

The original TNB poster

– *A Playgoer's Companion* –

## About the Play

Set in the Sussex area in 1898, *The Dollar Woman* introduces us to the world of pauper auctions, a system whereby each year the community's poor were auctioned or "rented" to the lowest bidder. The plot follows the family of the "Overseer of the Poor," Lewis White, who was in charge of these auctions, and finding a place for the poor people or "paupers" to live for a year while their "hosts" were paid for by the government. At the end of the play, we see talk of the creation of Almshouses, which was the next attempt to "fix" poverty in New Brunswick. The play shows the Overseer's son trying to understand what is going



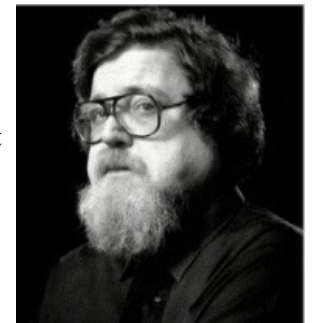
Almshouse, Saint John

on, and all the characters have to deal with the issue in their own way. It was only a little over a century ago that a former newspaper editor from Sussex helped bring an end to these auctions that saw the final woman sold for a dollar.

The first play TNB ever presented that was specifically about New Brunswick, *The Dollar Woman* was a landmark in TNB's history. Thirty-five years later, it is still the most controversial of their plays. There are stories on the internet of people remembering this story, and case studies done on it. Many of the characters in the play are real, historical people. Lewis White is a documented person, as is the pauper Martin Condon, and the reporter/activist George Francis Train.

## Alden Nowlan

Alden Nowlan was a critically acclaimed Canadian poet, novelist, and playwright. In 1933, Nowlan was born into rural poverty in Stanley, Nova Scotia, along a stretch of dirt road that he would later refer to as Desolation Creek. His education ended after a few days in grade five, and at the age of 14, he went to work in the village sawmill. At 19, Nowlan's artfully embroidered résumé landed him a job with *Observer*, a newspaper in Hartland, New Brunswick. While working at the *Observer*, Nowlan began writing



books of poetry, the first of which was published by Fredericton's Fiddlehead Press. He became the night editor for the Saint John Telegraph Journal and continued to write poetry. In 1967, he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, and his collection *Bread, Wine and Salt* was awarded the Governor General's Award for Poetry. In 1966, Nowlan was diagnosed with throat cancer. His health forced him to give up his job, but at the same time the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton offered him the position of Writer-in-Residence. He remained in the position until his death on June 27, 1983.

During his time at UNB, he became close friends with theatre director Walter Learning. The two collaborated on a number of play scripts including *Frankenstein*, *The Dollar Woman*, and *The Incredible Murder of Cardinal Tosca*. [adapted from wikipedia]

“The day the child realizes that all adults are imperfect, he becomes an adolescent; the day he forgives them, he becomes an adult; the day the child forgives himself, he becomes wise.” — Alden Nowlan

## Walter Learning

"Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring..."

Walter Learning is a Canadian theatre director, actor, and founder of Theatre New Brunswick. Learning was born in 1938 in the small village of Quidi Vidi in Newfoundland. He attended Bishop Field College in St. John's, and finished with the blessing of his teachers who pronounced him academically promising. After graduation, Walter set his sights on a broadcasting career, but compromised with his parents and moved to "the mainland" to attend the University of New Brunswick in the Faculty of Business. According to his Web site, "Pursuit of an attractive fellow student led him to sign up for a Philosophy class. He didn't get the girl, but did embrace the subject and in his second year switched to a Philosophy major." After receiving his BA, he was awarded



a Teaching Fellowship to pursue his MA, and a Commonwealth Scholarship to work on his PhD at the Australian National University in Canberra. Learning returned to Canada in May 1966. He was Director of Drama at the UNB Summer Session, and in May 1968, Walter Learning became the General Manager of the Beaverbrook Playhouse. There he founded Theatre New Brunswick, which presented its first production in January 1969 and oversaw the radical renovation of the building into a true theatre. For the next forty years, TNB remained Canada's only full time touring regional theatre. Learning remained as General Manager of The Playhouse and Artistic Director of Theatre New Brunswick for ten years. In that time, TNB produced more than 85 productions. In June 1978, Learning left Fredericton to take the position of Head of the Theatre Section of the Canada Council for the Arts. He has also been Artistic Director of the Charlottetown Festival, and has guest directed at many theatres including the Stratford Festival, the Dallas Theater Center, Persephone Theatre, Festival Antigonish, Lighthouse Theatre, Bastion Theatre and others. He has also been a frequent director at Australia's Canberra Repertory Theatre.

From 1992 to 1995 Walter was a freelance broadcaster, writer, actor and director. Then in 1995 he returned to Theatre New Brunswick as Executive Producer. He left this position in 1999 and has since concentrated on freelancing as an actor and director. According to his Web site, his golfing ambitions are less successful.

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