

Theatre Archives' Outreach and Core Archival Functions



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RÉSUMÉ Ce texte trace l'évolution des archives théâtrales conservées par les *Dalhousie University Archives and Special Collections*. Les auteurs veulent montrer comment les changements au niveau des normes archivistiques, des technologies et des attentes ont imprimé leur marque sur le service au public (les dispositions nécessaires pour la consultation des documents sur place) et les activités de relations externes (les dispositions nécessaires pour les services et les outils de recherche destinés à un public visé). De plus, ils suggèrent que le développement de leur projet de numérisation primé, *From Artillery to Zuppa Circus: Recorded Memory of Theatre Life in Nova Scotia*, pourrait servir de modèle pour explorer comment les archives peuvent considérer à la fois les besoins immédiats des communautés qu'elles desservent – autant les donateurs que les chercheurs – et la connaissance solide du rôle sociétal des archives, des tendances historiques de leur usage, et du danger de se concentrer trop étroitement sur les buts à court terme. En se servant des archives théâtrales conservées par les *Dalhousie University Archives and Special Collections* comme étude de cas, ce texte montre comment les activités de relations externes peuvent effectivement contribuer à une meilleure connaissance de tous les aspects de la gestion des collections, que ce soit l'acquisition, la description, ou le service au public, sans toutefois s'égarer des principes fondamentaux et des mandats. En effet, la concentration sur les activités de relations externes à court terme engendre des avantages à long terme grâce à la plus grande visibilité dans les milieux des archives et de la recherche.

ABSTRACT This paper outlines the evolution of the Dalhousie University Archives and Special Collections' theatre archives in order to demonstrate how changing archival standards, technologies, and expectations have influenced our public service (provision of in-house access to materials) and outreach activities (the provision of services and research tools for specific audiences) and to suggest that the development of our award-winning digital resource *From Artillery to Zuppa Circus: Recorded Memory of Theatre Life in Nova Scotia* might serve as a model of how an archives can balance the immediate needs of the communities they serve – both donors and researchers – with a firm understanding of archives' societal role, historical usage trends, and the dangers of focusing too narrowly on the short-term. Using Dalhousie University Archives and Special Collections' theatre archives as a case study, the paper shows how outreach activities can fruitfully inform all aspects of holdings

management from acquisition to description to public service without distracting from foundational principles and mandates. Indeed, the short-term focus on outreach activities reaps long-term benefits from the improved visibility within archival and research communities.

In 1991 Gabrielle Blais and David Enns¹ put forward the controversial admonition that archivists should be more attentive to public programming and not focus so narrowly on what are commonly regarded as the core functions of archives – namely, acquisition, appraisal, arrangement, and description. Terry Cook, Richard J. Cox, and others have cautioned against over-emphasizing usage trends and public demands when making acquisition, appraisal, and description decisions, arguing that leaning heavily on public demand may take us away from our foundational mandate to document our communities.² One of the communities less well represented archivally is, as Annette Fern³ and others have pointed out, the theatrical community. This paper outlines the evolution of the Dalhousie University Archives and Special Collections' (DUASC) theatre archives in order to demonstrate how changing archival standards, technologies, and expectations have influenced our public service (provision of in-house access to materials) and outreach activities (the provision of services and research tools for specific audiences) and to suggest that the development of our award-winning digital resource *From Artillery to Zuppa Circus: Recorded Memory of Theatre Life in Nova Scotia* might serve as a model of how an archives can balance the immediate needs of the communities they serve – both donors and researchers – with a firm understanding of archives' societal role, historical usage trends, and the dangers of focusing too narrowly on the short-term. As long as archivists bear in mind the overarching importance of documenting their communities, the relatively new and controversial addition of outreach to the list of archival core activities need not steer us away from our foundational mandate. Indeed, taking public service and outreach activities seriously can benefit acquisitions, archival management, description, and public service programs by encouraging archivists to be better “students of their society.”⁴

- 1 Gabrielle Blais and David Enns, “From Paper Archives to People Archives: Public Programming in the Management of Archives,” *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990–91), pp. 101–113.
- 2 See Terry Cook, “Viewing the World Upside Down: Reflections on the Theoretical Underpinnings of Archival Public Programming,” *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990–91), pp. 123–34; Richard J. Cox, “The Concept of Public Memory and Its Impact on Archival Public Programming,” *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), pp. 122–35.
- 3 Annette Fern, “What Have They Done with the Evidence?” *Theatre Survey*, vol. 45, no. 2 (November 2004), pp. 195–201, http://journals.cambridge.org/download.php?file=%2FTSY%2FTSY45_02%2FS0040557404000146a.pdf&code=84172162526ffaefbe3d4e84592ebdd3 (accessed 20 November 2006).
- 4 Cox, p. 131.

Early Years of Theatre Archives at Dalhousie University

Prior to 1970, the University Archives existed only as a small collection of manuscripts (including some of the early records of the Board of Governors) in the Special Collections department of the University Library. When the Archives was formally established, a University Archivist was appointed to acquire and organize the extensive university records, which were scattered throughout the many administrative and faculty offices on campus; to set up new theatre and business archives; to catalogue the private manuscripts which had been donated to the University; and to solicit papers from former Dalhousie administrative and academic staff. A music archives was developed the following year.

