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**Introduction**

Ever see a theatre production and wish you could relive it, or see the thought processes behind the design or drafts of costume sketches? Have you thought there might be an archive for this sort of thing? Theatre archives are a thing many have not heard of, yet they exist in dark corners of theatres all over the world. From playbills to set and costume designs to posters, these materials pile up and show the compiled history of the theatres which hold them. Some are held in-house, some in a wider community archive, and some even exist inside larger institutions, such as a university library or special collections. Others exist in private collections of those who worked in these theatres and look fondly back on them. However, by being separate, the archive is decentralized and the whole history of the theatre is scattered, making it hard to have a full narrative of  
the company.

This is where the American Theatre Archive Project (ATAP) comes in. Supporting the archives of an inherently ephemeral art is a courageous endeavor, and it takes a village made up of archivist and theatre practitioners alike. ATAP is comprised of regional teams, which go out and consult with theatres to help them come up with a plan for their archival materials. This plan can either be donation to a repository, in which case ATAP will help arrange, or create their own archive, which ATAP representatives and team members will help guide them through the process and provide resources and assistance when needed. North Carolina has a regional team, with the team leader from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This central location in the state, and a partnership with Duke, seems to be ideal for the project to take shape. However, due to circumstances beyond its control, the team has not been able to do as much as they have wanted in the years they have existed, excluding an interest survey at the beginning of the project.

While there is an abundance of theatres within the Triangle (Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill) of North Carolina, not a lot of them have archives, or at least publicly known archives. What I intend to look into is the presence, if any, of theatre archives in the Triangle area of North Carolina, and also to see if these theatres are aware of programs such as ATAP to help them start one for their company if they so wish.

**Research Questions**

* Do local Triangle theatres (professional and amateur) know about ATAP, and if so, how have they interacted with ATAP/benefitted from this knowledge?
* How has ATAP influenced the Triangle theatre scene, if at all?

**Literature Review**

To understand theatre archives, an explanation of community archives and performing arts archives/special collections is needed. Another important aspect to be considered is why these types of collections are important to help preserve the cultural memory of a theatre or surrounding community. This section will end with a summary of the American Theatre Archive Project (ATAP) as a whole, and a brief overview of the history and work done by the North Carolina team specifically.

**Community Archives**

The impact and awareness of community archives has become more and more recognized in professional literature over the past 10 years. From implementation, to building, to evaluation, the archives field has seen this trend grow, with new initiatives being thought up every week. The term “community archive,” as defined by Joanna Newman in 2011, represents the “collections of archival records that originate in a community...and whose collection, maintenance and use involves active participation of that community” (p. 38). The mention of maintenance and use in this definition shows the importance of community archives, and how they should exist independently of the institution which helped create them. Funding is always a factor in how these archives continue but having someone “with skills and possibly specialist services” supported in order to not lose the “passion and connection...brought by enthusiasts” is just as important (Newman, 2011, p. 41). Bringing the community together at the beginning and encouraging interest in the archive can help lay a foundation to help support the archive later on.

This impact is felt most when a “gap” in the narrative is filled; a group underrepresented in the community places their mark in history, a forgotten, or misremembered, piece of the past is uncovered, or someone discovers new information about their own family. These moments bring together communities and excite them about what else their collective history might uncover. Communities allowed to make “collective decisions about what is of enduring value to them, shape collective memories of their own pasts, and control the means through which stories about their past are constructed,” create more complete archives, and end up being more useful to the community in the long run, due to the input from the beginning (Caswell, Cifor, & Ramirez, 2016, p. 61). Community archives can help build a larger, more complete history of a place, institution, or group with these stories which come to light, providing a stronger sense of self value and worth. The impact of saying “we were here,” and having materials and history to back up that claim, especially if previously undocumented, adds to the value of a community and can encourage them to keep saying “I am here,” adding to their identity (Caswell et al., 2016, p. 75). Bringing forward these stories help communities define themselves and see themselves in a different light, and in a different way in how they interact with the world around them.

