

**28  
FEB**

## Maxwell Anderson

Today marks the anniversary of the death of playwright Maxwell Anderson, who died in 1959. He was one of the most important American playwrights of the twentieth century.

Born in 1888, Anderson spent his first three years on a farm near Atlantic, Pennsylvania. The family moved to Jamestown in 1907, where Anderson graduated from high school. He then attended UND where he joined nearly every club related to writing and drama. For money, he waited tables and worked the night copy desk of *The Grand Forks Herald*.

After taking his B.A. in English Literature, Anderson moved to Minnewaukan, where he was the high school principal and an English teacher. He was an avowed pacifist, and two years later he was fired for protesting World War I in front of his students. Later he moved to Palo Alto, California, to get his Master's degree from Stanford University. He eventually became chair of the English Department at Whittier College near Los Angeles, but was fired again for making public statements on behalf of a student seeking conscientious objector status.

Anderson decided it was time to get into a different business – newspaper reporting. He worked for several papers in San Francisco and New York, and then began a different calling – he penned his first play, *White Desert*. It enjoyed only twelve performances, but it won the attention of Laurence Stallings, a reviewer for the New York World, and the two collaborated on a war comedy, *What Price Glory?* It was a giant hit and had a run of more than 430 performances. Anderson quit the newspaper business and went into writing plays full-time.

In the next few years Anderson wrote, among many others, *Elizabeth the Queen*, *Mary of Scotland*, *Key Largo* and *Anne of a Thousand Days*. In 1933, his play, *Both Your Houses*, won the Pulitzer Prize. He also won the First Annual New York Critics Circle Award for *Winterset* in 1935 and again for *High Tor* in 1936. He also wrote radio shows and collaborated on screenplays for movies like *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Death Takes a Holiday*.

During the 75th anniversary of the founding of UND in 1958, Anderson was conferred as a Doctor of Humanities. He was too ill to attend, but he wrote a letter saying the university had been there for him when he needed it, saying “If I hadn’t gone to the university, I might have been an unhappy and mediocre banker, farmer, or store-keeper. I’d have gone no farther.”

Maxwell Anderson died the following year after having a stroke. He may have lost jobs because of his words, but his words have forever inked his place in history.

Merry Helm