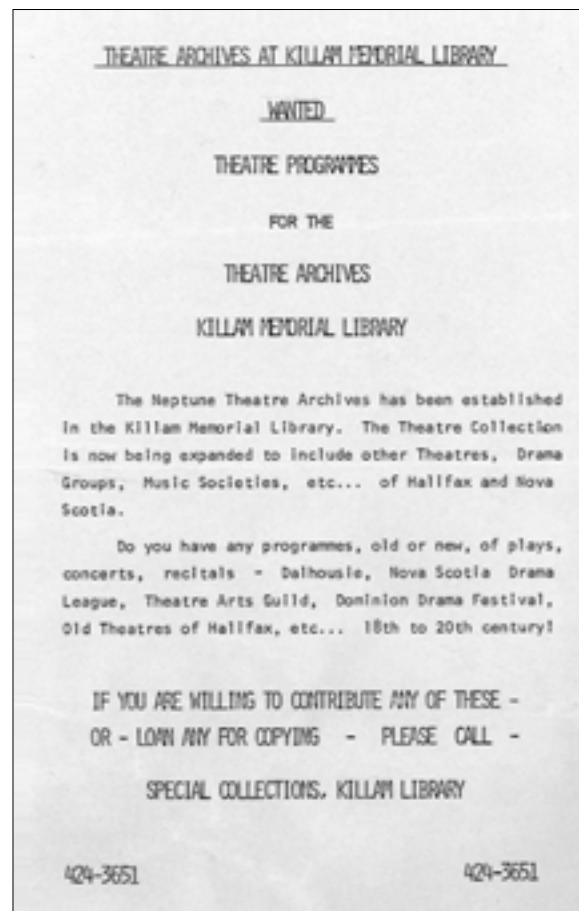


Figure 1: *Call for Materials – Dalhousie Theatre Archives, 1970s*

The early call for materials (Figure 1) prompted several donors to offer their collections of theatre programs representing community, amateur, and professional companies, primarily in Nova Scotia but also travelling shows performed in the province. Although such donations are generally considered to be non-archival since they came from collectors rather than creators, two points must be made here. Firstly, the Archives was in its very early days, and like many new archives tried hard to establish its collections even by soliciting donations that are generally considered to be non-archival or that were to be copied and returned. Secondly, in the long run, this strategy has served the Archives well in that the theatre reference collection contains many programs and posters representing companies for which we do not hold records but which, nonetheless, provide a significant cross-section of theatrical activity in the province over the last one hundred and twenty years.⁵

For a strong theatre archives, the existence of non-archival reference materials is just as important to many of our researchers as the fonds themselves. Indeed, appraisal methodologies such as the Minnesota Method recommend a tiered approach to collection, ranging from extensive documentation of businesses rated as the highest priorities to minimal documentation of lower priorities. Mark A. Greene and Todd J. Daniels-Howell note that “there had been a tendency to assume that agreeing to accept records from a company was the same as agreeing to serve as its archives—if it was important enough to document at all, it was important enough to document completely.”⁶ Discounting this all or nothing approach as unfeasible, they argue that archivists need to assess their documentary universes and define levels of acquisition they consider to be appropriate “reflect[ing] the fact that some individual companies will have to be more thoroughly documented than others.”⁷ Such an approach, Greene and Daniels-Howell argue, balances the needs of users against the fact that archives cannot document everything for everyone. Accepting but not soliciting documentation about major collecting areas, they suggest, “may seem contrary to traditional archival assumptions about acquiring the best documentation possible of any entity documented or none at all. Such an attitude is both impractical and foolish for an institution with a broad mandate and a very diverse user base.”⁸

5 Some of these activities include productions at the Orpheus Club in the 1880s, the 12th Nova Scotia Highlanders Christmas Concert of 1916, Lyceum and Garrick Theatre productions of the 1920s and 1930s, the Little Theatre Movement in the 1940s, Nova Scotia Opera Association and Queen Elizabeth High School Dramatic Society productions in the 1950s, St. Francis Xavier University dramatic society productions in the 1960s, Nova Scotia Festival of the Arts activities in the 1960s through 1970s, and the Nova Scotia International Tattoo in the 1990s.

6 Mark A. Greene and Todd J. Daniels-Howell, “Documentation with an Attitude: A Pragmatist’s Guide to the Selection and Acquisition of Modern Business Records,” in *Records of American Business*, ed. James M. O’Toole (Chicago, 1997), p. 165.

7 Ibid., p. 206.

8 Ibid., p. 191.

In the 1970s, articulation of what became known as the Minnesota Method was still two decades away, but in retrospect DUASC's policy of accepting posters and programs donated by local theatre-goers was born out of the same motivation as the Minnesota Method: 1) to provide extensive documentation for a select group of companies or individuals, and 2) to provide a minimal amount of documentation on a broad spectrum of activity. In 2007, we still adhere to these early principles, but add a third: we accept but do not actively solicit the donations of collectors, also a principle underlying the Minnesota Method. In DUASC's case, the non-archival theatre materials provide a rich context for the more detailed fonds that we do hold, and they do so in a manageable way beneficial to researchers. For instance, a researcher examining the growth of Neptune Theatre as a professional company could, through our reference materials, situate it in the context of what amateur and regional theatres and high school and university dramatic societies were doing.