Mostly supported by institutions in getting started with a community archive, what happens when the institution must pull-away from the project to work on others? Who will keep the archive alive and running, and making it a worthwhile investment for the community? Has there even been an impact to which people would want to keep it running? Coming up with ways to keep the archive active is a challenge most community archives face once their founding partner pulls back for whatever reason. Being an agent for your cause is important, and a “participatory approach” can help those left in charge to navigate these programs head-on.

A “participatory approach” involves allowing different views of “custody and management, and...archival practice, and of collection and value [that] are considered and embraced” (Flinn & Andrew, 2011, p. 15). This leads to a wider area of thought and acceptance to really make their community archive their own, especially if those leading it are open to these ideas. This approach can also open up the possibilities of partnerships with other similar institutions, or even with local businesses, to help support and nurture these archives. By partnering with businesses, other groups, or even schools, this collaboration can help foster a “wider sense of ownership and responsibility toward the archive and the archive service,” which can help sustain interest in the long run (Flinn & Andrew, 2011, p. 1). This approach also gives community members the chance “to speak for themselves and decide whether they wish to be included [in the archive],” which feeds into letting them control their own community narrative and how they are represented in history (Flinn & Andrew, 2011, p. 17). This also allows for the community to have a chance to speak and let their voices be heard in their own history, while shaping it to impact the history of other communities around them. The same could be said for theatre performances, and the buildings which they are in.

**Performing Arts Collections in Archives**

Performing arts collections have been in libraries and special collections for some time now, with the most notable being the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts and the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas. Ranging from music to theatre to dance, these collections tend to feature a wide variety of formats, from AV materials to dance notation to dramaturgy notes to set models and costumes.

Though the materials found in collections themselves have not changed much over the past 50 years, approaches to these materials have varied, especially in how they are used and cared for. An article on theatre librarianship by George Freedley in 1962 shines light on how three students in a workshop would handle performing arts materials coming in to different settings, which provides insight into priorities and levels of importance (Freedley, 1962). The students discussed the different spaces which their theatre collections resided in, ranging from public libraries to a theatre library, specific to a company or club, and what they would do with items such as playbills, books, photographs, and original designs (Freedley, 1962, p. 54-55). Comparing these recommendations from the students to articles written on performing arts archives today show how far performing arts collections have come, in terms of people interested in them and what they contain.

Performing arts archives and collections have evolved over time, as well as the challenges in “creating and curating representations of an ephemeral art form,” since these representations vary from art form to art form (Jones, Abbott, & Ross, 2009, p. 165). With the evolution of technology, performances have evolved as well, becoming more complex and harder to capture in a single form. What used to be just a script and costumes is now projections, lighting plots, scenic panels, and fly cues. Though there is no formal standard on how to represent these types of collections, the formation and evolution of professional organizations have helped archivists realize the “standardization of practice was possible without compromising the uniqueness of collections” (Fern, 2004, p. 198). This has allowed archivists nationwide to create a general standard, and to still be able to represent their collections in their own way, based upon what types of materials they have and the institutional knowledge of how they might be used.

A question which plagues theatre archives can also be applied to community and “pop-up” archives. How to capture all of these moving elements faithfully, and in full detail? For performing arts archives, this can refer to different performances and audience reactions or to each rendition of the script as different parts are cut and added back in throughout the rehearsal process, capturing each change as it moves. These questions are also asked of community archivists, especially those which form around protests or other highly publicized emotional events, such as Occupy Wall Street. These dramatic events cause archivists to ask, “How do you capture the mood of the time or reflect what it meant to take part in or live through such experiences?” (Jones et al., 2009, p. 167). Recreating the experience of actually being there is nigh impossible, but at the core, this is what archivists want their collections to capture - the feelings and the atmosphere of those who were. However, records and accounts are constantly evolving, in both settings, with new items and viewpoints being donated at all times, capturing a wide range of perspectives. For communities, this means adding in a wider set of experiences and drawing connections from other items in collections. For performing arts archives, this includes different accounts and reflections of one performance of a show, or different interpretations of a singular source material as it continues to be performed (Jones et al., 2009, page 169). Both types of archives must be open to constant change and use to be considered effective and relevant to their respective communities.

