCES

Major Road presented the show in a wide variety of situations through the four States of the tour and in New York. The audiences included oral historians and textile communities and sometimes just people.

WORKSHOPS

To complement the performances Graham Devlin, Marise Rose and Garry Lyons worked with Tom Hearn of the Iron Clad Agreement, the American producing company, to run a series of workshops/discussions based on the techniques and methods used in creating the show in England. These ranged from two hours to two days in length with participants as varied as a university M.F.A. acting class, academic oral historians, senior citizens and high school drama classes.

LECTURES

In each State we had the services of 'a humanities scholar' (known in the field of battle as humanoids). These 'set the performance in a historical context' and this ranged from a labour leader discussing organisation in the mills to a history professor relating the show back to the Neolithic period.

EXHIBITION

Bradford Art Galleries and Museums kindly lent us photographs from two exhibitions, 'A Pennine City' and 'People in Textiles' by Jose Reis. From these Marise Rose constructed a small touring exhibit which gave a visual impression of the geography in the Aire Valley and of the people working in the mills today.

ORGANISATION

The tour was set up and administered by Julia R. Swoyer of the Iron Clad Agreement through the funding agencies of four Humanities Councils. As part of the deal each community in which we stayed 'hosted' the company members, which meant we were massively overfed. In each State there was a State Coordinator whose role was to liaise with the venues, oversee the pattern of the week and whip the audiences in.

ECHOES IN AMERICA TOUR SCHEDULE FEBRUARY / MARCH 1984

SHOWS

Feb :	25	2pm	Pawtucket Public Library	Pawtucket	R.I.
	26	2pm	United Food and Comm. Workers Hall	Providence	
	27	1pm	Senior Citizens Center	West Warwick	
	28		Day Off		
	29	7.30pm	Blackstone Valley Historical Society	Lincoln	
Mar :	1	7.30 pm	Kingston Free Library	Kingston	
	2	1.15pm	Senior Citizens Centre	Westerly	
	3	8pm	Douglas Library	Hebron	C.T.
	4	7.30 pm	Booth and Kimock Library	Coventry	
	6	8pm	Mary Edwards Library	Willington	
	7	7.30pm	Buchanon Centre Auditorium	Mansfield	
	8	7.30pm	Town Hall	Somers	
	9	7.30 pm	Putman Public Library	Putnam	
	10	7.30pm	Quinebaug Valley CC	Danielson	
	11		Travel		
	12	7.30pm	Lakeland Cultural Arts Center	Littleton	N.C.
	14	7.30pm	Bynam Methodist Church	Bynam	
	15	10am	Cabarrus City Agricultural Ex Office	Concord	
	16	3.30pm	Marion Manufacturing Company	Marion	
	17	7.30pm	Isothermal Community College	Spindale	
	18	7pm	Cde Memorial Unit. Methodist Church	West Charlotte	
	19	7.30pm	Olympia Middle School	Columbia	S.C.
	20	7.30 pm	Pine Tree Elementary School	Camden	
	22	7.30pm	Community Hall	Newberry	
	23	7.30pm	Pickens Auditorium Tricounty	Pendleton	
	24	7.30pm	Greenville Fine Arts Centre	Greenville	
	25	3pm	Museum Of York County	Rock Hill	
	26	7.30pm	First Prestbyterian Church	Sanford	
	30	7.30pm	A.C.T.W. Hall. New York.		

WORKSHOPS

Feb	27	3-7pm	Centreville Unit. Meth. Church	West Warwick	R.I.
	29	10-2pm	Central Falls Free Public Library	Central Falls	
Mar	1	3-6.30pm	Kingston Free Library	Kingston	
	2	10-2pm	Westerly Public Library	Westerly	
	4	2-4.30pm	Manchester Community College	Manchester	C.T.
	5	7.30pm	Coventry Community Theatre	Coventry	
	8	3-5.30pm	Town Hall Somers	Somers	
	9	10-2pm	Quinebaug Valley CC	Danielson	
	10	2-5pm	Putman Public Library	Putnam	
	13	1-5pm	University of North Carolina	Chapel Hill	N.C
	14	8.40 10.30	Stanford Junior High School	Hillsborough	
	15	2pm-5pm	Cabarrus City Agricultural Ex Office	Concord	
	17	2pm-5pm	Isothermal Community College	Spindale	
	19	1pm-5pm	University of South Carolina	Columbia	S.C.
	20	1pm-5pm	University of South Carolina	Columbia	
	21	8.30-11am	Newberry High School	Newberry	
	22	2-5pm	Newberry College	Newberry	
	23	2-5pm	Tri County Tech College	Pendleton	
	26	9-10.30am	Charlotte High School	Charlotte	



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FRIDAY 24th FEBRUARY

Flew Gatwick - New York. Met by Kim Hutton our road manager and driver for the tour. Drove 200 miles to Pawtucket Rhode Island for a reception and 'Pot Luck' supper at Slater's Mill, the original textile Mill in north america. After dinner actors performed extracts from the show. We all went off with our individual hosts for the night(pattern for the next four weeks).