These programs and posters formed the backbone of the theatre holdings in DUASC's early years along with the records of Neptune Theatre, Nova Scotia's largest professional live theatre, acquired in 1971; Theatre Arts Guild, Canada's oldest continuously running amateur theatre group, acquired in 1973; the Nova Scotia Drama League, a non-profit organization formed jointly by professionals and non-professionals to promote drama in Nova Scotia, acquired in 1974; and Pier One, an alternative theatre company in Halifax, acquired in 1975.

In the 1980s, two other major accessions of theatre materials arrived: the University Women's Club donated twenty-five puppets used in performances dating from the 1940s and 1950s, along with photographs, partial scripts, programs, and other related materials. Also in the 1980s, Robert Doyle began donating set and costume design sketches from his work with Neptune Theatre and the Dalhousie University Theatre Program. The 1990s followed with donations from local actors, directors, and scholars such as David Renton and Richard Perkyns. By the late 1990s, then, DUASC housed theatre research materials, maquettes, set and costume designs, administrative and box office records, prompt scripts and other production records, photographs, costumes, puppets, publicity records, as well as some sound and video recordings. The richness of our holdings increased our incentive to make the materials better known among researchers both at Dalhousie and in the general public. To this end, the *Recorded Memory of Theatre Life in Nova Scotia* Project was conceived.

Origins of Recorded Memory of Theatre Life in Nova Scotia

The planning of DUASC's theatre resource began as far back as the search for a new University Archivist in the summer of 2000. During the hiring process, considerable interest and attention was paid to selecting a University Archivist who saw the potential of the Internet to enhance the visibility of and promote access to the Archives' holdings. At the same time, significant funding was becoming available from the Government of Canada for the development of "Canadian content" for the Internet.

The idea for a digital collection on the history of theatre in Nova Scotia came in a large part from a number of discussions that took place between University Archivist, Michael Moosberger, and Killam Reference Librarian, Oriel MacLennan, an avid supporter and patron of Nova Scotia theatre, who for years had deposited at the Archives programs, posters, and other related material for theatre productions she had attended. These discussions focused primarily on how to better promote DUASC's theatre collections for research use, first, among the faculty and students within the Theatre and Costume Studies programs at Dalhousie and, second, with the general public. Discussions also revolved around the changes that were occurring within Nova Scotia's theatre community, including the generational turnover that was seeing the founding members of many theatre companies retiring or moving into other areas of endeavour, and the need to document this transition.

With the positive response that we received from our earlier digital initiatives,⁹ it was decided that a multimedia, interactive digital collection would be a desirable resource to create to meet these needs. Funding was successfully applied for and obtained through the Canadian Culture OnLine Program (CCOP) in 2003–2004, internal university resources were secured, grant-funded staff were hired, and the necessary infrastructure was put in place for the Theatre History Project. The resulting digital resource – *From Artillery to Zuppa Circus: Recorded Memory of Theatre Life in Nova Scotia*¹⁰ – documents, interprets, and provides access to information and archival resources on the history of theatre in Nova Scotia, including over one thousand digitally-scanned photographs, audio clips, and promotional materials (Figure 2). It features profiles on prominent individuals in the field and illustrates the roles they played in their respective communities. The content of the site has remained consistent with the vision to promote the diversity and creativity of years of long-standing theatre activity in Nova Scotia by highlighting a vari-

9 See Thomas Head Raddall Electronic Archive Project at <http://www.library.dal.ca/archives/raddall/> and Waldren Studios at <http://www.library.dal.ca/archives/waldren/> (accessed 7 March 2007).

10 See <http://www.library.dal.ca/archives/nstheatre/> (accessed 7 March 2007).

ety of individuals and companies, as well as the work of costume designers through textual profiles accompanied by archival records, which serve to contextualize the information.



Figure 2: Recorded Memory of Theatre Life in Nova Scotia

One fact became apparent early in the development of the resource: DUASC could use the momentum generated by the project – especially through the invitations to participate – to raise our profile within the theatre community and possibly encourage individuals and companies to consider donating their records. Thus, as we strived to improve our public service for researchers through development of the digital resource as part of an outreach program focused on theatre archives, we also directed attention to potential donors themselves, further consolidating our status as the province's leading cultural archives.

Public Service and Acquisition Programs

One important, and often difficult to control, aspect of public service is the location of archival materials. The determination of which archives have what materials can affect how researchers apportion their time and may even affect a researcher's decision about whether or not to visit an archives, especially if

sought after materials are small or split fonds are held by several different repositories in various locations. In order to systematize acquisitions across the province, member institutions of the Council of Nova Scotia Archives (CNSA) approved a Cooperative Acquisitions Strategy, which has the primary objective of “ensur[ing] and promot[ing] the cooperative acquisition and preservation of Nova Scotia’s archival heritage at the local, regional and provincial levels.”¹¹ They collectively agreed on a rough outline of acquisition criteria that would see institutional Council members acquiring archival materials from their sponsoring body and its predecessor body/ies, as well as associated organizations and individuals. These might include corporate bodies, individuals, and families “which are local or regional in scope or whose records fall within thematic acquisition mandates, which may be local, regional or provincial in scope.”¹² A further clause identifies the general extent of Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management’s acquisition mandate, which includes agencies, boards, commissions, and departments of the Government of Nova Scotia, provincial Crown corporations, as well as corporate bodies and families that are provincial in range, and individual Nova Scotians of provincial or national scope.¹³ As an appendix to the document, each institutional member provided a copy of its acquisition policy outlining thematic mandates. Included in DUASC’s contribution is the following acquisition statement:

Records and papers of professional and non-professional Nova Scotia theatre companies. Private papers of actors, directors, playwrights, designers, theatre historians, etc.