Choosing what to keep in a performing arts archive can vary by what the particular focus is, what materials are available, and the resources needed to help maintain the collections in the best shape possible. These can include audio and video recordings, “manuscripts, photographs, and artwork” related to theatres in these collections, which can help “document and support research” (Russell, 2016, p. 63). However, these can also include items such as set models, costumes, scripts, and even potentially props from specific shows, if deemed important enough. These materials, along with ephemeral items, help historians “reconstruct what Gordon Craig describes as the artistry of theatre: the ‘action, scene, and voice’,” which helps bring the production to life in the researcher's mind (Harvey & Moosberger, 2007, p. 44). However, deciding what to keep from a donation to fully represent a performance can be a challenge.

A poster by Kathryn J. Hujda at the Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting 2017, titled “But is it Archival? Determining Research Value,” broke down the decision process, along with how the term “research value” can differ between different collections. For example, she chose to list items with “permanent research value” for both the Literary Archives and the Performing Arts Archives at the University of Minnesota to show how items can have different value, depending on the collection they are in. For example, scrapbooks and ephemera could have more research value to those with a performing arts focus, rather than to researchers with a literary focus (Hujda, SAA 2017). This breakdown really showcases what researchers find valuable, and the process she uses to determine if an item which comes in would be helpful to future research.

Research value is vital to consider, since otherwise, there could be materials in the archive which don’t fully help a researcher understand a show or overwhelms them to the point where they can’t find any information. With the mix of materials found in these archives (mentioned previously), items range from small and seemingly insignificant, to larger items, vital to understanding a decision made for a certain production of a show by the director or designers. However, even with all this information, there can still be aspects missing from the record, such as the “subtle interactions between artist, venue, and audience that add character and vitality to live art,” which cannot be replicated, and varies from performance to performance (Jackson, Wheeler, & Quinn, 2015, p. 22). This is where records such as audience narratives or responses in journals can come in handy, and for stage and house manager reports to be collected as well. These are all different types of data, while not considered data by some, which can be important to researchers wishing to find the impact of a specific show or performance. Context is also important to consider, taking in outside factors such as the “social, political, economic, and artistic contexts” to fully understand a performance and why certain choices were made in response to the surrounding climate (Marini, 2007, p. 20). Audience reaction also falls into the context field, with each audience reacting differently and each performance shaping and responding to the energy provided by the audience.

Since “performance is something that does not last...[and this] is exactly what fascinates theatre practitioners and scholars alike,” the research process for these groups is influenced by this fact (Marini, 2007, p. 18). Accepting that performance is ephemeral can help inspire new interpretations of classic works, creating a new experience each time for audiences. Another unique aspect to these archives is that “performing arts librarians and archivists are often themselves practitioners,” which brings a different “level of interest and engagement to the research process” (Jackson et al., 2015, p. 21). This personal touch helps elevate the work of a researcher with these connections and experiences provided by the archivist. It can also help in explaining certain aspects of a lighting or stage plan to users, who might not have the background in theatre to fully understand the technical side of things, or fully dissect costume or set sketches (Marini, 2007, p. 26). This knowledge of both theatre and archival work also lends itself to better advocacy for both disciplines, by knowing how to engage an audience, and how to preserve history and make it accessible for future use.

**Advocacy for Community Archives and Theatre Archives**

Memory is important to the human race; stories we pass down shape who we are and those who come after us and their views of the world. Sometimes, these memories are lost through war, budget cuts, or even pure neglect. This is where advocacy for collections, especially community archives, and for the root from which they stem, comes in as an important aspect of the arts and archives both. Hackman proclaims he thinks of “advocacy as an investment we make when we intentionally and strategically educate and engage individuals and organizations so they in turn will support our work,” which can be seen in the continued existence and growth of community and theatre archives (Hackman, 2012, p. 11). Think of a successful theatre you know, either locally run, or a university or regional theatre; what do they do to stay successful? They engage with the community around them, offer community or summer classes, and bring together people from all walks of life, gaining supporters and loyal audience members by producing content people want to see.