SATURDAY 25th FEBRUARY

First performance 2pm at Pawtucket Public Library. Audience 170 including 30 expatrit textile workers from Yorkshire. A very warm reception. Humanoid Gary Kulik, Smithsonian, Washington. Discussion centred around the relationship between academic history and memory. Actress Liz Humphry Williams ill with flu.

SUNDAY 26th FEBRUARY

2pm performance at the Meat Cutters Hall in Providence. Large union audience solidly behind the show - excellent humanoid Scott Malloy from the Bus Drivers Union. The discussion really took off with individuals giving their personal histories and talking about conditions in Rhode Island Mills. Asa thankyou they sang union song Solidarity Forever.

MONDAY 27th FEBRUARY

Inthe morning T.V. and Radio broadcasts Liz, Julia and Kevin. 1pm performance in a senior citizens centre with an audience of senior citizens and high school kids. Discussion dominated by 2 elderly Italian sisters, 73 and 74, who had worked all their lives in the mill. very funny and entertaining
3pm first workshop. 10 elderly people who had seen the show. We introduced ourselves ('intro') played extracts from the tape of our best interviewee('Clara') and the cast came in to demonstrate how taped material moved on to stage. Julia now ill.

TUESDAY 28th FEBRUARY

Day off in Providence. It rained hard all day.

WEDNESDAY 29th FEBRUARY

Workshop am 10 people. 'Intro', 'Clara' and then they interviewed each other about childhood memories('memory'). Company taken on tour of area including Mill village Slatersville, the first of many. Evening show for Blackstone Historical Soc; in the middle of nowhere, 235 came from somewhere to give standing ovation. Humanoid, Tom Leary, poetic and rather dull. Discussion centred on Yorkshire's history. Julia rushed to hospital with lock jaw.

THURSDAY 1st MARCH

Workshop Kingston Library. 25 people, oral historians and drama students. 'Intro', 'Clara', 'Memory' and using the students as actors dramatised some of the stories ('Staging'). Evening show, humanoid Kate Dunnigan a Thompsonian historian. The discussion included the subjects of unemployment and immigration.

FRIDAY 2nd MARCH

Morning workshop with oral historians group working on a granite project. 'Intro', 'Clara', 'Memory', 'Staging' using their material. Afternoon show ina massive Auditorium with terrible acoustics. Humanoid Laurence Metz, State evaluator for



the humanities Diane Disney was greatly impressed. Evening off went to see 'Fool for Love'.

SATURDAY 3rd MARCH

Hebron, Connecticut. 'The British are Coming' stickers all over the town, a massively over the top reception with groaning tables, followed by a standing ovation. Humanoid for the week, Joe Chapaitis from the University of Newhaven, very nice intelligent if unexciting academic.

SUNDAY 4th MARCH

Afternoon workshop, very successful using the actors to stage some passages from oral history transcripts collected there. Toured Cheyne village (old mill village) and saw Cheyne Hall being converted to a theatre. Local theatre group stimulated by workshop to mount their own oral history show. Evening show in a church, we cut out the dirty words (three shits) but left bugger in as no one knew what it meant!

MONDAY 5th MARCH

Evening workshop with 12 people mainly teachers concentrating on where they were when J.F. Kennedy was assassinated, very moving and powerful material.

TUESDAY 6th MARCH

Willington. Packed audience, discussion concentrated on how we put the show together.

WEDNESDAY 7th MARCH

Mansfield. Quiet audience mainly academics. We thought they were n't keen, but they assured us they were and apologised for being academic!

THURSDAY 8th MARCH

Afternoon workshop with 8 elderly senior citizens including a remarkable 92 year old who told extremely funny rambling stories. The town of Somers is having a 200th birthday next year and their festival coordinator who was at the workshop now wants to include an oral history project in their celebration. Evening, amazing 'Pot Luck' supper. Director of Connecticut Humanities liked the show.

FRIDAY 9th MARCH

It snowed, workshop postponed, watched videos. Evening show in Putnam many of audience coming to see the show for the second or third time. Discussion around the different models of textile villages.

SATURDAY 10th MARCH

Workshop 12 people. Textile workers local historical society interested in uses for oral history, possibly in a local festival. Evening performance in a studio theatre, largest audience since it opened in June '83, included the author of 'Yankee Yorkshireman' who presented a signed copy to the company. Lots of returnees. Graham sick.