No other institution in the province has specifically targeted this area in its mandate, although Acadia University Archives does hold two significant theatre fonds from the Wolfville area (Mermaid Theatre and the Atlantic Theatre Festival). Through this Cooperative Acquisitions Strategy and an active theatre and arts acquisitions program, DUASC is gradually being recognized within the archival community as the province’s cultural archives.

Our existing theatre, music, and literary holdings provided a solid basis on which to build future additions, and, indeed, the Theatre History Project has had the effect of accelerating our acquisitions in the area, including the receipt of a transfer from Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management of the records of the Dartmouth Players, Theatre 1707, and Theatre Arts Guild, which were in their possession. In the latter case, consolidation of a split fonds was a motivating factor; however, the other records were transferred

11 Council of Nova Scotia Archives, “CNSA Cooperative Acquisitions Strategy,” Article 2.0 (24 May 2001), http://www.councilofnsarchives.ca/about/policy_strategy.htm (accessed 7 March 2007).

12 Ibid., Article 5.1.

13 Ibid., Article 5.2.

because DUASC could provide a more substantial cultural context for the materials.

Just as a concerted effort in DUASC's early days to acquire theatre archives drew a healthy response, so, too, did our solicitations of participation in the Theatre History Project bring an awareness of archives to a new generation of writers, directors, actors, and designers. In the process of collecting information for the digital resource, theatre companies and prominent members of the acting, directing, and playwriting community were sent a letter inquiring about their willingness to be interviewed by Project staff. The result of this initial contact was twofold: first, it established a healthy roster of interviewees, and second, even amongst those who did not take part, it served as an introduction to DUASC's commitment to acquiring, arranging, describing, preserving, and making accessible records of Nova Scotia's cultural heritage. The tangible result of our effort is the recent acquisition of records from *Jest in Time* (Halifax), *Two Planks* and a *Passion Theatre Company* (Canning), *Mulgrave Road Theatre* (Guysborough), and *Chester Playhouse*. Additionally, since movement within the theatre community is so fluid, awareness of our activities has spread beyond our initial contacts, and we have recently acquired records from the *Playwrights Atlantic Resource Centre* (Goshen) and will in the near future be acquiring records from the *Ross Creek Centre for the Arts* (Canning).

Going back to the cautionary note mentioned in the introduction, one might ask to what extent is DUASC able to say that its acquisition program has not been unduly carried away by a transitory interest in one area. Certainly DUASC's mandate to support teaching and research on campus might appear on the surface to commit us to following trends, but as archivists know, each new acquisition must be appraised not only on its own merits, but also on how well it fits an archive's current mandate and holdings and on whether its acceptance will set any unwanted precedents.¹⁴ Once its mandate to acquire in a particular area provides adequate coverage, acquisitions in another area may take the fore for a time. Although we cannot be actively soliciting in all areas at once, we never turn away acquisitions that clearly fall within our mandate. The distinction here is between recognizing gaps and proactively filling them versus accepting at any time materials within our mandate, an activity that no archives can effectively predict in the long-term.¹⁵ Given our long-range vision for the Archives and its position within the national and provincial archival landscape, DUASC determined that the

14 See Timothy Ericson, "'At the Rim of Creative Dissatisfaction': Archivists and Acquisition Development," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–92), pp. 68–69; Mark Boles and Julia Marks Young, "Exploring the Black Box: The Appraisal of University Administrative Records," *American Archivist* 48 (Spring 1985), pp. 121–40.

15 See Greene and Daniels-Howell's discussion of these approaches to collecting, pp. 185–86.

Theatre History Project could, in fact, spur growth in an already strong area of acquisition and not impinge on other archives' stated areas of concentration.

A less immediately apparent result of our outreach program has been the increased awareness amongst theatre managers, artistic directors, and other cultural administrators of the value of both their operational and production records. As Diana Taylor reminds us, "The live performance can never be captured or transmitted through the archive";¹⁶ however, "the archive and the repertoire [described as 'embodied memory', e.g., gestures, movement, orality] have always been important sources of information [each] exceeding the limitations of the other, in literate and semiliterate societies. They usually work in tandem and they work alongside other systems of transmission—the digital and the visual, to name two."¹⁷ Although archives may not capture the ephemeral nature of performance, production records such as scripts, costumes, playbills, and especially maquettes – those "empty replicas of milieu [which evoke] the missing presence"¹⁸ – are, in conjunction with a knowledge of the "aesthetic and material culture"¹⁹ extremely important to historians attempting to reconstruct what Gordon Craig describes as the artistry of theatre: the "action, scene, and voice."²⁰ Without the existence of operational records such as front of house reports, board of directors minutes, administrative correspondence, contracts and licensing agreements, grant applications, rehearsal schedules, programs and artistic records such as set and costume designs, prompt scripts, lighting and sound cue-sheets, videotapes of performances, and reviews, memory of the specifics of our cultural heritage would be as fleeting as the performances themselves.