Archives are similar - they bring in new users all the time with their collections, they engage the community with outreach events, and they gain a loyal base who will help support them in rough times. If it’s a community archive, this support goes even deeper, maybe even to the governing level, as seen in Lisa Collins Shortall’s 2016 article on the County Offaly archives in Ireland. Even with all this support, advocacy is important to include in normal operations, making sure your mission and message are clear on all fronts and maintain strong relationships, not just to the archive or theatre itself. Community archives in particular have an importance in “shaping the local historical narrative, collective identity and social memory of a locality” (Collins Shortall, 2016, p. 144). In a way, where institutional archives have gaps, community archives can form and fill in those gaps, by collecting unheard narratives and objects institutions may not be able to take in at a certain time. Location could also play a part in this, with the “desire to physically secure...archival collections in a geographical provenance-based location” showing the importance of the collections to the community and how they would like to have them on hand, to both care for and to use at will (Collins Shortall, 2016, p. 150). Some theatre archives have taken this approach, with the theatres themselves maintaining their own archives, instead of donating it to a local repository to “keep it in the family” and for their own reference uses.

Advocacy for theatre archives and collections is just as important. Since the live performance itself is intangible, collecting the documents and materials made on the journey there are important to collect to help support scholarship in a number of fields (Smith, 2013, p. 61). Although video recordings exist, due to rules set forth by the Actors’ Equity Association they cannot be put online, except in short segments, which can limit their research value and cause frustration. Therefore, collecting other tangible items from theatres is important to help support, educate, and contribute to outreach events to the community, while also advocating for the archive’s value and importance to the theatres.

In a way, the most important way a theatre archive can advocate its collections and use is through the continued research done by theatre artists who become inspired by the holdings and through the impact these shows have on the audience. Since different areas of the theatre research different items, having a wide collection is crucial for all members of the crew and actors to gain use out of the archive. This allows them to compare notes later for cross discipline collaboration and allow them to “combine old and new information (research, observations, memories, experiences, relationships) in unique ways,” creating a new experience for the audience each and every time (Medaille, 2010, p. 345). Creating this environment for the audience to experience new and original theatre helps create relationships which can help spread the reputation of the theatre and its archive, which is a form of advocacy. By tying the two venues (the archive and the theatre) together, a new model is built, allowing them to work together and produce new, exciting content, while also not forgetting or diminishing their past.

**The American Theatre Archive Project**

A combination of the themes presented above, the American Theatre Archive Project (ATAP), officially inaugurated in November 2010, is a subgroup of the American Society for Theatre Research (ASTR) and the Theatre Library Association (TLA). First initiated at the 2009 ASTR-TLA joint conference, the main goals of the project were to “prepare archival guidelines for theatre companies so they could become aware of the value of their own records, assist theatre staff in maintaining their own archive or find partnerships, find out how theatre archives are used in academic settings, and how theatre and ILS students can become involved” in this project, with each team (Brady & Koffler, 2015, p. 106). Inspired by the Dance Heritage Coalition and the New Zealand Theatre Archives Project, Susan Brady and Ken Cerniglia took charge, and worked to develop the guidelines and goals for the proposed project.

After a year of planning and development, ATAP was born, with a main focus of raising awareness in theatre communities and educating theatre company staff in how to retain, care for, and archive their records, rather than just helping acquire the records for various local repositories (Brady & Koffler, 2015, p. 106). By fall of 2010, there were a number of teams in the United States and one in Canada, pulled together by an interest survey which was sent out (Brady & Koffler, 2015, p. 107). With so many excited and willing “teams,” guidelines and procedures were developed. Different committees were formed to help lead ATAP, as well as help things run smoothly between the teams and committee members. Together, they created a strategic plan, a brochure to hand out to interested theatre companies, and a brief handbook to hand out to initial sites (Brady & Koffler, 2015, p. 107-8). The first test of the project began in fall of 2011 in New York City (NYC), where a workshop “script” was given to archivist and NYC team members (Brady & Koffler, 2015, p. 108). Versions of this workshop have been given across the country to help spread the word and mission of ATAP.