SUNDAY 11th MARCH

Travel to Washington, guided whistle stop tour of the Smithsonian by Gary Kulik.

MONDAY 12th MARCH

Graham and Julia stayed in Washington to see the British Embassy and Press. Company arrived at Littleton North Carolina. Evening show at an Arts Centre in the middle of nowhere, hardly any punters, first bad audience of tour.

TUESDAY 13th MARCH

Workshop at U.N.C. with 20 people from Southern Oral History Project - 'intro' 'Clara', 'memory'. Staged a piece of their oral history material, enthusiastic participants. Evening, entertained by the Cane Creek Cloggers, excellent.

WEDNESDAY 14th MARCH

8.30 am workshop with 25 high school kids and a few adults. 'Intro', followed by interviewing each other about 'Rows with parents'. Read material and staged three pieces. Evening performance in a church, good audience, animated discussion about communist infiltration of unions in 1930s.

THURSDAY 15th MARCH

5.30 am start. 10 am show in Concord. Good discussion including reportage on North Carolinian mill life in the 1940s and 50s. Humanoid Paul Escott, professor of History at U.N.C. Unexceptional. Workshop in afternoon with about 15 people, interested in the process particularly, might mount a small show for 200th anniversary of their church.

FRIDAY 16th MARCH

Performance cancelled due to total lack of audience. Administrative difficulties!

SATURDAY 17th MARCH

Workshop with a handful of senior citizens, mainly interested in genealogy. 'Intro', 'Clara', 'memory'. Not a great success. Evening performance, small audience and discussion on union activity.

SUNDAY 18th MARCH

Good performance in church hall, discussion about the differences between English mill life and that in the States, covering mill villages, tied cottages, company stores.

MONDAY 19th MARCH

Radio interview/photocall, Kevin, Sue and Tom. T.V. interview, Phil, Liz and Julia. Afternoon Part I of workshop with M.F.A. acting students at U.S.C. 15 present. 'Intro' followed by interviewing each other on 'automobile stories'-a lively bunch. Humanoid for the week James Rembert from the Citadel, tended to go on a bit. Performance, bad acoustics, appreciative audience.

TUESDAY 20th MARCH

Part II of workshop, Garry worked out sequence for staging and cuts on the previous day's pieces. Graham staged them, very good and entertaining 2 days. Evening performance to an elderly audience, unexceptional, then on to Coy's house for endless liquid hospitality.

WEDNESDAY 21st MARCH

8.30 am workshop with 30 so called 'gifted' high school kids. Talked to them about drama and played games. Pretty much a waste of time, although teacher was impressed. Kevin and Sue did a good taping for S.C.E.T.V. Afternoon spent on administration.

THURSDAY 22nd MARCH

Workshop with 15 college students mostly drama. 'Intro', 'Clara', interviewed each other on 'adolescence', and roughly staged a piece. Evening performance

in a community hall, positive reaction from audience. In the discussion an 86 year old (Mr Textile of South Carolina) made a very moving speech and recited a poem.

FRIDAY 23rd MARCH

Workshop at Tri County Tech. with 4 people including Lee Cox, Director of Humanities for South Carolina, talked our way through it for his benefit, Major Road workshop leaders not at all happy about it. Good show in the evening, virtually no discussion except a little about english immigrants. Stayed at plush hotel (the only one and made the most of it)

SATURDAY 24th MARCH

Greenville Fine Arts Centre. Good small studio theatre space, enthusiastic but small audience, due to bad publicity. Unexceptional, low key, short discussion.

SUNDAY 25th MARCH

Performance in a museum. Large audience mixed adults and children. Discussion around varying opinions of conditions in mills and villages, quite heated.

MONDAY 26th MARCH

9 am workshop with 20,18 yearolds, some into creative writing, quite keen and interested. 'Intro', 'Clara' followed by interviewing each other on 'holiday experiences'. Some good stories. Evening show, a benefit for Sanford Community Theatre, a receptive audience although not many mill workers !

FRIDAY 30th MARCH

Final show in New York for the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union. Large audience including mill workers, potential sponsors and embassy officials, acoustics pretty dreadful, but audience reaction very good. After show reception given by the British/American Theatre Exchange. The End.

CONCLUSIONS

On the whole, and with the reservations expressed below, the tour was enormously successful. Our initial fears as to the suitability of Yorkshire oral history material for an American audience were completely allayed as soon as we had performed the show. Enthusiasm of the audiences and the promoting bodies and their readiness to suggest spin-off projects or return visits have encouraged us to think that our work has considerable scope for future American tours.