A related effect of DUASC's proactive outreach has been the education provided to theatre companies in preparing their records for transfer. Initially, these efforts focused on supplying theatre companies and individual donors with basic documentation on what procedures to follow when preparing records for transfer, including what types of boxes to use, how to pack the records efficiently, and how to prepare a preliminary inventory that would accompany the new accrual. For several of our long-standing theatre donors, we prepared lists of records having evidential, legal, informational, or historical value, that were, therefore, important to acquire. DUASC also identified

16 Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC, 2003), p. 20; Helen Freshwater, "The Allure of the Archive," *Poetics Today*, vol. 24, no. 4 (2003), p. 754.

17 Taylor, p. 21.

18 Robert K. Sarlós, "Performance Reconstruction: The Vital Link between Past and Future," in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance*, ed. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa City, 1989), p. 199.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 201.

20 Gordon Craig, "The Artist of the Theatre," in *Directors on Directing*, ed. Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy (Indianapolis, 1976), p. 163.

those records it felt had no significant archival value and could be destroyed by the theatre company. These initial efforts assisted greatly in the transfer and accessioning of new accruals and helped to expedite their processing, making materials accessible to researchers far sooner than previous donations.

If it sounds as if DUASC was performing a records management function for its donor institutions, at a certain level it was. Given the financial constraints that most theatre companies work under, the offer of free advice to assist them in streamlining their business processes related to their information management issues was not only appreciated but enthusiastically welcomed.

A tangible example of this type of developing business relationship occurred in 2004, when Neptune Theatre agreed to have two graduate students from the Dalhousie School of Information Management's Records Management course undertake a records survey of a portion of the Theatre's records and then develop a file classification system and retention and disposition schedules for these records. The initial proposal was developed by DUASC in consultation with the Theatre's Managing Director, and approved by the Theatre's Board of Directors. Two graduate students were selected, and over a three-month period they inventoried three departments and prepared a detailed file classification scheme and a number of retention and disposition schedules for the series of records identified in these departments. The results of this project were turned over to Neptune Theatre for implementation.

DUASC has also provided other types of support to Nova Scotia's theatre community. In December 2005, the University Archivist wrote in support of the Playwrights Atlantic Resource Centre's application to Canada Nova Scotia Skills and Learning Framework's Service Delivery Partnership Program for the creation of a special initiative position for an Archives and Strategic Planning Coordinator. This application, which proved to be successful, allowed the Resource Centre to rehire one of its former staff to work on organizing and appraising the Centre's records prior to their donation. This staff person emailed and met regularly with the University Archivist, and at the University Archivist's urging also participated in training offered by the Council of Nova Scotia Archives. The result of these efforts by the Archives was a far better organized and described body of records than we would have received otherwise.

In short, a digital resource intended to improve our public service became much more, essentially blossoming into a donor outreach program with positive spinoffs for both theatre companies, through records management consultation and preservation of their histories, and for DUASC, through acquisition of further fonds to improve the breadth and depth of our holdings. But once physical custody of theatre fonds is obtained, other challenges arise—namely, negotiating ownership, and managing usage and reproduction rights.

Implications of Public Service for Administration and Rights Management

In incorporating public service and outreach considerations into our routine, DUASC has faced a number of challenges related to the administration and management of its theatre holdings, some of which have been settled, while others still remain unresolved. The first and most pressing issue was the establishment of ownership by the University over all theatre holdings in the University Archives. Prior to 1999, physical custody of a number of fonds – including two significant theatre collections, Theatre Arts Guild and Neptune Theatre – had been acquired through deposit agreements. These agreements, while allowing the Archives the right to provide access (with the depositor's written permission), also encumbered the University Archives with all costs for preservation and description as well as annually reporting, in the case of Neptune Theatre, to the Theatre's Board of Directors on the Archives' status.²¹ From 2000 to 2004, it is estimated that DUASC expended over thirty thousand dollars in resources in the management of the Neptune Theatre Archives alone.

With additional pressures being placed on DUASC's human and financial resources, it became far more difficult to justify this type of expenditure on holdings that it did not own. As well, as these deposited records became more visible through their archival processing, the placement of their finding aids on DUASC's website, and the selection of materials from them for the Theatre History Project, it also became far more challenging to manage them as more requests for copies and publication permissions had to be forwarded to Theatre Arts Guild or Neptune Theatre for approval. By 2004, it became apparent that if these collections were to remain a viable part of the theatre holdings, DUASC would have to begin negotiations to void the deposit agreements and have the collections donated to the University Archives.

