

Peggy Conklin, Actress on Broadway, Is Dead at 96

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Correction Appended

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Peggy Conklin, a stage actress who found early success in "The Petrified Forest" in 1936 and followed it with a [wide](#) variety of dramatic and comic roles on Broadway, died last Tuesday at her home in Naples, Fla. She was 96.

Ms. Conklin had leading or featured roles from the 1930's through the 1950's. She made a brief detour to Hollywood in 1934, making five films in a few years, then returning to New York.

She was Gabby Maple, the filling-station waitress, in Robert Sherwood's "Petrified Forest." The drama featured Humphrey Bogart as the desperate killer Duke Mantee, a role that would help make him a star. Ms. Conklin also appeared with Helen Hayes in "The Wisteria Tree," Joshua Logan's 1950 adaptation of Chekhov's "Cherry Orchard." She was Janice Rule's anxious mother in William Inge's "Picnic" (1953), which also starred Ralph Meeker, Eileen Heckart, Kim Stanley and Paul Newman.

In 1941 she originated a role on Broadway that was to remain popular for decades on radio and television: Pam North, the amiably ditzy wife of Jerry North in Owen Davis's 1941 adaptation of Richard Lockridge's detective story "Mr. and Mrs. North." Playing opposite Albert Hackett, the urbane New York couple stumble into a [murder mystery](#): a corpse in their closet.

"Peggy Conklin's charm keeps Mrs. North's informality from being the annoyance it probably is," the theater critic Brooks Atkinson wrote in The New York Times.

Peggy Conklin was born on Nov. 2, 1902, in Dobbs Ferry, N.Y. She spoke little of her childhood, her son, Michael Thompson, said yesterday, except to say that it had been marked by poverty and her father's absence. Her mother died when Miss Conklin was 12, he said, and she was left in the care of two aunts. After [graduating](#) from high school, she left for New York to pursue an acting career.

Ms. Conklin married James D. Thompson, an [advertising executive](#), in 1935. He died in 1998. Besides her son, of Redwood City, Calif., she is survived by a daughter, Antonia West, of Stroud, Gloucestershire, England, and three grandchildren.

Although she continued to act after her marriage, the demands of family life proved distracting. "In later years," her son said, "she would look back and say, 'Gosh, I wonder if I could have had a career like Helen Hayes or Mary Martin.' "

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