PERFORMANCES

With the exception of Littleton, North Carolina we played to mainly large and highly appreciative audiences. The show itself survived the various vicissitudes imposed upon it by the radically different cultures in which we found ourselves. In the north the response to, and feeling from, the show was comparable to England, but in the south it was different! It was fascinating to see how well the show worked in the context of different textile communities and gratifying to be so well received by a more sophisticated New York audience.

WORKSHOPS

When they were good they were very good and when they were bad they were horrid! On the whole we were working with enthusiasts either theatre buffs or oral historians. Because of the different context of each situation each workshop was unique. With the exception of a few ill conceived groups, with which we had to work on occasion, the workshops provided enormous stimulus for the company members working on them, partly by showing us the cultural framework in which we were performing and helping us to understand the wider social implications of the whole programme and partly because the very excitement and quality of material produced in the workshops encouraged us to reconsider the options open to us in touring Britain. We hope that we can take some of the lessons learned in America on board and develop this sort of project around our British touring.

LECTURES

On the whole we were less than convinced of the value of these. Cynically we recognised that without this academic dimension the considerable Humanities funding would not have been available for the tour. Practically however we came to recognise that the actors task for the first ten minutes of each show was to wake the audience from the pleasantly comatose state induced by Humanoid Drone. Some peripheral amusement was gleaned from the introductions; for example we ran a book on how many times one of our scholars used the phrase 'if you will' in a fifteen minute address (28). Seriously we felt that the aesthetic and social implications of the project were not enhanced by such academic formality. Were any similar project to be undertaken in the future we would recommend that a way round this problem was found.

EXHIBITION

This was very successful, serving primarily as a stimulus for the audience to ask questions and become involved in informal discussions during the interval and after the show; also the images of back-to-back housing and nineteenth century mean streets served as a very useful referent for an audience brought up in a different culture.

ORGANIZATION

Undoubtedly the task of creating the "Echoes In America" project was enormous and all credit must go to Julia Swoyer for conceiving a project on this scale and for infecting four Humanities Councils with her enthusiasm. In our opinion the whole project was 90% successful as detailed above. Our reservations about the organizational problems that did arise stem from two sources.

Firstly, the large scale of the operation presented problems of itself. The distances involved, the logistics of dealing with four different states and the necessity of spending a lot of time socializing with representatives of our host communities, all conspired to put considerable pressure on the company's time and goodwill. Secondly it became apparent to us that the needs of the Humanities funding dictated a framework for the tour that was not necessarily ideal. The formality of lecture and discussion which bracketed the show seemed to create an overly academic atmosphere for the performance itself. Indeed with a 20 minute introduction and a half-hour discussion, the whole evening could stretch to three hours - too long, in most cases. We understand that, in many ways, this tour was an innovation. For the future, however, we would recommend that the intrinsic educational and social values of a performance of this sort should be recognized and that lectures etc. should only be employed sparingly, letting the arts event speak, as much as possible, for itself.

'Echoes' of the Old Days

A TOURING troupe from England will make a sweep through northeast Connecticut this week, performing in a play that depicts the life of 19th- and early 20th-century textile workers.

The troupe — the Major Road Theater Company of Yorkshire — will present the play, "Echoes in America," at various locations every day except Monday. The company is making the tour in cooperation with the Iron Clad Agreement, an arts exchange program this country has with England.

The play, based on oral histories of textile workers, is open to the public without an admission charge, thanks largely to a grant from the Connecticut Humanities Council, a state organization.

The Major Road Theater Company staged a similar production in England, based on oral histories of English workers. Sandra Slave of Coventry, who is helping to coordinate the tour, says the company decided to visit the United States because of its success in England. After leaving Connecticut, the company will

tour the textile areas of Rhode Island, North Carolina and South Carolina.

The program begins with introductory remarks by Joseph Chepalis, a history professor at the University of New Haven, and continues with performances by Sue Betts, Phil Hearne, Kevin Stamp and Liz Humphrey-Wilham, all English actors.

Thomas Hearn, director of "Echoes in America" and tour coordinator of the Iron Clad Agreement, said the play, "presents people's stories as they told them, a tough life remembered not because it was easy but because they had survived."