Discussions began with both Theatre Arts Guild and Neptune Theatre when we presented each organization with a rationale and business case for why these collections needed to be donated. Although the managers of each theatre company understood, appreciated, and supported the request, the Boards of each theatre company reacted quite differently. The Theatre Arts Guild Board relied on the recommendation of its management team and signed a memorandum of agreement for the donation of their existing archives and all future accruals with the University Archives on 21 July 2004. The Neptune Board was far more reticent, and realizing how attractive and beneficial the current agreement was for their organization, felt that signing a new agreement was not in the Theatre's best interest. Negotiations have since

21 *Memorandum of Agreement between Dalhousie University and the Neptune Theatre Foundation to Establish Dalhousie University as Depository for the Neptune Theatre Archives*, December 1970, pp.1–2.

stalled, leaving the Archives with two choices: maintain the status quo until a new Board is elected that might be more favourably inclined to renegotiate the current agreement, or seek the University's approval to cancel the current agreement and return the fonds to Neptune Theatre. Knowing the current constraints that Neptune has regarding available space, it is reasonable to assume that much of the fonds would be destroyed if returned to the theatre company. As a result, the Archives is prepared to retain physical custody of the fonds and continue working towards the eventual donation of the material at some time in the future.

Acquiring ownership of records is clearly the most satisfactory situation for archives; however, even if ownership is established, other rights management issues particular to theatre holdings – for example, the use of photographic and audiovisual materials as they relate to performance rights – may arise. With holdings from Neptune and Mulgrave Road Theatres, the Archives has the records of two companies that fall under the *Canadian Theatre Agreement* negotiated between Actors' Equity and the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres. The agreement limits how the images of Equity members can be used without paying a royalty to the actor(s). This has resulted in some records, such as videotapes of theatre performances, being made almost completely inaccessible for research use, while requiring signed releases and fees to be paid for the use of photographic images of actors performing. Equity has recently ratified a deal with the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres for the renewal of a new three-year *Canadian Theatre Agreement* (2006–2009), which should have additional provisions related to Equity members' performance rights, with special emphasis on digital usage.

The Theatre History Project forced DUASC to come to terms with legacy management issues such as ownership and rights, which has been a beneficial exercise overall not only for managing the holdings, but also for providing access to them. Discussions about rights management clarified for staff exactly what level of public access to the theatre fonds we can legally provide. In the case of materials that we own and for which no access or reproduction restrictions have been specified by the donor, DUASC, on behalf of the University, has the authority not only to permit public access to the materials, but also to license usage of the materials in all manner of formats, including print publications, websites, and film and video recordings. Materials we do not own pose special problems because researchers expect that, since we hold and have described the records, we can give permission for their use in publications. The further complication of seeking permission from the creator creates an added level of bureaucracy.

Public Service and Priorities for Description of Records

Accompanying the increased awareness within the theatrical and scholarly communities of the theatre archives at Dalhousie is, of course, the expectation that these fonds are easily found and are usable. Theatre companies and individuals highlighted in the Theatre History Project would likely receive greater immediate attention from researchers, so we prioritized for processing all those companies and individuals whose records we hold. The remaining theatre fonds, by virtue of their subject, were also placed high on our list of approximately nine hundred fonds awaiting descriptions that will bring them in line with current Canadian archival descriptive standards (i.e., *Rules for Archival Description*).

In 2004, DUASC conducted a holdings metadata survey to piece together what types of administrative and descriptive information it has about its holdings, and to standardize the creation of holdings control data for new acquisitions in order to streamline overall collection and use of both administrative and descriptive metadata. One of the key recommendations coming out of this survey was to take a multi-faceted approach to resource discovery that “is grounded in the assumption that providing researchers more ways to access archival holdings ultimately leads to an increase in the number of researchers who find their way into archives.”²² Such an approach takes into consideration those who primarily or exclusively use Internet search engines, those who use archival union catalogues, and those who use library catalogues, by providing ready access to fonds-level descriptions on archives’ websites, in archival union catalogues, and in library catalogues, whenever possible.²³ Another key recommendation was to maximize descriptive efforts by providing fonds-level descriptions for as many fonds as possible rather than more granular (series-or file-level) descriptions for fewer fonds.

Like most, if not all, archives, we have a greater backlog of materials waiting for description than we would like; thus, we annually apply for funding that will assist in our goal of decreasing it. This past year, in accordance with our new resource discovery strategy, we proposed to double our number of

22 Kathryn Harvey, *The Administrative and Descriptive Uses of Archival Metadata* (Master’s thesis, Dalhousie University, 2005), p. 128.

23 According to Helen Tibbo and Ian Anderson, user studies in the US and UK both demonstrated the wide variety of methods researchers identified as being most popular and effective. Although print sources rated at the top of the “popular and effective” scale, electronic methods are becoming more popular and will become more trusted if enough context is provided for results lists. Amongst the oft-cited electronic retrieval methods were OPACs and Internet search engines, with archival union catalogues trailing in the distance. See Helen Tibbo, “Primarily History in America: How U.S. Historians Search for Primary Materials at the Dawn of the Digital Age,” *American Archivist*, vol. 66, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2006), pp. 9–50; Ian G. Anderson “Are You Being Served? Historians and the Search for Primary Sources,” *Archivaria* 58 (Fall 2004), pp. 81–129.

fonds-level descriptions. With financial support from the National Archival Development Program, we targeted our visual and dramatic arts holdings as a high priority for description, along with the fonds of past and present individuals connected to Dalhousie and the fonds of Nova Scotian authors. Of our seventy-three new descriptions, twenty-five percent were theatre fonds, bringing our percentage of theatrical holdings described at the fonds level (or lower) to sixty-four percent. These represent our major holdings in the area, with the remaining thirty-six percent identified as small fonds with an extent of less than 10 cm. Each of our new descriptions are – in keeping with the recently implemented resource discovery strategy – being placed on our website, in the Dalhousie University Libraries' online catalogue, and in the Nova Scotian union catalogue, ArchWay, which is automatically uploaded to the national catalogue, Archives Canada.