With the NYC workshop seen as a success, ATAP continued to grow. An official manual to ATAP was published on their site in August of 2013, and an Initiation Program to help teams get started has been developed, and even awards grants to help a theatre company begin archiving their materials. ATAP has kept growing over the years, with 16 current regional teams nationwide, becoming an official standing committee of ASTR in 2014 (Brady & Koffler, 2015, p. 113). Meeting every year for an update at the ASTR- TLA annual meeting, ATAP is still growing and developing, helping more and more theatres nationwide.

Different teams function in different ways. Some are approached by theatres who have heard of ATAP and are curious to get involved; with others, the team leader approaches theatres in their area and tells them about the project. Some may have little going on due to circumstances out of their control, and others may have projects which have been going on since ATAP was founded. One project which has evolved is the Pacific Northwest team, which was one of the first founded back in 2009. Instead of working with individual cities or states, they decided to create a regional team, due to lack of archivists in the area and the size of the region, which also lead to online meetings to keep in touch and up to date on projects (Brady & Koffler, 2015, p. 114). Over the years, the Northwest team “developed the confidence and experience to work directly with theatre companies and approach external funders for support through a fairly lengthy process” (Brady & Koffler, 2015, p. 117-119). This included a survey of existing collections throughout the Northwest, outreach and promotion efforts, and creating new connections with theatres. While the Northwest team is one of the more documented teams, other teams are working along the same lines as well. Some teams, such as the New York team, have their own website—separate from the overall ATAP website— which keeps team members updated about ongoing projects, new projects, and meeting minutes.

**North Carolina and the American Theatre Archive Project**

North Carolina has had an ATAP regional team since around 2012-2013. While not yet at the scale it wants to be, the team’s goals remain the same: to create an archive for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s performing arts groups, ranging from PlayMakers to the UNC Opera group to all the various performing arts groups on campus, with some dream of expanding to all of the Triangle area of North Carolina. Formed by Dr. Adam Versenyi of UNC at Chapel Hill and a theatre professor from Duke University, the NC ATAP team set forth to determine the best way to start the project. Initially, feelers were sent out to theatre companies around the state. Soon after, they realized trying to work across the entire state was too big of a goal for such a small team and decided to focus on UNC’s Department of Dramatic Art and PlayMakers Repertory Company archive, due to their historical significance as being the “second oldest theatre department in the country” (“About Us | UNC Department of Dramatic Art,” n.d.). While some of its records are held on UNC’s campus, there are other records they wish to have accessible for themselves, to be able to reference quickly when needed.

Being involved with ATAP since its inception, Dr. A. Versenyi volunteered to be the team leader, which he sees as an “extension of [his] dramaturgical work” (personal communication, October 12, 2017). In fall 2014, the Community Archives class taught by Dr. Denise Anthony, offered at the School of Information and Library Science (SILS) at UNC became involved, choosing PlayMakers to be their practicum site. Other people from SILS and the University Libraries were involved as well, including the interim dean of SILS, Dr. Barbara Moran and staff from University Archives and Davis Library, along with a temporary staff member of Carolina Performing Arts. Together, they discussed possible issues which might occur, goals, and how best to carry out the project. The Community Archives class inventoried materials which were already in the “archive” within the Center for Dramatic Art (CDA) and compiled a report with suggestions of what to do next, with a full inventory and best practices suggested.

Due to various circumstances, after the final report in 2014 by the class, ATAP and the CDA archive were put on the back burner, to be picked up again in the future. During this process, other people involved with the project had to drop out for various reasons, leaving the project mainly to Dr. Versenyi, who also was a member of the ATAP steering committee for three years, acting as liaison between ATAP and ASTR. In the fall of 2016, interest in picking up and investing in the project sparked, and in mid-2017 really picked up, with a SILS graduate student expressing interest in the project and helping the CDA develop it further. Since Wilson Library on UNC campus holds a number of early Carolina Playmaker’s materials, it was decided to focus the in-house CDA archive on the past 40 years of PlayMakers history and productions done by various groups of the Department of Dramatic Art over the years.

Working on this project is what inspired the author for the topic of this master's paper, to see how ATAP can grow within the Triangle region of North Carolina, by conducting a survey of current in-house archives local theatres might have, and interviewing select theatre companies to gage their interest in an archive and what materials they would want to collect in one to represent their company as a whole.