The performances will be held at the following locations:

Today — First Congregational Church in Coventry, Main St. 7:30 P.M.
Tuesday — Hall Memorial School, Rte. 32 in Willington, 8 P.M.
Wednesday — Buchanan Center Auditorium, Rte. 89 in Mansfield, 7:30 P.M.
Thursday — Somers Town Hall, Main St., 7:30 P.M.
Friday — Putnam Public Library, Kennedy Drive, 7:30 P.M.
Saturday — Quinebaug Valley Community College Auditorium, Danielson, 7:30 P.M. ■

"Charlotte Observer" on March 13, 1984

Play Captures The Spirit Of Textile Workers' Survival

By LAWRENCE TOPPMAN

Once a year, the sun came to Keithley. You could see it first from the hill above the town, whose textile mills closed for Christmas week. But when the holiday was over, the furnaces blazed again and the sun crept behind the smog-blackened sky. Then the knocker-up went back to rapping the windows of the mill hands in time for the early shift, rousing people too poor to afford alarm clocks. The weaving shed began to shake and clatter once more, and the workers' corduroy trousers took on the peculiar aroma of grime and raw wool.

Keithley sits in the Aire River Valley of industrial England, but its spirit stretched to the New World, Rhode Island, Connecticut, North Carolina and South Carolina had textile towns, each distinguished by geography but maintaining similar lifestyles. That's the idea behind "Echoes From the Valley," a play about textile workers that is touring all four states and will come to Charlotte Sunday.

"The play relates to all American workers rather than that industry specifically," said director

Tom Hearn, who went to Britain for the premises and came back from Yorkshire to tour with the Major Road Theatre Company.

"The mills rust; through the piece, but that's not the predominant theme. As one person in the play says, 'We called ourselves survivors.' It's really about getting through the day, and that's something we all have to do."

Garry Lyons, writer in residence for Major Road, has done for textile workers what "A Chorus Line" did for dancers: tell stories in their own words. He interviewed 40 people and distilled 100 hours of conversation into 100 pages of script, which were trimmed to a 90-minute play.

"The whole play is one story after another, actors talking to the audience," said Hearn, speaking by telephone from Kingston, R.I. "It starts with somebody lying in the churchyard in 1910, watching Halley's Comet, goes into the midwife's story, then on to the knocker-up waking you for work when you were 12 years old.

"Even though things may have been gloomy, people remembered them with a fondness, a nostalgia. Something we younger people think we should be (impressed)



Photo From Major Road Theatre Company

The Cast: Liz Humphrey-Williams (from left), Phil Hearne, Sue Betts and Kevin Stamp in "Echoes From the Valley."

by, like going to the pawn shop to pawn a suit because you don't have enough money to eat, older folks laugh at. They're a proud people, though not boastful."

The play was the brainchild of Julia Swoyter, head of a nonprofit production company called The Iron Clad Agreement. The eight-

year-old group, which began in Pittsburgh and is now based in New York and Connecticut, generates film, video and theater projects about industrial society.

Swoyter first took an interest in the Piedmont when her group came through three years ago with "Interchangeable Parts," a

biography of Eli Whitney.

Last year, it returned to film "Thread/Work," a documentary about the closing of an S.C. textile mill, which aired on South Carolina's ETV. That show gave her the idea for "Echoes."

"I wanted to trace the textile industry from England to the American Northeast and South," she said. "A lot of the older textile workers in the U.S. are English, including some first-generation English who came to find jobs."

"I had wanted to take my company to West Yorkshire for some time — Pittsburgh and (the British town of) Sheffield became sister cities in 1980 — so I contacted the Yorkshire Arts Association."

"We sent them Virginia and Dynamos," a factual play about America's Industrial Revolution presented in music-hall style, including the vaudeville team of Marx and Engel. They sent us the Major Road Theatre Company."

Iron Clad gained the backing of four state humanities commissions, offering cities on the tour free performances in return for lodging, meals and publicity.

A typical presentation begins with a 10-minute speech by a

scholar versed in local textile history — UNOC's Paul Eckert, who handles that chore in the Charleston — his play, and a discussion afterward. In some cities, the company conducts workshops intended to encourage hometown folks to do their own projects.

"We share acting and production skills and show people how to gather oral histories," she said. "People seem keen to follow these up, and we put out a newspaper that shows where to go for research. Part of this is an attempt to leave something behind."

If You're Going

There will be three performances in the Charlotte area: 10 a.m. Thursday at the Cabarrus County Agricultural Office in Concord (with 2 p.m. work); 7 p.m. Sunday at Cole Memorial United Methodist Church, 2022 Super Creek Rd. W., Charlotte; 3 p.m. March 23 at the Museum of York County in Rock Hill.

Other N.C. performances will be in Spartanburg (Wednesday), Marion (Friday), March 26; Oberlin (Saturday) and Sanford (March 28). Other S.C. performances will be in Columbia (March 18-20), Camden (March 20-21), Newberry (March 22), Pendleton (March 23), Greenville (March 24), Oconee (March 24-25), 9 a.m.-4 p.m. weekdays.