The description of our theatre fonds, then, was driven partially by the creation of the Theatre History Project and partially from our own internal holdings metadata survey and tracking usage of materials. Regardless of the reasons for creating finding aids, there remains the challenge of educating the public in how to use them.

Recorded Memory of Theatre Life in Nova Scotia as an Educational Tool

There is almost a consensus that archives could do more to educate their users.²⁴ Archivists know the challenges and rewards of educating on-site users new to archives on what they can expect to find, how to use the finding aids and request material, and how to follow leads within the holdings. But what about users who first come to archives over the Internet? How does one educate them? To meet this need, the Theatre History Project team decided to explain various types of documents found in the holdings. The electronic resource's introduction explains the aim thus:

From photographs and programs to play scripts, annotated prompt books, casting schedules, sketches of costumes and set designs, reviews, interviews with actors and writers, the entire record from creation to production may be housed in an archival theatre collection. Likewise, through correspondence between companies and funding bodies, or contracts with actors and designers, for instance, the accountability, corporate memory, and evidence of a company is visible through the proper preservation and control of administrative records. This section exhibits a sampling of the types of

24 See in particular Elizabeth Yakel and Deborah A. Torres, "AI: Archival Intelligence and User Expertise," *American Archivist*, vol. 66, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2003), pp. 51–78; Elizabeth Yakel, "Thinking Inside and Outside the Boxes: Archival Reference Services at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *Archivaria* 49 (Spring 2000), pp. 140–60; Cook, "Viewing the World Upside Down"; Barbara L. Craig, "What are the Clients? Who are the Products? The Future of Archival Public Services in Perspective," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990–91), pp. 135–41.

records found within the Dalhousie University Archives as well as records generously donated to us from the files of organizations and individuals for the purpose of this project.²⁵

Individual sections on General Correspondence, Administrative Records, Scripts, Press Materials, Photographs, Costume and Set Designs, Video and Audio Recordings, and Reviews outline these various types of documents, provide examples from our holdings, and explain how each type of record contributes to our understanding of the theatre's milieu.

Other sections of the resource – “Organizations,” “People,” and “Design” – present studies of particular companies and individuals, as well as a discussion of costume design using the sketches of Robert Doyle as an example, since DUASC holds not only his sketches but some of the costumes too. This in itself can provide researchers the rare opportunity to study conceptual drawings and compare these with the finished products. The “Halifax Theatre History” section provides a general overview of nineteenth to twenty-first-century theatre in Nova Scotia's capital city, with sub-sections on the nineteenth century, the early twentieth century, the impact of the talkies, postwar cooperative and community theatre movements, regional theatre, and the scene today. The final section of the resource presents quizzes based on material available on our site and on theatre and drama generally.

Another of our cultural resources – the Atlantic Symphony Orchestra (ASO) electronic resource²⁶ – takes a similar pedagogical approach, but instead of foregrounding the types of documents available to researchers, educates researchers on the elements of an archival finding aid, such as, for instance, the concepts of series, and scope and content notes. In fact, the ASO resource essentially presents an illustrated finding aid with explanation of the elements found therein.

The hope is that by providing Internet users with this knowledge they might be better able to understand what they will encounter should they venture into the Archives. To create such explanatory resources for each online resource or finding aid would, of course, be out of the question; however, generating such tools for areas of our holdings which we know to be strong and growing will go some way to offering our off-site users with the education they would normally get only by visiting the Archives in person.

Since creating the theatre history resource, DUASC has obtained much positive feedback from within the theatre community, and from students who make use of our holdings as part of an assignment in the Post-Colonial Canadian Theatre course in the Theatre Department. DUASC worked with the

25 “Recorded Memory: Introduction” (2004), http://nstp.ucis.dal.ca/zouppa_5414.html (accessed 7 March 2007).

26 See <http://www.library.dal.ca/duasc/aso/> (accessed 7 March 2007).

course instructor, Roberta Barker, in 2004 to develop an assignment that would allow students to explore the various types of records available for specific productions and to create their own research questions out of the materials. The University Archivist and Archives Specialist visited the class early in the term to let students know about the website, explain the procedures for using the archives, and field questions about archives. The assignment, which provided theatre history students the experience of doing archival research, was such a success it has been offered again in the winter term of 2007.

As Enns and Blais observe, archivists

have a responsibility to provide a systematic education that teaches, at least in a basic way, the central principles upon which archival science is based—that is, provenance and original order—and in so doing, provide researchers with the intellectual tools with which to attack their research problems. ... It is in bridging the gap from awareness to use that education has a vital role to play.²⁷

DUASC's efforts to educate both distance and in-house researchers about the nature and use archival materials have tried to bridge this perceived gap in service.