Entertainment

A remarkable play based on oral histories

English actors as Yorkshire mill workers

By MATT MCGREGOR
Arts Editor

MANSFIELD CENTER — England's mill workers came out of row house history and jostled and jarred each other into memories of long days, long gone by, Wednesday in the Buchanan Center here.

Actually, there were but four English actors onstage, but the four represented many and perhaps all of the mill work force of Bradford and of the Aire River Valley of West Yorkshire in the north of England.

In a remarkable tour-de-force, the Major Road Theatre Company of Yorkshire, enlightened and entertained a capacity audience in a play derived from the oral history of some 35 English mill workers living and working in the years 1904 to about 1947.

The four spoke out in Yorkshire dialect; an English that is almost incomprehensible even to other Englishers and which reminded this listener of Dylan Thomas' famous remark about how Britain and America are two nations separated by a mutual language. Yet this speech was heart and soul of the presentation, as it was and still is heart and soul of Yorkshiremen.

Says Phil, one of the characters: "Blueday filtha plaice was Kaghley in thos' days. I was coold an' t'was dawmp for the simple reason t'was almost in the country... But this exampke falls short, for the Yorkshire dialect is one where inflections rise at the end of almost every statement. It is not quite sing-song and is idiomatic to the extreme. This listener caught words or phrases similar to Scotch dialect, as "hairn," for instance; meaning child.

But if the language is infectious, at least to this listener, it was the revealed portions of mill workers' lives were absolutely enchanting. If poverty and misery can be said to be enchanting (so long as you don't have to live them). Why this is so is primarily because of the innocent humor of

these people and primarily because of their gift for story-telling.

And then, of course, the production was so well done, from original playscript by Playwright Garry Lyons through Graham Devlin's direction to the acting of Sue Betts, Phil Hearne, Kevin Stamp and Liz Humphrey-Williams.

When the four get together to play and sing one of those street or town songs, one catches a glimpse of an older England; one of the Maypole dance and of frolics on the greensward. Yet the

song, "Poverty, Poverty, Knock," is one of humorous protest and it's refrain "Poverty, poverty, knock," has a mill factory sound basis, something like the pocketry-pocketry pock of machines endlessly running.

The play has been performed in Rhode Island and in Hebron, Manchester/Coventry, Willington, Somers and goes on tonight in Putnam, Saturday night in Danielson. For the rest of March, Echoes will be performed in both North and South Carolina, and a New York City tour this spring will conclude the schedule.

For preservation of mill worker history

As part of an on-going historical research into textile mills and their workers, the Echoes in America presentation includes a newspaper edited by Joseph Chepaitis, dean of the School of Arts & Sciences, University of New Haven.

Chepaitis also introduced the play by giving background to the early spreading of textile mills from England to New England and thence to the South in the U.S., and by contrasting the decline of the industry in all three areas with the current decline of heavy industry both in England and in this country.

The Major Road Theatre Company's presentation of Echoes From the Valley is in cooperation with a Pittsburgh-based theater company, Iron Clad Agreement, which has created and performed plays based on American inventors and entrepreneurs, and which has produced a documentary on the closing of a South Carolina textile mill.

Funding derives from the Connecticut, Rhode Island, North Carolina and South Carolina humanities councils or committees in cooperation with the Arts Council of Great Britain and The British Council.



THURSDAY, MARCH 1, 1984

THE HARTFORD COURANT

Theater Group Brings 'Echoes' Theater Group Brings 'Echoes'

By ENID VAZQUEZ
Courant Staff Writer

For more than 150 years, textile mill workers emigrating from England to the United States have been finding work similar to that in their homeland. English actors, bringing a dramatization of their country's industrial history to the old mill towns of eastern Connecticut hope to evoke memories among audience members who may be or have

been mill workers themselves.

The Major Road Theatre Co. of Bradford, England, will hold seven free performances of "Echoes in the Valley," a 90-minute play, in as many Connecticut towns. The characters and actions in the play are sketched from 100 hours of interviews the company conducted with former mill workers in England's Yorkshire industrial area.

The tour was arranged by the Iron Clad Agreement, a produc-

tion company based in Fairfield.

Iron Clad is using a \$13,815 grant from the Connecticut Humanities Council to produce the plays. Of the seven performances, four will be in libraries, helping the council achieve its goal of bringing humanities programs, such as plays and lectures, to libraries.

The grant pays for production costs and a program that includes a glossary of unusual words used

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in the play and articles on the period, 1900 to 1940.

As with most Iron Clad plays, "Echoes" will be followed by a discussion with members of the audience. When the play ran in England last winter, many former mill workers told of their experiences.

The Connecticut discussions will be led by University of New Haven history professor Joseph Chapalita, who will help the audience put their experiences into historical perspective, compare English and American industries and give an overall picture of Connecticut mill industry.

The two non-profit organizations also will hold five workshops on oral history in drama for college and theater groups. Iron Clad producer Julie R. Swoyer said she hopes that local groups will begin their own plays on industrial history. "That's really what we hope to leave behind," she said.

"Echoes" has no main character. Instead, it is a series of tales told in the span of a day that recall life in the industrial age, including issues such as the role of a midwife, sexual harassment dangers on the job and of dying. Iron Clad tour manager Tom Hearn, who directs the play, called the dialogue in the play poetic and witty.

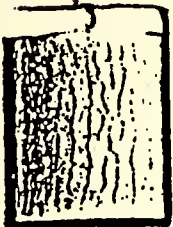
One actress fails of not being able to see the valley town of Keelgley from her hillside home. "You look down into a cloud of black

smoke. Hundreds of chimneys all belching black soot and smog and God knows what. And they lived under that. They didn't see any sun," she recalled. Only during Christmas week when the mills shut down, could Keelgley be seen from above.

"It's much more of a personal, humanistic experience than just (a portrayal of) industrial work. It has a lot of touches of humor. They talked about how bad it was, but they also see themselves as survivors and they're very proud of that," Hearn said.

The play was produced in five places in Rhode Island between Feb. 25 and 29 and will be in North Carolina and South Carolina after touring Connecticut. The Connecticut performances will begin Saturday at 8 p.m. at the Douglas Library in Hebron; at the Booth & Dimock Memorial Library in Coventry Sunday at 7:30 p.m.; the Mary D. F. 'wards Public Library in Willington Tuesday at 8 p.m.; the Buchanan Center Auditorium in Mansfield Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.; the Seneca Town Hall March 8 at 7:30 p.m.; the Putnam Public Library March 9 at 7:30 p.m.; and the Quinebaug Valley Community College March 10 at 7:30 p.m. in Danielson.

The Iron Clad Agreement was formed in Pittsburgh in 1976 and produces actual plays, films and videos that dramatize the United States' industrial age. It moved to Connecticut in 1981, when it also opened a New York office, and formed a relation ship with Major Road.



Play Captures The Spirit Of Textile Workers' Survival

By LAWRENCE TOPPMAN

Theater Writer

Once a year, the sun came to Keltiey. You could see it first from the hill above the town, whose textile mills closed for Christmas week. But when the holiday was over, the furnaces blazed again and the sun crept behind the smog-blackened sky.

Then the knocker-up went back to rapping the windows of the mill hands in time for the early shift, rousing people too poor to afford alarm clocks. The weaving dury trousers took on the peculiar aroma of grime and raw wool.

Keltiey sits in the Aire River Valley of industrial England, but its spirit stretched to the New World, Rhode Island, Connecticut, North Carolina and South Carolina had textile towns, each distinguished by geography but maintaining similar lifestyles. That's the idea behind "Echoes From the Valley," a play about textile workers that is touring all four states and will come to Charlotte Sunday.

"The play relates to all American workers rather than that industry specifically," said director

Tom Hearn, who went to Britain for the premiere and came back from Yorkshire to tour with the Major Road Theatre Company.

"The mills run through the piece, but that's not the predominant theme. As one person in the play says, 'We called ourselves survivors. It's really about getting through the day, and that's something we all have to do.'"

Garry Lyons, writer in residence for Major Road, has done for textile workers what "A Chorus Line" did for dancers: tell stories in their own words. He interviewed 40 people and distilled 100 hours of conversation into 100 pages of script, which were trimmed to a 90-minute play.

"The whole play is one story after another, actors talking to the audience," said Hearn, speaking by telephone from Kingston, R.I. "It starts with somebody lying in the churchyard in 1910, watching Halley's Comet, goes into the midwife's story, then on to the knocker-up waking you for work when you were 12 years old."

"Even though things may have been gloomy, people remembered them with a fondness, a nostalgia. Something we younger people think we should be (impressed)



Photo From Major Road Theatre Company

The Cast: Liz Humphrey-Williams (from left), Phil Hearn, Sue Betts and Kevin Stamp in "Echoes From the Valley."

by, the going to the pawn shop to pawn a suit because you don't have enough money to eat, older folks laugh at. They're a proud people, though not boastful."

The play was the brainchild of Julia Swoyer, head of a nonprofit production company called The Iron Clad Agreement. The eight-

biography of Eli Whitney.

Last year, it returned to film "Thread/Work," a documentary about the closing of an S.C. textile mill, which aired on South Carolina's ETN. That show gave her the idea for "Echoes."

"I wanted to trace the textile industry from England to the American Northeast and South," she said. "A lot of the older textile workers in the U.S. are English, including some first-generation English who came to find jobs."