Public Service versus Outreach and Public Programming

The distinction between public or reference service and outreach or public programming has often been made.²⁸ Responding to one researcher's requests is a matter of public service, which can quickly transform into more when other individuals ask similar questions and a critical mass of interest in a particular fonds, manuscript group, or subject area develops. Archivists who invest time in creating better finding aids, indices, subject guides, or electronic resources generally want to ensure their research tools receive adequate publicity. As Bruce Dearstyne recommends, among the best ways to promote archives are to prepare exhibits, establish publishing programs, present papers at conferences attended by individuals who do – or who might benefit from – research in archives, and become involved in scholarly and community networks and discussion groups.²⁹

DUASC has slowly started to engage in some of these activities, largely as a result of the Theatre History Project. After its launch we mounted a display

27 Enns and Blais, p. 106.

28 See for example, Bruce W. Dearstyne, "Archival Reference and Outreach: Toward a New Paradigm," *Reference Librarian* 56 (1997), pp. 185–86; Richard Pearce-Moses, *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology* (Chicago, 2005), <http://www.archivists.org/glossary/> (accessed 7 March 2007).

29 Dearstyne, pp. 189–91.

in the lobby outside our offices to highlight records, costumes, and photographs from our theatre holdings. Our publishing program is very modest at this stage with the production of bookmarks advertising two of our electronic resources, the first of which was the Theatre History website (Figure 3). These bookmarks have been distributed at Open House events, in buildings housing humanities and arts departments, and at national scholarly conferences devoted to Canadian theatre research and literary archives.



Figure 3: *Nova Scotia Theatre History Project Bookmark*

Part and parcel with conference attendance and distribution of publicity materials is the potential for networking. Like historians in their search for relevant archival holdings,³⁰ archivists use informal avenues to promote their own holdings, and through word of mouth, knowledge of these holdings can spread to other individuals who eventually make their way to the Archives to seek the advice, assistance, and expertise of archivists. Such has been our experience with the Theatre History Project: in the two years since its launch we have been contacted by Theatre Museum Canada³¹ about our holdings and have been invited by governments, heritage organizations, and theatre companies to be involved in consultations, conferences, and research projects.

Conclusion

Enns and Blais have argued that “the relationship between archivists and their constituency has become more symbiotic. Archives attempt to shape the services they provide to the specific requirements and expectations of their users; not only to fulfil information needs but also to guarantee public support. In assuming a more assertive stance they also are beginning to focus, and to

30 Tibbo’s and Anderson’s studies each found informal avenues such as talking with colleagues to be very popular methods used by historians to obtain information about archival holdings relevant to their research; upwards of eighty percent of historians surveyed indicated they talked to colleagues about research sources. See Tibbo, pp. 26–27 and Anderson, pp. 110–111.

31 Although it does not have a physical location, Theatre Museum Canada has a well-developed virtual presence which provides access to videos. See <http://www.theatremuseumcanada.ca/>

some extent, mould user needs.”³² It is certainly true that archives should take into account the needs of their researchers, but allowing research use to dictate acquisition, re-appraisal, and description programs could, as Cook warns, lead us to “betray the organic integrity of archives by a trendy consumerism.”³³ Are archives simply repositories of information, or are they repositories which “deal in artifacts in which information inheres?”³⁴ Are they purveyors of information or of evidence? Surely a middle ground may be found to resolve the dilemma of where – and how prominently – researchers figure in the archival mission.

Although researchers have been an important factor in the development of DUASC's cultural archives, they have not been the only – or necessarily even the most significant – factor. Our foundational mandate included the acquisition of theatre archives and subsequently influenced the formulation of our current collection policies; the Nova Scotia Cooperative Acquisitions Strategy helped solidify our position within the archival community as a repository of dramatic holdings. Recognizing the research potential of these holdings and drawing on the interests of members of the Dalhousie Libraries and Archives, the *Recorded Memory of Theatre Life in Nova Scotia* Project was conceived and developed as an educational tool – for the theatre companies, about the importance of their own records, and for the researching public. Clarifying rights and ownership, and describing these holdings, were identified at the project's outset as priorities since we could expect an increase in the number of requests for the materials, and management of the holdings would be more difficult otherwise. Marketing this new electronic resource and the holdings themselves became important for reaching a wider off-campus audience, so DUASC staff created publicity bookmarks, attended scholarly conferences, and promoted the theatre holdings through Open House activities and exhibits. In the end, researchers have figured centrally in our planning, though it would be erroneous to say that they entirely drove it.

The pragmatic fact is that staff expertise, grant funding, and researcher interest will influence archives' short-term direction by forcing them to prioritize acquisitions, processing, and preservation activities; however, archivists should never lose sight of their profession's most important goals: to document society in all its richness and complexity, and to remain committed to the preservation of the *evidence* of this rich, complex past by attending to the principles of provenance and original order. Furthermore, if Cox is right that there is “a natural ebb and flow of public interest in history,”³⁵ then it

32 Enns and Blais, p. 103.

33 Cook, p. 131.

34 Carolyn Heald, “Are we Collecting the ‘Right Stuff’?” *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995), p.186; see also Craig, p. 141.

35 Cox, p. 132.

becomes all the more important for “archivists, committed to outreach ... to be students of their society in order to understand the impact that public programming might have on their institutes and their mission.”³⁶ DUASC’s experience has shown us that outreach activities can fruitfully inform all aspects of holdings management from acquisition to description to public service, without distracting us from our foundational principles and mandate. Indeed, the short-term focus on outreach activities regarding our theatre archives has reaped long-term benefits from the improved visibility within the theatre, archival, and research communities.

36 Ibid., p. 131.