"I had wanted to take my company to West Yorkshire for some time — Pittsburgh and (the British town of) Sheffield became sister cities in 1980 — so I contacted the Yorkshire Arts Association."

"We sent them 'Virgins and Dynamos,' a factual play about America's Industrial Revolution presented in music-hall style, including the vaudeville team of Marx and Engels. They sent us the Major Road Theatre Company."

Iron Clad gained the backing of four state humanities commissions, offering cities on the tour free performances in return for lodging, meals and publicity. A typical presentation begins with a 10-minute speech by a

scholar versed in local textile history — UNCC's Paul Escott will handle that chore in the Charlotte region — the play, and a discussion afterward. In some cities, the company conducts workshops intended to encourage hometown folks to do their own projects.

"We share acting and production skills and show people how to gather oral histories," she said. "People seem keen to follow these up, and we put out a newspaper that shows where to go for research. Part of this is an attempt to leave something behind."

If You're Going

There will be three performances in the Charlotte area: 7 p.m. Thursday at the Carolina County Agricultural Office in Court St. (North 7 p.m. work- shops 7 p.m. Sunday 7:30 p.m. Memorial United Methodist Church, 2022 Sugar Creek Rd. N. Ch. in the 3 p.m. March 25 at the Museum of York County in Rock Hill.

Other N.C. performances will be in Bryson (Wednesday), Marion (Friday), Schedule (Saturday) and in North March 28. Other N.C. performances will be in Columbia (March 3-20), Cambridge (March 10-11), Macon (March 22), Rock Hill (March 27), Greensboro (March 29), Double (March 30) 962-3165, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays.

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Industrial America Mirrored

British Recount

By CHRISTINE A. NOWAK
CALL Staff Writer

PAWTUCKET — Pawtucket has been called the birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution because it was in this city, in 1790, that Samuel Slater introduced the first mechanized textile machinery to this country.

Although many of those textile mills which sprung up along the Blackstone and other New England rivers to accommodate the textile boom have since shut down, the sights and sounds of what went on in those mills remain alive in the memories of the thousands of people who worked in them.

Recounted are the many tales of low pay, long hours and poor working conditions; and the progress made by labor unions that infiltrated the mills. Greater Woonsocket textile companies were no different.

People familiar with the rise and fall of the textile industry in America either have a first-hand knowledge of the textile life or were made aware of it through members of their families who spent years in the mills.

Across the Atlantic, British textile workers lived through similar experiences and suffered the same fate that met New England mill workers. After working long hours for low pay in dirty factories, the people of the upper Aire Valley in West Yorkshire, England, found their mills closing and moving away. The stories they tell of their English textile mills mirror the images American textile workers recall.

Saturday, those memories of the British textile industry came alive in Pawtucket before a standing-room-only crowd of more than 175 people, as the Major Road Theatre Company of Yorkshire presented its American premier performance of "Echoes From The Valley," a play based on the recollections of retired textile workers in Yorkshire.

The play was presented in the Pawtucket Public Library, the first of 25 performances scheduled throughout Rhode Island, Connecticut, North Carolina and South Carolina — all major textile regions in America.

The group will give another performance in northern Rhode Island

Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. in Northgate, Louisquisset Pike, Lincoln.

Four actors make up the cast of the play, the script of which is taken from the actual words of the Aire Valley textile workers. Phil Hearne, one of the actors, explained that 40 people from age 60 to 90 were interviewed by the members of Major Road to gather material contained in the play.

The play covers the years 1904 to World War II and was written by Garry Lyons, a playwright in residence with Major Road.

According to Julia Royall Swoyer, producer, "Echoes From The Valley" is part of an on-going exchange between England and the United States. It is presented by the non-profit American production company The Iron Clad Agreement and funded in part by humanity councils in the four states the troupe will visit. All productions are free.

In addition to the performance, retitled "Echoes in America" to symbolize the similarities between the two countries' textile industries, the presentation opened with comments from Gary B. Kulik, chairman, social and cultural history department, National Museum of American History, The Smithsonian Institution.

The performance concluded with a question and answer session between cast members and the audience.

Because of this encouraged feedback from the audience and the original concept of the play — the memories of the workers — the play is entitled "Echoes."

The play also focuses on the recollections of school, foods, diseases, recreation and neighborhood people.

In addition to the casts' daily schedule of performances in the American textile regions, three other members of Major Road will conduct four-hour workshop sessions to teach interested persons the technique of gathering information for oral history presentations and how to present the information.

The sessions are open to all interested persons and are free. One will be held Wednesday at the Central Falls Free Library, Central Street, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

